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THE 7 RFW EXPERIENCE

ROANOKE AND BEYOND



AHRIYA

FINISHING THE
SCHOOL YEAR
STRONG

CYCLE SISTAH'S IN JAMAICA

PEDALING PURPOSE
ACROSS PARADISE

RVA EDITORIAL DR. MANNS

ON LEADERSHIP
& LEGACY

GORDY'S WAS MORE THAN THE MUSIC

BUILDING AN EMPIRE
FROM \$800



THE FOCUS

The Justice Business
Ecosystem Center

Table Of Contents

Cover Photo by @JayCwithacam
Model: Alexis Robinson
Dress: Wickedly Stitched by Kate

06 RFW The 7 Experience

A full four-day recap of Roanoke Fashion Week 2026, highlighting standout runway moments, designers, community partnerships, behind-the-scenes energy, and the people who brought The 7 Experience to life through fashion, culture, and creativity.

19 Cycling in Jamaica

An immersive travel and lifestyle feature exploring Jamaica through cycling, culture, scenery, and personal reflection. This article captures the beauty of movement, connection, and adventure across the island landscape.

25 Finishing Strong

Written from a youth perspective, this inspiring piece focuses on ending the school year with purpose through academics, extracurricular activities, leadership, and preparing for future goals while balancing personal growth and achievement.

29 Editorial — Dr. Monica Manns

Dr. Monica Manns shares a thoughtful editorial on leadership, empowerment, and the importance of building opportunities that strengthen communities and inspire future generations. Her perspective encourages readers to lead with purpose, vision, and impact.

34 The Ecosystem the Gordys Built

A deeper look into the family foundation behind Motown's success, examining how Berry Gordy and the Gordy family built an ecosystem of entrepreneurship, workforce development, business ownership, and creative opportunity that extended far beyond music

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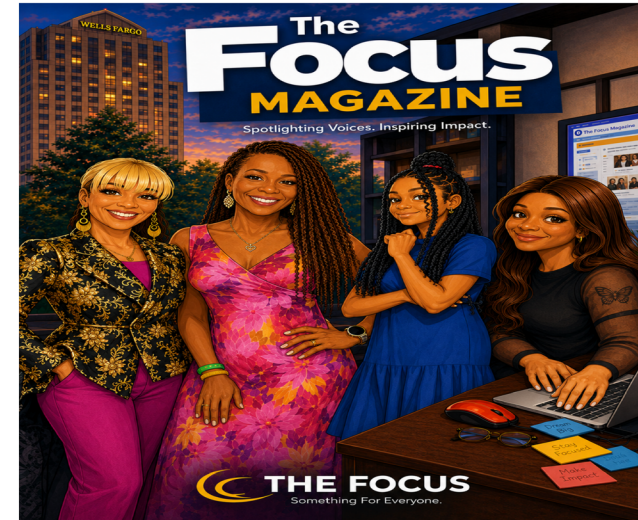
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Some issues arrive. This one landed.

The May edition of The Focus carries four stories that, without any planning on our part, ended up speaking to the same thing: what it looks like when people build, move, create, and finish with intention. Roanoke Fashion Week® — The 7 Experience was exactly that. Four days, dozens of designers, models, boutiques, and community partners, all brought to life under Erica Jenkins' vision and captured beautifully by @Jaywithacamera. Fashion as community. Fashion as purpose.

The Gordys gave us another kind of blueprint. Beyond the music, beyond Motown, this family constructed an entire ecosystem of entrepreneurship and opportunity. That story deserves to be told in full — and in these pages, it finally is.

Dawn Angelique Roberts took her bicycle to Jamaica and returned with something quieter and more lasting than a travel story. And Ahriya Shipman wrote directly to our younger readers about what it means to finish the school year the way it deserves to be finished — with purpose.

Finally, a word to our readers across the Commonwealth: The Focus is for all five regions of Virginia. Not just the valley. All of it. These stories reflect that, and so will every edition that follows. It is a good month to pay attention.

STAY FOCUSED MY FRIENDS

Editor Notes



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Roanoke Fashion Week
receives proclamation from
Mayor Cobb

THE 7 EXPERIENCE

“How Roanoke Fashion Week has become a platform for designers, stylists, boutiques, and emerging talent.”

Roanoke Fashion Week® – The 7 Experience

Thursday, April 23, 2026

Budget Chic Kicks Off Roanoke Fashion Week®

The opening night of Roanoke Fashion Week® – The 7 Experience



proved that fashion is far more than glamour and lights — it is also compassion, confidence, and community. Held at The Cafeteria building in Downtown Roanoke, the 2026 Budget Chic Show welcomed guests into an evening where creativity met purpose in one of the most heartfelt events of the entire weekend.

not defined by price tags, but by personality, self-expression, and confidence.

One of the most emotional moments of the evening came as participants from the Rescue Mission took the runway with pride and joy. For many, it was more than simply modeling clothing — it was a moment of empowerment and visibility. Roanoke Fashion Week® has long stood on the belief that fashion should create opportunities and confidence for all people, and Thursday night embodied that mission completely.

Hosts Destinee Vance and Eric Foster kept the crowd energized while sharing the deeper meaning behind the event. Throughout the evening, guests were reminded that proceeds from Roanoke Fashion Week® continue to support efforts to provide new clothing and assistance to unhoused students within the community.

The budget chic Show highlighted affordable fashion styled in elevated and imaginative ways. The runway featured Roanoke Fashion Week® models walking alongside women from the Rescue Mission, creating a powerful visual reminder that confidence belongs to everyone, regardless of circumstance.

The audience erupted with applause throughout the evening as models showcased looks curated from local thrift and budget-friendly retailers. The show demonstrated that style is





The show also highlighted the generosity of local partners including Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, whose support helped provide fashions and gift cards for participants. Community support was evident from the moment guests arrived, many bringing clothing donations to contribute toward the cause.

While the fashions dazzled on the runway, the true star of the night was the spirit of togetherness. The Budget Chic Show once again proved why Roanoke Fashion Week® has become more than a fashion event — it has become a movement rooted in inclusion, creativity, and impact.

As the curtain closed on opening night, excitement for the remainder of The 7 Experience was only just beginning.

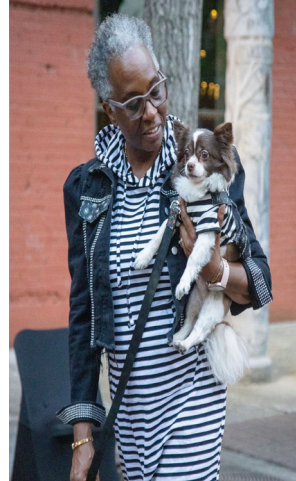
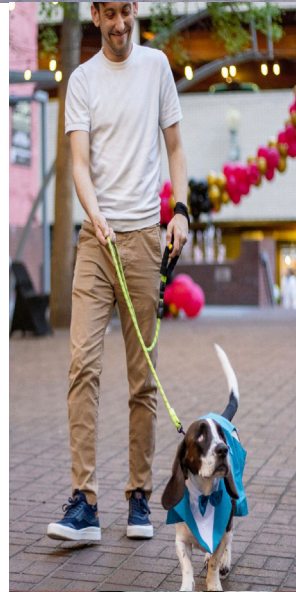


Friday, April 24, 2026

Doggy Show featured Fun, and Four-Legged Flair to Downtown Roanoke

Roanoke Fashion Week® continued its unforgettable 2026 weekend with a first-ever event that stole hearts across the city — the RFW 7 Experience Doggy Fashion Show at Century Plaza Families, pet lovers, and fashion enthusiasts gathered in Downtown Roanoke to watch stylish pups and their owners strut the runway in coordinated looks, costumes, and creative ensembles.

Hosted by the always energetic Michael Lee Smith, the event brought laughter, excitement, and nonstop crowd interaction from beginning to end. Dogs of all breeds and sizes took center stage as they competed in categories including Best Dressed Dog, Best Owner & Dog Duo, and Best in Show.





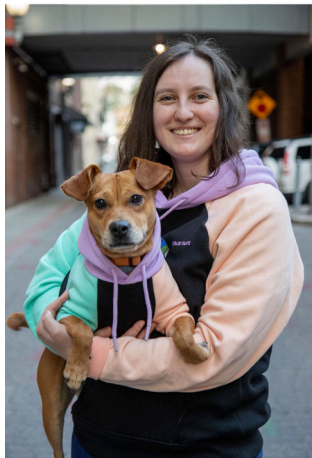
From glamorous tutus to edgy streetwear-inspired looks, the creativity on display reflected the same bold individuality Roanoke Fashion Week® is known for celebrating on its traditional runway stages. The audience quickly embraced the new addition to the weekend lineup, cheering loudly for every participant that crossed the runway.

The event also carried a deeper purpose. A portion of proceeds from the evening continued Roanoke Fashion Week®'s mission of helping provide clothing assistance and support for unhoused students within the community. By combining entertainment with impact, the show reinforced the organization's commitment to using fashion as a vehicle for positive change.

Community sponsors helped elevate the experience, including Nature's Emporium, who contributed raffle baskets, pet samples, and support for the event. Local businesses and attendees alike embraced the fresh concept, helping create an atmosphere that felt welcoming, family-oriented, and distinctly Roanoke.

For Roanoke Fashion Week® Executive Director Erica Jenkins, the success of the Doggy Fashion Show represented another example of thinking outside the box and creating opportunities for the entire community to participate in the fashion experience.

As the sun set over Downtown Roanoke and the final awards were announced, one thing became clear — Roanoke Fashion Week the 7 experience doggy fashion show was not just a one-time attraction. It became an instant fan favorite and one of the most memorable additions in Roanoke Fashion Week® history.



Saturday, April 25, 2026

The Next Generation Kids Show Takes Center Stage at Hotel Roanoke

The future of fashion took center stage Saturday afternoon as Roanoke Fashion Week® hosted its beloved Next Generation Kids Show at the historic Hotel Roanoke.

Filled with energy, confidence, and heartwarming moments, the event showcased young models ages 7 to 15 in a production that celebrated individuality, creativity, and self-confidence.

Families packed the Shenandoah Room as children from across the region stepped onto the runway with poise far beyond their years.

The Next Generation Kids Show has become one of the signature highlights of Roanoke Fashion Week®, offering young participants a supportive environment to grow, build confidence, and experience the excitement of the fashion industry in an uplifting and inclusive atmosphere.

This year's show featured fashions from major retailers and boutiques including Kohl's and JCPenney, along with looks from talented designers and children's brands. Many of the participating children were able to keep their runway outfits thanks to the generosity of sponsors and retail partners.

One of the defining elements of the Kids Show is its emphasis on inclusivity. Roanoke Fashion Week® has consistently created opportunities





for children of all backgrounds and abilities to shine on the runway. The audience responded emotionally throughout the afternoon, celebrating each child's individuality and confidence.

Under the direction of Assistant Director and Kids Show Director Kim Preston, along with the dedicated team of model coaches and volunteers, the production ran seamlessly while maintaining a family-oriented and encouraging atmosphere behind the scenes.

Host Eric Johnson of WSLs 10 Sports brought warmth and excitement to the stage as families cheered on every participant. From first-time walkers to returning young veterans of the runway, each child brought their own personality and spark to the production.

The show also served as a reminder of Roanoke Fashion Week's broad-

er mission — helping young people discover confidence within themselves. For many of the children participating, the runway became a space where insecurities disappeared and self-belief took over.

Saturday's event was more than a fashion show. It was a celebration of the next generation finding their voice, their confidence, and their place in the spotlight.

Special Thanks to:
Backstage help
Tanya Alleyne,
Celeste Brown, Ty
Dickerson

Kids Coaches
Sonja Parker, La-
Sonya Poindexter,
Lisa Holt, Kim
Garst



Sunday, April 26, 2026

Roanoke Fashion Week® Finale Delivers a Powerful Celebration of Fashion, Inclusivity and Community

Roanoke Fashion Week® closed out The 7 Experience in spectacular fashion Sunday evening with its highly anticipated finale at the Berglund Center — a production that brought together fashion, entertainment, creativity, and community on one unforgettable stage.

Guests arrived for an exclusive VIP hour filled with music, networking, entertainment, refreshments, and swag bags before entering the main event space





for an evening that celebrated the very heart of Roanoke Fashion Week®.

Hosted by Michael Lee Smith and Kat Pascal, the finale featured an impressive lineup of boutiques, retailers, stylists, and designers who transformed the runway into a showcase of artistry and individuality.

Participating boutiques and retailers included Versona, Unique & Chic Boutique, Zoeye Beach Optical, The Palatial, Shades of Color, JCPenney, and Suit City, each bringing unique fashion perspectives and styles to the runway. Models of all ages, backgrounds, body types, and identities confidently walked the stage, embodying the inclusive spirit that Roanoke Fashion Week® was built upon.

Following the boutique showcase, the evening transitioned into the highly anticipated designer competition segment featuring some of the region's most creative talents. Designers delivered bold collections that ranged from couture elegance and streetwear influence to avant-garde artistry and custom statement pieces.

The audience remained captivated throughout the evening as each designer brought their vision to life through movement, music, styling, and storytelling.

One of the most memorable moments of the evening came when Mayor Joe Cobb took to the runway and presented Roanoke Fashion Week® with an official proclamation recognizing the organization's impact and contributions to the community. The honor represented a major milestone in the event's continued growth and recognition throughout the city.

Special guest judges, including fashion industry representatives from Winston-Salem Fashion Week and Philly Fashion Week, added another level



of prestige to the competition while helping strengthen connections between Roanoke and larger fashion markets.

For Executive Director Erica Jenkins, the finale represented not just the end of a successful weekend, but the continuation of a vision years in the making — creating opportunities for the models, designers, boutiques and others.

Roanoke Fashion Week® once again proved that fashion can be more than clothing. It can be healing. It can be empowering. It can build confidence, create opportunities, and bring communities together.

As the lights dimmed and the final models exited the runway, the crowd rose for one final standing ovation — not just for a fashion show, but for a movement that continues to redefine what fashion in Roanoke can be.

Special thanks Finale Coaches Tanya Alleyne, Kathryn Keefer, Mika Hubbard, and Jason Hairston. Hosts Michael Lee Smith, Kat Pascal Photography Steve Custiss, Jay Cunningham





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Cycling through Ocho Rios, Jamaica, surrounded by ocean views, vibrant energy, and a community of riders from across the country, was an experience I won't forget.

Cycle Jamaica was more than a ride—it was an experience to remember.

From April 9-13, I traveled with five incredible women from Cycle Sistahs to participate in Cycle Jamaica, a cycling experience organized by Cycle Caribbean. What started as a trip quickly became something much more—an opportunity to connect, challenge ourselves, and experience wellness in a completely new environment.

FROM RIDE TO MOVEMENT: Cycle Sistahs in Jamaica

By Dawn Angelique Roberts



Cycle Sistahs was founded in 2020 as a way to bring women together through cycling, wellness, and community. Today, we are proud to be a nonprofit organization focused on empowering women to prioritize their health, build confidence, and connect through movement.

We stayed at the all-inclusive RIU Ocho Rios, where the scenery was beautiful, but the real experience happened on the road.



Each ride was an opportunity to challenge ourselves, support one another, and connect with cyclists from all over. There was an immediate sense of community. It didn't matter where you were from—once you clipped in, you were part of something bigger.

The rides also included friendly competition through Strava challenges. During the second ride day, I placed 2nd and 3rd, while fellow Cycle Sistah Karen Fontaine placed 4th in both challenges. It added an exciting layer to the experience and highlighted the strength and determination within our group. All participants were also awarded medals to commemorate the Cycle Jamaica experience.

“Cycle Jamaica was more than a ride—it was an experience to remember.”



“There's something special about riding in a place like Jamaica—the mix of challenge and beauty. One moment you're focused on the road ahead, and the next you're taking in the scenery, the sounds, and the energy around you. It's an experience that stays with you.”



The trip was so much more than a cycling trip—it was a full experience.

We started our days early, waking up at 4 a.m. to ride, which allowed us to fully embrace the day. After the rides, we had time to relax at the beach and pool, enjoy meals together, and take in the ocean breeze. It was the perfect balance of movement and rest.

And the experience didn't stop there.

In the evenings, the energy shifted in the best way. The resort brought everything to life with music and entertainment, creating a vibrant

atmosphere where we could unwind, dance, and connect even more. We had an amazing time enjoying the nightlife, spending time with each other, and building friendships with fellow cyclists from across the country.

Beyond the rides and the resort experience, we were grateful for the opportunity to give back. During our time in Jamaica, we visited a local elementary school, where we made a monetary donation and shared gifts with the students. It was a meaningful moment for our group and a reflection of our commitment to community both at home and abroad.

“Cycle Sistahs is more than a cycling group—it's a sisterhood.”



This trip was especially meaningful for us. Originally planned for November, the experience was postponed due to a hurricane in Jamaica. When it was rescheduled for April, it aligned 9x with a special celebration—we traveled on April 9, which was the birthday of one of our founding members, Elizabeth “Liz” Sadler Boyer.

We celebrated Liz all weekend long, enjoying dinners at different restaurants on the property and creating memories that will last a lifetime. It truly was a birthday celebration to remember.

Celebrating my birthday in Jamaica, doing something I love with women who inspire me, was truly unforgettable.

Cycle Sistahs is more than a cycling group—it’s a sisterhood.”

— Elizabeth “Liz” Sadler Boyer

What makes Cycle Sistahs unique is both our reach and our intention. While we have strong roots in Delaware, our community continues to grow, with members and connections across New York, Philadelphia, Maryland, and beyond. Women from different backgrounds come together through a shared commitment to wellness and support.

We’re just getting started.

To learn more about Cycle Sistahs, a nonprofit organization empowering women through cycling and wellness, visit cyclesistahs.org and follow us on Instagram and Facebook @cyclesistahs.



- 📅 Annual cycling trip to Martha’s Vineyard
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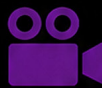
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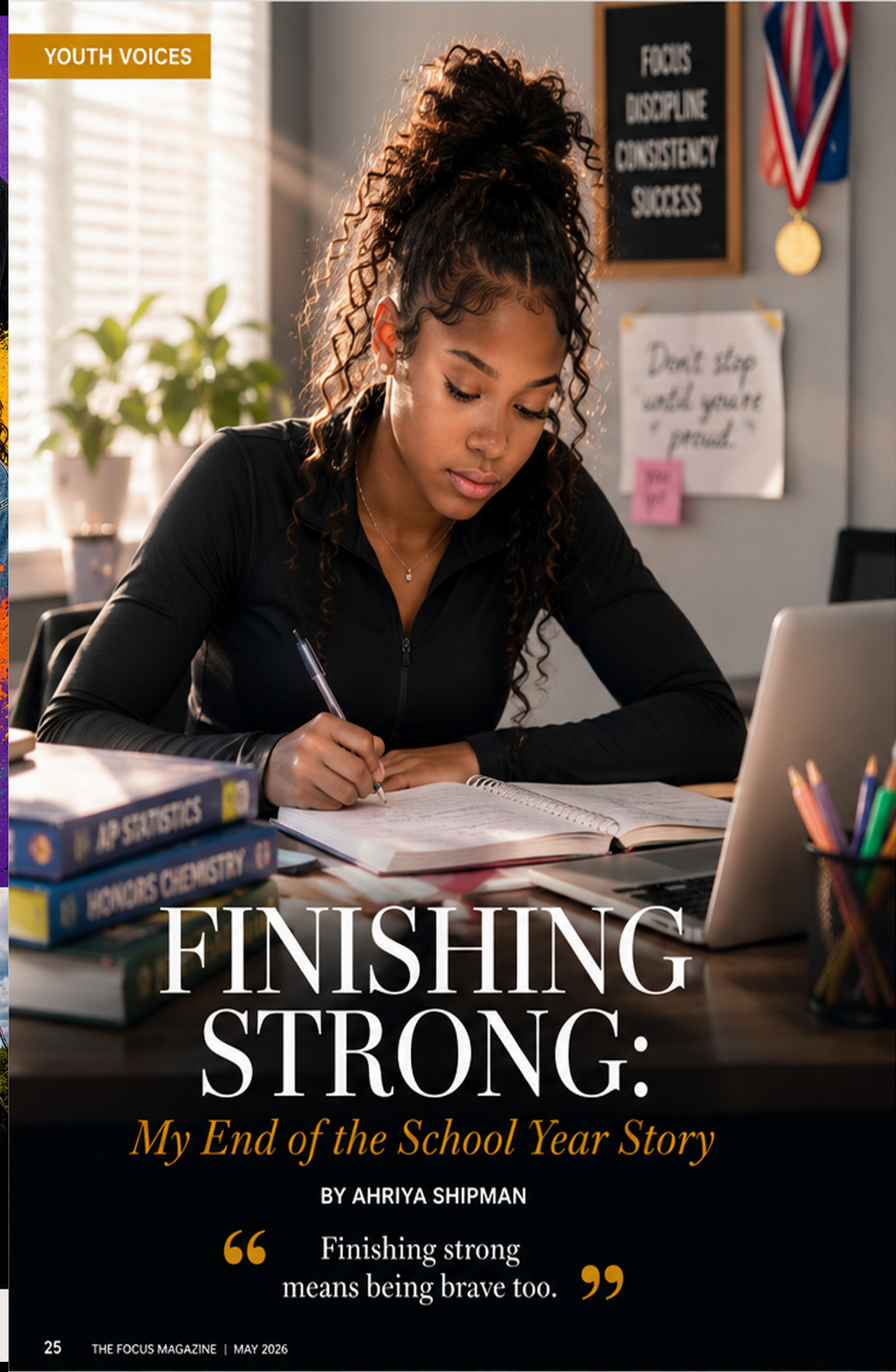
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FINISHING STRONG:

My End of the School Year Story

BY AHRIYA SHIPMAN

“ Finishing strong means being brave too. ”

PRESENTED BY





Okay, so the end of the school year is literally the most chaotic time ever. There are finals, big projects due, and everybody's brain is already halfway to summer vacation. But this year I actually wanted to finish strong — like, for real, not just survive until the last bell.

My biggest thing was keeping my grades up and staying an honors student. That actually means a lot to me because it proves I'm taking school seriously and not just going through the motions. Not gonna lie though, some days were rough. I'd come home exhausted and the last thing I wanted to do was homework. But I kept thinking about how hard I worked all year and how bad it would feel to throw that away right at the finish line. So I pushed through — studied for my tests, turned stuff in on time, and actually asked for help when I was confused (which, honestly, is kind of hard to do). Getting my final grades back felt so good. Like, I actually earned that.

The other huge thing? Cheer tryouts. Oh my gosh, I was so nervous. My stomach was literally doing flips the second I walked in. But I told myself that finishing strong means being brave too, not just getting good grades. I'd been practicing at home constantly, so I knew I gave it everything I had. When I found out I made the team, I genuinely almost cried. It was one of those moments where you're like — okay, yeah, hard work actually does mean something.

WHAT I'M MOST PROUD OF

- ✓ Honors student
- ✓ Made the cheer team
- ✓ Summer theater program

*Hard work
+ faith + focus
= success*



“I didn't want to walk into something that exciting feeling like I'd slacked off at the end of the year.”

On top of all that, I'm going to be in a Summer Stock Program for musical theater this summer, which I am beyond excited about. I love performing, so knowing that was coming up actually helped me stay focused. I didn't want to walk into something that exciting feeling like I'd slacked off at the end of the year.

Here's what I figured out: finishing strong isn't just a grades thing. It's about not quitting when you're almost done, being responsible even when nobody's really watching anymore, and pushing yourself when it would be so easy to just stop trying. It's about being proud of how you finished, not just how you started.

And honestly? I'm really proud. Honors student — check. Made the cheer team — check. Summer theater program — check. I finished the year the way I wanted to, and that's what finishing strong actually feels like. ■

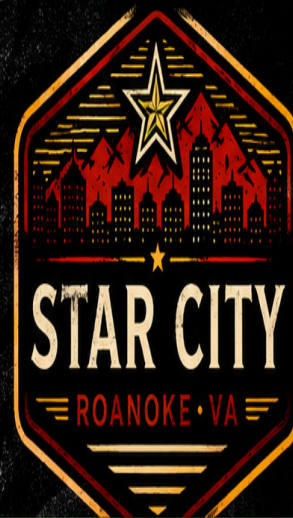


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THE INTERSECTION OF BELONGING & COMMUNITY SERVICE

By Dr. Monica Manns, Ed.D., MED, MRC

Belonging is more than being included—it's the profound sense of being seen, valued, and accepted for who you are. It is the human need to connect, contribute, and know that we matter to something and someone beyond ourselves.

For me, belonging took root in the communities that embraced me, shaped me, and trusted me enough to give me space to lead. And it is through community service that I have not only found my place—but found my purpose.

My journey in service began in the streets and schools of Richmond, Virginia. I was not born with privilege or a predetermined path. What I had was curiosity, courage, and a deep desire to make a difference. That desire led me into spaces where others looked like me, lived like me, and needed to be heard like me.

“*Belonging is not always found. Sometimes it is built.*”



Over the years, I've served in numerous roles—as an educator, mentor, advisor, and advocate. But more than titles, I carry a commitment: to build spaces where others can feel the same sense of belonging that helped me rise.

SERVING WHERE YOU COME FROM

Community service is not about recognition—it's about responsibility. It's about understanding that we all have something to give, and that our communities grow stronger when we invest in each other.

In Richmond, I've worked alongside youth, families, and leaders to create programs that empower, uplift, and equip. From youth development to educational equity, from mental health awareness to leadership development, my work has been guided by one belief: when people feel like they belong, they are more likely to believe in themselves and their potential.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

You don't have to have all the answers to make an impact. Sometimes, your presence is the power. Listening. Showing up. Speaking life into someone who may not see their own value yet.

I've learned that belonging is not always found. Sometimes, it is built—brick by brick, action by action, relationship by relationship.

A CALL TO ALL OF US

Whether you are leading a nonprofit, volunteering in your neighborhood, or simply showing up for someone who needs you—know that it matters.

We all have a role to play in building communities where everyone can belong. And when we do, we don't just change lives—we transform legacies. ■



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MORE THAN MOTOWN:

The Business Blueprint The Gordys Built

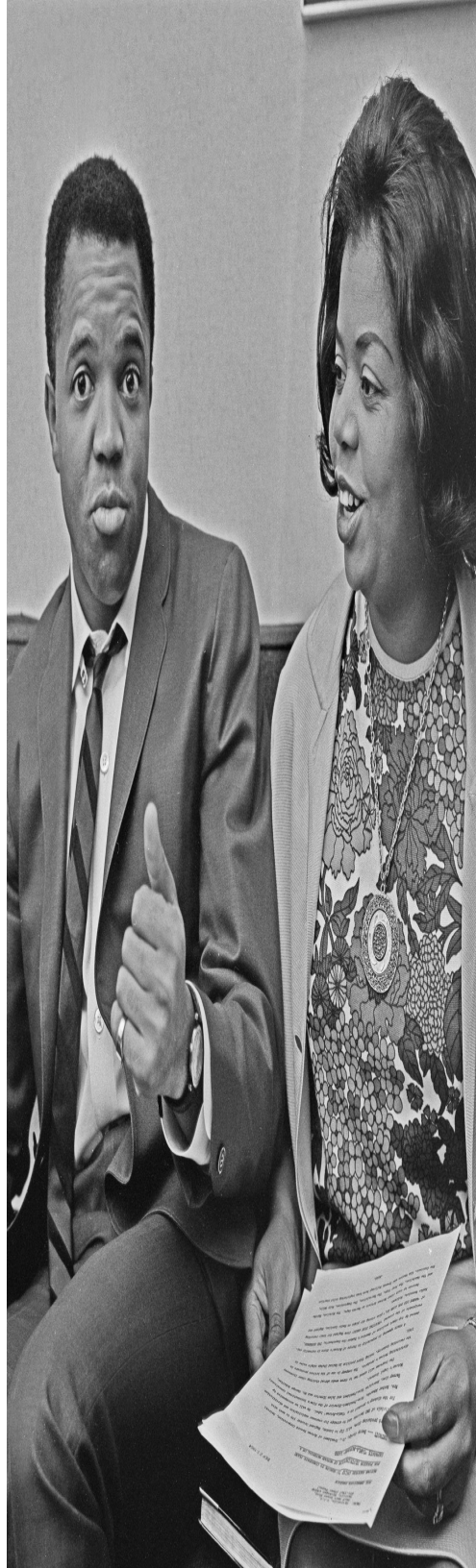
The Gordy family didn't start with Motown. They started with a grocery store, a contracting business, and a print shop — three separate industries running simultaneously out of Detroit, all built by a family who understood that wealth lives or dies on diversification. By the time Berry Gordy Jr. pressed his first record in 1959, his siblings had already spent their formative years working the register, reading balance sheets, and learning what it takes to keep something alive when one market goes cold. The music was new. The business instincts were inherited.

That context changes everything about the Motown story. This was never just a kid with a dream and a loan. It was a family deploying decades of accumulated entrepreneurial knowledge into a new industry at exactly the right cultural moment. And the ecosystem they built around that record label — the publishing arm, the touring operation, the artist management, the film division — looks a lot less like luck when you understand where it came from.

“The \$800 was not charity. It was capital allocation.”

Pops Built the Foundation

Berry Gordy Sr. — known to his children simply as “Pops” — arrived in Detroit from Sandersville, Georgia in 1922 with his wife



Bertha and their first three children. Like thousands of Black families who made the Great Migration north, they came seeking economic footing unavailable in the Jim Crow South. What distinguished the Gordys was what they did once they arrived. Rather than settle into wage labor, Pops built a portfolio. He opened and ran a grocery store. He launched a plastering and carpentry contracting business. He established a



printing shop. And Bertha, equally entrepreneurial, founded and managed an insurance agency. Together they created what amounted to a family business conglomerate — one that covered retail, skilled trades, print media, and financial services all at once. This was not accidental diversification. It was survival strategy elevated to institutional thinking. When construction work slowed, the store kept cash moving. When the store had a lean season, the printing contracts held. When everything else was uncertain, the insurance business offered a steadier rhythm. Wealth, in the Gordy household, was never dependent on one door remaining open. Their eight children — Fuller, Esther, Anna, Loucye, George, Gwendolyn, Berry Jr., and Robert — all grew up working in these businesses. They learned bookkeeping, customer relations, and the texture of running something before they ever had a

reason to apply it to music.

You Can't Work With Family— Except When You Can

It is one of the most repeated pieces of business wisdom in America: don't mix family and money. Keep your professional life and your personal life separate. The reasoning is familiar enough — personal loyalties cloud judgment, grievances at the dinner table spill into the boardroom, and when things go wrong, you don't just lose a business partner, you lose a brother.

The Gordys heard none of that, or chose not to listen. And the result was one of the most successful Black-owned enterprises in American history.

What made the difference was not that they avoided conflict — Motown had its share of tension, power struggles, and painful departures. What made the difference was that they came to the table with defined roles, complementary skills, and a pre-existing culture of accountability built inside the family long before Motown existed. When Esther Gordy managed the Ber-Berry Co-Op and told Berry he could have \$800 of the \$1,000 he asked for, that was not a personal slight. That was a CFO enforcing fiscal discipline. The boundary between family and business was not blurred for the Gordys — it was intentionally structured.

That structure came directly from Pops. His children had grown up with assigned roles in family businesses, watching their parents



treat commercial operations with the same seriousness they gave to everything else. Fuller worked construction and print. Robert gravitated toward music and studio work. Esther handled money and administration. The assignment of roles wasn't arbitrary — it tracked real skills and real temperaments. And when those same people moved into Motown, they moved into roles that fit them for the same reasons. The company didn't force a family dynamic onto a business. The family had already built the business dynamic at home.

The Brothers: From Pops' Payroll to Motown's Engine Room

Fuller Gordy, the eldest son, followed the most direct line from father to business. He worked in the family's construction and printing operations and transitioned into an executive role at Motown when the label was established. His presence represented institutional continuity — the same operational discipline he'd learned helping Pops run physical businesses now applied to a record company that Berry famously modeled on the Detroit assembly line.

George Gordy walked a similar path, grounded in the family trades before contributing to the broader Motown enterprise. But it was the youngest brother, Robert, who brought the most direct musical contribution. Robert left a stable post office job — a choice that required real conviction — to

“They didn't force a family dynamic onto a business. The family had already built the business dynamic at home.”

become a studio engineer at Hitsville U.S.A. He worked the boards on early recordings, helping shape the tight, clean production sound that would define a generation. He also recorded as a performing artist under the name “Bob Kayli,” releasing early singles on the Tamla label. Later, after the tragic death of his sister Loucye in 1965, Robert moved into Jobete Music Publishing as a manager, helping steward the catalog side of the operation.

What the brothers represent collectively is a theme central to the entire Gordy story: the willingness to leave conventional security for a shared family vision. These were not passive equity holders. They were working members of an operation they believed in because they had watched a version of it succeed their whole lives.

The Sisters: The Real Executive Architecture

If the brothers were important, the sisters were indispensable. Historians who dig below the surface of the Motown story tend to arrive at the same conclusion: without the Gordy women, the label does not become the institution it became.

Esther Gordy Edwards was the eldest

daughter and the most formidable business mind in the family outside of Berry himself. It was Esther who managed the Ber-Berry Co-Op, and once the label launched, she stepped in fully. She served as head of artist management and the art department, eventually rising to vice president and CEO. She organized and managed the legendary Motortown Revue tours of the early 1960s — taking Motown acts through the South during the height of the Civil Rights era, a logistical and cultural undertaking that required as much courage as business acumen. When Berry moved the company to Los Angeles in 1972, Esther stayed in Detroit. She preserved Hitsville U.S.A., saved hundreds of boxes of memorabilia, and opened what became the Motown Museum — now one of Detroit's most visited cultural institutions.

Loucye Gordy Wakefield served as vice president of Jobete Music Publishing and co-wrote songs in the early 1960s. But her most consequential contribution was structural: in 1964 she developed a system for collecting revenue from distributors that transformed Motown's cash flow. In an era when independent labels routinely lost money to slow-paying partners, Loucye's collections system was the difference between a thriving enterprise and a leaking one. She died suddenly in 1965 at just forty years old. Gwen Gordy Fuqua co-founded Anna Records with Berry in April 1959, operating an independent R&B label alongside the early Motown ecosystem. She was a songwriter in her own right, and her connections into the Detroit music scene — deepened by her marriage to Harvey Fuqua of The Moonglows — expanded the family's network at a critical moment. Anna Gordy Gaye, another sister, married Marvin Gaye in 1964, further weaving the family into the heart of Motown's artist roster in ways that were complicated and very human, as Marvin's landmark album *Here My Dear* would later make plain.

Three Industries, One Philosophy



There is a through-line that connects Pops' grocery store, contracting business, and print shop to what Motown became: the understanding that a community-sustaining enterprise cannot rely on a single product or a single market. Each of the three businesses operated on a different economic cycle. Retail feeds families daily. Construction builds lasting infrastructure. Print disseminates ideas and contracts. Together they absorb shocks that would otherwise be fatal to a single-industry operation. Motown, at its height, operated by the same logic. It was never just a record label. It was a publishing company, an artist management operation, a touring enterprise, a film and television production house, and a talent development academy. Berry's Artist Development Department — which taught performers how to move, speak, dress, and present themselves — was itself a parallel business, one that created value well beyond the recordings. The Gordys didn't learn diversification from a business school textbook. They learned it watching their parents survive and thrive in Detroit across three industries at once.

What the Gordy Blueprint Means Today

The Gordy family story is, at its core, a story about intergenerational economic architecture. Pops and Bertha built the habits, the



capital, and the professional culture. The siblings brought those tools into a new industry at precisely the right moment. And because the foundation was built on diversification — on the principle that wealth must be multi-rooted to survive — the Motown story did not end when Berry sold the label in 1988. The publishing catalog, the museum, the film rights, the cultural legacy: these endured because they had been treated as separate assets from the beginning.

Esther Gordy Edwards, who outlived most of her siblings and passed away in 2011 at ninety-one, perhaps embodied the family ethic most completely. While the music industry moved on, she stayed in Detroit, preserved what others would have discarded, and built an institution. The Motown Museum now generates its own economy: tourism, education, civic pride, a living reminder that Black entrepreneurial vision doesn't require external permission to be legitimate, lasting, or world-changing.

So the next time someone tells you not to work with family, point them toward Detroit. Point them toward a grocery store, a contracting business, and a print shop that taught eight children how to build something that lasts. The \$800 loan is the part of the story everyone knows. Everything behind it is the part that explains why it worked.



A vibrant, stylized poster for the Cousinz Festival 2026. The poster is designed to look like a colorful signpost with various sections. At the top, the word "Cousinz" is written in a large, bubbly yellow font on a red background, with "FESTIVAL" in white below it. To the left, a blue circle says "HOSTED BY CHICO BEAN". To the right, the year "2026" is displayed in white on black blocks. Below this, the venue "Norfolk SCOPE GROUNDS" is shown with a bridge icon. The date "SEPTEMBER -5TH-" is in white on an orange background, with "Norfolk, Virginia" in white on a green background. The main performer "KEYSHIA COLE" is in large yellow letters on a pink background. Below that, "SPECIAL SET BY THE-DREAM" is in yellow on a green background. Further down, "PLIES" is in white on a red background, followed by "Bryan-Michael Cox & Friends" in white on a blue background. At the bottom, there are several smaller sections: "DJ BOOF" in white on an orange background, "DJ ENVY" in white on a green background, "DJ Quicksilva" in white on a red background, "Jae Murphy" in white on a pink background, "DJ AKTIVE" in white on a blue background, "COUSINZ RADIO LIVE!" in white on a green background, and "DOMINIQUE DA DIVA" in white on a blue background. A small "RnB BLOCK PARTY STAGE" logo is also present. At the very bottom, the website "COUSINZFESTIVAL.COM" is written in white on a black background.

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