

# MARYLAND



COMMENTARY

## Second Chance salvages more than objects



Dan Rodricks

When it comes to describing Second Chance and its vast operation in South Baltimore, I hardly know where to begin. So I'll begin at the entrance: the statue of the angel visiting Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and the marble angels to either side. All of that came from the Michigan church where the late Robert Kearns, inventor of the intermittent windshield wiper, worshipped as a boy during the Great Depression.

It's a long story — just about everything at Second Chance is — so here's the short version: Throughout his life Kearns believed he was guided by a divine presence. Some time after his famously long and ultimately successful battle with automakers to be compensated for his invention, Kearns heard that his

boyhood Catholic church, Our Lady of Lourdes in River Rouge, near Detroit, was to be demolished.

He arranged to buy large elements of it, including statuary, the altar and 64 stained glass windows. He wanted the salvaged parts for a chapel he planned to build in a meadow of Cheston-on-Wye, his estate on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The chapel was never built. Kearns died in 2005. The pieces from Our Lady of Lourdes ended up at Second Chance.

A lot of things do — perhaps a million things by now. I could fill the rest of this column with a list.

What first-time visitors see as they walk into the massive showroom can be overwhelming. It's as if you've just walked into a museum of American life — as if the contents of countless grandmother's houses, millionaire estates, bygone restaurants, hotels, libraries, office buildings and contractor supply depots spilled into a giant warehouse and were suddenly moved by Hogwarts force

into orderly rows.

But it's not magic that maintains order. It's sweat.

Second Chance employs 250 people, and two-thirds of them are ex-offenders, or what we now prefer to call "returning citizens" — men and women coming out of prison, returning to Baltimore and getting a second chance at stable lives.

The operation's mission is as holistic as they come: recycling furnishings and building materials, keeping tons of useful stuff out of landfills and providing jobs for people who usually have a tough time finding them. It's a nonprofit that salvages lives and lounge chairs.

In the two decades since Mark Foster established Second Chance, it has grown at an impressive rate, from 25,000 square feet in its original retail location to more than 200,000 square feet in the industrial park on the west side of Russell Street. You can't miss it: The big sign on the facade of the warehouse says: "What Is and What Can Be."

For years whole houses have been donated to Second Chance for salvage. Their owners want to knock them down or gut them.

That's when Second Chance crews take over, extracting bricks, floor boards, window sets and doors, chairs and tables, kitchen cabinets and bathroom sinks, bath tubs and tile, staircases and railings, shelves and chifforobes, pianos and organs.

And the crews travel. Seven workers were in Florida this past week to take apart a house that had been donated to Second Chance. Crews have traveled to all surrounding states and the Carolinas and as far north as Maine to clean out or deconstruct houses. All they salvage comes back to Baltimore.

Foster said Second Chance takes 250 houses a year "and the pandemic was pretty good for us."

While confined to their homes in 2020, people engaged in household repairs and came to Second Chance for materials, or they performed

cleanouts and donated their unwanted items. The nonprofit reduced its showroom openings to Thursdays through Sundays, but business improved significantly, says Foster, and the four-day retail operation remains in place.

The other day I saw customers scouting toilets and bathroom vanities, wicker chairs and end tables. A man purchased a grandfather clock, and Second Chance employees helped him load it into a truck.

I try to refrain from using the word "amazed," but I was again genuinely amazed at the scope of Second Chance offerings and the way the place is organized. You never feel you're negotiating a mass of clutter or worry that something is going to fall on your head, or that you're going to stub a toe on a claw foot bathtub.

And the size of things can wow — iconic red-and-white "MARYLAND" lettering from the end line of the old basketball court at Cole Field House; the

giant "U" from the former Domino Sugars sign; an enormous, tufted carpet that looks as if it came from a sultan's palace; and ornate cabinetry from a sprawling Florida mansion.

Some items are, shall we say, given to speculation.

For sale now is a baroque, black marble dining room table, with inlay cherubs, and eight gold leaf chairs. It looks like something from Donald Trump's Manhattan penthouse. Someone at Second Chance thinks someone else will pay \$7,589 for it, and they might be right.

I saw a huge, round conference table almost as big as the one used in the Paris Peace Talks of 1973. I came across a glass curio cabinet that, I swear, could have come from my Aunt Minnie's house.

Sometimes Second Chance induces longing.

If I had the space and funds, I'd buy the 19th-century bar and back bar from the Deutsch Ungarisches Gasthaus, a long-gone Locust Point saloon and hostel, and have the club basement of my dreams.



Servant Courtney Speed, right, co-founder of the Henrietta Lacks Legacy Group, stops at a "Save The Nation of Turner Station" banner as she leads a walking tour on Saturday in Baltimore County. KIM HAIRSTON/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS

## Henrietta Lacks walking tour serves as showcase of her life, community

By Ngan Ho

Servant Courtney Speed puts the "speed" in her name. Speed on Saturday led a group of people through the Turner Station neighborhood in Baltimore County as attendees tried to keep up with the 82-year-old.

"I have a brisk walk. I hope you all don't mind," she told the crowd, some of whom were doing double time. Turner Station is the last home of Henrietta Lacks — a Black woman from Baltimore County whose famous 'HeLa' cells were taken without her consent at Johns Hopkins in 1951 and used in numerous subsequent scientific breakthroughs.

Speed is founder and president of the Henrietta Lacks Legacy Group, which has been holding walking tours through Turner Station, a predominantly African-American neighborhood south of Dundalk, to teach people about Lacks since 2011.

The mission of the nonprofit group is not only to extend the legacy of Lacks but also to highlight Turner Station, said vice president Dr. Adele Newson-Horst, a professor at Morgan State University.

"It's extending her legacy



The tour stops at the Turner Station home, where Lacks and her family lived.

and telling the good news of Turner Station. Phenomenal people lived here," Newson-Horst said, including Maryland congressman Kweisi Mfume and Kevin Jeffrey Clash, who was the puppeteer of Elmo on "Sesame Street," and lived across the street from Lacks' former home.

Speed has been guiding these tours since 2011. The gloomy weather and high winds on Saturday didn't stop her or about a dozen people from gathering at the Henrietta Lacks Community Center at Lyon Homes to learn about Lacks.

Over 70 years ago, a Johns Hopkins doctor took a sample of cervical cancer cells from Lacks, then a

31-year-old mother from Turners Station. Lacks died soon after her cells were taken due to complications from the cancer treatment.

HeLa cells, named after Lacks, have since been used for a variety of scientific and medical breakthroughs and treatments. Researchers in the early 1950s used them to develop the polio vaccine and they were instrumental in mapping the human genome.

The cells are considered the first "immortal" cell line, meaning they continue to reproduce in the laboratory instead of dying. Lacks' descendants are suing the U.S. biotech giant Thermo Fisher Scientific over whether use of her cells can continue.

The case became well known after Rebecca Skloot wrote the bestselling book "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," which was later made into an HBO movie starring Oprah Winfrey as one of Lacks' daughters. It is one of the best known examples of medical mistreatment and experimentation in the history of health care, and one of several cases cited by the Black community as a root cause of widespread distrust and resentment of the health system.

Speed, who moved to Turner Station in the 1960s, was inspired to develop the nonprofit group because of her friendship with one of Lacks' daughters, Deborah Lacks. The Henrietta Lacks Legacy Group's website quotes Deborah Lacks as having told Speed that her fondest wish was "for the world to know who my mother was."

"The quest of Deborah is to get the information out to the world about her mother," Speed said. "I'm ecstatically happy that we're finally reaching others outside of the city." Visitors have come from outside Maryland and abroad including Australia, Speed said.

The group stopped at Lacks' home, now occupied

by new tenants. A plaque that includes a picture of Lacks and her bio is affixed to the outside wall next to the front door. The group gathered around the plaque and a woman, who came from Delaware, was asked to read Lacks' bio out loud before the tour continued.

Laverne Gray, who lives in Baltimore and is retired, attended the walking tour because she wanted to learn about Lacks and has always been curious about Turner Station.

"It's such a strong community. It's totally fascinating that they have retained this identity over this time," she said. "I didn't know that there was a surviving African American community and that they were doing so well. This community does not reflect any negativity whatsoever."

The Henrietta Lacks Legacy Group is also raising money to commission two wax figures of Lacks — one to be installed in the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum and the other to travel the country as an educational tool.

The design of the figure will start once the funds are available, Newson-Horst said. The group has raised \$35,000 so far, about half of what it needs.

### SUNDAY NEWS SHOWS INTERVIEW GUESTS

**ABC's "This Week":** Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. 9 a.m., WMAR (Channel 2); 10 a.m., WJLA (Channel 7)

**NBC's "Meet the Press":** Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla.; Gov. Roy Cooper, D-N.C.; NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. 10 a.m., WGAL (Channel 8) and WBAL (Channel 11); 10:30 a.m., WRC (Channel 4)

**CBS' "Face the Nation":** Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla.; Kevin Anderson, mayor of Fort Myers, Florida; former national security adviser H.R. McMaster; Chris Krebs, former director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. 10:30 a.m., WUSA (Channel 9), WJZ (Channel 13)

**CNN's "State of the Union":** Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla.; Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla. 9 a.m., CNN

**"Fox News Sunday":** Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; Gov. Brian Kemp, R-Ga. 9 a.m., WTTG (Channel 5), WPMT (Channel 43) and WBFF (Channel 45); 2 p.m., FOX News Channel

**"Matter of Fact with Soledad O'Brien":** Host Soledad O'Brien spotlights the issue where millions of people in the U.S. do not have access to reliable internet services. 11 a.m., WBAL (Channel 11)

**"11 TV Hill with Jason Newton":** Host Jason Newton speaks with Dale Kunce, CEO of Greater Chesapeake Chapter of the American Red Cross about Maryland's contributions to Hurricane Ian relief efforts. 11:30 a.m., WBAL (Channel 11)

**"Square Off":** Moderator Richard Sher welcomes Anthony McCarthy, Professor Rick Vatz, Pat McDonough and Sheila Dixon to discuss the Baltimore City public school situation and investigation regarding grade changing and absenteeism. Plus, a study released by the national registry of exonerations concluded that Black people in the U.S. are seven times more likely to be convicted of a violent crime than whites. Also, Liz Cheney says she will leave the GOP if former President Donald Trump is the party's nominee in 2024. In the meantime, Trump is holding a fundraiser for Dan Cox, Maryland Republican candidate for governor, at Mar-A-Lago on October 17. *These topics and more are available on line at squareoff.net.*