



**AVENUE SCHOLARS.**  
Your Foundation for Success



the **PATHWAY**

Newsletter Issue 3 Vol. 8 April 2020

(RIGHT) Business Outreach Team: Front row, Cindy Siadek and Jan Benitez; Back row, Kathy McGauvran, Lindsay Decker, and Ana Lopez Shalla. (BELOW) Avenue Scholar students listen intently to a Mutual of Omaha representative during a Career Exploration Event.



## Intern Omaha program expands horizons

Less than a year since its inception, the high school internship program launched by Avenue Scholars in conjunction with the Millard Public Schools has five times as many internship spots open and four times as many business partners.

Even the name has changed — from “YBC (Youth, Business, Community) Internship Program” to “Intern Omaha.”

The program began last summer with students first taking a required one-week Human Relations/ Workplace Skills course. Students received dual credit from Metropolitan Community College and their respective districts for this course. They began their paid internships on June 17, working 20 to 40 hours per week throughout the summer.

During their senior year, program participants enrolled in a career/technical education course in a career pathway program related to their internship. They also took an internship course that required the submission of monthly journal entries aimed at helping them reflect critically on their experience. Students continued their paid internships, working 10 to 20 hours per week during their fall and spring semesters.

The Intern Omaha program is administered by the Avenue Scholars Business Outreach Team: Ana Lopez Shalla, Director; Cindy Siadek and Jan Benitez, Internship

Coordinators; Kathy McGauvran and Lindsay Decker, Business Outreach Coordinators. Lopez Shalla, Siadek, and Benitez are “fully dedicated” to Intern Omaha. Career exploration events are available only to Avenue Scholars students.

Lopez Shalla says the team “wears many hats” while managing the career exploration and business outreach programs. Intern Omaha, starting as YBC, began with one district — the Millard school district, which includes

Millard North, Millard South, and Millard West, and all Avenue Scholars students. It offered 41 internships with 16 different business partners.

For its second cohort, the program expanded to five school districts, adding DC West, Omaha Public Schools, Ralston, and Westside High School. This school year, operating as Intern Omaha, the program offered 219 internships with 64 business partners. Over 500 students submitted over 1,200 applications for internships. The growth has been an exciting challenge for the team.

“It’s like drinking water from a firehouse,” says McGauvran. “It’s super exciting. It is challenging. Now we have to be very thoughtful and careful about how we proceed and not lose value in what we already do.”

In her role McGauvran focuses on business recruiting, with her primary responsibility “to match business





## Scholar ‘one of the family’ at bank internship

Aylin Arroya is not wasting any time pursuing a college degree and joining the workforce.

In fact, she graduated in December from Omaha Bryan High School, and is employed at Security National Bank at South 29<sup>th</sup> Street through the Intern Omaha program.

Arroya will be seeking a different career path in college, but for now she enjoys working at the bank.

“I really like it,” Arroya says. “All my co-workers and I really get along. It makes my day go by faster, and I’m five minutes from my house.”

In August Arroya will enroll in the dental assistant program at Metropli-

tan Community College. Eventually, she would like to be an orthodontist.

Although born in Omaha, Arroya’s first language is Spanish. She uses her bilingual skills often while working at Security National Bank.

“Half our customers are Hispanics,” she said. “On Friday we always get a big rush from Greater Omaha Packing right across the street.”

Madeline Moyer, Market Manager, is grateful the Intern Omaha program found a place for Arroya at Security National Bank.

“She is a gem, just a joy to be around,” Moyer said. “She is like family. Everyone has adopted her.”

## BCBS intern enjoys long journey to success

Despite being in the United States for only eight years, Bryan Vasquez has found success and employment in Omaha, thanks to Avenue Scholars and its Intern Program.

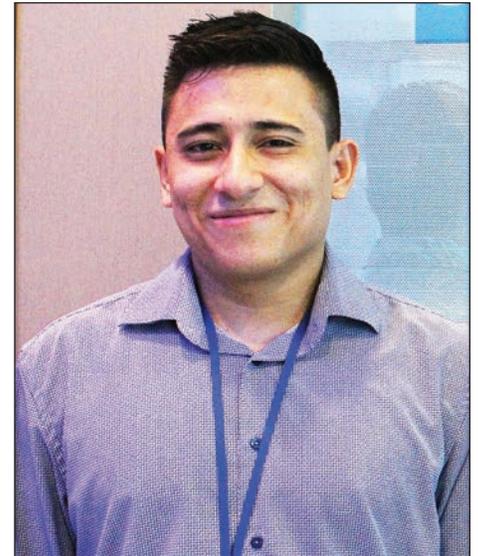
Vasquez is on track to obtain an Associate’s Degree in Data Programming Management from Metropolitan Community College and has been working full-time in Claims Processing at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska since May 2019. The Avenue Horatio Alger Career Scholarship has covered the costs of his college education, and the Intern Omaha program helped him get employed as an intern at BCBS.

“It [the intern program and Avenue Scholars] means everything to me,” Vasquez says. “They have helped a lot.”

A 2015 graduate of Omaha Bryan, Vasquez became a U.S. citizen at a Naturalization Ceremony here in Omaha. Vasquez has a wife in El Salvador, who is scheduled to join him in Omaha next November.

In the meantime, he is interviewing for a job promotion at BCBS, and he hopes to achieve a higher professional level, either at BCBS or another company.

Amanda Lonergan, Vasquez’s Industry Career Coach says Vasquez is “doing well in school and doing well in his job.”



## ‘No curves’ on Benson senior’s path to career

When Kandra Hartshorn, a senior at Omaha Benson High School, heard at an assembly during her sophomore year that she could qualify for an \$8,000 scholarship through the Avenue Scholars program, she was “all in.”

That’s what really pulled me toward it,” Hartshorn said. “I wanted to be in the program, maintain my credits, and get the \$8,000 to go to school. It’s steered me in the right direction. I got my CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) certificate last year. With them (Metropolitan Community College) offering a RN degree, it’s steering me on a straight path. There

are no curves along the way.”

To pay the other bills, such as her own car insurance, Hartshorn is employed as a paid intern at Werner Trucking. As the “youngest one there,” she works the “road breakdowns” desk, communicating with drivers to direct them to the nearest shop for repairs. During the summer, she works 30 to 40 hours. During the school year, she has been working 12 to 15 hours.

Hartshorn is focused on a career in nursing, but with much to unfold over the next few years, she is also considering “going into criminal justice.”

## Intern Omaha

continued from Page 1

partners with the needs of kids” who have aligned their career interest in one of the five career tracks: auto, health, business, IT, or trades.

With Intern Omaha welcoming more students into the talent pool — approximately “5,000 juniors and seniors in the community — we have more kids than business partners. We have a lot of work to do.”

McGauvran says the program “will only get bigger and stronger.” She is excited about the opportunities for students, considering the variety of internships available, 12 months of “real-world work experience,” and dual-enrolled high school and college credits for high school students.

“The growth has been humbling,” she said. “We knew people would be interested, but we had no idea of the need of everyone, from small two-person companies to Fortune 500 companies, that want opportunities to connect with the young people, the young talent in our community.”

There is constant collaboration between members of the Business Outreach Team.

The primary responsibility of Internship Coordinators Siadek and Benitez is “to facilitate the internship experience for our high school seniors, working both with the business partner and the school district contact (or lead),” Siadek said. The district contact is a person within each school district designated as a liaison for scheduling and data input.

Siadek says one of the major challenges is the increased caseload for the Coordinators, from 27 to 65 or 75 per person. Benitez was added to staff in March. Plans are to add an-

other Coordinator “who will have a distinct link to MCC and the Career Academies in high schools,” Siadek said.

Decker’s role is focused on coordinating career and professional exploration events for Avenue Scholars students. She also supports Intern Omaha’s growth through her marketing expertise.

“I hope the opportunities help students get a better sense of careers they might want to pursue,” Decker said. “If students want to look at a specific career path, I can go to a list of partners we have worked with that are interested in providing career exploration opportunities.”

Lopez Shalla, who is responsible for keeping all those parts of the Business Outreach Team in sync, is preparing for continued growth in the program. She said Blair High School will be added to the cohort of school districts for 2020-2021.

“And we are in conversations with several other districts, as well,” Lopez Shalla said.

Lopez Shalla believes the tremendous growth of the program is a natural byproduct of all the success Avenue Scholars Foundation has experienced over the past several years.

“To me, it is evidence of two things,” she said.

“With Dr. Bird at the helm, if there’s a will, there’s a way. It’s just a natural extension of the work we’ve already been doing at Avenue Scholars, and builds on our history of building mutually-beneficial opportunities for students and businesses. It’s also evidence that businesses and school districts are increasingly seeing the need for this kind of programming — to plant the seeds in our community, the opportunities to develop and keep the young talent that is here, and ensure they’re ready to go to work.”



### AVENUE SCHOLARS

Staff

#### KEN BIRD

President/CEO

#### MIKE ALVANO

Chief Operation Officer/  
Chief Financial Officer

#### KRIS VALENTIN

Director of Human Resources  
and Partnerships

#### JENNIFER BISIGNANO

Director of Information  
Services

#### BEVERLY HASS

Executive Assistant to CEO  
& Events Coordinator

#### PENNY DARNELL

Accounting Manager

#### LAURIE MERTEN

Office & Staff Assistant

#### KELLY BERNADT

Director of Student Support

#### JANAE DONALDSON

Student Support Coordinator

#### STEPHANIE KELLUM

Student Support Coordinator

#### DOUG PIERSON

Special Projects Coordinator

#### Postsecondary Coaches:

TERRY FISCHER,

Director of Career Programs;

Catie Dagle, Tonya Fairgood,

Terrence Gillian, Michael

Johnson, Amanda Lonergan,

Anthony Tate

#### High School Coaches:

JAMAR DORSEY

Director of High School Programs;

Jason Boyd, Taleya Broadway,

Kayla Gillian, Allison Goff,

Ashley Knott, Beth Leach,

Fred Starks, Kamina Lemons

#### Business Outreach Team:

ANA LOPEZ SHALLA,

Director of Business Outreach;

Lindsay Decker, Kathy Mc-

Gauvran, Business Outreach

Coordinators; Cindy Siadek,

Jan Benitez, Intern Coordi-

nators

#### ROD HOWE

Communications Consultant

#### NANCY MITCHELL

LEAP Coordinator

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

##### SUSIE BUFFETT

Chair

##### WALLY WEITZ

Vice Chair

##### BARBARA WEITZ

##### JOHN SCOTT

##### JEFF SCHMID

##### CALVIN SISSON

Directors

##### WALTER SCOTT, JR.

Chair Emeritus

Avenue Scholars Foundation

7101 Mercy Road, Suite 240

Omaha, NE 68106

*“Our mission is to ensure careers for committed students of hope and need through education/training and supportive relationships.”*

Beth Leach, High School Career Coach at Ralston High School, introduces a panel of Avenue Scholars at the Senior Academy Orientation, in preparation of students enrolling in classes at Metropolitan Community College.



Mekhi Banks, an Omaha North graduate, makes comments as a primary speaker at the Senior Academy Orientation, held at the Institute of Culinary Arts Building on the Fort Omaha Campus.



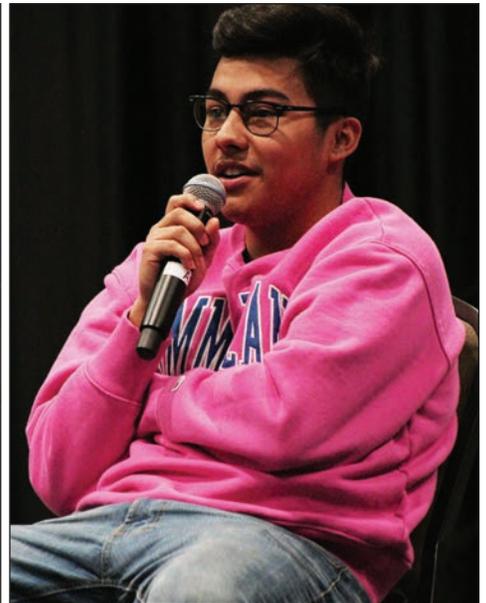
# SENIOR ACADEMY ORIENTATION



(ABOVE) Jaslyn Melgar, a Millard South graduate, provides her perspective on making the most of one's opportunities in the Avenue Scholars program.



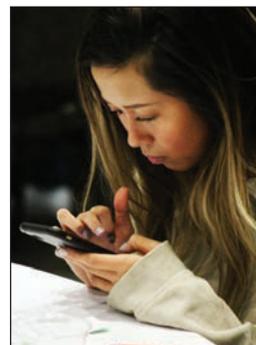
(ABOVE CENTER) Sharon Pelep, a Millard South graduate, animatedly answers one of the panel questions during the Senior Academy Orientation.



(ABOVE) Efren Valdez, a Papillion LaVista graduate, calmly gives his insights on how to stay on track as an Avenue Scholar student.

## What's at stake?

- Your use of the Avenue Horatio-Alger Scholarship at MCC
- Financial Aid Standing
- College GPA and Academic Standing
- HS Graduation, if you are in need of additional elective credits



(LEFT) One Avenue Scholar focuses on how to determine her upcoming schedule of classes at MCC.