Honoring our Heroes

New Orleans renames two streets to honor Pastors John Raphael and Robert C. Blakes. Will it change the direction of the city?

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By Edwin Buggage

The City Honors Two Great Men

Last year New Orleans lost two giants in the religious community who came to symbolize the true meaning of giving back to their fellow man and woman; recently, New Orleans changed the names of portions of two streets in New Orleans Central City Neighborhood in honor of these two pastors who worked tirelessly to improve not only the communities they pastored in but the entire City. The name of four blocks of Carondelet Street and 11 blocks of La Salle Street to Robert C. Blakes Sr. Drive and Rev. John Raphael Jr. Way, respectively.

The locations of the changes are as follows: Carondelet Street between Felicity Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard has been re-named after Blakes; who founded New Home Ministries who passed away at the age of 74 in April 2013. And LaSalle Street between Earhart Boulevard and Simon Bolivar Avenue after Raphael, the Pastor of New Hope Baptist Church who died at 60 in June 2013.

With the renaming of the streets to honor these great men we must ask ourselves what does this mean and how do we as a community aspire to the greatness that these men personified in their lives. “Thou Shalt Not Kill” the signs that dotted the City by Pastor John Raphael, a true crusader for his community and Robert C. Blakes who fought against blight and worked to curb crime and violence.

Both men were beacons of hope in their respective roles as truly being their brother and sister’s keeper and it is a great time to honor these men and their commitment as their lives are commendable and is an example of selfless giving.

**Cover Story, Continued on next page.**
“These were two great men that spent their lives working for the people of our great City, truly worthy of being remembered and honored for making a difference and saving lives,” Latvia Cantrell, Representative of District B where both streets are located told Data News Weekly.

A Gentle Giant Leads by Example

Raphael was a man who may have been known more for what he did than who he was. His “Thou Shalt Not Kill” signs were a known sight all over the City. And was a role model in the community in the same way as both Pastor Blakes and Raphael performed during their lives. As a scholar who has taught African-American Studies in universities across the U.S., he feels it is an important step in the right direction to honor those who have served our community and can be an inspiration to the next generation.

“The notion of memory and remembering is important for the present as it is for the future. It gives honor to those who honor is due, but for the future we have so few things that remind our community of the positive contributions of African-Americans so it is a good thing to honor them and spread their message and purpose in our community,” Webster told Data News Weekly.

Our Heroes and Sheores are Americans Heroes

Asia Rainey is an artist/educator and community advocate who worked for many years in corporate America. But today she is the Director of the Oya Market, a space that gives small local business and artists a place to sell their items in addition to having a performance space and meeting/teaching spaces. It is located in an area that is transitioning and the center of controversy surrounding gentrification on N. Rampart in the Marigny/St. Roch section of New Orleans. While she believes it is good to honor African-Americans who have made a difference she feels that more should be done than naming streets to honor them and their legacy.

“I have never quite understood the rational where they choose to rename these streets. Typically, across the country from my own traveling I’ve seen many cities where streets named for Martin Luther King is usually in the poorest section of town.” Continuing she says, I sometimes feel when they are re-naming streets it should feel that the solutions lie in the African-American Community doing what it can to empower themselves in the same spirit of Pastor Blakes and Raphael.

“Look at the change of these streets far beyond the naming of them. I feel during their lives they may have impacted some young preachers influencing them to become shepherds of people of their people,” says Dennis. Continuing he says, “There is a need for us to step up and do things. And when you name a street after someone and then someone may ask who this person was and then when they are told of the contribution it might inspire them.”

Speaking of his own work in the community he says, “We have to do more to prepare our young people for the well-paying jobs that are coming to our City. Because right now many of the jobs some are qualified to do are menial jobs, I am working to change that. I would like to see young people get education and training to access these opportunities.”

Fighting for a Seat at the Table of Power

New Orleans for better or worse is changing. Whether it is the names of streets or the compos
Plant Habits

By LMG Calla Victoria  
Data News Weekly Columnist

In our zeal to purchase plant material, it is a good idea to research the natural growth habits of plants to make sure that you are positioning them correctly in your garden. Know the spread and growth habits before making purchases, even go online and research images of the plants you are considering in landscapes. Take for example one of my favorites, Gaura lindheimeri (also called the butterfly plant). It is a wonderful wildflower, easy care perennial, and is spectacular in the landscape. Its tall delicate branches trail over creating a waterfall effect. The problem is the branches can bend way down and touch the ground; and then there is the careless yard guy with a weed whacker, oh my! I planted a white gaura in one of my raised flower beds in front of my home and the gaura was still touching the ground. This plant that needs to be in a tall container or planted behind other plant material that can prop the gaura up. I solved the problem with some pink gaura that I planted behind my huge Agave Americanas (century plants). As the gaura’s delicate branches drape through my agaves, they soften the look of the large sculptural plants, while at the same time the agaves prop up the gaura so that it is not sweeping the ground. Also, I did learn that the pink gaura are much harder than the white ones. My white gaura, which is a much larger and older plant, dies back each winter while the pink ones just sail on through.

Now let us discuss a plant’s spread. The general rule, when buying plants, is to buy at least three of the same plant to make a statement. Now that is a good rule for most plants, however some plants spread so quickly and widely that one plant is more than enough. For example, cat whiskers Orthosiphon aristatus, an enchanting perennial but it get huge very fast, so one is more than enough to make a statement. It is a distant relative to mint, so it can take over very quickly. I purchased one of these amazing plants a couple of years ago, and by the second spring I had to dig up and move this plant because it had gotten so large. The same is true for the sweet potato groundcover, in the attached image two small sweet potato plants covered all of the area.

Check out my “Gardening Tip of the Week” at www.thegardeningdiva.com

Remember, never get too busy to stop and enjoy the beautiful flowers!
The Asante Foundation recently held its 2015 Salute to The Mass Media Profession where Terry Jones, Publisher of Data News Weekly Newspaper received the Crystal Award. 2015 marks the Sixth Anniversary celebration of The Asané Foundation Festival and Awards. The organization is using it’s platform to say Asané to individuals who work in all facets of the mass media profession in New Orleans, LA. Award categories included book publishers, news reporting, marketers, cartoonist, and researchers to ancillary services administrative, editors, producers, camera operators, graphic artist, public relations, and meteorologists. For ticket information visit www.asanteusa.org or call 504-416-9699.

Photos by Glenn Summers

Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events
Summer Jobs Pay Future Dividends

Michelle Obama’s Real Life Experiences

By Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr.
Founder & President, Rainbow PUSH Coalition

Last month at the graduation ceremony of Tuskegee University, a historically Black college in Alabama, first lady Michelle Obama spoke candidly about the racial barriers facing African Americans and encouraged them to overcome continuing discrimination by staying “true to the most real, most sincere, most authentic parts of yourselves.”

People, she said, “will make assumptions about who they think you are based on their limited notion of the world.” She and her husband have “felt the sting of those daily slights throughout our entire lives.” But “those feelings are not an excuse to just throw up our hands and give up. ... They are not an excuse to lose hope.”

Michelle’s comments were deeply moving because they came from her lived experience. Today, two of three Americans have a favorable opinion of her; she is far more popular than her husband.

Her mother moved in to provide an anchor. The president came back to concentrate on his homework when there’s too much noise at home. How you keep it together when your families are having hard times making ends meet.

Michelle flourished in school, and went on to Princeton, where she felt virtually like an alien in a school filled with the children of privilege, where only 8 percent of the student body was African American. Yet, she graduated with honors and went on to earn her law degree at Harvard Law School.

But as Barack Obama’s political comet rose in 2008, Michelle became the target of harsh criticism. She was besmirched as “Mrs. Grievance” or “Barack’s bitter half.” The fist bump she gave Barack when he clinched the Democratic nomination was called a “terrorist fist jab.” She was accused of exhibiting a “little bit of uppityism.” As she told the graduating class at Tuskegee, “as potentially the first African-American first lady, I was also the focus of another set of questions and speculations; conversations sometimes rooted in the fears and misperceptions of others. Was I too loud, or too angry, or tooemasculating? Or was I too soft, too much of a mom, not enough of a career woman?”

But she made her way. She focused her political energy on fighting obesity, a plague across America, disproportionately affecting African Americans and Latinos. She made healthy eating and exercise more popular, while mobilizing public pressure on food and beverage companies to cut the sugar and change the offerings in school lunches and vending machines. Her work on issues military families face, particularly the pressures they feel not only when deployed, but after they come home, helped thousands find decent work.

Perhaps her biggest triumph was her biggest priority — raising her children in the White House. Her mother moved in to provide an anchor. The president came back at 6:30 p.m. to eat with this family, attended school events and athletic practices like a regular parent. Their tight and loving family has been an exemplary model for families across the country. And today, the vast majority of Americans have respect and affection for the first lady who made this happen.

Michelle Obama has said she has no intention of running for political office when she leaves the White House. But the interest in her running never subsides. If she decides to run, she would be the odds-on favorite, particularly for the Illinois Senate seat now held by Mark Kirk, whose most recent infamy was his attempt to use “street language,” degrading Sen. Lindsey Graham (R.S.C.) and the South Side of Chicago.

As Barack Obama’s presidency heads into its final years, one thing is clear: Michelle Obama’s grace, intelligence and discipline have served her family, her husband and the nation well.

Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow PUSH Coalition. You can keep up with his work at www.rainbowpush.org

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To Be Equal

Summer Jobs Pay Future Dividends

Great Depression, American youth are struggling to get the world experience they need for jobs of the future.” — White House, “We Can’t Wait Initiative” Statement Release, January 2012

I can still remember my very first job – and the valuable lessons I learned from it that continue to inform my career to this day. I got my first taste of entrepreneurship as one-third of a three-man janitorial company I started with two childhood friends. We mowed lawns, washed cars and cleaned windows. If it needed fixing or cleaning, we were the ones to call.

At the age of 15, I earned my first steady paycheck as a copy boy for a local newspaper. Like so many millions of teens before and after me, I had the chance to be exposed to the world of work at an early age. And I earned more money from the experience. With work came important lessons about responsibility, effective communication, time management, interpersonal skills and more. Today, as our nation continues to recover from the crippling impact of the Great Recession on our economy and job market, the ability of teens to jump-start their future careers, as they were once able to, remains in jeopardy.

Not only did jobs disappear during our nation’s economic downturn, summer jobs – widely acknowledged as the traditional means of entry into our nation’s workforce for teens and young adults – became scarce. Competition from older workers for those entry-level jobs once reserved for teens increased as the labor market weakened, and with states slashing budgets to make ends meet, state and federally-funded summer jobs placement programs were either underfunded or cut.

But teen employment matters for their future and for our nation’s. It not only gives young people something productive to do during the summer months, that job in the retail store, library or the local newspaper is money in their pocket and money being spent within the community. Studies have also shown that those who work when they are young are more likely to be employed in the future and will earn higher salaries.

After a high of 27.2 percent teen unemployment in 2010, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, teen unemployment for years ages 16-19 is now down to 17.9 percent. As is the case with adult workers, teens are beginning to find jobs as the market recovers, but unemployment remains high for young people—disproportionately affecting low-income youth and Blacks and Hispanics.

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Hospitals Profit from Exorbitant Markups

By Jazelle Hunt

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – Hundreds of American hospitals are turning a profit by charging patients exorbitant rates for necessary procedures. And for 50 hospitals in particular, the markups are as high as 12 times the amount it costs them to deliver those services.

This is the revelation from a paper published last week in the Health Affairs medical journal, titled “Extreme Markup: The Fifty US Hospitals With The Highest Charge-To-Cost Ratios.”

“These 50 are outliers, they’re very skewed. But that does not mean all the other hospitals are lidded,” says Ge Bai, assistant professor of accounting at Washington and Lee University, and co-author of the paper. “It’s very difficult to tell [though]. You’d have to ask the question, when you walk in, at the front desk…about the ownership of the hospital.”

The researchers looked at 2012 hospital price lists for nearly 5,000 facilities across the country, and compared them to the Medicare allowable costs, defined as the most reasonable fees a hospital can expect to spend in effectively delivering any given service to Medicare patients, as calculated by the government. They are not intended to guide hospital chargers to patients, and every hospital creates its own price list. These lists are called chargers because they’re often difficult for patients to access and decipher unless a hospital takes the rare initiative to be transparent.

According to the study, most hospitals charge patients between 1.5 and 4 times the Medicare allowable cost. A smaller, but sizable number of facilities charge between 4 and 9 times the cost. The 50 outliers – 49 of which were for-profit facilities – were charging patients between 9.2 and 12.6 times the cost they incurred in delivering services.

The top five hospitals with the steepest markups, all charging at least 12 times the Medicare cost, were North Okaloosa Medical Center and Bayfront Health Brooksville in Florida; Carepoint Health-Bayonne Hospital in New Jersey; Paul B. Hall Regional Medical Center in Kentucky; and Chestnut Hill Hospital in Pennsylvania.

Florida is home to 20 of the 50 high mark-up hospitals identified in the study. The rest are spread across 12 other states – mostly in the South (76 percent are), and mostly in urban areas (84 percent are).

The other states were Alabama (which had five of these facilities), Arizona (one), Arkansas (one), California (three), Kentucky (one), New Jersey (one), Oklahoma (one), Pennsylvania (seven), South Carolina (one), Tennessee (three), Texas (five), and Virginia (one).

Two publicly-traded corporate hospital systems – Community Health Systems and Hospital Corporation of America – own 38 of these facilities.

Chargers vary widely, in general and within this top-50 group. For example, at Orange Park Medical Center in Florida (number eight on the list), if an uninsured person is admitted for one to two days for chest pain, he or she could be charged somewhere between $12,000 and $23,000. About 15 miles away at Memorial Hospital of Jacksonville, the same patient would be charged between $9,000 and $17,000, and that’s with an extra day of care. Both hospitals are owned by the same company, which voluntarily provides its price estimates.

Uninsured people feel the full force of these charges. While the Affordable Care Act has helped millions get coverage, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 13.7 percent of Black people are still uninsured as of 2014 and will likely remain so. Many are low-income or below the poverty line, living in states that did not expand Medicare coverage.

Half of the states housing the top-50 high mark-up hospitals did not expand Medicare.

Insured people who are “out-of-network” at these facilities are also vulnerable. Insurance companies do not set their terms based on the hospital’s prices – if a policy covers 70 percent of all emergency visits, then the patient is responsible for the 30 percent, whether the hospital charged $100 or $1,000. When a person gets a bill from a hospital that isn’t partnered with his or her insurance company, the company often pays little to nothing of that bill.

People who are both insured and in-network end up paying higher premiums when a hospital with high markups is part of their network. As insurance companies have to cover members who end up in these for-profit facilities, they spread the steep charges among all their members.

“We don’t have price regulations in other industries so people can do comparative shopping. But in the health care market it’s very different. In many cases, we as consumers do not have the time…to compare prices,” Bai says, adding that during treatment, physicians don’t know or are not at liberty to discuss the hospital’s pricing systems. “We as consumers have no options before the service is provided. We just wait there hopefully…we’re sick and anxious.”

About 30 percent of the hospitals sampled in the study were considered-for-profit – Bai says that about half all hospitals in the country are.

Maryland and West Virginia are the only states with complete health care pricing regulations. California and New Jersey have regulations for what hospitals can charge uninsured patients. Maryland’s system is widely considered a national model, with the lowest mark-ups in the nation (1.5 of Medicare allowable cost). The report recommends a federal system patterned after it.

“We knew these high markups have been going on for a while, at least 15 or 20 years, but this is really over the top,” Bai says. “I think the public needs to understand…there’s a loophole in our system. The market has stopped working. That’s why we need the government to step to help regulate some of these prices.”

Hispanics. The national unemployment rate stands at a staggering 30.1 percent for Black teens and 19.2 percent for Hispanic teens. The groups of teens who need the work most in order to help themselves, and very often make a significant contribution to their family’s budget, are not finding the jobs.

Our nation’s answer to this dilemma has been a fractured portrait of private and public initiatives and success. Cities and states have cobbled together money – when it’s available – and have funneled it to local groups or agencies that connect youths to jobs or job training.

In 2012, the White House launched Summer Jobs, as part of the “We Can’t Wait” initiative. The project brought together the federal government and the private sector to create 180,000 employment opportunities for low-income youth.

At the National Urban League, we work with at-risk youth to introduce them into the workforce through a comprehensive set of services through the Urban Youth Empowerment Program. While all of these efforts are laudable and have changed many lives and communities for the better, it is not enough. Our nation needs to expand summer job programs and create year-round employment for our young people. We need a commitment that says yes to teens and to their future. Our nation needs a comprehensive jobs solution for young people, because piecemeal solutions will only deliver far-flung pockets of success.

Investing in our young people is an investment in the continued strength of this great nation and its workforce. Young people need the formative workplace skills they can get in those entry-level jobs to move on to greater career success and higher salaries in the future. Our nation, and its local economies, benefit when teens spend their disposable income. Surely there are tax loopholes, corporate or otherwise, that can be closed, bringing additional dollars to the table to invest in our young people. The financial cost of not investing in teens, not creating opportunities for future success, is what will cost this country, and our future in the fast-paced global economy, the most.

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

Commentary, Continued from page 6.
Angiel’s got stuff to do.

St. Jude patient Angiel:
Big Dreamer

But at this moment, she’s fighting cancer.

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