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Allan Houston's All-Star Fatherhood Initiative

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Data Zone Page 4

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"Blessed 26"

Family Breakfast


Page 2



Newsmaker All-Star Weekend Community Celebration

Page 5

State & Local Ray Nagin Convicted



Page 6

Kendal Francis' "Blessed 26" Family Breakfast

Planting the Seeds for Greatness in New Orleans Youth



L-R Bernard H. Robertson III, CRPC, AAMS President/CEO Robertson Wealth Advisors, WDSU Meteorologist Damon Singleton, Glenn Jones, Marketing Director Data News Weekly, Kendal E. Francis, Blessed 26 Founder and Executive Director, Sky Hyacinthe, Executive Director of Elevate New Orleans, Dr. Danna "Dr. TRUTH" Andrus, Terrence Jones, Owner/Founder The Locker Room 10 Room Inc.

By Edwin Buggage
Photos by Glenn Summers

Blessed to Be a Blessing

In the spirit of Black History Month, it is about sharing, and giving inspiration to the next generation. It is

about letting the young people of today understand that the fountain of freedom from which the drink is from; a well others dug with their sacrifices, so that today would be a better day. And while it is brighter days for some, there are still those young people particularly young males who live in a world where hope and aspiring to reach higher is something of a pipe dream.

And where their talents sometimes do not meet the opportunities for them to climb the ladder of success; but today there is a young man who is the embodiment of the words that appear in the second book of Corinthians, in that he is "Blessed to be a Blessing."

Kendal Francis in his day job is an Assignment Editor at local NBC affiliate WDSU-TV, but his passion

Cover Story, Continued
on next page.

INSIDE DATA

Cover Story	2	Commentary.	6
Data Zone	4	State and Local News .	7
Newsmaker	5		

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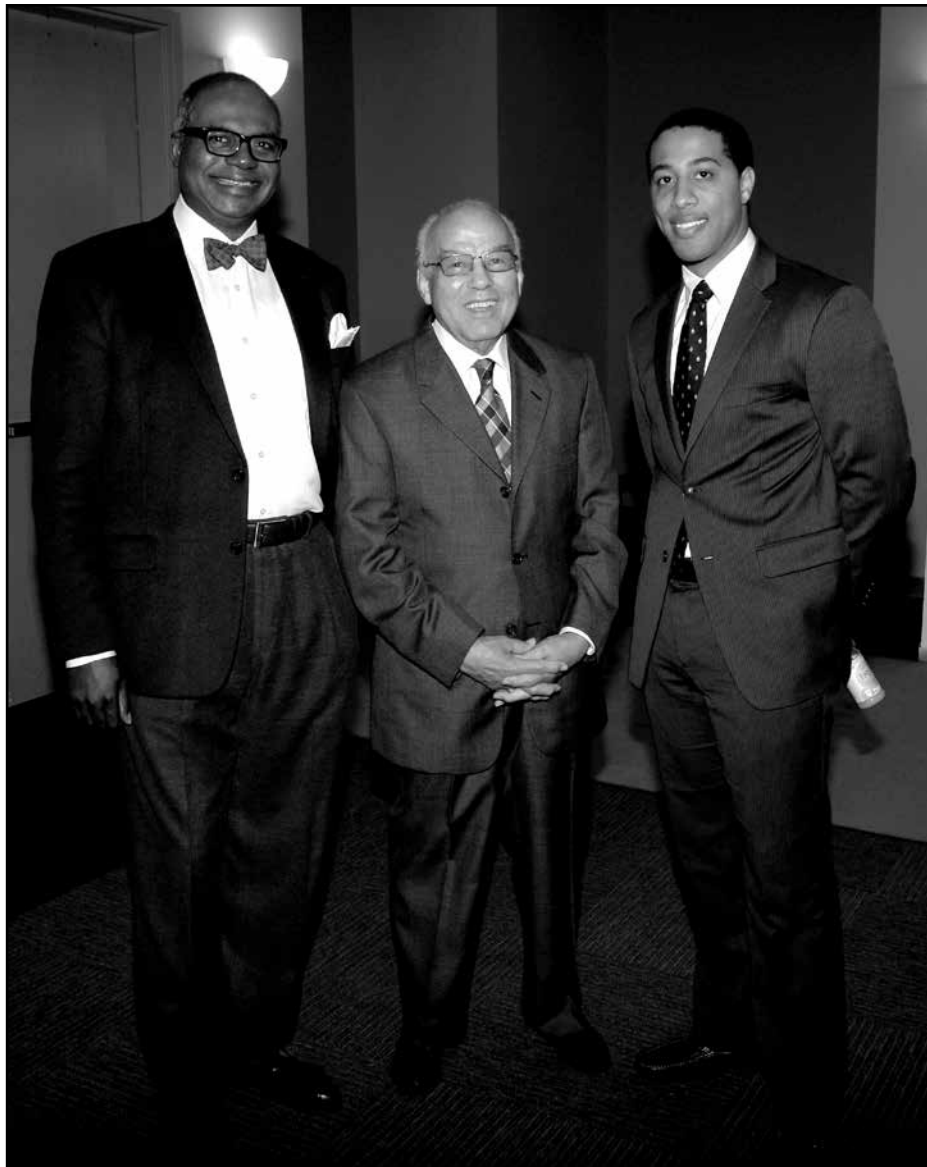
Cover Story, Continued from previous page.

lies in working with young people who are determined to become successful in spite of adverse circumstances. For a decade he has touched the lives of many through his non-profit "Blessed 26." His journey toward giving back began by watching his father Kenneth Francis and his immediate and extended family that provided him a template for how he would live his life, one dedicated to giving back and service. "I feel my father was the epitome of manhood for me growing up, and my mother Judy Francis is love in human form and my older brother Kevin was literally my hero, my grandfather Rudolph McClain is the most faith filled man I know and my grandfather Earl Francis, who died at 100 is the wisest man I've ever known; and these are the people who imparted into me that's fueled my desire to want to give back and serve others," he says paying homage to his family and how they shaped what has become his passion.

Growing up in Florida, while still in high school he was a student/athlete; while busy playing football as a star quarterbacks earning his team a state championship, he felt the urge to give back. Following in the footsteps of his father he volunteered working to help others. Upon moving to New Orleans as a student enrolled at Tulane University on a football scholarship he felt the need to not be in the chorus of those complaining about the problems of the City, but to become part of the solution. "When I looked around the City and saw what young people were going through, it pained me to see that some of them did not have the resources, and then I thought how could I make a difference? And contrary to what some think it is not all about money, but it is about taking your time and talent to commit yourself to helping people become successful in fulfilling their dreams, goals and ambitions. Early in my life I watched my father take kids to schools who received athletic scholarships, and he was the one in the community that filled a void to help people reach their goals, and that is what I am determined to do with "Blessed 26" links young people to resources that can help them become successful in life."

"Blessed 26" Targets New Orleans Young Men Who Strive For Excellence

Recently, Kendal held his "Family Breakfast" at Xavier University, bringing together a group consisting of high school students along with featured Speakers Dr. Norman Francis (no relation) President of Xavier University, WDSU Anchor, Norman Robinson, Motivational Speaker and Author Danna Andrus and Moderator WDSU Meteorologist Damon Singleton in addition to men who would serve to mentor and inspire the young men in attendance on this day. Speaking of his reason for having the event he says, "I wanted to do something that would bring people



L-R WDSU Anchor Norman Robinson, Xavier University of Louisiana President Norman C. Francis, and Patrick Johnson First NBA Bank Marketing and PR Assistant and Xavier University Graduate.

together around the common theme of empowering our youth, so I thought why not call it "family breakfast", where we would share and break bread and to have a conversation about getting serious about being one unit committed to the goal of helping our young people."

Speaking of some of the messages given to the youth he says, "Dr. Francis talked about opportunity and seizing the moment and I was excited and humbled that he agreed to speak to the kids. To have some of the kids hear his inspirational words about pursuing greatness and telling them that they can do whatever they desire if they put their minds and time into it was a great thing." Also during the program Dr. Danna Andrus, hyped up the kids with call and response motivating them that it doesn't matter where you start out in life it's what you do to change your circumstances and realize that your future is in your own hands and is a matter of making wise life choices. Continuing he says, "And for Norman Robinson to come off the anchor desk to allow the young people to see him in a different light; he was very jovial with the kids and just telling them stories about his grandmother and grandfather and the lessons they imparted on

him. He also talked about living during segregated times and how he never responded negatively to a negative situation. He was determined and did not care what people thought of him and that he was going to beat the odds. He said in anything in life he wanted to do he followed it up with action and I feel that's what it's going to take for our young people to be successful."

It Takes a Village: Passing the Torch and Aspiring to Greatness

Understanding the significance of history and passing on the spirit of uplift and advancing the race Francis feels strongly about this saying, "We are standing on the shoulders of giants, none of us have gotten here on our own, so I had a vision to bring 300 people together, young people and professionals to bridge the gaps of misunderstanding that sometimes happen between the generations.

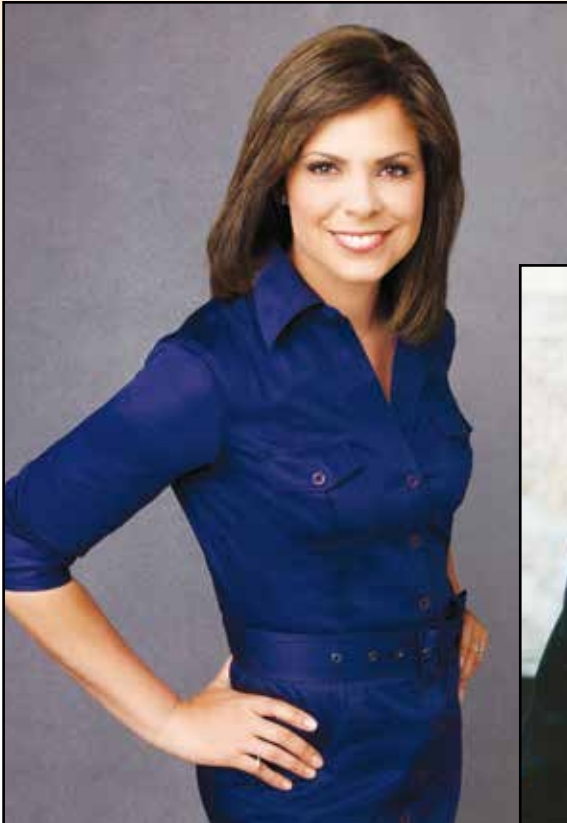
I spoke about some of the young people and how they've overcome adverse circumstances, I mentioned one young man who has a scholarship to Bard College in New York and he was given a standing ovation. And we went further and talked about how it is important to surround

yourself with the right people as you strive for success. Also during the event I did another challenge where I lined up several young men like a soul train line and asked another of the participants what he wanted to be and he said 'a lawyer' and I sat at the other end of the line and said I represent success, and you are going to have to get here without any arms and legs. Then I asked him how are you going to get here? And without saying anything the other young men picked him up and carried him over to me and that is what our community needs more people working together as a team to uplift, encourage, inspire and support each other."

As the African Proverb says, "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child," Francis realizes all hands must be on deck doing their part with everyone using their unique gifts to mold the leaders and citizens of tomorrow; to aspire to greatness and reach heights unknown to previous generations. Harkening back on history and how so many unsung" heroes" and "sheroes" took part in the liberation struggle he says of today the same principles apply. "Back during the Civil Rights Movement we had Dr. King and others that made sacrifices, but it has been and always will be bigger than any one person, for we are all agents of history. It took people from all walks of life to make a change and make historical steps forward for our people and I believe every person can do his own thing to accomplish this. For the Blessed 26 challenge I went into my personal network and asked them to donate 80 cents a day to help for a benevolence fund. I find in my outreach efforts you'd be surprised at what a small amount can do when it's put all together, the impact that it can have."

Speaking on how anyone can serve to better society Kendal feels the movement today is not solely as a mass movement as it was during the Civil Rights Movement, but of individuals and small groups doing their part to affect change. "Today it is not about one leader we all can do something to help invoke change. Like in our community the barbershop has always been a place where we discussed issues of the day and we have a person like my barber Wilbert "Chill" Wilson, who owns a barbershop and several other businesses becoming civically engaged and started "Walk A Mile for A Child." He is a great example of something not just talking the talk but walking the walk, here is someone who's walked in the shoes of many of the young men we are trying to help and now he serves as an inspiration for the youth of our City. This is only one example of the kind of things we can do and I believe there is something we all can contribute to the betterment of our City. It is as simple as this, ordinary people working together can do extraordinary things, all we have to do is our part and that is what I am trying to do is be a blessing to others with "Blessed 26."

Allan Houston & Soledad O'Brien to Host Fatherhood & Family Summit During NBA All-Star Weekend



Award winning Journalist & CEO of Starfish Media Group, Soledad O'Brien



New York Knicks Assistant General Manager and former two-time NBA All-Star, Allan Houston

Free Event to be held Saturday at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church

New York Knicks Assistant General Manager and former two-time NBA All-Star, Allan Houston, along with award winning Journalist & CEO of Starfish Media Group, Soledad O'Brien, will host a Fatherhood & Family Summit on Saturday from 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, 2515 Franklin Avenue.

"My Foundation has been at the forefront of educating the public about the importance of fatherhood and strengthening the family unit for years," stated Allan Houston. "Now it is our goal to unify members of the NBA community and beyond in one arena to promote this cause. We are excited to be able to partner with Soledad, Pastor Fred Luter, Pastor Steve Jamison and their organizations for what is sure to be a groundbreaking event."

Addressing the fatherlessness issue across the country and continuing their commit-

ment for change, the event will feature both a male and female panel that will each discuss the importance of fatherhood and family.

The female panel will be moderated by Soledad O'Brien and feature Senior Advisor to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Suzanne Immerman, Four-Time WNBA Champion and Olympic Gold Medalist, Tina Thompson, NBA Wives Adrienne Bosh and CleRenda McGrady and NBA Mom Sheryl Howard.

The male panel will be hosted by Allan Houston and Fred Hickman and include New Orleans Pelicans Head Coach Monty Williams, San Antonio Spurs Player Danny Green and Miami Heat Player Roger Mason Jr. Also included is a youth panel that will feature an interactive segment hosted by former NBA Player Keyon Dooling.

The event is free and open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis and will include prizes and giveaways for select participants. Doors open at 11 AM.

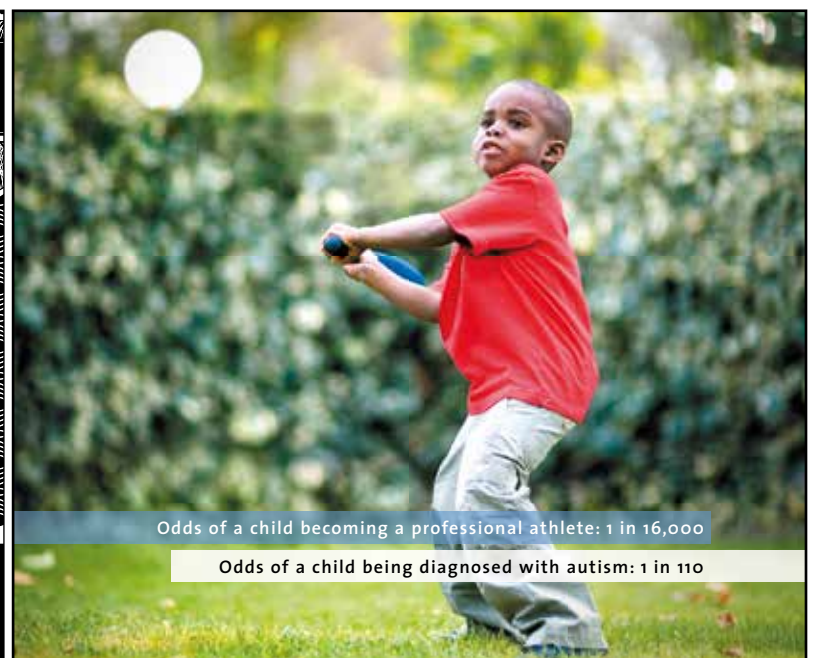
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Some signs to look for:

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No babbling by 12 months.

No words by 16 months.

To learn more of the signs of autism, visit autismspeaks.org



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NBRPA to Host All-Star Weekend Community Celebration

Rev. Jesse Jackson & Former Mayor Marc Morial Slated To Speak

The National Basketball Retired Players Association (NBRPA), the only Association comprised of NBA, ABA, Harlem Globetrotters and WNBA alumni, will be hosting a free community celebration, youth summit and youth basketball clinic at Oliver Bush Playground in the Lower 9th Ward on February 15, 2014 from noon to 4 p.m. as part of its NBA All-Star Weekend activities.

Supported by the global law firm Dentons, this very special philanthropic event is collaboration between the NBRPA, National Police Athletic/Activities League (PAL), National Urban League, Dillard University, Louisiana Justice Institute, Rainbow PUSH Coalition Sports Commission and the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission and the New Orleans City Council offices of James A. Gray and Stacy Head. The event will be attended by more than 20 former NBA players and will include comments from Rev. Jesse Jackson of Rainbow PUSH and former Mayor Marc Morial of the National Urban

League as part of a formal speaking program at 3 p.m.

Free community lunch from McDonalds followed by a youth summit conducted by Dillard University and youth basketball clinic conducted by the NBRPA, PAL and National Urban League.

Events will take place on February 15, 2014 at the Oliver Bush Playground, 2500 Caffin Ave and the schedule is as follows:

12-2 p.m. - Community Celebration with lunch provided by McDonalds

2-3 p.m. - Youth Summit conducted by Dillard University and the Louisiana Justice Institute

3-4 p.m. - Podium program featuring Rev. Jesse Jackson and former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial, followed by a youth basketball clinic conducted by the NBRPA, PAL and National Urban League



National Urban League President & CEO and former New Orleans Mayor, Marc Morial and Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, President & CEO Rainbow Push Coalition.

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Former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin Found Guilty on Corruption Charges

By Edwin Buggage

A Chapter in the New Orleans Post-Katrina saga has ended with former Mayor C. Ray Nagin being found guilty of accepting payoffs for City contracts, becoming the first mayor in the City's history to be charged and convicted of corruption.

Nagin's rise and fall is ironic as he came in on a note of anti-corruption when he took office in the 2002. Prior to Hurricane Katrina and the breaching of the levees he was a popular mayor a 60% approval rating and praised for his work in his fight to changing New Orleans' reputation as one of America's most corrupt cities. After the storm where there was enough blame to go around at the local, state and federal level, Nagin in an uphill battle was re-elected in 2006 defeating challenger and present New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu. But his second term was mired with many problems as a result his approval rating plummeted to 24% by the end of his second term. His fate would then take another turn three years after leaving office with him being indicted on 21 counts including bribery and wire fraud charges.



Pictured above is Former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin leaving the courthouse on Wednesday, February 12, faced the press after the jury in his federal corruption trial deliberated for about six and a half hours before finding Mr. Nagin, 57, guilty in 20 of the 21 counts against him. Photo credit AP

The jury, deliberated for about six and a half hours before finding Mr. Nagin, 57, guilty in 20 of the 21 counts against him. The verdict

came after a seven-day trial, with more than three dozen witnesses testifying, including the Federal Government star witness Rodney

Williams who had pled guilty to bribing Mr. Nagin in return for contracting work with the City. In a trial that garnered more media interest

than the citizens who want to close this chapter in the City's history. As evidenced during the days of the trial with a that was half-empty most of the time except when the former Mayor took the stand, sparring with the prosecutor and dismissing the charges against him as misleading and misinformed.

The details surrounding some of the counts against Nagin, who left office in 2010 after eight years, stem from a governmental probe alleged that the former Mayor accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and truckloads of free granite for his family business in exchange for promoting the interests of local businessman Frank Fradella. He also was charged with accepting thousands of dollars in payoffs from another businessman, Rodney Williams, for his help with his sons' granite business in exchange for City contracts.

Nagin will remain free on bond while he awaits sentencing. Each of the charges carries a sentence from three to 20 years, but how long would he serve was unclear and will depend on a pre-sentence investigation and various sentencing guidelines. No sentencing date was set.

Spiritually Speaking...



James Washington
Guest Columnist

Sometimes I have put myself in the most difficult of situations because without deliberate conscious effort, I forget God has worked this thing out, without any input from me. I used to think there must be something I'm not getting because the more I searched for the meaning of my own salvation, the more confused I would become. You see life teaches you a

thing or two or three when you're arrogant enough to think you have all the answers. I now know, as a result of a rather enlightening Sunday service, that I am not the primary source of knowing why things unfold the way as they do. My mistake had been to think that somehow, one day, through my own volition, "discover" the best way to serve God. My "calling" would be clear because, after all, I'm actively searching to see how I might best serve the Lord, given what I perceived to be my gifts.

Wrong. That's not letting go and letting God. That's holding on and giving man (me) way to much credit. The minister's message was so simple, that I can only believe it was God's time to share His destiny for me via a

word about independence. I realize now that I cannot do anything without Jesus. I realize I don't function well outside the boundaries of faith, a faith predicated upon Father God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Savior of my soul existence. It's an eternal thing with me. That means getting as close as I can, as often as I can to wallowing in the Word of God. He exists therefore I exist. My calling, my vocation, in this regard is to accept, listen and obey. Scripture says lean not upon your own understanding and seek Him. If I do that He will be found and you know what? Where He is, that's where I'll be.

So, therefore, the simple truth is don't try so hard. Finding God in the context of man's understanding can seem an impossibil-

ity. Finding God in the context of the Alpha and Omega brings certain clarity to the existence of and my perspective on my place in the universe. You've all heard this before. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for me. This is a life and death and life that makes eternity real. My life is a gift, granted to me by the Almighty with purpose and destiny, whatever that might be. All I have to do is accept it by seeking God's face, accept what is shown to me and listen. It's the listening part that is so difficult to me at times because, in this world everybody and everything is trying to get my attention. I find that in order for me to really listen, I need quiet time. I need some consistent time in the Word. I am not always con-

sistent, but it is my consistent belief that God will never abandon those who seek Him out. I believe in Deuteronomy it says that when all else fails, return to god and He will be merciful. Recognizing mercy as a blessing is a good place to begin. Grace is the reality of this journey. It's a daily bread thing. It's there for all of us. We've just got to let go and partake of the goodness and wisdom that is God's. It's not a give and get thing. It's a recognize and receive thing. The work was done by Jesus. How bout dat?

May God bless and keep you always.

James A. Washington is Publisher of the Dallas Weekly and President & General Manager of The Atlanta Voice Newspaper.

Hal Clark wins Playhouse on the Square's New Works @ The Works Playwriting Competition

Playhouse on the Square (POTS), Memphis, TN's professional resident theatre company, recently named local playwright Harold Ellis (Hal) Clark one of two winners in its New Works @ The Works Playwriting Competition for his play, *We Live Here*, about a black couple from New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward who wins a brand new home in an all-white neighborhood and discovers their "dream come true" is too good to be true. The play's world premiere took place on January 2-25, 2015 as part of POTS' 2014-15 season at Theaterworks, the company's third performance space. The other winner is Teri K. Feigelson, author of *Mountain View*. Clark and Feigelson, were chosen from six finalists, winning cash prizes and travel accommodations to participate in the development and rehearsals of their plays.

The six finalists' plays received individual staged readings at POTS as part of the competition. Clark, his wife, Cherie, and several friends attended a staged reading of *We Live Here* this past December. Afterwards, the audience and cast participated in an engaging and frank talkback session about Clark's play that elicited a variety of strong emotions and observations.

"The directing and acting were



New Orleans Native Harold Ellis (Hal) Clark is one of two winners of the Playhouse on the Square (POTS) in Memphis, TN's, New Works @ The Works Playwriting Competition for his play, "*We Live Here*".

superb. Several audience members were visibly sitting on the edges of their seats during the reading, and later were quite candid about the play's various themes during the talkback," said Clark, a New Orleans native who resides in Gretna, LA. "I'm confident that theatergoers will witness a captivating and entertaining production of *We Live Here*. I encourage people from the New Orleans metro area and

elsewhere to visit Memphis for the play's world premiere."

Clark wrote numerous unpublished novels and unproduced screenplays for more than 18 years before writing his first play, *Marrero Action*, in 2010. It was produced a year later at the Anthony Bean Community Theatre (New Orleans). Clark won UpStage Theatre's 4th (2013) Annual Emerging Playwright Project for his play,

Fishers of Men, which over the past two years has played to sold-out audiences in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. He directed a staged reading of the play starring original cast members Al Aubry, Martin Bradford, Damien Moses and Oliver Thomas this past December at LePetit Theatre (New Orleans). It was the featured theatrical production of the 2013 Words & Music Conference, hosted by the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society. *Fishers of Men* receives a full production at Wiley College (Marshall, Texas), Friday, February 28th. A staged reading of the play starring original cast members occurs at Tulane University, Saturday, March 15th for the Freedom Summer Redux Conference.

He was one of two finalists for the 2013 Stanley Drama Award for his play, *Tour Detour*. That play also earned him recognition as a finalist in Stage West's 7th Annual (2013) Southwest Playwriting Competition, and as a semifinalist for the 2013 Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. Clark's screenplay, *Chummy's Spirit*, based on his similarly titled 2006 self-published novel, was named an official selection for the 2013 International Family Film Festival (Hollywood, CA). For more visit www.haroldellisclark.com.

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Local Doctor Promoted to Partner



Dr. L'Issa L. Gates, a 2013 Data News Weekly Trailblazer and pediatrician at Westside Clinics, AMC in Marrero, LA has been promoted to the rank of partner. She is the first African American to attain that status in the organization. Dr. Gates says that "she is deeply honored and humbled by the promotion and looks forward to continuing to serve the families of the Greater New Orleans Area."

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