

FALL 2021 ISSUE



SCSD OFFICER LOOKS TO CONTINUE **GRANDFATHER'S LEGACY OF SERVICE**



SHERIFF'S STATEMENT

Fall 2021

Greetings,

In this special double-sized Fall issue of the Common Ground Newsletter, we bring focus to the overwhelming combined crisis of addiction, mental illness and homelessness occurring on the streets around the House of Correction and across the Newmarket Square area near "Mass and Cass" with an Op Ed that I wrote; a look at the area through a tour I conducted with local elected officials; and a temporary courthouse that we established at the House of Correction in conjunction with the Massachusetts Trial Court for the purpose of hearing cases involving people in the area carrying warrants with the goal of moving them into treatment for addiction and/or mental illness, pending the discretion of the sitting judge.

We also feature a story about one of our officers who is looking to carry on the rich legacy set before him by his grandfather, as well as stories about some of the programming that we make available to people remanded to our care and custody – including our new pilot program with NECAT (New England Culinary Arts Training) – which are designed to help them to return to society better able to care for themselves and their families.

We also take a look at some of the important community events that I helped to support in recent weeks including the Hispanic Heritage Breakfast, the naming of Mel King Square, the Annual Veterans Day celebration at the Puerto Rican Monument in the South End, and my appearance on the Java With Jimmy video podcast to discuss "Mass and Cass," along with several other subjects.

I hope that you'll enjoy reading about these and other topics in this edition, and I look forward to bringing you more insight and information about the form and functions of the Department in the issues to come.

-Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins

COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTER

SANDY ZAMOR CALIXTE - CHIEF Peter van delft - Editor D av ID Hill - Photographer Vonel Lamour - Designer

SHERIFF STEVEN W. TOMPKINS

IFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

PHONE.617-704-6688 VISITUSONLINE WWW.SCSDMA.ORG

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NDEX

SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT INTRODUCES NEW PROGRAM WITH NECAT

The Suffolk County Sheriff Department recently celebrated the graduation for people enrolled in a new pilot program with New England Culinary Arts Training (NECAT).

SCSD ESTABLISHES TEMPORARY COURTHOUSE AT HOUSE OF CORRECTION

The Department, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Trial Courts, created a temporary courthouse within the House of Correction to hear cases involving people with warrants living on the streets of Mass and Cass with the intention of moving them into treatment for addiction and mental illness.

AN OP ED FROM SHERIFF TOMPKINS About Mass and Cass

Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins speaks about the humanitarian crisis occurring on the streets around the House of Correction and in Newmarket Square, in addition to some of the difficult, but achievable solutions

OFFICER ANTONELLI LOOKS TO CONTINUE LEGACY OF SERVICE

Officer Michael Antonelli seeks to carry the memory and legacy of his grandfather's service to the Department with him as a new officer at the Suffolk County Jail.

PARTNER OF THE MONTH: Casa Esperanza

Read about Casa Esperanza Re-entry Coordinator Orquidea Pena is this latest installment of the POTM series.

AROUND SUFFOLK COUNTY WITH SHERIFF TOMPKINS

In this special feature of "Around Suffolk County," we highlight just a few of the stops made by Sheriff Tompkins in his work across the county.

DEPARTMENT PARTNERS WITH NECAT FOR NEW CULINARY TRAINING PROGRAM



The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department has partnered with New England Culinary Arts Training (NECAT) for a new "inside-out" program at the House of Correction.

Through a grant from Commonwealth Corporation funded to NECAT, the first seeds of this collaboration began as a conversation over a year ago with Suffolk County Sheriff's Department Re-entry Coordinator Nick Lahage, Assistant Deputy Superintendent Karla Acevedo and the NECAT staff, and culminated in twelve-week program in which returning citizens from the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department would be able to go, accompanied by Department custody staff, across the street to NECAT for culinary arts training and to be ServSafe certified. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plans for the full-fledged programming were put on hold.

But, with a few more conversations, sit downs, and some strategic tweaking, an alternative plan was hatched – NECAT would use the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department's culinary arts training kitchen to conduct the classes that were previously slated for NECAT's facilities.

Beginning with a class size of ten men, the program was launched with the help of NECAT's Executive Director Josephine Cuzzi, Deputy Director Martha Leahy, Chef Chris Faison, Director of Career Services Victor Acosta, and Student Services Director Elise Brandwein. The class was structured to include a six-week lecture and a six-week hands-on training for four days a week with each running three-and-a-half hours long. Not only did the men get the training they needed, but they also had the privilege of being able to eat the food that they prepared.

Soon the word spread around the House of

Correction about the great work the men put into the class, and about their tasty food. One thing Chef Chris always told the men was, "Chefs don't make mistakes; they make new dishes. So anything you did before this program was the foundation to a new recipe of your life."

During the twelve-week program, not only do the men receive culinary arts training, but they are also receiving career planning services from the Director of Career Services Victor Acosta, who helps the men to prepare resumes and, along with Chef Chris, is training them for the culinary workforce. When asked what some of the things he saw in the men from the first cohort were, Victor said, "Watching this first cohort was transformative: I saw people with hopes of learning something that might help them to people who became cooks who know that they now have a craft and livelihood. They went from the classroom, sitting and struggling, to the kitchen where they created their own dishes."

From starting with the basics, including how to prepare a soup, to making more challenging dishes like chicken pot pie, baja shrimp tacos, and lentil dishes, the men were able to make a wide variety of dishes and learn about the new skills that they now possess. With Department staff members assisting on a weekly basis, including Supervisor of Social Services JoAnn White and Workforce Development Manager Maia Porter, the men were able to receive honest feedback, and without the help of Captain David Hernandez, who oversees the kitchen, none of the kitchen work would have been possible.

What started as a twelve-week program with ten men wanting to learn something new, ended with eight confident, ServSafe certified chefs who will now have the opportunity to return back to society with a great achievement under their belts and a career in culinary arts.

With their own chef coats and hats, the men were celebrated with a graduation day at the House of Correction, which was streamed live on Facebook with the purpose of sharing their great collective accomplishment with their loved ones at home.

"Our partnership with NECAT—the culinary arts classes and the post-release employment assistance—has generated nothing but enthusiasm among staff and our returning citizens," said Nick Lahage. "When we first initiated discussions with NECAT about creating a training collaboration offering professional-level culinary instruction to our returning citizens, the intent was to model for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department an 'inside-out' approach, where returning citizens could travel to NECAT accompanied by security, attend classes, and then return to the House of Correction. Obviously, COVID-19 temporarily threw a wrench into those plans."

"But, I'm still hopeful that we can make that 'inside-out' approach work," Lahage continued. "Our first graduates were so proud of themselves and so confident! NECAT brought out the best in them. The goal is always to bring motivated individuals – while incarcerated – closer to using their community's resources with a positive objective in mind. Seize the opportunity, and leave prison with a viable career skill and the potential for rewarding job placement in the food and restaurant industry."

For more information about New England Culinary Arts Training, please visit:

www.ne-cat.org.



HOUSE OF CORRECTION COMMUNITY RESPONSE SESSIONS AIMED AT MASS & CASS CRISIS

Recently, the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department hosted the Community Response Sessions, a temporary mobile courthouse sited within the Suffolk County House of Correction.

Established in collaboration with the Massachusetts Trial Courts and City of Boston, the Community Response Sessions were part of a multipronged effort to begin addressing the humanitarian crisis occurring on the streets of Newmarket Square in the area also known as "Mass and Cass," short for Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard.

The plan for the in-house court sessions at the House of Correction (HOC) was enacted after several months throughout which Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins, area residents and business owners implored City and State officials for help in responding to the worsening health and safety crisis in the area created by the closure of the Long Island Bridge, and the addiction treatment services on the island that it led to, back in 2014. Then, as an alternative to that treatment center, which held as many as 800 beds, hundreds of people seeking addiction recovery services and housing were moved to Newmarket Square and into a vacant building that had been reconditioned into an emergency shelter.

Over the course of just seven years, the numbers of people traveling to the area for services exploded from hundreds into thousands, with an estimated sixty-percent of the people on the streets arriving from suburbs outside of Boston. This year, as hundreds of tents began lining the streets encircling the House of Correction and around Newmarket Square, amidst spiraling violence, sex-trafficking and predatory drug dealing, the issue reached critical mass with several tent fires, the spread of an infectious rodent-borne disease, and more violence was punctuated by five murders in the area.

Seeking to address both the overwhelming need for addiction recovery and mental health services of the people living in the streets, and improve safety and security for local residents and businesses, Sheriff Tompkins began making plans to utilize whatever limited resources were available to him through the Department.

"The situation just outside our doorstep has become untenable," said Sheriff Tompkins, speaking at the time about the impetus for the Community Response Sessions. "We've been asking for help for several years now, and for several years, no adequate solution has been offered by anyone who is in a position to help."

"The men and women living out there in squalor, in misery and in mortal danger deserve our assistance and attention, and the residents and businesses also deserve to be safe. Is this the only solution or the best solution? Maybe not, but it is one of the only ones that we currently have at our disposal, short of any additional intervention by other agencies."

Stressing his encouragement for other agencies and organizations to provide effective alternatives that offer both services to those in need and safe streets for the people living and working in the area, Sheriff Tompkins offered additional space on the campus of the HOC to provide a specialized addiction recovery unit with dormitory-style living in a less institutionalized setting. If approved, residents would take part in this 90-day treatment program wearing casual clothing instead of typical prison dress, officers' uniforms would reflect the more comfortable atmosphere with a polo shirt and khakis as the standard, and furnishings would be outfitted to become more conducive to achieving the necessary mindset for recovery.

Currently, the Department is awaiting approval by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to begin offering this program.

Following its temporary run at the House of Correction, the Community Response Sessions have ended and cases have moved back into more traditional courthouses in Boston. And, spurred by some of Sheriff Tompkins' efforts to mitigate the issues around Mass and Cass, in addition to his many calls to action for more agencies to step in and help address them, new partnerships with state and city agencies have led to proposals to redistribute services and facilities more broadly throughout the Commonwealth, and relocate some of the people seeking recovery, mental health services and housing from the Newmarket Square area to safer, more secure housing.



SHERIFF TOMPKINS BRINGS LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS TO VISIT MASS AND CASS, BUILDING 8

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins welcomed a group of local elected officials and addiction recovery representatives to the House of Correction to tour Newmarket Square and the area between Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard known as "Mass and Cass" to observe the overwhelming humanitarian crisis of addiction, homelessness and mental illness being suffered by the growing mass of people living on the streets there since the closing of the Long Island Shelter in 2014.

Sheriff Tompkins also brought the group onto the Campus of the House of Correction to visit Building 8, the site of his proposed addiction recovery unit that would be designed as a less institutional space with more relaxed attire for participants and officers alike, more comfortable furnishings, warmer visuals, and intensive programming to address substance use disorder and mental illness.





ON MASS. AND CASS, ALL OPTIONS SHOULD BE ON THE TABLE

By Steven W. Tompkins

{The following Op Ed appeared in The Boston Globe on October 14, 2021}

By now, many know of the enormous human tragedy unfolding in Newmarket Square at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Avenue — "Mass. and Cass."

This year, five killings have taken place within this small geographic location, with countless unreported sexual assaults and acts of violence. Sex trafficking is occurring at an alarming rate. An open-air drug den operates in plain view as crowds of people line sidewalks, injecting needles into their bodies before sharing them and dropping them in the street among countless others previously discarded.

A tent city stretches down Atkinson Street, out to Mass. Ave., up Topeka and Cummings streets and beyond, housing people living in abject squalor and constant mortal danger as they struggle deep within the throes of addiction, mental illness, and homelessness.

To help address this overwhelming humanitarian crisis, I've offered space within a stand-alone, unconnected building on the House of Correction South Bay campus for treatment. Working alongside law enforcement, the Suffolk County district attorney, courts, and the Legislature, we would treat people who the aforementioned authorities determine to possess actionable warrants or who present a danger to themselves or others, providing services we are qualified to administer, including detoxification, addiction counseling and treatment, mental health service; trauma-related mitigation programming; and general health and dental care.

We'd use a dormitory-style format, eschewing the aesthetics of institutionalization, projecting warmth and healing, and emphasizing recovery, revitalization, and renewal with many creature comforts unavailable on the streets. Mental health clinicians and addiction recovery counselors would help residents to begin the process of regaining control and stability in their lives, and preparing continuation of their recovery.

While I've received both supportive calls as well as criticism, with some even calling the proposal "inhumane" and "horrific," I would challenge anyone to come and walk Mass. Ave., and Atkinson and Topeka streets, and try not to use those very same words, or worse, to describe what they see on these streets and inside the tents.

Is my proposal the perfect or ideal solution to the pain and desperation that radiates from these forsaken people in this forgotten place?

Neither I nor anyone in the field of recovery would suggest it is. The most effective long-term treatment for addiction comes from voluntary treatment from professionals in safe, clean, community-based facilities.

Unfortunately, addiction is complex, and choosing recovery is far from a simple process for those enduring this nightmarish existence. Addiction and mental illness often preclude many from seeking help while in crisis. Even when attempting to take advantage of such services, many face the daunting reality of an onerous system with low availability of services, and even less of a collective will among many who occupy positions that can help rectify these deficits.

This crisis marks a catastrophic failure to act by society as a whole.

The unexpected closure of Long Island Shelter in 2014 came with a disastrous lack of planning for what to do for those seeking recovery. Seven years later, people continue to struggle, fighting for their lives alongside those actively using, as drug dealers descend on them, night and day, with no consequence for the misery they bring with their brazen predation. Despite estimates that 70 percent of the afflicted population on Mass. and Cass comes from outside of Boston, action to provide services elsewhere has been scant.



In spite of predictable platitudes that "we can't arrest our way out of addiction," few viable strategies from any sector have been offered to prevent the inevitability forcing law enforcement to intervene.

Plans to convert hotels in Boston and Revere into transitional housing and shelter for people in recovery were met with scathing rebukes by elected officials and community activists alike, and attempts to rebuild the bridge to Long Island have been met with fierce opposition by residents and elected officials in Quincy.

While I continue to engage with all interested parties in the hopes of encouraging immediate and long-term action to address this grave situation, I am compelled by what I see to act, and act now.

As the pain and suffering escalate with each passing day, I'm reminded of an often-quoted expression by Voltaire that warns, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

No, my proposal is not perfect. But continuing to do nothing, standing by, repeatedly failing to act, is not only morally unacceptable, it's no longer an option.

Meanwhile, more tents have begun dotting the landscape within the borders of the South Bay Mall.



SCSD JAIL OFFICER LOOKS TO CARRY GRANDFATHER'S BADGE, LEGACY OF GUARDIANSHIP INTO NEW ERA









Just over three-decades ago, in the year 1970, a young man by the name of John J. Antonelli, Jr. stepped across the threshold of the Charles Street Jail to start his new job as a correction officer for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department.

That day, wearing his new uniform and badge, Officer Antonelli began what would become a 12-year career of distinguished service that culminated in his role as the Chief Jail Officer, a position similar to that of today's Superintendents.

By all accounts, Antonelli cut an impressive figure over the course of his service, earning the respect of both the members of the Department and the people who had been remanded to the facility. In fact, he was so well-liked and respected among the inmate population that when a riot occurred and inmates attempted to storm the kitchen, their peers working there with Antonelli rushed to protect him, barricading the entrance to the kitchen, ignoring both the immediate and long-term risk such an act could engender from their fellow inmates.

But, as much as he added to the rich historical fabric of the Department, it is unlikely that Antonelli ever imagined that his impact would endure and his legacy would continue some thirty-one years later, and held aloft by another member of his extended family, no less.

Carrying not only the mantle for the Antonelli family, but the badge number worn by his grandfather, Michael Antonelli is both honored and eager for the opportunity continue in those large footsteps. "It's so cool that I'm able to honor him in this way," said Michael of his grandfather. "From what I've heard from my dad, aunts and uncles, my grandfather was very well respected, but even more, he was a good person. I am looking forward to following his example inside and outside of the Department."

Initially, as a graduate of the Department's Correction Officer Training Academy Class 21-01, Antonelli was assigned a different badge number. But, with the encouragement of his family and assistance from family friend and Department Senior Administrative Analyst Andrea Long, Michael was presented with Badge Number #416 during a ceremony held in in the Suffolk County Jail lobby, standing in front of the plaque honoring his grandfather's service.

"I am, myself, honored to be able to present this badge to you," said Suffolk County Jail Superintendent Michael Colwell, who presided over the ceremony, along with Special Sheriff Abiezer Ayuso. "Your grandfather was protected by the inmates during the insurrection back then because they so respected him for the kindness and empathy that he showed them. These are qualities, particularly back in that era, that are remarkable, and we will count on you to bring that same spirit of guardianship and humanity to our organization."

Chief Jail Officer John J. Antonelli served the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department from 1970 to 1982.





DEPARTMENT HOSTS ADVISORY COUNCIL LUNCHEON AT HOUSE OF CORRECTION

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department hosted the Family Matters System of Care Consortium Advisory Council Luncheon, recently. The event featured partners of the Family Matters program as well as the Reintegration Department team led by Director David A. Mayo.

The Family Matters System of Care Consortium and the Advisory Council are a coalition of stakeholders that promotes a family-centered approach for community connected practice, to advance and implement strategies that address health and wellness in communities impacted by incarceration.

The Advisory Council is a team of primary partners that navigates the vision and the direction of the consortium and its mission to guide, instruct, and promote partnership with community professionals. The Advisory Council works together to develop a multidisciplinary alliance designed to eradicate inequalities and empower those in need.

During the luncheon, the Council celebrated several members for their unmatchable work for the good of the Council, including: founder and supporter of the Advisory Committee, Karla Walker, who is now the Director of Consumer and Community Engagement for Community Catalyst; Karla Acevedo, Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Special Initiatives for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department; and Blanca Valentin, who is the CSA Program Director for The Home for Little Wanderers.

David Mayo, Karla Walker, and Karla Acevedo have spoken extensively on the history and plans for the future for Family Matters.

Sheriff Steven Tompkins, the catalyst for all of the above mentioned programming, was also on hand to offer kind remarks about goals and values of the Council.



PARTNER OF THE MONTH

Orquidea Pena

Re-entry Coordinator, Casa Esperanza

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department's "Partner of the Month" series highlights the outside agencies and organizations that are working with us to help improve the lives and increase opportunities for the men and women remanded to our care and custody by the courts. Each month, we will highlight these collaborations between our organizations and shed some light on some of the ways in which we are readying people to reenter their communities better prepared to provide for themselves and their families.

In this issue's installment of our "Partner of the Month" series, we feature Casa Esperanza Re-entry Coordinator Orquidea Pena. Casa Esperanza is a bilingual/bicultural behavioral health facility that specializes in serving the Latino community of Massachusetts. For more than three decades, Casa Esperanza has been studying the impact of addiction and mental illness on the Latino community in Massachusetts and examining what motivates a client to get help; what it takes for them to stay engaged in care long enough to meet their treatment goals; and how to support them in building a life in recovery that works for them and their family.

When asked what makes Casa Esperanza different from other re-entry organizations, Orquidea stated, "Casa Esperanza is a bilingual, bicultural, all-inclusive, trauma-informed, community-based organization that has been serving the Latino community for more than 38 years. With deep roots and local ties to the community, Casa Esperanza has established collaborations and partnerships with many entities that allow our Offender Reentry Program (ORP) patients to reenter the communities and society as contributing members, with equal access to opportunities across disciplines and spectrums."

At the Department, we know that returning citizens face barriers on a daily basis when it comes to finding employment, but an additional barrier that some might not think about can also be language. When asked what a major barrier of the Latino community is and how Casa Esperanza works to help an individual to overcome it, Orquidea said, "One barrier is the linguistic and/or cultural barrier that is significant. All patient-facing roles at Casa Esperanza employ staff that are bilingual and can assist with communication barriers. Casa Esperanza also provides English as a second or foreign language (ESOL) classes to all ORP patients, which they can participate in; whether it be for conversational, employment, or technical support."

Casa Esperanza has been a great community partner for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department by providing resources for those in need, and helping to minimize an added barrier for returning citizens.

"Casa Esperanza used to be a referral source, and we attended the monthly Discharge & Recovery Panels for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department," said Orquidea. "We have worked to strengthen that collaboration, and we not only attend these monthly meetings, but we also provide (prior to the pandemic and to continue after) weekly on-site psychoeducational groups, as well as individual case management and support for the returning citizens that qualify, as well as the returning citizens that are seeking both inpatient and outpatient services and supports from Casa Esperanza. Casa Esperanza lives by its mission, vision, values and goals each day and seeks to support and provide services for current, past and future patients, inpatient and outpatient. We believe in the equity and equality of opportunities for every individual, and will continue to establish and maintain partnerships with community entities that will help our patients achieve and exceed their goals, both short and long term. Casa Esperanza seeks to provide the services and supports necessary to ensure that treatment and recovery support the highest quality of life, without stigma, without labels, and with respect and dignity."

For more information on Casa Esperanza: https://www.casaesperanza.org/

AROUND SUFFOLK COUNTY WITH SHERIFF TOMPKINS



SHERIFF TOMPKINS APPEARS ON JAVA WITH JIMMY

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins joined James Hills on his video podcast show "Java With Jimmy" to talk about his proposal for a new addiction treatment unit, the crisis on Mass and Cass, and several other topics. Sheriff Tompkins was also joined on the program by former City Council Candidate and community activist Domingos DaRosa.



SHERIFF TOMPKINS JOINS EL MUNDO FOR HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH BREAKFAST

Sheriff Tompkins joined a standing-room-only crowd at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month at El Mundo's annual breakfast. Representatives of many different organizations, community groups, elected offices and neighborhoods around Massachusetts and beyond were treated to a comedic roast-style event hosted by President and CEO of El Mundo Boston Alberto Vasallo, III.



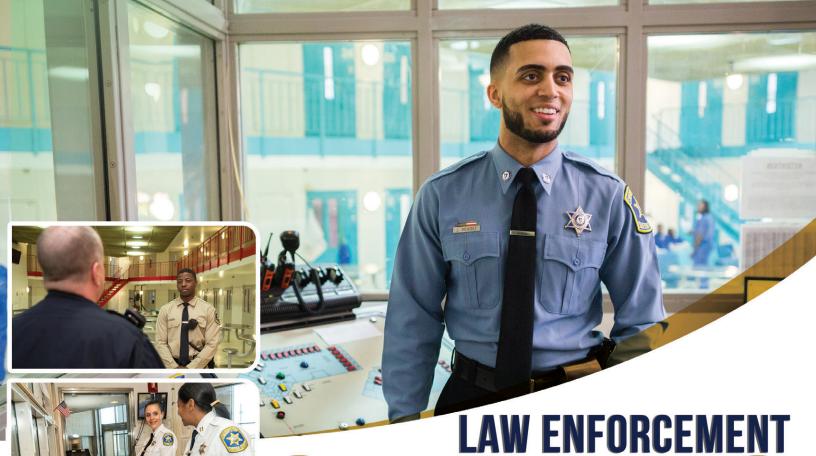
SHERIFF TOMPKINS OBSERVES VETERANS DAY AT PUERTO RICAN MONUMENT

Joined by members of elected office, community organizations, veterans' agencies, and residents of Boston and surrounding areas, Sheriff Tompkins took part in the annual observance of Veterans Day held at the Puerto Rican Veterans Memorial in the South End. The monument was unveiled in 2013 as a national first-of-its-kind tribute to the 200,000-plus Puerto Ricans who have served in the U.S. military since the island became part of the United States in 1898.



SHERIFF TOMPKINS HELPS CELEBRATE MEL KING AT SPECIAL CEREMONY

Sheriff Tompkins joined the throngs of supporters who came out to witness and celebrate the naming of Mel King Square for the former State Representative, Boston mayoral contender and longtime community activist. King, now 92, was the first Black person to run for mayor in the City of Boston and he was instrumental in the fight for affordable housing, the establishment of the "Tent City" apartment complex, the founding of the Rainbow Coalition, and the South End Technology Center, and he served as an adjunct professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).







BENEFITS:

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Steven W. Tompkins, Sheriff



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