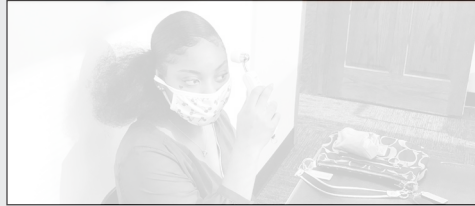




**AVENUE SCHOLARS.**  
Your Foundation for Success



Newsletter Issue 2 Vol. 9 January 2021

FAR RIGHT: An Avenue Scholar student practices using a blood pressure cuff. RIGHT: A student learns how to give a patient a TB test. This Career Awareness event took place at the Fulton Homes Education Center.



## Business Outreach Team meets challenges

In the unpredictable environment of 2020's Pandemic, the Avenue Scholars Business Outreach Team met the challenge of providing meaningful opportunities for students to become more aware of career possibilities.

"We knew going into this (planning events with business partners), we wanted to make sure we were still offering students opportunities — focusing on access, equity, and insights into what career interests they wanted to pursue," said Lindsay Decker, Career Exploration Coordinator. "We did not want to cancel any events, but we had to work around COVID. We had some business partners who still wanted to participate but because of COVID

decided they would have to push their participation to future years."

Decker and Ana Lopez Shalla, Business Outreach Team Director, determined that they could coordinate Career Awareness sessions with businesses that still wanted to participate through two methods — virtual meetings or controlled in-person visits.

"We were able to schedule 13 sessions, 6 in-person and 7 virtual," Decker said. "We were really careful to honor the policies and guidelines of businesses that offered in-person visits. We had to make sure the facilities were safe, that students and business staff wore masks, etc. We were really careful with on-site events. We saw that in virtual

sessions on Zoom business staff members would really take over and engage students."

In-person events included Woodhouse, Body Shop; Woodhouse, Auto Collision; Baxter Auto; CarStar, Body Shop; and Fulton Education Center, Health Care (two sessions).

Virtual events included Mutual of Omaha, Business; Boys Town, Business; Children's Hospital, Health Care; Boys Town, Health Care/Business; Quality Career Pathways, Health Care; Flywheel, IT; Lutz, IT.

"We could see that in some industries it would be a little more difficult to organize events. Hospitals and clinics, obviously, were not comfortable with allowing visitors,"

# Avenue Scholars welcomes new Board members

In 2020 Avenue Scholars added three new members to the Board: Calvin Sisson, Jeff Schmid, and Katie Weitz.

“Wow. What great additions to the Avenue Scholars Board. The three new Board members are committed, well informed, well respected and understand the importance of their Director’s role,” says President/CEO Ken Bird. “Avenue Scholars is excited to welcome Katie, Calvin, and Jeff to the Avenue Scholars Team.”

## CALVIN SISSON

“How cool is it that you get to have a direct impact on helping kids succeed,” says new Board member Calvin Sisson when considering all the work done by Avenue Scholars leaders and staff.

Sisson, as President and CEO of the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation, is responsible for managing seven unique and independent Scott family foundations as well as implementing the foundations’ philosophy and mission through their annual grant-making programs.

“What the early board and Ken [Bird] have established is phenomenal, and it has changed the lives of many students,” Sisson says.

Sisson admits it’s somewhat daunting to assume the responsibilities of filling the seat occupied by Walter Scott after Scott resigned from the Board in 2020.

“Walter said I’m stepping down and you’re replacing me,” Sisson said. “Everything [Walter] has done in his role to set up objectives and funding is huge. Of course, it made sense to maintain some representation on the board and continue having a board seat. It’s a great joy for me to take over for him. I’m clearly not him. Clearly, they are big shoes to fill, and I will try to continue that program (Avenue Scholars) as he sees it. For me, a primary goal is to protect the legacy that he and others started.”

Moving forward while addressing the challenges of maintaining and growing the organization, Sisson says the guiding force is still the primary purpose of Avenue Scholars.

“Avenue Scholars’ one goal is to take these kids and launch them into a career,” he said. “It’s a huge deal. To produce that kind of success at the end of a scholarship program is huge. Any organization would love to have that outcome.”

According to Sisson, Avenue Scholars is facing the same challenge as other non-profits — funding.

“We always need to address funding, how to diversify



and add funding sources to accomplish the mission of the organization,” he said.

Sisson also sees the need to maintain the outstanding leadership provided by Avenue Scholars administrators and board members.

“In the long term we need to continue looking at succession planning; we have to look carefully at how we add new folks at the board and leadership levels,” he said. “They have a great thing going. How do we protect that and grow it?”

## JEFF SCHMID

According to new Board member Jeff Schmid, Avenue Scholars is a proven commodity in the Omaha community. Now, the question facing the organization is how can it grow and expand so that even more young men and women can benefit from its mission?

“The organization started with a crescendo of people who believed in the mission and helped fund the mission,” Schmid says. “Ken did a tremendous job building that up. The organization has delivered provable results. Now, how do we scale that up? That’s where we are moving forward.”

Schmid, whose career spans 40 years in the banking business and is now working from Dallas to build “the next great Texas bank,” brings skills in growing organizations to the Avenue Scholars Board.

“With Ken following my career, I think he has seen some of the things I have done and do in business that appeal to him in considering the future of Avenue Scholars,” Schmid said. “My strengths are in the area of talent recruitment, team building, succession management, and performance-based management — things you need to use in figuring out how to grow the organization.”

“We all believe that the Avenue Scholars model is scalable, but if you’re going to scale it, you have to figure out how you’re going to do that. You have to have a plan, and at the end of the day you have to have a measure of talent and technology that’s going to deliver on that plan. My sense is that Ken wants me to bring that part of the formula to the board. For me, I see myself as an advisor to him and the board relative to people.”

Despite those complex challenges in growing the organization, Schmid recognizes that Avenue Scholars’ mission continues to be basic and simple.

“You don’t need to overcomplicate life,” he said. “People



want to be safe, and they want a good job. That may be an oversimplification, but that's the formula. We have a core of about 1,000 kids, and we know the formula works because we have seen the after-effects of success. The data provides proof of that. Now, what's next?"

Schmid believes the Board has a responsibility to help AS leaders determine the answers to that ultimate question and the best means of getting there.

"How do we make what Avenue Scholars has done sustainable for a long, long time? Is it an element that needs to be integrated more into the education system, and does it need to become a bigger part of the funding mechanisms that support that system?"

While trying to answer that question, Schmid hopes he and others can continue building on the vision that created Avenue Scholars.

"The success of Avenue Scholars is due to the thoughtful planning and the commitment of a full partnership around a mission," Schmid says. "Ken and Annie are a powerful team that believes in the value in people and the good in people. The success goes back to the DNA that's inside the Birds, Walter Scott, and others who believe 'we can make changes, we can make a difference.' It's an energy that creates its own solutions."

Schmid believes Avenue Scholars is a vital part of the community. "It's a great story and getting greater," he said.

## KATIE WEITZ

New Board member Katie Weitz, daughter of former Board members Barb and Wally Weitz, considers herself a "legacy" member and is proud to continue representing the Weitz Family Foundation on the Board.

"I care deeply about Avenue Scholars and its mission," Weitz said. "I am very pleased to sit on the board and excited to get more acquainted with the other board members. It's a good working group."

Weitz says she envisions bringing skills in strategic governance, advocacy, fundraising, and building organizational diversity to the Board.

"I do see one of my key roles on the board being strategic governance," she said. "Should Dr. Bird choose to pursue other endeavors and seeks assistance in developing a transition of leadership, I would like to help with that process."

Weitz wants to be involved in maintaining the institutional history of the organization.

"It's interesting to watch and support Dr. Bird as he nurtures and mentors the next generation of leadership," she said. "I am interested in providing support and being there to fill in the background information of the organization, and help carry on the institutional knowledge."

Weitz is excited to become more involved in several aspects of growing the organization.

"I want to be an advocate for broadening and strengthening the relationships with businesses and the community at large. Avenue Scholars is a great resource in the community and only a narrow band knows about it. More [businesses] could benefit from it and be part of it, and participate in meaningful ways. It requires a lot of support. I would like to continue building and ensuring diversity in staff, constituencies, and recruits. I would like to ensure the leadership matches the diversity of student recruits. I would like to support that effort."

Considering a year of dealing with the obstacles created by the Pandemic and ever-changing aspects of the working environment, Weitz wants to see Avenue Scholars continue to intensify its responsibility of providing guidance and support for young men and women trying to figure out their places in the future.

"There are many challenges," she said. "What's special about Avenue Scholars is the personal connection coaches have with students. As we grow, it's an important challenge to keep those connections and to stay in touch with students. We especially have to keep in mind the mental and behavioral health of Scholars."

"They need our help keeping control of what's going on in their lives when everything else in the world around them seems to be spinning out of control," Weitz said.



## AVENUE SCHOLARS

Staff

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President/CEO

### MIKE ALVANO

Chief Operation Officer/  
Chief Financial Officer

### KRIS VALENTIN

Senior Director of Human  
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### JAMAR DORSEY, SR.

Director of Community  
Engagement & High School  
Partnerships

### CATIE DAGLE

Director of Information  
& Quality Assurance

### BEVERLY HASS

Executive Assistant to CEO  
& Events Coordinator

### PENNY DARNELL

Accounting Manager

### LAURIE MERTEN

Office & Staff Assistant

### DOUG PIERSON

Special Projects Coordinator

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KELLY BERNADT, Director of Student Support; Janae Donaldson, Stephanie Kellum, Coordinators

### Postsecondary Coaches:

TERRY FISCHER, Director of Career Programs; Tonya Fairgood, Michael Johnson, Amanda Lonergan, Anthony Tate, Dan Corral, Cane Rodriguez

### High School Coaches:

JASON BOYD, Director of High School Programs; Taleya Broadway, Terrence Gillian, Allison Goff, Ashley Knott, Beth Leach, Fred Starks, Kamina Lemons, Alejandra Soto-Suarez, Marquita Lambert

### Business Outreach Team:

ANA LOPEZ SHALLA, Director of Business Outreach; Lindsay Decker, Kathy McGauvran, Business Outreach Coordinators; Jan Benitez, Allie Thompson, Intern Coordinators

### ROD HOWE

Communications Consultant

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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#### JOHN SCOTT

#### JEFF SCHMID

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#### KATIE WEITZ

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#### WALTER SCOTT, JR.

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

## Community Engagement

*Cooperative endeavors with other Omaha area non-profits provide resources for families affected by Pandemic*



JAMAR DORSEY

Welcome to the second installment of the Community Engagement Corner. We are excited to share the ways Avenue Scholars staff and students have been involved in the community this past quarter. Avenue Scholars, in collaboration with Girls Inc. and other non-profit organizations in the Omaha area, has been working to supply families in need with sanitation materials during the time of Covid-19.

The first Avenue Scholars Community Advisory Committee meeting was held Dec. 10, 2020. This committee is designed to focus on three objectives: advice, advocacy, and collaboration. In the first meeting the committee established ways to jointly serve all people in our community.

Power Hour's October guest, Dr. Sherell McArthur from the University of Georgia, shared with Avenue Scholars staff ways to use digital critical media to enhance literacy skills in the industries we serve students (healthcare, IT, business, automotive, and trades). In December, Dr. Keyonna King from UNMC shared with staff information on health disparities and how to educate our program participants on resources available to them and their families.

Avenue Scholars is excited to announce their relationship with the Munroe Meyer Institute. Over the course of the next few months MMI staff will be working with AS staff to provide tools for working with AS students. The tools will promote personal wellness for each staff member and student.

Lastly, over several months, Avenue Scholars has been working with Anthony Hadley of Hadley Enterprises, Inc. Hadley specializes in telling stories and using video to spread the word. Hadley has put together a short film called Avenue Scholars Student Voices. This film tells the story of the Avenue Scholars and the journey they have taken to get into the industry of their choice. Hadley is a native of Omaha and has worked with other non-profit organizations such as the NorthStar Foundation to tell their story from the students' perspective as well.

Until next time — remember that life is a marathon not a sprint. Condition yourself for the seen and unseen.

*Business Outreach Team* \_\_\_\_\_ *continued from Page 1*

Decker said. "We partnered with Fulton Homes, a Health Care training organization. They provide certification training for CNAs, CMAs, and other certifications. They're still working in this environment, so it worked well to partner with them."

Decker noted that student feedback from the in-person visits to the Fulton Homes training facility "was overwhelmingly positive."

Decker and business owners ensured the safety of in-person events by organizing students into "smaller cohorts" moving through the facility.

Decker and other Outreach staff learned that smaller groups might be a good strategy to use in the post-pandemic future because they observed how students were able to network better and have more one-on-one interaction in an "intimate environment." Even the virtual sessions proved to be positive and engaging.

Throughout the fall semester, the Business Outreach Team was guided by the early mindset and leadership of Avenue Scholars CEO/President Ken Bird who wanted to make sure staff continued to provide opportunities to get students out in front of businesses or potential employers.

"Career awareness programming is essentially a long-term play," Lopez Shalla said. "We want to be sure we are still sowing the seeds and setting the foundation for students' long-term career growth."

Lopez Shalla credited Dr. Bird and Decker with establishing a strategy for success during the fall term.

"It was an effort that could have easily gone away amid an urgent crisis," she said. "It was really prescient on Dr. Bird's part, and I am so glad for Lindsay's leadership for setting the stage for focusing on things that may not appear to be as urgent but are still important. I think the effort will pay dividends years from now when we see students come through the pipeline still informed and capable of making good decisions on what they want to do in their careers."



CarStar was one of the Career Awareness locations where Scholars were able to attend in person.