



**AVENUE SCHOLARS.**  
Your Foundation for Success



Newsletter Issue 4 Vol. 8 July 2020

## Avenue Scholars celebrates 2020 grads

Avenue Scholars staff held a "Senior Celebration Parade" Monday, June 8, in half-hour shifts from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the south parking lot outside the AS offices, honoring the 2020 graduates with gifts and congratulations.

LEFT: High School Career Coach Beth Leach gives a social distance high-five to a Scholar during the Celebration Parade. BELOW: HS Career Coach Taleya Broadway organizes gift bags for the Celebration.



HS Career Coach Allison Goff does a celebratory dance during the parade.



Ellie Enright, an Omaha South graduate, appreciates receiving her 2020 cupcake.

Omaha North graduates Kiara Simonsen (left) and Johnna Parker break out in smiles as they join the Senior Celebration Parade.



Ken Bird, Avenue Scholars President/CEO, enjoys a light moment with Jamar Dorsey, Director of High School Programs, as he visits with staff during the Celebration Parade.



# Avenue Scholars founder's simple advice

For Walter Scott, the 89-year-old Omaha philanthropist and driving force behind the founding of Avenue Scholars, most things in life are simple. Even in these complicated times of the Coronavirus pandemic and social unrest, Scott says all people have one simple responsibility.

"Be good citizens," he says, when asked what his message would be to today's high school and college graduates. "It's not a complicated problem. So much of our community just exists; they're just there. At some point you need to give back to your community."

Scott says that [becoming productive citizens] is one of the primary goals of Avenue Scholars Foundation — molding Avenue Scholars, the high school and post-secondary students enrolled in the program, into good citizens who are focused on successful careers and on "giving back to the community."

About 12 years ago, Scott says he and Mike Yanney, another Omaha philanthropist, "got to talking about things we wanted to do in the community to effectively and efficiently provide an education in the school systems. We worked out the bones of it [Avenue Scholars Foundation] and put it together."

Scott explained that the Avenue Scholars Foundation operates through two entities that are separate, but work together to provide educational and career building opportunities for all students enrolled in the program.

The "working side" entails a staff of administrators, program directors, coordinators, and educators who ensure that students get the guidance, instruction, and mentoring that lead to postsecondary education and careers. That "side" ensures that Scholars "have job offers" upon completion of the program. The other "side" is the Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation, which funds the postsecondary scholarships awarded to all Scholars who successfully complete the high school program.

Avenue Scholars Foundation launched its program in the Omaha community in 2008 with 25 students and five high schools: Omaha South, Omaha Bryan, Omaha Benson, Omaha North, and Millard South. In 2018-2019, 858 students were involved in the program. Avenue

Scholars has added Omaha Northwest High School, Ralston High School, Papillion-LaVista High School, and Millard North High School to the schools it serves, and the organization coordinates post-secondary education for Scholars with Metropolitan Community College.

Throughout the growth over the past 12 years, the Avenue Scholars staff has grown, adapted, and redefined its roles to meet the needs of all students. In addition to its core staff of administrators, high school "coaches," and post-secondary "coaches," which have been present since the organization's inception, Avenue Scholars has added staff to meet the needs of new programs, such as Business Outreach and Internships.

Starting in 2018, a game-changing financial resource was made available to students. Following successful

completion of the high school program, students have the opportunity to continue their education through a scholarship of up to \$8,000 per student, funded jointly by The Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation and Metropolitan Community College.

"There will always be changes," Scott says. "The original concept and idea we started with has worked fine, but for 11 years we've

been growing, adjusting, and changing the organization to keep providing students with the education and mentoring they need to succeed."

Another example of making a change to adjust to the program's growth is having each Postsecondary Coach assigned to specific career entry fields: Health Services, Information Technology, Auto Tech & Transportation, Trades, Manufacturing & Builders, and Business & Office procedures.

"Avenue Scholars Foundation started in 2008 with a simply stated but ambitious goal — to curb poverty by helping young people gain access to quality job opportunities. We're proud of the program's growth, the partnerships that have been built, and the positive impact the program has made on Omaha-area students and businesses over the past 12 years," Scott says. "We are also proud of the program's willingness to change in order to better serve its students, a trait that will help



# to Scholars: 'Be good citizens'

ensure that the progress we've made thus far will continue into the future."

Although proud of all the achievements Avenue Scholars has accomplished, Scott says there are challenges that will have to be addressed as the program moves forward.

"We have more schools interested in the program than we have money to support the growth in operations we would need to serve those schools," Scott said. "The challenge is for Ken [Bird, Avenue Scholars President/CEO] to figure out additional support. Then we could add more schools and more kids. They need a stable source of additional funds to be able to hire more staff."

For Scott, the keys to the success of Avenue Scholars has been enrolling students who are motivated and truly interested in taking advantage of opportunities to explore career fields and obtain jobs in areas of interest.

"We are most interested in kids who want to graduate and have opportunities to be productive citizens in the community,"

Scott says. "If we can get them exposed to and educated in careers in line with their interests, then help them get jobs in those fields, that's it! Then they have the opportunity for work that allows them to start a

family and to grow in the job, to become productive citizens in the community. Now, these kids have to do the job; we can't do it for them."

While high school students use the summer time to relax, recharge, and ponder what the 2020-2021 school year will look like, 2020 high school graduates and postsecondary graduates are figuring out how they are going to navigate the next stage of their lives. Walter Scott has a simple message for those students enrolled in the Avenue Scholars program.

"If you've mastered the fundamentals, your career can be wherever your talents and interests take you," he says. "Avenue Scholars helps provide a sense of direction by emphasizing education and the importance of building a future on that solid foundation."



## WALTER SCOTT'S IMPACT ON AVENUE SCHOLARS

*"Walter has been central in recognizing the need for an evolution of Avenue Scholars' focus from academic achievement for its own sake to one of concrete preparation, work experience, and ultimately permanent employment."*

– Wally Weitz

*"Mr. Scott is a relentless champion for opportunity. He has a remarkable ability to simplify even the most complex issues. As a leader, he is brilliant, yet has the ability to keep things brilliantly simple."*

– Kris Valentin

*"Mr. Scott is about creating a workforce for the Omaha community and providing access for students who would not normally have that access."*

– Jamar Dorsey

*"Walter's attention to the practical matter of how AS translates into jobs and careers for its students has truly brought Avenue Scholars to its ultimate mission."*

– Barbara Weitz

*"The quality Walter has which stands out the most is his generosity. He has generated a tremendous amount of philanthropy in Omaha through his example of service and desire to make Omaha and the state of Nebraska a better place."*

– Tom Osborne

*"Walter has been an amazing leader, but I think his constant focus on making sure the students end up with a job has been motivating for all of us (board and staff) - and it's what matters in the end."*

– Susie Buffett

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"Our mission is to ensure  
careers for committed students  
of hope and need through edu-  
cation/training and supportive  
relationships."

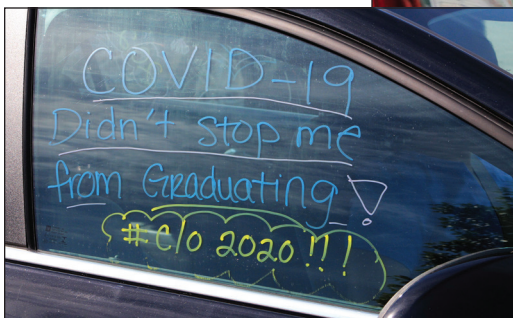


## Scholars honored at MCC celebration

Avenue Scholars held a "Reverse Parade" Graduation Celebration Monday, June 15, from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. in a Metropolitan Community College South Campus parking lot. Scholars who earned Career Certificates or an Associate's Degree were showered with gifts and congratulations.



Postsecondary Coach Catie Dagle (left) and Terry Fischer, Director of Career Programs, are happy to hand out gift cards to a Scholar during the Reverse Parade at the MCC South Campus.



MCC Navigator Amanda Ponce and Postsecondary Coach Tonya Fairgood strike a pose with MCC graduate Daisy Perez-Guzman.



ABOVE. Alyssa Niemeier, a Culinary Arts graduate, enjoys a humorous exchange with staff during the parade.



Postsecondary Coach Anthony Tate proudly poses with Juventino Chaidez-Cardenas, who earned an Associate's Degree at MCC in HVAC Technology.



LEFT. Postsecondary Coach Amanda Lonergan and MCC Navigator Racquel Hendersen deliver gifts to a couple of MCC graduates.