

**TAKING  
CARE OF**

**JUNE 2026 - JULY 2026  
VOLUME 9 | EDITION 3**

# *Business*

Servicing the Greater Kansas City Area  
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*Louis Smith Sr.*

## **Louis's Artistic Barber Salon Serves Generations With Care and Consistency**

### **ALSO INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

- Four Steps to Build Financial Wellness for Black Americans
- What Men's Health Month Means for African Americans
- KC Has Paired 18 Vacant Storefronts With Local Businesses for the World Cup
- And More!

# TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Servicing the Greater Kansas City Area

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**JUNE 2026-JULY 2026 • VOLUME 9 | EDITION 3**

# Taking Care of Business...

As the Executive Director of Rasheed Communications and Editor of Taking Care of Business, a new innovative bi-monthly business news magazine, our hope is to bring to you local and national news coverage from the African American community. Our focus is on premier black-owned businesses, powerful women in business, minority small business owners, and startup companies. We distribute this bi-monthly publication commercially and residentially with a target circulation of 5,000 copies six times per calendar year.

We highlight corporations that reinvest in our communities and further advance African Americans and women up their corporate ladder. We also intend to expose those companies which do not. We would like to provide your business with the opportunity to expand your marketing and advertising promotions for the Summer. Our goal is to build bridges so that the businesses in our community will support each other more. We will continue to foster an environment that encourages customers to shop locally for goods and service as we work to strengthen our community.

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Sincerely,

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Saleem Rasheed, Jr.  
Executive Director



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# 4 STEPS TO BUILD FINANCIAL WELLNESS FOR BLACK AMERICANS

*Here are four steps you can take in your personal finances to help you take control of your money and work to build wealth.*

## **1. Move Forward With Empathy (for Yourself).**

Building financial stability and wealth can be challenging — especially for many Black Americans, who also face the aftereffects of decades of inequality. Some sobering numbers:

Research from the Minneapolis Fed suggests that while today's racial wealth gap links all the way back to unequal levels of wealth in 1870, the gap actually grew roughly 0.1% per year between 1980 and 2020.

Today, white Americans (60% of the U.S. population) hold 84% of the country's total wealth, while Black Americans (13% of the U.S. population) hold just 4%.

White workers are paid more than Black and Hispanic workers at nearly every educational level, with white college graduates earning \$35.90 an hour and Black college graduates \$27.81 an hour in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

When data are not controlled for equal education or experience levels, Payscale found that Black women earn just 79 cents for every \$1 for white men.

It's important to acknowledge and even grieve these realities. Make sure to give yourself empathy when it comes to your personal finances: There are some macro forces outside of your control.

This doesn't at all mean we should accept the status quo or stop fighting for social and economic justice. Rather, remembering this wider perspective when it comes to your own wallet can help you identify what is in your control, identify your personal priorities and start making

more intentional choices with your money wherever you are today.



## **2. Enlist Allies and Community.**

An important first step in achieving greater financial health is building a financial support system. Your first and best ally is always yourself, so invest in your financial skill set. This could mean anything from auditing a business course at a local college, to doing your own research on financial topics like retirement and investments, to joining educational webinars through your workplace benefits.

As well as building your own financial knowledge bank, reach out for support from others. Access to workplace benefits like financial wellness programs, financial advice or even equity awards can provide opportunities to accumulate greater financial security.

If your employer offers a retirement plan, enroll and maximize any company match. If they offer you a financial wellness program, tap into any features you can use in your day-to-day life, like budgeting tools, savings support and access to professional financial advice.

Also, consider finding a financial mentor whom you can talk to about your financial goals and ideas and actions you

can take to turn those dreams into reality. This could look like working with an experienced financial coach or adviser who can offer you personalized guidance, or forging new relationships in your community. Many workplace 401(k) plans are managed by an adviser, and you may be able to connect with them for free guidance as well.



### 3. Build Your Credit.

Black consumers are more likely to be turned down for credit compared to white consumers, so building a stronger credit score can be an important step in opening the door to new wealth-building opportunities, like purchasing a home.

How do you improve your credit score? It may sound simple, but the first step is to not borrow more money than you can afford to pay back. Build up credit by using any credit cards you have to make small purchases — even a pack of gum — and then immediately pay off the balance. Over time, these small on-time payments can help raise your score.

Second, look for opportunities to borrow at lower rates—for example, some credit cards allow borrowers to post collateral like cash or securities in exchange for lower rates. This may not be the best move for everyone, but it may be a way to get your foot in the door.

Lastly, make sure you know how the rates on your credit cards or any other forms of debt work. Do rates increase if you miss a payment? Which of your debt charges the highest rate, and what is your minimum payment due? Prioritize paying down your most expensive debts first.

### 4. Build Your Savings and Investments.

Savings and investments are just as essential as credit. If it feels like a challenge to find funds to invest or save, con-

sider using the 50-30-20 rule to help you budget: Put about 50% of your money toward necessities like food and housing, 30% toward wants, and then you have 20% left to invest and save.

Make it a priority to build up an emergency savings fund if you don't already have one. Start small if you must, even saving \$5 at a time until you have \$1,000. Then, set your sights on having enough set aside to cover three to six months' worth of living expenses.

Just as important, invest for retirement. If you have a 401(k) through your job, great. If not, consider opening an IRA. From there, you can look into other opportunities to invest and grow your money for the future. Figure out what works for your lifestyle, and whatever you do, give your money a chance to grow.

### Building a Better Future

Some Black Americans may have to cover extra ground in order to generate and preserve personal wealth. Just know that no matter what the big picture is, you do have the power to make a difference in your own financial life.

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# What Men's Health Month Means for African Americans

**Men's Health Month** occurs every June with this year's **Men's Health Week** occurring June 12th through the 18th. This month, we dedicate time to raising awareness for the health issues that many men face, especially Black Americans and multiracial people. Understanding your risk for health conditions based on racial background and other risk factors, like age and family history, is vital. We look at some of the most common health issues that the Black population faces, what you can do to live a healthier lifestyle, and how you can make an impact this month.

## Health Issues Affecting Black Americans

While people self-identifying as any race are susceptible to many health conditions, the Black population is especially vulnerable to several. From a lack of educational attainment to living in poorer neighborhoods to higher rates of unemployment and being uninsured, the Black community is fighting for racial equality in healthcare. Men's Health Month stresses the importance of the struggle that many men face when seeking care for these conditions and more.



## Cardiovascular Disease

Heart disease is a term used to describe a number of conditions related to the heart, including heart attack, stroke, heart failure, arrhythmia, and more. Although Black wom-

en are disproportionately affected by heart disease as compared to Black men, African Americans are much more susceptible to it than White people. The Office of Minority Health reports that both African American and non-Hispanic White people were diagnosed with Coronary Artery Disease in similar numbers, but that Black people were less likely to have their hypertension controlled and more likely to die from heart disease.



## Mental Health Concerns

Many Blacks live in low-income neighborhoods and are below the poverty line themselves, placing them at higher risk for psychological distress. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the rates of serious mental illness rose among African Americans between 2008 and 2018. As an example, while depression and major depressive episodes have decreased overall across the country and all races, they have increased sharply among all age groups of Black Americans. Black teenagers are more likely to attempt suicide but, as a race, African Americans are less likely to die by suicide compared to those of other ethnic background.

## Prostate Cancer

Black Americans are more than twice as likely to die from prostate cancer than White men and other people of color. Part of the problem is that their cancer is detected later when it is more advanced and there are fewer treatment options available. Awareness and early detection has improved survival rates for all races, including African American patients. Today, when caught early, prostate cancer has a 99% 5-year survival rate. More needs to be done to raise awareness of prostate cancer and its disproportionate effects on the black population. However, there have already been great strides made with concerted efforts on behalf of government agencies, local community organizations, and healthcare providers.



## Diabetes

Diabetes affects your body's use of insulin, either by changing how much of it is produced or how well it responds to it. It often leads to other serious health conditions like heart disease and kidney disease. Diabetes also affects the Black population more than non-Hispanic Whites and every other race. The Office of Minority Health reports that African American adults are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, with Black men more likely to die from it. In recent years, it's been found that Black people were more than 2.5 times more likely to be hospitalized with complications from the disease and twice as likely to succumb to it than White people.

## Kidney Disease

The National Institutes of Health has insight into why Black people are more likely to suffer from kidney disease than any other race. American Indians and Alaskan Natives are 1.2 times and Hispanics are 1.3 times more likely to be di-

agnosed with kidney failure. By comparison, Black Americans are four times as likely to suffer from it. The two most common causes of kidney failure are hypertension and diabetes, which are also prevalent in African American communities for a variety of reasons, including the lack of preventative care, lifestyle choices, and limited access to healthy foods.

## Living a Healthier Life

The School of Public Health has offered a list of ways that all men, regardless of race, can improve their overall health, reduce their risk of chronic illness, and feel better each day. Remember that men's health is important all year and not just in June when we recognize Men's Health Month. If you have any existing health conditions or questions about implementing the suggestions below, be sure to speak with your healthcare provider.

- **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Your ideal weight is typically measured by body mass index (BMI). You can use a BMI calculator to help you determine the ideal weight for your height. It will not include body type or other factors, so your doctor may give you a different target weight.
- **Eat a Healthy Diet:** It's important to consider the types of foods you eat and the size of your portions. While there are many trendy diets out there, the best bet is to learn more about the foods you eat, like protein, carbohydrate, and fat content.
- **Take a Multivitamin Supplement:** Multivitamins are a great way to ensure you get plenty of the nutrients your diet may be lacking.
- **Stay Hydrated:** You should aim to drink 0.5 ounces of water per one pound of body weight. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, you should drink approximately 100 ounces of water each day.
- **Exercise Regularly:** The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends 150 minutes of physical activity each week. You can break this down into shorter workout sessions throughout the week that fit better into your schedule. If needed, start small and work your way up.
- **Reduce Screen Time:** Sitting down too much increases the risk for heart disease and stroke. If you must work at a computer most of the day, be sure to take frequent breaks. Getting up to walk or stretch can help you feel better throughout the day as well.

- **Get Enough Sleep:** The amount of sleep you need changes as you get older. The important thing is that you feel rested when you wake up. Good sleep is linked to improved mood, brain performance, and overall health.
- **Limit Alcohol Intake:** Alcohol should be consumed in moderation and safely. Long-term alcohol use is linked with hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer. It may also lead to risky sexual relations, motor vehicle crashes, and violence.
- **Manage Mental Health:** There are many ways you can support your mental health, from self-care to practicing gratitude to regular meditation. By putting yourself first you are better able to support those around you.
- **Keep Yourself Accountable:** Whether you turn to a support group, your family and friends, or use an app, keeping yourself in line with your health goals is important.

### How to Raise Awareness for Men's Health Month

It's easy to help raise awareness for Men's Health Month this June and there are plenty of ways to do it too. Be sure to involve women and families if appropriate, as they are some of your biggest advocates and want you to stay healthy as well. While Black people may be disproportionately affected by some health conditions and struggle with the healthcare system for various reasons, Men's Health Month is the ideal time to help create balance. Here's how you can help:



**Wear Blue Day:** In 2026, Wear Blue Day is celebrated on June 16th. The goal is to help raise awareness for men's health, which will ultimately lead to longer, healthier lives.

**Share Your Support:** Do you know someone who is struggling with their mental health, heart disease, or other condition? Many Black people suffer in silence. Take this opportunity to reach out and encourage them.

**Create an Awareness Campaign:** There are many ways you can raise awareness through a campaign. Ask the HR department at work to set up an event, send out flyers within your local community, or write a letter to the editor at your newspaper.

**Join a Fundraiser:** Is there a fundraiser happening nearby? Join that 5K walk, request sponsorship in the next food drive, or simply announce that you've made a donation to an organization and ask others to do the same.

**Start a Healthy Living Group:** Do you know plenty of men who would benefit from going for regular walks, staying accountable on a healthy diet, or losing weight? Why not band together to make it happen?

**Organize a Health Fair:** You can work with a local health clinic to advertise preventative screenings for prostate cancer, hypertension, diabetes, and other conditions. Reach out to a few and see if they are interested in raising awareness for Men's Health Month.

**Plan a Sports Day:** Have your friends, family, and local communities come together for a sports day. Pay a small fee to play and send the proceeds to an organization who can use the funds to support men's health.

### Men's Health And The Black Population: Raising Awareness

Black Health Matters stands with you in our efforts to raise awareness for men's health. We encourage you to support those you love with health conditions such as heart disease or mental health diagnoses, share your own stories of hope and survival, and collaborate with peers this June to raise awareness for Men's Health Month.



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# LOUIS'S ARTISTIC BARBER SALON

## SERVES GENERATIONS WITH CARE AND CONSISTENCY

BY JEANENE DUNN



**For nearly 40 years, the clippers have stayed busy inside Louis's Artistic Barber Salon. Generations of customers return not only for haircuts, but also for conversation, comfort and community.**

Salon owner Louis Smith Sr. has spent decades in the barbering industry, including 38 years running his own shop. Before opening the business, he worked in five different barber shops. Those experiences taught him not only the craft of barbering, but the importance of shop upkeep, building relationships and customer care.

That philosophy helped shape the salon into something more than a traditional barber shop.

"We wanted a place where everyone felt comfortable," Smith said. "Women, children, families — everybody. We have men, women and children who come for services."

From the beginning, Louis's Artistic has focused on creating a clean, smoke-free and respectful environment. Clients can relax while receiving quality service. "Coming to the salon for service is self-care," Smith added.

### Where Clients Feel Valued

Over the years, the business has evolved alongside the community it serves. What started primarily as a barber shop now includes women's grooming, facials and eyebrow services.

Smith said salon ownership requires balancing many responsibilities. He manages staff, maintains the space and works to ensure every client feels cared for.

"If you're stressed all the time, clients can feel that energy," he said. "You have to treat people right if you want them to come back."

That people-first approach helped the salon build a loyal,

multigenerational customer base. Some clients first visited as toddlers and now bring in their own children for haircuts.

For Smith, one of the greatest rewards has been watching families grow over the years.

"It becomes bigger than just cutting hair," he said. "You get to know people's lives."



### A Family Legacy Behind the Chair

That family-centered tradition also extends behind the barber chairs.

After attending barber school, Smith's sons, Wasilah Smith and Louis Smith, Jr., joined the business. Both have worked alongside their father for more than 20 years. Together, the three barbers have helped make the shop a longtime community fixture built on consistency, mentorship and family tradition.

Smith said working with young people has always been important to the shop's culture. Over the years, children and teenagers have spent time in the barber shop watching conversations, learning respect and observing the value of hard work and professionalism.

For many young customers, the shop is more than a place for a haircut. It is also a place where they feel encouraged, supported and welcomed.

“You never know who’s watching you,” Smith said. “Kids pay attention to everything.”

Smith believes maintaining a clean, professional environment helps set a positive example for youth. He said barber shops can shape young people simply by creating spaces where they feel safe and valued.

### Service Beyond the Shop

The business also reaches beyond the shop walls.

Each week, Smith visits homebound clients who cannot travel to the salon. He provides haircuts and grooming services that help clients maintain dignity, confidence and connection.

“A haircut can help people feel better about themselves,” Smith said of his homebound clients. “It lifts their spirits to look fresh.”



Smith’s son, Louis Smith, Jr., also provides grooming services for Serenity Funeral Home. The work helps grieving families ensure loved ones are cared for with dignity during final arrangements.

He said providing grooming services for the deceased carries a different kind of meaning. For families navigating loss, those final touches can bring comfort and a sense of closure during a difficult time.

### More Than a Barber Shop

The salon’s impact reflects the importance of supporting Black-owned businesses and neighborhood entrepreneurs. Smith believes businesses should invest back into their communities through service, mentorship and relationship-building.



After nearly four decades, Louis’s Artistic Barber Salon continues to be more than a place for a haircut. It remains a gathering place, a family tradition and a lasting part of the community.

**Louis’s Artistic Barber Salon is located at 6032 Troost Ave. in Kansas City, Missouri. The shop is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Walk-ins are welcome, though appointments are strongly encouraged.**

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# Kansas City Has Paired 18 Vacant Storefronts With Local Businesses for the World Cup So Far

Interior designer Morgan Irvin has big plans for the vacant storefront where she'll set up shop in the Historic 18th and Vine district. A special program run by the city is helping entrepreneurs like Irvin navigate regulations to set up storefront spaces ahead of the World Cup.

A special program is bringing empty Kansas City storefronts back to life by placing entrepreneurs in prime downtown spaces to show off for an influx of international visitors. City leaders hope the program leads to long-term opportunities for small businesses and building owners.



Interior designer Morgan Irvin says she never thought she'd have an opportunity to set up a brick-and-mortar business.

But, as thousands of World Cup tourists prepare to descend on Kansas City this summer, a new program run by the city is helping her navigate the regulations involved in doing just that.

Irvin already has big plans for her space located on the 1700 block of East 18th Street. She imagines creating fully-styled rooms with vibrant pillows and curtains to show off her business, Boxx Decor Co.

"I'll have complete looks all across the showroom floor, because for girls, this is a big thing," she said. "When we decorate, it's serious."

Irvin applied for her pop-up space through the city's Open Doors! program last fall. Kansas City Council launched the program in October, and more than 100 small businesses submitted their applications. It provides up to \$10,000 in grants and rent subsidies to activate vacant spaces, specifically targeting a boost in cultural and commercial activity ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Kansas City is investing \$1.6 million in the Open Doors! grant program, and the short-term rental company Airbnb announced in May that it would be pitching in \$100,000.

Interior designer Morgan Irvin has big plans for her storefront pop-up store in the Historic 18th and Vine district. She will be one of four new businesses in the area backed by the Open Doors! program.

For Irvin, it all adds up to her opening one of four new, Black-owned businesses in the Historic 18th and Vine district, all backed by the Open Doors! program.

"I'm coming out a totally different person, business-wise, because I've had to learn so much to be able to keep up," Irvin said. "I thought I was a business before, but now I'm a business."

## Entrepreneurs as Ambassadors

Kansas City Neighborhood Services Department Assistant Director Nia Webster has been promoting the program.

Webster said she's still finalizing leases, but she's connected 22 businesses, artists, and organizations with 18 storefront locations in the Crossroads and along the KC Streetcar line so far, and she's planning to place 10 to 15 pro-

gram finalists in other prime spots like Union Station between now and the World Cup. Webster said she's trying to help an additional 52 small businesses through the program. Final placements were announced the first week of May.

"I don't think anybody's doing anything at the level that we're doing when it comes to true, small business investment," Webster said. "We are putting the business in front of you, and we're promoting and marketing those businesses and saying: 'Here's Kansas City. Here is the city of entrepreneurs.'"

Webster said leases for Open Doors! operators are generally 3 to 6 months, and could help building owners connect with potential long-term tenants.

"We're pretty much taking a risk off of you to kind of test each other out to see if you all like this, but also giving an opportunity for an entrepreneur to learn the process," Webster said.



**Nia Webster, assistant director of the Neighborhood Services Department for KCMO, and Janá Wagner, division manager for the KC BizCare office, lead a World Cup ESO Lunch and Learn session in September at City Hall**

According to Airbnb, Kansas City is expected to host 11,000 guests during the World Cup on its platform alone, generating an estimated \$105 million in economic activity.

"I've been monitoring this Airbnb stuff, because they had a \$5 million fund for host cities and they were investing in different cities," Webster said. "We were able to grab some of that."

The short-term rental company will also sponsor the Airbnb Small Business Guide, a digital resource developed in partnership with Open Doors! The guide will connect World Cup visitors to local businesses, restaurants and storefronts, according to a press release from the city.

The efforts are part of Airbnb's Host City Impact Program, the release says, a \$5 million commitment to support projects in FIFA World Cup 2026 host cities that are designed to bring long-term opportunities and enhance the visitor experience.

"Kansas City's entrepreneurs are some of its best ambassadors, and Open Doors! is giving them a platform at exactly the right moment," Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City President and CEO Tracey Lewis said in a statement announcing Airbnb's contribution. "This investment is about making sure that when the world arrives, the economic opportunity reaches the entrepreneurs and small business owners who are the heart of this community."

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