South End News

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LOCAL NEWS for and about Boston's best neighborhood

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BOSTON BOSTON FOR THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE

FESTIVAL & PARADE JUNE 14, 2025 STARTS AT 11:00 AM

Boston Pride For The People is excited to announce Pride Month celebration in Boston on June 14, 2025. The celebration will include a parade, a festival, and more!

Boston Pride For The People is a volunteer-led organization that plans activities and events that celebrate therich diversity, culture, and intersectionality of the LGBTQ+ community.





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SpeakEasy's "Jaja's African Hair Braiding" Braids Together Comedy and Heart in Harlem Salon Story

BY JULES BECKER ContributingWriter

If you think a hair braiding salon is like any other, think again. As New York City born and bred playwright Jocelyn Bioh-who has been getting her hair braided since the age of four - could tell you, hair braiding is uniquely demanding and varied. Expert braiders often stand for hours as they cut, braid, dve, twist and wig the hair of customers whose needs are often as varied as their personalities. All of these fascinating factors come into play in Bioh's acclaimed 2019 play "Jaja's African Hair Braiding" (2024 Tony Award nomination). SpeakEasy Stage Company-already familiar with Bioh's work (having presented an exuberant 2019 production of her earlier "School Girls: Or, The African Mean Girls

Play"), is bringing high style to its Continued on page 4 Jaja's African Hair Braiding, SpeakEasy Stage Company, Roberts Studio, Calderwood Pavilion, Boston, through May 31st. 617-933-8600 or SpeakEasyStage.com



MaConnia Chesser (center) and the cast of Jaja's African Hair Braiding. Photo by Nile Scott Studios.

Immigrant life in "Jaja's African Hair Braiding"



From left: Ashley Aldarondo, Dru Sky Berrian, and MarHadoo Effeh. Photo by Nile Scott Studios.

BY REV. IRENE MONROE Contributing Writer

"Jaja's African Hair Braiding" is atragicomedy. Once again, Jocelyn Bioh brings another thorny issue to the stage. In "School Girl; Or, The African Mean Girls Play," Bioh tackled colorism and Eurocentric concepts of feminine beauty. In "Jaja's African Hair Braiding," Bioh sheds light on immigration.

Jaja is the proprietor of Jaja's African Hair Braiding in Harlem. Her hair braiders are catty, gossipy, fussy, and shape-tongued women dealing with their ebbs and flows of everyday life. However, their sisterhood and compassion for each other reveal themselves in a crisis that befalls Jaja and, by

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

LATIN FUSION DANCE CLASS WITH LENA JUNE 4 & 11, WEDNESDAYS



Photo via Pexels

6:30-7:30 p.m. O'Day Playground

75 West Newton St., South End Free fitness class offered through partnership between Boston Parks and Recreation Department and Boston Public Health Commission. Classes led by certified instructors. Sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

FREE BIKE REPAIR WORKSHOP JUNE 11, WEDNESDAY



Photo via Unsplash.

3:30-5:30 p.m. BCYF Blackstone 50 West Brookline St., Boston Hands-on workshop for flat tire repairs, brake adjustments, and gear tuning. All services free.

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Mayor Michelle Wu today announced the winners of the 2025 Legacy Business Awards. This year's cohort of 30 businesses represent 18 of Boston's neighborhoods, and, as a collective, have been in business for over 1,200 years. The awards eermony, hosted in partnership with The Dorchester Reporter, on Tuesday, June 3 at 5:30 p.m. Awardees will also have access to grant support and wrap-around technical assistance.

"Congratulations to Boston's 30 new legacy business awardees. Our legacy businesses are a driving force of support, resources, and connection across our neighborhoods," said Mayor Michelle Wu. "I am excited to recognize and celebrate the City's third wave of Legacy Business awardees who make our communities strong, lively, and welcoming for all."

This is the third year of the Legacy Business Program, the most expansive in the nation. Awarded businesses are longstanding, independent enterprises that make a strong contribution to the residents, communities, and neighborhoods of Boston. By recognizing and supporting Legacy businesses on an annual basis, the program builds on Mayor Wu's work to make Boston a city for everyone.

"These businesses are the heart and soul of so many of Boston's neighborhoods, and these awards signal that importance," said City Councilor Brian Worrell (District 4). "Ali's Roti Restaurant is one of those spots that is vital to the area, and I'm thrilled we can use this award to provide much-needed support for the entrepreneurs who power our districts."

On Tuesday, June 3 at 5:30pm, the City of Boston Office of Small Business, in partnership with The Dorchester Reporter, will honor the businesses at an Awards Ceremony and Reception. Mayor Wu, elected officials, City of Boston staff, and members of the Boston community will be in attendance at this public event, taking place at the Calderwood Pavilion. Those interested can register for the event here.

"The Dorchester Reporter is pleased to serve as the media sponsor for the City of Boston's Legacy Business Awards program," said Hon. Linda Dorcena Forry, former state Senator and co-publisher of The Dorchester Reporter. "As a 2024 winner, The Reporter can attest to the exceptional resources that come with this award. Small businesses constitute the backbone and the heartbeat of our neighborhoods. We're delighted to help highlight our fellow Legacy Businesses that serve and employ our residents and work relentlessly to keep Boston safe, lively, and prosperous."

Thisyear, the Mayor's Office of SmallBusiness, located within the Economic Opportunity and Inclusion Cabinet, received over 1,450 nominations. Intotal, community members nominated 320 qualified businesses. To be eligible, businesses need to be located in Boston and be in operation at their current location for at least 10 years.

The selection process is robust, with residents submitting nominations that are then reviewed by the City Council and finalists selected by a committee that includes representatives from City departments and Boston Main Streets. Selections were based on application scoring and community support.

"Iam proud to continue this hallmark initiative of Mayor Wu that invites residents across the city to honor the commitment, investment, and impact that small business owners have made in our communities for decades," said Segun Idowu, Chief of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion. "Because of the work of our Office of Small Business, this initiative continues to ensure the stability of these community bedrocks for generations to come."

- The list of awardees is as follows:
- Yoma, Allston
- Jacques' Cabaret, Bay Village
- Gary Drug Co., Beacon HillMelvin Pharmacy, Brighton
- Warren Tavern, Charlestown
- May's Cake House, Chinatown
- Peach Farm Restaurant, Chinatown
- Ba Le, Dorchester
- Greenhills Irish Bakery, Dorchester
- The Ice Creamsmith, Dorchester
- Black Seed Cafe & Grill, Downtown
- Angela's Cafe, East Boston
- Italian Express, East Boston
- La Hacienda Restaurant, East Boston
- Rino's Place, East Boston
- Dance Academy, Hyde Park
- Gondres Bakery, Jamaica Plain
- Ali's Roti Shop, Mattapan
- Boulevard Cleaners, Mattapan
- Penguin Pizza, Mission Hill
 Regina Pizzeria, North End
- Rialto Barber Shop, Roslindale
- Bay State Banner, Roxbury
- Cruz Companies, Roxbury
- Davis Funeral Home, Roxbury
- Merengue Restaurant, Roxbury
 American Provisions, South Boston
- American Provisions, South
 Drvdock Cafe, South Boston
- II Foley's Cafe, South End
- The Corrib Pub, West Roxbury

"These 30 businesses represent the cultural, and vibrant diversity that is Boston. This is the third year we have had the opportunity to honor 30 businesses that have played major roles in the lives of our communities," said Aliesha Porcena, Director of Small Business for the Office of Opportunity and Inclusion at the City of Boston. "Through a community driven process, we as a city have identified what makes our neighborhoods and streets special."

"Since 1921, Rialto Barber Shop has seen over a century's worth of customers from Roslindale and the surrounding areas," said Vicky Elias, owner of Rialto Barber Shop. "Bob Aliano himself has personally cut the hair of nearly seven generations of families since he began working at Rialto in 1959. Since Istarted workingat Rialto in the early 1990s, I've realized that this is a true legacy business—a place where customers become part of a huge extended family that turns a business into a home."

"It is an honor to receive the Legacy Business Award," said Cathy Spiropoulas, owner of Drydock Cafe. "To be able to remain a staple restaurant in Boston for 46 years is a privilege. Thank you to the City for the recognition and the future support."

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SOUTH END HONOR ROLL

Southern New Hampshire University

Harley Dasher has been named to the Spring 2025 President's List. Full-time undergraduate students who earn a minimum 3.7 GPA are named to the President's List.

Emerson College

Yueming Quparticipated in Emerson Stage's production of "I Love XXX" from Feb. 5-8 at the Jackie Liebergott Black Box Theatre.

The following students were named to the Dean's List for the Fall 2024 semester with a 3.7 GPA or higher: Amelia Vidgren, majoring in Creative Writing BFA and a member of the Class of 2026; and Justyn Homan, majoring in Theatre and Performance and a member of the Class of 2028.

College of the Holy Cross

Tiffany Cespedes Tavarez, a member of the Class of 2026, was named to the Fall 2024 Dean's List for outstanding academic achievement. Students must earn a 3.5 GPA or higher to qualify.

Emmanuel College

The following students were named to the Fall 2024 Dean's List, requiring a 3.5 GPA or higher for a 16-credit semester: Daeny Henriquez, a double major in Criminology & Criminal Justice and Sociology; and Inalyz Baez, a Management major.

Tufts University

The following students were named to

SpeakEasy

Continued from page 1

New England premiere of this informative and timely play.

Set in the title hair braiding shop in Harlem off of 125th Street, Bioh's initially disarming play opens on a hot 2019 summer day with Jaja's very capable 18-year-old daughter Marie managing the salon in the absence of her mother. Stretching stage-wide in Janie E. Howland's vivid and well detailed set, the salon includes hair braiders with diverse ethnic backgrounds hailing from West Africa. Jaja herself is a Senegalese immigrant about to marry her white boyfriend in order to obtain a green card and provide Marie-a Dreamer who arrived in America at the age of four-with an opportunity for a better life. A high school valedictorian and a would-be writer. Marie experiences a kind of unusual coming of age as she tries to balance her responsibilities at the salon and her own aspirations.

During the busy but never boring day of Bioh's play, audiences will be both entertained and sometimes very moved by the conflicts and interactions between braiders and their customers. Among the braiders are two veteran stylists-a gossipy and very outspoken Ghanaian braider named Bea and her emo-

Photo via Pexels

the Fall 2024 Dean's List, requiring a 3.4 GPA or greater: Emily Chervinsky, Class of 2025; Federica Italiani, Class of 2026; Alex Moy, Classof 2026; and Angelina Moy, Classof 2028.

American International College

Santiago Carmona, majoring in Economics and Finance, earned Dean's List honors for the Fall 2024 semester. Dean's List honors are awarded to full-time students with a 3.3 to 4.0 GPA.

Regis College

Julia Mei was named to the Fall 2024 Dean's

tionally torn Senegalese friend Aminata-who

is finding it difficult to deal with an unreliable

husband. Equally frustrated Miriam-a quiet

braider from Sierra Leone-hopes to bring her

young son to America.

In some ways the most

striking stylist is fast-

working and a very in

demand young Nigerian

named Ndidi. Adding to

the comic moments as

fussy customers annoy

some of the braiders-with

one fussy client bringing

her own comb and oil-are

sequences involving sock

and jewelry vendors. As

Jaja arrives in the future,

a foreshadowed problem

takes center stage im-

pacting the immigrant

Under the sharp di-

rection of Summer L.

Williams, a first-rate cast

achieves the striking

women at the salon.

List. Students must earn a 3.5 GPA or higher, with first-year students requiring a 3.25 GPA or higher.

Amanda Naoum, a member of the Class of 2028, has been named to the Fall 2024 Dean's List. Students must have a semester GPA of 3.5 or higher and successfully complete all registered courses.

During the busy

but never boring

day of Bioh's play,

audiences will be

both entertained

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and interactions

between braiders

and their

customers.

Dean's List.

Ndidi's seeming usurping of her position as a star stylist. Kwezi Shongwe captures Aminata's uncommon sensitivity-especially as she

> ments of dissatisfaction. vendors. On Broadway, "Jaja's

African Hair Braiding" was given a special Tony

design. SpeakEasy Stage Company's high caliber styling not only does honor to the rich history of black hair but also brings crucial attention to the rightful place of immigrant accomplishment in America.

Stonehill College

Curry College

I-Laikwa Hooks was named to the Fall 2024

scene-stealing persuasiveness in resenting

Catia has all of Ndidi's fireand confidence, Mar-Hadoo Effeh finds all of Miriam's complicated thinking. MaConnia Chesser makes the most of Jaja's eye-catching entrance-kudos to costume designer Danielle Domingue Sumi. Joshua Olumide catches all the elusiveness of James-Aminata's husband-and moves easily and convincingly between the

supports Bea in her mo-

Award for hair and wig



Publishers Emeritus:

Jeff Coakley Sue O'Connell Editor-in-Chief:

Sue O'Connell sue.southendnews@qmail.com

Editorial Design Manager: **Julie Walker Palmer**

Contributing Writers: Jules Becker

Letters to the editor: letters@southendnews.com

Calendar listings: sencalendar@southendnews.com

Display Advertising: sales@baywindows.com

Classified Advertising: sales@southendnews.com

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balance of humorous moments and seri-

ous implications with riveting results. Dru

Sky Berrian is commandingly poignant as

Marie moves from early uncertainty to great

eventual inner strength. Crystin Gilmore has

Immigrant life

Continued from page 1

extension, them all.

Halfway through the play, Jaja finally appears. Regally attired and happy because it's her wedding day, Jaja comes to the shop to happily share with the women, "The next time you see me, ladies, I'll be Mrs. Jaja Jacobson."

Jaja is marrying Jacobson to secure a green card, give her high school valedictorian daughter the status of a Dreamer, and give her a shot at the American Dream. As a successful small business owner, Jaja is revered and respected among her braiders, a group of African women of mixed immigration status whodon't fully comet othe foreuntil ICE picks her up, a pivotal moment in the play.

"We can't tell them she's my mother, and they might let her go free. They might detain me too. And then what? I go back to Senegal? I haven't been there since I was four years old! I don't knowanyone there. This sithe only place I know," Marie, distraught, tells the women.

The play is resonant and timely in this era of Trump 2.0. While you'll find yourself belly-laughing throughout it, it also sends a gut-punching message about immigrants in this country.

In 2018, Trump made the now-infamous comment that he'd like fewer immigrants coming from what he depicted as "shithole countries," likeHaiti, El Salvador and African countries.

However, to the contrary,Africanimmigrants are the most educated demographic group coming to the United States from countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Africa. They are better educated than

American-born citizens. Those who come here for school or are born here excel academically.

On May 13, as part of an executive order, Trump granted refugee status to White South Africans, the Dutch-descended Afrikaners who instituted apartheid, for racial discrimination they claim they now face post- apartheid. This grant comes after Trump's January suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, barring most refugees from entering the country and ignoring thousands of others who have been on a waitlist for years.

"This country is fine with TAKING. Dirty Africans! Get out of our country! Fine, I will go. But when do you want me to leave? Before or after I raise your children? Or clean your house? Or cookyourfood? Or braidyour wear? Can you give me the Bo Derek hair, please?" Jaja says to the woman

While immigration is the big issue that gets exposed in the play, the century-long thorny issue of black hair, surprisingly, is normalized. At least in Jaja's shop, decades before Massachusetts passed the CROWN Act prohibiting discrimination based on Black hair texture and hairstyles in 2022.

The Cook twins inspired Massachusetts' CROWN Act. In 2017, Mystic Valley Regional Charter School in Malden banned twins Deanna and Mya Cook from playing afterschool sports and attending their prom because they wore hair extensions to school, violating school policy. Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey stepped in on the twins' behalf.

Black hairstyles are not criticized when they are appropriated by white culture. In 1979, actress Bo Derek donned cornrows inher breakthrough film 10. In 1980, People Magazine credited Derek with making the style a "cross-cultural craze." In 2018, when Kim Kardashianposted avideo of herself flaunting

braids to Snapchat, she credited them as wearing "Bo Derek braids."

The culture within Jaja's African Hair Braiding will resonate with many Black women. Jalynn Charity, a first-year student at Wellesley College, wears mini braids. "The play feltsimilar and comfortable because I've been in a place like that for long hours while getting my hair done."

Like the customers in Jaja'ssalon, Jalynn shared that she sits in a chair,

falls asleep, reads a book, and brings snacks, but never thinks about the hair branders' interior lives. Charity continued, "I have a transactional relationship with my hair braiders." I say, "How are you?" but Idon't ask about their day. I don't know who their kids are because I don't think about their lives."

In one scene, we see how, after braiding hair for long hours on their feet, the women's legs are often swollen, and their hands blistered. "It makes me want to go to my salon the next time I get my hair braided, ask the braider how they are doing, and have a conversation. I never do that, and it's one of the insights I take away from the play," Charity stated.

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