



Administration makes transition in leadership

Talent, experience and dedication are traits or resources that are treasured by any institution and difficult to replace.

Two leaders of the Avenue Scholars Foundation administrative staff — Norma Deeb, Director of Human Resources and Professional Development, and Sharlene Karbowski, Director of Technology and Information Services — embody those traits, leaving a legacy of dedicated service to education upon retirement: Oct. 17 for Deeb and Dec. 31 for Karbowski.

Karbowski, whose association with CEO Ken Bird goes back to 1984 in District 66, has been with ASF since its inception in 2008.

“I was the second employee at Avenue Scholars in June 2008,” she said. “My title has always been Director of Technology and Information Services. It’s been kind of a joke as I received the first and only ‘Employee of the Month’ award, and when you are the only employee that’s not too difficult.”



Deeb started in 2010 as the HR and Professional Development administrator. She worked with Bird for many years in public education.

“I have known Dr. Bird since he was Director of Special Education at Westside,” Deeb said. “We were both young administrators who were active in our state association.”

Karbowski worked “directly with Dr. Bird in several capacities at Westside Community Schools and indirectly as he moved to superintendent.”

“I was fortunate enough to follow along Dr. Bird’s trail as his administrative assistant in Special Education and even



through his Governmental Relations stint,” she said.

Both have watched and assisted in the evolution of the Avenue Scholars Foundation mission. They attribute the Foundation’s success to the vision of Dr. Bird and to the dedication and professionalism of staff, and the commitment its Board.

“I think people have made ASF the success story it is. The close relationships with students and talent advisors have made for first-time success stories in many families,” Karbowski said. “The incredible vision of Dr. Bird has been a joy for me to watch for many years.”

IN TRANSITION. (Far Left) HR Director Norma Deeb takes time out for a reflective moment at an Avenue Scholars Foundation luncheon. (Left) Technology Director Sharlene Karbowski works with Kris Valentin, who will be taking over some of Karbowski’s administrative duties.

Deeb has been impressed with the staff’s ability to assess and re-assess programs based on student needs.

“We can actually modify our program to meet the needs of our young people,” she said. “We have staff who are always willing to go the extra mile for a student or for a colleague. I have enjoyed watching the emergence of the new leadership team and basking in their brilliance.”

Bird is thankful for the leadership model Deeb and Karbowski established.

“Norma’s drive and focus for finding, hiring and retain-

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SPOTLIGHT on Rosa Olvera

Scholar earns respect, full-time job at BCBS

Like any great adventure, the past year has been one of incredible self-discovery for Rosa Olvera who was recently hired to be a Coordinator of Special Benefits at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska.

A 2013 graduate of Millard South, Olvera would not have dreamed of being a professional in the business world.

“I would not have pictured myself being here,” she said. “I thought I wanted to be a

teacher. I switched to business [at Metropolitan Community College] because I liked the competitive edge. I did not know I had that in me. It’s crazy to see where I am at now.”

Her present position was made possible when she was selected as one of 14 Avenue Scholars to participate in the inaugural Partners in Education program at BCBS. Scholars worked as paid interns 12 to 20 hours per week during the 2013-2014 school year.

The Coordinator position was one of two



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Tutor generates excitement for math studies

“Hey, we get to do math!”

Although he does not hear this exclamation of excitement every time he walks into an Avenue Scholars classroom, math tutor Andrew Frecks has heard the phrase often enough to find his job rewarding.

Frecks, who had connected with Avenue Scholars Foundation when he worked as substitute math instructor in the Modular Math Lab at Metropolitan Community College, was hired in September to tutor students in the seven schools ASF serves.

“I try to get students caught up in their math classes or prepare them for tests or quizzes,” Frecks said. “I wish more would use this preparation time effectively.”

It has been challenging to “get to every student who needs help,” but he believes the work has paid off.

“It’s been rewarding. Week to week, it is a little different in terms of how many take advantage of the opportunity,” he says. “When they do



FORMULA FOR SUCCESS Math tutor Andrew Frecks helps Omaha North Scholar Qu' Niqua Damper solve a math problem. Frecks was hired in September to help Avenue Scholar students become proficient in math.

take advantage and are successful, there’s excitement. Some will even say when they see me come in, ‘Hey, we get to do math today.’”

Frecks believes the math tutoring program is “another great avenue these young men and women” can take to greater achievement. High School Talent Advisors agree.

“Mr. Frecks has done a great job. He is not shy when

it comes to helping kids,” says Omaha Northwest Talent Advisor Evan Feezell, who along with Ralston Advisor Amy Rector, takes care of arranging Frecks’ work schedule. “Kids are continually asking when Mr. Frecks is coming in again.”

Excitement often results in greater success.

“When Mr. Frecks comes in to the classroom, students

are jumping at the chance to work with him. I usually hear comments like ‘I wish he could come more than once a week,’” says Jamar Dorsey, Talent Advisor at Omaha North. “Students are usually engaged [in the tutoring sessions]. By the end of the first quarter, 7 out of 19 students had improved their math grade. I think this is huge.”

SPOTLIGHT on Brenna Palma

Scholar confidently explores career options

Brenna Palma is not certain of her future career, but she is certain she will find the right job.

For Palma, neither motivation nor grades have held her back. In fact, she graduated a year early from Omaha North because she was simply ready to move on.

“I did not care for high school,” Palma said. “I stuck to myself, and I wanted to start college. So I doubled up on classes and took summer classes to graduate early, in 2012.”

When Avenue Scholars Foundation came into her life, Palma received the

added inspiration and support she needed to keep moving in the right direction.

“My mom is a single mom, and we have not had much [in terms of money],” Palma said. “I think that was one of the main reasons people thought I should apply to be an Avenue Scholar.”

Palma started classes at Metropolitan Community College in September of 2012. She enrolled in the dental program in September 2013, earning a Certificate of Dental Assisting in August. Palma is qualified to assist in dental radiology and with coronal polishing.

“I basically pass instruments to the dentist,” Palma said.

In September she started working at

the McManigal Family Dentistry office. On Nov. 13, she received an Associate’s Degree of Applied Science from MCC.

Palma credits Talent Advisor Jermaine Jones with giving her the gentle but firm push she needed whenever there were any doubts.

“He has been very helpful,” she said. “Mr. Jones has always been there for me. He made me ask Avenue Scholars for help for financial aid. When I had problems, he would not let me quit.”

Although Palma has changed her mind about becoming a dentist, she won’t quit pursuing a meaningful career — one that’s just right for her.

“Now, I am thinking about the hygiene program at Iowa Western, or real estate,” said Palma, without a hint of worry or stress on her face.



TIMELINE SET TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is an on-line application that students **MUST** apply for if they want financial aid for college. Avenue Scholar students typically receive a Pell grant, which is money the student does **not** pay back. Avenue Scholar students will typically receive anywhere from \$500 to \$4,860 in Pell grant money. This money is sent directly to Metropolitan Community College (MCC) after the fall 2015 quarter has begun.

Each Avenue Scholar student will have the opportunity to have a portion of his or her tuition covered by Metropolitan Community College and, typically, the remainder will be covered by PELL grant money. However, students may have to pay for books, fees, and class materials. This process is for high school seniors to complete for the upcoming school year and then is repeated annually.

If you have questions about this process, please contact your student's Talent Advisor directly.

Avenue Scholars Financial Aid Timeline:

1. *Now through February 1, 2015:* Student and parent(s) will log onto www.fafsa.ed.gov. Both student and parent(s) need to apply for a PIN number.
2. *January through February 2015:* Student and parent(s) will gather W-2 forms for all jobs they have worked in 2014.
3. *February 2015:* In order to complete the FAFSA, the student and parent(s) must file taxes.
4. *By March 1, 2015:* Student will file the FAFSA online. Documents and information needed to successfully complete the FAFSA include:
 - a. Tax return documents
 - b. Student and parent(s) date of birth, social security number(s) or student alien registration number/ USCIS number
 - c. Amount of any 2014 child support paid or received, workers compensation, government benefits received
 - d. The student and parent(s)' PIN numbers
5. After filing the FAFSA, check your email to ensure the FAFSA application was received and is being processed.
6. *Late March 2015:* Save a copy of the SAR (Student Aid Report) from the FAFSA website.
7. *April 2015:* You will receive a letter from MCC stating (1) all needed documents were received and accepted, *or* (2) additional documents are needed to process the financial aid. If you are asked to submit additional documents, turn them in to Student Services at the MCC South Campus as soon as possible.
8. *May 2015:* Upon high school graduation, take final high school transcripts and high school diploma to the Student Services office on the MCC South Campus.

Resources:

www.EducationQuest.org
www.fafsa.ed.gov
www.avescholars.org

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ing the best staff for ASF has been amazing," he said. "Sharlene was with ASF when the page was blank. She helped develop and define who we are today and the course we will take in the future."

After retirement, Karbowski will continue to serve Avenue Scholars in an advisory capacity for technology. She also plans to spend more time with her husband, eight grandchildren and their families. Travel will also be on the agenda.

Deeb has not made specific plans, but "exercise and travel are definitely on the list."

Bird says their expertise will be missed.

"With the retirements of Sharlene and Norma, we lose two people whose passion and sense of hope for the young people we serve have helped shape and guide our program," he said. "I have been blessed to work with and call these two my friends."

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"Our mission is to ensure careers for students of hope and need through education and supportive relationships."



ASF PANEL. Maria Herrera, Omar Garcia Rivera, Zoe Ludewig, Juanita Olivares, Lance Otto, Jaquan Clements, Melissa Ortiz, Keven Washington, Spechal Paylor hold hands in an emotional show of unity after making a presentation at a November Equity Workshop.



ABOVE MIDDLE. Zoe Ludewig addresses the issue of bullying as Maria Herrera and Omar Rivera listen. ABOVE: Keven Washington (center) provokes laughter from Melissa Ortiz and Spechal Paylor as he suggests teachers should always have candy on hand to reward students for their efforts. RIGHT: Herrera wipes away some tears as she visits with ASF Curriculum Director Laura Miller after the presentation.



Avenue Scholars panel makes emotional impact

Debbie Schrader, an ESU#3 administrator, organized an Equity workshop held Monday, Nov. 4, at the Durham Museum, featuring guest speaker Pedro Noguera, a Professor of Education at New York University.

Avenue Scholars were also recruited to present their perspectives on student engagement with the ESU educators in attendance. Their presentation provoked a variety of comments:

“I felt the student panel was a tremendous addition to the day.”

“Having the student panel was very informative. The students made everything that was said [during the feature presentation] relative. They made it hit home.”

“The student panel was especially informative and impactful.”

Schrader says the ESU staff always looks for ways to engage students.

“We have looked at district student data and realized there are achievement gaps that need to be addressed — especially for those districts with student populations in poverty,” she said.

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openings this fall. Olvera applied for both positions and was offered both. She chose the Coordinator position because of the hours — 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday — and the problem-solving duties involved.

“The hours are good,” says Olvera, who explained that her primary duties include having to figure out whether BCBS pays

as the primary or secondary insurer in cases where customers have other types of insurance in addition to BCBS. “It’s fun. It’s like a puzzle.”

The regular hours help Olvera plan for care of her six-month old son. The full-time job also provides full benefits. She is continuing her education, taking one weekend class.

“I want to get my bachelor’s in business administration at UNO,” she said,

adding that she would love to continue her career at BCBS where “It’s nice to be at a job where I really feel respected.”

Olvera also has strong support from the Avenue Scholars Foundation.

“Whenever I didn’t think I could believe in myself, the Talent Advisors would be there to tell me I could do it — ‘don’t be lazy,’” Olvera said. “They’re awesome. I don’t think I would have even gone to college if not for them.”