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**YMCA of Metropolitan Washington Receives DC DOCS Partnership Grant for Documentary Film: The Life and Legacy of Anthony Bowen**

Local resident, civil rights activist and leader founded first African American Y in the nation

in Washington, D.C.

**WASHINGTON – March 2, 2021 –-**The YMCA of Metropolitan Washington just announced that it is a recipient of a 2020 DC Documentary (DC DOCS) Partnership Grant. The grant will be used for a short documentary on the remarkable life and legacy of Anthony Bowen, a Washington, D.C. resident, civil rights activist and leader who founded the first African American YMCA in the nation. The Y, now part of the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington, is currently known as the YMCA Anthony Bowen (1325 Anthony Bowen Way, NW.)

Anthony Bowen was born into slavery in Prince George’s County, Md. in October 1809. Determined to build his life as a free man, he moonlighted as a painter and bricklayer and earned enough money to purchase his freedom in 1830 for $425. Shortly after, he purchased his wife’s freedom. They moved to Southwest D.C. where he became the first Black clerk in the U.S. Patent Office—despite having no formal education.

“In 1853 and one year after the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington was founded, Rev. Anthony Bowen organized the first-ever African American YMCA. YMCA Anthony Bowen was a social and cultural center for Washington’s African American community throughout the 1900s,” explained Angie Reese-Hawkins, president and CEO of the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington. “The Anthony Bowen Y eventually became part of the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington.”

As a civil rights activist and leader, Bowen’s home in the 900 block of E Street SW, was an underground railroad station. He is said to have built an extra attic to hide runaway slaves. In 1839, he helped set up a meeting house for free Blacks at 7th and D streets SW and, in 1840, he won a contract making and filling seed packets. This allowed him to hire many freed Blacks for well-paying jobs. In 1841, he assisted in the formation of a Colored Building Association to help freed slaves in obtaining homes. During the Civil War, Bowen encouraged President Abraham Lincoln to enlist African American soldiers. As an educator and leader, he helped form one of the few schools for freed Blacks.

Over the years, the YMCA Anthony Bowen was the gathering place for many notable historic figures including Martin Luther King, Dr. Charles Drew, Duke Ellington and Marcus Garvey.

As a religious leader, Bowen was an active member of the church and he eventually became a reverend. In 1856, he helped establish the St. Paul A.M.E. Church on E St. SW, which served as an underground railroad station, school for escaped slaves and a house of worship.

Under the project direction of the YMCA Anthony Bowen Executive Director, Diane Taitt, and the film direction of John Ledbetter at Sunchase Media, the documentary will reveal an intimate and poetic reflection on the life and influence of Bowen. The documentary will also tell the story of a charismatic and compelling man of enormous courage and conviction. Bowen accomplished so much in his lifetime and at great personal risk.

Bowen’s work lives on in the mission of the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington—to foster the development of individuals, families and communities according to the ideals of inclusiveness, equality and mutual respect for all.

“We are honored to be founded by this amazing individual,” said Reese-Hawkins in reference to Bowen. “This documentary will not only tell the story of this remarkable man but will also reinforce the Y’s principals of mutual respect and equality.”

The film is expected to be released this summer when it will be accessible throughout neighborhoods of Washington, D.C.; cultural institutions, schools and area Y’s.

For more information on the Y’s programs, services and locations, go to www.ymcadc.org.

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**About YMCA of Metropolitan Washington**  
The YMCA of Metropolitan Washington is a non-profit 501©3 charity organization that has been serving the communities and families of Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia in the areas of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, for nearly 168 years. Through opportunities in wellness, aquatics, youth sports, summer camps, childcare and more, the Y engages more than 250,000 individuals and families. Visit [www.ymcadc.org](http://www.ymcadc.org) for more information. Members are asked to stay with the Y during this critical time to maintain charitable services for every community. #StayWithUs