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Liliane Makole, left, smells some of the fresh ground mint Iman Alshehab uses in her recipes. They are two of the founders of the group. Mera Kitchen Collective, a co-op founded by five women that uses food as a way to empower immigrant women.

LLOYD FOX/BALTIMORE SUN

Empowering immigrant women through food

Year-old Mera Kitchen Collective has plans for a restaurant as a hub

BY SARAH MEEHAN
The Baltimore Sun

The five founders of the Mera Kitchen Collective speak in several tongues. Arabic, English and French dominate their conversations around the dinner table, and their group's name stems from a Greek word. But their common language is food.

It's been a little more than a year since the women first gathered for a meal at Iman Alshehab's Moravia apartment to discuss ways to empower refugee and immigrant women through food. What started as a series of pop-up dinners and workshops has grown into a worker-owned cooperative with plans to open a cafe — a space they hope will become a hub for Baltimore's growing immigrant community and a workplace that supports

If you go

The Refugee and Immigrant Arts Feast runs 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. today at 2640 Space, 2640 St. Paul St., Charles Village. Free.
mera.kitchen/our-events/

women.

Today, the group will host the Refugee and Immigrant Arts Feast in Charles Village, where more than a dozen immigrant artisans and food vendors will sell their wares. And on May 6, they will begin making weekly appearances at the Baltimore Farmers' Market and Bazaar, serving delicacies like Alshehab's Syrian charcoal rice.

Alshehab was a chef at the Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus before fleeing the Syrian civil war. It's an unwritten rule that she cooks for the group at their home gatherings, concocting dishes like cheese-stuffed honeycomb bread, spinach pastries and lentil soup, replenishing the table with second and third helpings before her guests' first servings have been eaten. They get together multiple times each week to continue their work of bringing entrepreneurship opportunities to women like Alshehab.

"We all kind of came together to focus on women's empowerment," said Aishah AlFadhalah, a Mera co-founder who hails from Kuwait and mentors refugee families for the International Rescue Committee.

The five women have equal say in See **MERA**, page 11

Conowingo owner told to curb pollution

State wants Exelon to find ways to keep sediment, nutrient runoff from bay

BY SCOTT DANCE
The Baltimore Sun

Gov. Larry Hogan's administration is requiring the owner of Conowingo Dam to find a way to trap pollution that flows down the Susquehanna River and into the Chesapeake, threatening progress in cleaning up the bay.

For decades, pollution has built up behind the Conowingo. But the dam is now at its capacity and no longer traps sediment and nutrient runoff from across Pennsylvania.

Maryland Environment Secretary Ben Grumbles said a set of "stringent environmental conditions" imposed Friday is part of a broader strategy to speed bay cleanup "and hold our partners accountable for doing their part to create a healthier watershed."

Dam owner Exelon Corp. needs a water quality permit from Maryland to get a federal license to continue operating. The state issued the new permit with a requirement that Exelon develop a plan to continue trapping the same amount of pollution the Conowingo always has — See **CONOWINGO**, page 12

SUMMARY OF THE NEWS



LLOYD FOX/BALTIMORE SUN

A new Raven

Baltimore Ravens' draft pick quarterback Lamar Jackson gets a hug from coach John Harbaugh at a news conference in Owings Mills on Friday. The NFL draft continues today. **COVERAGE IN SPORTS**

MARYLAND

MURDER-SUICIDE: The day before Harry Rey killed his wife and then himself, police reports show Baltimore County police had been called twice to the couple's Woodstock mobile home because they had been arguing. **NEWS PG 2**

STATE SENATE RACE: Maryland's top court agreed to resolve a dispute over whether former state Sen. Nathaniel Oaks should remain on the Democratic primary ballot after pleading guilty to corruption charges, the attorney general's office said Friday. **NEWS PG 2**

WORLD

GAZA CONFLICT: Hundreds of Palestinians converged on the Gaza Strip's border fence with Israel on Friday, trying to burn and rip through it before drawing heavy Israeli fire. Three Palestinians were killed. **NEWS PG 12**

TODAY'S WEATHER

MOSTLY SUNNY WITH SOME SHOWERS

73
HIGH

42
LOW



Breezy and cooler Sunday **SPORTS PG 10**

Report finds no Russian collusion

Dems brand GOP findings a whitewash and release rebuttal

BY TOM LOBIANCO AND CHAD DAY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Republican-led House intelligence committee on Friday released a lengthy report concluding it found no evidence that Donald Trump's campaign colluded with Russia in the 2016 presidential campaign, drawing praise from the president and rebuttals from Democrats.

The report caps an investigation that began with the promise of bipartisanship but quickly transformed into an acrimonious battle between Democrats and Republicans over Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and whether there were any connections with the Trump campaign.

Trump quickly claimed vindication Friday, calling the report "totally conclusive, strong, powerful, many things."



Trump

"No collusion, which I knew anyway. No coordination, no nothing. It's a witch hunt, that's all it is," he told reporters in the Oval Office.

But the committee's Republicans didn't let the Trump campaign completely off the hook. They specifically cited the Trump campaign for "poor judgment" in taking a June 2016 meeting in Trump Tower that was described in emails to Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., as part of a Russian government effort to aide his father's presidential bid. The report also dubbed the campaign's praise of WikiLeaks "objectionable."

"While the committee found no evidence that the Trump campaign colluded, coordinated, or conspired with the Russian government, the investigation did find poor judgment and ill-considered actions by the Trump and Clinton campaigns," the House intelligence committee wrote.

The report's conclusion on collusion is See **REPORT**, page 12

Shooting ends grandson's life, sense of safety in E. Baltimore

George Evans feels the sting of surging violence in city

BY TIM PRUDENTE
The Baltimore Sun

The city block had been good to George and Jane Evans. A place for summer cookouts, Christmas carols and watching retirement days glide by.

But last week, it became the grim place where their grandson, Walter Baynes, was gunned down. Caught in the gunfire was George, a 69-year-old Baptist deacon who tended the block for decades.

The killing has darkened their bit of East Baltimore and home for 45 years.

"The block took my baby," Jane said in her husband's hospital room.

George lay awake beside her, a bullet lodged in his neck. His left foot was bandaged, right knee shattered, femur fractured. One bullet had ripped through his buttocks. Gunmen had shot up his legs.

"Eight times," George said. "I don't know who did the shooting or where they came from."

Police say a 17-year-old boy was among the killers. They charged Eric Gilyard with murdering the Evanses' grandson. Gilyard remains held without bail. Online court See **SHOOTING**, page 11

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Women empowered through food

MERA, *From page 1*
decision making, and they share profits, though they have different roles in the organization. Liliane Makole, who owned a cafe in her home country of Cameroon, cooks alongside Alshehab. She and AlFadhalah also handle outreach and foster connections with the immigrant and refugee community. Brittany DeNovellis, a program coordinator for Baltimore City Community College's Refugee Youth Project, works with them on outreach, coordinates volunteers and builds partnerships for Mera. And Emily Lerman, a program coordinator for a humanitarian medical organization, focuses on Mera's development, partnerships and events.

It's a structure that aligns with their key objective: giving women ownership of their work.

"If the goal was to be like, 'We want to get Iman a restaurant, we want to get Liliane a restaurant,' we could have done that. ... And that's not the goal," Lerman said. "We can do this — we can change what narrative looks like around the system for refugees."

According to the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees, more than 3,000 refugees resettled in Baltimore between October 2011 and September 2016. The city's foreign-born residents helped soften the blow even as others moved out — Baltimore added about 5,000 immigrants between 2010 and 2016; by comparison, the overall population fell by about 9,000 between 2010 and 2017, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

After a series of test dinners at their homes, Mera Kitchen Collective held its first event at Hersh's in South Baltimore in June.

"We wanted to do something together because ... there was the war on the idea of refugees in this country, and a war of words," said chef-owner Josh Hershkovitz. "It was a big deal to us, too — we're the children of immigrants and most of the people in this country wouldn't be here if it weren't for that."

Hershkovitz worked with Alshehab, who speaks little English, to prepare Syrian delicacies for the sold-out pop-up dinner.

"There was a translator there all day, but then it stopped really being necessary," he said. "It was pretty cool how the language barrier fell away."

Alshehab's cooking reflects the same careful intention that inspired her group's name. "Mera Kitchen" is drawn from "meraki," a Greek word that means to pour one's soul into the task at hand, and give of oneself with full devotion or love.

"It's a sense of community, a sense of being part of something big, a part of something meaningful. For me I feel like I'm changing — not the world, but I'm changing the narrative in Baltimore," said Makole, the native of Cameroon whose plantain dishes will soon be sold at the JFX farmers' market. "It's more than a restaurant. It's a community. We are sharing love. We are changing lives."

In November, the group joined the Johns Hopkins University Social Innovation Lab,



From left, Liliane Makole, Emily Lerman, Aishah AlFadhalah, Iman Alshehab and Brittany DeNovellis, back to camera. They enjoy a meal together at Alshehab's house, where they often have their meetings.

which provides mentorship, funding and other resources to 10 organizations from November through April. The most recent session culminated with a pitch showcase Tuesday. Alex Riehm, director of the Social Innovation Lab, has watched the members of Mera double down on their work during the past six months, contributing as much to their fellow cohort members as they've learned.

"That is something that they've lived not only in the organization that they're building, but also in our group," he said.

In addition, Mera is building a nonprofit arm aimed at training people in leadership skills and entrepreneurship.

"So many times people are like, 'Oh refugees, they come to this country — or immigrants — and they're just using all the resources,'" DeNovellis said. "And we're trying to say, 'They are the resources in this case.' We've all gotten so much out of this."

They've looked to Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse for guidance as they've modeled their co-op, and continue to seek the fellow collective's advice as they grow.

"There's a lot more people, and we're slowly incorporating them in more and more that we're doing," Lerman said. So far the group has partnered with five other women, and at least 15 vendors will take part in the Refugee and Immigrant Arts Feast. "The reason we're eager to get [cafe]

"It's a sense of community, a sense of being part of something big, a part of something meaningful."

Liliane Makole, native of Cameroon

space is because it just allows more opportunity for more people."

Opening a restaurant is difficult enough for lifelong Baltimoreans, let alone aspiring restaurateurs who aren't fluent in English or familiar with the city's layers of bureaucracy. But the women of Mera said from Day 1 they've received support from the city's food community, including restaurateurs like Lane Harlan, who hosted the group's second pop-up dinner at Clavel in November. That event sold out, too.

"They're essentially giving opportunities to immigrant and refugee women. That's right up our alley," Harlan said. "When you give people opportunity that are coming from other countries with such deep-seeded traditions, it's adding diversity to our food culture."

Alshehab teamed up with Clavel chef Carlos Raba to put on a dinner called "Wonders of Damascus," a five-course meal

fusing traditional Syrian cuisine with the flavors of Sinaloa, Mexico.

She'll also head the kitchen at Mera's future cafe. The group is finalizing its lease on the space, which will be in Charles Village or Station North, and they hope to open the doors within six months. It will be a home base and preparation space for pop-ups, the farmers' market and other events, and allow the group to take on more catering orders. All five founders have day jobs, and they can't keep up with requests for catering now.

For Alshehab, the cafe will be a game-changer. It now takes her two hours and two buses one-way to reach her job as a seamstress at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland in Southwest Baltimore. The centrally located restaurant will be closer to home and place her back in the kitchen.

Alshehab said Mera Kitchen Collective has provided her with a sense of family, even though her sons live in Jordan.

"It made me miss my family less," Alshehab said through AlFadhalah, who was translating. "I don't feel my sons are far away from me. Yes, I miss my children, but this makes me cope better."

Added AlFadhalah: "Now whenever she tells her son that she's having us here, her son calls us her children." smeehan@baltsun.com twitter.com/sarahvmeehan

Shooting ends grandson's life, sense of safety

SHOOTING, *From page 1*
records did not list his attorney.

Police say they caught the teen running away with an emptied 9 mm pistol.

The retirees ask themselves: How will they face their block again?

"I don't know if I'll ever feel safe there," George said.

The attack worsened what has been a bloody April in Baltimore. Someone ex-

ecuted a mother and daughter in their home. Stray gunfire killed a 65-year-old woman on her porch. City police counted 17 killings in March, but 31 this month.

In the Evanses' Broadway East neighborhood, the couple have been the keepers of a block squeezed by crime and blight. The plastic pansies in their front window brighten the street, but vacant homes rot within sight. They never had a rat before

last summer. George sweeps the sidewalk, but the trash blows down. The old neighbors called him the "block captain."

"Everybody knows George," neighbor Tieshia Redfern-Moore said.

Born in Edgemere and raised in East Baltimore, he moved in when young men settled arguments with their fists, not bullets, he says. There was street violence, but also a code: Grandparents were off-limits.

"These kids coming around, they ain't got no remorse. They ain't got no respect. They just take a life as a joke," he said in his bed at the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

A burly man, he retired after 39 years as a roofer. His forearms show it.

George also made his living as a painter, carpenter and electrician. He worked in laundries, at Montebello State Hospital, and making plastic straws at the old Maryland Cup company.

"Through the grace of God," he said, "I've been making it on bits and pieces."

Each summer, he grills hot dogs and hamburgers for the block. Everyone is welcome.

"If you can feed one," Jane said, "you can feed many."

Redfern-Moore moved next door last year. Soon, George was watching over her 9-year-old son as the boy walked to school. She offered to pay George for a ride to the grocery store.

"He looked at me like, 'Girl, don't you ever say that,'" she said, laughing.

The ride was free. Neighbor Adam Custis would call George for help with a flat tire.

"He wouldn't take no money," Custis said.

In the Evanses' brick rowhouse, its doors and windows secured by grates, the couple raised two children and sent them to college. They raised nieces and nephews when family members fell on hard times.

"We always kept kids," Jane said. "There's never been a dull moment in our house."

They also raised their first grandchild, Walter Baynes.

A young father, Baynes had a troubled record of drugs and robbery. He earned a GED in prison, then returned to his grandparents' home. He was working as a roofer with his uncle.

The 30-year-old had moved into a new apartment with his pregnant girlfriend one month ago.

Still, he would visit his grandparents, offer to run their errands and help himself

to their refrigerator. For three straight Sundays, George brought his grandson to the Church of Dynamic Deliverance in Southeast Baltimore. George was teaching him religion and car repairs.

The streets, he would tell his grandson, only lead to prison or the cemetery.

On April 19, Baynes returned for another visit. When he went to leave, he found his tires slashed, his grandparents said.

George said he went outside to help. As Baynes made phone calls to buy new tires, George sat outside his home on the sturdy wooden bench he built decades ago. He greeted neighbors for years from the bench.

Down the block, Baltimore Police Officer Joseph Rodgers had responded to a home where neighbors were arguing.

Baynes was leaning against the car on the block. George was looking down the street. The gunmen came from the alley. Then shots rang out.

Baynes was shot and fell. The barrage struck George, too. He crumpled and the bench toppled over.

"I couldn't move. I couldn't get up," George said. "Walt fell right in front of me."

Inside, Jane tried to go help.

"My husband was hollerin', 'Get back! Get back! They shot me!'" she said. "I was just trying to get to them."

The officer down the block heard the gunfire and ran up. Police say Rodgers chased Gilyard and arrested him. Detectives also found .40 caliber shell casings on the sidewalk, but no one else has been arrested.

Police spokesman Chief T.J. Smith said investigators found a handgun tucked in Baynes' waistband. He didn't fire back.

His grandparents say they never saw the gun.

"I don't know whether Walt did something to them," Jane said. "I just don't know."

George hopes to be released to a rehab center. He can't walk yet, and months of therapy await him.

"The block was nice. Everybody around there was peaceful. It's just this new generation that's coming up. They don't realize they're hurting families," he said, wiping tears with his hospital gown.

Last year a neighbor told George she was worried. Redfern-Moore feared the encroaching street violence. She remembers his words were once reassuring.

"He was like, 'You mind your business and you'll be all right.'"

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Baltimore City

Susan Agnes, Proper Person
4726 Ruby Ave
Halethorpe, MD 21227

Notice of Appointment Notice to Creditors
Notice to Unknown Heirs to all Persons Interested in the Estate of (188490) Arthur Swinford

Notice is given that SUSAN AGNES, 4726 Ruby Ave, Halethorpe, MD 21227 was on April 12, 2018 appointed personal representative(s) of the estate of Arthur Swinford who died on March 10, 2018 without a will.

Further information can be obtained by reviewing the estate file in the office of the Register of Wills or by contacting the personal representative(s) or the attorney.

All persons having any objection to the appointment or to the probate of the decedent's will shall file their objections with the Register of Wills on or before the 12th day of October, 2018.

Any person having a claim against the decedent must present the claim to the undersigned personal representative(s) or file it with the Register of Wills with a copy to the undersigned on or before the earlier of the following dates:
(1) Six months from the date of the decedent's death, except if the decedent died before October 1, 1992, nine months from the date of the decedent's death; or
(2) Two months after the personal representative mails or otherwise delivers to the creditor a copy of this published notice or other written notice, notifying the creditor that the claim will be barred unless the creditor presents the claims within two months from the mailing or other delivery of the notice. A claim not presented or filed on or before that date, or any extension provided by law, is unenforceable thereafter. Claim forms may be obtained from the Register of Wills.

SUSAN AGNES, Personal,
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