

# Baltimore

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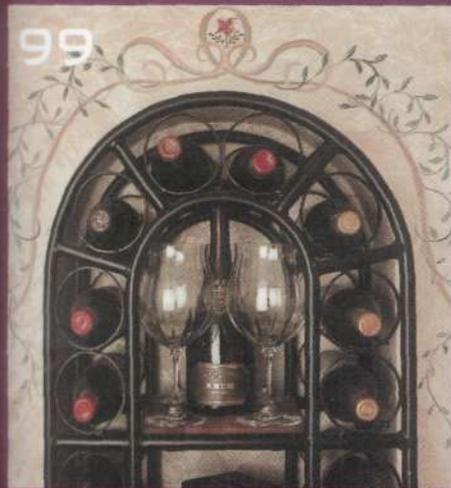
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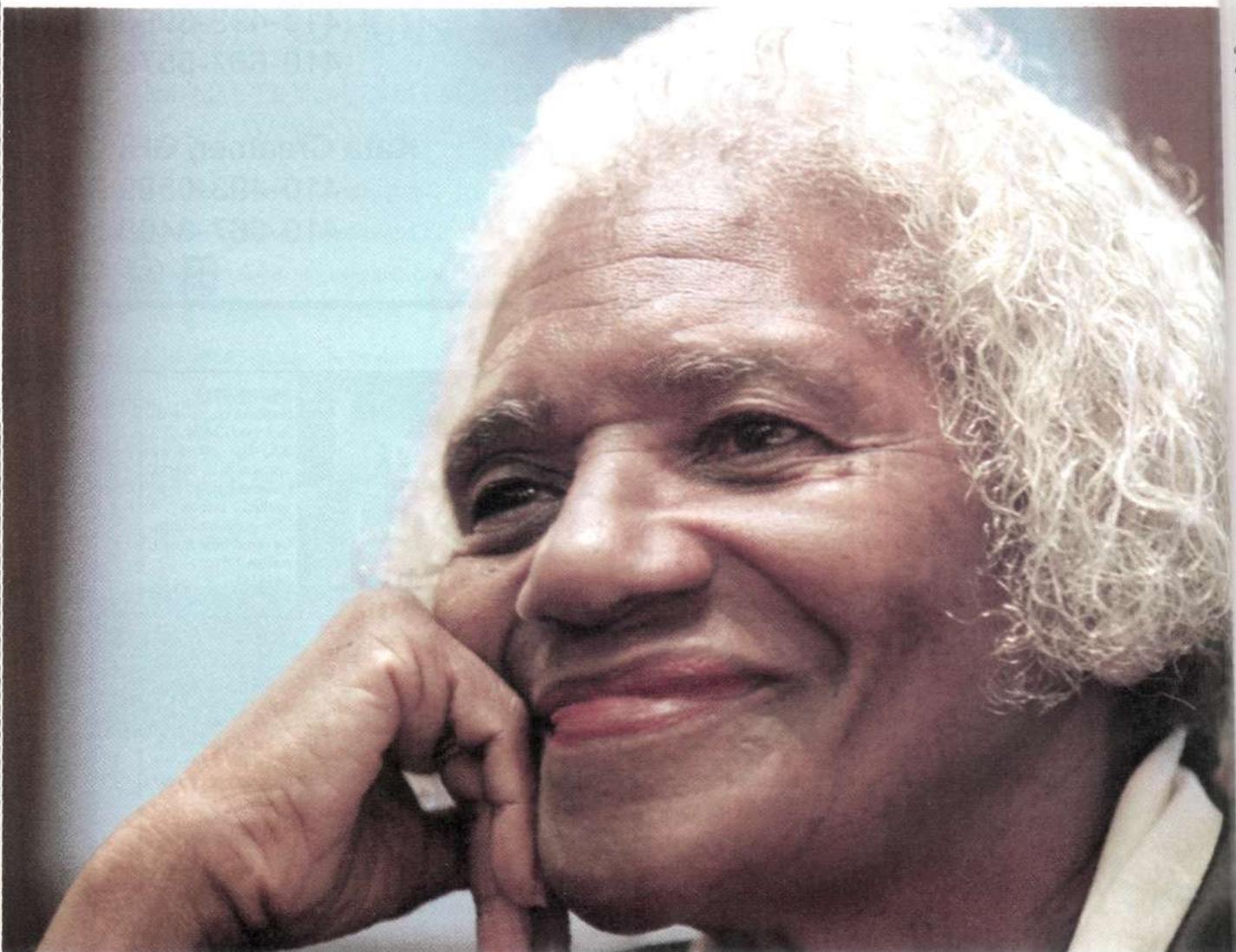
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## The education of Bea Gaddy

For years, legendary crusader for the homeless Bea Gaddy worked effectively outside the system. But now that she's on the Baltimore City Council, will the 67-year-old learn how to operate from the inside? By Jim Brochin

**B**ea Gaddy hobbles into the Baltimore City Council chambers on a warm autumn evening. Her foot is heavily wrapped in a walking cast, and she supports her weight with the help of a brown cane.

"Poor circulation," she explains.

Gaddy's white hair is pulled straight back, and she is dressed smartly in a white-and-black blazer. This is the start of her second year as a city council-

woman. She takes her usual seat in the right-hand corner of the chambers and stares straight ahead, her face impassive. She seems quite small and alone in the ornate room. While other Council members scurry about, making last minute deals and forming alliances, Gaddy sits quietly and speaks to no one.

After more than a year on the Council, Gaddy has yet to truly find her way around City Hall. She's doesn't have a great rap-

port with her fellow legislators and they, in turn, feel they haven't gotten to know her.

"We've never met together to discuss a single strategy to benefit the district," says her Second District colleague Bernard C. "Jack" Young.

There's no arguing that Gaddy has been an extremely vigorous and passionate advocate for the poor. And most agree that her potential as a councilperson is tremendous.

**A sympathetic ear:** To many of her constituents, Bea Gaddy is a politician they can really trust.

"She's closer to the very poor than anyone else," says Mayor Martin O'Malley. "She can be instrumental in finding a better way to provide homeless services."

But grassroots community work and legislative work are two different creatures.

"She has to figure out where she can make a difference," says O'Malley.

And, from a legislative perspective, Gaddy hasn't quite figured that out yet. Of the four bills that she has introduced, one was the controversial African-American reparations resolution, which calls on the U.S. Congress to consider granting descendants of slaves compensation for their families' suffering.

"I was asked by a constituent to put this bill in," explains Gaddy. "I'm not looking for money for descendants of slaves, but rather free housing, free education, free health care, and free graves."

City Council President Sheila Dixon says that Gaddy's resolution, while laudable, is a bit unrealistic.

"A change [like that] has to come on the federal level," Dixon says.

Like everyone else in the City Council, Dixon has enormous respect for Gaddy. But she echoes the sentiments of many when she says, "[Gaddy] has to assess what her priorities are and make a decision if she wants to be a legislator or not."

ASK GADDY IF SHE WANTS TO BE A legislator and brace yourself for her reaction. You see, Gaddy still adamantly believes she rightfully won a council seat in the 1991 election, when she was narrowly edged out by Paula Johnson Branch after the official count was finalized. Nine years later, she still won't stop talking about it.

"They should repay me for lost wages since '91!" she fumes.

It should all be a moot point now, right? Gaddy was the leading vote-getter for the Second Councilmanic District in 1999. She didn't only win. She won handily. So why can't she put the 1991 experience behind her? Why does she still feel cheated? To understand that, you have to understand a little bit about Bea Gaddy.

Homeless until she was 18, Gaddy pulled herself off the streets of New York City through "prayer and self-actualization," as she puts it. She moved to Baltimore

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**Above:** Gaddy shares an uncharacteristically light moment with her fellow Council members. **Below:** Gaddy chats with constituent James Richardson

in 1964. Here, she decided that the best way to conquer her own past was to help others, so she set up an emergency food pantry. She talked to churches, schools, and businesses, asking them to contribute to her pantry. It worked. She has spent the past two decades as a champion of the poor and marginalized in Baltimore. The numerous awards and acknowledgments she has garnered include being one of President George H. W. Bush's "1,000 Points of Light" and being named one of the "Women Who Made A Difference" by *Family Circle* magazine in 1991.

But when you've raged against the system for so many years, it's hard to know how to fight from inside City Hall.

WHEN BEA GADDY WALKS DOWN Collington Avenue, she is greeted like a conquering hero. People wave and shout encouragement. They reach out to squeeze her hand.

One thing's for sure: The people of the Second District feel as if they now have someone fighting for them on the inside.

Joan Floyd, the founding director of the Remington Neighborhood Alliance, says that she's already seen a difference since Gaddy took office: "In August, she did a walkabout with us in the neighborhood

from 23rd Street to Cresmont Avenue. There was a real sense of support and understanding from her. She was encouraging us to empower ourselves as a neighborhood. We got the sense that as we improved the neighborhood, she would be right there with us. Her presence is a real plus."

When you look at it that way, Bea Gaddy has been doing her own version of "constituent" work for the last 20 years (minus the salary), whether it be feeding the homeless or obtaining school supplies

and uniforms for underprivileged children. When Gaddy was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998 (she is currently in remission), some of her first thoughts were for other women: How much do they know about early detection? How can she educate them about this disease? As a result, Gaddy is raising the funds to



*Political writer Jim Brochin is a frequent contributor to "B-Side."*

On her turf: Bea Gaddy makes a point as she leans on boxes of donated food at her Collington Avenue office.



ordered treatment, they get sent to jail. And she wants the judges to start with her adult son, who she recently learned has become addicted to heroin.

"Here I am helping everyone else, and I can't even control what's going on in my own house," she sighs. "I want you to publish this about my son because if it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone."

But Bea Gaddy can't do all of this alone. And if she wants to be a powerful and effective City Council member, she needs to learn to work well with others.

Explains former State Senator and radio talk-show host Larry Young: "She has alienated [colleagues Bernard] Young and [Paula] Branch with her aloofness. It would be politically prudent of her to make the first step towards reconciliation."

All of this is pretty overwhelming to the 67-year-old Gaddy.

"I guess it hasn't hit me that I'm a councilwoman," she admits. "I don't understand the power I now have, and legislatively I'm going to have to learn my way." E

establish the Bea Gaddy Cancer Outreach Center, a nonprofit outreach and support facility for cancer patients.

And just because she hasn't quite mastered City Hall, that doesn't mean she doesn't have some very definite ideas on how to make Baltimore a better place to live.

"I want to bring back community schools that are open at night to teach

sewing, cooking, and reading to adults," Gaddy says. She also wants all schoolchildren to have uniforms, so kids don't make fun of others for the clothes they wear. She wants to act as an enforcer of the Civilian Review Board to make sure the Baltimore City Police treat her constituents fairly.

Most of all, Bea Gaddy wants judges to crack down harder on drug addicts, so that if they don't show up for court-



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