



AVENUE SCHOLARS.
Your Foundation for Success



Newsletter Issue 1 Vol. 10 October 2021



FROM LEFT. Jan Benitez, AS alumnus; Paula Bell, Spoken Word Poet; Jus. B, vocal musician; Shanketta Newsom, Spoken Word Poet



ABOVE. Avenue Scholars Kiara Simonsen and Johnna Parker enjoy a light moment before the banquet begins. **RIGHT.** Some Avenue Scholars alumni pose for a group photo following the celebration.



Event celebrates alumni success

Avenue Scholars celebrated “our alumni’s success in the workplace” at a banquet event, held at the Joslyn Art Museum Sept. 22.

Jan Benitez, AS alumnus, 2010 Ralston graduate, and QuaNiquia Damper, AS alumnus, 2016 Omaha North graduate gave welcoming remarks.

Paula Bell and Shanketta Newsom, local Spoken Word Poets, delivered poetry readings. Jus. B entertained with a vocal performance.

Eight alums were recognized for “determination and success”: Nandi Thomas, National Guard, Service Journeyman; Johnna Parker, Nurses Touch, Traveling CNA/MedAid; Aylin Arroyo, One World Health, Dental Assistant; Tinasia Smith, Bickford Senior Living, Medical Assistant; Caiden Barber, Bell Ryan Elementary, Paraprofessional; Ismael Chavez Diaz, M&A Tree Service & Landscaping,



ABOVE. AS alumnus Hsee Htoo engages in some conversation before the banquet starts

LEFT. the Postsecondary Team: Anthony Tate, Terry Fischer, Dan Corral, Canei Rodriquez, Amanda Lonergan, Marcus Manley, Tonya Fairgood

Walter Scott leaves legacy of service to Omaha community

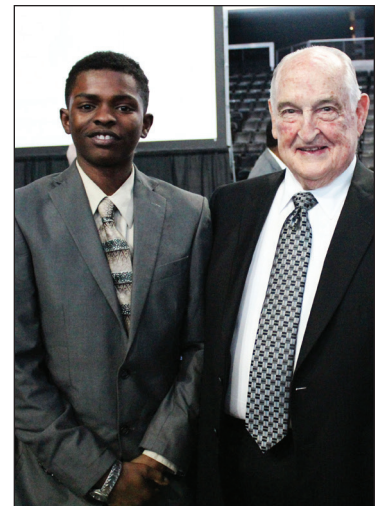
When Walter Scott Jr. died Saturday, Sept. 25, at age 90, the loss was felt throughout the Omaha community — from the Henry Doorly Zoo, to the University of Nebraska at Omaha, to Avenue Scholars, to numerous other charitable organizations and medical institutions.

As the *Omaha World-Herald* noted, Scott “was a giant figure in construction who left an even bigger imprint on Omaha as the city’s biggest and most influential philanthropist.”

Scott, reflecting on his years of supporting Avenue Scholars in the spring of 2020, expressed his pride in what the foundation has accomplished.

“Avenue Scholars Foundation started in 2008 with a simply stated but ambitious goal — to curb poverty by helping young people gain access to quality job opportunities. We’re proud of the program’s growth, the partnerships that have been built, and the positive impact the program has made on Omaha-area students and businesses over the past 12 years,” he said.

Colleagues of Walter Scott have fond memories of the many ways he impacted Avenue Scholars and the Omaha community.



“

Walter Scott, Jr., or Walter as we all knew him, was a legend in construction, telecommunications, and energy industries. Perhaps even more important, Walter ranks as one of America’s great philanthropists. Virtually no major philanthropic achievement in the state of Nebraska has been completed in the past 50 years without Walter’s involvement.

”

David Sokol,
Associate Chairman Emeritus & Horatio Alger
Endowment Fund Vice-President

“

When I think of Walter, I’m reminded of the saying, “Vision without action is dreaming. Action without vision is chaos. But vision and action together can change the world.” It’s hard for me to think of a better example of those words than Walter Scott. His vision for the future of education and the path to improve the quality of education to ensure a positive outcome is a great example of that saying.

”

Jack Koraleski,
Past Chairman, CEO & President,
Union Pacific

“

MCC was involved with the very first class of Avenue Scholars. Through Walter’s spirit and teamwork, we were able to set up a program that helped people get training and education that would lead to meaningful jobs. In the early years, as with many multifaceted challenges in a community, a lot of people could point out the problems and talk about them, but it took Walter to get people working together to find real solutions.

”

Randy Schmailz,
President of Metropolitan Community College

Alumnus encourages Scholars to ‘never give up’

Avenue Scholars Alum Qua Niquia Damp-er, in her welcoming remarks at the Sept. 22 Alumni Celebration, said her journey through the AS program, Metropolitan Community College, and the early years of her medical profession taught her three primary lessons: “never give up, the sky’s the limit, and always to remember ‘that you are enough.’”

Damper, a 2016 Omaha North graduate, is in her second year as a Medical Assistant at Children’s Hospital and Medical Center. Her duties include drawing blood, collecting urine samples, taking vitals, administering flu shots and COVID vaccine shots, and settling patients into their hospital rooms.

“At Children’s I’m in the Oncology/Hematology department, drawing blood from patients as young as 4 years old,” Damper said. “It was hard at first, but I love it now. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. They (patients) learn to trust you and love you, so it’s really hard when a patient dies, but I feel good knowing I had given them comfort.”

During her senior year at Omaha North Damper obtained her CNA certificate while attending Senior Academy Classes. She has been employed at Maple Crest nursing home for five years, where she still picks up random shifts, up to a minimum six days per month.

Damper knew the Avenue Scholars program was an opportunity she could not squander.

“I would not be where I am today if Avenue Scholars had not been there to push me,” she said. “I always loved school, but



there were times I would get a little discouraged and they were always there to pick me up. I knew it was my best opportunity — to get a scholarship and get my degree, so I did all my homework, worked hard, and never gave up.”

Although Damper is happy with her current job status, she says, “I’m not finished yet. Eventually I would like to be a sonographer tech.”

In addition to her own confidence and motivation, Damper acknowledges that a solid support system has been critical to her success.

“I have had lots of support from my mom and my sister,” she said. “And in Avenue Scholars I have another family that supports me, a family for life.”

Alumni Celebration

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Equipment Operator; Kiara Simonsen, Abundant Quality Care, Med Aid; Jamie Johnson, Immanuel Fontanelle, Registered Nurse.

Ten AS alumni were recognized for their “exemplary” success in the workforce: Brianna Jackson, Fraser Stryker (Law Firm), Legal Assistant; Miguel Rojas Hammond, OPPD, Line-man Apprentice; Jeanine Dalmeida, UNMC, Medical Assistant; Hope Gray, Ameristar, Kitchen Manager; DeVonna Williams, QLI, CNA; Miriam Islas, QLI, Traveling CNA; Amos Lacy, Lexus of Omaha, Toyota Technician; Steven Powell, Medical Solutions, Associate Security Analyst; Emmanuel Gordillo, Nebraska Medicine, Respiratory Tech; Mekhi Banks, Cobalt Credit Union.

Shohina Sultonova, AS senior at Millard North High School, gave closing remarks.

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JAMAR DORSEY, Sr.
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion & Community Engagement Consultant

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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

Diversity, equity, inclusion continue to be driving forces of Avenue Scholars' interaction with community



JAMAR DORSEY, Ed.D.

Welcome back readers to the Community Engagement Corner. Over the last few months I have been able to reflect upon the last year with Avenue Scholars. Avenue Scholars has taken steps to educate its staff and community on issues that surround diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). This column will be a year in review in the space of DEI and community engagement.

Diversity is often perceived to be about perspective, representation, tough conversation, and supporting inclusion. Inclusion prompts answers about creating environments conducive to feedback, supporting diversity, and being open. Equity was described as fairness, sameness, and valuing diversity and inclusion.

In the 2020-21 school year Avenue Scholars provided educational opportunities for staff with many sessions around diversity, equity, and inclusion. African American men of Avenue Scholars were able to share life experiences as a Black man, hoping to bring perspective for those who might not have that lens.

The women of Avenue Scholars participated in a roundtable discussion and shared their experiences navigating the workplace as a minority. CEO Ken Bird moderated a conversation about the journey African American males face regarding leadership positions. These sessions have had a profound impact on the staff members of Avenue Scholars.

NON-PROFIT YOUTH COUNCIL

Community engagement is involvement and participation in an organization for the welfare of the community. This year Avenue Scholars, Partnership for KIDS, NorthStar, Girls Inc. and Completely Kids will join forces to help students promote student voices through a Non-Profit Youth Council. The objective of the Youth Council is to implement a student-led focus group comprised of three to four students from each organization.

This Youth Council will be a platform where students can speak their truths and address issues through dialogue on a quarterly basis. Each organization will unite to create a collaborative Youth Council to develop social justice youth advocates and promote inclusion and student voices. This Youth Council group will be a safe space where high school and college students can use their voices to speak on various issues related to inequality, social justice, and inclusion.

I am looking forward to updating you next time on the start of this great joint community engagement event with the non-profit community.

Until next time — don't conform to the environment, make the environment conform to you!

As Program Support Intern Scholar makes connections

"Avenue Scholars has opened my eyes to lots of things and opportunities," says Shohina Sul-tonova, a Millard North High School senior. "I have met lots of lovely people who are helping me make lots of connections."



The opportunities include her current job as the Program Support Intern for Avenue Scholars, specifically with the Business Outreach Team. During the summer Sul-tonova worked 40 hours per work, but her work schedule was reduced to two days per week during the school year.

During the first couple weeks on the job, Sul-tonova was kept busy "attending meetings and events, and I met many people. I have improved my skills in email writing, replying to emails promptly, and staying in touch with new contacts."

Her primary responsibility this past month was to create a "big booklet" for the Iowa Expo Project. The booklet is designed to help this year's junior-year Scholars "with the application process, interview process, and resume writing," Sul-tonova said.

Sul-tonova is continuing to explore career opportunities this school year, with an eye on real estate, finance, or business. She plans to attend Metropolitan Community College, utilizing the Avenue Scholars scholarship to obtain an Associate's Degree in Business Management or Entrepreneurship. Still, Sul-tonova has not settled on a definite career choice.

"I'm trying to explore lots of things," she said. "I'm also looking at Health Care. I'm looking at lots of options. I'm not putting all my eggs in one basket. I definitely want a career but not so much that it interferes with my personal life. I want to have a healthy balance of work and personal life."

For now, Sul-tonova is excited about all the connections to careers she is making through Avenue Scholars.