



portfolio

Bridget N. Locke
Longform Articles
2019-2022

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A 'League' of Her Own

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, March 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/a-league-of-her-own/>



Photo credit:

Park Sports Information

March is Women's History Month, a time when the innumerable contributions of women to world history are more intentionally studied, recognized and honored. At Park University, we have history makers of our own to celebrate.

One such trailblazer is Ashley Jones, Park's varsity esports coach.

In July 2018, Park became the first college/university in the Kansas City area to announce the offering of a varsity esports program, starting with the Spring 2019 semester. After an extensive nationwide search, Ashley was hired for the head coaching position.

In January, Ashley began coaching Carin Bublitz, Johnny Carrasco, Nic Gresham, Yewon Lee, Laura Passler, Vince Payne, and Jake Watson, the University's "League of Legends" team, but she has been passionate about esports since its inception. In fact, playing "League of Legends" was one way that Ashley found a sense of community and a circle of friends as a college student.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Florida in 2013, Ashley was certain she wanted a career in esports, but found few career opportunities in the industry that were right for her at the time.

While waiting, she took volunteer positions with private esports organizations to gain experience and exposure. As viable career opportunities opened up, she started a job search and narrowed down what she wanted:

"Coaching esports at the collegiate level became my dream."

Nick Carter, Ashley's former supervisor at the University of Florida, served as a mentor during this period of professional and personal discovery.

"Mr. Carter offered me a position in the Information Technology Department, even though I had no prior IT experience. He hired me because of my work ethic. He believed I could take on any task that he assigned and always pushed me to be the best versions of myself, professionally and personally. He understood my passion for esports and supported my dreams in pursuing it as a career."

Go for it!

Although there remains a national conversation about the lack of gender diversity in the sport (["Esports is](#)



Photo credit: Park Sports Information

[getting bigger every year, so where are all the women?"](#) *Variety* recently asked), Ashley feels fortunate to have experienced no negative issues in her career and is proud to coach Park's first varsity co-ed esports team.



Ashley (front row, center), with team members (back row, l-r): Jake Watson, Vince Payne, Carin Bublit, Nic Gresham, Johnny Carrazco, and (front row, l-r) Yewon Lee and Laura Passler. Photo credit: Park Sports Information

"The community has been supportive from the beginning," she shared.

Still, if Ashley could offer words of wisdom to other women considering an esports career, Ashley would offer the same encouragement she received.

"Go for it! Work hard, keep your head down, and push through any negativity that might come your way," Ashley advised. "If it is something you are passionate about and you want it badly enough, it is all worth it when you finally end up exactly where you want to be."

Interested in seeing Park's esports team in action? Their inaugural League of Legends season just ended, but the team will be joining new tournaments soon. Check [Park.edu/esports](https://park.edu/esports) often for updated [schedule information](#), and be sure to follow them on Twitch at twitch.tv/parkesports, catch streams of their matches by following [Park Athletics](#) on YouTube, or stop by the Parkade Battlegrounds on the Parkville Campus.

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Living, Learning and Catching Fish

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, December 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/living-learning-and-catching-fish/>



Brittany Wagner isn't one for excuses—and she comes by it honestly.

"I don't ever let anyone tell me that I cannot do something," Brittany said. "There's a popular proverb that reads: 'If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; if you teach a man to fish, he will eat for a lifetime.' When I was growing up, my mom's favorite saying was, 'I'm not going to give you a fish.' She taught me early that the best way to be self-sufficient is to learn to do things for myself. I was raised to believe I could accomplish anything if I worked hard enough."

"Anything" includes graduating from Park University in Fall 2019 with a Bachelor of Science in Social Psychology. Brittany comes by her Park affiliation honestly, too.

Mom showed me

In the late 90s, Heather Bremen was a hardworking single mom who wanted a more meaningful career, so she began taking evening classes at Park. After three years, she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and soon after, earned a Master of Education degree from another institution.

All the while, Heather's daughter Brittany was watching and learning.

"Although Mom worked a lot and my grandparents helped out, I watched her balance it all," Brittany recalled. "She was always available to me. My mom showed me that it's possible to be an adult student who is fully present in life and in learning."

So strong was Heather's example that Heidi Bremen-Schmitz, Heather's sister, decided to attend Park, as well, and graduated in 2007 with a degree in education. Today, the sisters continue to inspire one another; Heather teaches first grade and Heidi teaches second grade in the same elementary school.

Seeing that it was possible to be a working adult—with a real life—and an engaged student was particularly helpful to Brittany, as she began attending classes at Park's Victor Valley Campus Center in 2016. Her determination and personal support system, along with an encouraging University environment, helped her to gain momentum and confidence.

"Park's faculty and staff work hard to ensure that adult learners have the tools they need to succeed. Jo Lewke, my student success coach, helped me sort through class scheduling and so much more. She has always focused on finding solutions to anything that presented a challenge. I have felt supported from day one."



Brittany (center) strikes a holiday pose with her mom Heather (left) and Aunt Heidi (right).

Message for the masses

Every person has a story, Brittany believes, and sometimes, certain elements of those stories instill fear and create reasons to stop pursuing goals before you start.

“I know that some people are afraid to go back to finish college, or they’re too intimidated to begin. I want everyone with doubts to know that they shouldn’t be afraid of higher education. It’s challenging—you have to commit to the learning process and do the work—but it isn’t impossible. In fact, it’s very manageable if you stay focused and remain determined to finish. No matter how long it takes...one small step at a time is still one step closer to graduation.”

It’s possible, Brittany says, even though life will continue to happen:

“During my bachelor program at Park, I have changed jobs, moved to a different state ... once, I lost my homework when my computer crashed so I scrambled to finish an assignment on my phone,” Brittany said. “When you’re determined, there are no excuses. You can’t let anything stop you.”



Left photo: Brittany, in cap and gown, celebrates kindergarten graduation with proud mom Heather.

Right photo: Brittany, Heather and another red carnation at Park’s 2019 Fall Commencement ceremony.

After graduating from Park, Brittany will pursue her master’s degree and plans to open her own marriage and family therapy practice in the future. In the meantime, she is excited to celebrate earning her first higher education degree with those who have encouraged her to keep pressing forward: her husband, her grandparents, her aunt, her Park supporters ... and of course her mom—who is undoubtedly proud of the latest ‘fish’ that Brittany has reeled in.

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No Hill for a Stepper

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, June 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/no-hill-for-a-stepper/>

You can see it in her eyes when she talks about him: Yvette Richards was, is, and always will be a daddy's girl. Although her faith assures her that her father's recent death at age 89 won't separate them forever, it is hard for her to imagine life today without the daily conversations they shared.

"We had strategy sessions every evening," Yvette said, grinning through tears. It is, understandably, bittersweet to reflect on his life in hindsight.

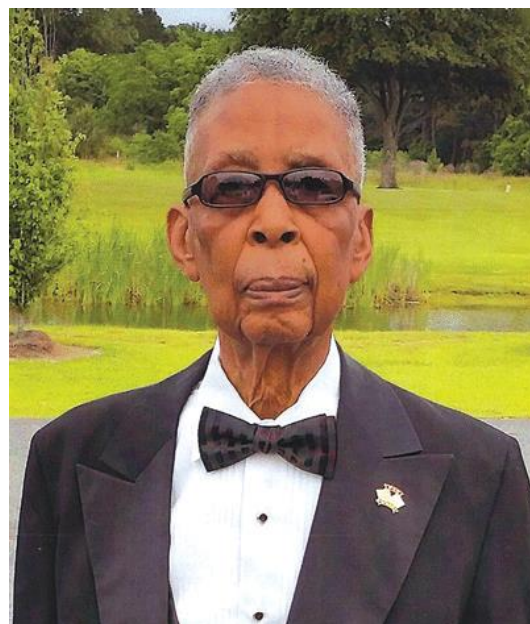
Still, Yvette noticeably beams when recounting his commitment to family, education and community, and his (literal) leaps of faith. Retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 David Forest Richards, Jr., a 1975 Park graduate, was a walking demonstration of service, commitment and historic feats.

"I can do that"

Chief Richards, a Sedalia, Mo. native, joined the U.S. Army in 1946 at age 17 and served in World War II. After a brief career as an apprentice



Chief Richards in action.



The late Chief Warrant Officer 4 David Forest Richards, Jr. (Retired)

mortician, he returned to the Army in 1954, completed airborne training at Fort Benning, Ga. and attended rigger school at Fort Lee, Va. "Daddy witnessed a jump once and said, 'I can do that,' Yvette shared. "He wanted to try it. Fortunately, he received the support of his superiors. That wasn't always the case for young black soldiers in those days."

He served ten years with the 612th Quartermaster Aerial Supply Company, and then transferred to the Arctic Test Center in Fort Greely, Alaska, where he tested airdrop equipment. He was then sent to the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center in Massachusetts, where he helped develop expendable parachutes for the Vietnam War.

Throughout his military career, Chief Richards received numerous awards and decorations, including the Silver Star; Bronze Star; Purple Heart; the Distinguished Order of Saint Martin; and honors from the 555th Parachute Infantry Association, Inc. "Triple Nickels." He was also recognized by the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus for his exemplary military service and, in November 2018, was one of 17 veterans inducted into the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame.

His military career also made history. Upon retirement in 1983, Chief Richards was the first African American inducted into the Parachute Rigger Warrant Officer's Hall of Fame in Fort Lee, Va., Quartermaster Corps, U.S. Army, with over 1,200 airborne jumps logged and over 11,000 parachute operations worldwide without incident as a Master Parachutist.

Think—and live—globally, act locally

As a military family, the Richards clan moved around often.

“Alaska, Massachusetts, Germany ...” recalled Yvette. “Every three years, we were in a new place.”

While constantly uprooting would be taxing for many families, Yvette regards her childhood as surprisingly stable and content—due in large part to her parents’ efforts.

“They gave us stability,” she said. “My brother, sisters and I were involved in regular youth activities because Mommy and Daddy encouraged us to join the Army Youth Association. He coached sports and Mommy coached cheerleading. While we were stationed in Germany, Daddy became the Commissioner of the Manheim Youth Department and helped lead the way for athletic activities and personal development programs to be developed for young people in Germany. He instilled in us the importance of service to the community because he modeled it for us.”

Chief Richards’ post-military career and community service was also a reflection of his belief in community engagement and youth development. As a Savannah, Ga. resident, he spent 12 years as a crime prevention analyst with the City of Savannah Police Department. He also volunteered (often serving in key leadership positions) with multiple community organizations, including 100 Black Men of America, Inc., Gateway Behavioral Health Services, Mental Health Association of the Coastal Empire, and the Chatham County Board of Education. He also served as an educator, teaching business and human resources management courses as an adjunct instructor at Saint Leo University (Fla.); Savannah State (Ga.); Central Texas College (Tex.); and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Fla.).



Chief Richards, Master Parachutist.



Chief Richards as a Park student, circa 1975.

Through all of his accomplishments, Chief Richards held a special place in his heart for his time spent as a Park student pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.

“Daddy was proud to be a Park alum,” Yvette said. “He deeply valued education and appreciated Park’s commitment to the military.”

He also found value in maintaining a spirit of optimism. Because of this, Yvette believes that he will always be remembered for his generous expressions of love, his compassion for others, and his zest for life.

“One of his favorite sayings was, ‘There’s no hill for a stepper.’ He instilled that sense of pride and expectation in our entire family, and in all the communities he served. No matter the depths and heights, no matter the challenge, keep trying. Keep striving. Don’t stop moving.”

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A Seat at the Table

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, May 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/a-seat-at-the-table/>



Isaiah Nichols, a Park U Criminal Justice major, is like many other graduating seniors. When asked about his plans immediately following [commencement](#) on May 11, his eyes light up with joy.

“I cannot wait to celebrate,” Isaiah smiled. “It’s been a long time coming.”

When asked about his plans beyond graduation night, Isaiah’s eyes remain joyful, but his words grow more focused and intentional:

“After I graduate, I’ll move back to Chicago and will apply to become an officer with the Chicago Police Department. I also plan to enroll in graduate school to study Criminal Justice – Law Enforcement. My end game is to be promoted to detective on the force and someday join the Chicago Police Board.”

Struggle and Strain

Although there has been a reported [decrease in crime in Chicago, Ill.](#), it’s no secret that the city has struggled. Isaiah hails from the south side—Englewood, specifically, which is one of more than 70 official neighborhoods in the City of Chicago. While there was a need for officers to engage in his neighborhood because of crime in the area, from as early as he can remember, Isaiah saw and felt the strain in community-police relations. From his perspective, there was a marked absence of police presence during his community’s good moments, and an abundance of distrust when officers came around. In fact, he was impacted personally by the tension.

“When I was younger, I witnessed and experienced harassment,” Isaiah recalls. “Once, when I was coming home from baseball practice, an officer stopped me and asked if I had a gun. When I said, ‘No,’ he pushed me against the wall, searched me and asked if I was a drug dealer. Of course he let me go because I hadn’t done anything wrong.”

This type of experience wasn’t unique to Isaiah. During a family gathering, his older brother was pulled out of a car, thrown on the hood and handcuffed without explanation.

“Those moments were devastating for us,” he said.

But beyond the emotion of the moment, these interactions were disappointing to Isaiah because they spoke to a bigger issue.

“We only experienced interaction with officers in a negative context. I knew there had to be a better way to relate. It gnawed at my conscience.”

Over time, many of Isaiah’s family and peers grew wary and suspicious of the police. But where they saw a lost cause, he saw the potential for change. At age 16, Isaiah—a talented athlete whose popularity at Leo Catholic High School as a college baseball prospect was growing—redirected his attention to a future in law enforcement.

A Seat at the Table

Isaiah came to Park U in 2016 and grew inspired by the insightful, task-oriented instruction he received from his professors. He names [Gregory Plumb, J.D.](#), [John Hamilton, Ph.D.](#) and [Cindy Anderson, Ph.D.](#) as the most academically influential on his time at Park.

“It has been really beneficial to learn from people who have experience in the field you’re studying,” Isaiah said. “It feels as if you’re receiving inside information that you’ll be able to apply as soon as you’ve graduated.”

His biggest personal inspiration has been his mother, Frankie Nichols.

“My mother has survived two strokes and breast cancer. Now, she’s fighting her way back to health after spinal cord surgery. She’s a nurse, and spending all those years on her feet has taken a toll on her body. But she’s a fighter and has saved countless lives. She pushes me to be a fighter. My mother is my biggest inspiration.”

After graduation, Isaiah looks forward to reuniting with his mother, his grandmother (another influential woman in his life to whom he dedicated his academic year) and is eager to begin the lengthy process of applying to the Chicago Police Department.

“Ultimately, I want to level the playing field for everyone in my community. I believe the best way to achieve that is have a seat at the table to better understand the processes and systems that affect all of us. That is the most impactful way to protect and serve.”

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Empowered and Engaged: Jesse's Journey

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, March 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/empowered-and-engaged-jesses-journey/>

From a very early age, Park University junior Jesse Patrick has been determined to figure out how things work.

"It started with watching my brother play video games," Jesse recalled. "I spent hours by his side while he played 'Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.' Everything about it intrigued me; even the basic walking, climbing and attack components. I was determined to learn how it all operated."



Photo credit: Robert Hoops

Jesse's interest in computer technology grew and eventually paved the way to his chosen field of study: Information and Computer Science. As an ICS major, Jesse's natural curiosity and need to understand function and structure serves him well when navigating the program's rigorous math and computer programming curriculum.

His inquisitive nature has also led to other revelations: since Jesse's first day on campus in 2016, he's been focused on figuring out how to make the college experience work best for his development.

"I wasn't very involved in high school," Jesse shared. "When I look back, I realize that time of my life wasn't as satisfying as it could have been. I wanted things to be different in college, so making the most of my time here became a top priority."

For Jesse, "making the most" of his time entailed getting out of his comfort zone to engage with new people, even when it felt awkward. At times, talking to people he didn't know was intimidating. Still, he persevered, and his networking led him to a circle of good friends and University organizations.

In spring 2018, Jesse, a Fides et Labor scholarship recipient, was elected president of Park Student Government Association. In addition to leading PSGA, Jesse serves as president of Park's chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success. He is also a student ambassador and works on campus as a resident assistant.

Last August, Jesse stood on the Graham Tyler Memorial Chapel stage at Park's annual Opening Convocation to address new students. During his remarks, Jesse offered the same words of advice that he continues to apply to his own life: meet new people and get involved.

“As a freshman, I never would have thought that someday I would be president of PSGA, but here I am,” Jesse said. “I encourage all of you to get out of your comfort zones, too. And if you feel like everyone’s a stranger like I felt at first, at least now you know one person ... you know me.”

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Just One Day

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, April 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/just-one-day/>



Xavier Harper, Park University senior, describes himself as an adventurous spirit who enjoys meeting new people and learning new things. His positive perspective is a sign of hard work and determination...and triumph over darker days.

Born in Okinawa, Japan into a military family (both parents are Air Force veterans), Xavier lived in Japan for seven years, then moved to Guam for just over two years. In 2008, his family received orders to come to the states.

“When I attended William Thomas Academy and Sumter High School in South Carolina, I played sports and found a sense of community,” Xavier said. “We had extended family nearby. For the first time, it felt like home.”

Then, when Xavier was 14, his family headed overseas again—this time, to Germany—and everything changed.

“It felt like starting all over. During this time, my father was deployed to Afghanistan. My mom also spent time in Iraq when I was five and seven, and continued to serve there from time to time when I was in high school. I missed my family and my friends and I wasn’t connecting with people in my new school. Eventually, I stopped talking and became withdrawn. I was already a little antisocial and this made it worse.”

While many high schoolers jokingly call lunch their favorite subject, Xavier recalls that time of day being the hardest for him at Ramstein High School because he sat alone and didn’t talk to anyone. Sometimes, he would avoid the lunchroom by walking around the entire school to pass the time. And, even though he returned to a familiar comfort—sports—it didn’t bring him the same joy as before.

Xavier was deeply depressed. At his lowest moment, he became suicidal.

"I was home alone one day and came very close to ending my life. But I kept thinking about my mom and my sister," he recalled, tearfully. "I didn't want them to be the ones to find me."

Xavier finally opened up about his pain, and his mother immediately sought help. After spending time in the hospital and beginning a long term treatment plan for his depression, Xavier eventually began to see the dark clouds lifting.

"It wasn't easy and it's an ongoing process. Over time, 'Just one day' became my mental catchphrase. It was a way to remind myself that things wouldn't always be so hard. Eventually, I would get past the tough days and one day, I would be successful. Until then, I had to take it one day a time. I still say that to myself when times are tough: just one day."

Eventually, Xavier finished high school in Germany and came back to the states for college. Xavier's uncle and former Park track coach Ken Davis encouraged him to transfer from a university in North Carolina and come to Park U.

"When I first arrived, I struggled. My GPA was up and down. But I didn't withdraw this time; I got to know people around campus. I would encourage anyone who is new here to learn to interact with other students and with those who can help you get over whatever obstacles you're facing. Get involved on and off campus. Stay on top of your studies, but get to know the people, too."



Today, Xavier is a starting guard/forward on Park U's developmental men's basketball team. As a health and wellness major, Xavier wants his life to reflect his field of study. He intends to use his experience with depression to encourage others to make mental health a priority.

Doing so saved his life.

"Sometimes, people use sadness and struggles with mental health against you. That's why people don't talk about what they're really going through. I'm sharing my story because I want to empower people to get the help they need."

Editor's note: Are you a Park U student who needs to talk to someone about your feelings? Licensed counselors are available at no charge to Park University students. Click [here](#) to learn more about Park's Counseling Center and Health Services.

Additional resources

- *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (Veteran Line: Press 1)*
- *Mental Health Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741741*
- *SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline: 1-877-726-4727*
- *Military OneSource: 1-800-342-9647*

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Born Leader

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, March 2019

<https://advancing.park.edu/born-leader/>



Ask Wakisha Briggs, Park University's Director of [Continuing Education](#), to describe her demeanor in leadership and life, and she'll offer one word that speaks a thousand:

"Motivated."

In fact, if you spend any amount of time with Wakisha, you'll pick up on her sense of urgency rather quickly. She is friendly, engaging and curious about others, but keenly observant and eager to get to the business at hand.

This down-to-brass-tacks approach may be a remnant of the decades Wakisha spent as an athlete and coach. In her youth, Wakisha's disciplined competitive spirit caused her to excel in basketball and led her to Metropolitan Community College—Penn Valley (Kansas City, Mo.) on a basketball scholarship. After graduating from college, Wakisha began her coaching career in women's basketball, joining the staffs of Penn Valley, then Fort Scott Community College (Fort Scott, Kan.), as an assistant women's basketball coach.

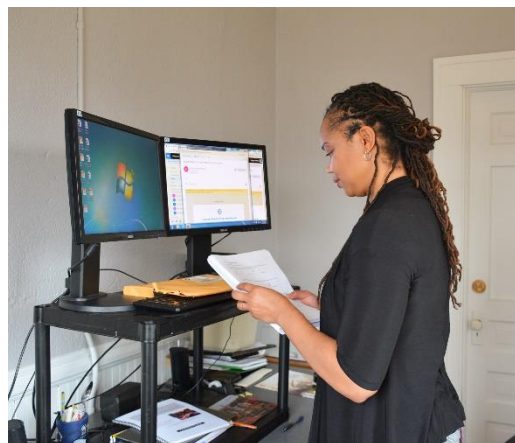
In 2007, she joined Park in a dual role: assistant basketball coach and continuing education specialist. Working alongside Park's legendary head coach, the late Joe C. Meriwether, to lead the women's team further raised Wakisha's profile—eventually opening the door to a five-year, part-time head coaching stint at Penn Valley Community College. During this time, her concurrent continuing education work at Park grew in scope and importance. While building leaders in basketball, she recognized her calling beyond the court.

Building a "Bridge"

In 2010, Wakisha founded [Bridge Leadership Academy](#), a non-profit organization purposed to build tomorrow's leaders through character-based development, education, personal and professional discovery, and committed community service.

"I had been watching retention trends for a long time—especially for students of color—and realized that I needed to help prepare them to succeed in higher education. I believe the African proverb is true: it takes a village to raise children. I wasn't afforded the opportunity to bear children of my own, so my afterschool program gives me a chance to contribute to 'the village,'" Wakisha said.

Thoughts of creating a lasting legacy of her own yielded another revelation: becoming more effective requires a system; in many cases, a team. While growing in leadership, Wakisha recognized her need for



mentors who could challenge and elevate her thinking and expand her network.

Enter “Mr. Pearson.”



No excuses

Wakisha first met Park University alumnus Walter Pearson, '90, in Jefferson City, Mo., during a gathering of the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus. During his storied career, Walter provided administrative leadership to three of the State of Missouri's executive branches: Department of Economic Development, Department of Natural Resources and Office of Administration. He also served as the assistant director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development, where he was responsible for overseeing the Missouri Division of Tourism, Missouri Arts Council, Missouri Film Commission and Missouri Minority Business Advocacy Commission. In 1998, he was appointed by Gov. Mel Carnahan as the director of business and urban affairs, and in 2009, was named commissioner for the Missouri Office of Administration, providing oversight to the Division of Personnel, Division of Purchasing and Office of Equal Opportunity.

Walter, like Wakisha, was friendly but direct and got straight to business. Early on, the two established their working agreements: they would speak often, but would reference one another formally (“Ms. Briggs” and “Mr. Pearson”); Wakisha would complete his recommended assignments in timely fashion; and she must be willing to handle his constructive feedback.

“Mr. Pearson has taught me several things,” Wakisha shared, “but the biggest takeaways for me have been to control my emotions and to always be prepared. He reminds me to think strategically so I can ask the right questions and align the right resources. When we talk, he usually gives me a list of things to consider or do, and he holds me accountable for taking action. I have come to appreciate the no-excuses dynamic of our relationship. Our interactions have made me a more effective leader.”

Her time has come

Today, Wakisha continues to strip away any excuses that hinder professional and personal progress. Promoted to Director of the Office of Continuing Education in 2009, Wakisha has overseen multiple high-profile projects at Park, including the Science e-fellow High Intensity Induction Program (designated “exceptional” by the American Council of Higher Education), and the North America International Chinese summer initiative for visiting teachers and students. She has also managed the Success for Veterans Walmart grant, developed the Office of Continuing Education Strategic Plan and assists in providing professional development opportunities to surrounding school districts.



“A lot of initiatives begin in the Office of Continuing Education, then they are given to other parts of the University to flourish and grow. I think there's a strong parallel between the initiatives that originate in

Continuing Education and the kids at Bridge Leadership Academy. The seeds of potential germinate in one place, then they reach their full potential in another,” Wakisha said. “I believe my role is to help shape successful ideas and people, then give them away.”

Her leadership portfolio continues to expand. In addition to her role at Park, Wakisha was recently appointed board president of the Hickman Mills C-1 school district, a role in which she oversees a board of directors and works closely with the superintendent of schools to support the overall strategy and initiatives of the district. Yet, through it all, her mentor relationship remains intact. “Mr. Pearson,” who was named Park’s 2017 [Distinguished Alumnus Award](#) honoree, continues to meet with Wakisha regularly for development discussions.

“I knew one day that someone would ask me about Ms. Briggs,” Walter reflected. “She is motivated by her faith and love for family and community. She still plays to win and she still coaches others to greatness, but in a different way. Her evolution is inspiring and I am glad to see others discovering what I have known for such a long time. She’s a born leader whose time has come.”

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Classroom Creativity: Park Alum Motivates Brilliant Young Minds

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, January 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/classroom-creativity-park-alum-motivates-brilliant-young-minds/>



Although education was not his field of study as an undergraduate at Park University, alumnus Grant Williams, '17, felt the pull toward teaching for many years.

Grant first began spending time in classrooms as a high school volunteer, earning the service hours required for various scholarships. Realizing he might have stumbled onto a career, Grant began student teaching in college while earning a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Park in 2017. After spending time substitute teaching, Grant became a teacher resident with the Kansas City Teacher Residency. The Residency program allowed him to co-teach with a mentor while earning his teaching certification and a master's degree in education.

The work is fulfilling. It's life-changing. And it's "orders of magnitude" harder than one might imagine.

Meeting needs, motivating minds

The 2019-20 academic year marks Grant's first year with a class of his own: a brilliant and spirited group of second graders at Phillis Wheatley Elementary School in Kansas City, Mo. While he has many years of training under his belt, Grant shared that effectively leading his own classroom--understanding their different personalities, needs and strengths—can be physically, mentally and emotionally demanding.

"Teaching is orders of magnitude harder than I could have ever possibly imagined. There are so many second-by-second decisions that take place."

While managing a classroom takes skill and experience, inspiring students to learn often takes creativity and compassion.

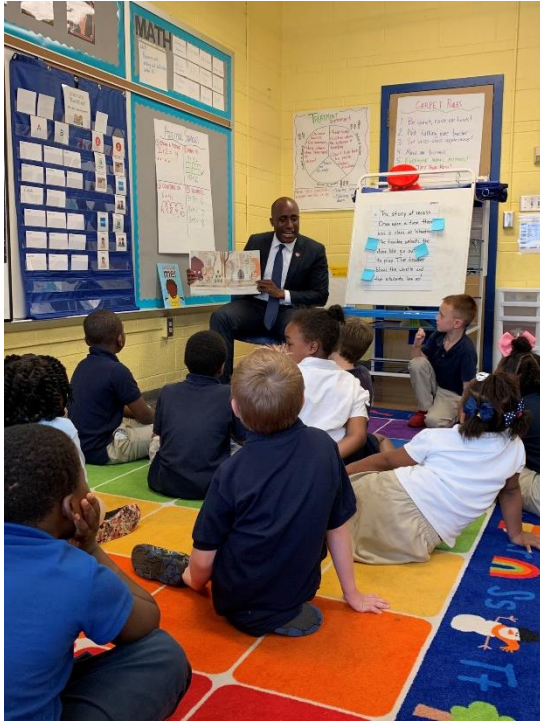
"Wheatley students come from all walks of life, and some face tremendous hardships that many of us cannot even begin to fathom. Getting students motivated to learn and work, particularly those who struggle academically, is the hardest part of our job."



Creativity at work: Grant challenged his students in math, and they met his expectations. His part of the deal? Singing "I'm a Little Teapot" for everyone in the lunchroom. Photo credit: Grant Williams.

Fortunately, Grant and his teaching colleagues are up for the challenge. In the last academic quarter of 2019, the first, second and third grade students at Wheatley Elementary studied non-fiction writing. To build their interest, Grant and his fellow teachers collaborated on initiatives to build excitement around the curriculum.

During the quarter, special guests came in to read to them—including Kansas City, Missouri Mayor Quinton Lucas, who responded to Grant’s personal outreach via Twitter. At the end of the quarter, the students concluded the learning unit by participating in a writing celebration, where they presented their work before an audience of fellow students, their parents and other invited guests.



KCMO Mayor Quinton Lucas, reading to Grant’s class.
Photo credit: Grant Williams.

The curriculum and the event taught them an important lesson about storytelling that can sometimes get lost at their age: communication is a two-way connection between the author or speaker and the audience. Grant often encourages his students to consider their audience when writing and believes that having an audience there, listening to them present their work, provided a very literal demonstration of the concept.

Beyond the teachable moments, the writing party provided an opportunity to celebrate their hard work.

“To my knowledge, our school never had an assembly where student work was showcased to students and families,” said Grant. “We did not change the curriculum. We simply provided a fun way for them to exercise what they were already learning. The goal of the event was for students to see how cool it is to be a writer and how fun it is to celebrate hard work. So often hard work is put in without recognition. If a student gives his or her best effort, they deserve to be recognized for that.

The writing party allowed that to happen.”

Try a little help from my friends

Among the special guests in the audience were visitors from his alma mater: Leah Fletcher, Director of Park University’s Career Development Center, and Meg Evans, Career Coach. The Career Development team saw Grant’s post about the writing celebration on LinkedIn and wanted to help him make the celebration special.



Grant gets Wheatley Elementary’s students excited for their end-of-quarter writing celebration.

As a result, Grant became the catalyst for and first recipient of Career Development Center's Professional Development Alumni Scholarship which, through a selection process, awards funds to employed Park U alumni who are pursuing professional development opportunities, have funding needs for enhanced work-related technology, or need to purchase supplies for a professional project.

The needed supplies, in Grant's case? A tried-and-true motivator for first, second and third grade students from generation to generation: sugar.

"Park's Career Development team provided donuts and juice for the students at the celebration, which we otherwise would not have been able to provide; they're very costly. But most importantly, Leah and Meg interacted with students, encouraged them during their presentations, and helped demonstrate to students that there are people outside the four walls of their classroom who really care about their success as learners," Grant said.

Grant, who served as Park Student Government Association president as an undergrad, credits Park for preparing him for this career. "As a student, I was and am still learning from people who have been in the trenches that I am jumping into. Park has a ton of resources available for students. The value of this cannot be understated. The Career Development Center was a great asset during undergrad to help me explore opportunities—and they continue to support me as an alum."

And he credits teaching for making him a well-rounded human being.

"Since becoming a teacher, I have learned a lot about myself as an educator and person. It is absolutely okay to be human. We often find ourselves in situations where we constantly have to be 'on.' The reality is, however, that we are human and make mistakes. It is important to be malleable in teaching. Just as students have to be molded and grow as students, educators have to grow and be molded into being highly effective teachers for our kids."

Don't "save." Serve.

Being a teacher is very rewarding, Grant feels, and provides an avenue for making a difference in society. Still, he cautions current and future teachers against adopting a savior complex: "Education as a career should not be pursued if you want to 'save' students. Students do not need saving; they need high-quality teachers who want to help them learn and grow."



Meg Evans, Park U Career Coach, enjoys meeting the brilliant writers of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School.

And to that end, Grant acknowledges all the adults who helped him develop—which is why he is honored and eager to serve in that same capacity.

“I would not be where I am today if not for so many positive adult role models when I was younger. I encourage anyone: if you have a chance to be a positive influence in a child's life, *do not hesitate.*”

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Future Philanthropists

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, February 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/future-philanthropists/>



Morgan Milledge, Excelsior Springs, Mo., native and Park University English major, knew she wanted to make a difference in the world long before she arrived on Park's campus.

"I started volunteering regularly with non-profit organizations in high school with my grandma and sister," Morgan said. "That was the first time I realized how many people around me were in need. It was eye-opening."

Her experience and compassion have paid off. As part of a pilot competitive scholarship program in the Park University Hauptmann School of Public Affairs, Morgan, a sophomore, was selected to be a Park University Service Scholar. During the selection process, participating students were asked to reflect on prior community service experiences and share how giving back impacted their world view. Morgan's familiarity with volunteering gave her

a clear perspective and solid advantage.

As part of the program, Morgan takes a leading role in steering her PS125 Lifespan Development classmates through a series of exercises: reading organizations' annual reports, examining their needs and impact, and sending out requests for proposals. The class, taught by Brian Cowley, Ph.D., professor of psychology, will select a deserving non-profit to gift with \$1,000 once their analysis is over. (The non-profit donations and the three-credit-hour scholarships are funded by a 2019 [Park University Spark Tank](#) grant that the Hauptmann School received for this project.)

Morgan is careful to give her classmates equal credit for digging in and doing the work that will make a difference.

"Even though I have a leadership role in the project, we're all working hard to learn more about community needs," she said. "Every person involved plays an important part in picking the right organization to support. It's been a truly collaborative effort."

Morgan hopes to see the project grow in participant number – and funding – in the years to come. She also has plans to grow her giving once her time as a Service Scholar ends.

"I've learned so much more about philanthropy through this process," she said. "There are so many worthy organizations in the area. I will walk away from this experience with a stronger understanding of how they all work to benefit our community ... and with a long list of organizations that I plan to support in the future."

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Make Your Mark

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, April 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/make-your-mark/>



Manika Karki, Park U freshman, enjoys the view from atop the stairs of Mackay Hall.

In August 2019, just as criminal justice major Manika Karki arrived in the United States for her freshman year at Park University, an [article](#) published in the *Himalayan Times* confirmed what she always believed about law enforcement in her native Nepal: women are not well-represented in the field.

But Manika won't be deterred and has already charted the course for her life after graduation: she intends to become the first female chief of police in her home country. Manika is ready to make her mark.

It began with a plan

Before coming to Parkville, Manika had already begun studying law at the Central Law College of Nepal. Once she heard more about Park at a United States Education Foundation (USEF) event in Kathmandu, she reconsidered her strategy.

"I almost devoted eight months to study for the admission exam and after graduation applying for police officer was my goal. Deep down, I also felt that an education abroad could give me a level of independence and confidence that I could not achieve at home," Manika said.

While the thought of moving to the U.S. to study was invigorating, it took a while for Manika to share these dreams with her family. She knew her parents would have reservations about sending their only daughter to America alone.

That's where Kevin Vicker, Senior Director of International Education, and Lora Zaidarhzauba, Associate Director of International Recruitment, stepped in. Kevin and Lora made contact with Manika after her initial inquiry and became extremely helpful during the enrollment process. They translated information from Park's website, assisted Manika with student visa paperwork, and even offered to help communicate with her parents, who were — as she predicted — very skeptical, initially.

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"I have relatives in Los Angeles, but Park is nowhere close to them, so my parents were very worried," Manika said. "I was able to convince them myself that I would be fine, but Lora offered to host a video chat with my parents to ease their concerns, if needed. I appreciate how supportive Lora and Kevin have been along the way."

Now that she's finishing up her first year, Manika realizes she has grown a lot, just like she predicted—even when it was challenging.

"The first few weeks were rough," she reflected. "Just before I left, I found out that my wisdom teeth were impacted, so I was healing from dental surgery. I was also sick for two weeks, because I needed to adjust to American food."

And then there was the weather.

While Manika was at first thrilled to experience snow, her excitement quickly waned as the Midwest winter trudged on and on ...

"I'm very glad to see spring," she laughed.

Global perspective and a growing network

Manika has several examples to pattern her career aspirations after: her grandfather and father, who both served as officers in Nepal, and now her professors at Park, who also have real-world experience as probation and police officers.



Manika on the steps of Herr House, eager for warm spring weather.



Manika, proud to share the culture of Nepal, at Park's International Festival, Nov. 2019. Photo credit: Matilda Kudaya.

She's also grateful for what she's learning outside of the classroom.

"My university experiences have been amazing. I have learned so many new things in such a short period of time, and it has gone by so fast," Manika said. "I am exploring more about myself every day. I have learned that it's important to socialize and meet new people. Making the decision about studying abroad was a huge step for me; I had never been away from my family for more than 10 days from my family, but believed I would gain a global perspective and create a huge network of ideas and friends. My friends have become like family from different parts of the world."

But no matter what she learns or where she studies, it is important to Manika to remember what her parents have instilled in her.

“My parents have played a very important role in shaping my personality and helping me to become who I am. My father often reminds me, ‘You are not there to follow others. Make your mark.’ So, that’s what I intend to do while studying at Park. I will find my voice and make a mark.”

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New York State of Mind

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, April 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/new-york-state-of-mind/>



Aneisha Ford, '18, enjoying a sunny day in Kansas City.

Park alumna Aneisha Ford, '18, had so many reasons to stay home: a fiancé, two dogs, a house to maintain, a future wedding to plan, family and friends who love her and would worry about her health and safety. Heading to New York in the middle of a pandemic to join the first responders didn't seem logical ... but she just couldn't shake the idea.

Then there was her job. When Aneisha asked about taking leave from her nursing role at a Kansas City hospital to help the patients and health care workers in the East Coast, her manager was supportive, encouraging and candid: her job couldn't be held for her if she left.

Still, she had just as many reasons to leave. As the COVID-19 death toll in New York City grew to exceed 10,000 (and continues to climb), Aneisha believed she was called to help.

"I just couldn't stop thinking about it," Aneisha said. "I have a passion for helping people, and I know the people in New York are hurting."

So she decided to take a leap of faith. "God was tugging at my heart. I felt that I had to honor Him by doing my part during this difficult time in America. I prayed about it one night, got in my car the next morning, and the first song I heard confirmed that I was making the right decision," she said.

After working with a medical staffing company to get assigned, Aneisha was bound for the Big Apple.

Joining a New Team

In her previous nursing role in Kansas City, Aneisha volunteered to work on the hospital's COVID-19 floor. That experience differs greatly from what she's experiencing in the long term care facility (which was recently renovated to accommodate COVID-19 overflow from area hospitals) where she's been assigned.

"We weren't wasteful with our equipment in Kansas City by any means, but we were able to abide by typical medical standards because the number of COVID-19 cases isn't as high in the Midwest. In New York, we're seeing about 30 new patients per day," Aneisha said. "The rules have changed. For example, we keep the same masks for five days because we have to preserve resources."



Being safe, sharing her light: Aneisha volunteered to work the COVID-19 floor at a Kansas City area hospital.

When she's not working her 12-hour shift, Aneisha stays in a hotel designated for those in New York helping with COVID-19 care. There are rigid safety protocols in place at the hotel to keep everyone healthy—physically and mentally.

"We don't touch anything as we enter the hotel, we take showers immediately, and all of our clothes are sent to a laundry facility. There are also counselors and other resources on site for us," she said. "We all support one another. There's a strong sense of teamwork. There's no way we could get through this without leaning on each other."



A skilled and competitive volleyball player, Aneisha uses what she learned about teamwork as a Park student athlete in her current role as a nurse on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Being a strong member of a solid team isn't new to Aneisha. While at Park, she was a middle blocker on the women's volleyball team during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons. Aneisha earned a spot on the 2017 CoSIDA Academic All-America first team for volleyball in the college division and was selected to the Academic All-America team after finishing as a first team all-district selection in District 3. In 2017, she was Park's second-leading blocker with 93 total blocks and a team-best 84 block assists. She also moved on to coaching, serving as a student coach in 2018, and (for a brief stint, before the demands of full-time nursing made it too challenging) served as assistant coach for women's volleyball in 2019.

Aneisha looks back on her time at Park and says her time as a nursing student and her time as an athlete and coach prepared her well for this season.

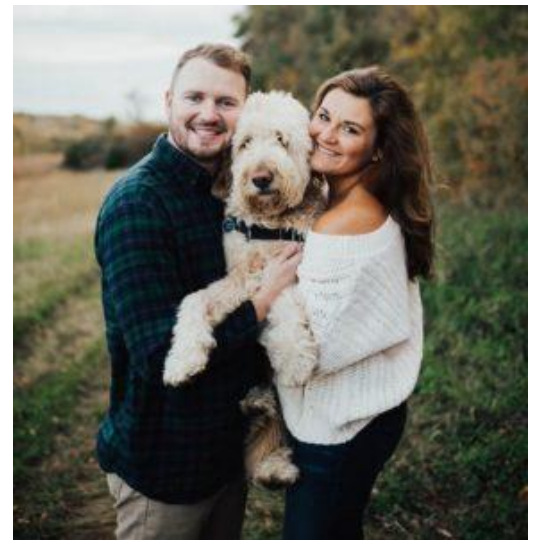
"I'm using everything I learned as a student and as a teammate," she said. "Park prepared me to work as a skilled nurse and to work well with others."

Hometown Hero

After her 21-day assignment in New York, Aneisha will be quarantined for 14 days upon her return to Kansas City, but knows she'll have a strong support system waiting once she comes home.

"My fiancé Jordan has been extremely encouraging; he understands why I need to do this. Even though my mom was pretty emotional in the beginning, she's come around. Both of my parents have been so supportive."

Her hometown support goes beyond her family and loved ones; her trip to the front lines in New York has caught the attention of her third grade teacher, who reached out to her



Jordan, Aneisha's fiancé, and other loved ones look forward to reuniting with her after her 21-day assignment in New York.

on Facebook (“The hotel has run out of mini fridges, and she’s offered to send me one,” Aneisha laughed), as well as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and several media outlets.

While it’s all very flattering, public recognition isn’t why she made the decision. Ultimately, Aneisha just wants to use her skills to show compassion, assist her fellow medical professionals, and spread light in what is, for many in New York City, a dark and difficult time.

“I became a nurse to take care of people. I just enjoy being a light in someone's day.”

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Servant Leadership: Get It and Give It

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, May 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/servant-leadership-get-it-and-give-it/>



Senior Master Sgt. Hawkins, just before retirement, in Oct. 2017.

Retired Senior Master Sergeant Marvin Hawkins, a Class of 2020 Park University graduate, is accustomed to servant leadership.

Over the course of his military career, Marvin (as he prefers today) served in the U.S. Air Force as a Dental Assistant, later advancing to Dental Squadron Superintendent and Medical Operations Squadron Superintendent, a role in which he managed personnel while operating as principal advisor to the Squadron Commander. The position taught him the importance of being a flexible leader who inspires collaboration and trust.

"I observed, listened to others and sometimes found that the old ways were not necessarily the best ways," Marvin said. "I would often ask, 'How can we do it better?'"

Leading by serving is also the common factor that drew him to Park. He was immediately impressed by the staff and faculty who were willing to serve students with a tailored experience, focused squarely on their development and success.

"I was previously enrolled in another institution," Marvin shared, "but felt very comfortable with Park's staff during my initial visit at Goodfellow Air Force Base. The University's reputation, course outlines, enrollment processes and guidance made switching an easy decision for me."

Pivotal people

Though Marvin was fulfilled in his military career, he felt led to establish stretch goals for himself and had military mentors who encouraged him to lean into this instinct. While stationed at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, Marvin's Squadron Superintendent and mentor, Senior Master Sergeant Edward Breen, often nudged him to pursue his degree. Another mentor, Chief Master Sergeant Scott Thompson, a Group Superintendent for whom Marvin worked while stationed at Goodfellow, checked in each semester to make sure Marvin took classes.

"I was a late bloomer when it came to starting college, and there were a number of times when I had to take a break from classes due to deployments and other commitments—but I kept moving forward," Marvin said.



Marvin enjoying the shade (and making plans for the future) on a sunny day in South Carolina.

Once he enrolled at Park, Marvin encountered another pivotal person: Wendy Medina, Park's Goodfellow AFB Campus Center Director.

He initially pursued studies in business management, but eventually realized that his heart and interests leaned in a different direction—or perhaps, more accurately, in the direction they always had. After consulting with Wendy, Marvin decided to pursue a Bachelor of Public Administration degree with an emphasis in public service.

"I needed to change direction. I was very close to finishing—just a few classes short—and Wendy audited my degree progress. In the process, she identified a few other degree programs that more closely mirrored my previous job. Sometimes we just need a little help finding the educational path that supports our aspirations and educational goals. I can't thank her enough for her patience, time and effort," Marvin said.

Get it and give it

Marvin, who now resides in South Carolina, completed his program in March 2020 and is currently contemplating his next career move. He knows he is called to serve, as well as to continue learning. Marvin has plans to begin graduate studies in Park's Master of Public Administration program.

"But first, I'm going to take a breath," he joked.

On a more reflective note, as he looks back on his time in the military and his journey through college, he understands the importance of building mentoring relationships and wants everyone else to understand it, too.

"Taking college classes can be difficult. Family and work obligations can make it challenging to focus on your goals. Look to your mentors for help and guidance. Sometimes a simple course correction is all you need, like Wendy did for me," Marvin said. "Now, I can proudly say I graduated Magna Cum Laude. It can be a constant juggle, but never give up."

Marvin also believes that the power of mentoring flows both ways. Giving back what you receive is just as important.

"Learn, and then pass on your experiences to others. You never know how you may influence someone on his or her journey to completing a significant milestone. When you help other people become better at whatever capacity, it seems to circle back in a positive way. It's incredible the relationships you can build when you're able to encourage and empower others."

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Three Weeks, One Day and a Lifetime of Purpose

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, June 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/three-weeks-one-day-and-a-lifetime-of-purpose/>

In 2018, Jason Roy, a licensed Emergency Medical Technician living in California, made himself a promise.

“I enjoy what I do, but couldn’t see myself in a 20-year career as an EMT,” Jason said. “So I promised myself that in 2020, I would become a student.”

The son of two nurses, Jason decided that a career in nursing was his logical next step. He researched several schools, including a few larger institutions closer to his home on the West Coast, but found himself drawn to a private liberal arts institution in the Midwest with smaller class sizes and friendly admissions representatives.

So, Jason kept his word. He moved to Missouri and, in January 2020, began taking classes at Park University.

Then the pandemic hit.



Jason Roy, ready for duty at the Bronx Zoo.

Set up for service

Jason has been serving others for a long time. After high school, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps—albeit as a bit of a fluke.

“I intended to join the Navy,” Jason said. “When I arrived at the recruiting station, everyone on the Navy’s side was gone,” he laughed. “But the Marines were still there and asked, ‘Why don’t you talk to us?’ So I wound up joining the Marines instead.”

As a Marine, Jason became a radio operator and eventually, his post-military career aspirations came into focus.

“When I left the Marines, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had the tools to do something great if I applied myself, but I struggled trying to find that purpose. Health care wasn’t even on my radar until a friend invited me to do a ride along in an ambulance. That invitation was the match that lit the spark.”

Jason became a licensed EMT in 2015. He has also volunteered for disaster relief efforts all over the world. Over the past three years, he has helped with Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts, for which he was awarded the President’s Volunteer Service Award; volunteered during the California wildfires; and traveled to Indonesia with a non-profit organization called All Hands and Hearts to assist with earthquake relief.

So, when Park's classes moved online as a safety measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Jason's was well-prepared to serve on the front lines of the pandemic.

Jason works part time as an EMT for an ambulance company that has a contract with FEMA. When the Fire Department of the City of New York City needed more ambulances for the overwhelming onslaught of emergency calls brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, they called FEMA for help. In response, 50 health care professionals from Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and Ohio left for New York City in March. Jason was among them.

"We traveled together, stayed in the same hotel and were all assigned to task forces," Jason said. "I was part of Task Force 7, which was assigned to cover Central Brooklyn, one of the hardest hit areas in New York City. My radio and unit name was 870-Nora."

Their assistance was greatly needed; when Jason arrived, the FDNY was responding to 6,000 emergency calls a day—double their 3,000-a-day, pre-pandemic average. His shift was officially scheduled from 2 p.m. - 2 a.m., but the real workday stretched to about 18 hours.

"All of FEMA's ambulances were dispatched from the Bronx Zoo. I'd start there in the ambulance around 11 a.m., work my shift, return to the hotel sometime after 4 a.m., and do it all over again," Jason recalled.



Jason, second from left, with some of his fellow Task Force 7 crew members in New York.

Most of the people they encountered were extremely sick and, in many cases, required CPR. The stretchers were too big for the elevators, so if they were stable enough to be moved, the patients were carried down many flights of stairs to the ambulance.

"Imagine being dressed in full gloves, a gown, mask, and face shield, with a 30-pound medical bag, and using the stairs to bring a person down six flights of stairs," Jason said.

"We still had to respond to other emergencies, as well," he continued. "People were still getting shot, stabbed, into car accidents, having strokes, giving birth, and the coronavirus just added to it. We did our best, and I can think back to a few of those emergencies where we made a big difference."

Those who were deployed to New York through FEMA were assigned three weeks on, one day off. Although the schedule was grueling, Jason rarely heard complaining and saw no

fear. The spirit of teamwork was apparent as soon as he arrived, and as the days went on, the task forces became more like family.

“We all signed up in the middle of a pandemic to do what we do best. Healthcare workers from all over the country came together to help others, no matter the risk to ourselves. We had no manual for what we were doing; we were effectively writing that manual in real time. All of us were proud to make that contribution.”



When one sleeps, the other is on the radio. Jason (right) and his partner, around midnight.

Ready for what's next

After his volunteer assignment was completed, Jason returned to Riverside, Mo. to rest, recover and settle back into life as a college student.

“I was happy to be home and sad I couldn't stay longer,” said Jason.

Now, he's getting geared up for his next semester at Park with a new perspective on life, a refreshed confidence in his chosen institution (“I believe that Park the best-equipped school to get me to where I need to be and I'm going full sprint until I reach my goals,” he said), and renewed faith he is on the right career path.

“I didn't have all the answers growing up,” Jason reflected. “Seventeen-year-old me in high school would never have guessed that I'd end up going to school to become a nurse. My parents tried so hard to make me want to be a nurse, but I ran away from it. Over the years, I made my own path, and through living life, I discovered what my passions were.”

Jason knows that there are other students searching for answers, too. He wants to assure them: finding your purpose is possible.

“Students go to college to find out what they should do. While some don't have a hard time finding these answers, others struggle. I want to encourage the students who might be having a tough time. You might not have the answers now, but as long as you live your life and stay true to what you believe, the answers will become as clear for you as they became for me.”

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Work, Wisdom and Worldwide Connections

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, June 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/three-weeks-one-day-and-a-lifetime-of-purpose/>



Park University alumnus Jake Fichman.

As a competitive high school athlete and student graduating from Kansas City's prestigious Barstow School, Jake Fichman, '11, had lots of options for college—but he approached his choice sensibly. After connecting with the Park University's distance running team, he believed he'd found a good fit.

"Park was the right choice for a number of reasons: it was a smaller, more intimate campus; close to Kansas City—which I love; close to my parents—whom I love; had a beautiful landscape; and generous scholarship options."

As an undergraduate, Jake formed a good rapport with his teammates, coaches and professors—particularly William Venable, who served as Assistant Professor of Marketing/Management during Jake's time at Park, and Park's Professor of Economics, Dr. Stephen Bell.

"Professor Venable and I clicked on a personal level. He inspired me to reach high and set myself up for a great future. We are still in touch. Dr. Bell taught economics in the clearest, and most interesting manner, with a real passion for the topic. I would have conversations with him after class about deeper areas of econ and really enjoyed his attitude and encouragement. Outstanding teacher."

While Jake was learning, he blazed his own business trail. Throughout his time as an undergrad, Jake ran Precision Cuts, the landscaping business he'd founded at age eight (yes, *eight*) on the weekends.

"I would knock on doors in my neighborhood and ask if I could cut their grass, trim bushes, and clear snow in the winter. It was my weekend job for most of my life."

In addition, Jake co-founded a second business before graduating as a Marketing and Finance double major: The Hummus Company.

"One night, I had dinner with my Park roommate and his aunt. Our waiter became my business partner! We built the business up nicely, had a factory and many customers—grocery chains, restaurants, etc. I sold my part of the company after about two years, and it still goes strong today."

Fail and try again

Although entrepreneurship is a trending topic now, Jake recalls that this wasn't necessarily the case during his formative years. Still, becoming a business owner was practically coded into his DNA. Several members of his family, including his grandparents, parents, uncles and cousins, were business owners. Jake credits his father, Rich Fichman, with having the biggest influence on him regarding vocation and business.

"During most of my early years, we spent hours each week discussing the stock market, management, profit and loss, accounting, taxes, employment, profitability, et cetera. His support gave me the confidence to fail and try again."

Jake's business mindset sometimes made it tough to be a student. He was eager to get out into the real world and apply himself and learn through failures and successes. He put himself on an accelerated timetable and graduated in three years by testing out of a few classes, using Advanced Placement credits, and taking summer courses.

And yet, after graduating from college and selling his business, Jake felt a shift in his purpose.

"I wasn't so excited about the 'American dream.' The idea of making more money to buy bigger, nicer things only to need to make more money to pay for those things...it just didn't make sense. I really sought the direction for my life at that point. I grew in my faith and wanted to go on a Godly-adventure. So, I learned more deeply about Israel and went to visit."

On that journey, Jake found himself amazed by what he learned about the Israeli culture ("Warm, family-friendly, passionate people," Jake marveled), and the history of the land. In the months to follow, the pull to change the direction of his life grew stronger. Jake decided to voluntarily serve as a member of the Israel Defense Forces.

Jake applied to serve in a one-and-a-half-year program. It took a while to get a response, but once he heard back, the urgency was jolting: he qualified for IDF service, but because of his older-than-average age (23 years at the time), he was instructed to make a final decision in three days, buy a ticket within the week, and move to Israel in two weeks.

"I hadn't yet talked to my family and friends about the idea, which made it tough," Jake recalled. "But as I'd waited for their response, I had become completely committed to the idea."

Jake's time in the military was inspiring ... and humbling.

"Encouraged by my loving mother, Suzi Fichman, I was confident that IDF would be impressed by summa cum laude education. Nope! I ended up in an infantry unit as a combat soldier and was given combat medic training. I also had a challenging time connecting with other soldiers. I was 24 and they were 18—and I didn't know Hebrew."

Eventually, Jake found his way. He became so enamored of Israel that he decided to stay and become a dual-citizen ... which, not surprisingly, led Jake to consider his next entrepreneurial venture.

Back to business

After his time in the Israeli army, he was asked by Israel's largest travel agency to serve as a consultant. Jake saw an opportunity to capitalize on his Midwest-honed customer service sensibilities, business experience and education.

"I became a sole proprietor, dealing mostly with a few clients in marketing consulting. I quickly saw the need to become service-focused, as there was always staffing issues at organizations, which didn't allow these entities to apply the advice I gave."



An engaging speaker and insightful thought leader, Jake speaks before a rapt audience.

In 2015, Jake began hiring freelancers, sold some retainer packages for ongoing digital platform development and content creation, and began building another business, [Goldfish Marketing](#). In a short period of time, Jake's firm began serving niches of need in the Israeli market. As his business grew, Jake spent considerable time learning new digital skills, hiring experts, and bringing in new and bigger clients.

Goldfish Marketing's high-profile client roster includes Vogue (Goldfish Marketing leads digital marketing for Allure's new "Anywear" line); CBN (Christian Broadcast Network); the Shalva Band; Israel's biggest tour company, Sar-El; members of Knesset (Israel's "congressmen" who serve in the legislative branch of the Israeli government); and the Prime Minister's Office of Israel. The firm was also asked by Israel's Ministries of Defense, Homeland Security, and Health to produce digital strategies for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Landing the longshot: beyond blessed

Jake and Maria manage the production of the annual three-day Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast for the Israeli government, hosted by Israel's president. While in attendance in 2019, Jake met the director of the Government Press Office, who offered Goldfish Marketing an opportunity to apply for a tender (which, in laymen's terms, is a formal process by which a supplier submits a bid to provide a good or service). The application process was arduous, but ultimately, Jake was invited for an interview with the Government Press Office's board and main director.

"They asked for an intro, presentation of our work portfolio, and a Q and A—all in Hebrew, of course," Jake laughed. "It was a longshot, in my mind."



After a few weeks, Goldfish Marketing received confirmation from the Prime Minister of Israel's Office that they had been chosen to provide foreign correspondent service, and Jake had been named Media Advisor to Israel's Government Press Office!

"I spoke to a member of the board and admitted that I was amazed we were chosen," Jake said. "There are dozens of very successful marketing companies in Israel, with many more years of experience, and here we are, a small startup company, led by a 30-year-old. The manager said to me, 'The director and the board all agreed that Goldfish Marketing is the best digital marketing company in the entire country. That's why we picked you.' I was so proud of my team that day, and knew that we were headed in the right direction."

Jake's role as Media Advisor to the Prime Minister's Office allows him a variety of interesting roles with the government. One week, he may work with a governmental ministry to advise on a new digital campaign for citizen awareness; the next, he might be asked to develop a network of global influencers who would be inspired to visit Israel with the promise of a press event and meeting with the Prime Minister.

Jake (far right, front row), with GPO President Nitzan Chen (far left, front row), President of Israel Reuven Rivlin (second from left, front row), and others

Jake has learned a lot about leadership in his current role.

Leaders must inspire teams to want to follow in good times and tough times, and must give 110 percent when client demands and timelines get overwhelming, he believes.

But more than anything, Jake said, it's important to love what you do, and love the people you do it for and with. The "for" and "with," primarily for Jake, are his wife, Maria, and their baby daughter, Yael.

"Maria has been monumental in all that's happened since 2016," he beamed. "She is my partner, my support, my counselor, and my sounding board. She interviews new workers with me, manages a few clients, directs some of the team, and helps me make core decisions—all while studying physical therapy at Tel Aviv University and raising our daughter."

At age 30, there is likely a long road ahead for Jake in life and business, full of lessons and opportunities. But as he looks back on his experiences, and considers his great fortune to be surrounded by people who inspire and motivate him daily, he again approaches it sensibly:

"I am beyond blessed."

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Wedded bliss: Jake and Maria on their wedding day.

Led to Lead, Here to Help

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, June 2020

Ask Park University Director of Military and Veteran Student Services Sarah Weygand, '16, what she wants people to know about her, and she'll give a simple answer: "I'm approachable and here to help."



Brandy Madrigal, a Park University student and military spouse, agrees:

"I reached out to the Warrior Center to find out why the G.I. Bill was not covering my tuition. Sarah explained that there was a possible mix up and advised me to contact the Department of Veterans Affairs. I did, and to my surprise, Sarah had also reached out on my behalf, knowing that this can be a lengthy process. Her service speaks volumes to the military community. Any student who is lucky enough to work with Ms. Weygand is in great hands. She puts in every effort to help us succeed."

Helping students succeed is simple, from Sarah's perspective. She understands that honoring students' personal experiences is key to providing the best level of support.

"Military-connected students come from all over the world," Sarah shared. "Park serves veterans who have survived combat situations; disabled veterans; reservists who have been deployed to help those affected by natural disasters; and spouses and children of service members who have moved multiple times ... you name it. They all have different experiences, and each one brings their own culture and history with them. Our military students are influenced by the military, but there's so much more to their stories."

Like many other students

Sarah's own story began in North Attleborough, Massachusetts. After high school, she attended a four-year University, but left after the first year. She felt lost.

"I just didn't have direction," Sarah reflected. "Like many other students who are unprepared for the lack of structure and feel uncertain about their plans for their lives, I failed out of school my first year and went back home."

Still, she had a sense of the type of roles that excited her. Sarah, raised around water, had served as a lifeguard and emergency medical technician. "I loved the responsibility of emergency service and helping people."



Proud to serve: Seaman Recruit Weygand, at the beginning of her military career.

She attended Community College of Rhode Island, got fit and took the ASVAB test and enlisted in into the Coast Guard Reserves. Sarah was stationed at Port Security Unit in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where she became qualified as a Boatswain's Mate and a combat medic, and advanced to Petty Officer 3rd Class (E-4). All the while, she prepared for a chance to serve full time. Then, in 2008, an active duty slot opened up.



Sarah on the water in Clearwater, Florida, practicing tactical maneuvers in a joint training operation with Port Security Unit 307.

"I jumped at the opportunity," she said.

Sarah was stationed at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center in Cape May, New Jersey, where the Coast Guard houses their basic training. Later, she became qualified as a fitness and swimming instructor for Coast Guard recruits in basic training.

Love at first (web) sight

Sarah and her husband Aaron, whom she met while serving in different units at the training center, left the Coast Guard in 2011. After living in Roanoke, Virginia, for two years, Sarah and Aaron moved to his hometown of Leavenworth, Kansas, to be closer to his aging grandparents. During this time, Sarah found Park University—by accident.

"An acquaintance heard me lamenting about another university that wouldn't accept my GI Bill for out-of-state tuition and told me to check out Park. I visited the website and fell in love! I saw that Park was military- and veteran-friendly, and offered the degree I was looking for. The rest is history."

Sarah earned a Bachelor of Science in Fitness and Wellness from Park in 2016.

"When I graduated from Park, it had been 10 years, start to finish, to get my degree. I graduated Magna Cum Laude," she said, proudly. "If I can do it, other veterans and non-traditional students can do it."

Around the same time, Sarah joined Park's staff. In 2019, she was promoted to Director of Military Services.

In addition to managing full time staff and work study students in the Global Warrior Center, Sarah ensures timely processing of VA educational benefits, collaborates with interdepartmental staff on programming and training, and creates connections with outside veteran service organizations.



Serving those who serve their country: Sarah (front row, left, with hands on her knees), serving alongside other Park U faculty and staff at the Heart of America Stand Down, 2016.

“One of my favorite aspects of the job is collaborating with so many different people and departments,” she said.

Sarah continues to sharpen her tools. On May 14, she graduated from the 2019-20 cohort of Pirates Rising, Park’s internal leadership development program; plans to enroll in Park’s Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership and Adult Learning this fall; and is thriving in her mentor/mentee relationship with Colonel Andrew Shoffner, Director of the Department of Command and Leadership at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and a Park trustee.

“He’s been really helpful in pushing me to prioritize my actions and organize my life,” she said. “Col. Shoffner is the perfect combination of efficiency, directness and kindness. He’s the type of leader I aspire to be.”

But ultimately, all roads lead back to helping people. It’s what she loves to do. And in that regard, she wants to help everyone understand: military-connected and non-military communities have more in common than not.

“We face barriers to education, are often older than traditional students, and may sometimes use different phrases, but military-connected students are like *all* students. We’re seeking education to achieve our goals, and to better our lives and the lives of our families,” Sarah said. “We are trying to learn and grow. Take the time to engage with us. The interaction might be more meaningful and enlightening than you realize.”

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Holly Jackson: Commitment, Confidence and Coaching

by Bridget Locke, College Coaching Network



Holly Jackson, recent high school graduate, ready to make her mark in theater and film. Photo credit: Vivian Nazzaro.

Holly Jackson, a Lenexa, Kan. native and 2020 graduate of Shawnee Mission West High School, remembers vividly the day her college acceptance message came—because it was quintessentially bittersweet. Like many seniors all over the country, the end of high school had come to a disappointing and unceremonious end ... while, at the same time, her whole world was opening up:

“On the same day it was announced that school was closed for the rest of year due to COVID-19, Pepperdine University sent an email saying that I had been accepted,” Holly said. “I had visited their campus at the beginning of my junior year and fell in love. Getting a ‘yes’ from Pepperdine was a dream come true.”

Born to perform

Holly’s dreams have taken shape and evolved over the course of many years. As a child, she discovered her natural talent for performing. First came dance lessons; later, a growing interest in singing and acting, which led her to join the musical theater community and perform around the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area. After taking a video production class as a high school freshman, Holly stumbled upon another interest: filmmaking.

“I don’t want to be known for one thing,” Holly said. “I think we should all find ways to develop our multiple talents and gifts.”

Her ultimate goal, after earning her degree, is to be in front of the camera as well as behind it. Holly’s double major in musical theatre and film studies at Pepperdine will be an important first step in realizing her dream.

Coaching is key

Preparing for an education and eventual career in entertainment requires commitment, confidence and coaching. The grind is grueling and highly competitive; auditions for roles and limited spots in college programs often yield more declines than yesses. Holly, like most actors, has learned to deal with her fair share of rejection.

“I targeted 21 schools, applied to 18 and auditioned for 15,” Holly said. “I am usually pretty confident, but when I received my first few decline letters, I found myself wondering, ‘Am I good enough?’”

Although rejection is a common part of the process, Holly has a supportive team in her corner to ensure that she remains well-rounded and confident.

Her parents, Anisha and Darric, lead the way in ensuring that her sense of self-worth does not waiver. Both have encouraged her involvement in issues beyond her intended field of study. Holly founded the Black Student Union at Shawnee Mission West, recently served as vice president of the school’s Multicultural Leadership Club, and was honored this spring with a Certificate of Accomplishment by the Greater Kansas City Committee for the Princeton Prize in Race Relations, which honors high school students



Holly (center), all smiles with mom and dad, on a high school graduation/college photo shoot. Photo credit: Vivian Nazzaro.

who make significant effort to advance racial equity and understanding in their schools and communities.

Learn more, be authentic

In addition to being a change agent for her community, Holly is focused on becoming financially astute concerning the financial responsibility of college. She and her family have partnered with College Coaching Network to learn more about essay writing, financial planning and scholarship searches.

“I really didn’t know much about student loans and the real cost of college before working with College Coaching Network,” Holly said, who secured \$13,000 in renewable scholarships through CCN’s *College Leveraging* program. “I would encourage anyone who is going off to school to learn more about the financial side of things. It’s also important to have a plan for what you want to share in your college application and scholarship essays. I didn’t have a sad story; I wanted to write about confidence and was worried that wouldn’t be compelling enough to be accepted. I learned along the way that it is okay to be authentic. We’re all unique, and our stories are valuable just as they are.”

College Coaching Network provides college selection and career assessments, financial planning, and assists with scholarship searches for college-bound students and their families. Visit www.erasecollegedebt.com to learn more.

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Comet Trails and Changing Stars

by Bridget Locke, *Park Stories*, June 2020

<https://advancing.park.edu/comet-trails-and-changing-stars/>



Rachel (left) with Edwin "Ed" James, Park University's Grand Forks AFB Campus Center Director, after graduation in 2014. Since earning her A.S. in Management, Rachel has earned a Bachelor of Science in Management / Health Care in 2020 and is currently pursuing an MPA with Park.

Although Rachel Borjas, '14, '20, and current graduate student in Park University's Master in Public Administration program, didn't realize during childhood that she was living in poverty, her adult perspective is very different.

"I came from very little. My parents were U.S. born but did not graduate from high school. They chose migrant work because that's all they could do," said Rachel. "We lived in housing projects and in shacks while we worked the fields. Education was not something my family emphasized."

Still, Rachel, a San Benito, Tex. native and youngest of four siblings, knew that she was destined for something different ... something more.

"My life today is a complete 180-degree turn from the life I had as a child."

Stability and motivation

Though it was a challenge to complete school due to the migratory nature of her parents' work ("I was always enrolled late and withdrawn from school early," Rachel recalled), she completed high school. Later, she married an airman and adapted to military life. During that time, Park University provided a sense of stability.

"Park was one of the only consistent universities throughout our military life that I saw," she said. "So, I enrolled and stuck with Park."

Along the way, Rachel has met several faculty and staff members who have collaborated with her and made her feel like "more than a number." Grand Forks Campus Center Director Edwin "Ed" James, in particular, has left a very meaningful impression.

"I will forever boast about Ed," Rachel said. "He didn't know, but my dad passed a long while back and I never had a father figure to guide or motivate me. When I had self-doubt or saw that I was hesitating, Ed encouraged me. He couldn't have known how much it meant."

Ed is just as big a fan of Rachel's:

"Rachel is a wonderful young woman who has worked hard to get to where she is," he said. "She has always been very appreciative but I remind her constantly that I have just provided some direction and

support. She is the one who has done the work and earned what she has achieved educationally and professionally.”

The end product

Today, in addition to continuing her education as a graduate student, Rachel works for the Department of Homeland Security at the Houston Field Office. Although she is currently a member of the Tactical Terrorism Response Team, she was initially drawn to a career with DHS because she hoped to help stop drug trafficking—also a remnant of her challenging childhood.

“I chose DHS because I wanted to make a difference. I was raised around drugs and have seen what it does to people and families. I wanted to do something to prevent drugs from coming across the border and reduce the amount of drugs available to young people.”

Oftentimes, when speaking about the importance of pursuing and finishing a degree program, Park University President Greg Gunderson talks about education’s power to influence and change the trajectory of an entire family’s destiny. He calls it the “comet trail” of higher education.

Rachel sees her pursuit of higher education and a better life as functioning in a similar way: “I changed my stars,” she said.

And her family has followed suit.

“My oldest sister earned her bachelor’s degree at 38,” she said. “My kids are enrolled in college now. My nieces and nephews are attending universities, too. They are being taught the importance of education and that it is now a necessity.”

No matter the circumstances or challenges, Rachel says, the power to change your life lies within your mind’s capacity to believe and your willingness to work hard.

“You can do whatever you set your mind to,” Rachel said. “Work hard and carry the sentiment both in your mind and heart that failure is not an option. You are enough. You can do it. You are not a product of your environment, but rather, an end product of what you decide.”

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Strictly Business: Ronnika Conway, The Spiritual Loctician

by Bridget Locke, *Keyline Mag*, September 2020

https://issuu.com/keylinemag/docs/new_september_2020_issue

Author's note: Strictly Business, a new Keyline Mag series, features the "independent artists" of the business world: America's entrepreneurs.



First comes the prologue, which could be an entire novel on its own: Ronnika "Ron the Showoff" Conway, originally from Kansas City, Mo., moved to Texas as a teenager at the urging of her older sister, Laura. After she settled in, Laura moved. Ronnika, still young and impressionable, became involved with an older man who would become her husband, the father of her child...and ultimately, her abuser.

When he was locked up on drug charges, Ronnika and her baby became homeless. But she had more than a baby in tow; Ronnika also had her husband's possessions and an instinct to survive. His phone kept ringing, so she started answering.

"I began selling drugs," Ronnika said. "I sold for six years until I was caught and went to prison."

Once released and reunited with her son, Ronnika began a new life and a series of jobs in various industries.

Meanwhile, her real purpose--which was also tied to a lucrative career--loomed in close distance.

Now begins the *real* story...

Bridget Locke: How did you get started as a loctician?

Ronnika Conway: I was dating someone who had locks, but they were dry and unhealthy. I learned to do her hair myself so we could save money. Her hair began to thrive, and she received lots of compliments, so my interest in becoming a loctician grew. I wanted to keep improving, so I looked for classes on Instagram. Eventually, I found a shop looking for someone to wash hair, and figured I could get hired and be mentored. By the time I contacted them, the position no longer available, but the owner had carpal tunnel and wanted to mentor someone so the shop's clientele would continue to grow. When we met, she observed my technique and said I had potential. We signed a two-year agreement in August 2018 and I began doing starter locks and retwists in the shop.

BL: So, you're rolling in a field you're passionate about, and you're working in a shop with a built-in clientele, which was better than your original plan.

RC: Yes! Then, at the beginning of December, she announced that the shop was closing at the end of the year. I thought to myself, "What's next? I don't know how to style." But I had clients who looked out for me. One client worked with a barber and told me he had an empty room for rent, so I moved to that space. I lost some clients who were tied to the previous shop, but I gained more. When I left the shop, I had 20 clients; in my first five months on my own, my clientele grew to 100. I moved from the room I was renting and opened up my own shop. I grew to 300 in June 2020, and now, I'm at 400 clients.

BL: You have quadrupled your clientele in one year--unpack *that* for a minute. How do you market yourself?

RC: Word of mouth and Instagram, mostly.

BL: What draws people to you?

RC: I treat them with care and respect. In many cases, I'm like my clients' therapists. Sometimes, I sage them or give them crystals. I keep their energy up and give them a safe place to be themselves. I'm also consistent, professional, very good at what I do, and expect respect for my time because I respect theirs in return. People respond to my confidence.

BL: How do you relax? How do you treat yourself?

RC: I meditate, ride bikes, gaze at the sky and watch the moon to gather my thoughts.

BL: You mentioned sage, crystals and meditation. Please talk more about why "Ron the Showoff" is known as the "Spiritual Loctician."

RC: I used to be very much into the traditional Black Christian church experience. I was a praise dancer, in fact. But I had trouble reconciling the contradictions that I found in Christianity, so I began following people who led me to the enlightenment that I needed to find peace. Plus, I always knew there was more to learn about our people--the *original* people--and felt I had more to learn about our connection to our ancestors.

I don't believe there is only one way to experience God. The path I'm on is the right path for me but I don't judge anyone for how they express their faith and ask for the same respect.



BL: Most creatives are inspired by other creative energy. What kind of music gets you hype?

RC: I love jazz and neo soul, mostly, but I listen to all types of music: FKJ, Tobe Nwigwe, Masego, Chika, Erykah Badu, India.Arie, Sa-Roc the MC and Oshun are some of my favorites.

BL: How would you advise someone who hopes to turn their passion into their profession?

RC: Never stop learning. Read all you can about your industry and continually work to perfect your craft. Social media is also a powerful tool for learning and networking, so follow and connect with people in your profession. And there are the basics of good business, of course: make sure your website is up and your scheduling is up-to-par. Also, be humble but not intimidated. Have faith in your abilities and strike a balance between work and play. Sometimes, people expect entrepreneurs to do anything to get and keep business--and you should feel free to turn down that business; just because people pay you, it doesn't mean they own you. Set boundaries and take ownership of your life.

Want to see Ron showing off? Visit rontheshowoff.com to learn more about her services and see a gallery of her work. Connect with her on social:  RontheShowoff  Ron The Show Off.

Bridget Locke (@BLWrites) is a novelist, editor and communications strategist based in Kansas City.

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Strictly Business: The College Coach

by Bridget Locke, *Keyline Mag*, October 2020

https://issuu.com/keylinemag/docs/october_2020_final

Author's note: Strictly Business, a new Keyline Mag series, features the "independent artists" of the business world: America's entrepreneurs.



Claude Harris, CEO and Founder, College Coaching Network.

In the early 1990s, Claude Harris was a high school student-athlete with dreams to become the first in his family to graduate from college. His grades were solid and his athletic ability was impressive, so he was a likely candidate for a scholarship, but his score on an important college placement test, the ACT, was low. Once he selected a school and began the college enrollment process, Claude received a crash course on the impact of his low placement scores to his access to financial aid—because he wasn't awarded the scholarship funds he expected.

Ultimately, Claude was selected to join his university's basketball team as a walk-on and received the scholarship funds he'd hoped for ... but not before his mother had to withdraw a significant amount from her 401k to fund his first year of school.

Though it all worked out, Claude never forgot his rocky beginning with higher education. In fact, he planted seeds from this experience for future harvest.

After graduation, Claude worked in the finance industry but sought out opportunities to teach college-bound students and families about the real cost of higher education in his spare time. Eventually, Claude formalized his content, created an award-winning pilot program focused on financial awareness in higher education, and has turned his hard-won knowledge into a viable business: College Coaching Network, which launched in 2009.

Today, CCN is a one-stop-shop of interactive resources for college-bound students, offering virtual college tours, access to mentors, live webinars, and more. Through the platform, students engage in social learning through courses, gamification and peer-to-peer interaction.

In the Q & A below, Claude reflects on the road to self-employment, the *real* power source of his black card, sugary snacks, Lalah Hathaway, and more.

Bridget Locke: Before leading College Coaching Network full time, what was your vocation? Was there a tipping point that led you to branch off and start your own company?

Claude Harris: I was the vice president of brokerage at a bank, helping families with wealth management. Even though I'd progressed in my career the "traditional" way—I went to college, got a job, climbed the ranks, got a better paying job at a different company, repeated the process—I knew as a child that I wanted something different. At an early age, I observed the rhythm of life that most lived by, but believed that my heart, vision and contribution to the world has always been bigger than following the status quo. Seeing what everyone else is doing has never pushed me to do the same. I decided long ago that I would work to bridge the gap between my dreams and my reality. The dream has always been to carve my own path and to own my own business.

BL: What did you have to sort out before declaring you were a business owner?

CH: Great question. There are three pertinent steps to survival as an entrepreneur. First, you must invest your time and

money into developing a high level of skill in the business-to-consumer aspect of your company; something with a rapid sales cycle that compensates you well for the time that you spend. Without that, you can't survive long enough to build a scalable business. Second, you must graduate from thinking small. We become entrepreneurs for lifestyle freedom. If you are just going to trade time for money, why not stay at a traditional job? Lastly, if you want to earn a massive income, gain influence in your industry, and have freedom with your time, you can't do all the work yourself. You must learn to leverage others' talents and strengths for the greater good of your business.

BL: How disciplined do you have to be to own a business?

CH: You'd better be disciplined or you won't last! There are so many shiny objects that will vie for your attention, so many things demanding your time ... you must create structure—quickly.

BL: How have you come by your industry and entrepreneurial knowledge? What are you reading? Do you have mentors?

CH: I spend devotional time every day, seven days per week. I need “me” time to fill my cup so I can fill the cups of those whom I have the privilege to serve. I read about eight books a year (though I'm trying to step up my game!) and listen to podcasts five days per week. When I was first starting out, my mentor was my prayer life and the people who came my way right when I needed them. Along the way, I have organically acquired mentors. It takes time to build a network of people who can contribute to your life for particular purposes, but I encourage anyone who is serious about development to build a strong circle of people who will pour into you and make you a stronger leader.

BL: How has your mindset changed since establishing your own business? What have you *stopped* doing now that you're a seasoned business owner?

CH: As new entrepreneurs, many of us still have employee tendencies, which is often translated as “everyone is a customer.” I've learned that isn't necessarily true. As I have matured as a business owner and leader, I understand that there are those whom I am called to serve ... as well as those I am not. I also had to evolve past the mindset of equating value creation with compensation. I learned and encourage other entrepreneurs to learn that value creation should be linked to customer outcomes. Once I shifted my mindset to team building to help more people, my focus became less about “me” and more about “we” -- how can my business ideas help others reach their goals and dreams in life? Now, I'm not rattled when my resources don't equal the next step needed for my business. My faith is my black card and it opens up unlimited opportunities and resources. When you shift your focus to meeting the customers' needs, the resources and compensation will follow. Beyond business, becoming a successful entrepreneur takes personal sacrifice and discipline, too. Getting organized and taking control of your time is important. Taking control of your *impulses* is important. For example, I have given up excessive sugar. Man, cereal was the toughest! I *love* Frosted Flakes. But I took an honest look at the health of my family. A few of my loved ones have had issues with diabetes. So, why tempt fate? Now that the foundation of my business is laid, I want to experience all the fruits of my labor. I know I need to be disciplined in all aspects—mentally, physically, spiritually—to carry my business to the next level. So, no Frosted Flakes. And yes...it's hard. I want a bowl right now ...



BL: What do you see for your business in the next few years? What are your goals?

CH: We will serve over two million students per year with our Virtual College Planning App. I am very proud of our international presence. In the next few years, I want to launch a national financial literacy initiative to help young men and women enter into the world of angel investing and entrepreneurship.

BL: Now the fun stuff...What kind of music centers you or gets you hype to create and innovate?

CH: My favorite artist is Lalah Hathaway. I could listen to “Let Go” a thousand times.

BL: How do you relax? How do you treat yourself?

CH: I am a sports fan. I was an athlete from grade school through college, and now I love watching my daughters compete. I'm content to be “Über Dad” these days.

BL: What's your theme song?

CH: I know he's become a polarizing figure, but Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" still speaks to me. I can't control what happens to me but I can control how I respond.

BL: Any final thoughts for those who are hoping to become entrepreneurs?

CH: Yes. Dream big. Life has no limits.

Want to learn more about College Coaching Network? Visit www.collegecoachingnetwork.com for info on the app. Connect with Claude on Facebook (@collegecoachingnetwork) to catch "Social Learning Live," a live weekly series connecting viewers to experts in education-relevant fields and topics.

Bridget Locke (@BLWrites) is a novelist, editor and communications strategist based in Kansas City.

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Strictly Business: Chris Chiles, the ‘Picture Painting’ Producer

by Bridget Locke, *Keyline Mag*, November 2020

https://issuu.com/keylinemag/docs/november_2020_final

Author’s note: Strictly Business, a new Keyline Magazine series, features the “independent artists” of the business world: America’s entrepreneurs.



The seeds of Chris Chiles’s music infatuation first took root in his grandmother’s Arkansas City, Kansas home.

“My grandmother had instruments at her house and always encouraged me to play something,” Chris recalls. “There was a bass guitar, an organ, an upright piano and a nine-piece drum set. All five of my uncles could play instruments, so I always had music around me.”

Chris naturally took to the drums, but his family couldn’t afford formal lessons, and his uncles, who provided strong male role models in his father’s absence, were always working. Because they didn’t have much spare time to teach him, he taught himself to play.

In addition to the music he heard in his own head, Chris was influenced by the music he heard through his

speakers. Teddy Pendergrass, The Brothers Johnston, The Temptations, The Whispers, Ray, Goodman and Brown (“The great crooners,” Chris reminisces), and the quiet storm songs that aired on late-night radio all served to influence his musical taste.

As Chris grew older, he continued to hone his craft. Today, he’s a long way from Kansas—1,400 miles away, in North Long Beach, California, to be exact—but those early seeds continue to bear fruit. Here’s his story ...

Bridget Locke: So, you began as a self-taught musician. When did your formal training begin?

Chris Chiles: I played all through high school in the jazz band. Then, I earned a music scholarship to a community college, where I played every style of music, studied music theory and sharpened my piano skills. While at the college, a local guitarist noticed how well I played the drums and wanted me to help record a few songs. I agreed and, in return, he loaned me a keyboard and a four-track tape recorder. My Uncle James loaned me his TR-606 Drumatix drum machine, as well, and I started making beats on campus out of my dorm room. I made a couple of tracks for some campus rappers but the guitar dude wanted his stuff back. That summer, back home, I bought my first sequencer, the Yamaha QY10. It was portable, so I kept it with me at all times. After transferring to a four-year university, I linked up with a dope bass player, Tim Newton, and a dope keyboard player, Tony Simpson. We played talent shows and campus events. They became my brothers. I studied the technical side of music for a couple more years: theory, composition, scales, chords, melodies and instrumentation. I learned a lot, but I hated it; there were so many rules and restrictions. I changed my major from music to English—but I had my portable sequencer, so I could always make music.

BL: That's an interesting transition. Why English?

CC: I wanted to become an English teacher. I didn't believe I was or could be a music producer back then. I didn't know I could sell beats or work in a studio and actually produce a record for an artist.

BL: And yet, here you are. How did you become a music producer? When did you know you could do it?

CC: I moved to California and began working at an electronics store with a guy named Ryan Darden. Ryan told me he was interning for a guy named Patrik Ian-Polk. He was writing and directing a film called *Punks* and looking for music for the soundtrack. Ryan had my beat CD and gave it to Patrik. Patrik called me a week later; he had chosen two tracks from the CD and invited me to come to a studio in Hollywood to work on them. I'd *never* been to downtown Hollywood; I'd never driven on the 405. But Patrik offered me a lot of money for these two songs. So, I made my way to Hollywood and brought my sequencer with me. We tracked the music and vocals, and Patrik passed me a check. I believe this was the moment I thought I could really be a music producer. After that, I began working with local artists as often as possible. I also took a job at a famous music store in Lawndale, California, and it was there that I started to gather all the gear I would later need to really put together some good music.



BL: Let's talk about your production company. How did you prepare to launch?

CC: Affiliate Entertainment is the company. My great friend, Corey Alvarez (a.k.a. Mysta Pulse) and I put together some dope hip-hop music through this venture. It's in the name: "Affiliate." I wanted the company to be into everything; music, movies, writing, clothes, shoes, games. Everything. To launch it, I studied everything about music production companies. I learned the legal side of business ownership and music production. I also spoke to people who owned their own businesses and asked them what they did. I didn't know much about branding, but knew the brand would be black and gold everything, in homage to my fraternity.

BL: What was it like to release your first project?

CC: I put out the album *Black and Gold* with a bunch of dope artists that I knew: Young Webb, Oso Cali4nia, Cynthia Chiles, Cito from Fresh & Famous Co., RJ and FMG. It was my introduction to a full-scale music production project...and it was rough, but I got it done.

BL: Let's talk about current projects. What are you working on?

CC: Today, I'm working with so many talented artists like Oso Cali4nia, whose project will drop soon. Young PrinceTH\$. His album *Manifest Destiny* came out last year and we're back in the lab again. Mysta Pulse has some really uplifting music that I was honored to work on. A young singer/songwriter

named KC Chapman and I are mixing on his next album. I'm mixing an album for Reggie BDS, an artist from Brazil. That one is really fun. One of my favorite albums that I helped produce is *Mentally iLL* from TAZ Tikoon. She's a rapper and entrepreneur from Virginia. I also produced the lead single *Drip Splash* from another album she dropped called *.WAV Goddess*. I started my publishing company MARCY/DOROTHY Music this year with BMI. In addition to all that, I've invented a card game based on battle rap and the entire hip-hop culture, called "Hip-Hop 101: Win the Crowd!" It's set to drop in December.

BL: How would you advise an up-and-coming producer?

CC: Content is key these days. You have to put out music every week to stay in the listener's ear. If you slack, they move on to the next and you're old news. I make a beat a day. Luckily, I've been surrounded by artists who believed in me as a music producer. Surround yourself with artists with the same mind set. Make yourself affordable and available, and study your craft.

BL: Who do you look to or listen to for inspiration? What is your theme song?

CC: I listen to the music of producers and engineers I respect in the field. I follow a music producer named Focus; he's Dr. Dre's right-hand man, practically; I interviewed him once on a show I hosted. I listen to *The Chronic* every few months. I listen to *Thriller* once a month because it's Quincy. I listen to *Compositions* by Anita Baker for a live instrument mixing reference. I grew up during the New Jack Swing era and when Timbaland was killing the game. I love all of Kanye's work. My theme songs? *I Like* by Guy and *I'm Bad* by LL Cool J. Those tracks make me move every time. They send me back to when I first fell in love with hip-hop. But mostly, I just look to be inspired. I study the brush strokes, but I intend to paint my own pictures.

Want to learn more about Chris's projects and Affiliate Entertainment artists? Visit www.affiliateent.com or connect with him on social. IG: @affiliate_ent / FB: Chris Chiles / Twitter: @Affiliate_ent

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Tamika McClaine: Grief, Growth and Grind

by Bridget Locke, Keyline Mag, January 2021

https://issuu.com/keylinemag/docs/jan_2021_issue

Author's note: Strictly Business, a new Keyline Magazine series, features the "independent artists" of the business world: America's entrepreneurs.



As a youngster, Kansas City, Kansas native Tamika McClaine established her career goals early.

"I grew up wanting to be a mortician," she said.

One problem: by the time she headed to college, Tamika still hadn't overcome her fear of dead bodies. So instead, she majored in journalism.

"The dream was to become a writer for VIBE magazine," Tamika reflected. "I never got around to that, but my passion for writing has come in handy several times throughout my adult life."

Today, Tamika is wife to her college sweetheart, Kendon, and mom to three "McChildren": Kendon II (Deuce), a college freshman and musician; Kennedy, a high school student, cheerleader, future veterinarian and resident Anime expert; and Kellan, a middle schooler who is on pace to become the world's next "video game designer/comic book writer/YouTube star/Broadway actor/ televangelist."

Tamika's also a hip-hop head, blogger, volunteer, public speaker and apparel designer whose recent designs caught the attention of some of Hollywood's heavy hitters.

Bridget Locke: What were you doing before you

became an entrepreneur?

Tamika McClaine: I was a stay-at-home mom and loved it! My time was spent supporting my kids at every event, being *that* mama in the stands, and volunteering at each of their schools. My tenure on PTA boards led to other board positions within the city...which led to sidewalks being built around local elementary schools and serving on naming committees for new schools that were built within our school district. So, yeah—I did more than pack lunches.

BL: Let's talk about your blog. What is it called, what prompted you to start it and when did it launch?

TM: It's called *The Process*. After I lost my mom in 2018, I started the blog to chronicle my grief journey. It launched in July 2019.

BL: Besides giving you a platform to express yourself and providing others with helpful tips for navigating grief, what other doors has *The Process* opened?

TM: I've been fortunate enough to speak at conferences and other events regarding grief, loss and mental health. Because my mom was an organ donor, I've also partnered with local organizations, like Saving Sight and Midwest Transplant Network to advocate and speak about the importance of organ donation, especially within the African-American community.

BL: *The Process* organically led to another business venture—correct?

TM: Yes. I also decided to sell t-shirts that featured one of my sayings: "I Trust God AND I See A Therapist!" I partnered with an amazing vendor who brought my vision to life...and then I realized that I could actually create them myself! Over the course of eight months, I went from having an idea, to a hobby, to a side hustle, to a full-fledged business. In April 2020—yes, during the shelter-in-place order—I became inundated with t-shirt orders, even though I was just starting out. I realized that I needed to establish myself as a legitimate business quickly, so I started tossing around names, and nothing sounded right. My oldest son came up with Tees by T.MAC, and here we are!

BL: What did you have to sort out before determining that you were ready to launch full-scale?

TM: I had to decide very quickly whether this was to be a hobby or a business. I didn't want to pour time and money into something that wasn't meant to last. I had to get over my fear of failure and dive in head-first, and I'm so grateful that I did.

BL: You mentioned that your son helped you to determine the name. Did you already have ideas about branding?

TM: I wanted my branding to be a direct reflection of my personality: bold, chic, but urban enough to look great on a hoodie. That was super important; I am a proud product of the golden age of hip hop, and believe that my love for all things related to that culture is really the backbone of my business. As I decided on the color palette, I knew that I didn't want to deviate too far from the colors that were associated with my blog website.

BL: Your blog is inspiring, your brand is distinct and people are taking notice. Speaking of 'taking notice' ... there is one particular t-shirt that has become immensely popular, right?

TM: Right! My most recent shirt, which is a collaboration with my good friend, graphic designer Reena Stewart, depicts Joe Biden and Kamala Harris on OutKast's "Stankonia" album cover. It went viral, and everything changed! That tee has been shared on social media by Chris Rock, Halle Berry, Kevin Fredericks—known as KevOnStage—The Source Magazine, and even the niece of Vice President-elect Harris. We've been shipping as far away as Ontario, so that's a pretty good indication that people dig it.



BL: Who are your mentors?

TM: My mentor is also my sister/friend, Kira Cheree. She walked me through the darkest season of my life when my mom passed away, and then she pushed me into my purpose by providing a platform for me to share my story. *Then*, she supported my journey into entrepreneurship. She's the best, literally. I hope she knows just how large a role she has played in my growth, both personally and professionally.

BL: Since you've launched, how have you improved and built upon your knowledge and skill? Also, what have you stopped doing?

TM: I've become very intentional when it comes to my brand. Most recently, I graduated from Entrepreneur Business Basics, which trains and equips African-American business owners. That experience was just what I needed to give me the tools and confidence to go to the next level. There's an insane attention to details that I've always possessed, but I've become quite obsessed as it pertains to my business. I'm often up at 3 a.m., making sure the fonts are eye-catching on my website. I've learned very quickly that being attached to any and everything isn't always what's best in the long run. I've also stopped trying to bring everyone along with me...that was the hardest thing to tackle, but the most beneficial.

BL: You just touched on the level of dedication that it takes to be a successful entrepreneur. How do you balance it all? How do you unwind?

TM: Starting my business has required more discipline and accountability than anything else I've ever encountered. I'm still employed with my day job. Between that, three children doing distance learning, a very patient husband, and my current title as "The Strong Friend," there is very little time for myself. I had to remind myself early on that I am also still grieving the loss of my mother...an occasional break is necessary and non-negotiable. Movies in bed is usually my preferred method of self-care. I make sure that I schedule time for things like pedicures or the occasional shoe splurge—Timberlands, Chucks, and Louboutins are my top three. In addition, I make sure that I buy myself a new book every month or so.

BL: What kind of music moves you? What's your theme song?

TM: I've always had a love for all types of music. Hip hop inspires me on so many levels: the music, the fashion, the lyrics. It's a huge part of who I am. If I'm pulling an all-nighter, my playlist will likely include everything from A Tribe Called Quest to Nirvana or Green Day to Janet Jackson. If I'm in a rut and need to get my head together, 80's pop usually does the trick. I'm a Phil Collins fan! And, it's no secret that I have a deep, undying love for Michael, Janet, Prince, Stevie, Tupac...and Kirk. Kirk Franklin's music literally saved my life. In my opinion, he's the Michael Jackson of gospel. My theme song? "Baby I'm A Star" by Prince ("Might not know it now...").

BL: Who's hot in KC that a national audience should know about?

TM: My bro Jo Blaq is a phenomenal producer; I'm a fan of literally anything he drops. I've become a fan of a local artist, Kim Keys; her voice is bananas! Isaac Cates is definitely my favorite local musician/composer; he does it all. I follow several spoken word artists from the Poets in Autumn Tour...they're a ridiculously talented group of people.

BL: What's next for The Process and Tees by T.MAC?

TM: I definitely see myself outgrowing my little workspace at home. 2020 has taught me to roll with the punches and go with whatever happens, so I'll just say that I'm open for whatever comes next. One goal that I've always had is to develop meaningful partnerships with



organizations and companies that align with my values and all things that make me, me. I'm just a woman who loves God, my family, my friends who are my family, and the culture. When it's all said and done, nothing is by coincidence; my process launched my purpose. I'm just out here trying to make my mama proud.

Want to follow **The Process** with Tamika? Visit her website at tamikamcclaine.com/TheProcess, follow her blog on Facebook @TheProcessBlog, and connect on Instagram @TheProcessBlog. To check out the latest **Tees by T. MAC**, visit teesbytmac.com and follow on Facebook @TeesByTMAC.

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Celebrate Everyday

by Bridget Locke, *Catholic Key*, December 2020

<https://catholickey.org/2020/12/25/celebrate-every-day/>



The Martinez Family. Photo: Megan Marley.

The Martinez Family have weathered the storms of the pandemic, a cancer diagnosis and treatment through devotion to their faith, hope for the future and the support of their Catholic community.

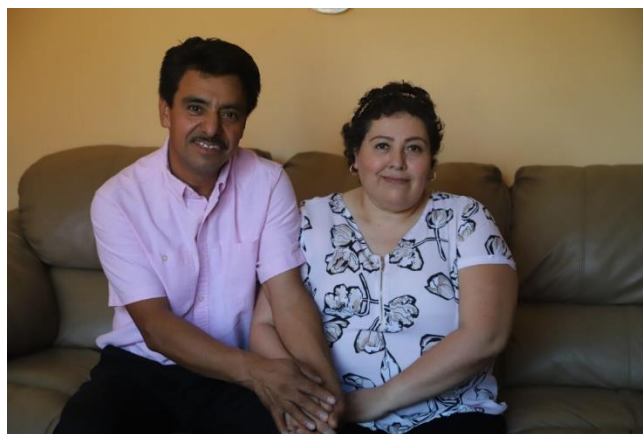
To the secular world, the end of the calendar year usually signals a period of excess, rampant consumerism and a frenzy of festivities; big meals, expensive gifts and increased debt is the order of the day as December 25 looms near. However, for Catholics, this time of year holds more meaningful significance. Advent season is an appointed time for believers throughout the world to focus on the virtues of hope, faith, joy and peace, with hearts of

repentance and celebration. Given the turbulent nature of 2020—natural disasters, worldwide sickness, social unrest and a deeply divided country—it has become more important than ever for followers of Christ to reflect on God’s abundant blessings and to give thanks for his perfect gift of salvation to the world.

The Martínez family of Raytown, Missouri, understands this well. In a year that has tested their faith like no other, this close-knit family of five can attest to the importance of maintaining faith and focus in spite of fear and uncertainty, and feeling the merciful, healing hand of God in the midst of sadness and suffering.

A journey to abundant life

All it takes is a short glance at Adelfo and María Martínez sitting hand-in-hand, smiling at one another in their living room, and the depth of emotion between them becomes obvious. After more than 27 years together, they are more in love than ever. The couple met and dated in their native Mexico, then moved to the United States in 1997 in search of a better life. Traveling to a new country with two toddlers in tow was a major adjustment.



After 27 years together, Adelfo and Maria Martinez are just as in love as ever and have instilled a love of God and service to the Church in raising their three children. Photo: Megan Marley.

“We arrived with very little and we didn’t know anyone at first,” said Adelfo.

While they had much to learn about adapting to a new life in America, María was adamant that one component of their former lives in Mexico would not be left behind: her children would be raised in the same religious tradition, with the same morals and standards as she had been.



Mitzi Martinez is grateful for the love, support and prayers that have flowed from their Catholic community as her mother Maria battled cancer, and today as they celebrate her restored health. Photo: Megan Marley.

“That’s one thing my mom always instilled in us,” said Juan. “Going to church was always important.”

The young family lived in the historic Northeast district of Kansas City, and began asking their neighbors about Mass.

“We heard about a Catholic church in Kansas that celebrated Mass in Spanish,” said Adelfo. “We attended, but not regularly, because it was a long way for us to travel every Sunday.”

Adelfo and María longed for something more consistent and, in 2001, were excited to join a parish closer to home: Holy Cross Catholic Church in Kansas City, Missouri.

“We went from being late every Sunday to super early,” laughed Mitzi.

At Holy Cross, Adelfo was chosen to serve as a reader and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and became a member of the pastoral council. Over time, his desire to serve God and his people has only grown. From 2007 to 2010, Adelfo studied theology at the Bishop Helmsing Institute. He has served as Grand Knight of Knights of Columbus Council 15287 for more than six years and supports catechesis for adults as an instructor.

“When my dad became more involved in church, his commitment led to our becoming more involved, too,” reflected Mitzi, 26.

She and Juan, 25, were altar servers, and today, the tradition continues with their 12-year-old brother Miguel, who is a server at Saint John Francis Regis Parish, where he also attends school and the family now worships.

“Serving is fun,” said Miguel. “Other kids might get bored in church, but I stay interested because I’m active.”

Finding a church community was very important to his family in the beginning of their journey, Adelfo said. Drawing from the strength and prayers of those who are grounded in faith became more important than ever over the past year.

Hope and faith

In 2019, María was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer, an illness that caught the entire family off-guard.

“María had always been healthy, with no major sicknesses,” said Adelfo. “When we found out she had cancer, we weren’t prepared. It tested us emotionally and financially.”

While Adelfo, a professional electrician, scurried to secure healthcare for María, she struggled to stay upbeat for her husband and children—particularly, Miguel.

“It was very, very hard. Mitzi and Juan are adults,” María explained, “but Miguel is still young and depends on me for everything. I needed to be healed because we still have him to raise.”

Though everyone fought to hide their sadness and fear from María, it was often Miguel who encouraged his mother to stand firm in her faith. After her mastectomy, María began chemotherapy. Coping with the physical effects of her treatments was harder than she imagined.

“I was more devastated about losing my hair than losing my breast,” María reflected. “But Miguel would see my sadness and say, ‘Let’s go to church.’ He would go with me to Our Lady of Lourdes [Parish], which is close to our home, so I could pray and celebrate the Eucharist. I learned so much from that experience. I feel so grateful. I know that God does not give us a test that we cannot handle.”

From the date of María’s surgery, to her final round of chemotherapy in March 2020, the Martínez family was surrounded in love and prayer by their expanding circle of loved ones.

“The Mass before Mom’s surgery was very full,” Mitzi recalled. “We had priests and church members, friends and loved ones come to visit my mom in the hospital, and they have continued to care for us. We are so thankful to everyone for all the support they’ve shown.”

Through tears, María agreed: “There were so many people who wrote letters and prayed for me. They felt like angels on earth.”

Joy and peace

Normally, holiday season at the Martínez home would be abuzz with traditions that bring multiple families together.

“One of our favorite traditions is to invite over other families, celebrate *Las Posadas*, break piñatas and recite the novena,” said Adelfo. “This year, with all that is happening with the coronavirus, we may not be able to do those things.”

Although a more subdued holiday season is not what they’d prefer, the Martínez family feels content to count their blessings, even if this year is a scaled-down celebration of five. There are so many reasons to rejoice: María, whose bouncy, lush curls have returned, is cancer-free. Next May, the still-in-love Adelfo and María hope to commemorate their 25-year milestone wedding anniversary in a special blessing and renewal of commitment ceremony. But, whether COVID-19 subsides or large events will still be limited, they are grateful...and at peace.



At 12 years old, Miguel Martínez finds joy in being an altar server and encouraging others to stand firm in their faith, even when faced with difficult circumstances. Photo: Megan Marley.

“We celebrate every day,” said Adelfo. “We are a happy family. We have a community full of family and friends who love and support us, and most importantly, God loves us. That is what I want everyone to understand, especially when there is so much suffering in the world. People need to know that God loves us all.”

Simple traditions to celebrate Advent at home

- + Traveling wisemen – using figures from a small nativity set, or a photo on cardstock, move the three wisemen around your home each day to symbolize our Advent journey of faith.
- + Have your Advent wreath blessed or do it yourself (search online for “Advent wreath blessing” for ideas)
- + Choose 24 Bible stories to read as you open your Advent calendar each day or create a Jesse Tree with one ornament for each story.
- + With each Christmas card received, create a new link with the person/family’s name for a paper prayer garland for Christmas Day.

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Voice and Adventure: The Value of a Catholic Education

by Bridget Locke, *Catholic Key*, March 2021

<https://catholickey.org/2021/03/11/voice-and-adventure-the-value-of-a-catholic-education/>



Yen Truong. Photo: Megan Marley.

If Yen Truong found her voice at Holy Cross Elementary School, she discovered her sense of adventure at St. Pius X High School

If Yen Truong's friends were allowed a single word to describe her, many would opt for the same one: "Talkative."

That's okay with her. She embraces the label because it demonstrates just how far she has come. Today, Truong has lots to say—but not so long ago, she spoke to few people beyond her immediate family.

"My mom, dad and I emigrated from Vietnam to the United States when I was three," said Truong, who is now 19. "We didn't speak English. My parents left behind everything they knew to give me a better life in America."

Though Truong worked hard to adapt to her new surroundings, her parents recognized soon after enrolling her in public school that she needed more focused attention from her teachers to be successful.

"I struggled to communicate with my teachers," Truong said of her early classroom experiences. "I attended two different schools in Kansas City before my parents decided that placing me in Catholic school would put me in a better position to thrive."

Truong began attending Holy Cross as a kindergartner, and as she progressed to eighth grade, earned the SPX Mock Scholarship, which enabled her to attend St. Pius X Catholic High School. If Truong found her voice at Holy Cross, she found her sense of adventure at St. Pius X. Already a stellar scholar, Truong was constantly encouraged by teachers and classmates at St. Pius X to grow socially, by meeting new people and trying new things.

So, she jumped in with both feet. She tried soccer. Tennis. *Basketball.*

"I had never played a sport until I attended high school, and my friends convinced me to try out for basketball. Because our school was small, I made the team—but I wasn't very good," Truong laughed. "I think I made one layup the entire season. Still, being in an environment where everyone encouraged me to try added to my confidence. It helped me to grow."

Much of the cost of Truong's Catholic education was covered by the **Endowment Trust for Catholic Education**, a fund which distributes millions of dollars in donations to participating Catholic schools every year. For students who have financial need, the monetary assistance offered

from the Trust provides access to a Catholic education that equips them for a life of faith and service, while preparing them for the academic rigor of college.

Truong also credits the Catholic school environment for strengthening her faith, and giving her a solid foundation that will be with her for life.

“Being in a Catholic school, it was easy to ask questions regarding the faith and receive answers that will help me further understand my faith,” she said. “I believe that simply being in a Catholic environment greatly aided me in growing stronger in my faith!”

Her Catholic school upbringing certainly prepared Truong for higher education. After finishing high school in 2020 with multiple college credits, Truong currently studies biology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and plans to become a physician assistant after graduation. Before completing her bachelor’s and master’s degree programs, she plans to earn a Certified Nursing Assistant license to test the waters of the medical field.

“The physician assistant program is competitive. I just want to be sure I have a backup plan,” she said.

At the heart of it all, Truong, who was once intensely shy and reluctant to speak, is drawn to connecting with others and feels a career in medicine and a life of service is the appropriate way to meet and help people. It’s the ideal way to honor her family.

“I just want to create a fulfilling life for myself. If I am fulfilled, then I will consider myself successful. Becoming successful is the best way for me to honor my parents and supporters for their sacrifice and investment in my future.”

Are you interested in making Catholic education accessible to more deserving students in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph? Please consider a donation to the Endowment Trust Fund for Catholic Education. Visit www.etfce.org to learn more.

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God's Plans are Perfect

by Bridget Locke, Catholic Key, June 2021

<https://catholickey.org/2021/06/04/gods-plans-are-perfect/>



Though she knew no English when she first arrived, Yulys took English classes, earned an associate of arts degree and began teaching. Today, she teaches religion and Spanish at Holy Cross School, where her children attend.

In 2009, Yulys Espinosa emigrated from Cuba to pursue a more promising, liberated life in the United States. The refugee process took five years for her and her husband Roger to complete, but from their perspective, it was worth every second. Though they faced several unknowns, Yulys wasn't afraid to leave behind everything familiar for the promise of something better for themselves and their 15-month-old son, Flavio.

"Leaving Cuba was difficult to do," Yulys said, "but we were ready. We were desperate to leave Communism. We didn't have any family, friends or much money, but heard good things about this country and *simply trusted*. We were so happy when we arrived and saw someone holding a sign with Roger's name in the airport," Yulys laughed. "We said, 'We are in God's hands and everything is going to go well.'"

Yulys' unshakable faith — and her ability to see God at work in every aspect of her life — would be helpful during the year to come. There were difficult days ahead.

Soon after arriving in Kansas City and settling into their new apartment, Yulys discovered that another family member would soon join them.

"I was pregnant," she said. "We didn't know it at the time, but we came to the U.S. as a family of four."

Although Diana, her daughter, was a blessed surprise, Yulys' pregnancy proved difficult. Because she had trouble keeping food down, she struggled to gain weight, was exhausted and had a tough time keeping up with young Flavio while Roger worked to provide for their family.

"I wasn't in communication with my family, and there were times when I was so sick, our refugee resettlement social worker from Jewish Vocational Service took me to the hospital," Yulys recalled, tearfully. "I couldn't care for Flavio the way I wanted, which made me very sad. And it was winter."

(Kansas City winter. One of the snowiest Kansas City winters in history ...)

Still, something on the inside kept Yulys afloat: her faith. She'd been very active in her church in Cuba and knew to look for God's presence in every situation.

"When I was in the hospital after having Diana, a stranger brought me holy Communion," she said. "And, we had become friends with a couple in the area who came from my husband's hometown in Cuba," Yulys recalled. "We were developing connections here. I was able to see God's hand on our family and on everyone who helped us during that time, even when the days were difficult."

Eventually, Yulys resumed other things that brought her joy and fulfillment; specifically, involvement in church and pursuing education.

Their apartment was just a few blocks from Holy Cross Catholic Church. When winter became less brutal and they bought a car, she and Roger began attending Mass every Sunday.

“In Cuba, I did a lot in the Church; I was a reader, worked as a missionary and served as a catechist,” Yulys said. “I missed doing all those things.”

Yulys spoke with Father Jason Koch, parish priest at the time, who invited her to become a catechist at Holy Cross.

She also returned to education. Yulys earned a business administration degree in Cuba and wanted to become educated to prepare for work in Kansas City. Though she knew no English when she first arrived, Yulys took English classes, earned an associate of arts degree and began teaching. Today, she teaches religion and Spanish at Holy Cross, where Flavio, 13, and Diana, 11, attend.

“Being a teacher in a Catholic school is the perfect job, because it gives me the opportunity to teach the truth about Jesus,” she said.

Eleven years have passed since Yulys’ journey to Kansas City. Today, she and her husband Roger remain united in love and faith. Her children are thriving. And her faith remains unwavering.

“Everything has come together for my family,” Yulys said, in awe. “God’s plans are *perfect*.”

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Play Hard, Pray Harder

by Bridget Locke, Catholic Key, June 2021

<https://catholickey.org/2021/06/04/play-hard-pray-harder/>



Matt and Penni Warner with their three boys are Camp Savio and Camp Bosco's most ardent champions (daughter Marybeth not pictured). **Photo: Laura Hughes**

"Necessity is the mother of invention," Plato once wrote — and there is perhaps no better way to explain the creation of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph's summer camp for youth, Camp Savio. It was needed.

In 2011, after the campsite where diocesan middle schoolers were typically taken for summer camp was damaged by a tornado, Diane Pickert, (then) director of youth ministry for St. Gabriel Catholic Church, and Tim Volk, (then) director of youth ministries for St. Therese Catholic Church-North, received an invitation from Maur Hill-Mount Academy to use their facility. "Edge Camp" was born in 2012, and a year later, the camp was renamed Camp Savio in honor of Saint Dominic Savio. Camp Savio continued to gain in popularity

and attendance. Eventually, additional staff was hired, and one week of Camp Savio expanded to two.

Though Camp Savio is geared toward middle school students, by 2015 the high school-aged staff numbers swelled past 20. In 2018, a third week was added to accommodate the leadership development needs of the older youth, and Camp Bosco was created. While Camps Savio and Bosco provide distinct experiences for the age groups they serve and employ, their focus on spiritual development, teamwork and a family atmosphere is a common thread.

Camp champs

The focus on family is what hooked one of the camps' most ardent champions and volunteers. Penni Warner first became acquainted with Camp Savio when her daughter Marybeth attended as a seventh-grader. Though Marybeth attended alone her first year, Warner saw a significant change in her daughter after she returned home.

"I saw the spiritual growth in Marybeth right away," said Penni, "and decided to go with her the following year. I wanted to experience it for myself."

The whole family followed Marybeth to camp, in fact. Since 2012, Penni and her husband Matt, both youth ministers, have served as camp chaperones for their parish. Additionally, their sons represent every camp demographic: Everett, 11, will attend Camp Savio as a first-time camper this summer; Charlie, 14, will attend Camp Savio as a camper for the last year (and transition to Camp Bosco next year); and Weston, 17, has been selected as a servant-shepherd this summer.

A day in the life

So, what should campers expect at Camps Savio and Bosco? First, there's the VIP treatment upon arrival.

“One of my favorite parts of camp is how the families are greeted as soon as we pull into camp,” shared Everett. “We feel welcomed right away.”

Penni agrees: “The servants and shepherds take the families’ luggage and put them in the rooms. The parents don’t have to lift a finger, which is nice!” she said.

As campers get settled, they are divided into shepherd groups, allowing for experiences with new people.

“An emphasis on spiritual growth and social development through teamwork and service is a primary focus for Michael Nations, our Diocesan Youth Ministry Director. Assigning the youth to groups with a mixture of kids from different parishes prompts them to connect with people they might not otherwise meet,” Penni said. “Our diocese covers a lot of territory, so the youth from city and rural backgrounds get exposure to one another. As they interact, they find out just how much they have in common.”

The camp motto, ‘Play hard, pray harder,’ promotes equal parts physical and spiritual activity. While the daily agendas are filled with team-building exercises and fun — including water sports, arts and crafts, low-rope challenges and the popular (and messy!) mud day — there is also daily Mass, worship music, reconciliation and parish pow-wows, where members of the same parishes reassemble to discuss all that they’ve learned and experienced.

Then there’s Eucharistic adoration.

“If you ask the youth about their favorite parts of camp near the beginning of the week, they’ll likely talk about the games and physical activities,” Warner said. “But if you ask them near the end of the week, many will say, ‘Adoration.’ That’s when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and everyone gets an opportunity to experience Christ in a personal way. This is the moment it gets real for them. That’s when it gets real for *me*. It’s my favorite part of camp.”

Lasting impact

While some younger campers feel homesick at the beginning of the week (often, it’s their first time away from home), those sad feelings almost always subside by the end of the week. Along the way, there’s a whole contingency of weeklong “mommies” who are ready to comfort them through it.

“Some campers may be a little teary when they arrive, but by the end of the week, they’re often crying because they *don’t* want to leave,” said Penni. “Until then, I’m there to serve as a fill-in mom, along with the other chaperones. We want them to feel comforted and nurtured, and for the parents to know their children are safe. The women chaperone the girls and the men look after the boys. Again — the family environment aspect is really important.”

However, the most important aspect is the lasting impact that the camps can have on the campers’ relationships with God.

“We have grown with these kids over the years,” says Penni. “I’ve seen them when they start out as campers, and now see many of them going to seminary, becoming faithful members of the Church, and understanding what Christ can do in their lives. And I’ve seen it in my own home,” Warner continued. “Marybeth will graduate next year from Benedictine College with a double major in theology and evangelization-catechesis. Weston has a very strong prayer life and heard the call to

ministry several times during adoration at Savio and Bosco. He is now discerning the priesthood. What more could any parent ask from a camp experience? There are just so many good things to share,” she beamed. “I could go on and on.”

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More Than Numbers

By Bridget Locke, *Catholic Key*, September 2021

<https://catholickey.org/2021/09/09/more-than-numbers/>



Angela Laville, CPA, MBA, is the newly appointed Finance Officer for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph and a strong woman of faith who loves her family and seeks God's direction in every decision.

Keen understanding of accounting principles? Check. Efficient management skills? Absolutely. Emotional intelligence? No doubt! Everything you would expect to be true of Angela Laville, CPA, MBA, the newly appointed Finance Officer for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, is true. However, she is *also* a strong woman of faith who loves her family and seeks God's direction in every decision.

Laville is so much more than a "numbers person."

Expanding horizons

"I was always strong in math and finance," said Laville. "In college, I considered various options,

but after speaking with accountants, found that the field would allow me to assist others in professional and personal environments. Becoming an accountant allowed me to work in my strength while helping others to be successful."

As her career progressed, supervisors suggested Laville explore other disciplines to become a well-rounded leader. Expanding her horizons allowed her to lead a variety of functions, including finance, human resources, information technology, risk, marketing, and more.

"As a result, I can see the big picture and offer guidance from financial and operational perspectives," she said.

Laville has remained open to exploring new experiences in her personal life, as well, while yielding to God's perfect timing. She waited intently to find the right person with whom to share her life, marrying in 2016 at age 51.

In 2015, Laville and her husband Gordon were set up by a mutual church friend and realized quickly that they were compatible in the most meaningful way: their faith.

Being married to someone who continually grows in his faith and shares it with everyone he meets inspires her daily, Laville said. Equally devout and inspiring are her four stepchildren: Sister Mary Teresa, who took perpetual vows with the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita in August; Elie, who serves with National Evangelization Team (NET) Ministries; Nina, a sophomore at Benedictine College; and Betsy, a junior at St. James Academy.

"They dance, sing, play violin, flute, soccer and more. Most importantly, their faith is strong, and they know that their talents come from God. I am so blessed to have joined this family."

God was asking more

Years ago, as Laville cared for her very ill mother, she was led by then Father Robert Gregory to study

the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) for strength. Verse six, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied,” became her focus in prayer and perspective. It changed her life.

“I began recognizing virtues and gifts that evolved from living out the words of Jesus Christ,” Laville said. “Now, whenever I meditate on these words and live in accordance with these principles, I can follow through on what God asks of me.”

In 2011, Laville responded to God’s calling by transitioning from the large for-profit business sector to small business and nonprofit sectors.

“God was asking more of me,” she said. “He showed me that small businesses and not-for-profits needed strong leadership.”

In 2020, God led her to serve in a greater capacity. After a call from a recruiter, Laville began the process of interviewing for the position of Diocesan Finance Officer and took the helm following the retirement of Dave Malanowski.

Laville feels fortunate to lead such devoted and knowledgeable teammates.

“I am truly blessed with a strong team that knows all the intricacies of the diocese. As we support the mission of Bishop Johnston and the diocese, we remain focused on using our resources wisely, supporting our schools, and spreading the faith.”

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On June 15, 2021, Dave Malanowski, a St. Therese (North) parishioner and recently retired Finance Officer for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice (For the Church and Pontiff) Cross for 30 years of distinguished service to the Church in a solemn prayer service presided by Bishop James V. Johnston, Jr.

“We believe this is the first time anyone from our diocese has received this special honor from the Holy Father,” said Bishop Johnston. “It’s a source of pride and joy — not only for Dave’s family, but for our diocesan family. His service has been marked by integrity, competence, a Christian demeanor and a love for the Church and her mission.”

Founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1888, the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Cross is presented to laypersons and clergy, and is one of the highest papal honors bestowed upon laity.

St. Bridget Parish: An Enduring Example of Good Stewardship

by Bridget Locke, Catholic Key, February 2022

<https://catholickey.org/2022/02/07/st-bridget-parish-an-enduring-example-of-good-stewardship/>



St. Bridget Parish, Pleasant Hill circa 2021. Photo: Megan Marley.

Last October — with Bishop James V. Johnston, Jr. presiding at Mass, as well as current Pastor Father Curt Vogel and several former pastors serving as concelebrants — parishioners and well-wishers gathered to commemorate the sesquicentennial anniversary of St. Bridget Parish in Pleasant Hill, Mo. Clearly, a 150-year legacy provides reason enough to celebrate; the number alone demonstrates longevity and tenacity. But a deeper dive into history uncovers more meaningful inspiration. Many acts of faith, hope and charity can unfold over a span of 54,750 days.

Mission and motivation

The St. Bridget Parish story started in 1867, when Cass County, Mo., Catholic families — mostly Irish railroad workers — gathered monthly to celebrate Mass in one another's homes. Eventually, they desired a church in which to worship, so the men of their community consulted with Archbishop Peter Kenrick of the Archdiocese of St. Louis (where Cass County was then located) and requested that he purchase land for a structure. He obliged, and on May 13, 1868, the mission of the church was canonically established.

Construction commenced at South Jeffreys and Locust streets in Pleasant Hill and was completed in 1870. As the families stood witness in 1871, Bishop John J. Hogan of the Diocese of St. Joseph dedicated the church to Saint Bridget of Ireland (also known as Saint Bridget of Kildare). Saint Bridget, one of Ireland's three major patron saints, was renowned for her leadership of the Irish people, generosity and devoted life of prayer and service to the Church.



Photo: Megan Marley.

The original church structure burned down in 1880, but this setback only strengthened the families' motivation. They constructed and furnished a new brick building. In 1885, Bishop Hogan dedicated the new church.

Steadfast stewardship

Upgrades continued beyond the fire, and happened more frequently as years progressed. Particularly since the 1930s, parishioners have donated time, talent, pews, property, state-of-the-art instruments,

substantial financial support and so much more. Remarkably, St. Bridget Parish has no substantial debt today. When the mortgage was paid off in 2017, parishioners declined to take on large-scale projects or hire more staff. Instead, they opted to save for a rainy-day fund and make improvements as needed and could be afforded.



Photo: Megan Marley.

Father Vogel, raised in Pleasant Hill and now serving as pastor of his home parish, recognizes this spirit of good stewardship from the past as well as the present.

“When I was young and Father expressed a need, St. Bridget’s parishioners simply did what was asked of them. As pastor, I have experienced the same. While I know this spirit of giving isn’t unique to us, I recognize how fortunate we are that people continue to step up.”

In his homily commemorating the parish’s anniversary, former pastor Monsignor Offutt similarly emphasized the importance of the parishioners:

“That’s the glory of this place. The gospel

preached and the gospel lived ... people who had Jesus Christ so deep under their skin that they brought the Lord into every room they entered. For 150 years, St. Bridget [Parish] has been the seat and the scene of people who learned and taught what it means to be genuinely great and truly important.”

When asked to offer thoughts about his (or any) parish’s key to longevity and good stewardship, Father Vogel carefully noted that devotion extends beyond financial support. Everyone all in, he said. Share what you have as expressions of your love for God — and do so proactively.

“When priests make a plea, heed the call. But you don’t have to wait. Step out and *ask* what’s needed. Offering to help with RCIA, confirmation, any need ... It’s all meaningful. Many Catholics want thriving parishes — something grand, in the solemn sense, because they want an atmosphere that helps them to encounter God. The Church needs people to give generously so that thriving parishes are possible.”

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Just Say Yes

by Bridget Locke, *Catholic Key*, April 2022

<https://catholickey.org/2022/04/04/just-say-yes/>



Angelina Creedon.

Like most students focused on the future, Gladstone, Missouri, native Angelina Creedon had already begun considering life after high school before she had even graduated. Heading off to college was the initial plan for the homeschooled student in 2020. However, the possibility of pursuing a different path also tugged at her heart.

“I have watched my parents serve in ministry since I was very young. I also served in peer ministry and helped with the Challenge group at St. Charles Borromeo Parish as a mentor to middle school girls,” Creedon said. “I have known for a while that I want to serve God for the rest of my life.”

Although attending college wouldn’t prevent Creedon from growing in ministry, she felt more and more that God was calling her to do something bold and intentional in service to the Church.

The NET was cast

During her sophomore year of high school, missionaries from NET Ministries stayed in her family’s home and encouraged her to apply someday. After their discussions, Creedon felt called by God to pursue NET.

Based in West St. Paul, Minnesota, NET Ministries was developed in 1981, when founder and President Mark Berchem organized a team of young adults to put on several high school youth retreats around Southern Minnesota over a three-week period. Eventually, the missions expanded over more states, and the time commitment grew to nine months. NET, short for National Evangelization Teams, was later adopted as the ministry’s official name, drawing inspiration from Mark 1:17 (“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people’”) and Luke 5:4 (“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down your nets for a catch’”). Today, more than 150 NET team members serve annually across the country.

“I’ve been acquainted with several NET alumni in my personal life, and felt drawn to who they are in their faith,” Creedon said. “Their character told me what I needed to know about the strength of the program, so I decided to apply.”

The application process, which Creedon describes as encouraging and intense, entails completing an application, participating in an interview and attending a Discernment Weekend, a retreat attended by multiple prospective missionaries. During the Discernment Weekend, applicants learn more about NET and spend time in prayer to determine whether spending the next year as a missionary is what God is calling them to do.

Creedon found the process validating. “Every step helped affirm who *I* am in the faith,” she said.



Angelina Creedon (third from left) with the rest of NET Ministries Team 11.

Relational ministry

In August 2020, Creedon began serving as a parish missionary in Jasper, Indiana, where four parishes feed into the youth group she serves.

Currently, she oversees youth nights, plans youth retreats and helps facilitate religious education for approximately 40 young people. With every interaction, setting the atmosphere for others to develop real relationships with Christ is her focus.

“I give our youth group members a safe space to be authentic and ask questions. While I cannot eliminate their distractions, I can help build a level of trust that invites them to encounter Christ. NET is a relational ministry, and our relationships become the safe place for them to share. The end goal is to put young people in community with one another, and provide an environment for them to clearly hear Christ speaking to them.”

Next (ordered) steps

Creedon’s time in the program will end in May 2022. As she did in high school, Creedon has begun contemplating the next phase. As always, she is depending on God to order her steps.

“Whatever comes next for me, I know I’ll be working in ministry. I’ve prayed about it, and have heard God tell me, ‘Just say yes.’”

To learn more about NET Ministries, visit www.netusa.org.

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Communication and Collaboration: Keys to Constructing the Church of the Future

by Bridget Locke, *Catholic Key*, June 2022

<https://catholickey.org/2022/06/08/communication-and-collaboration-keys-to-constructing-the-church-of-the-future>

Over the years, Martha Kauffman, construction manager for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, has seen many construction projects come to fruition. From minor updates to major renovations and new construction, Kauffman has helped parishes enhance their physical structures to demonstrate good stewardship, gratitude to God for his provision and faithfulness in preserving the Church for generations to come.

While reverence to God is paramount, successful construction projects also require meticulous planning. Therefore, under Kauffman's guidance, the diocese adheres to a structured process flow that helps ensure that the right constituents are convened and accountable through every stage.

As part of the Property Management Office, the Construction Management Office is involved with projects that cost more than \$150,000 and require the expertise of an architect, engineer or other professionals. The Construction Management Office, led by Kauffman, works in close collaboration with the Diocesan Building Commission. Together, they oversee the design and construction phases of major builds.

Go with the (process) flow

There are several major projects in various phases of completion within the diocese. For example, Downtown Kansas City's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception is in the midst of its "Building Glory" capital campaign to construct the new Father Donnelly Hall Evangelization Center, a 300-400 seat, multi-purpose event space that will house parish offices, meeting rooms, a reception area and catering kitchen, and includes improvements to Morning Glory Ministries, the parish's mission to the homeless and hungry of the downtown area. Additionally, St. Andrew the Apostle Parish (Gladstone) is in the schematic design phase of its "Church for the Ages" campaign, to erect a new worship space to seat 1,200 and add classroom space, youth program rooms, meeting rooms and a large reception hall.

Neither project would have advanced to this point without carefully crafted strategies. So, what are the hallmarks of a good construction plan?

It's important to assess needs, secure proper approvals and engage the appropriate church leadership and professionals in the process. These steps are expounded upon in detail in the comprehensive "Guidelines for New Construction and Major Renovation Projects" document, which is being updated to include information on contracts and different options for Project Delivery Methods. Written by the Construction Management Office and peer-reviewed by the Building Commission, the document offers step-by-step instructions for parishes engaged in major renovation and new construction projects.

While the guidelines were created to help parishes of the diocese navigate construction projects with a clear-cut process flow, Kauffman believes the *most* important components of a successful construction project are not confined to a written manual; they grow from its pages. They begin and end with transparent leadership and intentional communication.

Building buy in

Building buy-in for projects often starts with conducting a master plan feasibility study, which includes brainstorming sessions that bring in representative groups of people to express needs and opinions, relative to a proposed project.

“Forming a committee with a large swath of experience and representation of the parish is key,” said Kauffman. “Pastors who put the right people on parish building committees typically have the most positive experiences with major renovations. Successful parish leadership strives to include all constituents and consider the opinions and needs of others, so there are few surprises or controversies down the line. They build consensus among the parish and communicate the process effectively.”

Kauffman names several pastors who understand the importance of bringing all voices to the table — including Monsignor Brad Offutt, pastor of Visitation Parish, where a feasibility study has been launched to assess the potential for upgrades to Visitation Catholic School. His thoughts on collaboration mirror hers.

“Major capital projects can be so multifaceted that even when intense, well-meaning pastoral, financial, and technical scrutiny is invested in them, they can still be tricky,” he said. “Therefore, a parish really must not only have the explicit permission of the Bishop, but also the assistance of diocesan architectural, liturgical, legal, and financial staff in planning and executing a serious building project.”

Respect is also key.

“One of the primary obligations of a pastor is to respect his people,” Msgr. Offutt continued. “From wall colors to worship, a pastor must get to know his folks in their history, habits, and hopes. He needs to learn how things got where they are, where they might go, where he thinks they really need to go, and where the community he serves thinks they need to go. This process takes time and inevitably surfaces disagreements. That is when the work of respect begins in earnest, as consensus slowly forges from the diverse points of view in a given community.”

With every project, Kauffman wants one thing to be clear: the Construction Management Office is here to help.

“Those of us who work in the Construction Management Office and serve on the Building Commission have multiple years of experience and exposure to major construction builds,” she said. “We are here to help; never to hinder. We are committed to doing our part to make every construction project successful.”

Diocesan Building Commission

- Deacon Michael Lewis, *Chairman*
- Matt Berislavich
- Bob Drake
- Bill Gagnon
- John Giacomo
- Chris Hotop
- Bernard Jacquinet
- Martha C. Kauffman
- Angela Laville

- Tim Saxe
- Thomas Strahan
- Father Paul Turner



Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

New Donnelly Hall

- **Project Phase** – Construction Documentation
- **Project Delivery Method:** Construction Manager as Constructor (CMc)
- **Architect:** SFS Architects
- **Construction Manager:** JE Dunn Construction
- **Total Project Budget:** \$14 million
- **New Construction is approximately 19,000 square feet and includes:**
 - Event space for parish and diocesan functions with seating for 350-400 people
 - Catering kitchen
 - Parish offices
 - Gift shop



St. Andrew the Apostle Parish

New Church

- **Project Phase** – Schematic Design
- **Project Delivery Method:** Construction Manager as Constructor (CMc)
- **Architect:** HTK Architects
- **Liturgical Design:** Clark Architectural Collaborative 3
- **Construction Manager:** Straub Construction

- **Total Project Budget:** \$26 million
- New construction is approximately 52,000 square feet and includes 18,000-square-foot church with seating for 1,200 people



St. Munchin Parish

Parish Hall

- **Project Phase** – Schematic Design
- **Architect:** La Tona Architects
- **Total Project Budget:** \$3 million
- Renovation and addition to the St. Rita School building.
- This project has been under consideration since 2010 and began with an existing building conditions report to determine if the building was viable.
- Project restarted in 2019 with renewed energy and an established building committee.
- The current facility was built in 1949 and has a total of 12,950 sf and two floors.
- Project is planned in phases and includes:
 - Window replacement
 - New HVAC
 - Installation of new 3-stop elevator
 - Renovate existing classrooms in school
 - 2,500-square-foot building addition, which includes new kitchen and serving area, new restrooms, storage and support functions

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KC MOTHERS IN CHARGE

2020 ANNUAL REPORT &
2021 SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER

2020: A BRIEF LOOK BACK

SPRING + SUMMER 2021

Still Going, Still Growing

CELEBRATING ROSILYN

4TH ANNUAL UNITY AWARDS

Will You Join Us?

2020: A Brief Look Back



It's no secret that 2020 was challenging in multiple ways: a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, social unrest – and in Kansas City, Mo., the worst year on record for homicides. In spite of it all, KC Mothers in Charge continued its work in the community to advocate against violence and provide education in schools, prisons, neighborhoods and through the media. Here are some of the highlights of our work in 2020:

At the beginning of the year, our founder, Rosilyn Temple, joined the US Attorney and others to announce the kick-off of a new anti-violence program, “Why Are We So Angry.” KC MIC volunteers received special training and then were sent to high-risk neighborhoods to visit with families about their fears and what help they would like to receive. We began our work in the North Town Fork Creek neighborhood, and when the pandemic shut down home visits, we continued our outreach through door hangers and neighborhood association activities. We hosted a block party for neighborhood residents in September, and have since worked with Sheffield and Blue Hills Neighborhood Associations. The “Why Are We So Angry” program is funded by a generous grant from the Kansas City Crime Commission.

Our annual Pee Wee's Run was held virtually, with dozens of people running individually and raising funds for KC MIC's work. Thanks to our volunteer race directors, Cara Gilmore and Estelle Brooks, and to the event sponsors: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, Country Club Bank, Fit 4 US 4 U Health & Fitness, KMBC-9 Community, Power Plus Pilates, Swope Health Services, Ada & Kevin Koch, Dan Haley, Palle & Dennis Riling, Stevi & Jeff Brick, Barbara Mueth & Steve Rinne.

Our 3rd annual Unity Awards celebration went virtual, too, with help from emcee Steve Kraske of KCUR radio. The Unity Awards recognize individuals and organizations who work with law enforcement in innovative ways to improve their community. Awards went to Ann Murphy, PhD, founder and director of the Youth R.I.S.E. soccer program for at-risk youth, and to Sheffield Place for their work with the KCMO Police Department to make improvements in their neighborhood. Thanks to our Unity Awards sponsors: UMB Financial Services, Palle & Dennis Riling, Serenity Funeral Home, Elizabeth Bordenave, Stevi & Jeff Brick, Commerce Bank, Kay Johnson & Bill Koenigsdorf, Ada & Kevin Koch, Barbara Mueth & Steve Rinne, and Chaplain Chuck & Dawn Murphy.



KC MIC helped make the holidays brighter for the families we serve in a variety of ways. Our volunteers participated in three different Trunk-or-Treat events at Halloween, provided grocery store gift certificates for Thanksgiving, and provided gifts and food for 27 children, as well as their families, who were impacted by homicide.

At the end of 2020, KC Mothers in Charge learned that we had been chosen as one of six black-led nonprofit organizations in Kansas City selected by the REACH Healthcare Foundation for a special new project aimed at increasing our capabilities and helping the foundation develop new ways to support nonprofit organizations led by and serving the African-American community.

Due to the growth in the number and scope of the services we provide, KC MIC also added a new staff position Managing Director, Bridget Locke (see page 4), to allow founder Rosilyn Temple more time to follow her passion of working directly with families.

The Year In Numbers

IN 2020, KC MOTHERS IN CHARGE PROVIDED:

107

Visits to homicide scenes in support of families

POLICE LINE - DO NOT CROSS

14

Family home visits in the immediate aftermath of homicide



4,777

Weekly phone calls to bereaved loved ones of homicide victims



8

Hope & Healing Support Group sessions



48

Individual grief therapy support sessions



"OUR MEN AND WOMEN AND OUR CHILDREN ... WE'RE LOSING THEM BY THE DOZENS. THE WHOLE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE OUTRAGED."

- Rosilyn Temple, 2020

Special Thanks to our Generous Donors

IN 2020, YOUR SUPPORT WAS STRONGER THAN EVER!

\$50,000-\$200,000

Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund
Jackson County COMBAT
KC Crime Commission

\$10,000-\$49,999

Curry Family Foundation
Menorah Heritage Foundation
REACH Healthcare Foundation
UMB Financial Corporation

\$5,000-\$9,999

American Century Investments Foundation
Terry Bauman
Anonymous

\$1,000-\$4,999

Catherine Brents
Cambridge Charitable Gift Fund
Central Presbyterian Church
Commerce Bancshares Foundation
Judge Cleveland F. Moulton Christmas Poor Fund
Dylan Knaggs
Ada & Kevin Koch
Marvin C. and Marguerite R. Eagan Foundation
Barbara Mueth & Steve Rinne
Network for Good
Robert Overton
Margi Pence
Timothy Racer
Palle & Dennis Rilingier
Chaplain Henry Son
Ten Ten Foundation
Visitation Social Services/St. Francis Xavier
Tony Zummallen

\$500-\$999

Stevi & Jeff Brick
Elizabeth Bordenave
Country Club Bank
Jerry Daily
Kay Johnson & Bill Koenigsdorf
Kauffman Foundation Holiday Matching Gift Program
McLain's Markets
Pentair Inc.
Usha Rengachary
Tim Sheahan
Joan Tonkinson
The Wally Foundation, Inc.
Peggy Zilm

Up to \$499

Amber & Chris Manning Fund
Danielle Anderson
Amy Axtell
David Bamberger
Amy Bearce
Robert Becker
Blue Valley North High School Soccer Program
Bright Funds Foundation
Jennifer Bryan
Vicki Callahan
Mary Cape
Connor Cape
Rebecca Colnar
Stacey Golub
Don Compier
Keith Connor
Deborah Cook
Terri Daly
Stefanie Davies
Tom Davis
William Eisenberg
Margaret Ekerdt
Jasmine Fierst
Debra Foster
John Franklin
Nora Freyman
Mary Gentry
Mary Gigliotti
Jill Gillespie
Cara Gilmore
Joshua Givens
Rosary Glenn
Christine Glenski
Global Prairie Foundation
Kerry Gordon
Dan B. Haley
Lona Harris
Harvest Graphics, LLC
Mary Kay Heldmen
Joseph Hiersteiner
Susan Horowitz
Katherine Hovde
Jennifer Stence Design
Linda Johnson
Tara Johnson
Harvey Kaplan
Debbie Kreszyn
Bridget Locke
AJ Loscalzo
Mary Lou McClone
Sue McCord-Belzer
Jason Miles

Arlene Millard
Jody Mitchell
Regina Nouhan
Pete Peterson
Matthew Pozel
Edna Ray
Richard and Annette Bloch Family Foundation Fund
Elizabeth Schellhorn
Wendy Shaul
Dianna Shomaker
Amy Smith
Kelly Somberg
Meagan Stach
Amy Stewart
Daniel Suddarth
Elizabeth Sweeney
Brendan Sweetman
Dawn Taylor
Ellen Turner
Laura & Scott Weinberg
Sarah West
Keith Wiedenkiller
Callum Williams
Craig Wilson
Denise Wray
YourCause LLC
Carol Zastoupil
Karl Zobrist

In-Kind

City of Kansas City, Missouri



Spring + Summer 2021

STILL GOING, STILL GROWING

Meet Bridget



Bridget Locke, the new managing director of KC Mothers in Charge, joined the organization on January 1, and is responsible for leading fund development, communications strategies and the implementation of an updated strategic plan. Her addition to staff allows Rosilyn Temple to take on a new title—Founder and Program Director—and focus more intently on KC MIC's community engagement, outreach and prevention, media engagement, and new program development, the duties which are core to our mission.

“My position opens up capacity for Rosilyn, our outreach specialist, Latrice, and the rest of our core mothers to comfort the hurting people of our city while elevating our organization’s profile as a voice in the prevention of violence,” Bridget said. Prior to joining KC MIC, Bridget served as director of strategic

communications at Park University and has also served as the major gifts manager for United Way of Greater Kansas City, and assistant director of enrollment services and marketing manager at Donnelly College.

Mothers Moving Forward

Though the pandemic created barriers for how hands-on our work could be in 2020, KC MIC's purpose to comfort and support families through the unthinkable remains as important as ever. KC MIC's Core Mothers have an important piece in that work. Our Core Mothers are women who have courageously chosen to join the movement against violence after losing a loved one to violence, and can often be found standing in solidarity at vigils and celebrations of life when a local family has experienced a homicide. Since the beginning of 2021, KC MIC's Core Mothers have met regularly and made plans for impacting the community who oversees the group, is creating leadership structure within the men more Mothers to the group in 2021. Two new members have joined since



Pee Wee's Run 2021: Another Success!

Thanks to everyone who ran “virtually” in this year’s Pee Wee’s Run on April 17, 2021, and be sure to check out the video highlighting all our participants at kcmothersincharge.org. Big thanks to our returning volunteer race directors, Cara Gilmore and Estelle Brooks, and to our sponsors: Carol & TJ Salmon, BNL Communications, Country Club Bank, Bridge Leadership Academy, Elizabeth Bordenave, Palle & Dennis Rilinger, Barbara Mueth & Steve Rinne, Usha Rengachary, Active Health KC Chiropractic & Rehab, and Swope Health Services. Together, we raised over \$9,800 in support of KC Mothers in Charge!



Spring + Summer 2021

STILL GOING, STILL GROWING (CONTINUED)

Condemning Violence, Celebrating Life

Throughout 2021, we have continued to host memorial, birthday and anniversary vigils in honor of loved ones lost to homicide. As a symbol of love and life, KC MIC provides to the families environmentally-friendly philodendron plants (as shown on the cover), which are known for their heart-shaped leaves.



Why Are We So Angry?



KC MIC's "Why Are We So Angry?" project, established in 2020, encourages community engagement by focusing on anti-retaliation and conflict resolution strategies, and by encouraging neighborhood residents to call the police or the TIPS Hotline to report crimes. Earlier this year, we engaged in a clean-up day, home visits/community meetings, and a close-out community block party for Greenleaf Apartments. We're grateful to the management of Greenleaf Apartments, as well as to Bridging the Gap, the Community Action Agency of Greater Kansas City, Evergy, FedEx, Goodwill of Western Missouri and Eastern Kansas, The Kansas City, Missouri Health Department, KCPD, KC Water, Mattie Rhodes Center, Sheffield Neighborhood Association, UMKC, and Waffle House for their collaboration and support.

Survivors Will Heal

The Survivors Will Heal Support Program was launched in July 2021 as a direct response to the overwhelming number of non-fatal shooting victims in the Kansas City metro area. Through support groups and one-on-one counseling, KC MIC provides a safe space for healing and mental health opportunities for those recovering from the personal trauma of gun violence. The goal is for participants to adopt healthy ways to move forward, and in some cases, to work through and ultimately quell thoughts of retaliation against their assailants.



3rd Tuesdays | 5-7 p.m. | 3200 Wayne Ave., KCMO
(Robert J. Mohart Multipurpose Center)

- Variety of topics and speakers
- Conflict resolution
- Support and sharing in a safe space

2021 Meeting Dates:

- July 20
- August 17
- September 21
- October 19
- November 16
- December 21

Celebrating Rosilyn



Rosilyn Temple, who founded KC Mothers in Charge more than six years ago following the murder of her son, Antonio "Pee Wee" Thompson, has received numerous recognitions in recent months honoring her leadership and KC MIC's work in our community:

Rosilyn was featured as one of Kansas City's "history makers and change agents" by KSHB-TV 41's coverage of Black History Month in February. Visit www.kshb.com/rosilyn-temple to read all the details.

She also was featured in the May issue of Woman's Day magazine as part of their "Amazing Moms" feature recognizing mothers across the country who are making invaluable contributions to their local communities.

Finally, this summer Rosilyn was named to the prestigious Starr Women's Hall of Fame at UMKC, which recognizes extraordinary Kansas City women who are social reformers, volunteers, philanthropists, civic leaders, activists and educators.



Rosilyn with current and previous KC MIC Board members.
Photo courtesy of Rob Smith Photography.

Join Us for the 4th Annual Unity Awards!



Presented by



Due to the recent resurgence of COVID-19 cases, we have decided to host the 2021 Unity Awards virtually. Mark your calendars now for Wednesday, Oct. 27, 6 p.m., and plan to support the mission of KC MIC by joining us for this special online event!

This year, we have included a few new categories to honor a KC MIC volunteer, individuals and/or organizations who help prevent violence or advocate for non-violent solutions in our community.

To purchase tickets for the virtual event, to nominate someone for an award, or to become a sponsor, visit kcmothersincharge.org/unityawards.

Please Consider a Gift

To invest in the programs and services that help KC Mothers in Charge support the hurting families of Kansas City, please send your donations to KC Mothers in Charge, 3200 Wayne Ave., Ste. 124W, KCMO 64109, or visit kcmothersincharge.org to donate online. Thank you in advance for your generosity and support!



KC Mothers in Charge is:

Staff

Rosilyn Temple, Founder & Program Director
Latrice Murray, Outreach Specialist & Lead Core Mother
Bridget Locke, Managing Director
Donald Lang, Ph.D., LPC, Contract Individual and Family Therapist
Stephanie Ross, LMSW, MPA, Contract Individual and Family Therapist
Stacey Stark, Contract Bookkeeper

Board of Directors

Elizabeth Bordenave, Chair	Gerald Gray II
Usha Rengachary, Vice Chair	Major Dan Haley
Amy Smith, Treasurer	Barbara Mueth
Ken Novak, Secretary	Palle Rilinger
Jennifer Bryan	Phyllis Stevens

Connect with Us!



@KCMothersinCharge



@kc_mic



@KCMothersCharge



admin@kcmothersincharge.org



(816) 912-2601



www.kcmothersincharge.org

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Contact Us

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w. kcmothersincharge.org



Founder and Program Director Rosilyn Temple (l), Core Mother Yvonne Page (2nd to right) and Outreach Specialist Latrice Murray (right) supporting the family of Tarey Johnson, Sr., 27, who was killed Aug. 28, 2021.

Connecting with Community Despite COVID's Persistence

Although many of us anticipated a return to business as usual at some point this year, we've all still found ourselves navigating the complexities of the pandemic for the majority of 2021. KC Mothers in Charge was no exception. In Fall 2021, we made it a top priority to find ways to directly support the community while remaining cautious and safe.

We continued offering our monthly support group, Hope & Healing, as well as our new group, Survivors Will Heal; hosted a Why Are We So Angry? Block Party; passed out candy to KC's kiddos for Halloween celebrations; and showed several families that we will always think of them, by showing support at vigils and during their first holiday seasons without their loved ones. In the pages to follow, you'll see us doing our best to guide, support and empower the community and clients we serve.

4th Annual Unity Awards



While the 4th annual Unity Awards celebration was presented virtually due to COVID concerns, the spirit of the ceremony and the generosity of our supporters felt stronger than ever!

With pride and admiration, and with help of an energetic host, KSHB 41's Kevin Holmes, we honored the game-changing community leaders who work hard to make Kansas City a better, safer, more united place to live.

Congratulations again to Thelma's Kitchen, Lyrik's Institution, Barb Shelly, Janice Stallings, Peggy Zilm, and Pastor Cassandra Wainwright, this year's Unity Award winners!

And, because of the generosity of our ticket holders and sponsors (who are listed below), we raised nearly \$10,000 in support of the work of KC MIC's mission!

Special Thanks, Sponsors!

Gold Sponsor:



Silver Sponsors:

Barbara Mueth and
Steve Rinne

Chaplain Chuck and
Dawn Murphy

Bronze Sponsors:

Elizabeth Bordenave
Kay Johnson and
Bill Koenigsdorf
Ada and Kevin Koch
Usha Rengachary
Palle and Dennis Rilinger
University of Missouri-
Kansas City
Frank and Peggy Zilm

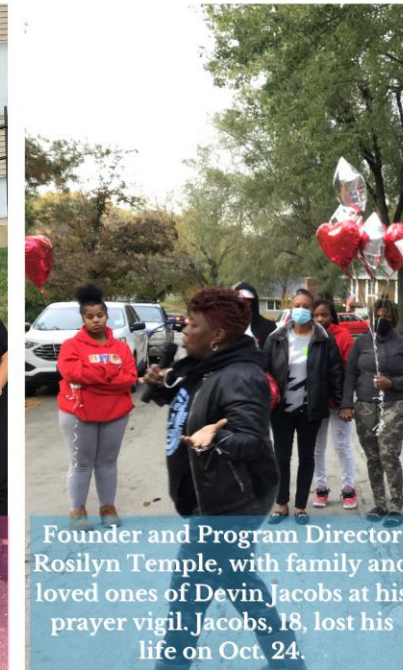
Have you seen the 4th annual Unity Awards?
Click [here](#) to watch!

KC MIC Connection - Fall / Winter 2021

KC MIC in the Community



KC MIC Core Mothers, volunteers and partners were all smiles at the most recent Why Are We So Angry? closeout block party event.



Founder and Program Director Rosilyn Temple, with family and loved ones of Devin Jacobs at his prayer vigil. Jacobs, 18, lost his life on Oct. 24.



Outreach Specialist Latrice Murray managing the KC MIC information table at UMKC on National Injury Prevention Day.



Rosilyn and Latrice, preparing to welcome KC MIC clients for our Thanksgiving giveaway. 40 client families were given \$50 Price Chopper gift cards.



The kids need candy! Rosilyn, Latrice and Peggy Zilm, who was recently honored as one of our Volunteers of the Year, sort candy for one of many Trunk or Treat Halloween events.



Jess Loya, KC MIC's AmeriCorp VISTA volunteer, representing the organization at the National Injury Prevention Day event.

KC MIC Connection - Fall / Winter 2021

10 Years and a Lifetime



On Nov. 23, 2021, Rosilyn returned to the scene where her son, Antonio “Pee Wee” Thompson, was found murdered in his apartment exactly 10 years prior.

Back in 2011, over a six-hour period, Temple remained at her son’s homicide scene, wondering about the policemen and fire department personnel who had been dispatched.

“What is happening? What are they doing?” she recalls asking.

“I couldn’t believe there was no community liaison for me. I knew there had to be a better way to support victims’ families,” she later said--and that unmet need served as the catalyst for the launch of KC Mothers in Charge.

Since 2014, KC Mothers in Charge has served a multitude of grieving Kansas Citians with support groups, individual counseling, emergency assistance, support at vigils, guidance on access to victim service resources, and so much more. Core to the success of these programs and services has been Rosilyn. As always, we marvel at her leadership and strength. But most importantly, we acknowledge her as a grieving mother who will spend the rest of her lifetime missing -- and honoring -- her son.

We will always remember Pee Wee.



Rosilyn, in front of Pee Wee’s apartment, Nov. 23, 2021.

Welcome, New Board Members!

In early Fall 2021, KC MIC named two additional dynamic women to our Board of Directors. We are proud to welcome Sarah Miller, Vice President, Group Account Director, unbound agency, and Stephanie Newton, Senior Accountant, Planned Parenthood Great Plains.



Sarah Miller

We're very fortunate to have them join our ranks!



Stephanie Newton

Holiday Giveaway



‘Tis the season ... to #AlwaysRememberThem.

On Dec. 18, KC MIC staff and volunteers extended the spirit of the holiday season by showing special support to our new client families who are experiencing their first year without their loved one, due to homicide. This year, KC MIC gifted more than 130 families with wrapped gifts, household supplies, gift cards, and more.



Holiday Giveaway (cont.)

'Tis the season ... to #AlwaysRememberThem.



KC MIC Connection - Fall / Winter 2021

Mark Your Calendars!

In 2022, we hope to impact our community like never before ... but we need your engagement and partnership to make it happen! Below are a few dates we'd like for you to mark on your calendars:

- **January 18:** Survivors Will Heal Support Group (for non-fatal shooting victims), 5 p.m., KC MIC office
- **January 20:** Hope and Healing Support Group (for survivors of homicide victims), 5 p.m., KC MIC office
- **January 26:** Volunteer Orientation Sessions, 10 a.m. & 5 p.m., KC MIC office

Check our socials and website for details and updates!



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admin@kcmothersincharge.org



(816) 912-2601



www.kcmothersincharge.org

Thank you for considering a gift.

To invest in the programs and services that help KC Mothers in Charge support the hurting families of Kansas City, please send your donations to:

KC Mothers in Charge
3200 Wayne Ave., Ste. 124W
Kansas City, MO 64109

- or -

Visit kcmothersincharge.org/take-action to give electronically.

Thank you in advance for your generosity and support.

KC MIC Connection - Fall / Winter 2021