

the MILWAUKEE COURIER

November Is National Native American Heritage Month

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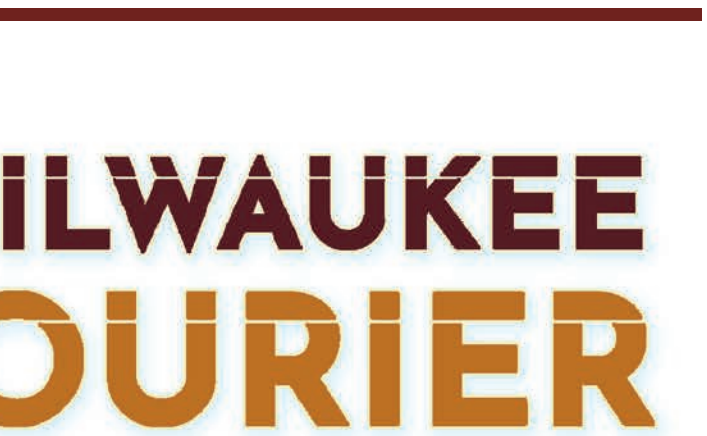
Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell Launches Milwaukee County Executive Bid, Vows to Build on David Crowley's Legacy: 'I Don't Believe in the Impossible'



Milwaukee County Board Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson is seeking the position of Milwaukee County Executive. Source: Submitted photo



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Milwaukee County Board Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson is seeking the position of Milwaukee County Executive. Source: Submitted photo

By Drake Bentley

When Marcelia "Cece" Nicholson-Bovell was a young girl growing up on Milwaukee's north side she would often play outside with her family and friends.

But one day, as Nicholson-Bovell chased her mother across the street she was suddenly struck by a car. The driver immediately stopped before exiting the vehicle.

"What stuck with me was hearing the woman, who was a white woman, get out of the car and say, 'Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I was just trying to get out of here,'" Nicholson-Bovell told the Milwaukee Courier on Nov. 7.

The woman had made a wrong turn upon exiting I-43 and ended up in the heart of Milwaukee's challenged 53206 ZIP code. A place she admitted she didn't want to be.

The dynamics of the city — one of pervasive historic segregation — became all the more apparent for the third grader. Then she grew older and began to connect the dots about her community.

"My family, my parents worked hard every single day, but still couldn't afford their own home," she said.

Nicholson-Bovell questioned why she would see people selling and ingesting crack cocaine in her neighborhood and recalls hearing gunshots many nights.

"When I became older, I started to make those connections about mental health and trauma and all the things that my community has gone through," she said.

"There was so much adversity as a child, but I think it also built my character and it made me stronger and I think a better representative for Milwaukee County because I've not only lived it and experienced it, but I understand it."

Nicholson-Bovell, 38, has

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Milwaukee County Board Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson is seeking the position of Milwaukee County Executive. Source: Submitted photo



Milwaukee County Board Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson is seeking the position of Milwaukee County Executive. She married her husband, Renwick Bovell, in October 2025.Source: Submitted photo

Sen. LaTonya Johnson Named Senate Co-Chair of Wisconsin's Joint Committee on Finance

Johnson takes on a key budget leadership role as Wisconsin enters a new era of legislative control

By Jasmine Tyler

Sen. LaTonya Johnson is stepping into a major leadership role in Wisconsin state government after being named co-chair of the Wisconsin Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance. The committee plays a significant role in shaping the state's budget and reviewing spending priorities.

I sat down with Johnson to discuss her new role, the priorities she hopes to advance and what Wisconsin residents can expect moving forward. Johnson said one of her top priorities is bringing attention to issues affecting Black communities by closely monitoring state spending and following the dollars. She wants to ensure resources reach the communities that need them while addressing longstanding disparities.

Johnson previously served as the ranking member of the Joint Committee on Finance and has served on several committees, including Children and Families and Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

"The thing I want to do the most is put the people back in the budget. The state has such a big surplus because we haven't been financially backed and now our community is feeling the financial burden," Johnson said. During our conversation, Johnson also addressed Milwaukee's financial challenges, including shared revenue, the city's reliance on grants, its remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding before the sales tax legislation and the city's financial relationship with the state.

Republicans held the majority in the Wisconsin State Senate beginning in 2011, with a brief six-month period of Democratic control in 2021, before Democrats regained control in the 2026 election. Johnson said Milwaukee did not receive the financial support it needed during that period of Republican leadership.

She described the state's approach as providing Milwaukee with additional tools through increased shared revenue, rather than directly addressing the city's financial challenges.

"Milwaukee was on the verge of bankruptcy, down to our last $96 million of ARPA funds before the sales tax passed. Republicans in control did not bail Milwaukee out. Every other city has a secondary revenue source except for Milwaukee," Johnson said.

Mental health treatment and its connection to the criminal justice system are also issues Johnson wants to bring to the forefront. She raised concerns about the shortage of residential psychiatric treatment options for children and the challenges families face when appropriate care is unavailable.

"The majority of the money that the City of Milwaukee gets is from grants because of poverty and violence. Milwaukee is the second-poorest city in the state of Wisconsin," Johnson said.

As she takes on her new role, Johnson said she intends to keep a close eye on state spending and make sure the needs of Black communities remain part of the conversation. For her, that starts with making sure the people are represented in the budget.



State Sen. Latonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee). Source: X/Twitter account

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EDITORIAL

To submit an editorial for publication, please email it to the Milwaukee Courier at **milwaukeecourier@aol.com**. Deadline for editorials are due on Tuesdays at 12:00 p.m.

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SAY SOMETHING REAL

Mississippi: Too Big to Rig, This Time



Michelle Bryant

By Michelle Bryant

More than six decades after Medgar Evers was gunned down in Mississippi for registering Blacks to vote, the struggle over who gets to exercise power, and who gets to hold it, is still a thing. The names have changed, but the resistance to diverse leadership and full civic participation remains a stain on the Magnolia state's political landscape. Without doubt, the recent U.S. Senate race bore out that tradition.

Cindy Hyde-Smith was 4 years old when Evers was assassinated on June 12, 1963. She was born into the Mississippi that Medgar gave his life trying to change. Hyde-Smith, who pursued a career in cattle farming and agriculture, eventually went on to serve in the Mississippi State Senate before becoming a U.S. Senator. She had the power to help shape the changes Evers sought, but decided to double down on the state's harmful legacy.

From opposing federal voting rights protections to championing legislation designed to eliminate DEI initiatives, Hyde-Smith wore her legislative record like a badge of honor. Her political philosophy yielded little consideration to the historical and systemic disadvantages confronted by Black Americans.

Now consider a bit of historical irony. At the time of Evers murder, an 11-year-old Dorothy Winston was coming of age in Richmond, Virginia. She was a young Black girl growing up in a country still deeply divided by segregation, racial discrimination, and the systematic denial of opportunity to African Americans. Decades later, she would break racial barriers in Evers' Mississippi.

Dorothy Winston Colom became a respected judge and the mother of Scott Colom, a young man whose pursuit of a federal judgeship would later be blocked by Mississippi Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith. He is now the very man who has bested her in the November election cycle and will be assuming her seat in the U.S. Senate. He becomes Mississippi's first Black U.S. senator since Reconstruction. It is a simply delicious and profoundly symbolic moment in the state's history.

But while we celebrate, we must also be clear-eyed about how Colom's victory came about.

Consider the state's decision to incorporate commercial credit bureau data from Experian into its voter-roll maintenance process. The Secretary of State's office used Experian information to identify voters who might have moved, in what many believe was an effort to target and purge Black and young voters. Even though Experian acknowledged that its database does not verify actual residency, Mississippi moved forward with its implementation, and the consequences were chaotic.

Tens of thousands of registered voters were removed from the voting rolls, had to cast provisional ballots because of misinformation and errors that were not of their making, and stood in line for days to ensure that their votes were counted. There had been a hope to disqualify enough voters to help Hyde-Smith win. But Mississippi voters were told that turnout had to be overwhelming, historic, huge.

Black voters and their allies took the "Too Big to Rig" warning to heart. If they hadn't, the outcome could have been very different. The lesson: We must be too organized to be outmaneuvered, too informed to be misled, and too vigilant to be silenced.

From the Track to the Trades

BikerFest Mke Builds Youth Workforce Pipeline Expanded Southeast Sales Powersports partnership connects youth to the skilled trades while rebuilding the fleet that keeps them riding





Milwaukee, WI — A motorcycle gets their attention. The opportunity can change their future. BikerFest Mke is expanding its partnership with Southeast Sales Powersports to connect its Sliders youth program to motorcycle repair and maintenance education, career exploration, and a first step into the workforce.

The entire Sliders program will participate in learning about motorcycle repair and maintenance. Two participants who meet working-age requirements have been selected for employment opportunities at the dealership, with start dates dependent on required work permits. Younger participants will gain early exposure to the trade while seeing a path from program participation to employment.

For BikerFest Mke, the expansion establishes a workforce development pipeline built on something young people already care about, and a local employer willing to help them take it further.

"Talent is not what Milwaukee's young people are missing. They need access to places where that talent can be recognized, challenged, and put to work," said Venisha Simpson, executive director of BikerFest Mke. "Southeast Sales is opening that door. We're asking more Milwaukee businesses to do the same —bring your expertise, make room for a young person, and help build the workforce and leadership this city's future depends on."

Sliders is a year-round program that uses motorcycles to engage young people in rider safety, mentorship, technical education, and personal development. Some participants arrive having never ridden a bicycle. Others come looking for a positive outlet, trusted adults, or a safe place to belong. Their interest in riding becomes an opportunity to develop confidence, discipline, responsibility and leadership.

The expanded partnership gives that growth another setting: a professional service department. Led by CEO and owner John Erdmann, Southeast Sales Powersports is committing its service-team time and expertise to work on program motorcycles with the Sliders team while creating employment opportunities for eligible youth.

"Giving back to the community that has supported our dealership for the past 62 years is very important to us. We want to continue to create opportunities to mentor and support the up-and-coming youth from the City of Milwaukee, which is why we decided to partner with BikerFest Mke and support the Sliders program," said John Erdmann, CEO of Southeast Sales Powersports.

Participants will connect science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to the motorcycles in front of them. Maintenance and repair offer practical lessons in measurement, mechanical systems, and troubleshooting, complementing the program's applied math and financial literacy education.

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EDITORIAL

Kweku's Cypher

ELEVATE

"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor." -Henry David Thoreau



Kweku Akyirefi Amoasi

By Kweku Akyirefi Amoasi

In antiquity, many societies lived under a caste system. A caste system means that whatever station you were born into is where you lived the rest of your life. If you were born into the nobility, you lived as a noble forever. If your station was farming, you could only be a farmer. And, if you were a peasant, you were to live at the bottom of society and so would every generation from your loins. No mobility. Just stuck!

FAITH

Free democratic societies provide hope for their citizens as they promise that a person will have the opportunity for upward mobility, regardless of where they were born or to whom they were born in that society. Skills such as hard work, education, and emotional intelligence allow one to "move on up." Faith in this system drives individuals to excel while propelling society to higher levels.

FACT

Family: let's dig deeper. Is elevation simply to elevate on a material level? I often see people draped in the opulence of life, surrounded by material success, stating they are ***their ancestors' wildest dreams.*** The fact is, a lot of us have lost our way trying to "elevate." If elevation can be limited by a societal structure, then that is not the type of elevation that Thoreau was referencing. What he referenced can only occur internally. Ironically, true elevation has little to do with consumerism and prosperity on a material level. And that's a fact.

FUTURE

The elevation we should seek to acquire is on an ethereal and spiritual plane. This is the paradox of looking for answers to questions not yet asked. Only when we learn to shift our focus to looking *within* for growth and peace can we begin to manifest the level of perpetual inner peace we desire. However, it is this *seemingly* chimerical language that makes this quest appear to be an exercise in futility. No, beloved, I humbly submit that it is our original teaching that has failed us.

FORWARD

Consider this, beloved: when someone dies after a long terminal battle with a horrific disease that created all types of pain and distress to our loved one, we state, *"they are in a better place now."* However, the physical body is a shell, but the energy, the spirit, the life-sustaining force within continues. And once released from the toxic nature of this earth, we immediately equate that with true peace. Beloved, what if we could find that peace before our spirit departed from our body?

FANTASY

To rest in the earthly Elysium fields is not fantasy. Beloved, true peace can only come from within. So, when we attempt to elevate in a material world, we find that peace to be short-term. Our

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the MILWAUKEE COURIER

On April 30th, 2026, Milwaukee Black Media Trust began publishing the Milwaukee Courier Newspaper.

In 2026, it was acquired by Civic Media, which aims to champion democracy through the power of local voices while continuing the Courier's long tradition of centering Black stories, leadership, and community narratives. Today, the Courier remains committed to elevating the issues, achievements, and perspectives of Milwaukee's Black community.

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FEATURE

The Matthew Taylor Foundation Partners With Children's Wisconsin and the Milwaukee Fire Department for Christmas Toy Drive

By Drake Bentley

Children's Wisconsin and the Milwaukee Fire Department are partnering with a Milwaukee nonprofit focused on progressing the work of those believed to be wrongfully convicted for a Christmas toy drive at the end of this year.

The Matthew Taylor Foundation is named after a prisoner at Oshkosh Correctional Institution, who was convicted in 2013 in Milwaukee County of first-degree reckless homicide among other charges.

Taylor, 32, has maintained his innocence since being sentenced to 30 years in prison in 2014. He has also attempted to repeal that conviction. He said he started a foundation to show growth can happen even behind bars.

"It's important because my journey has been about growth," Taylor told the Milwaukee Courier. "Since I've been incarcerated, not only was I able to finish school and read numerous self-help books, I just really felt like it was just important to find a way to give back to my community.

"I wasn't the shooter and it's very sad how they are willing to convict a person."

The group running the foundation in his name has since gone on to hold repeated community events, including an event on Sept. 11 at a local firehouse to honor first responders on the 25th anniversary of the terrorist attack. Mayor Cavalier Johnson was in attendance.

Now the foundation is accepting donations for a toy drive at Children's Wisconsin hospitals around Christmas time.

"At Children's Wisconsin, we believe every child deserves the best. Toy drives play an especially important role during the holiday season," said Megan Hughes, volunteer services manager at Children's Wisconsin.

The donations received through toy drives will be delivered to the hospital's Milwaukee or Fox Valley corporate centers, where they will be reviewed and distributed to pediatric patients across the hospital's network.

"Thoughtful gifts and activities help create a sense of normalcy, comfort, and celebration during an otherwise difficult time," Hughes said. "They can reduce stress and anxiety, support medical play with care team members, provide positive distractions, and give families a special moment of joy when they need it most.

"The generosity of community members and organizations that host toy drives helps our care teams add those extra-special touches throughout the holiday season and beyond. Every donation helps bring smiles, comfort, and encouragement to the kids and families we serve."

To participate in the toy drive please scan the QR code below.





From the Track to the Trades

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The work also demands more than technical knowledge. A difficult repair requires patience. Following a procedure requires discipline. Asking for help requires trust. Working alongside others calls for communication, respect, and an understanding that one person's decisions can affect the whole team. These experiences give participants opportunities to manage frustration, accept feedback, and become people others can count on.

The expansion follows a summer in which Sliders continued practicing but could not race because too many program motorcycles were out of service and repair resources were limited. Southeast Sales is helping address that barrier while making the repair process part of the education. Returning motorcycles to service will protect access to riding and strengthen the program's capacity to grow.

BikerFest Mke has also acquired additional dirt bikes from the City of Milwaukee that will require assessment. Further technical support, parts, and repair funding could help turn those bikes into additional learning and riding opportunities.

As outdoor practice winds down, the partnership will keep participants connected to their peers, mentors, and goals. Families will see a bridge between a child's interest and their preparation for adulthood: younger participants can explore a trade, while those entering employment begin learning what a workplace expects of them.

For Southeast Sales, the commitment is an investment in both the community and the industry's future. Its staff can introduce young people to careers they may never have considered and help them understand the skills and judgment those careers require.

Together, the partners are putting BikerFest Mke's values: **Skill. Safety. Solidarity.** to work: developing ability through experience, making preparation and responsibility essential, and sharing the expertise that allows more young people to participate.

BikerFest Mke welcomes employers, skilled-trades professionals, civic partners, and donors to strengthen the pipeline through equipment, repair resources, technical instruction, and age-appropriate employment opportunities. With greater investment, more young people can enter the program, stay involved, and turn ambition into achievement.

- **Donate:** Your contribution directly supports our programming, equipment, and training opportunities. Every dollar helps remove barriers and creates real pathways for youth and families. To donate, visit: https://donorbox.org/sliders-flat-track-racing-program
- **Volunteer:** Give your time and be part of the work on the ground. Volunteers play a critical role in delivering our programs and helping us reach more young people with meaningful experiences. To volunteer, visit: https://qrco.de/volunteeratbikerfestmke

About BikerFest Mke

BikerFest Mke is a Milwaukee-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving youth and families through motorcycle-based education and experiences. Its year-round programming combines rider safety, mentorship, STEM learning, mechanics, financial literacy, applied math, and career exploration to develop participants' skills, character, and leadership.

About Southeast Sales Powersports

Founded in 1964, Southeast Sales Powersports is a Milwaukee-based powersports dealership and community brand offering motorcycles, recreational vehicles, parts, and service. With deep local roots, Southeast Sales connects riders of all experience levels through a shared passion for powersports and a commitment to lasting relationships. The company's community-centered approach extends beyond the showroom, reflecting its investment in the people and neighborhoods it serves. For more information, visit southeastsales.com.

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POLITICS

Governor-Elect David Crowley Names Chief of Staff, Transition Team Leadership



Jeff Pertl (middle) has been named chief of staff by Gov.-elect David Crowley. Thad Nation (left) was named director of the transition committee and Alex Lasry (right) was a named a co-chair. Source: Provided and Getty Images

By Drake Bentely

Gov.-elect David Crowley announced a chief of staff and transition committee leadership following his historic election victory last week.

Crowley will take office on Jan. 4. He announced Nov. 11 that **Jeff Pertl,** the former secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, will serve as chief of staff.

Prior to his role at DCF, Pertl was the senior policy advisor for the Office of the State Superintendent at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Pertl also served as a Dane County Supervisor and received his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison and his Master of Public Policy from the University of California, Berkeley. He lives in Madison with his wife and children.

"Jeff Pertl brings an incredible depth of experience, a strong understanding of state government, and a deep commitment to serving Wisconsin families," Crowley said in a statement. "Throughout his career, he has demonstrated the leadership, thoughtfulness, and collaborative approach needed to tackle our state's biggest challenges and deliver results for the people of Wisconsin. I'm confident Jeff will be an invaluable partner as we build an administration focused on bringing people together, making life more affordable for working families, and moving Wisconsin forward."

The director of the transition committee will be **Thad Nation,** a long-time professional specializing in state and local government and political advocacy.

Nation is the founder and senior partner of Nation Consulting, where he serves as a senior advisor to CEOs and executive teams. Before founding Nation Consulting, Thad built a career in government and politics, including work for three governors, executive-level roles across multiple state agencies, and experience with state and national political parties. He lives in Mequon with his wife.

Crowley also announced 12 co-chairs:

• **Shirley Ellis** spent nearly three decades working with Congresswoman Gwen Moore, serving as a trusted senior adviser and District Director. In that role, she oversaw district office operations, constituent engagement, and outreach to community organizations and stakeholders throughout Milwaukee and Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District.

• **Greg Wesley** is President and CEO of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, where he leads philanthropic efforts and community partnerships aimed at strengthening the Milwaukee region. Prior to joining the Foundation, he served as Senior Vice President for Strategic Alliances and Business Development at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

• **Alex Lasry** is a business executive with experience in professional sports, economic development, and public policy. He previously served as Senior Vice President of the Milwaukee Bucks, where he helped lead the organization's business development, rebranding, and new arena development efforts.

• **Marcus Lewis** is a Wisconsin educator and higher education professional. A member of the Ho-ChunkNation, he has more than a decade of experience in diversity and equity work and has served as a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

• **Peng Her** is the co-founder and CEO of The Hmong Institute in Madison, where he leads community development, education, and cultural enrichment initiatives.

• **Nick Bauer** is a Milwaukee-area investment professional and business executive with more than two decades of experience in investment management and financial services.

• **Kathleen Rulka** is a retired Marriage and Family Therapist and clinical chaplain in Marshfield whose professional career focused on palliative care, hospice services, and end-of-life counseling.

• **Alec Knutson** serves as Chief Advocacy Officer for Ascension Wisconsin, where his work involves healthcare advocacy and public policy.

• **Dan Terrio** serves as Area Extension Director for UW-Madison Division of Extension in Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties. A member of the Oneida Nation, Terrio also serves on various boards, including the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project.

• **Awais Khaleel** serves as Assistant Corporation Counsel for Dane County, where he provides legal counsel and representation for county government and its departments.

• **Mary Arnold** served as Mayor of Columbus, Wisconsin, providing leadership to the city's municipal government and representing the community in local government affairs.

• **Maria Luisa Morales** is a longtime community and immigrant rights advocate who has worked to advance equity and improve conditions for Latinx communities in Racine and throughout Wisconsin.

"I am focused on assembling a strong transition team and preparing my administration to deliver for the people of Wisconsin from day one," Crowley said in a statement. "As we onboard our transition team and prepare to lead the Badger State, I look forward to working with legislative leadership to advance our shared priorities that deliver results for all Wisconsinites."

Meanwhile, the state Legislature has also announced leadership positions.

State Sen. Dianne Hesselbein, D-Middleton, formerly the Senate minority leader, will serve as Senate majority leader. And Rep. Greta Neubauer, D-Racine, formerly the Assembly minority leader, will serve as the Assembly's first-ever female speaker.

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

COA Youth & Family Centers Celebrates 120 Years of Service to Milwaukee, Honors Community Leaders, and Looks Toward the Future

Historic milestone celebrates generations of impact while highlighting a renewed commitment to meeting Milwaukee's evolving needs; media is invited to November 16 grand reopening of expanded food pantry and diaper bank.



Dr. Amy J. Rowell



MILWAUKEE, WI – For 120 years, COA Youth & Family Centers has been a cornerstone of the Milwaukee community, providing children, youth, and families with opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive. On Saturday, October 10, 2026, COA celebrated this remarkable milestone with its *Night with the Stars* 120th Anniversary Gala at the Hilton Milwaukee, bringing together generations of individuals whose lives have been touched by the organization.

The celebration welcomed current and former staff and board members, former program participants and campers, longtime supporters, community partners, and generous donors. Together, they celebrated not only COA's extraordinary history but also its enduring commitment to strengthening Milwaukee families and neighborhoods.

Founded in 1906 and for many years known as Children's Outing Association, COA began by providing outdoor recreation, nutritious meals, and enriching experiences for children. Over the following 12 decades, the organization evolved to respond to changing community needs, expanding its services to include early childhood education, youth development, family support, school readiness, food & healthcare access, and overnight camping experiences.

Today, COA continues its mission through neighborhood-based services concentrated in Milwaukee's Amani and Riverwest neighborhoods, along with overnight youth camping opportunities at COA Camp Helen Brachman in Almond, Wisconsin.

"For 120 years, COA has been more than an organization. We have been a source of opportunity, a place of belonging, and a partner to generations of Milwaukee families," said Dr. Amy J. Rowell, Chief Executive Officer of COA Youth & Family Centers. "While we are incredibly proud of our history, our greatest responsibility is to the future. The needs of our community continue to change, and so must we. We are not done yet. We are building on 120 years of experience to ensure COA remains strong, relevant, and responsive for generations to come."

Honoring the Stars Who Strengthen Milwaukee

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of three distinguished awards recognizing individuals and organizations whose commitment to community service, leadership, and philanthropy exemplifies COA's mission.

- **Community Star Award – Hunger Task Force, received by Reno Wright:** Recognizing the organization's extraordinary commitment to fighting hunger and strengthening food security throughout Milwaukee, including its valued partnership with COA.
- **Rising Star Award – Jo Peguero:** Celebrating a current employee who has been identified as someone with emerging leadership, achievement, and the promise of continued positive impact in the community.
- **Alumni Star Award – Fatou Fall:** Honoring a member of the COA alumni community whose accomplishments reflect the lasting impact of opportunities, encouragement, and support. (Fatou attended camp as a child and is now a summer camp counselor.)

The evening was emceed by **Blake Eason of WISN-TV** and featured a special video message from **Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley**, who began part of his professional journey as a COA staff member. Crowley reflected on his connection to the organization and introduced Rising Star Award recipient Jo Peguero, reinforcing the powerful role COA has played in developing community leaders.

The awards served as a reminder that COA's impact extends far beyond its programs and facilities, living on through the people, partnerships, and opportunities that continue to shape Milwaukee.

Special guests included Tom Schneider who served as executive director for more than two decades.

A New Chapter of Leadership, Stability, and Renewed Focus

Since January 2025, COA has been led by Dr. Amy J. Rowell, who has guided the organization through a significant period of rebuilding and organizational renewal.

Under Rowell's leadership, COA has refocused on its core mission programs and services, stabilized staffing and finances, strengthened organizational operations, and positioned itself for sustainable growth and greater community impact.

The organization's financial turnaround and renewed strategic direction represent important milestones in ensuring that COA can continue delivering high-quality services while remaining responsive to the neighborhoods and families it serves.

"Reaching 120 years is an extraordinary accomplishment, but longevity alone does not guarantee relevance or success," Rowell added. "Our work over the past year has

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Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell Launches Milwaukee County Executive Bid, Vows to Build on David Crowley's Legacy: 'I Don't Believe in the Impossible'

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served on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors since April 2016. She made history in April 2020, when she became the first Black and Latina person elected chairwoman and has since been reelected unanimously.

She was sworn in during the same time period as Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. More than six years later, Crowley has just been elected the first Black governor in Wisconsin history, leaving a vacancy at the county executive position.

Upon his resignation, Nicholson-Bovell automatically becomes acting county executive. But she will appoint another individual to interim ahead of the spring election in April 2027.

Nicholson-Bovell is seeking the county executive position and provided the Courier an exclusive interview to launch her run on Nov. 9. If elected, Nicholson-Bovell would become the first Black and Latina woman elected county executive.

Nicholson-Bovell's parents are longtime public servants. Her father, Maurice Nicholson, worked for Milwaukee Public Schools for 30 years. His family is from Alabama but they relocated to Milwaukee during the Great Migration. Nicholson-Bovell's mother, Herminia Nicholson, still works for MPS and her family is originally from Puerto Rico.

Like many parents of color who have lived decades in Milwaukee, Nicholson-Bovell's parents saw their neighborhood change for the worse. Children are now growing up in a more dangerous, nefarious environment.

"There was a lot of joy, but I also saw things looking out my window that I think no children should be able to see," Nicholson-Bovell said.

Nicholson-Bovell can be first woman of color elected Milwaukee County Executive

A chance to make history in Milwaukee County is not Nicholson-Bovell's reason to seek the seat, but she understands that she is a product of her background and isn't satisfied with potentially being the first.

"I have a bittersweet feeling about it," she said. "It's exciting and empowering to know that I'll be able to shatter that glass ceiling and provide for others to come behind me. But that's just it, it's 2026 and we're still talking about the first. That breaks my heart because I know so many amazing, brilliant women before me."

Nicholson-Bovell views herself as standing on the shoulders of women like Vel Phillips, Gwen Moore and Michelle Obama.

It's still too early to know if any other serious contenders will seek the county executive position. Nicholson-Bovell worked closely with Crowley the past six years. The county executive and chair of the Board can typically be at odds throughout the legislative process, especially when more conservative members are in leadership. But Nicholson-Bovell worked seamlessly with Crowley to pass the county's agenda. By seeking the chief executive role, Nicholson-Bovell sees an opportunity to build on that work while also finding new innovative ways to govern.

"I've learned the way county government works," she said. "I know the people who keep it running and so I have firsthand experience. But also, making sure the continuity piece of (Crowley) going to the governor's office will ensure that there is no gap or lapse in service to the million residents we serve."

Residents are more likely to interact with city government like their alderperson, but county government can provide critical mental health services to the community, emergency assistance for those in need of housing, substance abuse prevention work, and operate the Community Reintegration Center (formerly House of Correction).

"(Crowley) has left a great foundation for me to build upon, but I think what differs me from (Crowley) is I'm a big dreamer," Nicholson-Bovell said. "And so I don't believe in the impossible. I'm thinking about what more we can do with what we have. I want Milwaukee County residents to know, I want to make life easier, I want to make life more affordable.

"As things get more challenging for our families in this current economic environment, I'm not going to cut services. And I'm going to work as hard to leverage my relationships, leverage my background, leverage my network to bring more creative ideas and solutions.

"I want to bring more people to the table. Not just the politics, not just the operatives, not just the CEOs, but the working mom, the formerly incarcerated, the youth. It's not about self. It's about what you can provide to others with the gifts that have been given to you."

Nicholson-Bovell's background is filled with a passion for education

Having been in public office for a decade, and coming from a family with a history of involvement in public education, Nicholson-Bovell is well connected in the community. She is a graduate of Milwaukee School of Languages and has been recognized with awards for her labor activism work while teaching at MPS.

Nicholson-Bovell started teaching in 2012 and was assigned a fourth-grade classroom that had previously been used for special education.

"I didn't have enough tables and chairs for the roster of students," she said. "The books were all torn up, the paper was peeling off the walls. And they're like you have three days to transform this classroom."

This is when Nicholson-Bovell learned about the value and importance of labor unions.

"I called the teachers union and they delivered me supplies," she said. "I learned about the value of joining the union and it was actually the teachers union that pulled me in. They saw that I was eager, that I was young, that I cared. They started inviting me to meetings. I learned how to represent my constituency, which was Black and Brown families. I taught at a bilingual school.

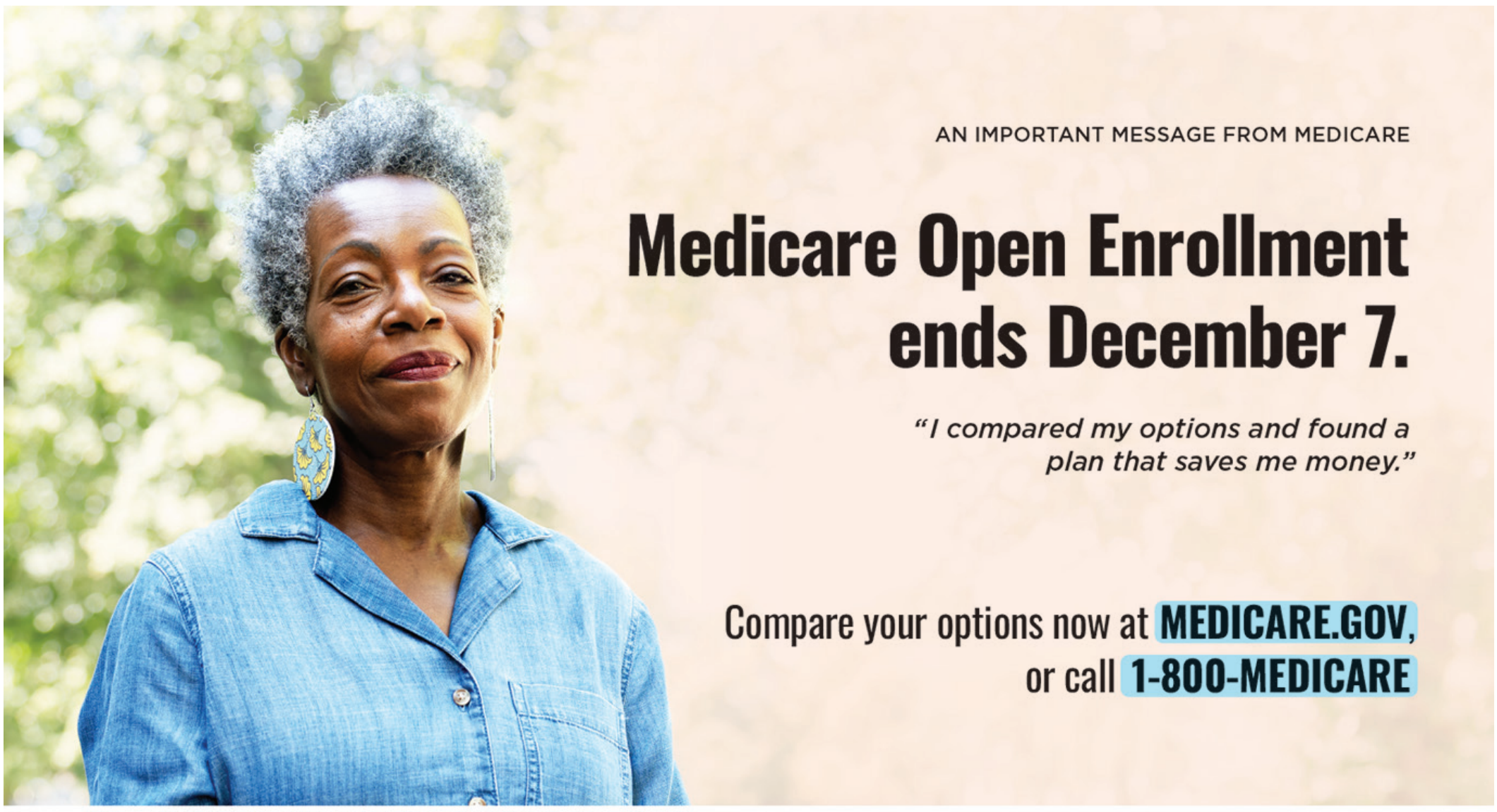
"And so, that really started to shape my worldview because teachers poured into me. I became a teacher because I wanted to give back to our children and I thought this was how I was going to save the world.

"I saw all the challenges, not only my students and their families had to overcome, but teachers as well trying to be good stewards of the education. I knew that I couldn't just teach, that I also had to organize. So I would start going to school board meetings."

Nicholson-Bovell's public image continued to grow as a regular at community

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COA Youth & Family Centers Celebrates 120 Years of Service to Milwaukee, Honors Community Leaders, and Looks Toward the Future

Continued from page 5

been about strengthening our foundation, investing in our people, restoring financial stability, and focusing our resources where they can make the greatest difference. We are honoring our past by building a stronger future."

Continuing the Celebration: A Grand Reopening and Renewed Commitment to Food Security

As COA moves into its next chapter, the organization is inviting members of the media and community partners to witness firsthand one of its newest investments in meeting critical neighborhood needs.

On **Monday, November 16, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.,** COA will celebrate the grand reopening of its recently renovated and expanded **Food Pantry and Diaper Bank at COA Goldin Center, 2320 West Burleigh Street, Milwaukee.**

The improvements, made possible in part through generous support from **Northwestern Mutual and Hunger Task Force,** reflect COA's ongoing commitment to addressing food insecurity and providing essential resources to families in Milwaukee's Amani neighborhood and surrounding communities.

The expanded space will support COA's commitment to delivering services in an environment that emphasizes dignity, accessibility, and respect for every individual and family seeking assistance.

"At 120 years old, COA is not standing still," Rowell said. "We are listening to our community, responding to real needs, and continuing to evolve. The reopening of our food pantry and diaper bank is a tangible example of what that commitment looks like. Our history is worth celebrating, but our future is what inspires us."

About COA Youth & Family Centers

Founded in 1906, COA Youth & Family Centers is a Milwaukee-based nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening children, youth, families, and communities through high-quality, accessible programs and services. With a focus on Milwaukee's Amani and Riverwest neighborhoods, COA provides early childhood education, youth development, family resource and support services, food security programs, and other community-based initiatives. COA also operates COA Camp Helen Brachman, an overnight youth camp in Almond, Wisconsin, creating opportunities for Milwaukee youth to experience outdoor education, personal growth, and adventure.

For more information, visit www.coa-yfc.org.

Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell Launches Milwaukee County Executive Bid, Vows to Build on David Crowley's Legacy: 'I Don't Believe in the Impossible'

Continued from page 6

events and rallies speaking about the concerns of public school teachers and labor unions. She quickly found herself on lists of Milwaukee's most influential young leaders and began receiving award recognition.

One day while teaching, Nicholson-Bovell was approached by a group of organizers from the Working Families Party, who encouraged her to run for public office.

"It was never my idea to run for office," she said. "I thought they were crazy. I said no at least a few times. And then the state Legislature attempted to take over Milwaukee Public Schools."

In 2015, Republican state lawmakers attempted to take over MPS, which is something that gets rehashed anytime MPS is under scrutiny. Such plans call for the elimination of an elected school board and instead have an appointed commissioner take control.

"That's when it clicked for me," Nicholson-Bovell said. "Someone like me, a teacher, someone from the community I'm serving needs to be at the table if the county executive was going to have a role in this potential new school district. I finally said, yes, I'm running."

Nicholson-Bovell married Afro-Guyanese husband in 2025

The church can often be a staple for many Black families in Milwaukee. That was also the case for Nicholson-Bovell, whose grandparents were in church leadership.

"We weren't the type of family that went to church just on Sunday," she said. "We were the type of family that lived in the church."

Nicholson-Bovell credits her faith with laying an early foundation of principles. She said she didn't want to put herself in a box of one single ideology, she added that she has progressive values and is willing to work with anyone committed to bettering the lives of Milwaukee County residents.

"I am always going to stay true to my values because I grew up in the church," she said. "These aren't called leftist or socialist values to me. These are the values of God himself and Jesus Christ. These are the values that are stated in the Bible."

Nicholson-Bovell married her husband, Renwick Bovell, in October 2025. Bovell, an Afro-Guyanese man, has been her rock helping her navigate life the last year.

"When we first met, I was bragging about the city and I'm like, look, if we're going to date, you need to know that I'm not going anywhere," Nicholson-Bovell said. "And he's like, whatever, Milwaukee can't be that cool. And he came here and he absolutely fell in love with it and he's loving getting to know it every single day."

It's typical for Nicholson-Bovell to be caught having brunch with her girlfriends, a group of highly influential women that includes the future First Lady of Wisconsin, Ericka Crowley.

"Sometimes we'll spin up to Chicago and do a little sightseeing, or go to a concert," she said, adding some of their favorites artists are Lauryn Hill, Beyonce and Usher.

"I'm very serious about my work as an elected official, but as serious as I am about my work, I'm serious about my role as friend, wife, daughter and sister," she added.

Nicholson-Bovell hasn't been able to escape the negative news cycle during her tenure. But she remains focused on what drives her, the disparities she discovered as a young girl on Milwaukee's north side.

"While I take accountability for some of the negative stuff, there are some other things that I feel targeted," she said. "I think it's fair to say that being a Black woman in office and being in a role that hasn't ever been held by someone who looks like me, comes with a more intense level of scrutiny. And it comes with bias. We can't escape that we still live in not only a misogynist, but a racist society.

"We are still trying to dismantle so many of these barriers."

ELEVATE

Continued from page 2

insatiable appetite will keep us searching for the next material high. Elevation does not mean you are better than anyone; it simply means you are living life as the best version of yourself. When we vibrate at a low level (e.g., striving for success through status and station only), we hold the cortisol response for continual chasing. When we raise our *frequency*, we are in tune with our higher self, and that leads us to perpetual contentment.





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