



Photographer offers workshops as alternative to street life

Brian Saunders

TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Vernon Ray had an epiphany after attending his younger cousin's funeral. Seeing a young man lose his life, not much older than Ray's son, it was time to give back to the community.

Ray launched Shoot Cameras, Not Guns, a program through his photography studio to teach children, teens, and even adults photography as an alternative to getting involved in street life.

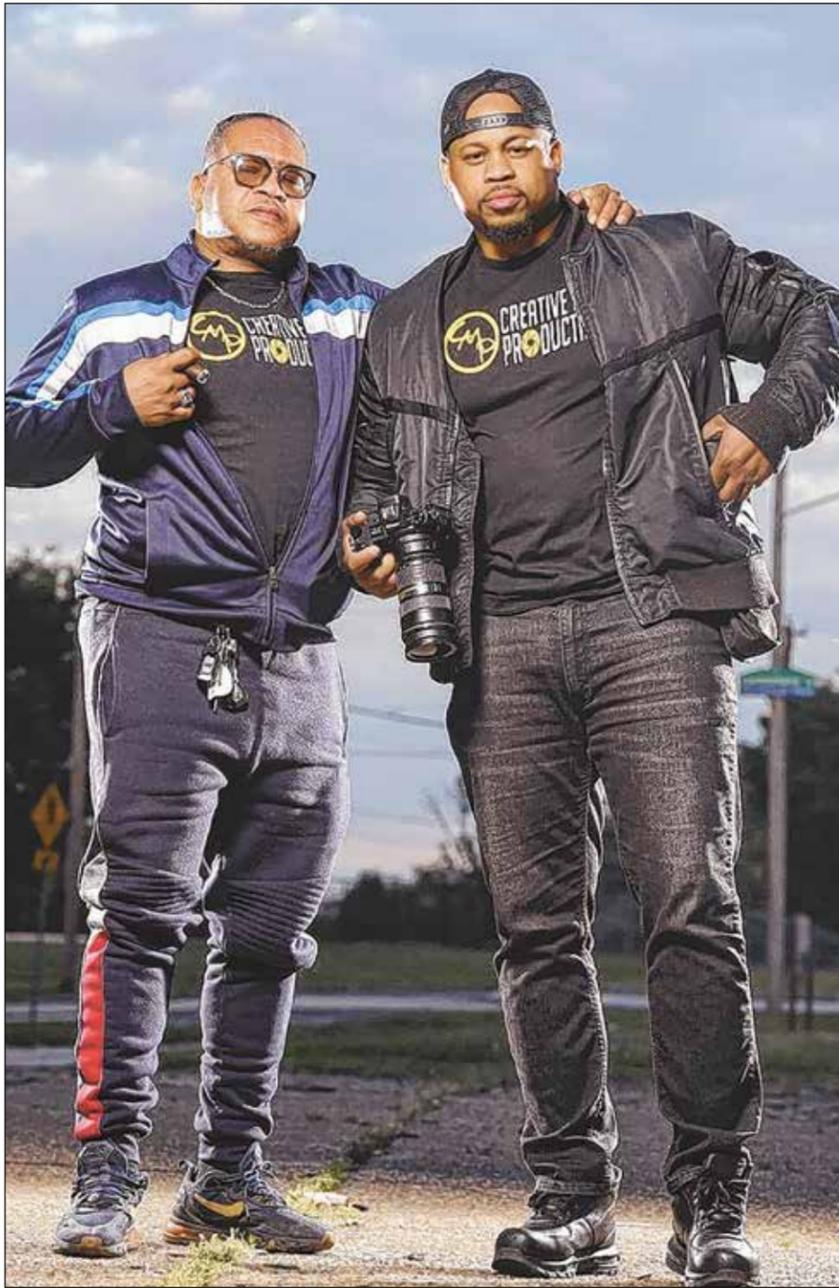
"I called my brother, and I say, 'Yo man, we got to do something man,'" Ray said. "Just like that, I just blurted out 'shoot cameras not guns.'"

From there, Ray got moving quickly. He created a logo, an Instagram account, and a concept video where a child had to choose between carrying a gun or picking up a camera. The caption on the video read, "60% of our youth rather get caught with it (guns) than without it. It's time to show them a new way, shoot cameras, not guns."

Ray lost another cousin in 2021, who was working to change his life and looked up to him. He got involved with the photography studio and even participated in workshops before being shot and killed.

Ray had to lower his cousin's body into the grave. This experience reaffirmed he needed to keep pushing his program to sway people towards photography over being involved with guns.

"Because I was so passionate about seeing a change, I started offering more free workshops," Ray said. "I got to do something. They need the help. I offered more free workshops, buying cameras and equipment with my own money because I didn't want to see



T. Anthony Crawford, left, and Vernon Ray. Ray piloted a Philadelphia program, Shoot cameras, not guns, "to fight against gun violence and directly change the mindset of our traumatized community through giving a different option through photography." —SUBMITTED PHOTO

another young brother end up like that."

Just last week, one of the teenage boys Ray mentors through the program was shot and killed after he gave a monologue about violence

prevention. Ray said the trauma from that murder is why his program must be successful. The program works, but he needs people to come together and support the movement.

With over 1,000 homicides in Philadelphia since January 2020, Ray said that Philadelphia is in a state of emergency and offering

WORKSHOPS » 4A



The African Methodist Episcopal Church's annuity investment department is based in Memphis, Tenn. —GOOGLE MAPS PHOTO

AME Church halts payouts to retirees amid investigation

Chanel Hill

TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, one of the country's largest Black Protestant denominations, has halted making payments to retired ministers on its pension plan.

According to a news report, the AME Church, which has 2.5 million members, suspended the pension payments of retirees after it found possible financial irregularities in the denomination's pension fund.

In a news release, the church stated that an outside law firm is handling the case and they are also working with law enforcement to investigate a possible crime.

The release also said the church will have the report available publicly upon its receipt. However, the church has not revealed how much money is in question.

"The AME Church takes this crime seriously," the church said. "We're also committed to making every fund participant whole by restoring their full investment plus interest."

Concerns about the pension fund had been circulating for months. In December, church leaders told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that problems with the pension fund were discovered during a leadership transition in the retirement services department, which serves about 5,000 retired clergy and church workers.

"Out of an abundance of caution, we immediately engaged outside legal counsel and forensics experts to conduct an independent and comprehensive investigation into holdings managed by the

AME » 4A

City Council sounds off on gun violence

Brian Saunders

TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, D-3rd District, recalled a traumatic experience involving gunfire during Thursday's City Council session.

While leaving a banquet for We Embrace Fatherhood, a community organization, Gauthier and a friend heard gunshots ring off last weekend.

"We waited out the shooting, ducked down on the floor of my car," Gauthier said. "There were so many shots. And to be honest, I thought the bullets were going to hit the car. I thought we were going to die that day. But all I could do was pray and wait for the shooting to stop. And by the grace of

God, we were unharmed and managed to drive away."

Gauthier shared her experience not for pity, but to highlight how out of control gun violence in Philadelphia has become over the past two years.

Since Jan. 1, 2020, there have been 1,175 homicides in Philadelphia, and 1,032 were gun-related. Gauthier said her firsthand experience reminds her of the trauma Philadelphians go through daily. Just in 2022, there have been 465 shooting victims and 114 homicides.

Gauthier said she has friends who are considering moving away from the city — an option that not everyone can afford.

COUNCIL » 4A

Slap at Oscars mars proud night for Black Philadelphians

Will Smith's slap 'was heard around the world'

Stephen Williams

TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

It was supposed to be a night when Philadelphia celebrated two native sons — two Black men — winning the Oscar on the same night and when another Black man, Will Packer produced Hollywood's biggest awards show.

After all it was just a few years ago, when the Oscars were criticized for being virtually all white.

On Sunday, Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson of the Philadelphia-founded hip-hop band the Roots won the documentary feature Academy Award for his "Summer of Soul," a concert film he called a celebration of "Black joy."

And Will Smith won the best actor statue for "King Richard," the biopic that tells the story of Richard Williams, the father of



Will Smith accepts the award for best performance by an actor in a leading role for "King Richard" during the 94th Academy Awards in Los Angeles on Sunday.

—THE NEW YORK TIMES PHOTO/RUTH FREMSON

tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams.

But before Smith collected his award, a joke by Oscar announcer comedian Chris Rock about Smith's wife Jada Pinkett Smith's close cropped hair resulted in Will Smith walking on stage and slapping Rock in the face. As he went back to his seat in the audience next to his wife, he yelled several profanities to Rock during

the ceremony that had to be bleeped out by U.S. censors.

The incident shocked many in the audience and millions watching around the world. Pinkett Smith has spoken publicly about her struggle with alopecia, an autoimmune disease that causes one's hair to fall out and has no known cure.

"I wish it hadn't happened," said WDAS personality Patty Jackson. "It

was a night to celebrate him (Smith). We really wanted to celebrate not only him but how Philly was represented. I don't even remember what Questlove said (as he accepted his award). It was just crazy."

Jackson said she remembers interviewing Smith in December, during his book tour for "Will".

OSCARS » 4A



"If you feel trapped in a place where you feel scared to go outside or let your kids play at the park, that's an injustice," says Councilmember Jamie Gauthier.

—TRIBUNE PHOTO/ABDUL R. SULAYMAN