



FALL NEWSLETTER

## Dominican Center Welcomes New Executive Director.

Former Safe & Sound leader working with Amani residents, Amani United leaders, partners and staff to write next chapter of DC's history.



DC Executive Director Maricha Harris, center, shows Gov. Tony Evers, left, and Rep. Kalan Haywood the Dominican Center's hydroponics lab during a visit where the governor held a press conference at DC.

## 'Moving the Important Work Forward'

Milwaukee native Maricha M. Harris wasted no time getting started in her new role as Dominican Center executive director. In her first few weeks on the job she hosted Gov. Tony Evers, met with the Amani leaders and neighborhood partners, secured meaningful funding and got to know the Board of Directors and staff through

one-on-one meetings.

"I'm humbled, honored and grateful for this opportunity," said Harris. "I'm excited to work alongside DC staff, Amani United, community partners and other stakeholders to continue moving the important work that's happening forward."

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# 'Moving the Important Work Forward'

Harris comes to DC from Safe & Sound, where she managed the day-to-day operations of the \$2.5 million nonprofit. The position afforded her with fiscal, human resource and operational responsibilities. Additionally, Harris brings 12 years of experience to the role and has served at Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin, Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, Trini-Dad's Child Development Center and as a Licensed Realtor with Coldwell Banker Realty.

"Throughout my progressive career, I have leveraged my communications, relationship building and leadership skills to achieve results," said Harris.

Harris takes the leadership torch from Interim Executive Director Denisha Tate-McAlister, who has served as DC's leader since the retirement of Sr. Patricia Rogers, OP in June. "Amani means peace. It is with peace of mind that I welcome the new Executive Director of DC, Maricha Harris, to her role. I pass the torch with

pride and promise," said Tate-McAlister.

And the Amani Community has a lot of love to give. Barbara Smith, DC Board member, Amani United leader, and long-time Amani resident, welcomes Harris to the neighborhood and wishes her well. "Congratulations and welcome to the Amani and DC family," Smith said.

"Sometimes walking into the unknown can seem a bit scary or intimidating, but please be assured that because you have joined a strong family, we are all here together to build greatness."

Harris sees this opportunity to serve the community where she grew, studied and worked to progress change. "This is a full circle moment for me. Growing up, I lived in neighborhoods that faced significant challenges. And while I remember those challenges, I also remember resilience, strength and the beauty that lives within our neighborhoods," she said. "There are so many assets in our community - right here in Amani and 53206."

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Love. Passion. Commitment. Service. And hope. These are some of the words I think of when I reflect on the residents, Dominican Center staff and board members, partners and others who are part of the Amani community.

Each day there are many acts of love and kindness happening in Amani. We are excited to share the stories in this newsletter because they highlight what is possible when passionate people make a commitment to serve others.

We hope you are inspired by the work that's happening and the future that's ahead of us. There's great momentum in Amani, and it's an honor to be on this journey with all of you.

*Yours in Service, Maricha*

# Gov. Evers Visits Dominican Center



TOP: Gov. Tony Evers (center) poses with Dominican Center staff and Amani United leaders. BELOW: A discussion was held with Gov. Evers, Rep. Kalan Haywood, Dominican Center staff and Amani United resident leaders. BELOW RIGHT: Executive Director Maricha Harris gives Gov. Evers a tour of DC.



Earlier in October at Dominican Center, Gov. Tony Evers announced \$75 million in grants for small businesses in Wisconsin that focus on diverse businesses. The governor, along with Amani's Rep. Kalan Haywood, chose DC as a site for the press conference because of its location in the heart of the Amani neighborhood.

After the press conference, Gov. Evers enjoyed a tour of the Dominican Center with Executive Director Maricha Harris and participated in a conversation with DC staff and Amani United resident leaders about the priorities they have set for their neighborhood. Want to read more about our visit? Read [TMJ-4's coverage online](#).



# Amani Seniors Touched by DC



TOP: Dominican Center employee Wes Landry visits with Amani resident Michael Spinner after a Wednesday food delivery. BELOW: Landry calls a resident as he unpacks their food delivery. BELOW RIGHT: Ms. Johnnie Lockett sits in her living room as her weekly food delivery is put away in her kitchen.



*'I am so thankful for the Dominican Center'*

Wes Laundry, "Mr. Wes" as he's called throughout the community, has lived in Milwaukee since 1960 and he's served the residents of the Amani neighborhood at the Dominican Center since 2001. Since 2020 though, he's taken on a new important role: serving the most vulnerable in Amani's senior population.

"I would do this even if I didn't work at Dominican Center," Mr. Wes said. "If there's no one in the community doing these things, if no one takes the time to help, it won't get better. Some of these people don't have anyone to help them, and I am able to support my community, which I love. I wouldn't live in any other neighborhood besides [Amani]."

Mr. Wes has been delivering food boxes to seniors throughout Amani every Wednesday since the start of the pandemic. The food boxes are prepared by WestCare and include pantry staples, produce, milk and meat.

"I like the food, it is excellent. My sister cooks a lot of it," said Michael Spinner, an Amani resident on Mr. Wes' route that lives with his sister Veronica. "It is a daily activity when Mr. Wes comes by, I look forward to it every Wednesday. I try to not schedule any appointments because I like to visit with him, he's very helpful and I am very thankful for the Dominican Center."

Mr. Wes delivers to each senior on his route and carries each box to every kitchen. He explains what he has for each resident and he asks if there's anything they would like next time – and he finds a way to supply it. This week, when visiting long-time resident Mrs. McHenry, he learned that she had been hopeful that he "I am very grateful for Mr. Wes

and the Center," said Mrs. McHenry. "I can't wait to see him on Wednesdays, it is such good service and I enjoy it to the utmost." Mrs. McHenry, an Amani resident for more than 30 years, has been involved with Dominican Center for many years and she always wants to know what's going on in the community. Even from the comfort of her home, she wants to make sure those serving her are well too. "If [Mr. Wes] doesn't show up in time, I call him to check on him and make sure he's OK."

Residents in Amani always talk about their community as a family, and those that Dominican Center serves are no different. "I have only known Mr. Wes for about a year since he started delivering food to me, but he is a very friendly man and my sisters and I love him. We told him he could be a part of our family," said Ms. Johnnie Lockett.

Ms. Lockett said she had a stroke and cannot use her right hand properly. So she is very appreciate of the Dominican Center for helping her. "It is healthy food and I have more help to cook the food, which I am so thankful for the service," she said.

Ms. Lockett's neighbor, Ms. Thompson is also grateful for the service. "The food is good and I like to eat," she said. "Before Mr. Wes started coming, my cupboards and my refrigerator were getting low. But now I have enough to last me quite a while." She told Mr. Wes that this would be her last delivery because she had so much in her kitchen that he had brought her.

"OK, well when you need more, you know

# Education Changes Everything.

DC Adult Education student earns HSED during pandemic, now she's on her way to helping others as a Registered Nurse

Jasmin Roberson, 29, completed Dominican Center's Education Program and earned her HSED at the YWCA after DC partner Milwaukee Area Technical College referred her to that program. She then took a series of classes for certifications, including her CNA. She starts classes at MATC in January to become a Registered Nurse. "I see all of my certificates on the wall and I am so proud of myself," Roberson said. "I got a nice job, and I can't wait to start my associates degree."

Not only has Jasmine dedicated herself to a better future for her and her family, she has inspired others to do so as well. She referred her brother and his wife to the program and they're going to go back to school. She also has inspired her youngest son. "My son says he wants to be a doctor, so I'm going to have to become a doctor so I can teach him everything I know."

Though she beams with academic confidence now, that wasn't always the case. "I had my first son at 16 years old. I was out of school since 7th grade, and

my oldest son is in 7th grade now! I was so scared to go back to school, but life is what you make it and you need to step out of your comfort zone," she said.

"[Going back to school] is the best thing you can do, you can't go wrong," Jasmin said. "You need an education with how this world is today and we need to better ourselves, everyone individually needs to better themselves. Just call Dominican Center, they helped me. Go get that education!"

Jasmin, who has been a mom first for most of her life, said that it took a tragedy in her life to realize that she had to make it better. She recently lost her six-year-old son, and that changed her whole world.

"When I lost my son, I felt like I was losing myself. After that I tried to find happiness, I got married, but I didn't get the correct help I needed. Now that my mind is clear, I realize it took me almost losing myself to find myself. God put certain people in your life for a reason. It takes a village, and that is everyone in

the Education Program. I got good support from my family and all the teachers are awesome, even when tough love is needed. All I had to do is reach out," Jasmin said. "When I caught that number, the light was starting to shine down and I was walking the path."

After her realization and finding her educational path, Jasmine knew she wanted to help people. "I wanted to help people dealing with drugs, abuse, things like that. Just tell them it's going to be OK. And now I know I am going to help people as a nurse, you can't beat that!" She said.

Jasmin said that choosing to change your life is not easy, but that is when you need to reach out to your support system. "I needed extra tutoring and there were days I cried and wanted to give up," she said. She said sometimes everything she was going through including the death of her son, the COVID pandemic, and life changes of getting married and moving to Milwaukee from Minnesota, on top of her studies were a lot to handle. "I did have to do one class over because of everything I was dealing with at that time, she said. "But the help is there and all you have to do is reach for it."

"You just have to go back to school, you'll learn so much. All of the teachers, Ms. Barbara, they're willing to help, they're not going to let you fail," said Jasmin. "If you haven't been in school, Dominican Center is the best place to be. Don't be scared because you won't know how it is until you go. Once you meet Ms. Barbara, it is nothing but

support. They want the best for you."

*Anyone can enroll in the program at any time. For more information on the Dominican Center's Adult Education program, contact Education Coordinator Barbara Wells at [barbara@dominican-center.org](mailto:barbara@dominican-center.org) or call 414-444-9930.*

*Donate*

*Please consider supporting an Adult Education Student with an Education Kit - everything a student needs, including all required tests, for two semesters at Dominican Center.*



## DC Hosts Annual Amani Partners Meeting

DC invited more than 30 neighborhood partners to the Wisconsin Black Historical Society to network and participate in roundtable conversations about the neighborhood's priority areas: Safety, Housing & Economic Development and Education & Family Well-Being.

Partners were energized to learn how their work relates to other partners' work in Amani and eager to make plans to work together in the coming year. All Amani Partners sign a Neighborhood Agreement each year highlighting their commitment to the Amani residents.



## DC Receives Grant from Greater MKE Foundation

Dominican Center was gifted with a generous \$32,500 grant that will allow DC to continue providing housing resources and access for residents to housing programs and neighborhood partners who offer beneficial services that support the Amani Revitalization Plan.

To read more, visit Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service [here](#) and to read more about the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, visit their [website](#).



## Earn & Learn Program Supports Youth Success

Earn & Learn is a summer employment program started by Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett in response to barriers young people face when looking for employment and good wages. This year, Dominican Center hosted six youth who worked as community organizers. "It doesn't even feel like work, just having fun," said Stevie. "We had fun while cleaning up the community and making it better."

To read more, [click here](#).



## DC Receives Grant from Greater MKE Foundation

Denisha Tate-McAlister served as interim executive director at DC, and because of her passion and dedication to the Amani neighborhood, the DC staff and Board of Directors was ready to serve residents seamlessly during the leadership transition.

"Working with DC and the Amani Neighborhood has been exciting, inspiring, challenging and rewarding. We have many accomplishments to be proud of and several opportunities we have yet to realize. But the work of the residents, partners and supporters has been life changing!" said Tate-McAlister.

She is a friend to the neighborhood and still involved in building a better future in Amani. DC thanks her for all she accomplished.

