



PARTNERSHIPS: FAR LEFT: Terry Fischer (center) enjoys the moment of introducing Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska leaders who were instrumental to establishing an internship program for Avenue Scholars. LEFT: Avenue Scholars listen intently to a Metropolitan Community College teacher during a Career Explorations field trip to Metropolitan Community College.

ASF, Aksarben, Horatio Alger, MCC join forces

Excitement is in the air at Avenue Scholars Foundation following the announcement this winter that the foundation is partnering with the the Aksarben Foundation and Horatio Alger Association to launch its largest and most significant scholarship endeavor to date: AKSARBEN Scholars Career Connectors for students from low-income families, offering programs in career and technical education that prepare these students for high skill, high demand occupations.

Working full circle with Metropolitan Community College, the goal is to help students from low-income backgrounds in the Heartland make a seamless transition from high school to career training and into a meaningful career in the community.

“These are exciting times,” says Ken Bird, Avenue Scholars Foundation CEO. “Once fully implemented, this program will result in the ongoing issuance of 600 scholarships to students who proceed through the high school portion of the Avenue Scholars program and wish to continue their education in a career or technical program at Metropolitan Community College.”

As in 2008 when Avenue Scholars Foundation was founded, students begin the program in their junior year of high school, which requires that students be free or reduced lunch eligible, that they demonstrate an interest in a targeted career path, and that they agree to participate in Avenue Scholars programming. Throughout their junior and senior years Scholars will participate in Avenue Scholars classes, related career activities, and will work in part-time jobs when appropriate. In addition, students will identify career paths and will complete the application process to the community college.

The capstone of the Career Connectors initiative is the potential to earn an Aksarben Horatio Alger scholarship worth \$2,000 annually. Plus, that scholarship will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$2,000 from Metropolitan Community College. This scholarship opportunity will enhance Scholars when they take the next step on the Career Programming Path.

The first scholarship recipients will be announced April 20.

In the Career Path phase, Avenue Scholars will identify Career Talent Advisors for each student. The Talent Advisors will be responsible for social, emotional and general life skills support as well as developing career readiness skills. Metropolitan Community College will identify Student Navigators who will be assigned to individual students and be responsible for managing MCC related processes, such as registration and financial aide. Navigators will also provide expertise in designated career fields of study.

Once students are ready for the work force, Talent Advisors and Navigators will work together to ensure career placement at the appropriate time. AKSARBEN FOUNDATION will work with member businesses to identify potential employment opportunities and networking relationships to create a pool of jobs.

This year Avenue Scholars Foundation is affiliated with seven metro high schools: Omaha Benson, Omaha Bryan, Omaha North, Omaha Northwest, Omaha South, Millard South and Ralston.

“Partnership in the AKSARBEN Scholars Career Connectors initiative provides a welcome opportunity for Avenue Scholars to expand its program,” Bird said. “To that end, we are extending our reach to

include nine additional high schools beginning in the 2015-16 school year — Bellevue East, Bellevue West, Omaha Burke, Omaha Central, Millard North, Millard West, Papillion-LaVista, Papillion LaVista South and Omaha Westside. Our plan is to expand our program to all high schools in Douglas and Sarpy Counties within the next two years.”

Avenue Scholars’ continuing focus is on inspiring students to achieve career goals.

“Though our program may be growing, the fundamentals of what we do and whom we serve will not change,” Bird said. “We will continue to serve exclusively students of hope and need, utilizing education and supportive relationships as the means of preparing them for productive careers.”



Scholar carves path to culinary career

Considering that two years ago Ann Brovold had not even thought of being a chef, the idea of working in the kitchen of award-winning chef Clayton Chapman, the owner of The Grey Plume, is a bit surreal.

As a junior at Omaha North High School, Brovold thought she would be pursuing a career in accounting. Having to look for a job and discovering that she enjoys getting “dirty” in the garden changed that mindset.

“Senior year I started to lose interest in accounting,” she said. “Then, I needed to find a job, and City Sprouts was hiring. Being there, I fell in love with it. I am a girl who likes to get dirty, and they had cooking classes there. It changed everything I wanted to do.”

Brovold is now enrolled in the Culinary Arts program at Metropolitan Community College. She earns credit hours by working volunteer hours in The Grey Plume kitchen. Brovold had already forged a connection with Chapman, who serves on the City Sprouts board and has conducted some of the cooking classes for City Sprouts.

“I have learned quite a bit just watching them [kitchen staff], by watching everything they’re doing,” Brovold said.

After obtaining her Culinary Arts associate’s degree, Brovold plans to major in agribusiness at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. One day she would like to own a farm-to-table restaurant.

While the pathway appears to be straight, true and uncluttered at this time, Brovold has had to overcome several obstacles en route. First, she is adopted and says there “have been issues; at times it’s been hard.”

Brovold is thankful for all the mentoring and support she has received from Avenue Scholars, especially from her high school Talent Advisor, Jamar Dorsey, and Career Talent Advisor Albert Varas.

“They have done everything for me,” Brovold said. “I was able to get a full scholarship [to attend MCC], and Mr. Varas got two jobs for me — City Sprouts and as an aide in the After-School program at Sherman Elementary.”

Tragedy struck during Brovold’s first year in Avenue Scholars where she met Erianna Carr who became her partner for a presentation on early childhood education for the Career Exploration program.



KITCHEN DUTY Ann Brovold carefully peels and chops onions in the Grey Plume kitchen, fulfilling service hours for credit from Metropolitan Community College. Brovold takes time at the end of her shift to pose with Grey Plume owner Clayton Chapman, whom she met while working at City Sprouts.

“She and I would take on extra things for the presentation,” she said. “I am not a great public speaker; I felt only able to do it [the presentation] because of her. I only knew her about a month, but she had a big impact on me.”

Brovold and Carr worked hard to make their presentation on time, although they had the option to give their presentation a week later.

A week after the presentation Carr was killed in a shooting, “when we could have been making the presentation,” Brovold said. “We were always the last two stops on the van, just the two of us.”

“After that, I would barely do any talking,” she said. “Albert has been working a lot with me. I was able to speak at a City Sprouts gala. He got me into networking to help with my communication skills.”

Brovold says she feels “very lucky” to be working in The Grey Plume kitchen. Chapman says it is “great to see Ann grow.”

Everyone connected to Brovold’s story is excited to see her achieve her dreams, looking forward to the day they can dine in her farm-to-table restaurant.

ASF receives community service award

Avenue Scholars Foundation was selected as the winner of the 2015 CCSW (CCSW: Chancellor’s Commission on the Status of Women) Outstanding Community Service Award.

“The Awards Committee was impressed by the Foundation’s continued commitment to the UNO community and how ASF has advanced women’s issues through service,

programming, education, and other leadership activities,” said Angela Nastase, executive secretary for Office of the Dean, College of Information and Technology.

Ken Bird, Avenue Scholars Foundation CEO, and Kelly Bernadt, college counselor, accepted the award at UNO’s annual luncheon on March 4, 2015, held at the Milo Bail Student Center Ballroom.



Ken Bird and Kelly Bernadt.
Photo by University of Nebraska at Omaha

Ramirez pays forward ASF rewards

Before he even settles on his career path, Melvin Ramirez is paying forward the benefits he has reaped from his Avenue Scholars Foundation experiences.

In November 2014 Ramirez became a Student Advocate for 53 students at Omaha South High School. He was hired full-time for this position by the Latino Center of the Midlands. The program, designed to intervene with troubled students, is called "Pathways to Success."

"[To qualify] students have absences between 10 and 20 days or more, or have trouble with the law," Ramirez says. "I intervene with the students to help them reduce absenteeism and to have a better attitude ... a lot also struggle academically ... so my goal is to discover what I can do to help them academically, and I also visit with the families."

Ramirez can empathize with his students. He believes the journey of the past six years put him on a pathway to this job at Omaha South. He was accepted into the Avenue Scholars Foundation program during his sophomore year at Ralston High School, becoming one of the first official Scholars as a junior in the 2008-2009 school year. Aprille Phillips was his high school Talent Advisor.

For Ramirez, Avenue Scholars has been a life-changer.

"They are a huge part of me. I can honestly say three things have impacted my life — one, the birth of my son [4-year-old Joel]; two, the love of a mother; and three, Avenue Scholars," he said. "When I first started Avenue Scholars, I was never meant to be part of the program. I had no hope to be anybody. Avenue Scholars taught me the importance of education, and they gave me the drive to succeed."

"That is why I enjoy this job. Many of these students remind me of myself. I am proud to say I am part of Avenue Scholars, and I am very willing to give back."

Albert Varas, an AFS Career Talent Advisor, has also been a major influence. Ramirez met Varas prior to becoming an Avenue Scholar when he interviewed with him for a position at Building Bright Futures. Although Ramirez was not chosen for the position, the two stayed connected, even more after Varas was hired to work at Avenue Scholars Foundation in 2012.

"Albert became an important mentor for me," Ramirez said.

After Ramirez obtained a Liberal Arts Associate Degree from Metropolitan Community College in May of 2014, he decided to take a year



GIVING BACK Melvin Ramirez, who became an Avenue Scholar in 2008, talks to troubled youth at Omaha South High School. Ramirez works as a student advocate for a program called "Pathways to Success" at the Latino Center of the Midlands.

off and seek employment that would enable him to work with at-risk youth. He was offered a paraprofessional position at Omaha South but declined because "I wanted to do something more meaningful," and he interviewed with the Latino Center for an open position at Bellevue West, but he was told he was not "qualified" for the position. Hoping something new would open up, he left his resume with Melissa Mayo, the Latino Center director.

In September, after a month went by with no opportunities, Ramirez took a job as an assistant director at Spring Lake Elementary. However, in October he received a message from the Latino Center asking him if he would be interested in a new position. Ramirez was granted a second interview and was hired for the Student Advocate position at Omaha South.

Ramirez is one of three Student Advocates working for the Latino Center. The Pathways to Success program is also present at Bellevue West and Omaha Bryan. Those programs are still trying to get to the program goal of 40 students per caseload.

Depending on the situation, Ramirez meets with students in his caseload one to four times per month. For now, he would like to continue working full-time for the Latino Center. It may have been a circuitous route, but he feels he was destined to get the job.

"I think it was meant to be, but just not on my time," Ramirez said.

If he can work out the schedule, Ramirez would like to start working on a secondary education degree at the University of Nebraska Omaha next fall — with a focus on history or a dual language program.

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& Events Coordinator

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Data & Office Manager

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Career Talent Advisors

JAMAR DORSEY
Team Leader,
High School Talent Advisors

Career Talent Advisors:
Jermaine Jones, Kristin Walsh,
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High School Talent Advisors:
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DR. KEN BIRD
CEO/President

Avenue Scholars Foundation
7101 Mercy Road, Suite 240
Omaha, NE 68106
402-916-9777
Fax: 402-614-5977

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



CARSTARS

Local auto repair shop gives Avenue Scholars hands-on experiences

For Avenue Scholars, CARSTAR is more than a small business focused on repairing damaged automobiles. It is also about building careers for young men and women.

“Our working relationship [with CARSTAR] started with a ‘cold call’ to initiate a conversation about becoming a career exploration post partner,” said Brad Ekwerekwu, Career Talent Advisor Team Leader. “I spoke with Mrs. Margaret Keith, who is one of the owners, and our experiences with her have been one of the best yet.”

According to Ekwerekwu, this is the second year of partnering with CARSTAR for career exploration posts.

“She has hosted us at three different locations now, and will continue to do so in the future,” he said. “Additionally, we are looking to create a pipeline of summer jobs as car detailers, technician assistants and painter assistants.”

CARSTAR has eight locations — four in Omaha and four in Lincoln. In February, Avenue Scholars visited the shop at 120th and Maple in Omaha.



CLOCKWISE (Starting top row). Jessica Thompson and Remington Barber-Holmes (Omaha North) try their hands at painting a bumper under the watchful eye of CARSTAR technician Sean Cunningham — first on a simulator and then in the painting room; (ABOVE MIDDLE) CARSTAR specialist Travis Vosika gives Aye Tu (Omaha South) and Edgar Recinos-Sandoval (Omaha Bryan) pointers on taking out dents in some fenders; (ABOVE) Alan Ramirez (Omaha Benson) listens to advice and works on smoothing out a dent. (LEFT) CARSTAR specialist Joe Wiczorek discusses the finer points of working on a car’s framework with Barber-Holmes and Thompson.