

AUGUST 2024

# Newsletter

## NATIONAL BLACK BUSINESS MONTH

AUGUST 19, 2024



### IN MEMORIAM

We want to take the time to remember and honor fellow community member, EarlGiver Essien before the beginning of this month's newsletter.

Our hearts at BBEC are with the Essien family during this time of loss.

You can support and donate to the family using this link: [Help Lay EarlGiver Essien to Rest](#)



### Happy August ☀️ and National Black Business Month!



We're coming at you with a new, **jam packed**, newsletter with all the updates and news you want to know from BBEC 📧!

## AUGUST 19, 2024



## COMMUNITY UPDATES

### SENATOR WARREN VISITS

**“Small businesses are the backbone of our society” - U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren**

Thursday, July 18, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren stopped by The Collab413 to have a business round-table discussion with four Black businesses and entrepreneurs in Pittsfield.



**Left to Right: Jocelyn, DeSean, Ludwig, and Destiny**

With an amazing conversation, entrepreneurs and business owners, Destiny Saunders - Dolc'e Rose Beauty Supply, Ludwig Jean-Louis - Cravins' Ice Cream Jocelyn Guelce - The Collab413, and DeSean Scales - D Scales Photo Lab, were able to tell Senator Warren about their journeys to become business owners and the importance of small, Black businesses, especially in the Berkshires!

Vibe North Street recipients, Jocelyn and Destiny, reflected on their journeys of securing funding to open storefronts on North Street, Pittsfield MA. Jocelyn notes that she and her business partner(s) “are driven by the community’s investment” in The Collab413.

Noting the disparity for hair care products for Black folx in the Berkshires, Destiny Saunders saw the “excitement [from Williams College students] coming to [their] monthly pop-up shops.” With the Vibe North Street grant, Saunders was able to secure a storefront on North Street! This is the same storefront she would host pop-ups in front of.

For DeSean Scales, everything “has been a snowball effect of positive things.” Featured in BBEC’s talent show earlier this year and being in July’s Artist Walk, Scales’ business is climbing higher and higher. A Pittsfield native - born and raised, Scales’ business philosophy is to “highlight the successes of local business owners.” Additionally, Scales noted that “the most rewarding thing [in his business career so far] is the art gallery at BBEC.” (Learn more about “The Creative Journey” below this section)



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Finally, Ludwig Jean-Louise mentioned to Senator Warren how BBEC's Equipment and Infrastructure grant allowed him to "get the equipment [in his new location] up and running." Ecstatic that Jean-Louise runs an ice cream and frozen yogurt shop, Senator Warren took a pit stop to grab a root beer float!



**Left to Right: Andrea Willaims (Black Arts Council Manager), Brianna Christie (Communications Coordinator), and Aike (BBEC Intern)**

To end, Jean-Louise left the round-table discussion with encouraging words: "It's an obstacle today, but tomorrow we'll have the strength to overcome [owning a business]."

BBEC Executive Director and staff followed Senator Warren's lead by stopping by Cravins' for some ice cream!

Here's a snapshot:

You can learn more about the round-table discussion at [iBerkshires](#), [The Berkshire Eagle](#), and [The Berkshire Edge](#)! Additionally, don't forget to support Dolc'e Rose Beauty Supply, TheCollab 413, D Scales PhotoLab, Cravins' Ice Cream, and your local Black businesses found on our [directory](#)!

## "THE CREATIVE JOURNEY" ARTIST TALK

As a featured artist in our talent show earlier this year, Pittsfield based photographer DeSean Scales was in July and August's First Fridays Art Walk (July 5 and August 2)!

At July's Arts Walk, DeSean and BBEC made "The Creative Journey" open to the public.

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Continuing our summer gallery, DeSean gave an incredible artist talk August 2 discussing who/what inspires him, who his art is for, future goals as an entrepreneur, and more! Thank you to everyone who came out to support DeSean.

On top of the artist talk, you now have the ability to view "The Creative Journey" in our new [Digital Gallery!](#) Browse through the photos, get a feel for DeSean's work, and if you see something you like, put in a request to purchase it from the artist!



DeSean's work is up until November 5th, 2024! So, stop by Monday through Thursday from 1pm – 5pm. If you have any questions, please email [arts@berkshirebec.org](mailto:arts@berkshirebec.org).

Be sure to support DeSean @[dsphotolab](#) on IG and @[DSPL](#) on Facebook.

Interested in taking your career and talents to the next level like DeSean, apply to the Afro Renaissance Grant mentioned below!"

## CHOICES MENTORING INITIATIVE CROWDFUNDING

**Help support your community organizations!**

Choices Mentoring Initiative is launching a crowdfunding campaign to enhance their youth programs, expand their mentor recruitment and training efforts, and support their headquarters.





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[The Choices Mentoring Initiative](#) seeks to decrease risk aspects and unearth resiliency to advance emotional welfare and participants' overall achievement.

Their mission is to build relationships that connect the youth to themselves, their family, and the community with skills learned to increase the feeling of inclusion and value, mutual respect, and self-identity. Choices works with youth to develop an understanding of themselves using knowledge and skills to traverse situations and nurture their self-identity.



After more than two years of impactful work in our community, Choices Mentoring Initiative is dedicated to extending its reach to more young men across Berkshire County. To sustain this vital growth, we are seeking the support of our community.

Support Choices Mentoring Initiative by donating to this link: [Choices Mentoring Campaign](#).

Questions? Contact Choices Mentoring Initiative [here!](#)

## R.O.P.E HIGHLIGHTS AND CELEBRITY ENCOUNTERS

The [Rites of Passage and Empowerment](#) (R.O.P.E) program has had an eventful summer!

R.O.P.E Berkshires is a local, proven mentoring program for young women of color and young people identifying as female or non-binary. R.O.P.E's mission is to celebrate and honor the entry of adolescents into adulthood and provide them with skills and knowledge that they need to be successful, independent and responsible people. It is designed to help participants discover their inner voice and support all components of personal development and personal leadership.



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BBEC had the pleasure to support R.O.P.E at the silver sponsorship level for their Ghana trip. From July 8th - July 19th, R.O.P.E had the opportunity to experience a life-changing trip in Accra, Ghana.

On route to Ghana, R.O.P.E scholars and ambassadors had a chance encounter with rapper and musician, [Ja Rule!](#)

While there, they engaged in service-learning projects, embarked on a cultural exchange with students at the University of Ghana at Legon, and toured historic sites. These service learning projects helped raise funds for the University of Ghana at Legon and orphanage in Accra, Ghana.

Meeting Ja Rule wasn't the only celebrity encounter they would have. On Saturday, July 27th, members of R.O.P.E got to meet [Vice President Kamala Harris](#) on the tarmac before her speech at the Colonial Theatre here, in Pittsfield!



There's more in store for R.O.P.E this summer. Join them this Saturday, August 24th at 6:00 PM for their event "Ghana Experience" at the Berkshire Innovation Center.

This event is an opportunity for R.O.P.E mentees and ambassadors to show the Berkshire community Ghana through their eyes. This includes the impact of visiting sites the enslaved were held, but also, the excitement of participating in Kente cloth making. This is an opportunity to support this amazing organization and their mission.

For more information, contact R.O.P.E at [pittsfieldrope@gmail.com](mailto:pittsfieldrope@gmail.com)

**rites of passage  
AND  
EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM**

FORMALLY INVITES YOU TO OUR

**GHANA**



**EXPERIENCE**

Followed by a taste of Ghana

**August 24th 6pm**

Berkshire  
Innovation  
Center

45 Woodlawn Ave, Pittsfield, MA

If you have any questions feel free to reach out to [pittsfieldrope@gmail.com](mailto:pittsfieldrope@gmail.com)



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## COMMUNITY EVENTS

**THURSDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 12**

FEIGENBAUM CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INNOVATION  
RECEPTION: 4 PM, CSI ATRIUM | TALK: 5 PM, CSI I2I

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



The MCLA physics department will host NASA engineer Dr. Renee Horton as their fall Physics Speaker on Thursday September 12th. Dr. Horton was the first female president of the National Society of Black Physicists, she is a fierce disabilities rights activist through Lighthouse Louisiana, and the founder of Unapologetically Being, Inc., a nonprofit for advocacy and mentoring in STEM. More info about Dr. Horton can be found at [her website](#).

The physics department created the Physics Speaker Series through the [TEAM-UP Together EXCEL](#) grant they [received earlier this year](#). This grant is administered by the American Institute of Physics (AIP) with the mission of doubling the number of African American students earning a bachelor's degree in physics or astronomy by 2030.

To learn more about the event, you can contact Department Chair, Kebra Ward at [kebra.ward@mcla.edu](mailto:kebra.ward@mcla.edu).

## BBEC GRANTS

**Unleash Your Creativity with the 2024 Berkshire Afro Renaissance Grant**

This grant is specifically designed to support local black youth and offer them the necessary resources to explore and enhance their artistic talents. Through this grant, we aim to empower the youth to bring their artistic visions to life, while contributing to the rich tapestry of our cultural heritage.

For more detailed information about the application process, prospective applicants can contact Andrea at [arts@berkshirebec.org](mailto:arts@berkshirebec.org) or call us at (413) 441-0111.



**Watch the Promo Video Now!**

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## NEW OPPORTUNITIES

**Berkshire Taconic**  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

### **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation is looking for a new President.**

All inquiries, nominations, and applications (including resumes and two- to three-page letters of interest describing relevant experience relating to the opportunities, challenges, and qualifications outlined in the full position profile) should be directed in strict confidence below. Applications will be reviewed as they are submitted.

Apply and view the full job description here: [Application and Job Description](#)

### **Homeowners and Landlords: New Mass Save® enhanced residential offers!**

Find out if you may be eligible for 100% off on needed insulation! There are new Mass Save offers for people who earn too much to qualify for the Income Eligible Fuel Assistance Program, but can benefit from additional support. Look at the chart below to see if you might qualify.

Number of Household Members	Annual Household Income to qualify for 100% off approved insulation through enhanced residential offers
1	\$45,393 – \$63,000
2	\$59,360 – \$79,146
3	\$73,327 – \$97,768
4	\$87,295 – \$116,392
5	\$101,262 – \$135,015
6	\$115,229 – \$153,638
7	\$117,847 – \$157,128
8	\$120,466 – \$160,620

Benefits of insulation and air sealing improvements include:

- Lowering energy used for heating and cooling by up to 20%
- Decreasing drafts to improve comfort and humidity all year long
- Minimizing outside noise for a quieter, more peaceful environment
- Preventing allergens and pests from entering your home
- Reducing the chance of ice dams—protecting your home from potential damage

If your income is below the numbers on the above chart, and you are already receiving fuel assistance, you can call HomeWorks as well at 413-207-9807 or sign up online at [www.hwe.works/EGS](http://www.hwe.works/EGS). If your income falls above the numbers on the chart, you can still call HomeWorks and you may be eligible for at least 75% off of approved insulation.

Learn more about this opportunity on our website [here!](#)

