



Black creatives in South Jersey are striving despite COVID-19 hurdles

by Ahnyah Pinckney

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the loss of approximately 2.7 million jobs and more than \$150 billion in sales nationwide in 2020, according to the Brookings Institution. That’s roughly one-third of jobs and nine percent of annual sales across the creative economy, which includes: fashion, film, art, music, and advertising industries.

New Jersey is home to 19,000 arts-related businesses, which employ some 80,233 people statewide, according to the advocacy group Americans for the Arts. Here in South Jersey, creatives are coping with the impacts of COVID and systemic inequality yet thriving despite limited resources.

We spent time with three of them.

Fashion line and coworking space inspire creation of ‘Black country club.’

“You have to go through adversity to figure out if this is what you want to do and to get to the next level of what you’re trying to do,” said Charles Jay, a native of Sicklerville and full-time entrepreneur since 2020. He shared that one particular struggle, his cancer survival story, is the inspiration for his fashion brand URBANE.

Jay launched the athletic luxury clothing line in 2015 after graduating from Rutgers with a bachelor's degree in Marketing. URBANE designs often feature the number 93, which is significant because Jay was diagnosed with cancer in 1993 at the age of two and had to have his right kidney removed.

“Every morning, I’d wake up and play with building blocks. So that’s where the whole concept comes from,” said Jay of URBANE’s color blocks logo. The line has come a long way, with URBANE designs appearing on television shows, including VH1’s Love and Hip Hop and HBO’s Euphoria, said Jay.

In addition to managing URBANE, he opened the first Avenue Black location in the Gloucester Premium Outlets in November 2020. This space hosted events and housed photography, a makeup studio, and a retail room available for rent. Jay refers to Avenue Black as a “retail creative coworking space” designed to encourage more collaboration among creatives of color.

Following a change in mall management in March 2021, Jay decided to leave and enter a one-year lease with the Deptford Mall. Then in February, Jay purchased an old store in the Turnersville Square shopping



An URBANE clothing line display at Avenue Black located in Gloucester County’s Deptford Mall. The athletic luxury designs are the creations of South Jersey-based entrepreneur, Charles Jay.

plaza that he’s rehabbing with the goal of expanding Avenue Black into a Black country club.

“We will have wine tastings, cigar rolling, galas, art shows, fashion shows, consultations,” said Charles Jay, who aims to open the new location in January 2023.

Self-taught makeup artist doesn’t take anything for granted

Jurnee Gabri-El is a self-taught freelance makeup artist and social media influencer based in Palmyra.

“I almost don’t have a typical day,” says Gabri-El. Some days are booked with events, traveling to meet clients, or creating content for her social media platforms. Weekends are the busiest: a schedule of 2 to 4 client appointments a day, with early morning and late night video editing sessions to prepare her content, including makeup tutorials.

“I have a healthy following. I don’t have a huge one. But respectfully and humbly, I influence the girls,” said Gabri-El, whose TikTok account has earned more than 600,000 likes and some 15,000 followers.

One of her recent Tik Tok videos titled, “We not wearing concealer no more” began to trend this summer. The traction was exciting for Gabri-El, but then soon afterward, another makeup artist, Christen Dominique, posted a similar video without crediting any sources. TikTok users quickly caught on to the similarities and called Christen out for stealing Gabri-El’s idea. Christen denied the accusation. But these are the kinds of hurdles that Gabri-El expects.

Gabri-El says that because she is self-taught, she doesn’t take anything for granted but tries to work hard and innovate. She says that while there are now more options for Black women in the makeup industry—for instance, in terms of color palettes that are more inclusive of women with darker skin tones—challenges remain.

“There’s a lot of colorism in the industry, and it’s one of the things I try my hardest to speak against and bring awareness to,” said Gabri-El. After six years of perfecting her craft, Gabri-El is still trying to better herself and encourages aspiring makeup artists to do the same.

“Do your homework, save your money, plan your money, take classes with the people whose style you

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Choose or Lose

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In Washington, Fetterman says he would fight for universal early childhood education and make sure public schools have the funding they need, so teachers aren't shouldering so much of a burden. He says he will work to increase investments in career and technical programs to prepare young adults for successful and in-demand careers in critical industries. And for students who do opt to attend college, to ensure the cost isn't a barrier, he'll support efforts to make community colleges tuition-free and reduce the burden of student loan debt that too many borrowers are experiencing.

Mehmet Oz was born on June 11, 1960. He's known professionally as "Dr. Oz." He's a television personality, author, politician, professor emeritus, and retired cardiothoracic surgeon. Dr. Oz is the first Muslim candidate to be nominated by either major party for U.S. Senate.

The son of Turkish immigrants, Oz was raised in Wilmington, Delaware, and graduated from Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania. A dual citizen of the U.S. and Turkey, Oz served in the Turkish Army during the 1980s for six weeks of mandatory training (specifically for citizens who reside in foreign countries) to maintain his Turkish citizenship. He subsequently began his residency in surgery at Columbia University Irving Medical Center in 1986. In 2001, he became a professor of surgery at Columbia University and later retired to professor emeritus in 2018. In 2003, Oprah Winfrey was the first guest on the Discovery Channel series Second Opinion with Dr. Oz. He was a regular guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show, making more than sixty appearances. In 2009, The Dr. Oz Show, a daily television program about medical matters and health, was launched by Winfrey's Harpo Productions and Sony Pictures Television, running for 13 seasons. Oz's promotion of pseudoscience, including on the topics of alternative medicine, faith healing, and various paranormal beliefs, has earned him criticism from many medical publications and physicians.

In 2018, Oz was appointed to the President's Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition by President Donald Trump and was removed from the position by President Joe Biden. In 2021, Oz declared that he would run in Pennsylvania's 2022 U.S. Senate election as a Republican to succeed retiring incumbent Senator Pat Toomey.

Describing himself as a conservative Republican, Oz opposes abortion, the Affordable Care Act, and the legalization of recreational cannabis while supporting school choice, hydraulic fracturing, closer relations with Israel, the right to bear arms, and protection of same-sex marriage.

The general election is less than two weeks away. Don't let all these crazy tv and radio political campaign commercials divert you from doing what you need to do on election day. Go vote. Election day is November 8th. In Pennsylvania, the polls open at 7 am and remain open until 8 pm. It's your time to choose or lose. Let your voices be heard and your votes counted.



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Social Security

Disagree With Your Disability Decision?



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Social Security is here to help millions of people secure their today and tomorrow by providing benefits and financial protection. We continue

to protect the integrity of our disability programs by ensuring we make the correct decision on each claim.

However, if you disagree with the decision on your claim, you can ask for your case to be reviewed by filing an appeal.

How can I appeal Social Security's decision on my claim?

Generally, there are four appeal levels. If you are not satisfied with the decision at one level, you may appeal to the next.

The appeal levels are:

Reconsideration: A reconsideration is a complete review of your claim by someone who did not take part in the first decision. We look at all the evidence submitted in the original determination and any new evidence.

Hearing: If you disagree with the decision at the reconsideration level, you may ask for a hearing. An administrative law judge, who had no part in the original decision or the Reconsideration of your case, conducts the hearing.

Appeals Council Review: If you disagree with the

hearing decision, you can request a review by Social Security's Appeals Council. The Appeals Council looks at all requests for review. They will decide whether or not there is a reason to return your case to the judge for further review.

Federal Court Review: If you disagree with the Appeals Council's decision, you can file a lawsuit in a federal district court as the last level in the appeals process.

Please visit our Appeal A Decision webpage for more information at www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/appeal.html.

When should I file my appeal?

If we denied your claim, you have 60 days from the date of the notice to file an appeal. The easiest and quickest way is to file your appeal request online at www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/appeal.html. This is where you can submit associated documents electronically. You can also call your local Social Security office or 1-800-772-1213 to obtain the forms. You can find your local office at www.ssa.gov/locator.

Do I need a representative to file an appeal?

A representative or attorney is not required to file an appeal. Whether you choose to appoint an attorney or authorized representative is completely up to you. You may choose to have someone help you with your appeal or represent you. Your representative may be a lawyer or other qualified person familiar with you and the Social Security program. We will work with your representative just as we would work with you. They can act for you in most Social Security matters, and they will receive a copy of any decisions we make about your claim.

If you need us to review your case, please go online at www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/appeal.html or call 1-800-772-1213. Please share this information with your family and friends.

Creatives

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want to emulate...know that you're going to have to work twice as hard for half as much," said Gabri-El. "But more importantly, build your community and start with the people who are to your left and right."

Recent Rowan grad aims to release a South Jersey-based short film later this year.

Not too far from Palmyra is Christianna Arango, a self-described multimedia guru. She decided to pursue a career in filmmaking after graduating from Rowan University in 2021.

Arango is based in Sicklerville and works as the digital communication and social media manager at The Perfecting Church in Sewell. She creates all of the social media content and oversees all the church live streams and recordings.

Arango is working on her first independent project: a short film set in South Jersey that follows a group of college students who become friends after facing adversity. She's received support from the Perfecting Church, which is helping her with plans to premiere the film in select local theaters later this year.

"I feel like I have the ability and have been blessed with the gifts to influence people away from what's going on in the world and show them what it could be like," said Arango.



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