



**AVENUE SCHOLARS.**  
Your Foundation for Success



Newsletter Issue 1 Vol. 11 October 2022



## Alumni celebrate stories of career achievements

The fourth annual Avenue Scholars Alumni Celebration attracted 131 former Scholars to the event held Sept. 21 at the Scott Conference Center.

Dr. Lisa Sterba, Senior Director of Programs, welcomed alumni, staff, and parents. Student speakers included Katie Besse, Teanna Hamilton, Hannah Harvey, Jacob Guinto, and Julia Romero.

A “Spoken Word” narrative was delivered by Aliyyah Rodriguez. Alisa Moore provided a musical highlight, singing “The Climb.”

Ashley Knott, Omaha Westside High School Career Coach, spoke about the history of Avenue Scholars. Catie Dagle, Director of Information & Quality Assurance, presented special Board recognition.

Janae Donaldson, Director of Student Support, led off the recognition of alumni.



Alumna Hannah Harvey remarks on her journey to find her career in millwork and welding.



Alumna Julia Romero provides closing remarks at the fourth annual Avenue Scholars Alumni Celebration, including her career achievements in the construction field.



Janae Donaldson’s remarks prompt laughter from alumna Teanna Hamilton.



(ABOVE) Several Avenue Scholars alumni pose for a group photo after receiving special recognition honors.



(LEFT) Alumnus Jacob Guinto comments on his Avenue Scholars experience.

## Decker provides leadership in new communication position

Seeking to communicate a consistent and easily accessible message of Avenue Scholars' mission in the Omaha community, Lindsay Decker is embracing her new role as Director of Communications and Development.

Decker says her primary responsibility is to "oversee how we are communicating to constituents and main stakeholders — our community, our students, and our parents — how we keep that voice consistent, easy to access, and easily understandable through a marketing lens."

Coming from her previous role as Career Exploration Coordinator on the Business Outreach Team, Decker is well aware of how important her new job is in supporting all the Avenue Scholars departments — especially the High School Career Coaches, Postsecondary Career Coaches, Business Outreach, and Intern Omaha — in their interactions with the community.

"For example, with the high school team getting ready to recruit the next cohort of students, I needed to consult with Michael Johnson (Assistant Director of Programs) to review what the plan was and how I can best support their plan to ensure the communication is consistent and easy to understand," Decker said.

On the Development side, Decker is tasked with

maintaining and building relationships with businesses and donors.

"It really is essentially about creating relationships with people and sustaining those relationships," Decker says. "We want to work with people who feel passionate about and inspired by the things we do."

Decker acknowledges that fundraising is part of that relationship building.

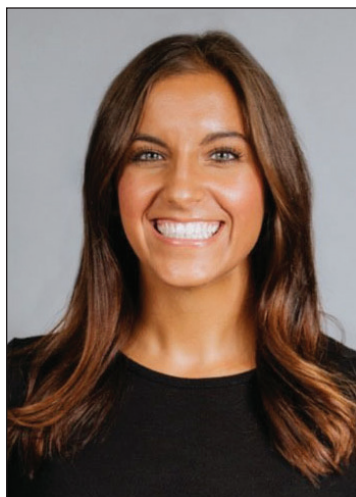
"If you're passionate about workforce development and giving back to the community through mentoring and internships, you will want to support Avenue Scholars in advancing the mission," she said. "It's that passion that I want to plug into."

Not coincidentally, Decker was recently accepted into Leadership Omaha's Class 45 (the forty-fifth year of the program). A select group of 40 young leaders were chosen to participate in the 10-month program, which requires attending a monthly seminar where the class will be putting together projects to benefit the Omaha community.

"It's about building leaders, helping us flex our leadership strengths," Decker said. "I want to think people see me as leader by example, that they see something from me that inspires them and models for them a way to help make our city a wonderful place to live."



## Iowa program Career EdVantage SWI rebrands as Avenue Scholars SWI to 'better align' with original AS mission



**Cara Cool-Trede**

Career EdVantage Southwest Iowa, established in 2019, was the first expansion of the Avenue Scholars program established in the Omaha Metro area.

This year, the Iowa program has "shifted" names to be known as Avenue Scholars Southwest Iowa.

"We couldn't be more excited," says Cara Cool-Trede, the Avenue Scholars SWI Executive Director. "We've always worked together with Avenue Scholars. Now, by sharing a common name, we have even greater advantages moving forward."

Cool-Trede has served as Executive



**AVENUE SCHOLARS**  
**Southwest Iowa**

A Charles E. Lakin Foundation Initiative

Director since the program's inception in 2019. She oversees and facilitates all aspects of the organization. Prior to joining Avenue Scholars, Cool-Trede worked with Iowa Western Community College.

In its opening year, Avenue Scholars SWI served four school districts and 19 students. The Iowa program now partners with eight school districts: AHSTW, Tri-Center, Riverside, Shenandoah, Lewis Central, Treynor, Glenwood, and Underwood.

"We can't wait for what's next at Avenue Scholars Southwest Iowa," Cool-Trede said.

## Avenue Scholars Welcomes New Staff

**Jessi Hedlund**  
Internship  
Coordinator



**Education:** Bachelor's Degree in Spanish Language, Literatures, and Culture, Colorado State; Master's Degree, Educational Administration-Higher Education, UNL  
**Previous Work Experience:** Higher Education Liaison, Central Plains Center for Services; Career Advisor & Graduate Research Assistant for Job Location and Development, UNL; Spanish Teacher, Lewis Central Community School District (Iowa)  
**On Working at AS:** "I'm proud to work for an organization that helps young people figure out what they're passionate about and what they're good at, and from there help them determine how they can transform those interests into a meaningful career."

**Vanessa Collins**  
High School  
Career Coach  
Omaha  
Northwest



**Education:** Bachelor of Arts Degree, Creighton University; Master of Arts Degree, College of Saint Mary  
**Previous Work Experience:** English teacher, Omaha North High School, OPS; Senior Processing Analyst, First Data  
**On Working at AS:** "Working for Avenue Scholars is exactly where I am meant to be. Working with my colleagues is easy. All of the staff is helpful and willing to listen to suggestions on how to improve every aspect of the program. Being heard and valued is a major strength that should be bragged about. I truly enjoy working here because it combines my natural desire to improve on everything around me and to help guide children into adulthood. I look forward to serving my students and colleagues in the best way I can."

**Shaney Esparza**  
Office  
& Staff  
Assistant



**Education:** Bachelor's Degree in Child, Adult, and Family Services, Iowa State  
**Previous Work Experience:** Head Secretary at Hartman Elementary, Omaha Public Schools; Admin Associate, Office of Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, UNL; Behavior Intervention Specialist & Special Needs Paraeducator, Waterloo (IA) Community Schools  
**On Working at AS:** "I am honored and proud to be part of such an inspirational and distinguished team at Avenue Scholars. The foundation they have built as an organization and the support they provide for students/families throughout the Omaha metro area is incredible. They are dedicated, committed, and devoted to every individual they serve, and provide a companionship that lasts for a lifetime!"

**Zadie Johnson**  
High School  
Career Coach  
Papillion  
LaVista



**Education:** Bachelor's Degree in Education & Human Services, UNL; Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, UNO  
**Previous Work Experience:** Business teacher & DECA advisor, Ralston High School; teacher at Monroe Middle School in Omaha and Hastings High School in Houston, TX  
**On Working at AS:** "It is an honor to work within Avenue Scholars and be able to advocate for my scholars and help them reach success within their education, careers, and lives."

**Kristy Preuss**  
Office  
& Staff  
Assistant



**Education:** Bachelor's Degree in Communications Studies, Iowa State  
**Previous Work Experience:** Leadership & Learning Program Secretary, Millard Public Schools; Executive Payments Consultant, Heartland Payment Systems  
**On Working at AS:** "In the short time I have been at Avenue Scholars I have seen how passionate everybody is about the work the organization is doing. It is very rewarding to be a part of and support a team of caring individuals that want what is best for students and guide them toward achieving their goals."

**Tom Prescott**  
Postsecondary  
Career Coach



**Education:** Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, Biola University  
**Previous Work Experience:** Reemployment Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Labor; Family Teacher, Boys Town; Language Arts, Spanish and GED teacher, schools in North Carolina and California  
**On Working at AS:** The students are why I am here. I am impressed and inspired by how many barriers our students face getting as they are starting out in college and moving into their career field. Our students have incredible drive as they move ahead, they strive facing barriers I never had to face. How can I not be there for them? The job can be incredibly difficult but I enjoy being there to help coach, encourage, and challenge the students as they find who they are in what they do.

### AVENUE SCHOLARS Staff

**KEN BIRD**  
President/CEO  
**LISA STERBA**  
Senior Director of Programs  
**KRIS VALENTIN**  
Senior Director of HR and Administrative Services  
**CATIE DAGLE**  
Director of Information & Quality Assurance  
**LINDSAY DECKER**  
Director of Communications & Development  
**MICHAEL JOHNSON**  
Assistant Director of Programs

**JIM SUTFIN**  
Special Assistant to the President/CEO

**OFFICE & STAFF ASSISTANTS:**  
Shaney Esparza, Beverly Hass, Kristy Preuss

**Student Support:**  
JANAE DONALDSON, Director of Student Support; Guadalupe Perez-Aguilar, Student Support Assistant

**Postsecondary Coaches:**  
TONYA FAIRGOOD, \*Dept. Head; Anthony Tate, Dan Corral, Canei Rodriguez, Marcus Manley, Tom Prescott

**High School Coaches:**  
ASHLEY KNOTT, \*Dept Head; Terrence Gillian, Allison Goff, Beth Leach, Fred Starks, Kamina Lemons, Marquita Lambert, Vanessa Collins, Jose Almanza, Jordyn Smith, Zadie Johnson

**Business Outreach Team:**  
AUDREY GUSTIN, \*Dept Head; Jessi Hedlund, Tom Robertson, Intern Coordinators

**ROD HOWE**  
Communications Consultant

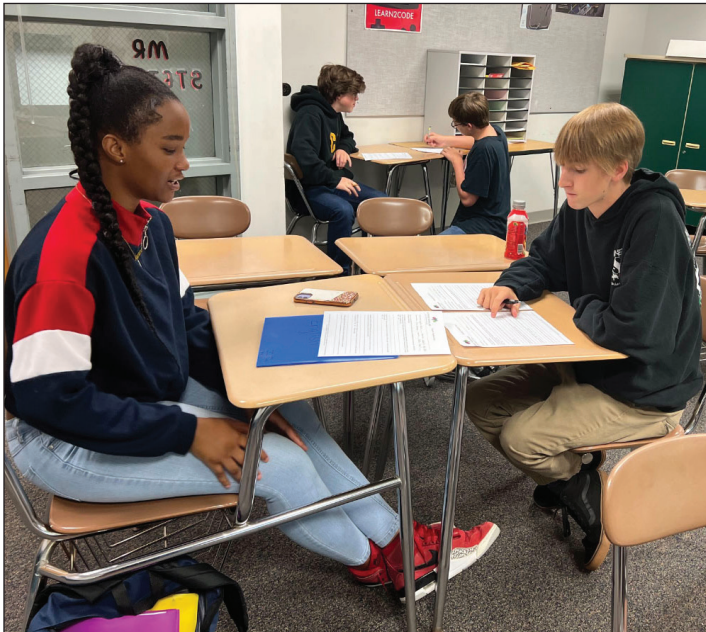
**Avenue Shared Services:**  
**MIKE ALVANO**  
Vice President & Treasurer  
**PENNY DARNELL**  
Accounting Manager

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**SUSIE BUFFETT**  
Chair  
**JEFF SCHMID**  
**CALVIN SISSON**  
**KATIE WEITZ**  
Directors

Avenue Scholars  
7101 Mercy Road, Suite 240  
Omaha, NE 68106

*"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."*

# Westside enrolls in Avenue Scholars program



Students practice asking their employers for feedback on their performance at work during a classroom activity at Omaha Westside High School.

This semester Omaha Westside High School became the 10th Metro school to be enrolled in the Avenue Scholars program. Ashley Knott was selected to fill the High School Career Coach position at Westside.

Knott said she currently serves 26 students at Westside, where she taught English for several years before accepting an Avenue Scholars Career Coach position at Papillion LaVista.

“It’s been surreal to be back in the building,” Knott said. “The relationships that I had with staff from when I worked here before have certainly helped; starting a new program always involves some trial and error. All in all, we’re off to a great start. The students I’m working with are so eager to learn and participate in the programming, and the enthusiasm they have for being part of this inaugural class at Westside is palpable.”

Avenue Scholars is currently adding Blair High School to the list of schools the program serves.

## Boot Campers honored at event

Avenue Scholars held its second annual Boot Camp graduation ceremony at the Metropolitan Community College Fort Omaha Campus in June.

Jacquie Armstrong, Associate Dean of Construction Education at MCC, was moderator for the event, and Tom McDonnell, Vice-President for Academic Affairs at MCC, welcomed Boot Camp participants.

Catherine Lang, State Director of the Nebraska Business Development Center at UNO, was the keynote speaker.

Scholars Nathaniel Howell, Micah Woods, and Tina Hyde commented on their experiences. Hyde also provided introductions.



Tom McDonnell, Vice President for Academic Affairs at MCC, comments on the Boot Camp program.



Catherine Lang, State Director of the Nebraska Business Development Center at UNO, was the keynote speaker.

Micah Woods, a Millard South graduate, after commenting on his Boot Camp experience, gave AS President & CEO Ken Bird a wooden toolbox.



Tina Hyde, an Omaha Northwest junior, delivers remarks on her Boot Camp experience and future plans.



A group of Avenue Scholars applauds classmates as they are recognized during the Boot Camp graduation ceremony, held at the Fort Omaha Campus of Metropolitan Community College.