



STRAIGHT TO WORK

ASF initiates program to help students navigate path to employment

Straight to work. The concept is not for everyone. High school students are consistently advised that the real path to a meaningful career is a college education. Many high school graduates are not ready for the “real world.” Some are. The key is being ready for either avenue.

Avenue Scholars Foundation has recognized that — although the number one goal will continue to be supporting students through at least an associate’s degree — some graduates are not wired to follow the college path. Thus, ASF has initiated a program called “Straight to Work” to guide students directly into the work force.

“The career program [Straight to Work] evolved out of need for students to be streamlined from high school graduation straight to a professional environment,” says Career Talent Advisor Brad Ekwerekwu. “Creating an opportunity for them to be part of our program and focus on the transition to a career field was of paramount importance. Many students were struggling to find purpose and or motivation



to endure through the first few years of college, and this program is a dynamic solution that encourages them to think about careers here and now.”

Terry Fischer, Director of Career Services, says the program is necessary for ASF to fulfill its mission to “ensure careers for students of hope and need.”

“We needed to come up with another pathway for our students to move towards a rewarding career,” she said. “We want them to polish transferable job skills, discover employment opportunities, continue to train and obtain

job skills ‘on the job.’”

Six students attended an Aug. 21 orientation that targeted 2014 high school graduates who did not enroll in college. ASF is committed to working with these Straight to Work students for “at least a year ... with educational and on-the-job training sessions. Some students may excel faster than others, so it is really up to the individual student,” Ekwerekwu said.

Fischer says they hope to discover the best methods of helping these young men and women find meaningful employment

without going through a traditional college or vocational route.

“We are starting to work with Metro [Metropolitan Community College] to possibly develop a fast-tracking career pathway, or program,” Fischer said.

A number of community partners will be involved in the Career program, which includes developing students’ life skills in the areas of housing, financing and health care. Much of the responsibility will be placed on the students

Straight to Work continued from Page 1

READY TO WORK ASF student Kathryn Carmichael gathers information from her cell phone as she fills out a "Career Student Information" form.

making realistic plans for achieving career success.

"The key is to set up a plan. What will 'you' need to do, say, complete, sacrifice, and acquire to get to the end goal," Ekwerekwu says. "Answering questions about the 'how' is essential. Focusing on each of these aspects will give the student the knowledge base to take initiative and responsibility in his or her own life. As we see success, we as advisors will take steps backward and let the students manage their lives accordingly. Until that point, we will be a consistent and positive force for them through encouragement and empow-

erment."

Fischer says ASF has a "rolodex of community and business partners who are willing to be of service. Ultimately, we would like to forge new pipelines for employment — like our partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield — but that project is a work-in-progress."

Fischer expects the program to evolve.

"Now that the 2014 Career kids are underway, our next step is to track down older scholars who dropped out of college and are working, and re-engage them with this program," she said.



Courtland Olson
Talent
Advisor



Duties: Working with high school juniors and seniors as a teacher, advisor and advocate

Education: Graduated from Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, IA with a double major in Education and History

Previous Experience:

History teacher,
Omaha Benson, 5 years

On Working at ASF: The Avenue Scholars Foundation is an incredible resource for many students of need. I couldn't be more excited to be a part of such a great Foundation that is having a lasting impact on the lives of the students it serves.

ASF grad Jermayne Thompson enjoying new role

The circle of life. So many aspects of life "come back full circle." Thus is the case for Jermayne Thompson, the Avenue Scholars Foundation accounting intern who began working June 1 to assume the role of Adam Stahlecker who resigned as Controller in August.

Thompson started his ASF circle in 2008-2009 as a senior at Omaha Roncalli. He attended Metropolitan Community College for two years, obtaining a Business Transfer degree — meaning all his classes transferred to his undergrad program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This fall he will graduate with an Accounting degree from the School of Business Administration. He became aware of the internship opening at ASF through a UNO online site called "Career Connect."

"I saw it there and called the ASF staff to see if I could apply, if I would qualify," Thompson said. "They assured me I would. I applied and got the job."

His duties include payroll, budget, daily check writing and quarterly reports.

"I like it," Thompson says. "I am learning a lot of newer things, such as other

accounting software. It's all helpful."

Besides classes at UNO, Thompson has kept busy with real-world experience. He was an accounting intern at Hayes & Associates for two years. Thompson is thankful for all the opportunities ASF has provided. In fact, he appreciates the chance to even become an "Avenue Scholar" because Roncalli is not affiliated with the program.

"My twin sister, Jasmyn, was in one of the first groups of students to be chosen," he said. "She went to high school at Omaha North. My mom asked Avenue Scholars to add me on. Everything I have done outside of high school has been because of Avenue Scholars. If not for them, I probably would

not have gone to Metro; if I had not been there, I would probably not be at UNO, or here [in an ASF office]. It has been a domino effect, in a good way."

Thompson would like to become a CPA. This spring he has one more class to take before meeting the minimum of 30 hours of business classes. Once he has completed that class, he will be ready to take the four tests — over the summer — required to become a CPA.





BOOK CORNER. Maribel Navarrete lines up one of the hundreds of books in her bookstore, tucked into the corner of her mother's clothing store at 1710 Vinton Street.

Young bookstore owner wants to make a difference

Considering she was a small business owner at age 16, confidence has never been an issue for Ralston graduate Maribel Navarrete, now 18 and a freshman at Metropolitan Community College.

With that character trait already built in, Navarrete just needed a support system to pursue her dreams.

"I have never lacked much in confidence," Navarrete said. "Avenue Scholars gave me the security I needed to go to college. Having the Talent Advisors, and place to ask questions, helped me a lot when I was first starting. It's good knowing they're there. Yes, they are doing their jobs, but it's on a deeper level than just doing their jobs."

Navarrete's business venture is a bookstore, presently tucked into a corner of her mother's clothing store at 1710 Vinton St. in South Omaha. It started with a collection of her own books, comprising most of two, 4'x8' bookshelves. The store has grown to a dozen shelf units and hundreds of books.

The collection started in a smaller, "hole in the wall" venue, mostly with her young adult, teen and children's books. Navarrete is expanding through direct buys and donations. She moved into the present space June 7.

Her love of books began as soon as she

could read. Now, she averages reading over a book per day.

"I have never been good with clothes; I'm not the fashionista in the family," Navarrete said. "I live for words. I got the reading gene."

At Metro Navarrete is pursuing an Associate's Degree in General Education/Liberal Arts, with emphasis in journalism and poetry.

"Originally, I wanted to be a public speaker, I really like motivational speaking," Navarrete says. "I have been writing since I could pick up a pencil. That's just my higher calling. I want to write about things that matter."

She wants peers of her generation to open up their eyes.

"The ways this generation is growing up," she said. "It's more who you are, then what you are. I am concerned that this generation is more concerned about what you have than what you are. That needs to stop."

Navarrete plans to continue expanding her bookstore and to some day branch out on her own, apart from the clothing store. In the meantime, she will continue studying, reading and writing with the confidence to continue going in the direction of her dreams.

AVENUE SCHOLARS FOUNDATION Staff

KEN BIRD
President/CEO

JEFF JOHNSTON
Chief Operating Officer

NORMA DEEB
Director of HR
& Professional Development

SHARLENE KARBOWSKI
Director of Technology
& Information Services

BEVERLY HASS
Executive Assistant to CEO
& Events Coordinator

JENNIFER BISIGNANO
Data & Office Manager

JERMAYNE THOMPSON
Accounting Intern

DOUG PIERSON
Program Director

LAURA MILLER
Director of Educational Services

TERRY FISCHER
Director of Career Services

BRAD EKWEREKWU
Team Leader,
Career Talent Advisors

JAMAR DORSEY
Team Leader,
High School Talent Advisors

Career Talent Advisors:
Jermaine Jones, Kristin Walsh,
Albert Varas

High School Talent Advisors:
Juan Cangas, Emily Christensen,
Evan Feezell,
Courtland Olson, Amy Rector,
Marcus Wagstaff

KELLY BERNADT
Counselor

KATELYN SCHANY
Counselor Intern

ROD HOWE
Communications Consultant

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WALTER SCOTT, JR.
Chairman of the Board

SUSIE BUFFETT
Vice Chair

HENRY DAVIS
DICK HOLLAND
BARB & WALLY WEITZ
Directors

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."

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY



PROUD PAINTERS. ABOVE: Career Talent Advisor Jermaine Jones, Lee Mar, Maia Molina, J. Whitney Davey, Alex Wells, Nicole Gomez, Career Talent Advisor Kristin Walsh, Kandi Velasquez, and Maria Herrera pose for a group photo after spending a day completing some interior painting at a Habitat for Humanity home. The bottom photo is (left to right) Alex Wells, J. Whitney Davey, Kandi Velasquez, Lee Mar, Nicole Gomez, Maia Molina, Maria Herrera; BELOW: Maia Molina, who has graduated MCC and transferred to UNO, rolls paint on a divider wall.



Scholars volunteer at Habitat for Humanity home

Career Talent Advisors Jermaine Jones and Kristin Walsh supervised a contingent of seven Avenue Scholars who volunteered to paint the inside of a Habitat for Humanity house in South Omaha. "It was rewarding to see the students working so hard and smiling at the same time," Walsh said. "I think they had fun and took the responsibility of doing a good job very seriously. We are hoping to continue these projects throughout the school year."

Green seeks career as neo-natal nurse

Inspired by her mother and motivated by her own personality of being "a people person," Omaha Northwest graduate Angie Green is focused on helping bring babies safely into the world.

Green, now enrolled at Metropolitan Community College to obtain an Associate's Degree in Nursing, plans to become a neo-natal nurse.

"I like babies, infants; I want to save lives," says Green, whose mother was both a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) and CMA (Certified Medical Assistant) during her career.



"She has always been a caregiver; I watched her take care of grandma," Green says of the inspiration that motivated her to seek a career in the medical field.

In the past few months Green has taken big steps toward fulfilling her dreams. She received her CNA certificate July 29. In mid-September, Green was accepted for "pre-employment" at the Nebraska Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. She will be working about 30 hours per week after completing orientation sessions Oct. 1 and Oct. 3.

Evan Feezell, Green's Talent Advisor at Omaha Northwest, and Career Team Leader Terry Fischer have been instrumental in helping Green find her pathway to a nursing career.

"If not for them, I would still be thinking about what I want to do," she says. "They motivated me to actually get up and do something. They really influenced me."