

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT

The Heart of Everyday Black History

By *JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director*

I can confidently say that we live, we create, and we are Black History every single day.

Black Joy is real, and it moves in tandem with Black Trauma—layers upon layers that can be peeled back like an onion that brings tears to your eyes.

There are sacred spaces where we experience unfiltered, unquenched joy. For you, it may be your home church, gatherings at the community center in your legacy neighborhood, or events at the YMICC, MDTMT Community Center, Umoja Health, Wellness and Justice Collective, or the RSAA.

I, too, have felt joy in many of the spaces I intentionally named. I have also experienced and witnessed joy at ABIPA's Life's Center over the past year—just a blink in time. The first moment I walked through those doors, I knew it was home for us, and that it would become a place of peace and abundance for those we serve. A place overflowing with service, laughter, dancing, and the spirit of community.

I have vivid memories of tears of joy and pride welling in the eyes of neighbors during our introductory tours. The journey in this building has spanned being told that people “don't believe in the building,” and later, “I am so proud of you.” Both statements hit differently, yet both carried truth.

I cannot speak for all Black leaders, and even more specifically Black women leaders, but I can speak frankly for myself: the work of holding and harnessing the Work has at times broken my heart and my spirit, but never my purpose. That purpose is what keeps me going. The stress has affected my heart both metaphorically and literally. I actively work against the predictions of epigenetics and lean instead into generational blessings rather than generational curses. It is hard. It is intentional. It is worth it.

It feels fitting that we are making another pivotal shift at ABIPA during Black History Month and the celebration of our 22nd anniversary. We have truly loved our time at 220! We are deeply grateful to the owners who opened the doors to us in the wake of Hurricane Helene. They have been



JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Red Angle Photography

amazing supporters of our work. We did have the first right to purchase the property, but the owners received a remarkable offer that exceeds our current ability to close.

But, have no fear! When one door closes, God has a way of leading us to something better.

I will be transparent: when I learned about the offer, I was flattened. It felt like the air had been taken out of my balloon that had been filled with Faith. I am a believer and have never

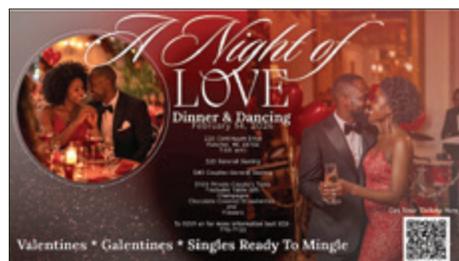
stopped trusting. But, if we're honest, we've all had moments like that—more than once.

A college friend reassured me by sharing an experience she'd had without even knowing what I was facing. She spoke to me about wanting something deeply, and a friend telling her, “What is for you can never be un-for you.” She had no idea how much her words encouraged me.

We Are Still Celebrating!

You don't want to miss our last Sunday Shop at 220 Continuum Drive on February 22 at 3 p.m. It will transition into a celebration of the work done on these grounds at 7 p.m. Do not be dismayed—we are still working. This spring, we will pivot to Pop-Up Sunday Shops in the community, and this summer we will announce our new spot.

Stay tuned!



ABIPA promotes economic, social, and healthy parity achievement for African Americans and other underserved populations in Buncombe County through advocacy, education, research, and community partnerships.



Celebrating 21 Years of Being the Community Health Connection for Asheville and Beyond

Help Us Celebrate Our Birthday by Gifting ABIPA a Donation of \$21

Tax-deductible donations can be made by sending a check to ABIPA, PO Box 448, Asheville, NC 28802, or donate online at www.abipa.org. Thank you for your support!



JaiEssence McEachin, MPH. Photo: Red Angle Photography

Take Your Personal Experiences to Heart

By *JaiEssence McEachin, MPH*
ABIPA Health Education Program Manager

Your story, and your health, can spark changes that save lives.

February is American Heart Month, a nationwide observance that spotlights cardiovascular disease and the urgent need for more lifesavers. The first presidential proclamation was issued on December 30, 1963, designating February 1964 as the inaugural American Heart Month. President Lyndon B. Johnson framed it as a call for Americans to take charge of their heart health, a mission that still guides the observance today.

But there's a deeper story behind that proclamation: personal experience. Johnson had suffered a severe heart attack in 1955 at just 46 years old. At the time, heart and blood vessel diseases accounted for more than half of all deaths in the United States. His proclamation was a national call to action urging citizens to support research and take steps to prevent cardiovascular disease.

While death rates from heart disease have declined over the past 60 years, the overall number of deaths remains the highest in the nation, even surpassing cancer and accidental deaths combined. Cardiovascular disease (CVD),



which includes all heart and blood vessel conditions, is still the leading cause of death in the US, responsible

for approximately 1 in 3 deaths (about 916,000 to 919,000 annually as of 2023). Together, heart disease (22% of US deaths), and stroke (5.3% of US deaths), comprise more than 25% of all deaths.

This may sound discouraging until you return to the context of President Johnson's experience. He had a heart attack at 46. Nine years later, he was in a position of national leadership that helped drive research, awareness, and advocacy, efforts that contributed to reducing heart-disease-related deaths from more than 50% of all US deaths to about 25% today.

There are two points I want you to take away today. First, never discount your personal experience or your voice, both can spark change. Second, listen to your body and intentionally take care of your heart. It can save your life.

Upcoming Events at ABIPA Life's Center

A Night of Love

Saturday, February 14

Dinner & Dancing from 7 p.m. until. \$25 General Seating; \$40 Couples; \$100 Reserved Couple's Seating (Includes champagne, chocolate covered strawberries, and flowers). To RSVP or for more information, text (828) 778-7122.



Heart Health Red Dress Tea



Saturday, February 21

Presented by the Asheville, NC Links at 3 p.m.

Sunday Shop & ABIPA Celebration

Sunday, February 22

Free food and supplies from 3-6 p.m. The celebration begins at 7 p.m.

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