



SURVIVING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

DETROIT TO NATION: WE'RE STILL STANDING

By Luther Keith

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The reporter from the national news network wanted to know how Detroiters were coping with the Coronavirus crisis.

Were they worried?

Would the crisis sap the city's comeback spirit?

How were they handling the sudden deaths of prominent community leaders?

Perhaps, I should not have been surprised by the line of questioning.

After all, the city is now tagged as being one of the "hot spots," for the virus based on the number of infected residents (more than 8,000) and deaths (more than 1,000).

The current crisis comes after surviving the recession of 2008, corruption scandals at City Hall, bankruptcy, a stubbornly high-poverty rate, a public school system trying to stage an academic turnaround, a "comeback" that seeks to be more inclusive of the neighborhoods and longtime residents.

There is no disputing any of that.

But, like we have always done, we are rising to the challenge in this surreal drama that has thrust us all into a real-world disaster movie.

We all must deal with this new reality.

The deaths are numbing, so many people we know, love and cherish. In stunning succession, we have lost Marlowe Stoudamire, only 43 years old, a community servant known for his work with the Skillman Foundation and the Detroit Historical Museum; the affable and dedicated gentle

giant of Detroit State Rep. Issac Robinson, just 44, and funeral home icon and business mogul, O'Neill Swanson, 86, who over four decades has buried Detroit's most famous – Aretha Franklin, Rosa Parks and federal judge Damon J. Keith – as well as thousands of everyday people.

All of this is made more chilling by the learning of the infections of so many people we are personally connected with – friends and family – and the incessant social media reports of celebrity and luminary deaths and infections from all over the world.

Our economy is, in effect, shut down and teetering toward recession. Friend and neighbors have lost their jobs. No one is immune. Restaurants, nightclubs, bars and numerous “nonessential” business are shut down. Our houses of worship are closed. Media companies who are used to covering the story are now part of the story. They are taking financial hits without advertising revenue; reporters and editors are being laid off and furloughed.

Our schools are closed. And, not to be overlooked, our musicians cannot entertain us and soothe our souls at live music venues.

A new phrase, called “social distancing” has entered our lexicon and is now part of our daily lives.

We are working from home, those of us who still can work, and trying not to go stir crazy.

We are told not to go outside, cover our faces to stay safe and stay at home.

Of course, all of this is anathema to all the things that make ARISE Detroit! and so many other churches, community groups and block clubs and powerful forces for positive change and nurturing our community.

We are used to coming together in groups large and small to engage in community service projects, to mentor, to tutor, to teach, to learn to plan, to celebrate and to mourn.

So we have created a new reality, a new normal, to cope and survive.

Our technology has become our lifeline. Instead of meeting in conference rooms, we are meeting by way of conference calls, Zoom, Facebook Live and other digital and virtual platforms to hold our meetings and governmental business.

We are making phone calls to check in with neighbors, friends and family.

We are making food deliveries to seniors and nursing homes; physicians are offering free medical help for the uninsured, some landlords are waiving or deferring payments for renters.

We are donating to a fund to help laid off service workers.

We salute our overwhelmed health care workers – nurses, doctors and physician assistants -- as our heroes.

In thousands of ways, large and small, Detroiters are stepping up. This is who we are. This is what we do.

The virus does not care about your social status, the size of your bank account, your celebrity status, your politics or your beauty.

We are all in this together.

Detroiters understand this.

And we will ARISE again.