


QUIET OUTSIDE

NOISES THAT SURROUND WILDLIFE DISRUPT THE BASIC INSTINCTS THE ANIMALS’ LIVES DEPEND ON. LEARN HOW TO TURN DOWN THE VOLUME AND PROTECT WILDLIFE IN YOUR YARD. **F11**

Sunday

The Times



TRENTON

## How one developer is bringing hope to a forgotten street he once lived on

*Andre Williams purchased 10 vandalized houses for just \$10,000 and is creating a path to homeownership that could dramatically reduce housing costs for city residents.*

**Vashti Harris** *For Times of Trenton*

For Andre Williams, of Trenton, restoring 10 abandoned and boarded-up houses on Chambers Street is personal.

“I used to live in one of those houses many years ago with cousins while I was in high school, and I knew all the families that lived in every single house,” said Williams, 51, who owns Bass Contracting LLC, a construction company that purchases and renovates abandoned residential and commercial properties in Trenton.

In 2022, Williams said, the City of Trenton contacted him about potentially renovating the houses instead of demolishing them.

Trenton’s Public Information Officer Ranai Morgan said, “The city chose to work with Williams because he is a local contractor with a proven track record of successful projects. He is committed to revitalizing the neighborhood and shares the city’s goal of seeing these houses occupied once again.”

For 20 years, Morgan said the single-family row houses had been unoccupied and vandalized throughout the years.

Despite being vandalized and stripped of their copper, electrical wires, and plumbing, Williams said the houses still had solid foundations for him to build upon.

In 2023, Williams said he purchased the homes from the city through his company D.A.T. Alliance Corp. LLC, for just over \$10,000.

Morgan said the city chose not to demolish the houses “because demolition would have left empty lots in a neighborhood we want to see thrive. Renovating the existing structures helps preserve the character of the area.”

While growing up in Trenton during the 1990s, Williams recalled seeing those houses occupied and wanted to bring life back to his former neighborhood.

“For me, I looked at it as our responsibility to go back and clean up old neighborhoods,” Williams said. “So, when the city called about the houses, I said, ‘Let me walk through them first.’”

**SEE TRENTON, A9**



**Developer Andre Williams is breathing new life into the abandoned and vacant houses on Chambers Street in Trenton, shown behind him.** *Courtesy Andre Williams*

“I used to live in one of those houses many years ago with cousins while I was in high school, and I knew all the families that lived in every single house.”

**Andre Williams, who owns Bass Contracting LLC**

CAMDEN COUNTY

## A teen’s flight from ‘house of horrors’

*Escaping from years of alleged captivity and sex abuse, she faces an uncertain future, experts say.*

**Riley Yates and Matthew Enuco**  
*For Times of Trenton*

The frantic teen came running to their house, banging on the door and desperate for help.

Her head was shaved, she wore no shoes and her bulky sweatshirt hung from her body, several sizes too large. She hadn’t bathed in weeks.

To 36-year-old Michael Lacey, she was a haunting sight, even before she began to pour out a tale of torture so stomach-churning that he wasn’t sure what to believe.

For six years, the teen said, she had been held captive by her mother and stepfather, who pulled her from her Camden County school in 2019 after she finished sixth grade. She was chained to a toilet or confined to a dog crate, beaten and sexually abused, she said.

She’s 18 years old, but talked like the child she was when she disappeared from the



**Bars cover a window of the home in Gloucester Township that authorities said was the scene where a girl was abused for years.** *Matthew Enuco, for Times of Trenton*

world all those years ago. She laughed oddly and out of place, giggling as she accused her stepfather of molesting her while he was drunk.

She was unrecognizable to Lacey. She was his next-door neighbor.

“I gotta get away from there,” the teen blurted to Lacey and his 75-year-old mother, who live together on a quiet street in

Gloucester Township tucked not far from a golf course.

“Picture someone coming to you, not knowing anything about the world and asking a million questions,” Lacey recounted in an interview with NJ Advance Media. “That’s exactly what she was doing. Exactly.”

In May, after the teen’s dramatic escape, authorities charged her mother, Brenda Spencer, and stepfather, Branndon Mosley, with crimes that include kidnapping, aggravated assault and endangering the welfare of children. They could face life in prison if convicted.

If true, the accusations would make this a rare case of extreme child abuse, the kind that garners national attention and sparks conversations among onlookers who hope for a bright road ahead for a once-tormented child. But experts say the dash the teen took to Lacey’s doorway on May 8 was just the beginning of a complicated path to an unknown future. What happens to kids who break away from upbringings so allegedly deplorable and inhumane?

It’s an especially pressing question for the New Jersey teenager, who had already been the victim of sexual abuses committed by her birth father years before the new allegations came to light.

**SEE CAMDEN COUNTY, A10**

STATEWIDE

## New N.J. laws upgrade early education

*Murphy signs bills requiring full-day kindergarten and boosting free pre-K in the state.*

**Liz Rosenberg** *For Times of Trenton*

Gov. Phil Murphy signed a series of laws last week that will end the era of half-day kindergarten in New Jersey for good and continue a massive expansion of pre-K across the state long after he leaves office in January.

The three bills Murphy signed into law Wednesday include a new requirement for full-day kindergarten in every school district and a new state funding formula for preschools.

The legislation also includes a law that extends the maximum length of contracts for outside providers of preschool programs in school districts to three years.

The new rules mean every school district must establish a full-day kindergarten program by the start of the 2029-30 school year, Murphy administration officials said.

At the same time, the state is continuing its push for school districts to offer free, full-day pre-K programs for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Murphy said the number of school districts offering free, full-day pre-K has increased by 350% since 2018.

The state spends over \$1 billion to pay for early childhood programs, and that number will increase as more districts apply for grants to start their own programs, the governor said.

“With the steps we are taking today, we’re going to ensure that every parent in New Jersey will eventually be able to enroll their child in a high-quality pre-K program at no additional cost,” Murphy said.

This upcoming school year alone, 20,000 more pre-K seats will open up across the state, state officials said.

“By prioritizing early learning, we’re giving working families the tools they need to thrive and unlocking the full potential of the next generation,” said state Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, D-Essex, who sponsored all three bills.

Only 10 of New Jersey’s nearly 600 school districts do not have free, full-day kindergarten for all students. Three of those districts — Millstone in Monmouth County, Westfield in Union County, and Metuchen in Middlesex County — said they are moving forward with plans for full-day kindergarten programs in the fall.

The other New Jersey school districts that still have half-day kindergarten are:

**Moorestown:** The Burlington County district has a free half-day kindergarten and a paid full-day option. A referendum planned for September will ask voters to approve funding for construction of full-day kindergarten facilities.

**Haddonfield:** The Camden County school district has a half-day kindergarten, but passed a resolution earlier this year to fund a full-day kindergarten program.

**SEE STATEWIDE, A9**

REGION

## \$16B new digs

A tour of the mammoth \$16B Gateway rail tunnels project taken last week reveals each construction project faces unique challenges. **A6-A7**

SPORTS

## A decisive win

Iga Swiatek wins her first Wimbledon championship with a rare 6-0, 6-0 victory over New Jersey native Amanda Anisimova. **E6**