

Robert “Bob” Wynn and Climb USA

The Long View of Creating Wealth



Bob Wynn, the founder and CEO of Climb USA, has been promoting wealth development in Madison’s Black community and beyond for over 40 years.

By Jonathan Gramling

Part 2 of 2

Robert “Bob” Wynn, the founder and CEO of Climb USA, a financial literacy and youth investment non-profit located in the Urban League’s Black Business Hub, was almost eased into his passion for promoting investment as a path to wealth development and management. Wynn became a labor lawyer with the UAW after graduating from the University of Michigan Law School in the area of real estate and wills. And over the past 40 years plus, his career has slowly and methodically — almost like wealth development itself — turned in the direction of helping the Black community and others build generational wealth.

While Wynn was primarily engaged in minority business development. He noticed the impact that wealth development had on the people whom he served and became a proponent of investment clubs where a group of people come together, study the stock market and each pay in \$25 per month to mutually purchase stock. At one point, Wynn felt he had better formalize his credential, since the knowledge he had picked up was informal.

“As I started talking to more people about investing, I thought that I should verify my assumption that I knew what I should know if I am going to be speaking about investing in the industry,” Wynn observed. “So I ended up taking this Series of three broker licenses tests. And I passed them. At one point, I thought I was going to go into the wealth management field. And when

you do that, you’re not supposed to actually be a member of an investment club. So I pulled out in the 1990s and did not want to be a part of a club since I was now a licensed professional.”

Wynn left the WI Dept. of Commerce in the late 1990s to work at the newly formed WI Dept. of Financial Institutions and stayed there until 2004. He furthered his efforts to promote generational investment.

“It was during that process that I established Asset Builders of America because the financial education programs that we were creating under the Dept. of Financial Institutions were growing at such a rate that it became more than what the state wanted to continue to manage,” Wynn said. “Rather than just letting those programs dissipate, the thought was, ‘Let’s create a non-profit that can continue to run and manage some of those programs that required meeting with people in the evenings or on Saturdays. That’s when you are trying to reach the moderate to low-income investor. Your programs have to be after work hours or on weekends. That’s what gave rise to Asset Builders. We have a Power Point presentation and one of the slides shows that the African American population was around 12 percent, but the African American population owned about four percent of the nation’s wealth.”

Asset Builders did a lot of work around wealth development. Asset Builders sponsored the Money Conference and a lot of other programs to generate wealth in the Black and other communities. One of the programmatic areas was investment clubs.

“Climb was initiated as a program

under Asset Builders,” Wynn said. “I actually have a report that I can share with you where we promoted the investment club initiative in 2002 when Asset Builders was just getting started. The idea of investment clubs was included in a Chicago Federal Reserve report that was dated February 2002. We were looking to initiate the investment club movement even back then in the early 2000s. But we just never got the momentum that’s needed. Starting a business is not easy. So every investment club is a business. That’s the message that we are trying to get through to the state of Wisconsin, WEDC and others. They are beginning to understand that. It really was an ambitious proposition that we would try to start this proliferation of investment clubs. That meant as a non-profit, we were going to be this ‘chamber of commerce’ just starting investment businesses all over the place. We got about 30 started. Many of them folded and so they didn’t last very long. But there are people today who were part of those initial investment club start-ups. And they thank me because they did learn a lot in that short time as a part of that program.”

In 2019, Asset Builders went through a strategic planning process. In essence, the investment club movement was let go while Asset Builders focused on populations that were more in tune with investment. Wynn wanted to focus still on needy populations and established Climb USA.

“Now, we don’t refer to them as investment clubs because trying to get more people in the policy arena and the thought leadership arena to understand that these are businesses,” Wynn said. “We refer to them as Community-Based Investment Enterprises. Now it has more of an appreciation for other government-sponsored entities such as the Community Development Financial Institutions that many people refer to as CDFIs. That has gotten government-approval status. By Community-Based Investment Enterprises, we are trying to promote the CBIE initiative and see if we can get that to have government status at some point. We don’t have it yet, but WEDC has provided some support to us.”

The Community-Based Investment Enterprises (CBIE) are for-profit business entities that are subject to federal and state tax laws. But they are streamlined and only realize a “profit” when stocks and investments are sold and not while they accrue value.

And the wealth accrual is a slow process. These are not “get rich quick” schemes. There are no “high-risk” investments.

“We are very long-term oriented in the investments that we make,” Wynn said. “You only pay taxes on realized gains. You don’t pay taxes on unrealized gains. There is always a K-1 that has to be filed for each member at the end of the tax year. But it’s very minimal in terms of the impact on the members’ taxes because we’re always very con-

scious of any sort of sale that we might make in a given stock. The first stock that my family club bought was Microsoft and we still own it. Apple is another one we bought. We did sell a portion of it because Apple split seven for one. And we sold a portion of it and then we’ve had a couple of withdrawals, so there has been some allocation of tax gains. But sometimes they can be offset by selling something at a loss. So we kind of manage the tax outcome that way.”

While it takes a long-term approach, none the less, these entities do accumulate wealth, which translates into its members having more options in life.

“The second case study club is my family club,” Wynn said. “I told my family I can’t be a hypocrite and help the community and my whole family isn’t doing this. We got started and even our children were members. And the parents and some of the relatives would put in money for the children. So they were putting in their requisite \$25 per month as well. Our family club has about \$240,000 and that is after over \$100,000 has been taken out. You add up everything that has been put in and it is no more than \$100,000. We put in \$100,000 and took out \$100,000 and we have a portfolio that’s valued at about \$240,000.”

Wynn continues to apply these principles to his own life. When his mom died, he made an investment on behalf of his nephews.

“I have always been fascinated with compounding,” Wynn said. “My mom died in the early 1990s. I told my wife, ‘Let’s just take \$1,000 and sock it away for the benefit of our four nephews. We’re going to put it in a 20th Century Growth Fund.’ They were 9-11-years-old. We were going to lock it up longer than the time it would take for them to be in college. We wanted this to be post-college money. We would see what it grew to. We decided to let it mature on June 19th. It was like 2016. When it unlocked, we were able to send a check of \$2,700 to each of our four nephews. They said, ‘Wow! Why is Uncle Bob sending us \$2,700 each?’ They each did different things with it. I was hoping they would do a project together. It was \$1,000 that we put away and absolutely forgot about it for two decades. And then when it matured, it was about \$12,000 that we were able to divvy out to the nephews.”

Wynn continues to encourage people to make big-picture, long-term investments. These are not going to make someone rich overnight. That kind of investing makes someone else rich. Wynn is interested in generational wealth development.

“Sometimes wealth gets a bad rap,” Wynn said. “We promote wealth because your range of choices in what you can do in your life is correlated to the amount of wealth that you have. ‘To invest is to take a risk. Not to invest is to take a bigger risk.’ That’s something that See Climb USA on Page 13 —————

EV Charging is Easier Than You May Think

From Madison Gas and Electric Company (MGE)

Electric vehicles (EVs) are gaining popularity as a cleaner and more sustainable option to internal combustion engine cars. One of the key advantages of EVs is how easy they are to fuel up.

Experts estimate that around 80% to 90% of EV charging happens at home. One way to charge your EV at home is to use a standard 120-volt household electrical outlet and the charging cable that comes with the car. That’s right—the same outlet that you use for your smartphone can charge your EV. A standard outlet will charge your EV at about five miles an hour, or around 50 miles overnight, which is typically enough for the average commuter or city driver.

For faster home charging, consider MGE’s Charge@Home program, which provides customers with a Level 2 charger. Participating customers pay a monthly fee of about \$20 with no upfront costs for standard installation plus the cost of electricity. MGE coordi-

notes the installation and maintains the charger. Level 2 chargers operate at 240 volts—the same as a clothes dryer. They can add up to 30 miles of charge per hour.

The fastest type of charging, Level 3 or DC Fast Charging, can replenish a substantial portion of your battery in a matter of minutes, making long road trips more efficient. A network of highway fast chargers is continuing to expand, providing more convenient charging options for long-distance driving. When you need to charge up quickly in the Madison area, you can charge with renewable energy at any of MGE’s more than 50 public charging stations. MGE’s public charging network includes its EV Fast-Charging Hub in the Capitol East District in downtown Madison.

EV drivers enjoy the simplicity of plugging in their vehicles at home or using conveniently located public charging stations, all while contributing to a greener, more sustainable future.

With the variety of EV options and the accessibility of charging continuing to grow, the transition to electric transportation has never been easier.

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Climb USA From Page 11

I don't think people totally appreciate. The stock market is at an all-time high. If you're a part of the investor class, you're just riding along with the thriving growth in the economy in general. But if you're not, then you are literally just walking away leaving money on the table. And over a long period of time, that is what non-investors are doing. It's just like that Apple stock that we bought. I'm sure we didn't pay more than \$5,000

with it. And when it peaked before we sold some, that \$5,000 had grown to \$55,000. It took 2-3 decades. But we just sat and waited."

and the economic power — that the people in your family coming after you face. Wealthy families have understood this since the founding of the United States. Bob Wynn and Climb USA hope that you will understand this too.

Africa Fest From Page 7

And in front of them on tables will be different implements that are used in everyday African life.

This year, the tent will feature banners depicting the 25 years of Africa Fest. And in front of them on tables will be different implements that are used in everyday African life.

"Africa Fest is a symbol of our community, symbol of togetherness of the African people and their friends and to showcase our cultures through this event in the Madison and Dane County area," Vasongi said. "The African continent is one of the richest continents in terms of culture, tradition, and more. In this short writ-up we will be discussing African cooking utensils. African cooking utensils like other artifacts are loaded with rich history, diverse cultures and traditions. They are of varying sizes and designs based on the different parts of the continent. These tools are made from natural materials such as clay, wood, bamboo and raffia. All these reflect the connection to the land. These utensils have been crucial for food preparation for years. They include and are not limit-

ed to cooking spoons, bowls, folks, serving spoons, plates, storage containers, mortar and pestles, baskets, fishing tools, pots, and more."

The exhibit will also feature some traditional clothing.

"Cowries shells were used as currency in Africa for decades," Vasongi said. "During marriage introductions, it symbolizes beauty, fertility, and prosperity. Cowries are incorporated in wedding attires, hair dos, and decorations. Bridal aprons are very significant among the Ndebele people of South Africa. This symbolizes the bride's transition into marriage and fertility. The groom's family presents the bride with a plain apron which she would embroider with bold designs. These aprons are worn during ceremonial occasions."

Through its food, arts and crafts, clothing, exhibits and of course the musical and dance performances, each year Africa Fest is just a taste of the diversity of Africa and what it has to offer. It is only through coming back year after year that one's hunger for knowledge about Africa begins to be satiated. Come out to McPike Park on August 16th for a taste of all that Africa has to offer.

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Happenings From Page 12

17 (Field House Entrance). This free event, organized by the VAHS Black Student Union, is open to the public and designed to help families get ready for a great school year while celebrating community, culture, and connection. The event will feature free community resources, vaccinations provided by Walmart (Parent/guardian must be present; health insurance card required), free vision screening provided by the Lions Club, and school supplies, information booths, and more to help kick off the year. No RSVP is necessary. All Verona Area residents are welcome.

Hub Saturday Market

Every Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., the Hub Saturday Market transforms into a lively celebration of local talent, creativity, and entrepreneurship. This weekly pop-up event brings together a diverse array of small businesses, each showcasing their unique products—from handcrafted goods and artisanal treats to fashion, wellness items, and more. The atmosphere is electric with community spirit. Visitors can stroll through colorful booths, meet passionate business owners, and discover one-of-a-kind finds that you won't see anywhere else. It's more than just shopping—it's about supporting dreams and building connections. Whether you're a local or just passing through, the Hub Saturday Market is a must-visit. Come for the products, stay for the people, and leave inspired.

Plays at American Players Theater In the Hill Theatre

A Midsummer Night's Dream By William Shakespeare; Directed by David Daniel A sparkling and poetic pop-up book, bursting across the sylvan Hill stage, propelled by magic, romance and the very best kind of mischief. June 7 – October 4.

In the Touchstone Theatre

'ART' By Yasmina Reza, Adapted by Christopher Hampton, Directed by Jackson Gay A wickedly funny look at friendship, flaws and all, overflowing with wit and charm and plenty of snark. An artful debate that will leave you laughing. June 13 - September 28.

The Death of Chuck Brown, Written & Directed by Gavin Dillon Lawrence; Choreography by Victor Musoni. A vibrant elegy for a community in transition, funny and rhythmic and raw. Grab a seat for this powerful world premiere in the Touchstone. June 24 – September 25.

Tickets for the full season are now on sale. Find more information at americanplayers.org, or call the APT Box Office at 608-588-2361.

Wisconsin Union Theater

The Wisconsin Union Theater (WUT) team has announced its 2025-2026 season, continuing its tradition of presenting a diverse arts lineup with a season of music, dance, theater, and comedy events, for which patrons can currently purchase subscriptions. Single ticket sales will begin June 24. The season includes the Jazz Series, the 106th Classical Series, and a variety of performances across many genres, including Brazilian jazz, Afropop, modern dance, multimedia theater, and comedy. Patrons can purchase tickets online, in person at the Memorial Union Box Office, or by phone at (608) 265-2787.

Cafe CODA

8/16 Sat 2 p.m. Kirtan with Swami Aamod?? \$0

8/16 Sat 2 p.m. Tango Class/Social??? \$15/5

8/16 Sat 10 p.m. Africa Festival After Party w/ DJ Lyriks

8/19 Tue 7:30 p.m. Salsa Night - Bachata Lesson / Dance Social (8:30PM) \$10

8/19 Tue 7 p.m. Tango Night w/ Madison Tango Society (back room) \$10

8/20 Wed 7 p.m. CODA Karaoke \$0

8/20 Wed 7:30 p.m. Swing Night w/ Jumptown (back room) \$10

8/26 Tue 7:30 p.m. Salsa Night - Bachata Lesson (7:30 PM) / Dance Social (8:30PM) \$10

8/26 Tue 7 p.m. Tango Night w/ Madison Tango Society (FRONT room) \$10

8/27 Wed 7 p.m. CODA Karaoke \$0

8/28 Wed 7:30 p.m. Swing Night w/ Jumptown (back room) \$10

8/28 Thur 7 p.m. closed

8/29 Fri 7 p.m. Tani Diakite & Afrofunsters \$15

8/29 Fri 10 p.m. AfroVibe DJ Dance \$20

Black Parents Summit 2025

We are excited to invite you to the Black Parents Summit 2025 — a powerful gathering dedicated to supporting the success of Black students and families in our community, on Saturday, Sept. 20, Noon-3 p.m., @ Madison College, 2429 Perry St., Madison, WI 53713Lunch will be provided. Join us for an afternoon of open dialogue with Black educational experts on how we can best support our children's academic and personal growth. This is an opportunity to raise concerns, share solutions, and build stronger partnerships between families and educators. Space is limited, so please register by Sept. 15, using the QR code or this link: <https://tinyurl.com/BlackParentsSummit2025>.

2025 Community Change-Maker Awards

On September 11, Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) will honor local leaders and organizations who are advancing social and environmental justice in our community. At a time when many organizations are shying away from diversity, equity, inclusion, sustainability, LGBTQ+ rights, and other social justice issues, Community Shares of Wisconsin and its nearly 70 member nonprofits are proud to honor leaders who champion these causes and continue to do what is right. The event will take place at The East Side Club in Madison. The public is invited to attend the event. Tickets purchased in support of this event help Community Shares award \$6,000 in donations to local nonprofits. Each of the six award winners will select a nonprofit to receive a \$1,000 donation. Tickets are a suggested donation of \$50. To sponsor the event or purchase tickets, visit communityshares.com.

MSCR Announces Fall Softball and Kickball Leagues

Madison School & Community Recreation (MSCR) has opened registration for its popular adult fall softball and kickball leagues, offering five weeks of friendly competition and camaraderie.

Games will be held Monday through Thursday evenings at Olbrich and Goodman Fields starting September 2. If kickball is more your speed, the Fall Kickball League is also accepting registrations until July 27. For only \$25 per person, join the action starting September 2, with games played on Tuesdays at Olbrich. Don't have a team? No problem! MSCR offers a free agent list to connect individual players with teams looking for members. Teams and free agents can register and find more information at mscrsportsleagues.org.

Rhumba 4 Rainbow

The Rainbow Project presents Madison's Premier Charity Gala to prevent child abuse and violence, on Friday, September 19, 7 p.m.-midnight, @ the Exhibition Hall, Monona Terrace, 1 John Nolen Drive, Madison. Advance tickets: General \$50; Select \$95; Premium \$125. Visit: www.therainbowproject.net.

Learn About America

Child enrichment program, age 6-10, free. Learn US history, heritage, national songs, holidays, arts @ Goodwill Community Room, 2901 N. Sherman Ave, Madison. Meets twice monthly, 2nd and 4th Tuesday (except Dec. 23), 3:00-4:00 p.m., doors open at 2:30. To sign up or receive additional information, contact Tara: tara.learnaboutamerica@gmail.com