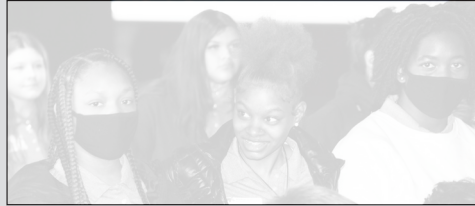




**AVENUE SCHOLARS.**  
Your Foundation for Success



Newsletter Issue 4 Vol. 10 July 2022



Melvin Sudbeck (Center), Sudbeck Homes President, is happy to receive a "Friend of Avenue Scholars" award from Anthony Tate, Postsecondary Career Coach, and Ken Bird, Avenue Scholars President & CEO, during the Avenue Scholars annual Celebration Luncheon. The luncheon had been cancelled the previous two years due to the pandemic.



Tonya Fairgood, Postsecondary Career Coach, and Kamara Cullins, an Avenue Scholars alum, are all smiles following the luncheon.

## Spring luncheon welcomes Scholars



The Avenue Scholars Celebration Luncheon returned to Baxter Arena April 27.

Jason Boyd, Director of High School Programs, welcomed the 2022-2023 class of new Scholars.

Tonya Fairgood, Postsecondary Career Coach, introduced Kamara Cullins, an Avenue Scholars alum who gave an impassioned speech regarding the path she took through the program to achieve career success.

"Friends of Avenue Scholars" honors were awarded to QLI (presented by Ken Bird, President & CEO), Werner Technology (presented by Lindsay Decker, Business Outreach Coordinator), and Sudbeck Homes (presented by Anthony Tate, Postsecondary Career Coach).



Avenue Scholars Alum Biye Belew expresses his thanks for the Avenue Scholars experience.

Daragh Mahon, EVP & Chief Information Officer of Werner Technology, was happy to receive a "Friend of Journalism" award at the luncheon. Presenters (from left) were Ken Bird, President & CEO; Lindsay Decker, Business Outreach Coordinator; and Mike Alvano, COO & CFO.



Terrence Gillian, Benson High School Career Coach, applauds his Scholars.



Canei Rodriguez, Postsecondary Career Coach, introduces Biye Belew.

# Lakin Foundation boosts healthcare initiative

By all measures, the Charles E. Lakin Foundation got what it was looking for when its board approved funding the Avenue Scholars healthcare program three years ago.

At the time, Steve Wild, President of the Charles E. Lakin Foundation, said he was happy the Lakin Foundation could be a key financial resource for the success and the continued expansion of the healthcare initiative at Avenue Scholars.

"I really admire the results of what Avenue Scholars has built in terms of a program that serves the community," Wild said. "After I became president, we made a determination that we did not want to look at or solicit applications for grants. We want to be very strategic in seeking out relationships with non-profit organizations that would take us in the direction we want to go."

Jennifer Green, the Lakin Foundation's Operations & Grant Manager, says Charles Lakin was a big proponent of "people bringing themselves out of poverty and making themselves self-sufficient." Lakin was most interested in supporting a program that would be making the biggest impact on young people finding a successful career pathway.

"We could see that healthcare was by far the largest and most popular pathway that Avenue Scholars had," Green said. "By funding this program, we knew we could impact the most students coming through."

Pleased with the current success, the Lakin Foundation approved in the fall of 2021 another 3-year grant to fund the healthcare program. With the pandemic over the past two years, Wild has noticed how much the healthcare program through Avenue Scholars has continued to thrive despite the challenges.

"The pandemic made everything significantly more visible, and the demand for more healthcare professionals increased," Wild said. "We were very impressed with the results they were able to accomplish in a very tough environment."

Postsecondary Career Coaches Tonya Fairgood and Canei Rodriquez are responsible for the healthcare students case-loads; they are proud of the program's success, noting the process can be "very rigorous at times."

"In order to maintain high grades, one must be willing to designate at least 4 hours or more toward studying every day," Fairgood said. "Balance is the 'simple key' that we use as coaches. We have to teach students to balance their coursework, employment, as well as their personal lives in a manner that is going to help them be more successful."

The base requirement for students entering the healthcare program is obtaining a CNA (Certified Nursing Associate) certificate.

"As healthcare coaches, we are adamant about students

obtaining their CNAs at the very least," Fairgood said. "A CNA can turn into a career for some individuals, so getting it as early as possible (age 16) has been essential in moving into other careers in health care."

Avenue Scholars students are given the opportunity to take CNA training during their junior year and begin working in the field. They have another opportunity as seniors to obtain a CNA through Senior Academy.

Several professional organizations and businesses have partnered with Avenue Scholars to assist students seeking to obtain a CNA. They include QLI, Fulton Homes, Quality Career Pathways, and Methodist College.

Fairgood and Rodriquez say their goal is for every student that comes into the healthcare program to leave with at least one or two certifications and/or an Associate degree.

Currently, 72 students are enrolled in the healthcare program, and of those, 69 are employed in the industry. From 2017 to 2022, students have obtained 183 certifications in healthcare through the Avenue Scholars program. Those certifications include CNA, CMA, LPN, Paramedic, Medical Assistants, Sterile Processing, EMT, RN, Respiratory Therapy, and Pharmacy Tech.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare is the fastest growing industry and expected to add the most jobs in the next 10 years.

"The healthcare industry is very high in demand, and we are very happy to coach students with a desire to pursue a career inside it," Fairgood said.

All High School Career Coaches are responsible for assisting students in finding career pathways best suited to their interests and skills. The healthcare pathway has been popular at Papillion-LaVista High School.

"I have been able to watch eight of my students over the past two years earn their CNA license thanks to generous funding," says Papillion-LaVista High School Career Coach Ashley Knott. "For each of these students, this step has allowed them to gain a much deeper understanding of their career field of interest and to get further exposure of the demands of state licensure processes."

Knott is confident that all these students have bright futures ahead of them.

"Each one was beaming when they called, texted, or returned to class to let me know they had, in fact, passed their written exam and practical exams," she said. "Even better, though, has been watching them enter their first CNA jobs. I hear such passion and eagerness to learn and do right by their patients. I have such confidence that helping these young people gain these certifications is a win for them as individuals but also for the greater community at large."







Millard North students applaud one of their classmates who received a Special Recognition honor.

## Senior Academy luncheon celebrates student achievement

Senior Academy graduates were honored at a luncheon celebration, held May 4 at the Stockyards Ballroom. Graduates Shohina Sultonova and Samuel LaPlante were emcees for the event. Graduates A'Myrah Johnson and Estefany Oropeza-Cortes spoke about their "College Dreams."

Lance Paqua, Ralston Avenue Scholar Alumni, talked to 2022 Senior Scholars about his journey to a successful career in the steamfitting industry.

High School Career Coaches Allison Goff (Millard North), Marquita Lambert (Millard South), Terrence Gillian (Omaha Benson), Kamina Lemons (Omaha Bryan), Fred Starks (Omaha North), Taleya Broadway (Omaha Northwest), Vanessa Collins (Omaha South), Ashley Knott (Papillion), and Beth Leach (Ralston) recognized each of their Class of 2022 graduates. Beth Leach and Allison Goff announced "Special Recognition" honorees.

Marcus Manley, Postsecondary Team, and Tyler Cannon, MCC Navigator, provided comments representing their respective programs.



**ABOVE.** Scholar Samuel LaPlante welcomes guests to the Senior Academy Celebration Luncheon.



**LEFT.** Omaha South Career Coach Vanessa Collins announces her Senior Academy graduates.



**BELOW.** Scholar Shohina Sultonova introduces the next speaker.

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*"Avenue Scholars, the leader in bridging the gap between education and business, guarantees careers for our youth of hope and need through supportive relationships, individualized coaching, education, and training."*

# Community Engagement

## Avenue Scholars Staff and new Youth Council focus on Social Justice



JAMAR DORSEY, Ed.D.

Hello all and welcome to the fourth and final installment of the Community Engagement Corner for the 2021-2022 calendar year. Our Avenue Scholars program is excited to engage students, staff, and the community this summer.

Avenue Scholars core values are integrity, innovation, collaboration, respect, and hope. This column will speak to the value of Innovation. The definition of innovation is “a new idea, method, or device.” This summer Avenue Scholars will be innovative in how they offer services to the newly inducted 10th grade students and all current Avenue Scholar participants. The community can look forward to seeing Avenue Scholars in the community with internships, taking summer classes, participating in boot camps, working full-time jobs, creating spaces to have critical conversations, and leading youth initiatives with other similar non-profits, such as the Youth Council.

The Youth Council’s primary objective is to implement a student-led focus group of three to four students from each participating organization: NorthStar, Avenue Scholars, Partnerships for Kids, Completely Kids, and Girls Inc. This Youth Council will be a platform where students can speak their truths and address issues through dialogue on a quarterly basis. On April 20 the Youth Council met at the Partnership for Kids headquarters. Each group presented a proposal on how to impact the community. They will work on their social justice projects in July and present to the community to kick off the 2022-23 school year. I would like to personally thank the CEOs for believing in this vision and supporting this joint effort. I also applaud the staff members and students for being creative and authentic people in this safe space to bring awareness and to educate the community collectively.

Avenue Scholars staff will also have the opportunities to engage in neighborhood cleanups in the communities in which their students reside. In the month of May Avenue Scholars staff engaged in the last inclusion book club meeting of the calendar year. The reading was *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. Staff were presented with several thought-provoking questions that prompted staff to reflect on the reading while also building personal perspective.

Lastly, I have enjoyed writing these columns for the Omaha community and appreciate the support of all of our stakeholders. I want to leave you with something to ponder over the next few months until we meet again in this space. The topic is “representation.” Representation is fundamentally vital to see across different industries and media. It allows marginalized people to imagine a future outside of their reality and consider new possibilities that have been systematically out of reach. Every day, society bombards us with rhetoric and media that tell us what can and cannot be achieved — and who can and cannot achieve it. Seeing the first person in his or her family succeed and break generational poverty is paramount on an individual, societal, and political level.

Until next time — don’t conform to the environment, make the environment conform to you.



## Ralston graduate provides keynote address at luncheon

Lance Paqua, a 2018 Ralston High School graduate, was the keynote speaker at the Senior Academy Celebration luncheon, held May 4 at the Livestock Exchange Ballroom. In his address, Paqua reviewed for Avenue Scholars seniors how his participation in the AS program guided him to a successful career as a steamfitter.

Ralston High School Career Coach Beth Leach says Paqua was a leader in the classroom and in the program, noting he was a state champion with Skills USA.

“Lance was always working jobs where he worked really, really hard,” Leach said. “He worked with a crew at Monster Tree Service and led a kitchen as a cook at Spaghetti Works.”

In March of his senior year Paqua landed a position with Local 464 Steamfitters Union, “beating out people much older and more experienced for his spot,” Leach said.

“What makes Lance incredibly unique is his grit and determination in the face of adversity,” Leach said. “He is a very focused and hard worker, and he knows how to find and capitalize off opportunities. In addition, he makes the tough decisions to put himself in a better place for the present and for the future.”

In his spare time, Paqua trains and competes as a “winning boxer,” representing his local union at a recent Blue Collar Boxing event.