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THE DEEP BENCH

A Monthly Newsletter by The Office of African American
Affairs

MORE ARTICLES
ON NM BLACK
PROFESSIONALS

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October Edition

October 5, 2020

The Office of African American Affairs is proud to use our platform to recognize the many Black professionals throughout New Mexico, who are committed to making an impact on the lives of Black New Mexicans. Poised because of their education, experience and expertise to be the leaders in our business, public and private sectors.

Each month we will be recognizing three individuals, spotlighting their accomplishments and the impact they are making in New Mexico.

If you would like to nominate a Black professional (or yourself) to be included, please send name and contact information to andreat.watson@state.nm.us.

Devin James Baldwin

Navigator

Santa Fe County, Santa Fe, NM

Devin James Baldwin is a writer, poet, and community worker, committed to unleashing the power of story through spoken and written word. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA, he has resided in New Mexico since 2012. Devin completed his M.A in Professional Writing at New England College, and holds a B.A. in Leadership and Organizational Studies from the University of Denver. As a writer, Devin's work focuses on issues pertaining to race, identity and culture—specifically as it relates to Black or African American identity in the United States. Devin released his debut collection of poetry, *Black Matters: Poems & Prose*, independently published on Amazon.com in June 7, 2019. Devin is currently working on a second book of poetry, which is scheduled to be released in Fall of 2020. In the occupational realm, Devin is currently employed as a Navigator with the Santa Fe County Community Services Department. In this role, Devin connects county residents to resources and services that help them to address challenges related to housing, transportation, food insecurity and other social determinants of health. During his 18-year career in the nonprofit and human service field, Devin has served in a variety of other capacities, including, but not limited to, Workforce Program Director, AmeriCorps Member, Victim Advocate, and Case Manager. In his spare time, Devin enjoys spending time with his family and friends, reading, watching a good movie, and cooking.



What do you believe are the strengths of the NM Black Community?

I would say that a strength of the Black community in New Mexico is the opportunity to contribute one's ideas and talents beyond geographical boundaries. Being that African Americans make up such a small percentage of New Mexico's population, it makes it almost necessary to transcend geography when looking for ways to connect and engage in collaborative community work. These lack of geographic boundaries not only enhance opportunities for state-wide collaboration, they also broaden the scope and potential impact of collaboration.!

Navigator

*Santa Fe County,
Santa Fe, NM.*

What do you want your influence on the NM Black Community to Be?

I would like to see Black people gain a more collective voice and to be recognized as an essential and vibrant part of New Mexico's culture and heritage. Too often during my time in New Mexico, I have felt as though there was no a place for me here—that I was just a visitor, but would never truly belong. That Black people did not fit into the tri-cultural narrative of Angelo, Indigenous and Hispanic, proudly touted by so many locals. Through my writing and community work, I hope to challenge these assumptions about who belongs. To create opportunities for constructive dialogues that can begin to deconstruct these excluding narratives.

What can NM do to attract more Blacks to our state?

If Black people do not see themselves represented or feel acknowledged, it will be very difficult to persuade them to move somewhere or convince them to stay. African Americans represent approximately 2% of New Mexico's state population and are not considered part of New Mexico's tri-cultural heritage. If New Mexico truly wants to attract more African American, it will need to figure out ways to include Black people and Black culture into the historical and current narrative.



Opal Marie Cole

Executive Director
Family Crisis Center, Farmington, NM

Opal Marie Cole was born in Jamaica, West Indies and raised in New York City where she attended college and graduate school. Opal has a Master's of Science degree in Education with a specialty in Guidance and Counseling. Opal moved to Farmington, NM approximately twenty years ago.

Currently, she is the Executive Director of the Family Crisis Center (FCC), a position she has held for eighteen (18) years. FCC provides both residential and non-residential services for individual and families experiencing issues with Domestic Violence.

Opal's primary goal since her college days where she caught the counseling bug has been to provide quality social services to those she serves. She is guided by the philosophy that her job is not to change anyone but to provide alternatives and options for those seeking to make a change or improve their circumstances. Whether it's a mother and children, a man seeking shelter from domestic violence, an employee or a college student she meets each individual where they are and seeks to empower them by offering the tools for growth.

She enjoys many hobbies, including photography, making beaded jewelry, reading, sewing, different genres of music, traveling when the time allows and she is not opposed to binging on a night of Netflix.



What do you believe are the strengths of the NM Black Community?

Rich culture, history, diversity of thought and talent. Diversity from the perspective that we have both a pool of people who were born and raised in New Mexico as well as transplants from other areas of the country who work together to strengthen the Black communities and NM as a whole. Our creativity, courage and ability to adapt, thrive and grow no matter our circumstances is a strength that should be held close and enhanced whenever possible.

Executive Director

Family Crisis

Center,

Farmington, NM

What do you want your influence on the NM Black Community to Be?

I would like to know that the next generations of Black boys and girls learn about our past history so that they do not repeat the lessons of the past. To help figure out ways to influence and get into that "Good Trouble" that John Lewis talked about.

Help our youth to know that Civic Engagement is important and necessary and that you could do this in a positive way, subtle way and with the support of the larger community.

So often in Farmington I walk into a room and I am the only Black person in that room. That was a major adjustment when I moved to this community from a City where I was surrounded by the Black culture and could engage, learn from and support my brothers and sisters. In other areas of the state there appears to be much more of a presence and focus on activities, organizations, businesses and churches that center on the Black community. We do not have that here, I know the OAAA has conducted Focus Groups in Farmington and so I do have some curiosity about the results of such groups and would be interested in working on goals the community has articulated as points of interest.

What can NM do to attract more Blacks to our state?

Most people seek communities that would enhance their current way of life. Cost of living to include housing costs, transportation, employment, low rates of crime, medical care, cultural outlets, educational resources, recreational/outdoor activities and weather are all areas that should be emphasized in marketing campaigns to those in other states. Others need to know that "NEW" Mexico is not a foreign country but a state in the United States of America. We are not often in the spotlight on a national level and if we are, the focus is on Santa Fe or Albuquerque. Marketing campaigns should pay attention to answering the questions What's in it for me? How would moving improve my life? I also believe these campaigns should be tailored specifically for areas of the country with high volumes of African Americans who might see a benefit in relocating.



Jamia Warner

Director of Healthcare Coordination Division
Department of Veteran Services

Jemia Warner was born and raised in Chicago, IL. She attended the University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign, where she obtained both her Bachelor and Master degree of Social Work. Jemia is currently a licensed Clinical Social Worker in the state of Wisconsin. Jemia has worked with adults, children, racial/ethnic populations, families, and veterans. Her clinical expertise has focused on working with individuals who experience grief, trauma, adjustment issues, and mood-related disorders. She is also a military spouse of an active duty officer who serves in the United States Air Force.

Jemia Marie Warner is the Healthcare Coordination Division Director for the New Mexico Department of Veteran Services. As the Director, Jemia is responsible for educating veterans and their families about available VA and non-VA health benefits, as well as advocating on their behalf. She works closely with the federal VA Health Care System and local veterans' organizations on Behavioral Healthcare, Suicide Prevention, Homeless Veterans and Veterans Transportation in order to ensure our veterans and their families receive quality healthcare. Jemia also serves as a private contract therapist to military dependents in the state of New Mexico. Jemia is passionate about creating change in world and thrives to make this a daily goal.



What do you believe are the strengths of the NM Black Community?

Like many black communities, it is the resiliency that the NM black community has shown when facing adversity. It is the ability to find beauty and hope in darkness and create masterpieces with little to no resources.

What do you want your influence on the NM Black Community to Be?

I want my influence to be change, I want it to be that I have helped with creating a seat at the table for Black New Mexicans. I want individuals to be knowledgeable, and accepting of their roles as important in a community that may not see them for the greatness that lies within them.

What can NM do to attract more Blacks to our state?

Advertise the beauty of the land and all the resources available that can be used for blacks to grow their businesses and families.

*Director of
Healthcare
Coordination
Division*

*Department of
Veteran Services*

Office of African American Affairs
310 San Pedro NE Suite 230
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108

Due to the temporary closing of OAAA, we are sending out content concerning COVID-19 and information that affects the African American Community.

If you have any questions, please call
505-383-6222 and follow the prompt.
Andrea Tammy Watson: andreat.watson@state.nm.us

