

# RUSTBELT

Stories of innovation and invention  
in Northeast Ohio

# REFORMERS



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By the seventh-grade scholars of Citizens Leadership Academy  
**SPRING 2015**



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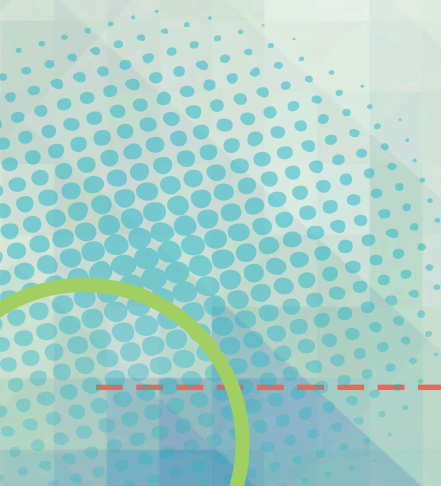
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Special Thanks

About Citizens Leadership Academy and Expeditionary Learning





# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to those striving to improve Cleveland and our world through their dedication and creativity, and who provide us with incredible examples of perseverance, compassion, and optimism.

Presented to

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on

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# FORWARD

During the second trimester, our seventh-grade crews studied the Renaissance in social studies. The Renaissance was a “rebirth” of arts, science, and culture in Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries. The Renaissance spirit was fostered by many inventors, innovators, and reformers. We learned about Johannes Gutenberg, the man who created the printing press around 1440. Also, Leonardo da Vinci embodied the Renaissance because he was an inventor, scientist, and artist. Studying the history of the Renaissance helped us get an understanding of how its ideals have resurfaced in Cleveland.

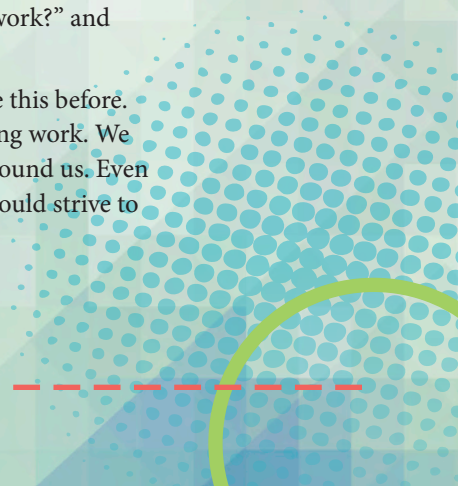
Our project was to find modern-day leaders in Cleveland who are striving to better our community. Our interviewees ranged from scientists and doctors to chefs and CEOs. Our interviewees included Eric Gordon, CEO of Cleveland Metropolitan School Districts; Monyka Price, chief of education for the city of Cleveland; and Bac Nguyen, chef and owner of two restaurants that sell Asian-style street food. All 29 interviewees were truly inspiring and impactful individuals.

Our goal in this project was to highlight and celebrate all of the interviewees’ accomplishments in Cleveland, while also conducting a successful interview and honing our writing and listening skills. During the interview we asked questions like, “Do you have any advice for young people who want to go into your field of work?” and “What are some ways you have positively impacted Cleveland?”

This project was a great experience for us, especially considering we had never done anything like this before. Yes, it was challenging, but the seventh grade was able to persevere to finish this valuable and rewarding work. We learned that there are so many leaders in Cleveland who all work to better Cleveland and the world around us. Even though our interviewees have different views, goals, and ideas, they all model what younger people should strive to be and they leave an inspiring impact that makes us want to better the world in which we live.

- Mya [redacted] and Alura [redacted] crew 4

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# ELIZABETH EMERY



“I think it’s important that people see different variety of art, not just drawing and painting but that there are other kinds of art.”

Elizabeth Emery, a Cleveland artist, has always loved to make things with her hands. Emery’s work is a new and exciting form of art that includes fabric, plaster, multiple colors, and other random objects to create a unique and one-of-a-kind work. Emery’s art and passion for the arts are what make her a true Cleveland Renaissance innovator.

Emery, 50, has been living in Cleveland, Ohio, since 2008. Emery works at a nonprofit organization called Zygote Press. She works with visiting artists who come from all over the world. She is originally from Boston, MA, but was raised in Philadelphia, PA. When Emery was younger she wanted to be an artist, but then she at one point wanted to be a veterinarian as well. She was an athlete for 10 years doing bike racing around the world. Emery attended the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied art history. She obtained her master’s in ceramics from Alfred University. Emery eventually fulfilled her dream of working as a career artist, and has rooted in Cleveland, Ohio with her own work on display at the William Busta Gallery.

Emery is impacting Cleveland because her creations are a very unique type of art. Her most popular style of sculpture is mixed media with found objects. Interestingly, she sews bags out of fabric from thrift stores, then pours in the plaster. She waits for about two hours. Once dry, Emery peels off the fabric and reveals a one-of-a-kind sculpture. If she wants to pick different types of colors, she has to use separate mixes of plaster.

This style of art was inspired by her previous career in the fashion industry in New York City. She was a fashion designer designing textiles for people who made clothes from 1986-1994.

She designed with varieties of materials such as cotton, rayon, or nylon. “I ended up combining the two (fabric and sculpture) through experimentation. I do a lot of experimentation in my work,” Emery explained. She has been making art like this for three years and plans to do it for many more!

Emery said that “creating art is hard.” There is a lot of problem solving in making art. When she started making these bags she had some problems with the length of the objects, but she now has a system to prop up the bags so they spill over on themselves instead of growing too long. Emery has begun sharing this process with others and teaches kids about all different types of art.

Emery’s unique style and craft of art has garnered attention from more fans. Her work has been displayed at galleries and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland. Emery sold lots of sculptures; one of her highest sales was recently for \$900. When asked about her art inspirations or muse, she indicated that she did have a favorite. “I loved the artist Henry Matisse,” Emery said, recalling visiting art museums with her mother when she was young. “His paintings have a lot of fabric, patterns, and color.”

Emery’s goal for 2015 is to show her work outside of Ohio. She says that she wants to try to find a gallery in Los Angeles, so that one day her art could be on display throughout the world and impact a larger audience. She is actually in the process of traveling to California and looking for a gallery that would hopefully be interested in her work. “Then if everything works out maybe I could find another home for my work” Emery said.

By Aaron [redacted]

# ELIZABETH EMERY



“Art is hard. There’s a lot of problem solving in making art.”

Fashion designer, world cyclist, and innovative artist – Elizabeth Emery has done it all. Emery, a Cleveland resident since 2008, developed her own distinct style of sculpture, which she describes as “mixed media with found objects.” Her sculptures are hard and heavy, with different colors and patterns. Her work is truly one of a kind.

Emery was born in Boston, MA, and was raised in Philadelphia, PA. When she was a child, she wanted to be an artist and then a veterinarian. Emery earned a degree in art history from the University of Pennsylvania and a master’s in ceramics at Alfred University. These degrees have helped her succeed in the fashion industry and as an independent artist. Emery explained that now there are many job opportunities, thanks to technology. “There are so many different cool jobs out there,” she said. “If I were younger, I would research the kind of jobs that are out there.”

Emery worked in New York City in the fabric field from 1986 to 1994. Emery worked in the fashion business designing textiles for people who made clothing. Emery really liked meeting the clothing designers and being able to touch the fabric. Emery designed whether a fabric would be cotton, rayon, or nylon and what the weave was, and what the pattern was. “I liked that we really made something,” Emery recalled. Emery worked in the fashion business from 1986 to 1994.

Emery was an athlete for ten years doing bike racing from 1991-2001. Emery trained every day and raced nationally and internationally. Emery competed in the Tour de France, national championships, and world championships in Japan, Switzerland, Brazil, Germany, and Spain. Emery decided it was time to stop

racing and was thinking about what to do next and art seemed like a good idea to Emery. Emery is a determined and talented individual. Her perseverance and drive are just part of the many reasons she’s a Renaissance Clevelander.

Today Emery works as a full time artist and shows her work at the William Busta Gallery. To create her art, Emery gets fabric from thrift stores and sews cloth bags. Emery pours the plaster inside and peels it off after the plaster has hardened. When Emery first started making these bags, she didn’t have a system to prop them up, so the plaster spread and the resulting sculpture was always very long. Emery didn’t like that shape, so she had a system to prop up each bag so it spills over on itself. This innovative and interesting manner of creating art is what sets her apart from other artists and innovators in her field. There are big things in store for her future.

Emery’s work is evolving and she plans to extend her influence and art into other parts of the country. Currently, she is researching galleries in Los Angeles, CA with the hope of showing sculptures there in the coming years. Her work is interesting and may appeal to audiences outside of Cleveland. Emery explained that her unique work is a good fit for those cities. “I am interested in making the next step to also showing in a larger art market and it seems like LA would be a good place for me because my work really relates to what I have seen there,” she said.

The future is so bright for this Cleveland Renaissance artist, and our city will always be home to her work.

By DaCarlos

# ELIZABETH EMERY



“Know what your career options are. It’s important to make money to have a house and a studio and food.”

When people think of the Renaissance, they think of Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo, but when we look back at modern-day Cleveland’s Renaissance contributors, we will remember the name Elizabeth Emery. This modern-day Renaissance is different than the Renaissance of the 1400s because of the technology that’s being used. For example, Elizabeth Emery used technology to invent a new way of art.

Emery’s art is interesting and groundbreaking because it is unlike anything else! First, according to Emery, the process begins with finding fabric at thrift stores and sewing it together to make bags. Then, she pours plaster inside, lets it dry, and peels it off. “The bags take a couple of hours to make,” said Emery. Each color is a separate mixture of plaster that has to be applied. When Emery peels off the fabric, the plaster retains its texture and becomes a unique sculpture. “Art is hard. There’s a lot of problem solving in making art,” Emery said of the process.

Emery was born in Boston and raised in Philadelphia. She works with kids at the Boys and Girls Club teaching them to appreciate drawing and painting but other types of art as well. She wants younger artists to take advantage of their artistic talent and research more jobs out there when they have the skill. She says that she loves to work with children. Emery also likes that Cleveland is starting to change and is building lots of new things,

like restaurants and attractions for visitors. However, she wants to also exhibit her art in other places around North America. Emery wishes she had a gallery in Los Angeles because it suites her style. “I am interested in making the next step to also showing in a larger art market and it seems like LA would be a good place for me because my work really relates to what I have seen there,” she explained.

Before becoming a full-time artist, Emery was a cyclist. She trained every day and raced nationally and internationally, including in the Tour de France and national championships and world championships in Japan, Switzerland, Brazil, Germany, and Spain. She said she had to carry all of her belongings with her like wheels and clothing. She also said, “It was fun to travel. Cycling is a team sport, and I enjoyed that aspect of the tactics and figuring out how to do best as a unit.”

Elizabeth Emery has achieved a lot in her life thus far and is very successful in what she does to become something she dreamed as a child to be.

*By Malachi*

# ART FALCO



“We have over 1,000 curtains a year, and we draw over 1 million people annually to Playhouse Square to enjoy these shows.”

Playhouse Square CEO Art Falco is a true contributor to the local Renaissance because of his work bringing theater back to life in Cleveland, Ohio. He and his team of employees at Playhouse Square have helped to revitalize the downtown experience and look of the theater district. Falco joined the team in 1985, and later became president and CEO of Playhouse Square in 1991. Playhouse Square is the performing arts and theater district in Cleveland, and it has hosted millions of visitors and tourists to watch the exciting performances, dine in the beautiful restaurants, and enjoy the gorgeous glimmering chandelier that has been erected above the streets.

Art Falco, 61, was born and raised in Painesville, Ohio. His favorite thing about Cleveland is “all of the wonderful assets it has to offer,” he said. Falco originally thought his career would be in accounting, but he ended up taking a turn to join the Playhouse Square family. When Art Falco was younger, one thing he would tell himself is “have an open mind to all opportunities that present themselves,” he said. Surprisingly, Falco revealed that when he was younger, he was much quieter.

Falco was recruited by a headhunter, a person who searches for a person for a particular job. At the time Playhouse Square was in need of a finance director. Falco accepted the position and has been there working diligently since 1985. He has truly made it to the top; Falco now serves as the very successful president and CEO. His efforts to transform and grow the Playhouse Square franchise have made a remarkable impact on downtown Cleveland’s economic prosperity and entertainment industry.

Playhouse Square’s mission falls into three categories. “First, is a presenter of variety of performing arts activities, second is a leader of economic and real estate development, getting money

and business in the area to help it thrive. Third is a leader in art education,” Falco informed. Falco is responsible for all three parts of that mission. “I’m responsible for setting the agenda and making sure we set goals and then we accomplish these goals,” he stated.

Over the years Playhouse Square has done a great job impacting the community. They started out by renovating three old theaters and today they have 10 performing spaces. “Our work is making a difference in that we are providing economic benefits for the city of Cleveland and we are bringing more money into Cleveland and we are providing jobs,” Falco said. Playhouse Square is now a top destination for Clevelanders and tourists who are looking for a night on the town. His company and the massive expansion of the theaters have created many job opportunities for Clevelanders, and this is critical for the revitalization of our city. Playhouse Square now has more than 300 employees. “Playhouse Square is a place for arts and technology to come together in different ways,” he said. Playhouse Square is finding ways to be relevant and meet the demands of the 21st century entertainment industry.

Playhouse Square is the largest performing arts center outside of New York City. It consists of eight venues and attracts more than 1 million people each year. These visitors contribute more than \$43 million to the local economy impact every year exclusively from its performing arts activity. Playhouse Square has given back by providing funding for more than 60,000 students to see shows there.

Falco’s drive, ingenuity, and innovation are only a few of the many reasons why he is a Cleveland Renaissance contributor. The city of Cleveland has a theater district that is second only to that of New York City, and that is thanks to their determined and industrious president and CEO, Art Falco.

By Aiyana [redacted]

# ART FALCO



“Our work is making a difference in that we are providing economic benefits for the city of Cleveland.”

A giant, glowing, glimmering, glamorous gold chandelier hanging over the street outside Playhouse Square. Millions of amazing great shows a year. Millions people enjoying the performances. A huge building to watch amazing plays that people love. Cleveland has to thank Art Falco for it all.

Falco, 61, is the chief executive officer of Playhouse Square. Born and raised in the eastern suburb of Painesville, Falco now lives in Cleveland with his wife. Falco has two daughters, ages 32 and 27. Falco attended Bowling Green University to study accounting, and originally he thought his career would be in accounting. The city of Cleveland is grateful that he decided to work with Playhouse Square in June 1985.

Falco is responsible for three parts of the Playhouse Square mission. The first part is presenting a variety of performances at Playhouse Square. The second is improving the area’s economic development. The third is to make Playhouse Square a leader in arts education. “I’m responsible for setting the agenda and making sure we set goals and accomplish those goals,” Falco explained. Falco’s impact and improvements to the downtown theatre district can be seen and felt by all who visit. Playhouse Square is a thriving and vital part of downtown Cleveland’s economic and aesthetic revitalization.

Over the years Falco and 300 other employees have made so much progress. “We started renovating three old theaters, and today we have 10 performance spaces,” exclaimed Falco. Playhouse Square hosts more than 1,000 curtain calls and draw

more than one million people annually. “Our work is making a difference in that we are providing economic benefits for the city of Cleveland and we are bringing more money into the downtown area and providing jobs,” Falco stated. Playhouse Square has over 300 employees and the other businesses and restaurants in this area are rapidly growing as a result of this renovation.

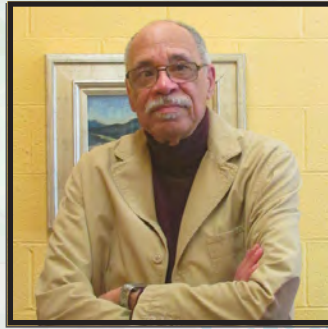
Falco one day received a call from a headhunter looking for a finance director for Playhouse Square and he thought he would be a good candidate. Falco had no experience with the arts or theater, so he was not sure about taking the position. Falco thought if offered the job, he would take it and stay four or five years, then leave with some great networking opportunities and bounce back in to the real world. That was 30 years ago, and Falco is still working to improve his organization. In 1991, he was appointed CEO. “I hope that we continue to grow with more performances and larger attendance at Playhouse Square shows,” Falco said.

Falco’s outstanding contribution to this city of Cleveland tells how he is truly a Renaissance man. Falco has done so many amazing things to help this city and rebirth Cleveland. Falco has made more theater buildings and he has truly made Cleveland more beautiful. Falco has amazing goodness inside him and he should continue to work at Playhouse Square for the rest of his life.

By Ricky 



# DR. ROBERT HAYNIE



**"It's called critical thinking. Take the harder course to be challenged."**

When Dr. Robert Haynie started as a doctor, leukemia was killing 90 percent of the people who had it. Now 80 percent of people who get leukemia live. Medicine has evolved in the past four decades, and Dr. Haynie has been at the forefront of it all as an associate dean at the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Dr. Haynie's life work and dedication to our city make him a true Renaissance contributor because he is helping to train the future physicians of America. Dr. Haynie is extremely passionate about his impact on the city of Cleveland.

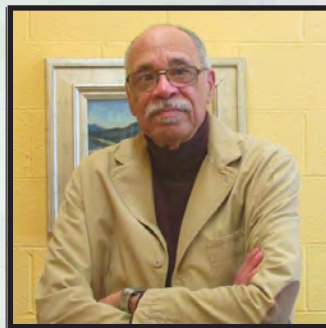
Dr. Haynie is 70 years old and has lived in Cleveland since 1967. He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. He got his Ph.D. in chemistry in 1972 and his M.D. in 1978. He also taught at a medical school in Chicago. Dr. Haynie has made a huge impact in Cleveland by helping to shape and train our city's future generations of doctors. Additionally, Dr. Haynie started the Robbins Bridge to work with minority students in Cleveland. He wants them to come to CWRU and practice medicine in their community. "You need to look at your own school and see what you are doing for the city of Cleveland. I want to see pipelines to our school," Dr. Haynie explained. Now three students have received full scholarships to Case Western Reserve University undergrad and medical programs as a result.

Dr. Haynie realized he wanted to be a chemist when he was in fourth grade and his parents bought him a chemistry set. Every Christmas he would ask for a better chemistry set. He was very focused and loved learning. His teachers saw that he had potential and encouraged that. His seventh-grade teacher, Mrs. Faff, was amazed when Dr. Haynie had done his presentation including sodium and chloride. In high school his teacher Mr. Davidson saw his aptitude and gave him a college chemistry course! "I was always very focused and loved learning. I had teachers that saw that I had potential and encouraged it," Dr. Haynie added.

Dr. Haynie wants people to practice medicine so they can deal with issues around health and not just disease. "Instead of looking at an intervention, let's look at prevention," he said. If he ever went back to chemistry, he would to teach high school chemistry, and he has good advice for your people. "Don't let peer pressure cause you to deflect away from your dreams," Dr. Haynie said. He wants more people from Cleveland to work in the medical field at CWRU, so that more people may follow their dreams.

*By Jamir*

# DR. ROBERT HAYNIE



“Luck is where preparation meets opportunity.”

There are many brilliant people in the world, but how do those people use their brilliance? If you want to read about someone who uses his brilliance to help people, then you are in luck! Today, you will read about a man whose dream was to become a chemist when he grew up. Associate Dean Dr. Robert Haynie, at the prestigious Case Western Reserve University’s School of Medicine, has exceeded his childhood ambitions. Dr. Haynie recalls asking for a chemistry set for Christmas, instead of action figures when he was young. He knew he wanted to make a difference in the world and that his interest in science was a way to do so. For the benefit of Cleveland residents, he certainly has achieved his vision of using chemistry, medicine, and compassion to heal our world.

Dr. Haynie grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, but eventually established roots in Cleveland. Dr. Haynie believes his career plan started as early as grade school, when he changed the life of a boy named Richard Eucles. Dr. Haynie started at a new school because his family moved from an area to a better school district. Although he was new, Richard played with him and made him feel welcomed. Over time, Dr. Haynie and Richard became good friends, but Richard came down with polio, which at the time, wasn’t rare, but is today. Dr. Haynie still continued to play with him and made him feel welcomed as Richard did when Dr. Haynie was new to the school. His compassion, persistence, and ability to confront frightening illnesses was evident even at the tender age of an elementary student. Richard’s family was moving out of town and Dr. Haynie was called down to the principal’s office so that his mother could meet the young Dr. Haynie. Richard had really blossomed during the year he was there and Dr. Haynie had treated Richard like all of the others and didn’t make him feel any different. Richard didn’t want to leave the school because of how well he was treated and because of how much of a friend Dr. Haynie was to him. Richard’s mother’s exact words to Dr. Haynie were, “Young man, you’re going to be a doctor.”

Dr. Haynie originally thought he wouldn’t be a doctor because he didn’t like shots and he didn’t want to see blood. Little did he know that he would become a physician and he would meet the man who developed the vaccine to prevent polio. Dr. Fred Robbins was a pediatrician who wanted to end the disease that was crippling children. Everyone was at risk of catching polio and it was very devastating for children. Dr. Fred Robbins went to his laboratory and isolated the polio virus and tissue

culture without use of the tools that we have today. “I can’t think of a greater medical accomplishment,” Haynie said. Dr. Jonas Salk, working at the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Medicine also came up with a vaccine for polio along with a man named Albert Sabin. Dr. Robbins, a dean at Case Western Reserve University’s School of Medicine won a Noble Prize for his discovery. Dr. Haynie was good friends and a student of Dean Robbins.

Dr. Haynie entered the University of Cincinnati as a chemistry major. His mentor told him that Western Reserve was an excellent school but Dr. Haynie had previously thought that CWRU was a military school. He attended CWRU for medical school and is now a dean there. At CWRU’s School of Medicine, there are four academic societies and when students are admitted to medical school, they are randomly assigned to a society. Dr. Haynie advises 200 students in the Robbins society, named after Dr. Fred Robbins. Dr. Haynie’s job is to get students from day one of medical school to graduation. He helps them navigate the curriculum, conduct research projects, do community outreach that goes beyond the borders of the medical school, and writes their dean’s letters for residency applications. Dr. Haynie also prepares his students for the pressures of medical school and becoming a doctor. “People expect us to get it right every time. That’s a huge responsibility and a huge psychological impact. We have to teach students how to ask for help,” he explained. Dr. Haynie also advises students to stick with their goals. “Don’t let peer pressure cause you to deflect away from your dreams,” Haynie added.

The thing that shocked Dr. Haynie when he first started at CWRU was that there were no minority students on campus. John Hay was in walking distance of the university, but minority students did not go on the CWRU campus. Dr. Haynie wondered if that was because they didn’t have the scores, or because the school wasn’t aggressive enough in recruiting them. Fast forward 10 years; Haynie is doing something about that. Dr. Haynie is on the board of directors for the John Hay School of Science and Medicine, where he started the Robbins Bridge to encourage minority students to attend CWRU for undergraduate and medical school through support and scholarships. “I want to see pipelines to our school,” Haynie explained. “I want you to come back and practice medicine here in your community so we deal with issues around health and not just disease.”

By Khari [REDACTED]

# CHRIS HARRIS



“Sometimes you have to get knocked down to the ground so you can get up and next time you are stronger for whatever comes your way.”

Every DJ needs a cool name, and Chris Harris is no exception. Harris’s stage name is DJ \$crilla. He explained, “Scrilla is a slang for money. I just like the way the word sounds, the way it flowed off your tongue.” In addition to his name, Harris is unique as a DJ because of the way he writes his music. When he is in the car and he thinks about what somebody said or when something happens, he finds somewhere to stop and write it down as lyrics so he can memorize it when he gets to the studio.

Harris, 32, is from Cleveland Heights and has lived there the majority of his life. He went to Cleveland Heights High School and attended Kent State University. His degree is in electronic media. He also went to school for journalism. He said, “While I was studying to become a journalist, I really started to take music more seriously, then I realized that I may not make a lot of money doing music, but I’m passionate about it and I love it.” Harris credits a Christmas gift from his mom for inspiring his music career. He also said, “Had it not been for me getting turntables, I probably wouldn’t be doing music.”

Harris also got inspiration from his high school teachers. Not just one, but several of them. He also had a lot support from his family and friends. Besides outside support, it took some challenging moments to get Harris to where he is today. He said, “It also took failing a few times as well. Sometimes you have to get knocked down to the ground so you can get up and next time you are stronger for whatever comes your way.” For example, two years ago Harris quit music because he wasn’t where he thought he was going to be. He was miserable not making music and decided to try again, knowing it takes hard work and dedication to do what you love. Harris makes a lot of songs but the most of the songs he makes, he does not put it out there for the public. He said, “I’ve dabbled in writing music for other genres, but primarily I stick to

hip-hop. I’ve made hundreds of songs, but not hundreds that are out there. You always make more than you put out and weed them out to pick the best.”

In addition to his music, Harris has an important professional career as the spokesman for the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office. The medical examiner is responsible for investigating deaths, so when there is a homicide or suspicious death, the bodies are sent to the medical examiner’s office to determine the cause of deaths. “I’m the voice for the office,” said Harris. Harris releases information to the media or public.

Harris is a Renaissance Clevelander because not only can his raps help other people to get through tough situations, he is in an important position at the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office. His recent album is called #ALLin, which means that it takes hard work and pride to do what you do. He said, “The song ‘All In’ from the new album really illustrates that music journey I’ve been on up to this point, doing music, quitting music, and getting back up because I realized it is who I am.” Harris has worked with people from all over the country. If he is listening to music on the Internet and he likes the artist’s music, he reaches out to them to collaborate.

Harris loves working with the community. He works with a lot of charities like the City Mission during his free time. He said, “I love learning from the youth, learning their story, telling them about my story and spending time together trying to be a positive male role model in young people lives.” Harris is a leader and a great inspiration to kids and others. He is always pushing himself far and it is worth it. He is a hardworking man and he pushes himself to where he wants to be.

By Jaylen [redacted]

# CHRIS HARRIS



“I want to show other young artist or aspiring musicians that they can do this. You can make the same stuff that Chris Brown or Lil Wayne makes right out of your house.”

Chris Harris is a really talented artist that wants to inspire the world! It started out that he wanted to be a DJ. This was before he even thought about making music. For Christmas one year, his mom got him some turntables and he was playing some records for some friends, and they all started to freestyle over the instrumentals. Harris said this sparked something in him.

Harris graduated from Cleveland Heights High School, where his first gig was at a high school dance. The high school allowed him and a couple of friend to perform at a Valentine’s dance. He said he was so excited, he pulled the mic out of the sound system and no one could hear him when he was rapping. “Things didn’t go as planned, but it was a lesson learned, and I still appreciate it,” he recalled. Harris credits his inspiration from his high school teachers, not just one but several of them. They told him they believed in him and said he could “do anything that he put his mind to.” He said music just happened to be that thing. After high school, Harris graduated from Kent State University with a degree in electronic media, and his college degree helps him when he needs to write a press release or a professional email to other artist or venue. He says it helps his message get across.

Harris’s work is about giving people another option or an alternative as far as what they want to hear, and the type of message they want to hear. Harris likes to present a positive message to help his listeners. “I think if I have a song that someone can related to or it can make them feel better or give them a different perspective, that’s really the best compliment you can get,” he explained. Harris’s favorite of his four albums is #ALLin because it really reminded him as to why he got into music, and why he does it.

Harris is also the spokesman for the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s office. The medical examiner is responsible for investigating homicides or suspicious deaths to determine the cause and manner of the deaths. Harris is the voice for the office. He releases information to the media or public and may have to write press release or other communications in this job too.

When he was in high school, Harris worked on a TV show about the Cleveland Browns. It used to come on every Saturday morning. He hosted the show and said it was a lot of fun and he loved writing stories

and being on camera. It was then that he made the switch from wanting to be a doctor to wanting to be a sports reporter. Music was always lingering in the back of his mind, and he then switched to doing that full time. At first, Harris’s mom was very hesitant about him doing music and told him to look into going something else. Then his family got a chance to see him perform and they changed their minds. He says now they are supportive.

When asked to reflect on his younger years, he said he was “similar in the fact that I was pretty quiet.” Harris said he is different now because he has more confidence and he works and studies harder. The advice he would give to his younger self would be to “take advantage of the opportunities you have in school, and get involved with as many things that you can, like sports, student council, anything” and also to “take the extra classes and get good grades so you don’t have to pay for college or school,” he said.

Harris said as a DJ, he always thought every DJ needs a cool name, including his, DJ \$crilla. “I just like way the word sounds, they way it flowed off your tongue,” he said. I He kept the DJ in his name because that’s what started him into music. That’s where his roots are, and that was really important to him to keep that. He said, “Had it not been for me getting turntable, I probably wouldn’t be doing music.”

When Harris is writing a song, usually he writes song in the car, but not while he’s driving. Usually he gets an idea and he will pull over and jot that idea down; that’s how he writes most of his own his lyrics. He says it’s a comfort thing. He says once he has crafted a song and perfected how he wants it to sound, he will go into the recording studio. He will bring in different people to play instruments, they’ll lay their part, and they all will mix the song and master the song. “I’ve worked with people all over,” he described. “That’ s what I love to do, find unique talent out there and collaborate.”

Harris strives to maintain his hometown pride by creating all of his music, videos, and production efforts here in Cleveland. He truly represents the traits of a Cleveland Renaissance innovator because he is a well-rounded, educated, talented, and an original person.

By Kaila

# CHRIS HARRIS



“I realized that I loved making music and music makes me happy, so I can’t quit because music is who I am.”

Chris Harris is a 32-year-old spokesman for the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office, but he is also known as “DJ \$crilla.” Born in Cleveland, OH, and raised in Cleveland Heights, Harris initially had no interest in music. He was more focused on sports. As Harris was growing up, he realized sports weren’t his thing. He attended Kent State University to study journalism and graduated with a degree in electronic media. “When I need to write a press release or write a professional e-mail, that communicate experience I learned in college really helps me come off as a professional when dealing with other artist, other people, other venues, anything I’m conducting business with, it helps that message get across,” said Harris. Harris realized the importance of his education and planning for a professional career, but he also had a dream to be a musician, and he wanted to make his dream come true.

Harris’s first gig was at a high school dance. He and his friends performed during a Valentine’s dance. “I was so excited I actually pulled the microphone out of the sound system and no one could hear me when I was rapping. Things didn’t go as planned, but it was a lesson learned, and I still appreciate it,” he explained. Harris eventually traveled around the country performing at more than 100 different college events and festivals, and working as a DJ. He performed at an event for University of Southern California in Los Angeles at the Avalon Theatre, a historic venue, and there were close to 2,000 people there, making it the biggest show he ever performed. Harris’s talents extend into acting, public speaking, rapping, and dancing as well. At the starting point of his career, he even auditioned for a role with Denzel Washington for the movie, Antwone Fisher.

Harris has worked with other artist in the same position as him. He collaborated with upcoming artists like Lauren Lanzaretta from Cleveland, and another upcoming artist from New Jersey named Lenny Harold. Harris hopes to work with more artists who

are in the category or stage as him so they can help each other. He explained, “I like to work with artist who are in the same position as me, still up and coming, trying to get their name out there.” Although he likes working with new artists, Harris still dreams about performing with some incredibly successful musicians. If he could work with any artist, he would chose Michael Jackson because he was the greatest of all time. “He understood the bigger picture when it came to music. It would be a pleasure to work with him and soak up all of that knowledge and experience he accumulated over the years,” Harris said. His second choice would be Tupac because of how “understandable and real he was.”

Harris’s latest album is titled #ALLin. “It’s my favorite because it really reminded me as to why I got into music and why I do it,” he exclaimed. Harris realized it takes a lot to get where he is today, mostly support. He said, “There’s a lot of negativity out there and I don’t want to add to that,” he said. Harris prides himself on creating work that will inspire and lift others up. “My work is giving people another option or an alternative option as far as what they want to hear, and the type of message they want to hear,” he explained. Harris said he often gets ideas for his music while driving. “Usually I’ll get an idea and I’ll pull over and I’ll jot that idea down. That’s how I write my lyrics,” he described. In the future, Harris hopes that people will continue to gravitate toward his music and the music industry.

Chris Harris is an inspirational, positive, and hardworking DJ, performing artist, and spokesman. Two years ago, he kind of gave up on music, but he thinks of it now as merely a “setback,” he said. Harris realized he couldn’t just quit music, but the “setback” he had actually made him a much stronger and more confident artist. The city of Cleveland and the world are grateful that he is continuing to make his impressive music and use his gifts and talents to inspire others to strive for their dreams and ambitions.

By Jaelynn

# CHRIS HARRIS



“I want to show other young artist or aspiring musicians that they can do this. You can make the same stuff that Chris Brown or Lil Wayne makes right out of your house.”

Chris Harris is a talented local Cleveland musician who is contributing to our city’s Renaissance and revitalization. Chris Harris, aka DJ \$crilla, thinks his music makes a difference in several ways. “I keep my music very positive. I do make music about things that I feel are important to the community and for people who may be going through obstacles in their lives. There’s a lot of negativity out there, and I don’t want to add to that,” he stated. There are endless reasons why Harris embodies a Renaissance spirit and energy for our city of Cleveland, including his positive music, contribution to arts, and the fact that Harris supports many organizations and works with kids to help inspire them to achieve their goals.

Chris Harris, 32, has lived in the Cleveland area all his life and graduated from Cleveland Heights High School. He got inspiration from his high school teachers, not just one, but several of them. They believed in him and said he could “do anything that he put his mind to,” recalled the optimistic Harris. He has created four albums. His favorite album is the most recent one, which is titled #ALLin. “It’s my favorite because it really reminded me as to why I got into music and why I do it,” he explained. Harris dabbled in writing music for other genres, but primarily he sticks to hip-hop. He has made hundreds of songs, but not hundreds that are out there. “You always make more than you put out and weed them out to pick the best,” he said. A lot of his music is based off of true stories. Sometimes it’s a personal true story of his or stories from people he has met. The song All In on his the new album really illustrates that makes a journey that he has been on up to this point, doing music, putting music, and getting back because he realized it is who he is now.

Harris graduated from Kent State University with a degree in electronic media. While he was studying to become a journalist, he really started to take music more seriously, and then he realized that he may not make a lot of money doing music. However, Harris did not let this deter him from following his dreams of working as a professional musician because he is passionate about it and loves it. His college degree also helps him when he has to write a press release or a professional email. He feels his education helps him to be professional and get his message across when dealing with other people, artists, and venues. Today, Harris has pursued both music and his professional career as spokesperson. He is also the spokesman for the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office. As for his music and dreams, that’s another story.

Harris’s first gig was a high school dance. His high school allowed him and a couple of friends to perform at a Valentine’s dance. He was so excited that he actually pulled the microphone out of the sound system and no one could hear him rapping! “Things didn’t go as planned,” he recalled, “but

it was a lesson learned.” He still appreciates that now. Harris treats every experience as a learning opportunity and he has worked with people from all over the country. If he is listening to music and he hears an artist and likes how they sound, he would reach out to them. That’s what he loves to do, find unique talent out there and collaborate. Harris likes to work with artists who are in the same position as him, still up and coming, trying to get their name out there. “It’s a little bit easier to work with people going through the same thing as you so you can do both help each other out,” he said. For example, Harris has worked with a singer out of Cleveland named Lauren Lanzaretta and a singer out of New Jersey named Lenny Harold.

Harris’s journey has not always been so easy. About two years ago, he pretty much had quit music because he “was not happy with the way his career had been turning out,” he shared. During those two years it was miserable for him not to make music. He realized that he loved making music and music makes him happy, so he cannot quit because music is who he is. “It’s a hard industry to try to make it in,” Harris said. “You have to fight through and persevere.” He feels 100 percent better about his music today, and he doesn’t regret going through the time when he quit. “I needed to get knocked down so I could have the strength I have today,” stated Harris. Even though he makes music, most of the music Harris listens to isn’t his. He listens to anything that sounds good to his ears, especially hip-hop and rap.

Before he thought about making his own music, Harris wanted to be a DJ. “For Christmas one year, my mom got me turntables. I was playing some records for some friends and we all started to freestyle over the instruments. It sparked something inside me and I thought I should try making the music instead of playing the music,” he recalled. He was a freshman in high school around this time. At first, his mom was very hesitant about him doing music and told him to look in to doing something else. Then his family got a chance to see him perform and changed their minds. Now they are very supportive. Once he got older and got more confident, he realized he could do it.

As a lifelong Clevelander, Harris, aka DJ \$crilla, has been able to experience all the city has to offer. His favorite thing about Cleveland is the food, especially sushi and pizza. He has gone to every kind of sporting event, and he really likes the Great lakes Science Center and going to Cedar Point to ride all the rides. In the future, Harris hopes that people continue to gravitate toward his music. It’s very long journey, but his goal is to have his music reach as many people as it possibly can and “of course, have fun doing it in the process. That’s important, Harris said. “You want to have fun and love what you’re doing.”

By Neveah [redacted]

# ANGELO MERENDINO



“I felt like I finally found a way to share the things that move me. Photography has given me the opportunity to share those things.”

“It’s a way for me to share what’s important and I can leave something behind that will let others see or think or feel,” said passionate Cleveland photographer Angelo Merendino, explaining why he has dedicated his life to photography. Merendino has created many critical and highly viewed pieces, including his most notable, “The Battle We Didn’t Choose,” which documents his late wife Jennifer Merendino’s battle with breast cancer. Merendino exhibited extreme compassion and candor when reflecting on his wife and their experience with fighting a terminal illness at an especially young age.

Merendino studied photography at school in Cleveland for a couple of years but then he went to the real world to learn on the job. “The route I took was different because I was able to learn the technical side of photography by doing, rather than in a building,” he said. When he was younger, Merendino wanted to be a musician, but he felt like he was a better photographer because it allowed him to communicate his thoughts and feelings. “I felt like with drumming I couldn’t express how I was feeling. I still love music more than ever, but photography feels better,” he described.

Merendino is a unique photographer, and he likes to record things that are happening as stories. Merendino’s most famous work is that of Jennifer’s battle with cancer. “The Battle We Didn’t Choose” is the title of his acclaimed photography that documents his wife going through cancer treatment. He was most proud of this piece and he didn’t even make money for it. For him, “Little things didn’t matter. What became more important is the people in my life that I loved,” he explained. When they were

going through the heartache, sadness, and struggle with trying to treat her breast cancer, Merendino realized that she was all that mattered to him. “I got to spend six years of my life with an amazing person,” he said. “Not everyone gets to live.” After living through the loss of his beloved wife at the young age of 40, he had experienced such tremendous loss and grief. “My wife was my best friend and she taught me a lot,” he expressed. His wife was a big influence for all of his work. “She didn’t feel horrible for herself; she shared what she was going through and tried to show other people what was important,” he said.

Merendino doesn’t have an official job; he is a freelancer. He takes pictures for newspapers, magazines, and advertisements. Merendino is happy and proud to do his job he doesn’t do it just for money but to make people happy and to learn about new things. He is inspiring because he’s happy about what he does and is learning while doing it. Some other photographers only do their job for money. Merendino likes to make people happy and he does when he’s working.

Merendino is a Cleveland Renaissance innovator for his groundbreaking work and inspirational message. Merendino is a kind person who helps others cope with the realities of cancer. Merendino is a hero to the people with his camera and takes very high quality pictures of everything, not just people. Merendino will continue the job that he loves.

By Elijah

# ANGELO MERENDINO



“Photography is a great way for people to understand something even without sharing the same language.”

Angelo Merendino, 38, is one of Cleveland’s most talented photographers. When asked what he was most proud of he said, “My late wife passed when she was 40. I’m most proud of being there for her and creating my non-profit.” His wife passed because of breast cancer. His wife was his inspiration in photography and was the subject of his famous work, “The Battle We Didn’t Choose.”

When he was younger, Merendino wanted to be a musician. He said, “I like music and it’s the best medicine.” Sadly, Merendino’s wife Jennifer was diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age. He said, “Taking photographs helps part of the healing of his loss.” Merendino’s beautiful and realistic depiction of his wife’s fight with cancer drew attention worldwide. He is raising awareness, compassion, and educating people on the reality of cancer. He does this for the survivors, families affected by cancer, and to honor those who have passed away from this tragic disease.

Jennifer Merendino received the news of her diagnosis just months after celebrating their wedding. The devastating news was shocking and difficult to accept. Merendino decided to take pictures to document his wife’s experience while undergoing treatment for her breast cancer. His wife permitting these images to capture her battle with cancer, and for both, the photos helped them cope. Merendino later compiled these powerful images into

the photographic essay, “The Battle We Didn’t Choose.” This work received worldwide attention and garnered support from people and families going through the similar ordeals. This act sparked awareness for cancer and enlightened many to the struggles and reality of a terminal diagnosis. Merendino has created a nonprofit, The Love You Share, to support cancer awareness and research, and to provide financial assistance to women receiving treatment for breast cancer.

Merendino is an inspiration to all. His photography is interesting and his passion for his art is unparalleled. Today he works as an independent contractor and takes jobs for various companies that will pay him to take their photos. He proves that you have to chase your dreams in life to find a career that you are happy with, and don’t be afraid to take risks to earn it.

Merendino’s work is impacting Cleveland in many ways and he embodies the Renaissance spirit for his passion, fortitude, and innovation.

*By Kennedy*



# ANGELO MERENDINO



“What became more important is the people in my life that I loved and realizing that I’m fortunate in so many ways.”

Angelo Merendino is one of Cleveland’s local photographers. His inspiration is recording things that are happening. He would like to share stories with others in the future. “As a child I wanted to be a musician, but felt like I was better at photography than music,” he recalled. “I still love music more than then ever, but photographing feels better.” He has dedicated his life to photography because of what it allows him to do. “It was a way for me to share what’s important and I can leave something behind that will let other see or think or maybe even feel” he said. “I feel like it’s an impact I can make,” Merendino said.

Merendino moved on to Manhattan, where he learned ways of the world, rather than attending traditional school. He learned the technical side of photography by doing instead of sitting in classes in a building. Now, he works as a freelance photographer, going wherever he is hired, from concerts to coffee shops. “I just photographed food and the people making the food and they will use those for a website,” Merendino explained.

His most significant work is a collection of photographs called *The Battle We Didn’t Choose*, which documents his wife Jennifer’s fight with breast cancer. Breast cancer is not something that you would want to joke around or play about. It is very heartbreaking. People will not understand how bad it is until they really see it for

themselves. The most important thing to Merendino was “taking care of her. The camera was secondary.” The photographs really gave him an escape because cancer was consuming their lives at the time. “The way that I was documenting what we went through was the way I expressed life at the time,” he recalled. When something was really important to him, he felt the need to photograph it. It seems like photographing was an important way of healing. He says, “I didn’t think of the camera. It was the pen; I was using to write a story.” Merendino’s wife was his best friend and one most influential people in his life. “She didn’t feel horrible for herself. She shared what was doing through and tried to show other people what was important,” he said. “She was all that mattered.”

If Merendino ever had a superpower, he said, “I would like people to smile.” In addition to his freelance work, Merendino spends time with family and friends and enjoys being in Cleveland and also riding his bike also going down to the river. “I try to enjoy the beauty in everyday life,” Merendino said. “I’d like to leave something behind that allows people to be their best.”

By Miya



# EARL PIKE



**“You can’t just give people a hand out; you have to give them a hand up.”**

Earl Pike is determined humanitarian and community organizer because he intends to make our city of Cleveland and the world a better place for everyone. His nonprofit work and philanthropic heart make him stand out as an upstander and contributor to Cleveland’s revitalization since he cares most about making life safer, healthier, and economically sustainable for the people. His work includes teaching the unreachable about HIV/AIDS and coming up with ideas to prevent getting HIV/AIDS. Pike now works as a nonprofit consultant.

Pike, who is 59 years old and lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, is trying to make our community a better place. He was born and raised in Oliphant, Pennsylvania. When he was younger, he was both similar and different from how he is now. He’s similar because he is a “risk taker, loves to read, loves to take charge, and loves to learn,” he said. He believes that while he was younger he should’ve known and believed that “sometimes the world tries to make you into something you’re not...don’t listen,” recalled this wise and inspirational man. When Pike moved to Cleveland, he felt as if there wasn’t many good things about the city, but now there has been much improvement. “There is positive creative energy, things that weren’t happening 10-15 years ago,” he said.

Pike got involved with helping people who had AIDS because he knew it was one of the biggest things in history affecting people disproportionately. It affected minorities, African Americans, and the gay community. Pike felt like he “should stand up for people because this was a disease about unfairness.” He started educating the people who were hard to reach such as prisoners, deaf people, mentally ill, and gay people. These were the people outside of society and he knew it was important to teach them about HIV/AIDS. At that time, there wasn’t any medication that could treat people who had HIV/AIDS. Pike and his wife went to 200 funerals of friends who died from AIDS. He led the AIDS Taskforce for 11 years; during this time, the Taskforce grew to provide care for 1800 people with AIDS. Pike says that “they are actually closer to finding a care for HIV/AIDS than people realize.” Their progress is so incredible they might be only 10 years away from an effective vaccine. “Something needs to be done quickly because there are 20 million people with HIV/AIDS around the world who need medication, which is a challenge,” he explained. AIDS spreads for a lot of different reasons in society globally. They spread due to poverty, racism, and discrimination against gay people. If everybody were

treated equally, we would do a lot better in terms of health outcomes. The AIDS Taskforce is making a difference by testing more, providing more medication, and more acceptance and equality.

To get Pike’s ideas across, he works with organizations and charities. He has worked with a lot of nonprofit agencies as a nonprofit consultant in everything from medical research to Cleveland Culinary Launch and Kitchen. He’s also on the Board for Engage! Cleveland. He even got an award from the Cleveland Foundation for somebody who embodies social justice. He’s a chief strategy officer at Open Doors Academy. If you didn’t know, Pike is a Renaissance Clevelander. He has based his career on trying to help the community, not just the local area in Cleveland, but the entire world. He tries to come up with ideas, medication, and other possible solutions to help prevent, stop, treat, and cure HIV/AIDS. He also helps people that are hard to reach and teaches them all about HIV. Pike is a person who believes that “you can’t just give people a hand out, you have to give them a hand up,” which is what Pike is trying to do with so many people who have AIDS. All we have to do is be patient, listen, and try to make his plan work and come true.

Pike had ideas and goals to improve AIDS awareness and treatment. Pike is trying to make sure everyone gets the care need. “We have to remember that patience is the key,” he reminded. “The worst part of any job related to social justice is that it’s hard to be patient. The change happens slowly.” Cleveland is the second poorest city in the country, with one-third of people and half of kids living below the poverty line. That’s been known for 10 years and nothing has changed just progressing, so “It’s hard to accept the fact that it takes a lifetime to make a change. We need to not just fix it but make sure it never happens again,” stated the brave man. One key Pike always uses to make his career dream come true is his education. Any problems? He would research it, read books, and learn about it. What you are learning isn’t a fact but how to learn a fact. His education helped him do that. Pike is proud of himself to know that he was part of the movement that helped changed the way AIDS is perceived. He started in 1985 and has saved lives and helped make progress for thousands of survivors. Earl Pike is not just an advocate for social injustice; he is an agent of change.

By Talitha

# EARL PIKE



“A huge part of getting things done is knowing the right people. You bring them to the table and then get out of the way and let them do what they do.”

In the 1980s, fear of AIDS was rampant. There were no drugs or tests for it, and AIDS was spreading quickly. Earl Pike, a resident of Cleveland Heights, dedicated 11 years of his life to changing that. From 1985-1996, Pike was the executive director of the AIDS Taskforce for Cleveland. Pike’s job was to figure out how to educate groups of people who were hard to reach. These groups include prisoners and the mentally ill. Pike also met his wife working at the AIDS Taskforce. Together, they realized they had been to 200 funerals. Working in aids slowly took its toll on them. “We would do our job during the day and take care of sick friends at night,” Pike explained.

When Pike was younger, his dad was a Marine. He wanted to be a soldier or an astronaut when he grew up. Also Pike said one of his teachers inspired him to enter a poetry writing contest, which he won. “Because of his support, I feel like I really found my voice, Pike recalled. He was born and raised in Oliphant, Pennsylvania. Pike continues to read and write even today, as he calls himself a “voracious” reader who does book reviews for the Plain Dealer newspaper.

Pike’s most difficult challenge was when he had to go to those 200 funerals because so many people he knew had died from AIDS. Along with that, Pike is now participating in physical

challenges. He entered a competition that was designed by Army special forces in which he got a call with a location and showed up at 9 p.m. and ended up on a 13-hour endurance test with 35 pounds of bricks on his back. Pike also wants to run a marathon in Antarctica. “I like pushing myself; what’s the next really hard thing I can do?” he said.

Pike currently live in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, with his wife and two children. He and his wife share similar life passions, and actually met while working for the AIDS Taskforce. “We would do our jobs during the day and at night take care of sick friends,” recalled Pike. “Back then there really weren’t any medicines and wasn’t much we could do for people with AIDS.” After how hard he and his wife worked to help fight AIDS, they realized they were in need of a break. Pike and his wife set off for Asia backpacking trip for 6 months. They got married in Bangkok, Thailand. Pike’s wife is originally from Cleveland, and that is how he eventually settled in this city to start a life together. Cleveland is proud to have such an adventurous, brave and morally courageous person like Pike.

By Zion

# EARL PIKE



**“You want to change poverty? Educate kids and give their parents jobs.”**

Have you ever thought about what the world would be like without HIV/AIDS, injustice, or poverty? Earl Pike is a nonprofit consultant and community organizer, who essentially aims to improve social injustice and eradicate inequality in our world. Pike’s resume is impressive, and he has worked to help nonprofit groups to improve our society. The city of Cleveland is thankful for this Renaissance reformer because his efforts have made a positive impact on the people who needed it most.

Earl Pike, 59, lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, with his wife and two kids. “I didn’t think there was anything good about Cleveland when we first moved here,” Pike insisted. “There is so much positive energy right now in Cleveland that is really exciting. It’s everything that is happening with Breakthrough Schools to urban farms and the gay games that showcased to the world what an open city we are. Lots of exciting things that weren’t happening 10-15 years ago.”

Pike grew up in many different places because his father was a Marine for 27 years and the family had to move as a result. “He was a staunch Republican and I’m a big old liberal,” he recalled. “He believed in two things, that we are here to serve others and treat people equally.” Pike attributes his father’s two beliefs as how he came to be an advocate for people in need. “He showed me how to treat people. When I become a supporter of gay and lesbian rights, he supported me,” said Pike.

Pike got involved in trying to cure and treat AIDS patients in 1985. “There were no drugs and no test; there was nothing,” Pike explained. He led the AIDS Taskforce for 11 years. “When I first started working in AIDS, my job was to figure out how to educate groups of people that were hard to reach,” Pike said. Those groups included prisoners, deaf people, the mentally ill, and gay people. Eventually, the AIDS Taskforce was providing care for 1,800

people with AIDS. “I got involved with AIDS because I remember thinking it was going to be one of the biggest things in history and I knew it was affecting people disproportionately,” Pike elaborated. He understood that there are social determinates associated with AIDS and wanted to help fix that.

In 1996, Pike stopped working at the AIDS Taskforce because he and his wife needed a break. He and his wife had been to more than 200 funerals; one of the funeral parlors wouldn’t bury his friend with AIDS. “It makes me so happy to see how much that has changed– the acceptance that is there now that wasn’t there before,” said an empathic Pike. Pike impacted Cleveland changing the way people perceive AIDS/HIV and getting people the testing and treatment they need. Pike said to expect an effective HIV vaccine in the next 10 years because there has been so much progress with AIDS research on treatment and prevention. People with HIV can now live a normal lifespan. As a result, Pike left the AIDS Taskforce. “I felt like I accomplished what I wanted to accomplished and that AIDs would be okay. People were paying attention and weren’t dying anymore. I wanted to move on to the next problem,” he explained. Pike and his wife backpacked through Asia for six months and they got married in Bangkok, and then he moved onto his next challenge.

Pike is important to Cleveland not only because of the work he did with the AIDS Taskforce but also the work he is doing now as a nonprofit consultant. He helps us with many of charities and nonprofits, including schools. He helps out many of the organizations in Cleveland. He is also on the boards of Engage! Cleveland and Policy Matters Ohio. Pike has had a big impact on Cleveland health and schools. Earl Pike is not done helping Cleveland with the many other problems that the city has.

By Taylor [redacted]

# LINDSAY SIMS



“I want to make not just money but an impact in Cleveland.”

“I’m proud of the fact that I was brave enough to do something really risky,” said Lindsay Sims, owner of the company Customer BOOM. She helps for-profit and non-profit organizations boost their business. Sims strives to expand her one company to at least three or more. “I work with small organizations now and there are other organizations that can use what I do,” she said. Sims is a true Renaissance contributor because she is an innovator that is helping to change the way Clevelanders use social media to access opportunities.

When reflecting on her past, Sims admitted that she used to be very shy. This would come as a surprise to those who have met this inspirational lady today! Sims was once pursuing her Ph.D. in political science at Pennsylvania State University. She did not want a job that would distract her from her Ph.D. work. However, she volunteered for non-profits like Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries. There she worked in communications because she liked talking to people and using the internet to help people. According to Sims, “That’s how I started my company and I stopped doing my Ph.D.” Sims realized she needed to chase her dream of using social media to help connect people.

Sims loves social media; she loves working on the computer and she loves the internet, period. “Now I play on Facebook and Twitter, and make pretty pictures and chat with strangers,” she said. She thinks that the work she does is fun, and who would not want to love their job! “I got good at it while I was working with the nonprofits. It’s a different thing to do it for a business than for

pleasure,” Sims explained. Before all of this, she said that before this she didn’t actually have any social media of her own. Also she said when she represents someone else, she has to be careful because she is using someone else’s work and has their company’s success in her hands.

One of the most difficult challenges for Sims was starting a company. “When I first started my company I didn’t make any money. I’ve been doing this since 2011,” she said. In the past six months things have been going very well for her. That is really impressive for her to start from nothing and now have a company that is doing well just four years later. Sims uses her computer skills to market various companies. For example, she may promote a dry cleaning business one day and run a contest for free pancake batter the next.

Sims uses her connections with nonprofits to get interns to work for her. She has done this countless times with high school students and women living in shelters who need jobs. “I work with that company to get young people jobs so they can learn how to do what I do,” Sims explained. She works with up to three high school students during the summer. Sims wants her company to grow even more so she can give more people jobs and help more small local businesses. “I want to make not just money but an impact in Cleveland,” said Sims, and this is just one of the many reasons she is a Cleveland Renaissance innovator.

By Essajee

# LINDSAY SIMS



**“I want to be able to employ many people, to give people jobs and to have many interns who learn how to do what I do.”**

Have you ever looked for something to make your business boom, but had no success? Are you tired of putting your business in expensive ads in newspapers, TV, magazines? Lindsay Sims, 35, is an entrepreneur who owns a business called Customer BOOM. Sims uses the internet and social media to help small businesses make money and acquire new customers. “I want to make just not money but an impact in Cleveland,” stated Sims.

Sims is so passionate about her work that she stopped her Ph.D. in order to start Customer BOOM. Sims was in a Ph.D. program in political science at Pennsylvania State University. She started volunteering with nonprofits like Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries doing communications, like talking to people and using “the internet to help people” and realized she wanted to do that full time instead of continuing her studies. “There’s nothing wrong with quitting, if you find yourself doing something you hate. I really did hate it,” Sims recalled.

Sims loves social media and working on the computer. She loves to do graphic design and so it was easy to decide to do that instead of what she didn’t love. “I got good at it while I was working with non-profits,” she explained. Customer BOOM first started with Sims started working with non-profits. She loves social media and helping people through social media to show them that the internet is fun and won’t attack you.

One of Sims’s inspirations is Cicely Tyson, who is an actress. Sims is inspired by Tyson because she is very regal and she presents herself as a very classy lady. Tyson is not from a classy background but she has a classy way about herself, and she’s African American just like Sims. Another one of Sims’s inspirations, Oprah, made a career for herself as a reporter, but Sims first saw her when she was almost nothing. “She always wanted to be a reporter and I had no desire to do that, but to see the impact she had to make in peoples life’s is inspiring,” Sims said.

Sims said she has changed a lot since she was younger growing up in St. Louis. “I’m proud of the fact that I started a business I used to be really shy,” she explained. “I’m proud of the fact that I was brave enough to do something really risky.” Sims is from many places; she lived in every version of the hood, plus shelters and a car for awhile. She had almost every challenge you can have, like a speech impediment and dyslexia. She says if you were to see her today, you wouldn’t know any of those things because she worked really hard and overcame them.

Working at Customer BOOM, Sims said, “The most rewarding thing is to help client s make sales.” When she gives her client customers, she’s showing them that the Internet loves the customer and the world is a friendly place. She thinks that getting to see a customer happy is rewarding. Sims thinks the hardest part of owning her own business is staying disciplined. “I work by myself, and I work for myself. The only person I am accountable to is myself. That sounds like it would be easy but it’s not,” Sims explained. Sims herself. She thinks that is the best thing on the planet because no one else has to discipline you, but it is hard to have self-discipline. Still, making her clients successful drives her to persevere.

Sims has big dreams for her future. “I don’t want to just have one company,” she added. She wants to have three or four companies. Sims mostly works with small businesses now and there are other types of organizations that can use what she does, like membership organizations including fraternities and sororities that don’t market themselves well. Sims plans to soon have kids and have a family. Also, each summer she works with teenagers to do what she does and teach them job skills. Sims is important because she is an African-American entrepreneur, and she helps small businesses make money and get customers so they can grow.

By Naya

# LINDSAY SIMS



“I’m proud of the fact that I was brave enough to do something really risky.”

Ever have trouble looking for a job, or maybe you just haven’t decided yet? Lindsay Sims responded by creating her own job based on something she loves. If you follow Sims’s lead, you can get on the road of a good life. If you’re still in high school and you can’t think of your future or your job, then Sims could even help you intern at her company.

Lindsay Sims was born in East Cleveland, but moved to St. Louis, MO, at the age of two. While growing up, Sims recalled her aspirations of wanting to be a teacher and helping others. However, she was really shy and recalled, “I had a speech impediment, so I had 15 years of speech therapy.” Although she still considers herself to be that same person, she has overcome many obstacles and grown into a wildly successful businesswoman. “I used to hate talking in public all the time,” explained Sims. When asked what advice she would offer her younger self, this entrepreneur stated, “Be braver. That doesn’t mean do everything everybody wants you to do. It means do you really want to do.” It is obvious today that Sims has embraced this mantra, and applies it to her own company, Customer BOOM.

Lindsay Sims started her company, Customer BOOM, in the year 2011. Customer BOOM’s work is mostly done on the computer and on the Internet, like Facebook and Twitter. Sims loves social media and the Internet, and that’s why she decided to start company that uses Internet to help people. While pursuing her Ph.D. at Pennsylvania State University, Sims used her computer skills to help nonprofits. “I saw the impact I was having at the nonprofits being able to help them. That was my inspiration. I

wanted to help more people and more businesses,” Sims explained. Also Lindsay Sims was inspired to start Customer BOOM by Oprah because “the impact she wants to make in people’s lives is inspiring” and by Cicely Tyson because the actress “is very regal” and she “presents herself as a classy lady” in Lindsay Sims’s eyes.

Customer BOOM does online marketing for nonprofits and businesses like spreading the word about the company’s products and services. “I help them use their social media to reach people who don’t know they exist,” Sims described. “My job is to let them know that the small businesses hidden off in corners are there.” Sims recently hosted a contest for a local pancake batter company. In that contest, Sims designs the Web page for members of the public to put in their e-mail addresses. She then picks the winner randomly and coordinates sending the winner the pancake batter and announcing it on Facebook. “The most rewarding thing is to help clients make sales. When I can sell some pancake batter for my client, that’s really great,” Sims said. Sims also enjoys working with interns. She looks to local nonprofits to connect her with people who need job training. She increases the workforce at the company and high-school students get to learn from her.

Now that you know more about Lindsay Sims, she can help you with marketing for your business or organization. She can also serve as an inspiration. Remember, if you are unsure about your future and like helping people, then Customer BOOM is the place.

By Raymond [redacted]

# DR. ELENI STYLIANOU



**“Love what you do. Be compassionate. It’s really important how you treat people and remember it’s not always about you.”**

Imagine a world free of fatal diseases. Who would not want to see this occur? Dr. Eleni Stylianou has committed her life and research to trying to eradicate immune response diseases. Dr. Stylianou is a research scientist in the pathobiology department at the Cleveland Clinic, where she contributes to the research of better understanding and curing specific diseases. Her work as a scientist and inspirational achievements are what make her a true Cleveland Renaissance contributor.

Dr. Eleni Stylianou was born and raised in London, England. Dr. Stylianou earned her Ph.D. at University of Wales Medical School after she obtained her degree in biochemistry at London University. “When I was in high school and we started to do science (first time was in high school), I was immediately drawn to it,” she explained. “It captured my imagination and curiosity, and I thought it would be a really cool thing to do.”

Even though our world today has come a long way in terms of gender equality, the number of female scientists in senior positions is drastically lower than that of their male counterparts. “Sometimes when you go other places to give a talk or meet scientists, you realize there are challenges being a woman in terms of how you are perceived,” stated Dr. Stylianou. “Women are not necessarily perceived the same way as men.” She is a role model for young women in science and encourages them to do their best in life and pursue their dreams.

At the Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Stylianou researches inflammatory diseases like asthma, arthritis, and inflammatory bowel disease. She seeks to understand the molecular basis of the

disease to prevent it from happening in the first place. “The hope for all of us is that we discover something that will patients,” Dr. Stylianou said. She helps to find triggers for diseases and then ways to prevent them. She and her team are looking for cures to get rid of the world’s health concerns, especially inflammatory bowel disease. Her team studies how to find cures for gut diseases to make the world a better place.

Back when Dr. Stylianou’s father was young, everyone had to pay to go to high school. His father, a shepherd with no formal education, couldn’t afford to send his seven kids to high school. “The high school principal took Dr. Stylianou’s father on because he was very smart, but after a semester they let him go because he couldn’t pay the fees,” she recalled. “My father was devastated by that. He encouraged us at every stage to love school and to make the most of our education.” She was inspired to go far in her education and now to help young scientists get their training.

Dr. Stylianou loves her job because she says she loves to interact with younger scientists. She helps the next generation of scientists learn more about their work through training them. She is an inspiration and role model for young scientists. She thinks it is really important to enjoy the career you choose but also to help people through that choice. “Love what you do. Be compassionate. It’s really important how you treat people and remember it’s not always about you,” she said. Dr. Eleni Stylianou is an inspiration to all people, not just scientists, because she tells people to follow their dreams and never give up.

*By Johnnie*



# DR. ELENI STYLIANO



“Being able to understand the world we live in, I thought it was incredible that science allows you to do that.”

Have you ever wondered how diseases are cured? Dr. Eleni Stylianou is a research scientist who uses different types of tools to see how diseases affect the human body. Dr. Stylianou is positively impacting the world, specifically our city of Cleveland, Ohio, because of her groundbreaking research at the famous Cleveland Clinic hospital.

Dr. Eleni Stylianou originally hails from London, England. She was born and raised there and attended a very cosmopolitan school with a diverse group of scholars. Dr. Stylianou is proud of her Greek Cypriot heritage and upbringing in the Cypriot community in London. She recalls, “it was really happy time for me growing up.” Dr. Stylianou studied biochemistry for three years and then went on to graduate school for her Ph.D. “It’s a long road, but at least at graduate school you begin to get some sort of income. It’s something you accept as necessary and in the end is really important that you train well,” she said. After working as an assistant professor in the UK, Dr. Stylianou came to the U.S. and she has lived in Cleveland for seven years. Stylianou wanted to be a scientist her entire life. She was immediately drawn to it because “it captured my imagination and curiosity,” she explained. Her tenacity and work ethic led her to join the ranks of female scientists at the Cleveland Clinic.

Dr. Stylianou says some of her work involves using a microscope for imaging and looking at bacteria cells. In her research at the Clinic, she gets tissues from patients who have inflammatory diseases. They take out the tissue, isolate and grow

cells in a culture in the lab, and study how cells respond. They can add proteins, see how they behave differently from normal tissue, and look at responses to normal tissue and other cells. They also isolate the nuclei from cells and look at the DNA and that help them at how genes get turned on and off using primary humans cells meaning cells taken from patients. “The hope for all of us is that we discover something that will help patients. That’s what all of us are aiming to do,” she explained.

Specifically, Dr. Stylianou studies inflammatory diseases like asthma, arthritis, and inflammatory bowel disease. They are looking at areas of inflammatory bowel disease that haven’t been looked at before, and they are trying to educate and inform about these new areas. One is looking at how genes are turned on and off by epigenetics, or how the environment turns genes off. They are studying those changes in diseased versus normal cells. Epigenetics is a new area in inflammatory bowel disease. They are also looking at the lining of the gut and trying to understand those early events that trigger the disease. Dr. Stylianou said her work can be difficult, but that’s how she knows it is worth it. “The challenging aspects are the ones you accept because that is what it is like when you do anything worthwhile, its very much part of the job. It’s so rewarding when you actually do find a solution and discover something nobody else has discovered before that is the most fantastic feeling,” she said.

*By Nina*

# DR. ELENI STYLIANOU



“That’s what science is, improving on what you’re doing.”

“The hope for all of us is that we discover something that will help patients. That’s what all of us are aiming to do,” said Dr. Eleni Stylianou, one of the female scientists to have her own lab at the Cleveland Clinic. It took some time to get to where she is, but it is all for impacting and understanding changes in the disease that her team can target with a drug. She is helping the Cleveland Clinic improve the medical field in Cleveland and throughout the world. Being a female scientist isn’t easy because “women are not necessarily perceived the same way as men,” Stylianou explained. However, she has been lucky with her experiences because the environment has been equal for men and women.

Originally, Dr. Stylianou is from London, England, but her family is from Cyprus. “My grandfather didn’t have a formal education and my dad due to the financial cost at that time in Cyprus didn’t finish high school so my family encouraged us to make the most of our education,” she recalled. Dr. Stylianou went to London University for her undergraduate degree in biochemistry. She next went to the University of Wales Medical School for her Ph.D. and received her post-doctoral training at the University of Cambridge. Dr. Stylianou is married to a NASA aeronautical engineer, who is also helping Cleveland better the world by learning more about it.

Dr. Stylianou works at the Cleveland Clinic in the pathobiology department, where she studies inflammatory diseases. She is currently focused on inflammatory bowel disease. They do research into the pathology of diseases. They try to better understand why the disease occurs and what medication or drug can change the whole outlook on current diseases such as asthma, inflammatory bowel disease, etc. Dr. Stylianou and her department look at the disease and try to find the main trigger. “That means understanding how disease occur and what the molecular basis of the disease is and trying to find ways to cure those diseases and prevent them from happening in the first place,” she explained.

Dr. Stylianou is a part of the Cleveland comeback or “Renaissance” because she’s helping Cleveland’s medical field become even better than it already is. She is one of many scientists at the Cleveland Clinic giving

the community hope that one day there will be a drug or medication that can help inflammatory diseases. A medication for those types of diseases would save and improve so many lives. Dr. Stylianou and the Cleveland Clinic are already extraordinary, so her being able to find out what’s causing those diseases and how to treat them would make Cleveland’s “Renaissance” even more exciting to watch. The work she is doing makes you want to be proud that you’re from Cleveland.

Dr. Stylianou faced a great hurdle in her career choice. Being a female scientist is a big accomplishment and how much she has accomplished in her years in Cleveland is amazing. According to Stylianou, “Women are not necessarily perceived the same way as men. I’ve been lucky in the environments where I have been. Particularly where I am, I feel I have equal opportunity. Sometimes when you go places to give a talk or meet scientists, you realize there are challenges being a woman in terms of how you are perceived.” She explains that there are other females within the department of pathobiology. That says women can accomplish anything they put their minds to.

Dr. Stylianou got really interested into the science field in high school and she knew that’s what she wanted her career to be. She did four years of post-doctoral work before she got her first faculty position. According to Stylianou, “Criticism is such an important part of science when it is constructive. It can be hard to accept criticism and review what you do. That’s what science is, improving on what you’re doing.”

Dr. Stylianou is one of Cleveland’s most accomplished female scientists. She and her lab are putting Cleveland’s medical field even higher on the ladder of being such a good hospital. She and her colleagues are making Cleveland a better city every day through their research. Dr. Stylianou has accomplished so much with her studies and as a scientist working to eliminate some potentially fatal diseases. For that Dr. Stylianou is well deserving of being a part of Cleveland’s Renaissance.

By Kaiya

# LAUREN WELCH



“We want to make sure every woman feels empowered. The best part about our group is that even our flaws are celebrated.”

Lauren R. Welch is the co-founder of the Cleveland’s Young Women Professional Minority’s Group (CYPMWG), where she helps position women of color as assets in their community. She is a Renaissance innovator because she gives people an opportunity to follow their dreams. She has been the recipient of a Celebration of Heroes award.

As a young girl growing up in Ohio City, Welch wanted to pursue her dream of being an actress. She joined Near West Theatre growing up. She attended Wittenberg University and studied communications and women’s studies as her major. Welch has an impressive resume and accolades of achievement. Working in Los Angeles, she has helped people get on the red carpet and also on the path to success. She has worked with MTV, Reebok, and other companies. Now back in Cleveland, her hometown, Welch and her friend Jazmin Long came together to create a great organization. They loved people and wanted to create more opportunities for women of color, so they founded the Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women’s Group.

Welch and Long created the organization in early February 2014. CYPMWG is a group where women of all types come together to enhance their careers and community. Welch explained the meaning and goal of their organization, “We want to be able to connect women of color with other like-minded individuals and help you take your career to the next level.” Welch said their priority is creating a safe place for women to express themselves and be themselves. There’s a membership fee to belong to CYPMWG but most events are free. It is located downtown at the YWCA. As Welch said, “You should wake up every day as a beginner. You should prepare yourself to learn something new every day.”

CYPMWG has a variety of events to help its members. For example, today some middle schools and high schools have a Junior Achievement programs. Like Junior Achievement, they bring in

CEOs and seasoned professionals to connect with members and learn about a variety of different topics like financial wellness, healthy living, and more. Welch does the same for women looking to start their own businesses. “You never want to look back and say, ‘I wish I had learned more, we provide opportunities for women of color to expand their knowledge and understanding of how to excel personally and professionally.’ ” she explained. The group also does community service at the FoodBank and other organizations.

The purpose of CYPMWG is to make every women feel confident about themselves and to help them reach their goals. The organization holds events for women. Some events CYPMWG hold are networking and leadership development. They have brought in a finance guru and entrepreneurs. CYPMWG, also, has mentors for the majority of the group. Even Welch has a mentor. They host these events every other month. Welch says that her favorite events are the brunches they have. They provide an opportunity for women to come together and discuss topics that are important to them. It really has a nice effect on the women as members.

CYPMWG is a very productive organization. It is open to anyone. As Lauren R. Welch said, “Literally anything you like to do, you can make a career out of it; you simply need to know where to start. You have time to learn and understand how.” Welch is not only the co-founder of the CYPMWG, she is also Marketing Manager for The Western Reserve Historical Society, a communications committee member for the Cleveland New Year’s Eve Alliance and a board member for The Consortium of African American Organizations. She has always had a passion for helping people, and continues to help Cleveland in a variety of ways.

By Amonee [redacted]

# LAUREN WELCH



“Literally anything you like to do, you can make a career out of it; you simply need to know where to start.”

Lauren R. Welch is a fascinating woman who helps young African American women find a job and be successful in life. Welch is an entrepreneur who has worked for companies like MTV, TV One, Reeboks, and Zico Coconut Water. She also has helped people get on the red carpet when working in Los Angeles. Welch is the Co-Founder and Chair of The Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women's Group, where she is helping young women of color achieve their dreams.

Welch's inspiration is her family. “They inspire me to do more, give back, and be a servant in the community,” she explained. The one person who really inspires her is her own mother. Her mother encourages her to keep learning and improving. She helps Welch keep the balance between her work and social life.

As a child, Welch wanted to be an actress. She lived in Ohio City and she joined the Near West Theatre for several years until figuring out it wasn't her thing. Then she thought about being a lawyer because both of her parents worked at law firms. When she moved to LA, she helped others who were pursuing acting careers. Welch said, “I much prefer to be behind the scenes.” Welch went to college at Wittenberg University and she majored in women's studies and communication. There, she learned how to create an organization and understand the marketing required to build a brand. Welch's women's studies background helps shed light on women's experiences to others, like how there is a wage gap between men and women. She said, “My education allowed me speak on behalf of women in a way that opened other's eyes to the inequalities that exist for us.”

When she moved back to Cleveland, Welch became interested in creating CYPMWG and said it is very important in helping women enhance their careers and communities. “When you begin your professional life, we want to be able to connect you with someone who can jumpstart your career,” she explained. Welch knows how difficult the career world can be and sees her organization as a means of support and access to networking. “There are so many different women doing different things,” said Welch. “You can connect and see what they did right and wrong and figure out how to move onward and upward.”

Lauren R. Welch and her friend Jazmin Long started CYPMWG in early February 2014 as a safe place for women to express themselves and find support professional and personally. “We want to make sure that every woman is important. The best part about this group is that even our flaws are celebrated. We encourage and remind each other that we are bright and beautiful,” Welch described. The group doesn't have any “black girl tension,” Welch said; instead, they all give each other opportunities and pass along connections. “It's amazing how much support we've gotten tremendous support in the community and corporate sponsor who help us pay for the events,” Welch added.

CYPMWG has different events every other month, including live networking, leadership development, and guest speakers like finance gurus. Welch said she was in Junior Achievement in school, and that's where she learned how to write her checks, budget finances, and much more, and CYPMWG is a place for that financial education to continue. Events often alternate between educational speakers and fun activities to bond with one another. Membership events range from talking about bullying to manicures and pedicures. “We go from serious to fun and it helps us become sisters,” she said. “That's important because as you move up, you want to have a support system behind you.” Their next event will be in June. They plan events for the weekend or on breaks when people are not in at work or in school. You have to be 18 or older to join the organization, but they are looking to connect with youth. Welch said, “I think the ladies would love to see and mentor young women and provide guidance too.”

Lauren R. Welch's organization is a way to get young women of color to achieve their goals and know they can do anything if they put their mind to it. You could join this group to bond with other ladies and have speakers who got to the top by success with their business and how they should look up to these women. Welch and Long created the organization for women to find themselves. The Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women's Group is a way to be successful and grow into better young women.

By Jordyn

# LAUREN WELCH



“I think it’s important that women of color get into the community and see how talented and bright we are.”

Lauren R. Welch is the co-founder of Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women’s Group (CYPMWG). Welch’s idea is to position women of color as assets in their community. The city of Cleveland is going through a modern-day Renaissance, and Lauren R. Welch is helping to empower the minority females of our city, which make her a true contributor and reformer.

Welch attended Wittenberg University and was a women’s studies and communications major. “I got my foot in the door very early with marketing and women’s studies,” said Welch. Her studies help Welch to learn how to create an organization and inform others. “My education allowed me to speak to people from a women’s standpoint and a business stand point,” Welch explained. She was inspired by her family, saying, “I think it’s important that women of color get into the community and see how talented and bright we are.” Welch’s main inspiration is her mother, who helps her keep the balance between her work life and social life.

Before Welch was the co-founder of the Cleveland’s Young Professional Minority Women’s Group, she worked in marketing in Los Angeles in lifestyle and entertainment. She also worked with MTV and Reebok helping to get people and companies. Welch originally wanted to be an actress. “I joined the Near West Theatre growing up. I did it for several years until finding out that wasn’t ultimately for me,” Welch recalled. She was still able assist actresses and be behind the scenes.

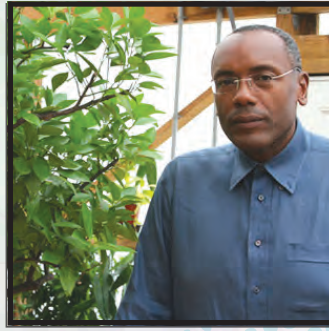
Welch and her friend Jazmin Long started the Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women’s Group in 2014 around February. “It was amazing how much support we’ve gotten in the community and corporate sponsors that helped us pay for events,”

Welch added. In the group there’s all kinds of things they do, like brunches for the women. “The great part about the brunches is that you eat good food and bringing all these women together and they are able to talk about what happens, at home and at the work place,” said Welch. In addition to brunches, the group has networking opportunities, guest speakers like finance experts, and community service. “You should wake up every day as a beginner, and to prepare yourself to learn something new every day,” said Welch. They also have an even where they get manicures and pedicures, which is fun but also to promote self-care. Some of the events are just for fun and others are more educational. “Whether it’s bullying or karaoke, we go from serious to fun and it helps us become sisters,” Welch explained. These types of things are important to Welch and in general because it’s important to all ways have a support system behind you. In order to join the Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women’s Group you have to be 18 and over. The CYPMWG is located in downtown Cleveland at the YMCA, one of their big supporters.

Lauren R. Welch has achieved many extraordinary accomplishments like being Marketing Manager of The Western Reserve Historical Society, on the board of the Consortium African American Organization and a Communications Committee Member for Cleveland’s New Year’s Eve Alliance. Welch is a part of Minds Matter, and last but not least, Lean In. Welch’s mission is to help women enhance their careers and community through networking, community engagement, and leadership development, and her organization and involvement in others are helping her do that for the city of Cleveland.

By Samara

# MARC WHITE



“If I leave this place better than I found it, then I will have done my job.”

Marc White is somebody who wants to make the world a better place, and shows others how to do that as well. He worked with others to make empty unused vacant lots into something bigger and better. By the time they were done working on the vacant lots, they had turned them into a beautiful food garden to make the city look better and provide healthy food options. For people that don't have food, he grows it and gives it out to people in need through the Rid-All Green Partnership.

White grew up in Cleveland and recalls always wanting to make the world a better place. His career has not always been in city gardening. In the late 1980s he wanted to be a fashion design and make all types of different clothing. He started thinking about it around the time he was in high school because he liked to dress up and show off his clothes. His dream job was to become a fashion designer, and he made it happen. White was the first African-American male to graduate with a degree in fashion design from Kent State University. He worked with all kinds of world-renowned people like Calvin Klein, Oprah Winfrey, Spike Lee, and many more entertainers.

White has traveled all around the world working as a humanitarian. When he was in Israel, he met a woman from Cleveland just like him. The two ended up falling in love and marrying. They have eight kids and he thinks that it's very important for his kids to learn and help others. When his kids get older, he want them to be just like him by “making nothing into something” and “making the world into a healthy place for people to enjoy the community more,” he said.

White thinks that the best thing about his job is “the people that he and his employees meet and the discoveries that we make,” he explained. In order to help the community, he put plants and gardens in vacant lots. White impacts people in the city of Cleveland by turning empty and unused vacant lots into something more useful. This is such an important endeavor because one of the city's major issues is unused, unsightly, and vacant lots. The urban farms include gardens with vegetables, flowers, fish, and other plants. All of the soil that is being unused and or wasted by just sitting outside, he makes a use out of it. He is impacting Cleveland by changing the meaning of things, and beautifying spaces that were once an eye sore to the community.

Planting community gardens and finding a better use of vacant land is one step in the right direction for improving the land use of our city. “If I leave this place better than I found it, then I will have done my job,” he said. “I consider it better to be making good healthy things available to people and to give them the benefit of the knowledge and experiences I have gleaned from my travels.” At his job he also educates kids that come to visit the farm. He is going to continue to teach others and especially kids, about their health and about eating healthy foods. White embodies what it takes to be a Renaissance innovator because of his commitment to improving the lives of the people and the vitality of our city.

By Blaze



# JOHN ANOLIEFO



“It takes a village to raise a child.”

John Anoliefo is the executive director of the Famicos Foundation, which improves Cleveland by providing affordable housing and social services. He has lived in the Cleveland area since 1976. He came to this country in 1976 and went to college at Lake Erie College in Painesville, OH. He graduated in 1980 and moved to Euclid. He lived in Euclid until 2002 when he brought a house in Glenville.

Anoliefo, 62, was born in Nigeria. When he was in high school, he wanted to be a banker. He was interested in economics and he did very well school. When he came to Ohio to go to college, his major was economics. Economics, the way he looks at it, has a direct trajectory to working in a bank. He said to “stay in school and get an education” because education got him where he is today.

Anoliefo said since he has had his children, he is wiser. He also said he doesn’t drink or smoke at all anymore. He said he doesn’t want to do things that he’s telling his not to do. He also said he has developed more patience because his job requires him to.

What inspires him is his father. He grew up watching his father help people. His father’s entire life was about that, so now all of his life it has been about that. As a youth growing up, he did a lot of community activities, especially helping seniors in the village whose family had passed so they didn’t have anybody to do certain chores that required extra strength. They organized themselves through the church or student government. In his country, unlike the U.S., where people in your neighborhood all come from different cities, everybody was born in that village and grew up there so you knew everybody and want to help each other. There is this saying “It takes a village to raise a child” and in Nigeria it’s especially true. After college, Anoliefo started as the executive assistant to the mayor in East Cleveland and the work he did was about helping people.

What he does at Famicos Foundation is to provide leadership and the vision, plus payroll and to pay contractors and vendors.

If the money is not there, it falls on his shoulders. Their mission is to improve the quality of life in greater Cleveland through neighborhood revitalization, affordable housing, and integrated social services. “When we do that, it is not just giving somebody a place to live, even though housing is where it all starts,” Anoliefo explained. “We go further to walk with our tenants to make them a very productive member of society.” They make all of those things come together through programs in the community, gardening, and farmers markets.

Their work makes a great deal of difference. When a single parent loses their child through the court system because they don’t have a place to live, the Famicos Foundation steps in and works to make sure the parent is now stable with her own apartment, and then that parent reunites with his or her child. That is what Anoliefo’s foundation is about.

His foundation is currently working on renovating the Eastside Market to reopen it. It has been closed for more than 20 years. It is on 105th and St. Clair and is owned by the city of Cleveland. Late last year, the city of Cleveland put an RFP [request for proposal] for somebody with a plan to redevelop it. In competition with others, Anoliefo submitted a plan to reopen it. Their plan calls for a bakery and stalls that sell fresh food plus opportunities for local farmers in Glenville.

John Anoliefo is a reformer. When he came to the Famicos Foundation in 2002, there were about 14 people working there. From then to now, they have grown to 44 people working there. When he came there, the budget was one million dollars. Their budget now is close to four million dollars. Anoliefo is very close to retirement, and he hopes soon someone will take over his legacy. “I hope that when it is time for me to hang it up, that there will be a young man or woman who will take over for me and do much more than I have done and take this organization to new heights,” he said.

By Aniyah



# JOHN ANOLIEFO



“With education, anything is possible in life.”

John Anoliefo is from Nigeria and is the executive director of the Famicos Foundation. The Famicos Foundation helps people get homes and have better lives. Their motto is “Building homes. Restoring hope.” The foundation helps low-income families get in houses so the family gets back on its feet; it also can help the parents get a job and the kids get a good education.

Anoliefo moved to the United States to attend Lake Erie College. He had to adjust to life in a new country, including sports. “When I came here, I didn’t understand football,” he said. “Now I am a Browns fan.” Anoliefo also changed when he had his four kids. He stopped smoking and drinking to be a good role model and he encourages all kids to get a good education. “Stay in school and you can do whatever you want in life,” he added.

The Famicos Foundation is located in a building that was previously an all-girls school but they made it into an apartment building. When Anoliefo started, there were 14 people were working there, but they now have a staff of 44. The building also has 73 apartments upstairs, but it’s only for seniors (62 and older). Sister Henrietta Gorres created the Famicos Foundation 45 years ago. Sister Henrietta worked with residents after the Hough riots to rebuild their homes and lifestyle. Sister Henrietta worked to provide residents with minor homes repair. Now her legacy lives on under Anoliefo’s leadership.

The foundation is making a big difference. When parents are living in poverty, their kids can be taken from them. The Famicos Foundation helps the parents with a stable place to live so they can get their kids back. The foundation gives kids summer jobs and pays them ten dollars an hour. That money goes toward clothes, school supplies, or to go out with their friends. The foundation also works with the residents to teach them how to eat healthy and how to cook healthy. “This is not just a story. This is real. This is what we do,” Anoliefo explained.

Anoliefo has four kids, three girls and one boy. His wife is from Nigeria too; she’s a social worker and works downtown for the county. The oldest girl is a lawyer. The second lives in New York, working at a nonprofit organization that helps low-income students achieve their educational goal by helping them go to college. The third girl is a master’s student at Stanford University. The boy graduated college two years ago in Springfield, OH, with a degree in business administration. His kids have been successful because they followed Anoliefo’s advice, “Education is important. Please pay attention to the teacher. Go to school every day. Do your homework and stay out of trouble.”

By Javion

# EVELYN BURNETT



“The world needs to change, and I’m going to start by changing the conversation.”

Evelyn Burnett, Vice President of Economic Opportunity at Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, is changing the conversation about Cleveland. Burnett is an amazing person and is trying her best to make sure the community remains positive and clear all of the violence. She works hard to make sure that it is safe to walk to the store and through the streets.

“Things are changing slowly. When you go to work every day, feel proud about yourself.” These are the words of Evelyn Burnett. Burnett wants to change the community with the community’s help. Cleveland Neighborhood Progress strives to create communities of choice and opportunity.

Burnett has pushed for change in unique ways, including her work at Admiral Center at Living Cities that helped celebrities use their resources and influence to develop sustainable and impactful solutions to the most pressing social problems.”

Burnett attended University of Akron to study dance, marketing and public relations. She also got a master’s degree in public administration. “Education, marketing, and dance prepared me for my current position,” she said. Burnett wasn’t even thinking about vice president at the time. She just wanted to see Cleveland in a different way. Hopefully, Cleveland in the future will be a better, safer prouder community.

Burnett thinks she is and isn’t making a difference in the community. Even though her organization is helping, she also sees tremendous need in the community and the need to face issues like police brutality. Burnett feels like it shouldn’t matter what type of race you are and when these situations occur, she feels like we can change the community and come together as a team and be united. The goal is to be a strong community that people deserve. Burnett listens to what people have to say and creates good policies to get the people toward the goal they want to reach, which is not an easy task. She said, People have to change their lifestyles. We have to educate people about why we are doing this.” Burnett knows she can reach this goal.

“People need to have more pride in Cleveland,” she added. Burnett is changing the conversation once again. She wants people to believe in Cleveland and wants people to know that she will try her hardest to get people on board; besides, this is what she does best. Burnett is deleting all of the negative things that happen because she wants the community to be a team and fight for their rights.

Burnett has been doing this job for two years. Burnett, of course, likes what she does. She gets to do things that involve leadership and involve changing the community in many ways. She doesn’t like bossing people around; just because she’s the vice president doesn’t mean she has the right to be bossy. Burnett’s inspiration is her parents and the risky things they did that inspired her to do what she does now.

Burnett manages programs and services for her organization. “One important conversation in advancing the region is the misconception about economic opportunity and what that means,” she explained. Burnett’s work is all about expanding access for people to meaningfully participate in the Cleveland economy, including young or seasoned professionals. Burnett added, “People of color, in particular, also need to have access”. Another part of her job is learning how to create conversations around change in Cleveland.

Burnett will continue to make a change in the community and change the conversation about Cleveland as well as changing the violence that’s been going on. She also wants to make growth to the community and hopefully in the future the community will be better than what it is today.

By Jordan [REDACTED]

# EVELYN BURNETT



“I want people to think of Cleveland as a place people want to be instead of their only option. I want it to be just as desirable as the big cities like New York.”

Burnett is one of Cleveland’s game-changers and is currently the Vice President of Economic Opportunity for Cleveland Neighborhood Progress. When she was asked about Cleveland’s future, she said, “I want people to think of Cleveland as a place people want to be instead of their only option. I want it to be just as desirable as the big cities like New York.”

When Burnett looks back at her youth, she thinks it is different than her life now. “When you are younger, it’s all about you but when you are older, you have to take responsibilities that sometimes you don’t want to do.” If she got the chance to do life over again she would take that chance, and do better than what she did before and she would study harder. She said knowing what she knows now, she stresses that math is very important. She explained that when she was a teenager, she used to hate math, but now she needs math for her work as vice president. She also said she would take better care of herself physically and mentally and realize that much of what she thought was important really wasn’t.

As a little kid growing up in Youngstown, Burnett wanted to be a barber because everyone respected the barber. She attended Ursuline High School, and then went to the University of Akron, where she majored in public relations and double-minored in marketing and dance. Next she got her master’s in public administration. Most people go into government with that degree, but Burnett wanted to work in the nonprofit sector. She explained that with the job that she has now, she would like to change people’s lives. She likes what she does. “It’s hard when you go to work every day and come back home not feeling good,” she said. “I really wanted a job that I could feel good about when I came home.”

Burnett has been working at Cleveland Neighborhood Progress since 2013. Before that she worked in New York City at another nonprofit organization. Cleveland Neighborhood Progress seeks to improve Cleveland neighborhoods and make them areas where all people want to live, learn, work, invest, and play. The organization was founded in 1988. “I am the person who is interested in catalytic projects in my areas of interests. I enjoy board roles and working with organizations within an adaptive leadership and collective impact framework,” Burnett said. She hopes to empower the disenfranchised and launch successful ideas that will benefit the greater good of society. The economic opportunity team oversees and manages programming integrating services around education, asset building, workforce and economic development, health and leadership building and engagement.

“I think I have made a little progress but there is still a lot of work to be done. Some of the progress is about changing the conversation, to challenge commonly held assumptions,” she explained. “If you believe in people, you have to work hard to get them what they deserve.” Burnett eventually wants to take her work worldwide, saying, “I would want to create a vision, and helping people see the greater good.”

By Khalil

# PETER DEBELAK



“Have time to do that problem solving changes your outlook. I wanted to create a space that allowed as many people as possible to have that experience.”

“Have time to do that problem solving changes your outlook. I wanted to create a space that allowed as many people as possible to have that experience.”

“A big part of why I opened this shop is not to create future wood workers. I believe that when you have to create things with your hands and create things, it can change who you are and your perspective,” said Peter Debelak, owner of Soulcraft Woodshop. Debelak has lived in Cleveland for 24 years total. Born here, he left at the age of 18 for 14 years, returning at the age of 32. Now he is 37 with a happy family.

Debelak would tell himself to go after his passions, not just what you think you’re supposed to do. Growing up, Debelak loved working with his hands. “In college every summer I worked jobs in construction to pay for college and during that time I fell in love with art,” he explained. Debelak went to law school at Ohio State University and attended college at UCLA. Debelak enjoyed school a lot. “I’m kind of a big nerd,” he joked. He said living in a tiny studio apartment in Westwood, next to Hollywood. “In that tiny studio apartment I had a tiny wood working area,” he recalled. He made a big mess and his roommate was always annoyed by this. Debelak practiced law as a profession for five years but as he did this, he continued to make furniture. This began the legacy of Soulcraft Woodshop.

“If there’s not a challenge it’s kind of boring,” Debelak said of his work. When Debelak opened the shop, it was a risk for him and his career. He began to build tables for rooms at new restaurants. Debelak also started to donate furniture to charity and puts some up for auction. He teaches a woodworking class for

6 weeks for \$300. The students can cut and create things they want with wood. Debelak has specific plans for growing the woodshop. He wants to expand his shop into other things like a metal shop, ceramics studio, and also a robotic studio; he is currently working on achieving this goal.

Debelak is married with three kids. His wife grew up in Medina and he met her in law school. She now works at Birchwood School in the west side doing nonprofit fundraising. “She never specifically practiced law but her law degree helps her with her job now,” he said. Before law school, his wife worked with nonprofits like University Hospitals, Pittsburgh Symphony, and the New York Museum.

Debelak’s kids love tinkering around with him. His daughter is getting into gymnastics so they built a balance beam. “We made a bed for Maddie’s dolls. She can sand it and glue it and put it together,” he explained. Debelak and his oldest son Charlie made a little rocket and Charlie cherishes that gift from his dad. Debelak and Charlie also built a lemonade stand and put it on the side of the road.

Debelak loves to help the community and would do anything to help the people in that community get experience working with their hands. The public can come to the shop for classes, and he works with them if they can’t pay too much. “I tell people money is never a reason you should not use the shop; if people can’t afford it we will make it work,” he said. Debelak helps everyone and makes it a better place wherever he is.

By Javon

# PETER DEBELAK



“Working with your hands makes you constantly curious about the world you live in. To be able to give people that opportunity, I think, has a snowball effect.”

Are you creative? Do you like working with wood? If so, you have a lot in common with Peter Debelak. Debelak, 37, has lived in Cleveland for 23 years. He is the owner of Soulcraft Woodshop and Soulcraft Design.

Debelak grew up on West Boulevard in the city of Cleveland. When he was younger, he wanted to be a neurosurgeon (a brain surgeon). Debelak said that at his young age he was curious about the world and had different goals than other kid, which he said made him “kinda weird.” Now reflecting on his life, he said one piece of advice he would give himself is to “go after your passion not after what you think you are supposed to do.”

For college, Debelak went to Ohio State University and earned a degree in linguistics, or teaching computers how to talk and think. He then went to UCLA for law school. Before he started woodworking professionally, he was a lawyer. “In college every summer, I worked jobs in construction to pay for college, and during that time I feel in love with art,” he explained. Debelak opened up his shop to give people an experience that most wouldn’t be able to afford.

Soulcraft helps the community with through Debelak’s shop. People can come there and take classes to learn how to do wood crafting. He said that the reason he runs this shop is for the people that don’t have money to buy their own machines or for people who are just trying it out for the first time. Debelak said, “I believe that when you have to create things with your hands and create things, it can change who you are and your perspective.”

Debelak is also a father of three children: Maddie, age 7; Charlie, age 5; and Oscar, 5 months. He also makes things in his shop for his family. He said that his daughter is getting into gymnastics, so he made her a balance beam. He made a toy rocket ship with his son, and also made duct tape wallets and a lemonade stand with his kids. Debelak said they made \$40 in just one day.

Debelak has heroes he looks up to. One of the people he looks up to is James Krenov. He was a woodworker last century. Another person he looks up to is John Muir, who is considered the “father of our national parks.” Muir worked at a factory and worked his way up and tripled their business. Debelak said that a message he got from Muir is that “You are never stuck where you’re at; you can change the situation.”

Debelak had lift ups and put downs on his journey to becoming a woodworker. He says that “there were people who loved me so they didn’t tell me that I was an idiot, but they told me in not so many words.” At first his family and friends thought that Debelak was kidding. Once when they saw that he was going for it, Debelak says they have been nothing but supportive.

*By Kahmeirrah*

# LIZ FERRO



**“It’s touching lives and changing lives of girls who didn’t believe in themselves to believing they can move forward.”**

Liz Ferro is an inspiration to many people. Ferro is the type of person to care about others. She doesn’t want people to go through what she had to experience as a child. Ferro started her career based on her experience growing up. She is a successful woman and has overcome more to provide girls with great opportunities. She started off as just a normal person, but now is rising in fame. Ferro started an organization called Girls with Sole. Girls with Sole helps girls who are at risk for what she went through when she was growing up.

Ferro’s story shows bravery and how her career started. She was in four foster homes and her parents adopted her when she was two. She has two brothers, one adopted and one biological. Then comes her story, which is what got her to this point in life today. She has been through many challenges in her life, but without those challenges, the organizations she has today wouldn’t have been created. “I had no idea what I wanted to do when I grew up,” Ferro said. She went through a very deep depression growing up. Also, she had a lot of emotional issues. She was raped for a whole year by her neighbor. Holding all that anger and sadness wasn’t good for Ferro. She also didn’t see herself as a successful kid. “It took me years and years of hard work literally working at it. I had one therapist who was really good. The other ones only focused on bad things,” Ferro recalled. She then started to keep a positivity journal, which helped her stay optimistic. Every day she had to write three things that were positive and that she was thankful for. She also did swim, track, softball, and gymnastics, and this helped her both physically and mentally. “Your body reacts positively to the exercise,” Ferro said. If she could talk to herself back then, she would say, “Believe in yourself more. Don’t let other people bring you down when they tell you you’re not going to accomplish anything. Don’t be so hard on yourself,” Ferro explained.

Ferro’s whole career started by her growing up story, which led to an amazing support group today. It also had begun when she started being more athletic and followed up to Girls with Sole. Some of her accomplishments are being on “The Today’s Show,” and receiving an award from Self Magazine. She was also in Runner’s World magazine. Her biggest reward and accomplishment is seeing kids benefitting from Girls with Sole. Ferro wanted to help girls who share the same story she did when she was growing up or are at risk for abuse. It started six years ago

in August 2009. Some of the girls in this program experienced bullying at school, dating violence, and emotional abuse. She helps them with mind, body, and soul so they can grow up to be fearless woman. Also, the other half of the program focuses on self-esteem building. “We do that in Girls with Sole because it helps you to be a more optimistic person even if bad things are happening in your life,” Ferro said. They do many activities such as volleyball, basketball, football, kickball, running game activities, paddle boarding on the lake, and dragon boat racing.. “It’s touching lives and changing lives of girls who didn’t believe in themselves to believing they can move forward.” Ferro said. She goes at least five days a week to different locations to run the programs.

Ferro has been running marathons so she can get support and funding for Girls with Sole. She is also in the process of running a marathon in all 50 states to spread the word and raise awareness. So far she has completed 30 states. “I have to be creative in how to raise money for the programs,” Ferro said. Also she has to get support the group with shoes, art materials, and equipment to run the programs. Some of favorite places are Sedona, Arizona, and Hawaii. Still, she loves Cleveland. One of Ferro’s favorite things about Cleveland is the lake. Another favorite is the diversity of people in Cleveland. There aren’t many staff members yet until Girls With Sole grows bigger. As a nonprofit, she has to make the money by herself. When she can’t afford to pay herself a salary, she does it on her own, but she has received grants from TJ Maxx and Sherwin Williams to help out with the group.

Ferro went to Niagara University for two years, then transferred to Miami and majored in speech communications with concentration in public relations. She graduated in December 1991. Her husband is from Connecticut, and he works at Huntington Bank as an insurance broker for big companies. Ferro’s goals for the future look very big. She hopes to see the organization grow to have a larger staff and more locations across the country. “We’ve gotten great national attention and people ask if I got money for being on the Today Show. I didn’t get money but gets recognized in the community,” Ferro explained.

*By Danielle*

# LIZ FERRO



“Believe in yourself more. Don’t let other people bring you down.”

Those are the words of the wonderful Liz Ferro. She is a high-achieving 46-year-old who has lived in Cleveland for 23 years. Her passion is fitness and encouraging others. Ferro grew up in Rochester, NY. She went to college and then moved to Cleveland in 1992. It is here where her organization began. Growing up, Ferro was in and out of foster homes. When she was two years old, she was adopted into a family of a mom, dad, and two brothers. At the age of 8, she was sexually abused by a neighbor. This experience is how her inspiration for Girls with Sole began.

Girls with Sole is Ferro’s organization. Her title is founder and executive director because she runs the programs too. Girls with Sole is a non-profit organization that is recognized by the government. Their mission is to provide free fitness/wellness programs to girls who have experienced abuse or are at risk for being bullied at school, dating violence, or emotional abuse. “I bring the program directly to girls where they are. We concentrate on mind, body, and soul,” Ferro said.

Girls with Sole is run by Ferro as the sole staff member. Until Ferro gets the proper and stable funding she needs, she cannot have a full staff. Ferro doesn’t get paid; she mostly relies on grants funding. Ferro and her girls run races as part of wellness within the

organization. “Lacing up for a Lifetime of Achievement” (LUILA) is one of the runs she does with her girls and the public. LUILA is a 5-mile race and 2 mile walk/fun run. It usually gets 700 people and is good advertisement for the organization. Ferro loves fitness and exercise and says it helped her when she was growing up. “It’s a way instead of acting out to get rid of all that bad stuff,” she said. Ferro runs marathons also, and is currently running a marathon in every state to raise awareness for her organization. Ferro provides her girls with materials such as shoes, sports bras, etc. These much-needed materials benefit the girls by making running more comfortable, especially when running long distances such as a 5K.

Girls with Sole is touching and changing lives of girls who didn’t believe in themselves. “I think helping all kids is great,” Ferro said happily. She is an amazing, strong, kind woman who will take things further in life. Her organization has changed the lives of many girls and hopefully she will expand and continue to do so.

*By Karter*

# ERIC GORDON



“I think my work is making a difference in a lot of ways. It’s changing the way schools work together.”

Eric Gordon is the CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) in Cleveland, Ohio. Before Gordon became CEO, he was the Chief of Education, and before that he taught algebra in inner-city New Orleans and Toledo. While Gordon was in Louisiana, he taught at an all-black high school. He also was a driver’s education teacher and directed plays and musicals. Gordon was not from the inner city, but from a really poor community.

In 1970, Eric Gordon was born. As a child he used to laugh and joke around, but he was always a hard worker in school. Gordon wanted to be a firefighter or a meteorologist. If he could go back in time, he would tell himself, “Don’t worry so much about finding the right job; spend time doing what you like and do it really well. Don’t keep on applying for the next thing, you’ll be noticed.” Gordon was the first in his family to go to college, and he attributes his success to that decision. “I have a great life because people helped me go to college and have the ability to make a choice,” he said.

As the CEO of CMSD, Gordon intends to improve the graduation rate to help more high school kids getting a diploma. In the three years with him as CEO, the graduating rates went up 12.1 percent. Gordon said, “My whole goal is that kids get a diploma so they can do what they want to do, and I’ve helped a lot of kids do that.” He also mentors kids who get into serious trouble. He hopes that what he does sticks with them to make sure they’re successful. He believes that every young person should an education so they have options and are able to choose their life, and he wants to triple the number of his scholars that get to make their own choice by tripling the number of students at effective schools.

Gordon has worked really hard to become superintendent. What attracted him to his current job was the previous superintendent, Dr. Sanders. He was one of Gordon’s college professors. Gordon is also inspired by Michael Casserly, who runs an organization that supports large school districts. Gordon said, “I admire him incredibly ... He is in charge of a group that runs 67 large districts, but he always makes time me.” Gordon said some advice he would give himself is to “take a vacation and recharge my battery. I don’t model that.” In his role, you would have to always be honest and transparent even when it’s bad news. “Leaders

sometimes cover up the bad stuff” Gordon explained. He also said leaders need to be honest when they don’t know something. “You don’t know everything and you can’t know everything. As soon as you give yourself permission not to know, you’ve given yourself permission to go find out.”

One of Gordon’s favorite Cleveland projects is the Cleveland Plan, which is a reform strategy for CMSD. The goal of the Cleveland Plan is to make sure that students graduate from high school and become successful. Gordon said something that influences students to do better is a good mentor. “Sometimes it’s a teacher or parent ... a lot of students don’t get mentoring support. If I could do anything to influence students to do better in school, I would make sure everyone had a mentor,” he explained. Gordon plans to triple the number of kids that get a great education and eliminate schools that can’t provide great education. Gordon also thinks that Breakthrough Charter Schools have done what he is trying to do, producing good leaders.

Gordon’s wife is from Waterbury, Connecticut. She is an educator as well, but does not work, supporting him and CMSD instead. Gordon said that he has no personal children but he has over 39,000 children who are in CMSD. Gordon hopes to stay in Cleveland to finish his career, and make sure students in Cleveland receive a great education. “Most people in my position don’t get to stay for a whole career, or sometimes choose to leave. I would feel very great about retiring knowing I’ve made a big impact on children of Cleveland as a way to finish work I do,” he said.

Gordon’s long-term goal is that every kid who steps into a Cleveland school is able to choose their life. Gordon doesn’t think about disappointments. For example, in the second year Gordon was CEO, he got Cleveland’s rating up to a C; unfortunately the rating fell to a D the next year, but Gordon kept preserving to improve the school district.

Gordon is such an inspiration because he encourages students to do better in order to choose what they want to do in life. He believes that anything is possible if you put your mind to it.

By Najja



# ERIC GORDON



“The whole project is about getting schools that are doing a bad job to get better or close and to make sure that no matter where you live in the city, you can go to a school you like and that will make sure you will get a great education.”

Born in 1970 in Toledo, Eric Gordon sits in his office every day thinking about how he can make Cleveland better and how he can improve Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD). He does this by ensuring his 39,000 kids get a good education so they can pick their own futures. Eric Gordon is an extraordinary example of a Cleveland Rustbelt reformer. He was selected as the CEO of CMSD in June 2011 and has accomplished a lot since his induction. Gordon has taught in New Orleans and Toledo and has served as a high school principal in urban, rural, and suburban school districts. In the suburban district, Gordon realized he wasn't doing his cause of improving education for disadvantaged students, so he moved to Cleveland. When he moved, he taught driver's education, math, and algebra. He also directed plays and musicals.

Specifically related to his cause, Gordon mentors young people in serious trouble. He sticks with them so they can be successful, and he believes that as CEO, if he never sees kids, he can't achieve his cause. He wants to make sure his 39,000 kids can have the ability to choose their lives and have the chance to pick their education.

Gordon got interested in his cause because although he wasn't from the inner city, he was poor and almost didn't go to college. People helped him get to where he is now instead of in a factory with his dad, which is what would have happened if he hadn't gone to college. For example, one of those people is Dr. Sanders, the previous superintendent, and also his professor and mentor who taught him to be principal. Sanders called to offer him a job in Cleveland, and the opportunity to work for his mentor and in an urban environment attracted him to his current position. Throughout his time in education, Gordon said he learned that kids are kids and it doesn't matter their color. Gordon has progressed through his different jobs and challenges, and has accomplished a lot for himself, his 39,000 kids, and his family. Gordon had to accomplish a lot to get his current CEO position. Before he was CEO, his title was chief academic officer. He was responsible for all the teaching and learning: what teacher taught what, what materials they had to teach with, and the summer school and Saturday school. “I made sure teachers knew what to teach, how to teach it, and that they had the tools they needed,” Gordon explained.

If he hadn't pursued a career in education, he would be a meteorologist, but not on television. Instead, some weathermen work for airports to let know that it's safe for planes to land, or Gordon could have worked for a shipping company like UPS to help them avoid storms. Good thing he didn't become a weatherman or a meteorologist, because some of the incredible changes that he made to the CMSD wouldn't have happened.

Gordon has done many things to make CMSD schools the best they can be. For example, he raised the district's graduation rate by 12.1 percent in three years.” That means lots more kids got their diploma,” Gordon exclaimed. He wants more kids to get their diplomas so that they can do what they want to do, and he has helped a lot of kids do that. One disappointing thing that really didn't go his way was when the district's grade rose to a C one year and then fell back down to a D instead of increasing again. However, Gordon is very positive and doesn't spend time thinking about disappointments. Instead, Gordon tries hard to make a difference in CMSD schools. He wants to help schools work together instead of competing against each other, regardless of whether they are public schools or charter schools like Breakthrough. “I think that Breakthrough Schools has done exactly what I am trying to do, which is create schools that will give kids great education,” Gordon said. “Part of what I've been able to do is change that so we all think we should be helping each other, so it doesn't matter where you go to school.” Now he's changed how people in Cleveland and even in Ohio think about what kids deserve in education, especially compared to four years ago when he took the superintendent job.

Gordon has many responsibilities in his job, some that he may like and dislike. He likes when his day focuses on making the schools better and he gets to work with kids. It's the best part of his day. Some dislikes are when simple things that should work don't, plus when he spends time in meetings that he doesn't think are useful or important. Additionally, in his job he has to be a public figure and go to events. He feels it's important, but it's not fun for him because it's not directly helping make schools better. Even though he may not like some of his responsibilities, he pushes through it and gets the job done. “I'm really hard working, and I won't ask anyone to do something I would not do myself,” Gordon added. He's a good problem solver; that is how you figure out how to make schools better. Another strength is he really loves to work so it's not something he does to keep a job. “People can tell when you love what you do or just tolerate it. If you don't love what you do, people pick it up right away and they are less willing to help,” he explained.

Eric Gordon is a very extraordinary man who has accomplished a lot to make many positive changes to the CMSD. He also takes time out of his day to help troubled kids and his coworkers to be the best they can be. For that he is a Cleveland Rustbelt reformer.

By Rainah

# ERIC GORDON



**“To me, it’s not about telling you what you should do; it’s about making sure you get the chance to do whatever it is that you want to do.”**

An extraordinary man from a poor community is reforming Cleveland. Eric Gordon is the CEO of Cleveland Metropolitan Schools. He said he wants every Cleveland child to get a great education. He loves to interact with the children of Cleveland, and he wants all Cleveland schools to work together for the better.

Gordon was born in Toledo in 1970. He stayed in Toledo until he was 12 then moved to Pittsburgh. When he was younger, he wanted to be a teacher, fireman, or a meteorologist. He was the first in his family to attend college. Gordon attended Bowling Green State University where he got a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Secondary Mathematics, Driver Education and a master’s degree in Education Administration and Supervision. He is married but doesn’t have any children, but he says he has 39,000 kids, the number enrolled in CMSD. Gordon said his advice to his younger self is, “Don’t worry too much about finding the right job. Spend all your time doing what you do well and the right stuff will happen when it’s supposed to happen.”

Gordon always wanted to be a teacher because he thought it would be fun and give him the opportunity to help children. He taught algebra, geometry, and math for students who didn’t pass their tests. He also taught driver’s education and directed plays and musicals as extra-curricular activities. He said “Little Shop of Horrors” was one of his favorites to direct. He taught in inner-city New Orleans, Louisiana, and Toledo. Then he moved to an affluent suburban community and taught at one of their schools but decided to leave because it didn’t align with his cause to help young people get a great education. “The kids in that district were going to be fine,” Gordon explained. “It didn’t matter if I was there or somebody else was there.” Gordon wants children to pick their own life and have options for their future, and he says education lets them do that. When the job offer came to him, he moved to Cleveland and has been here since 2007.

Gordon is a role model to many young children. He feels he is more mature now that he is older. “I think a lot of the things I was younger I still have, but you just grow up and learn how to use them,” he recalled. He said his favorite thing about his job is to engage with the students. When Gordon taught at an all-African American school, he said he learned that kids are kids, and it doesn’t matter the color. Gordon mentors young students who are at risk for dropping out of school or getting expelled or going to jail. “I’ve stuck with them and stick with them and try to make sure they are successful,” he said.

Gordon has made much progress with CMSD schools. He is most proud of the district’s increase in their graduation rate by 12.1 percent in a three-year period. “My whole goal is that kids get a diploma so they can do what they want to do, and I’ve helped a lot of kids do that,” Gordon said. Gordon feels his work is making a difference in several of ways, including helping schools to work together. “Part of what I’ve been able to do is change that so we all think we should be helping each other, so it doesn’t matter where you go to school. What matters is that you got the education you were promised,” he explained. Gordon wants to retire knowing he has made a big impact on the children of Cleveland.

Gordon is a great worker but he advises himself to take vacations and to rest sometimes. His favorite project he has worked on so far is the Cleveland Plan, the reform strategy for the Cleveland school district. He has many descriptions of his job. He is like the principal of all schools. He is responsible for managing all the principals, making sure the buses come, ensuring food and safety for students, and that the buildings are clean, but it’s all for one goal. “My long-term goal is that every kid who steps into a school in the city of Cleveland, whether it’s a district school or a charter, steps out of it being able to choose their life. That they have all the education they need to pick whatever they want to do,” he said. Gordon takes his responsibilities and job seriously.

Gordon is a great mentor and gives great advice. “If I could do anything to influence students to do better in school, I would make sure everyone had a mentor,” Gordon added. He thinks students should find a quality high school that fits them well and has the things they care about. He recommends John Hay, Cleveland School of the Arts, Bard Early College, Digital Arts High School, and New Tech schools. “You have to try it on and go visit them and think about whether you could see yourself and your friends walking down the hall and laughing and having a good time,” he advised.

Gordon feels that Cleveland is changing for the better, and he wants the same for CMSD. Gordon took a school district that was falling apart and is changing it for the better. Gordon is a courageous man and perseveres for CMSD schools. He is admired by many young children. He strives for the greater of Cleveland.

By Amari [REDACTED]

# ERIC GORDON



**“Don’t worry too much about finding the right job. Spend all of your time doing what you do well, and the right stuff will happen when it’s supposed to happen.”**

Eric Gordon is an influential and inspiring man who puts so much hard work and effort into the students and schools within the Metropolitan School District (CMSD).

He’s influencing greater Cleveland as CEO of CMSD, and as the “big principal” of 39,000 students. Gordon’s cause is to “make sure that every young person that I can influence gets a good education. That way you get to make your own decision in life.” This is something Gordon strives for within the Cleveland Metropolitan schools and something to which he is personally committed through mentoring students himself. Gordon said, “I mentor a number of young people. Usually they are kids that get into serious trouble, and would have been expelled or gone to jail or dropped out of high school. I’ve stuck with them and stick with them and try to make sure they are successful.” He’s a committed person and tries not to lose touch with his cause. Mentoring is just one of the few things he does in his tightly packed schedule.

Gordon was born in Toledo and stayed there until he was 12, and then moved to Pittsburgh for middle school and high school. Gordon says, “I was a poor kid and almost didn’t go to college.” He was actually the first person in his family to go to college when he went to Bowling Green State University for two degrees, first in secondary math education, and also for his master’s in administration. Gordon also went to Ohio State University for his superintendent’s license. Gordon has been in Cleveland for eight years and said he loves it. “It reminds me a lot of a big Toledo, so it feels like home,” he added.

When Gordon was younger, he wanted to be a teacher or a meteorologist. It seems like teaching came through. Gordon taught in an all-black high school, and said that “coming from a rural community,” this was a new experience for him. Through that experience, Gordon said, “It taught me that kids are kids, and it doesn’t matter what color you are.” Gordon was attracted to the position of CEO because of the previous superintendent, Dr. Sanders, who was also his mentor and professor. Gordon also said that he is really proud of his school district and his peer superintendents at the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 67 large school districts, even elected him to run their organization.

Gordon’s most significant project thus far is the Cleveland Plan, which is the reform strategy for CMSD. The Cleveland Plan is “making sure that your family can pick a school that they want and that the choice that they pick will give you a great education,” Gordon elaborated. Throughout Gordon’s tenure as CEO, he has helped bridge the gap between public and charter schools. Gordon wants to make a difference by changing the way schools work together. Gordon said, “In the past,

your school would not work with district schools.” He says that’s part of what he’s been able to change within his job.

Gordon is most proud that our district’s graduation rate has increased 12.1 percent in the past three years. He says that his whole goal is that, “Kids get a diploma so they can do what they want to do, and I’ve helped a lot of kids do that.” Although Gordon likes tweeting about his students and hanging out with them for part of his day, he dislikes when “simple things that should work, don’t work.” Gordon describes himself as a positive person who doesn’t spend time thinking about disappointments. However, there is one disappointment that still lingers. “In my second year here, I got the district’s rating to a C, and then in the third year it dropped to a D. That was really disappointing because I knew how hard we had worked,” he recalled. Not only did that disappoint him, he said regarding his concern for CMSD, “Ohio is changing how they determine if a school is good and it is harder. I worry that people will think that just because our schools went down in the rating, that they will give up on us.” Although all this is occurring, he and CMSD are trying to triple the number of kids who get a great education and he wants to shut down every school that can’t do it.

Gordon is so hard-working and his job can be very stressful, so he doesn’t have much personal time. Gordon stated that he would give himself advice to take a vacation to recharge because he needs to model work-life balance for others. A trip to Hawaii with his wife— who helps support him and his big job — would surely benefit; they deserve it! For those who might be interested in his job, he is more than happy to give some advice. Gordon sincerely stated, “Always be honest and transparent, even when it is bad news. Leaders sometimes cover up bad stuff. You don’t know everything and you can’t know everything, so don’t pretend you know everything.” Gordon has personally lived through his own advice for people by being a transparent and honest CEO.

Gordon was an inspirational person, and this is the “end” of his fourth year with CEO as his title. Gordon hopes to stay in Cleveland and finish his career here. “Most people don’t get to stay, or choose to leave. I would like to retire knowing I’ve made a big impact on the children of Cleveland,” he said. Gordon said his final advice for jobs or just life is this: “Don’t worry too much about finding the right job. Spend time doing what you like and do it really well. Don’t keep on applying for the next thing; you’ll be noticed.” Gordon surely is noticed and will be a person that others won’t forget.

By Alura [REDACTED]

# BAC NGUYEN



“Don’t worry about other people and what others think.”

Bac Nguyen is a funny and cool chef that was born and raised in Hanoi, Vietnam. However, he moved to the Cleveland area at the age of 2. As a chef, he owns two restaurants called Bac —named after him—and Ninja City; they both sell Asian-style street food.

Nguyen says that he spends time at both of his restaurants. “I’m at Ninja City during lunch and Bac at dinner,” he added. As far as his job, he does more “administrative, scheduling, [and] managerial stuff.” Although he does a lot of behind the scenes work, Nguyen says he still does cook sometimes and comes up with specials and the recipes. Since there are many different restaurants out there, Bac and Ninja City face competition and new ideas are always changing. “Everything is up in the air when you own a business,” he explained. Nguyen, although always busy, hopes to “start a family with his wife and to take time to open restaurants to maintain quality.”

Things don’t happen without a reason. Nguyen got his inspiration for opening restaurants due to his childhood. Nguyen grew up in the restaurant business because his mom and grandma each had a restaurant. At first, when he was younger, he didn’t want to go into restaurants or business and management. Nguyen then took what his family did and put his “own spin on it.”

Nguyen said Ninja City does not resemble an Asian restaurant. “I wanted it to be simple and fun; that’s something that sounds like a 12 year [old] and is what we were going for,” he joked. You can definitely see the resemblance when it comes to the theme of fun due to the comic wall hangings that are around the restaurant. In contrast, Bac is “more Asian bistro with more classic pan Asian.”

The restaurant is still casual but it’s more of a formal sit down as opposed to the bar café of Ninja City. Ninja City’s food is “more like a street market as oppose to the sit down,” Nguyen described. Although Nguyen comes up with the recipes, he uses his grandma’s recipes and what he learned from his mom and grandma at their restaurants. He has also wanted to go to Japan to get inspiration and to try their food, since it’s so different from Southeast Asian food.

Nguyen’s favorite thing about Cleveland is its accessibility. “Big cities have more to offer, but there is something for everyone and there is a little bit of something for everyone,” Nguyen said. Bac, Ninja City, and the employees at the restaurants including Nguyen not only just work at a restaurant, but they also give back to Cleveland. They all try to participate in as many activities as possible, such as the St. Malachi “Soup for the Soul” event, for which they donate soup. Nguyen’s focus is “running [a] good restaurant and then donate when asked.”

Nguyen has words of wisdom to say about finding your path in life. “In general, figure out what it is that you really like, [and] don’t not like stuff because it isn’t popular. I wish I would have stuck with my interest because I brushed it under the rug. Stick with what you are passionate about and don’t give up on it,” he advised.

By Alura

# MONYKA PRICE



“When I rally people in the community to create these initiatives, I don’t know the young people who will be affected, but it makes me feel good to know that there are young people who are positively benefiting from what the Mayor has created and I’m executing.”

Monyka Price probably cares more about education for Cleveland’s youth than anyone else. After a career as a buyer in the fashion industry, Price thought of changing careers to become an educator or administrator. After conferring with mentors, Price went back to school to earn various education degrees.

Price serves as Chief of Education for the City of Cleveland. In her role, Price serves as a conduit between the Mayor of Cleveland Frank Jackson and the CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Eric Gordon. “Between Mayor Jackson and Eric Gordon, I’m that one-person department who’s the link between the Mayor’s vision and mission and the CEO’s goals with regard to education,” she explained. Price forms programs, administers scholarship and grant programs, and creates initiatives to serve our youth. Since she began her role in 2007, Price has accomplished many things including leading the launch of the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland. The launch joined multiple organizations together, including the City of Cleveland, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and colleges and universities to eradicate academic barriers preventing the educational success of children.

Price attended an all-girls Catholic school named Lumen Cordium. During her time in high school, Price took an interest in science. She thought of becoming a nurse and when she graduated from high school, Price went to Kent State University to pursue a career in nursing. She later realized that nursing wasn’t the career for her. “If I had the opportunity to speak to someone about what being a nurse entailed, I would not have gone there and wasted time and money,” Price said. After this experience, Price began to wonder what she should do next.

Price’s aspirations to be in the education field started around the third grade. “I thought I wanted to become a teacher,” she said. This moment led Price to go back to school to receive multiple education degrees and become an administrator. After her 13-year career as a buyer, Price felt that changing her career was best because of her desire to positively impact lives. “I started thinking about how much I wanted to mentor and inspire,” Price said. After discussing with mentors, Price decided that an administrator was what she wanted to be. “I obtained a master’s degree as a teacher then a master’s degree in administration four years later. Thereafter, I went back to school and earned my superintendent license and certification.”

Price’s prior positions and firsthand experience working with kids help her make many decisions in her current role. She often refers back to her role as an elementary school principal and uses that instinct to inform her decisions as Chief of Education. “Almost daily I think about my experiences at Citizens Academy,” Price said. “I always draw on my experiences as a principal, and it guides me to create that particular initiative or program.” Having once worked with children on a daily basis, this gives Price an extra sense on how the decisions she makes will impact the education of children.

When asked about what motivates her, Price says knowing that she is impacting the lives of students in a positive way. During the time Price was thinking about changing careers, Price wanted a career in which she could impact the most lives possible. “I thought about how I could impact 30 students (as a teacher), or I could impact an entire school as a principal, affecting more lives with that opportunity,” she explained. Price might not know any of the children that will be affected by her decisions, but it makes Price feel good to know that she is impacting the lives of Cleveland’s youth in a positive way.

Price has noticed many changes since she took her role. “In the past, we’ve had pockets of excellence regarding education throughout the city, but it wasn’t enough and it wasn’t systemic,” Price said. As a result, organizations came together to provide quality education for the youth of Cleveland in every area regardless of where the child lives. The Cleveland Plan, a plan signed into law by Governor John Kasich in 2012, provides the City of Cleveland with tools to change the way education looks in Cleveland Metropolitan School District and Cleveland. “We have a great deal of work yet to accomplish, but progress has occurred,” Price said.

Monyka Price’s desire to better the education of Cleveland’s youth is what makes her a major contributor to the City of Cleveland. Her aspirations as a young child to become an educator led her to change careers to positively impact as many lives as possible.

By Derrick [REDACTED]

# MONYKA PRICE



**“I’m motivated by knowing that I’m impacting students in a positive way.”**

Monyka Price is an educator looking to make a change in the lives of young children. Price is the Chief of Education for the Mayor’s office in the City of Cleveland. Her goal is to provide quality education for young people. She attended Kent State University, Ursuline College, and Cleveland State University. “The thought of me positively impacting a young person’s life inspires my work,” Price said. She is a great example of a role model and her accomplishments in life are why she is a Renaissance Clevelander.

Price, a former principal, serves as a liaison between Mayor Frank Jackson’s ideas and goals and CEO Eric Gordon of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD). “Between Mayor Jackson and Eric Gordon, I’m that one-person department who’s the link between the Mayor’s vision and mission and the CEO’s goals with regard to education,” she explained. Prior to education, she worked in the fashion industry and felt the need to switch careers. She was a buyer for 13 years, and she wanted a career where she could make an impactful difference. “I want to guide our young people,” Price said. Price is an inspiration as an educator and person as a whole. She actually went back to school to get her education degrees.

Price is a hard worker. She gets into her office at around 6 a.m. and doesn’t leave until night. Her job is critical for children in Cleveland schools, and Price has been dedicated to her work since she began her role in 2007. She has many programs that she has worked on for young people to succeed in life and get a better education. One of her accomplishments is the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland, which brings together organizations including local colleges and universities to help students reach success.

She works hard daily, not just for her success, but for others. Price said, “I started thinking about how much I mentor and inspire people.” She also creates programs and administers scholarship programs, sticking to her love of children and their futures. “I’m

on different boards all focused on education and different ways to serve our young people in the city,” Price said. She works to influence youth in such a way that encourages them to replicate an optimistic approach in all aspects of life. She works hard to provide good programs so kids can get the education they deserve.

Price is a great influence and gives many things to Cleveland. One thing that she gives to Cleveland is great programs for youth. One program for youth is the Redirecting Our Curfew Kids (R.O.C.K.) program. This program helps increase school attendance, provides intervention, and helps students work more positively in school. “I’m motivated by knowing that I’m impacting students in a positive way,” Price said. There’s no question about whether having been a principal influences her now. “When I’m creating an initiative, I draw on what students’ needs are,” Price said. Her working every day to create and find out ways to help youth is something all of us should do and not just with kids.

You may ask what the next steps are... Well, there are many things you could do right now to be better in the future. Price has great ideas for people interested in being educators. One of her ideas or thoughts is to shadow someone. Specifically, if you want to go into education, shadow someone who is a teacher, principal, and maybe a nontraditional career within education. “It would be ideal if every student in the city of Cleveland upon graduation has a career plan to achieve a particular goal or dream,” Price said. Everyone should take the time to think about what they want to become and try to shadow someone to execute that goal and hopefully, to become more successful.

Monyka Price, some say she’s a leader and a motivator, and they’re right; she’s both of those things in one. From her making positive programs for youth to being a positive person every day, she is a role model and leader in Cleveland. “People say I’m always trying to mother someone. I want what a parent would want for his or her child,” Price said.

*By Mya*

# RONN RICHARD



“Education is the only escape from poverty.”

Ronn Richard is a very nice, hardworking, successful, and focused man. He is also a former CIA agent and the CEO of the world's first community foundation. “I had lots of experiences as a kid that made me want to do this job,” says Richard. Richard explains that he wants to make Cleveland a better place, starting with giving students a better education and helping the poor by donating money.

Richard grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and went to a school where there were poor white and black kids. His father didn't like segregation, so he tried to get white schools to accept black kids. Being that he went to a poor school, he did not get a good education. They spent most of each school day outside. Not having a good education when he was younger made him realize how hard life really is without a quality education, and he said it made him want to better each and every school in Cleveland before he retires. Richard says that when he first came to Cleveland, only 7 percent of high school graduates were going to college. “I learned if you went to a bad school, you shut a lot of doors to your future,” he explained. “All these years later, education is my number one priority.”

Richard finds that getting people to work together and cooperate is the most challenging thing about his job as CEO. He's currently trying to help East Cleveland make decisions for their city. They can't agree on any suggestions made, so it makes it harder for the Cleveland Foundation to help them if they can't come up with anything. “When people cooperate, it's real easy,” said Richard.

Richard has lived in many places, but he says Cleveland is his favorite. He says he likes that you know your neighbors, so you don't just live there; they become your close friends. Richard lived in many places where people barely share “hi's” or “bye's.” He explained, “When I lived in NYC and DC, I never knew my neighbors. It's what I like best about Cleveland.”

The Cleveland Foundation was founded in 1914 during a time of terrible poverty. It was unsanitary, and there were a lot of poor people who needed help. A lawyer named Frederick Harris Goff wanted to persuade the rich to donate money to the poor, so he created the world's first community foundation, the Cleveland Foundation. In a community foundation, they don't rely on one rich person to give them money; they raise money each year from people. “A community foundation raises money locally and gives it out locally,” Richard said.

To become a CEO, he had to learn many things over the years. You have to understand finance, budgeting money, raising money, keeping accounts, and doing taxes. You have to go to school for that type of stuff. It's not easy. Richard believes that your best bet is to hire a person who has suffered, because they understand the world better. “When you've had to deal with tough things in your life, it makes you tougher, gives you more patience,” said Richard.

Richard went through many things to get to where he is now. Everything he's done has contributed to his current success. He enjoys his job, but there are ups as well as downs. Ronn Richard is a very nice, hard-working, successful, focused man.

By Inaya

# RONN RICHARD



**"If you want to have a fun life, valuable life, then help people."**

CIA agent to CEO and president of the Cleveland Foundation, Ronn Richard is a very influential man. The reason he wants to go to work is to help people. His goal is for every kid to have a shot in life, and he won't retire until all schools in Cleveland are excellent. Childhood experiences and opportunities during and after college helped him today to do his job. He worked all three sectors (government, nonprofit, and business) so this gives him a unique perspective on how all three sectors work together. He has been received many awards, but he said, "I don't really care so much about the awards; I just want to get things done."

Richard was born on January 25, 1956, in Washington, D.C. Both of his parents were from Cleveland, but they moved because his father joined the Marines and got stationed in Washington, D.C. Richard grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. His parents didn't like segregation. When he was little, his father told him to always use the restrooms that said, "Blacks only." When it was time for Richard to go to school, his father tried to make the white schools to accept black kids, but it didn't work. By seventh grade, Richard was attending a high-quality junior high school, but he was hopelessly behind in math. He always wanted to become a doctor, but he said, "You can't be a doctor without math. Education is important. The only way better life is to step up and have all those things you want, have an education. Education is the key to success."

Richard's today life was influenced by past opportunities and college life. He had done one year of college in Japan and spoke Japanese very well. He tried to apply for FBI, but they said it would take a whole year to do a background check. He told his teacher about this, and his teacher connected him with one of his friends, David Rockefeller. Mr. Rockefeller's great-grandfather helped start the Cleveland Foundation. Rockefeller offered Richard a job in the Japan Society. His main job was to run programs for businessmen who wanted to do business with Japan. This is how he met his wife in the Foreign Service. This opportunity helps him today being president and CEO of the Cleveland Foundation.

Before Richard was CEO of the Cleveland Foundation, he was a CIA agent. This opportunity was really effective; this was when he worked the government sector. He was there during 9/11, and said it "felt like we let

down America." He saw the plane fly right into the Pentagon. This was nerve wrecking for him. After the CIA instead of being the bad guy, he wanted to be the good guy now. When he found out that the CEO position was open at the Cleveland Foundation, he knew this was an opportunity to help people. His only obstacle as a CEO is getting people to work together. For example, he explained how he hasn't been able to get East Cleveland's city council and mayor to cooperate so the Cleveland Foundation can give them money. Also from him being such a nice person, it was tough for him to fire people. Past events help him become a better CEO every day.

Helping people motivates Richard to work hard every day. Being the CEO he gets to help everyone in Cleveland. "If you want to have a fun life, valuable life, then help people," Richard added. His goal before he retires is to make every school in Cleveland an excellent school. The Cleveland Foundation has about \$2.1 billion in the bank and uses it to fund things like Cleveland's metro parks, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and a lot of things in University circle. Richard and his foundation are an inspiration is us. The future generation to come, he wants to help us to be successful as we can be.

Richard has nominated for many awards. He was nominated as one of the 100 most influential men in Cleveland and the 50 most influential nonprofit executives. "I didn't really care so much. I'm always like, 'So what?' I just want to get things done," Richard explained. Every year he gets nominated for these awards. That proves that he is a really great C.E.O.

Richard has made a big impact in Cleveland. Under his leadership, the Cleveland Foundation has donated to Breakthrough Schools. He helped fund the charter schools in Cleveland. He helped enrich the Cleveland the community by funding things that we enjoy every day. Even though he doesn't care about our Cleveland Cavaliers, he still supports Cleveland in many ways. Thank you, Ronn Richard, for making Cleveland a better place every day.

*By Mahogany*



# RONN RICHARD



“People who had difficult experiences in life have a real advantage.”

Are you interested in becoming a CEO? Do you like the sound of dealing with finances, doing taxes, raising money, etc.? Ronn Richard is the CEO of the Cleveland Foundation. He has been their CEO for 12 years, and he was listed as one of the 100 most powerful men in Cleveland. In the Nonprofit Times magazine, he was one of the 50 most influential people. However, Richard is more concerned with his work than the awards he has earned for it. “I don’t really care about awards and such. They always list me as one of the 100 most powerful men in Cleveland, but I’m always like, ‘So what? Who cares?’ I just want to get things done,” Richard said. Richard is a very inspirational man because he isn’t a selfish person; he would rather do his job than be obsessed about awards and such.

Richard had plenty of experiences as a young child that led him to be a successful CEO. He was born January 25, 1956, and grew up in Washington, D.C. His parents were orphans from Cleveland, and they had five kids by the time they were 23 years old. He grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. His father was against segregation, and he remembers as a child that his father warned him, “Don’t you ever, ever, ever drink from the whites-only fountain. You drink from the colored fountain.” Being so young, he didn’t understand why his father was yelling at him, but through the years, he began to understand why. He went to a school with kids who were poor whites and blacks. His father was determined to get white schools to accept black kids. Later, Richard spent one year of college in Japan and also learned how to speak Japanese. One of Richard’s professors, David Rockefeller, offered him a job at the Japan Society in New York. According to the Cleveland Foundation website, from 1983 to 1988, Richard was a career U.S Foreign Service officer and a desk officer for North Korean, Greek and Turkish affairs. These experiences prepared him for the transition of becoming a CEO.

Before he was a CEO for the Cleveland Foundation, Richard also worked in management at Panasonic for 13 years. After leaving Panasonic, Richard became the managing director and chief operating officer of In-Q-Tel, the CIA’s venture capital fund. He helped make sure the technology was up to date and helped prevent terrorist attacks in the U.S. During this time, he witnessed a tragedy that the world may never forget. He was working in Washington, D.C., when he saw a plane fly into the Pentagon on 9/11/2001. At first he didn’t know what was happening; he remembered seeing people in their seats on the plane. He went to the CIA headquarters to see if they knew what was happening, and everyone there was afraid that a plane was going to attack them so they evacuated the entire building. “All these people dedicated to helping America, and they felt like we let America down,” Richard recalled. Within a week the CIA identified the people responsible for this terrible thing, and planned the bombing of Tora Bora. He said, “I’ll never forget those two years of my life; really stressful and crazy.”

Richard’s organization, the Cleveland Foundation, has helped Cleveland in many ways. The Cleveland Foundation was founded in 1914 by Frederick Harris Goff, who was the lawyer of John D. Rockefeller. There was horrible poverty in Cleveland in 1914. The people in Cleveland needed to escape poverty, and they needed a special person to help them. Goff wanted to convince the rich to give money to the poor. He had plans to go to New York because New York had money, but John Rockefeller convinced him to stay in Cleveland because Cleveland needed him more. Without the Cleveland Foundation, Cleveland wouldn’t have some of the things that are beneficial in Cleveland such as the Metro Parks, Tri-C theatres, housing for low-income families, etc. “Each year the Lake-Geauga fund awards more than \$1 million in grants to nonprofit organizations in Lake County and Geauga County, Ohio,” according to the Cleveland Foundation website.

Richard had many obstacles he had to overcome as a CEO, but without those obstacles he couldn’t learn from them. He had to learn how to manage people in order to find the right person for the job. He had to learn how to deal with financial issues such as budgeting money. “I think that people who’ve had difficult experiences in life have a real advantage,” Richard said. “When you’ve had to deal with tough things in your life, it makes you tougher, gives you more patience.”

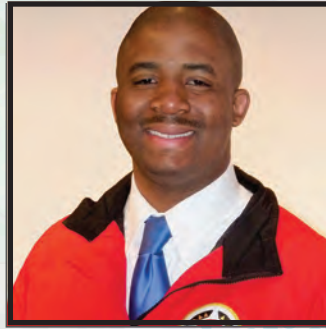
When Richard isn’t battling work, he loves to spend time with his wife and kids. He also enjoys reading and fishing. He and his wife have two children together: a son, Nicholas, and a daughter, Susanna. Their son likes to play sports, but Richard is not really interested in sports. “To be honest, I know less about sports than any other being you’ve ever met in your life,” Richard said. He believes that professional athletes are not good role models because, for example, Cleveland puts so much money on sports and so little on education.

Have you ever dreamed of being a CEO? Then Richard has advice for you. You have to have enough business background and an education in business. “The more education you have, the more money and choices you can make,” Richard said. “Education, education, education.”

Ronn Richard is an inspiring and powerful man who went through a lot and accomplished so much over the years he has been a CEO of the Cleveland Foundation. “The only way to get a better step up and have all those things you want is to have an education,” Richard said. What he means is if you want to have a good job and make money, you have to have an education in order to get there. “I don’t want to retire until I know every school is an excellent school,” Richard said. Richard cares about his job and helping people in the Cleveland community and students who attend Cleveland schools.

By Marissa [REDACTED]

# PHIL ROBINSON



**“We believe every child can learn, no matter who you are.”**

Phil Robinson, City Year’s vice president and executive director, helps the children of Cleveland. He does all that he can to teach the children and the new generation of leaders. He works hard and does what needs to be done to get where he wants to be. He does this because he loves the city of Cleveland with its rich history and people. City Year focuses on working with young people. They have young volunteers give a year of service to help student stay on track so they can graduate from school. “It’s a very rewarding feeling to wake up and work on something that you care about,” Robinson said. City Year’s motto is “The only thing worse than kids giving up on school, is if we give up on them.”

Robinson is 34 years old. He is married and has a 10-month-old daughter named Olivia. He was born and raised in Cleveland at 93rd and Union. He spent most of his childhood time in Bedford Heights. He lived in Cleveland until he was 18 years old. Robinson is a very intelligent man. He has worked hard to get to where he is now. During Robinson’s eight years of college, he went to George Washington University (GWU). In his sophomore and junior years he served as the president of the Black Student Union of campus then for the entire student body. Because of that, he is in the GWU Hall of Fame. “It’s a great place to have fun and find yourself when you are growing up,” Robinson recalled. Then he came back after eight years of college and then went to college in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve University for his master’s in business administration. He also came back to Cleveland because he thought it was time to start a family.

At City Year, Robinson is in charge of running the overall organization. He manages budgets and his staff. “We have 2.5 million dollar budget and mix of about 65 staff and volunteers that I am in charge of,” Robinson said. He is the type of person who goes out and helps with fundraisers for the schools that he works with. Robinson, in addition to his board of directors, spends a lot time on strategic planning, deciding the future of the organization, and getting support so they can do the work that they need to do. Also, he serves as the external champion, giving speeches about the organization and meeting folks to talk about City Year’s work. At East Technical High School, they have increased the graduation rate from 39 percent to 72 percent in less than five years. That will be the highest graduation rate in the district for a general high school.

Robinson was inspired to work in education because of his experience tutoring a boy in Cleveland. The boy was in seventh grade, but reading at a fifth-grade level. They started out reading Cinderella but the boy was not interested until they found a Sports Illustrated magazine with LeBron James on the cover. At the end of the tutoring session, Robinson realized he wanted to do more. “I went home and talked to my wife and quit my job,” he said. “I believe your zip code should not dictate your destiny. At City Year, Robinson and his team try to fill gaps between what cannot be provided and what students need. He does this when school aren’t able to help students with certain types of issues.

Robinson started working on Capitol Hill for a United States senator after college. “I did that because when I was in college that was during 9/11, and that really changed my whole outlook,” he said. He was studying finance and going into business, but he decided that instead of going to Wall Street, he wanted to give back, so he worked for U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein. He did this for several years and decided to work in the private sector in marketing and public relations. “I worked for a lot of large clients doing marketing and advertising,” he said. “When you see people interview on the news and giving speeches they come to us to get training and do research.”

Robinson helps a lot of children in Cleveland, Ohio. “We believe every child can learn no matter who you are,” he said. Children face different obstacles every day. Robinson tries to help with that. They are also giving future leaders to give a year of service to help the next generation of leaders. “It’s a really great way of helping others and it’s that concept of paying it forward.” Robinson says. “That’s what our work allows people to do.”

Robinson tries his best to help the children of Cleveland and works hard to do it. Robinson is looking forward to the future of Cleveland and his life. “I hope I continue to work with great people on things that I love, and I hope that whatever I do continue to make a difference in the communities that I work in and serve,” he said. He loves the city of Cleveland. He is a native of Cleveland and wants to be part of the group that helps continue to improve the city and write its next chapter.

By Autumn 

# PHIL ROBINSON



“I love the city of Cleveland. I’m a native to Cleveland and I want to be a part of the group that helps continue to improve the city and write its next chapter.”

Phil Robinson is a very successful and determined man who works with youth volunteers to make their futures brighter and to show them that sometimes you have to fail to succeed. Born and raised on 93rd and Union, Robinson lived in Cleveland until he was 18 years old. He then went to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and lived there for 10 years. In college for his sophomore year and junior year, he served as the president of the black student union on campus. His senior year he was student body president for the entire school. Because of that, he was inducted into the school hall of fame. He went to Case Western Reserve University for his master’s in business administration. When he came back to Cleveland in 2007, he was still working in marketing and started tutoring.

During college, Robinson experienced 9/11. That changed his whole outlook on the world itself. At the time he was studying finance and preparing to enter the world of business, but instead decided to go to Wall Street, he wanted to do public service. “I wanted to give back, so I worked for U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein,” he said. A few years later, Robinson switched to the private sector. He worked for a lot of large clients doing marketing and advertising. “When you see people interviewed on the news and giving speeches, they come to us to get training and to do research,” Robinson explained.

Now Robinson gets the privilege and opportunity to do what he loves and to help kids succeed and thrive. “Every child can learn and every child can succeed if they have support to do so,” he said. City Year focuses on working with youth. City Year is a productive program that involves youth volunteering to better their education and to strengthen their will to help others. “We have young volunteers who give a year of service to help kids stay

on track so they graduate to be successful,” Robinson added. In City Year schools, they have increased the graduation rate from 39 percent to 72 percent in less than five years. That will be the highest graduation rate in the district for a general high school. City year believes that every child has the opportunity to succeed. “A lot of children face different obstacles every day. Sometimes schools aren’t able to help students with those types of issues. That’s where we come in,” Robinson described.

The City Year budget has increased by 1.5 million dollars in four years because of successful fundraising. For a lot of business people, Robinson has given speeches about City Year in just four minutes. “That was a really interesting experience. It gave me the chance to meet a lot of CEOs and elected officials,” he recalled. City Year fills that gap between what cannot be provided and what students need, and it also helps the volunteers get leadership experience. “We’re getting future leaders to give a year of service to help the next generation of leaders who are students,” Robinson said. He hopes to continue to work with great people on things that he loves. “I hope that whatever I do continue to make a difference in the communities that I work in and serve. I love the city of Cleveland. I’m a native to Cleveland and I want to be a part of the group that helps continue to improve the city and write its next chapter.”

Robinson’s hard work and dedication has helped children to succeed not only academically, but emotionally because it makes them feel better about themselves and what they can accomplish in life as an individual and their level of confidence in themselves.

By Octavia

# MERAN ROGERS



**“It’s really scary to share a dream with someone because people will not take you seriously.”**

Meran Rogers has traveled the world, and now she wants to bring a piece of that experience to children in Cleveland. Rogers is the founding director of Global Ambassadors Language Academy. She grew up speaking three different languages: English, Chinese, and Taiwanese. She taught young students for a year in Taiwan, and she also went to east Africa and volunteered for two months with an agency that helped people with HIV/AIDS. Now she is back in Cleveland. “I love Cleveland’s quirkiness. I love the mom and pop shops,” she said. “Here every house looks different. There are cute neighborhoods. That’s not something you can make. We’re a big mix of people of all kinds of colors and nationalities and interests.”

Rogers says that her school, GALA, is a charter school like Citizens Leadership Academy. The school is for kindergarten through eighth grade. The children who go to her school mainly learn Mandarin and Spanish, and through an immersion program, they take their other classes in those languages. This is exciting for her because it’s the first in this region. You consistently are speaking that language. Most schools have a language class separately, but this helps students to become bilingual and truly speak more than one language.

Rogers believes that her childhood is to blame for planting the idea of having a language immersion school. She states that her childhood was quirky. Her mother spoke Polish, and her father spoke Chinese and Taiwanese. They all made the effort to speak one language, English. This interaction made things awkward for her, but it later caused an idea to arise that will help Cleveland students.

Rogers didn’t have any grown-ups in her life to give her direction. If she did, they could’ve helped her to think about her future. Rogers’s mom didn’t finish high school and she was an immigrant from Poland. “She couldn’t really help me think about what kind of job to do,” Rogers recalled. “She just wanted to pay the bills.” When Rogers was around 13 years old, her dad left. Most of her brothers and sisters lived in Taiwan, so she could not look to them for help or inspiration for her future.

For GALA, Rogers got funding from many different sources that will help support her idea. Rogers has yet still raised money herself. She gives

advice that you cannot do anything without money, and if your idea is really good enough, it will attract a lot of meetings to give money. There is constant rewriting of her plan. She says to start a school you have to have a very detailed plan and layout. Also the academics and operations must be detailed too.

Rogers has been working GALA for over three years, and now the school is set to open in August 2016. She says that her progress is slow, but still a lot of progress. “Every day is progress. No matter how little the progress it’s still progress,” Rogers described.

Rogers feels that GALA will help in other ways around Cleveland. She believes when a new school comes to Cleveland, everything gets better. Rogers thinks that it is important if you’re learning another language because it means you are more accepting of those who are different. Also if you are learning a new culture automatically which means you are embracing other cultures. Right now in Cleveland, “parents that want this kind of education for their child don’t have anywhere to go,” Rogers explained. “Some parents are so passionate about this type of education that they do move.”

Rogers hopes her school will have a successful future and be able to grow. “Some people never realize what their dream is, and I actually got to do it. I feel very lucky,” she said. Eventually she states that they will add more languages such as Portuguese and Arabic. The school will start with one building. “The other dream for the school is to add a high school or a partner with a high school with the same idea,” Rogers added. “It’s really scary to share a dream with someone with people because they may not take you seriously.

Cleveland schools are different compared to other schools around the world. “Most of the students in the world grow up speaking at least two languages,” Rogers said. She has the belief that knowing another language is an important part of education. “Growing up bilingual makes you smarter,” she explained. Rogers found the right people and shared my idea and they made the commitment to help with their time money, ideas and connections. Now her dream is one step closer to reality.

By Diajae [redacted]

# MERAN ROGERS



**“When you bring a really great school to Cleveland, everything gets better.”**

Imagine going to a school and hearing students speaking only Mandarin or Spanish. You may think you have stepped into a foreign country, when you are actually still in Cleveland. That school is GALA, or Global Ambassadors Language Academy, and its founding director is Meran Rogers. Rogers is a 31-year-old young lady who was born in Chicago, and moved to Cleveland, Ohio, when she was three. She shows a noticeably large interest in helping other people. She and her husband have two children, a four-year-old boy and a 19-month-old daughter. Her husband works as a civic engagement director at Cleveland State University. Currently, Rogers is working hard to get sponsors and gain money for her dream of GALA, so it can become a reality.

Rogers's international travel inspired GALA. First, after college, she lived in Taiwan for a year teaching third-graders. She enjoyed her job; she loved teaching very much but had to make a decision. “I almost stayed for another year,” she said. Instead, Rogers moved on to Kenya and Uganda, where she worked at an agency that helped people battling HIV/AIDS. “It’s hard if you’re sick because you can’t get to a hospital,” she explained. Rogers rode around in a boat with medicine helping sick people. She decided to make their lives easier for them; she was there for people she didn’t even know.

When Rogers was younger, she began to grow certain “seeds” in her life that led to her vision for GALA. Her childhood helped because her mother only spoke Polish, and her father spoke Chinese and Taiwanese. It was difficult for her as a child because then she wanted to be like every other child in America, which meant speaking one language. Now she wants children to have the same opportunity as her, but she ended up forgetting Polish and Chinese so now she just speaks one language, English. Rogers wants for her children to learn more than one language also. As a child, she didn’t have a lot of adults in her life because her mom worked hard all day trying to pay the bills by cooking, cleaning, and providing daycare. Her father left when she was very young, and Rogers had to learn to be independent at a young age. “Most of my brothers and sisters live in Taiwan, so I couldn’t talk to them either,” she said.

As a young girl, Rogers was very different, and at the time, she did not want stand out. In school, the one thing she knew she had to do was get good grades. If you try very hard, you will reach your goals. “If you’re not good at school, you still have to try because all of your options revolve around that,” she said. Rogers pushed herself to make good decisions for her own benefit. Rogers knew the significance of school and her education because she stayed focused on the future. In addition to school, Rogers believes people can learn a lot by traveling. “I think everyone should travel!” she advised. “You have to go out of the country at least twice. Don’t wait.” She has a deep passion for traveling outside of the country, and now she is bringing a piece of that to Cleveland through her school.

At GALA, Rogers started out with seven people on her board. “Their job is to be my boss and make sure I’m doing a good job,” Rogers explained. Now she has 15 people on her board. That is an amazing difference, from seven to 15. Rogers believes that Cleveland needs a language immersion school like GALA, and it’ll be beneficial to the city. “When you bring a really great school to Cleveland, everything gets better,” she said. She believes in her dream that GALA will be an awesome school. Rogers has been working on GALA for three years, maybe a bit more than that, and now the school will be open in August 2016. She took her time on this project and said it was a slow process but a good one.

Rogers really does strongly believe in this school, and this huge dream that is becoming reality. “I think my work is making a difference because until GALA opens, parents that want this kind of education for their child don’t have anywhere to go,” Rogers explained. She says that this will really change education for children around Cleveland. Rogers has a lot of people on her side, but it hasn’t always been like that. For instance, Rogers had a very close friend who laughed when she shared the idea of GALA, but she just dusted it off and persevered through it even though it may have hurt her feelings. Rogers is a strong woman for that kind of response, especially from a close friend. Now, she’s opening the school next year; it’s not a dream, it’s a real project.

Everyone outside of America that is a student grows up learning at least two languages; it’s normal for them. Rogers thinks that it will benefit students as they grow older. “When you are looking for a job or want an opportunity, you are competing with billions of people in the world who can speak two languages,” she explained. Also, if you grow up being bilingual, you’re more likely to score much higher on tests. “Lastly speaking another language will help you visit another country,” she said. You’d automatically have an advantage if you’re bilingual. Catch up, America!

Meran Rogers started out having a complicated life as a young child. Any adolescent would want to be like everyone else, but as you grow older, you learn to love being different. Being different is always an advantage, so embrace it like Rogers did. She’s a very inspirational woman; she pushed through challenges and now she is living her dream. What do your dreams mean to you? Are you willing to put in the effort? Are you ready for the ? Rogers is an outstanding example of how to make this possible.

*By Taylor*

# TOM SCHORGL



“There is nothing you can’t do without hard work.”

Thomas B. Schorgl has loved art since he was five years old, and now he has a bachelor’s degree and two master’s degrees all in art. Schorgl is now president and CEO of the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture. He is inspired by his wife and children, plus a couple of artist who inspires him at work. “They work extremely hard, even though they are not known to anybody,” Schorgl said.

At CPAC, Schorgl is responsible for achieving the mission of the organization of unifying, strengthening, and connecting arts in Cuyahoga County. Schorgl’s role at CPAC is to manage staff of seven people and report to 15 people on the board of trustees. “My responsibility is to lead, but also to let other people lead when it comes to particular issues,” he said. For example, if there is an issue around an artist’s work, there is a director who helps solve that. They also have a research director, and it’s a shared process on what they decide, but ultimately it’s up to Schorgl. “I explain to the team what’s within our skill set of capacity,” he added. “If anything goes wrong, I am the person they hold accountable. If anything goes right, it’s because of my awesome staff.”

Schorgl loves his job but said if he could have another job, it would probably be as a printmaker. “That is what I got my Masters of Fine Arts in,” Schorgl said. Once a year he does a wood engraving, and for the past 18 years he done a wood engraving of a bridge in Cleveland, then he inks the top and presses the block and prints an image of this. Also, he does this a lot during Thanksgiving.

Schorgl explained how he first got interested in the arts when he was 5 years old. He said he went into the store with his mother and he signed up for a contest to draw Santa Claus. A few weeks passed and he won, so that’s what started his passion that later led to his career. Schorgl studied for his undergraduate degree in four years. He immediately jumped into master’s classes for 1.5 years. Then he was awarded a master’s degree in fine arts from Miami of Ohio. That is also where he met his wife.

Before CPAC, Schorgl was president of Culture Works in Dayton, Ohio, from January 1994 to June 1997. He said that the most exciting thing about coming to Culture Works was merging two organizations. Prior to Culture Works, Schorgl was a museum curator then director.

Schorgl is an inspiration to people because he followed his dream and succeeded at it. So whatever you believe in, take it and go as far as you can with it just like Schorgl.

*By Erielle*

# TOM SCHORGL



“My responsibility is to lead, but also to let other people lead when it comes to particular issues.”

Tom Schorgl is the president and CEO of CPAC (Community and Partnership for Arts and Culture). Schorgl has a big responsibility for his organization. He has to make sure the organization is meeting its mission and that nothing goes wrong. Overall, this was what Schorgl wanted to do and his job is important and also helpful.

Tom Schorgl is interested in arts; it started when he was a little boy. Schorgl first became interested in art when he was five. Schorgl stated, “I went to the grocery store with my mother, and they had a contest to draw Santa Claus. It took me a couple of years; it triggered the idea that if I could do something I like, draw or paint, then that’s something I’d like to do.” When Schorgl went to school, he focused on visual arts. He then found it boring even though he had the technical skills. He was able to receive his degrees for going to school and working hard. Schorgl earned an undergraduate’s degree in four years. Then he immediately got his master’s in fine arts in one and a half year. Since he had these degrees he is now very successful and was able to get a job where he is able to take responsibility and is a good leader to his staff. He worked as a curator and then director of an art museum before coming to Cleveland to develop this service organization.

Schorgl has a very big responsibility for his job. He manages a staff of seven and he reports to 15 people on his board of trustees. His responsibility is to make sure his organization is meeting its mission, which is to unify, strengthen, and connect arts to Cuyahoga County. “If anything goes wrong, I’m the person they hold responsible. If anything goes right it’s because of my awesome staff,” he explained. This responsibility is very serious and big to handle.

Schorgl has many people in his life that were an inspiration to him, including his wife and children. He also stated that there were a couple of artists and public sector speakers. “There are a couple of artists who inspire me and work extremely hard, even though they’re not known to anybody. There are also public sector speakers that inspire me (Tim Hagan).” This is very helpful to him because he has many people supportive to him.

Schorgl feels good about his responsibilities. “My responsibility is to lead but also to let other people lead when it comes to particular issues. If there’s an issue around our artists work and issues there, then we have a director for artist work who helps solve that,” he explained. He has to explain to the team what is within their skill set and capacity but mostly it is up to him.

There were exciting things happening at CPAC. There was no CPAC before Schorgl came there. Schorgl had an interview with two people, one from the Cleveland Foundation and the other from Gund Foundation, and they had high expectations for him. “The last interview, they said, ‘Ok ,you’re our guy. We expect you to connect arts and culture with other sectors, and at the end of the three years, if there’s no reason for CPAC to continue, we’ll give you an exit package.” This was what Schorgl wanted to do, and he has been successful because CPAC is now in its 18th year.

Schorgl has helped many people through his organization and hard work. Schorgl is a good president of CPAC and he has a good staff who help him. All of the people who have supported and have inspired Schorg were very helpful because now he is helping other people in our community.

By Stefani [redacted]





# HANNAH BELSITO



“When I started working there, downtown was on the upswing and I was really excited about the growth and Renaissance happening and being a part of that.”

Hannah Belsito loves the city of Cleveland and its people. The people in Cleveland were very helpful and kind when she was finishing college and looking for a job. Belsito has been all over Ohio and said Cleveland is unique. “We take that for granted, but there are so many people in the community who want to help you succeed and are doing what they can to help and that’s not common, but it’s how the people here are,” she explained. For a living, Belsito welcomes people on vacation here in Cleveland and helps them realize what a special place it is.

Belsito is the vice president of destination development and community affairs at Destination Cleveland. Belsito’s firm tries to get visitors come to Cleveland. The people Belsito works with handle the marketing. They have advertisements on the radio outside of Cleveland and they talk with meeting planners to try to get conventions in Cleveland. Belsito said her role is to make sure visitors have a good experience once they get to Cleveland. Belsito said, “We have museums, three sports, good restaurants and well-known chefs, and so many wonderful parks – those are some of the things we promote.”

Belsito went to college at John Carroll University where she studied communications and English. While she was earning her diploma, she ended up following opportunities to do internships and work places for a short time. One of Belsito’s internships was in downtown Cleveland, and it was then that she fell in love with the area. “When I started working there, it was on the upswing and I was really excited about the growth and Renaissance happening and being a part of that,” Belsito explained. When she graduated, she got involved in young professional organizations and helped form one called Engage! Cleveland to bring together all of the young professionals groups. This is important to Belsito because she is surrounded by passionate people. She said, “I figured out

five year ago that I was really passionate about connecting people to their passion and also connecting people to their community.” Belsito also has a master’s degree in urban planning from Cleveland State University.

Belsito was born in a small town Salem, Ohio, near Youngstown. As a kid, she was shy. Belsito said, “I hid behind my mom in stores.” Belsito has now lived in Cleveland for 15 years, and she chose her career to help Cleveland. One of her current projects is a wayfinding initiative to put up signs and maps to help visitors find their way around. They have four test signs in the ground and plan to install 50-60 more throughout downtown this year. Another big project is the CLE Travelbackers program, through which they have trained 1,500 staff to represent Cleveland. The campaign targets the travel and tourism industry including waitresses, taxicab drivers, hotel workers and more. Belsito and Destination Cleveland take them to restaurants and games to educate them on what is going on in Cleveland. They see about 50 CLE Travelbackers at each event. “That shows them the value of how to treat visitors. That way, when visitors come, everyone they interact with is friendly, kind, and knowledgeable,” she said. “Our work is never going to end because visitors keep coming.”

Belsito is passionate about Cleveland and making Cleveland a better place through all of the projects at Destination Cleveland. Her goals are to make Cleveland better city and place for all who visit so the city will be in an upswing and not a decline. Belsito said, “You learn something new about your self and career and city every day. When I was your age, I never thought I would be working for a convention and visitors bureau but I really enjoy it. I know I want to be helping Cleveland, helping my city grow and improve.”

By Michael [redacted]

# HANNAH BELSITO



“There are so many people in the community who want to help you succeed and are doing what they can to help and that’s not common, but it’s how the people here are.”

Her name is Hannah Belsito. Her career is great because it impacts so many people. When visitors come to Cleveland, Belsito makes sure they have a good time so they want to come back.

Belsito is 34 years old. She was born in a small town called Salem, Ohio. When she was younger, she was shy but now is outgoing. Belsito said she would tell herself not to be scared when she was younger. “Every time you’re scared, that’s when you’re learning. Embrace fear,” she added. Belsito has lived in Cleveland for 15 years. She has a two-year-old son named Edison.

When Belsito was going to school at John Carroll University, she was involved in a lot of internships and opportunities. Belsito said, “I really wanted to improve downtown Cleveland.” That’s exactly what she is doing now with her work for the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau at Destination Cleveland. Belsito also earned a master’s degree in urban planning at Cleveland State University.

Belsito’s title is Vice President of Destination Development and Community Affairs. Their goal is to get people to visit and make their visit positive. “We have people I work with doing marketing to get them to come, and I make sure they have a good experience when they get here,” Belsito said. She and her team also talk to meeting planners so they will book their meetings or conventions in Cleveland. This brings a big group of people to Cleveland all at one time, and they stay in our hotels and eat at our restaurants. Belsito and her team are also working on something called a way-finding project, putting up signs and maps to help visitors find their way around. They plan to have 50-60 signs up in Cleveland

by the end of the year. Belsito said, “Our work is never going to end because visitors keep coming.”

When asked about how she decided on her career path, Belsito said, “There are so many careers out there that you don’t even know exist yet.” She added, “I think it’s common that people try to have us decide lawyer, doctor, and teacher (when we are young).” Speaking specifically about her current job, Belsito said, “It’s something I never would have thought I wanted to be.” Her advice to students is to “follow your passions and figure out how you get involved in those and you will find careers you love.” For Belsito, her passion is Cleveland. “I love so many things about Cleveland,” she said of her current home. “We have museums, three sports, good restaurants and well-known chefs, and so many wonderful parks.” She continued, “The people of Cleveland are so helpful and kind and genuine, particularly when I was in college and trying to find a job, they are so willing to meet with you. They will take the time here and in a lot of other cities that wouldn’t happen.”

Hannah Belsito is important to Cleveland because when visitors come to Cleveland she makes sure they have a good time so they’ll want to come back. Three years ago, only 34 percent of Clevelanders would recommend the city as a vacation for friends and family, but thanks to efforts like Belsito’s, that has increased by 20 percent. She said, “We have to work really hard to make sure every single visitor feels welcomed and has a good experience.”

By Niya

# GEOFF HARDMAN



“I don’t consider it a success just yet, but I’m definitely proud of what we built, the teams we’ve built and the people we’ve brought together.”

Geoff Hardman is the president of Spark Base (his brother Doug is CEO. Hardman is also co-owner of Cleveland Bagel Co. His dad and grandfather were photographers, and his parents also worked for themselves showing dogs. Hardman grew up in Kinsman, Ohio, in the county of Warren, Ohio. He is now 38 years old and has an incredible job where he gets to bring his dog, a French bulldog named Milton.

Hardman moved to Boston when he was 18. Hardman dropped out of college, which he doesn’t recommend, and took a one-way ticket to Boston. Hardman worked in retail with cell phones. He ended up managing the store and moved on to work for AT&T Wireless. The company kept giving Hardman new stores and he would open them up and build their teams. Hardman moved back to Cleveland after eight years in Boston because his brother was working for a company that had an open position that fit Hardman well. The brothers then started their own business, Spark Base. “Doug and I took the chance of going out on our own and we are still surviving,” Hardman said. Spark Base manages the production, design, and use of loyalty and gift cards for merchants across the country and world.

What Hardman is doing supports Cleveland because he provides technology and jobs. He loves how Cleveland the people in Cleveland are nice to him, show him respect, and introduce him to new things. However, there was one thing missing in Cleveland. He said there needs to be a bagel shop in Cleveland, and Hardman did something about that. Last year, Hardman and his neighbor started talking about making bagels. “It’s a much longer process

than most bread. We feel that’s why there aren’t many bagel companies,” Hardman described. The process starts with a sponge of flour, water, and yeast. they let that sit for three hours and do its chemical reaction. Then, they mix it in an 80-quart mixer and roll it out on a tray that stays in the refrigerator for 8-24 hours. Hardman wakes up at 3:30 or 4 in the morning to start his day on weekend making bagels.

Cleveland Bagel Co. makes six or seven different types of bagels. “We try to keep it traditional. We get more creative with the schmears,” he added. They have 40 different flavors of cream cheese that they have experimented with. Hardman started experimenting with the recipe, which took a few months. Hardman said looking back, his first bagels were terrible but people liked them. “It’s constant revision of the recipe,” he explained. Hardman is good for Cleveland because he, his brother, and his neighbor are working together.

In the future, Hardman hopes to work full time at Cleveland Bagel Co. He would like for Spark Base to grow large enough that the company would be acquired by another company. He is more interested in bagels, and so are the people he meets. “When I talk to my friends about this company that is much larger, eyes glaze over. When I talk about bagels, everyone wants talk about it,” he said.

By Jordyn

# GEOFF HARDMAN



“I’d always said there wasn’t a good bagel place in downtown Cleveland. If we had a morning meeting, someone would bring bagels in from the suburbs.”

Last summer, Geoff Hardman’s neighbor was laid off from his job of 20 years. His off-hand comment about starting a bagel company turned into a reality for Hardman and his neighbor. Fast-forward and they are now co-owners of the Cleveland Bagel Co.

Hardman is also the co-owner of Sparkbase, which manufactures gift cards and store loyalty cards and manages the technology to track their use. He is the president of Sparkbase, and his brother Doug is CEO. Sparkbase has gotten bigger over time. When they started out in 2009, they had four employees and 3,000 square feet. Now they have 26 employees and 10,000 square feet of office space. “I don’t consider it success just yet, but I’m definitely proud of what we built, the team we’ve built, and the people we’ve brought together,” Hardman reflected.

Starting two of your own companies may seem like a big risk, but Hardman has always been a risk-taker. When he was 18, he dropped out of college and bought a one-way ticket to Boston. There, his success began. He worked in cell-phone retail and ended up managing the whole store. Eventually he was the youngest manager in the North to have multiple stores. He moved back to his hometown and now is part of Cleveland’s emerging food scene.

Hardman said making bagels requires constant revision of the recipes and that he is no stranger to hard work because of how he grew up. His dad and grandfather were photographers, so they ran their own business, Hardman Photography. His parents also bred and showed dogs, so at one time his family had 8 of them. “My parents worked for themselves. I was surrounded by that aspect,” Hardman explained. In addition to Doug, he also has a half-sister, four stepsisters, and two stepbrothers.

Working at both Cleveland Bagel Co. and Sparkbase keeps Hardman very busy. “Trying to balance that with friends and family can be difficult, but I am definitely happy,” he said. Hardman recommends that others take more chances like he did starting two of his own companies. “As you grow older, you realize in the grand scheme of things that nothing is really going to hurt you, and if it does, over time you are going to recover from it, so it’s worth the endeavor,” he explained.

By Tony

## SPARKBASE’S MISSION:

To help businesses recognize and reward loyal customers wherever and whenever they interact with their brand.

Source: [sparkbase.com](http://sparkbase.com)



# NATE MCDONALD



“One of our core values is respect for individuality and appreciation for diversity in all of its forms.”

Nate McDonald grew up on a farm in Chardon, Ohio, to which his parents moved when he was one year old. He moved to the East side of Cleveland not long ago and said of his current home, “Cleveland has just enough of everything and not too much of anything.”

When McDonald was young, his mom told him about public defenders and what they do. He thought that was fascinating. From that time, into college, McDonald kept that idea in mind, and worked hard to achieve such a position for himself. McDonald explained that the U.S. Constitution mentions lawyers just once, saying anyone with a crime has the Constitutional right to a lawyer. “I see it as a patriotic service that people can provide. It’s different from other kids of service like being in the military or being a politician,” he added.

McDonald went to Kenyon college and graduated in 1998. However, because McDonald didn’t want to go straight into law school, he decided to work for a little bit to clear his head before continuing his education. He earned a job as a teacher’s aide in a Montessori school. “I didn’t know much about Montessori and how it was different from other styles and approaches to education,” McDonald said. He learned a lot through his teaching experience working with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. “If you put children in an environment that is a good place for them to learn, they will automatically do that because it’s their natural tendency to want to learn,” McDonald described. “I saw that happening in an elementary classroom, and I was so impressed.” McDonald worked in business litigation, assisting when two companies had a dispute, but he returned to education after realizing it was his priority.


McDonald is now the principal of Montessori High School (MHS) in Cleveland. He is passionate about what he does. McDonald feels a sense of purpose upon waking each morning and knowing he’ll get to work with kids all day. McDonald views education as one of the most important aspects of our culture,

having said, “If we don’t have a solid education for everybody, were not going to succeed as a society.”

McDonald’s career impacts MHS’s 100 students every day. The sense of purpose that drove him to become a public defender now drives him to be standout educator. “Everyone grows, but you tend to always remain yourself,” said McDonald. His school has created a community. They are making a contribution through their own work and by being who they are. When asked about his school’s primary beliefs, McDonald said, “One of our core values is respect for individuality and appreciation for diversity in all of its forms.” McDonald manages and supervises the school from the business aspects to the educational aspects. MHS is unique because a quarter of the students there are boarding students. Also, MHS students can take advantage of the museums and gardens that their University Circle location has to offer. “We don’t even think about them as field trips,” McDonald explained. “We’re in University Circle because we think of that as part of our school.”

McDonald hopes in the future that Montessori-style education is available for children from the beginning of their educational careers. He wishes children from all over the country could go to public Montessori schools. He has been working with Stonebrook, a Montessori elementary school in Cleveland, to help them move in that direction. McDonald said, “We’re trying to find ways to prove that education can be done differently. If we succeed and we can show other people that this works well, then our approach can be used all over the place for all kinds of different people regardless of their access to money.”

Nate McDonald is making a difference within his community. He cares about education. Even though he is a principal, he still interacts with all of the students. He hopes to have Montessori schools all over for kids from the age of 18 months to 18 years.

By Tyler 

# NATE MCDONALD



"If people are well educated to become the best version of themselves and to follow their own interests and feel good about who they are, they will become really good citizens with a tremendous amount to contribute to the world."

Nate McDonald, 39, was born in Chardon, Ohio, where he grew up on a farm with lots of animals and vegetation. He traveled across the world and returned to live in Cleveland. "It's a friendly place to be," he said of Cleveland. "I find that I have connections with people I didn't even know about because in some ways it is like a small town."

When McDonald was younger, his mom told him about a job for public defender, which is a type of lawyer who represents people who are charged with a crime but can't afford private representation. McDonald was fascinated by the idea and found it was always on his mind. McDonald said he became a lawyer because the U.S. constitution has a clause that talks about how every person charged with a crime has the Constitutional right to be represented by an attorney. He sees it as patriotic service the people can provide. "It's different from other kinds of service like being in the military or being a politician. It's a really important service that is right there in the Constitution," he explained

McDonald graduated from Kenyon College in 1998. "At the time I knew I didn't want to go straight back to school," he recalled. He wanted to work a little bit before going to graduate

school. "I got a job at a Montessori school. I didn't know much about Montessori and how it was different from other styles and approaches to education," he said. McDonald served as an assistant in an elementary classroom. He was impressed by how well the Montessori method worked. In fact, McDonald was so impressed that he worked very hard and is now the principal at Montessori High School (MHS), a boarding school here in Cleveland.

When asked about his school's purpose, McDonald said, "We're trying to find ways to prove that education can be done differently. If we succeed and we can show other people that this works well then our approach can be used all over the place by all kinds of different people regardless of their access to money." MHS has a strong community where individuality and diversity are appreciated. The school is located in University Circle, so they can have class and study at the art museum, botanical garden, and libraries.

McDonald is a very smart, successful man who used to help people who couldn't afford legal counsel, and who now helps children with their education.

By DeJuana

## HISTORY OF MONTESSORI EDUCATION

- Montessori started in 1907.
- Maria Montessori's first school was the Casa dei Bambini in Italy.
- The Montessori method is a child-centered education approach.
- The Montessori approach values the human spirit and the development of the whole child- physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.

Source: American Montessori Society



# NATE MCDONALD



“Anything you want to do, you can do it in Cleveland.”

Nate McDonald is the principal of Montessori High School at University Circle (MHS). He originally did not want to be a school principal. When McDonald was a kid, he wanted to be a baseball player, which he was in college. However, when he got a little older, his mom told him about what public defenders do. McDonald said, “That was fascinating to me.”

McDonald grew up on a farm in Chardon, Ohio. He feels that becoming a public defender is a patriotic service and he can identify with their purpose. “I knew what it was like to not have things and to be in a position where you didn’t have the money for something,” McDonald recalled. A public defender is a lawyer who represents people who are charged with a crime and can’t afford to pay their own lawyer.

Now, McDonald has three kids, ages 3, 6, and 8. He and his wife and kids live in South Euclid. McDonald’s mother and father make the syrup for Mitchell’s Geauga maple walnut ice cream. His two oldest go to Cleveland Montessori in Little Italy, and the youngest will go when he’s older.

MHS used to be a mansion in 1910. The school bought it seven years ago. Since then, they have bought two additional mansions. One house is used for dorm housing. There are three

sections of the dorm. One section is for girls, another is for boys, and the last is for the adults. Their curfew is 10 p.m., by which time all students have to be in their section of the house. School starts at 8:45 a.m. The other two houses are for offices, a dining room, and classrooms.

McDonald is proud to be part of improving Cleveland’s educational options and quality of life. “Cleveland has just enough of everything and not too much of anything,” McDonald said. “Anything you want to do, you can do it in Cleveland.” He likes the sports teams and also the restaurants. McDonald likes how we don’t have too much traffic. “It’s a friendly place to be,” he added.

When asked about advice for today’s students, McDonald said, “Do the things you are passionate about and do difficult things. When you challenge yourself, you tend to realize things you never would have known. Don’t take the easy way.”

*By Jordan*

# MEGAN MOYNAHAN



**"I'm committed to doing this. I don't see myself retiring any time soon."**

Megan Moynahan travels from Maryland to Ohio every other week. She has been living in Cleveland part-time for the past two years. Her weekly trek is worth it every time she is able to help paralyzed patients regain function through a process called functional electrical stimulation. She is 50 years old, is married, and has twin boys who are 17 years old.

When she was 14, Moynahan enjoyed reading science magazines. She eventually came across a great science article about biomedical engineering, which sparked her interest and led her down the path she's followed ever since. "Your career path is all about the people you want to work with and for," she said. Moynahan attended Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore for her undergraduate degree. Later, she got her graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University.

The first time Moynahan saw what impact her work could have on real people, she was 22 and in graduate school. "It was amazing," Moynahan said. "It's very dramatic to watch someone stand who wasn't able to stand before." Moynahan loves to help people. What really inspires her is a desire to help our community. She especially loves helping kids who have paralysis, which she did at Shriners Hospital in Philadelphia. "Because they were such happy kids, I didn't feel pity for them. They want you to see them as a regular person," she said. Moynahan also worked for the FDA, a government agency, near Washington, D.C., monitoring pacemakers.

Now in Cleveland, Moynahan uses technology developed at CWRU to help patients at local hospitals. The technology is called functional electrical stimulation, which deals with how your brain sends signals to your spinal cord and the rest of your body for movement. When a person's spinal cord is injured, those signals can't get through. Moynahan works with a surgical team to put wires under their skin to give them renewed function, like using their hands, standing up, and walking. "I love my job. I am pleased to be able to do it. It's very rewarding," she said.

Cleveland is the central point in the whole world where people come to get this technology. Moynahan said this represents what makes the city special. "People build things and make things in Cleveland. These are people who when they see a problem they roll up their sleeves and find a solution for it," she said. "The technology we developed is not available anywhere else." Moynahan's team even helps wounded warriors at the VA hospital.

What Moynahan is doing helps our community. She is making people's lives better. Our community is blessed because Moynahan and her team help people walk again. Without her team, many paralyzed people might not walk or use their hands again. Her commitment to her job means she will not stop helping people, even with her long commute. "I'm committed to doing this. I don't see myself retiring any time soon," she said.

By LeDon



# BAC NGUYEN



“Stick with what you are passionate about and don’t give up on it.”

Bac Nguyen is a chef and owns two restaurants in Cleveland. His first restaurant is named Bac, and his second restaurant called Ninja City. He was born and raised in Hanoi, Vietnam, and has been living in Cleveland since he was two years old. He grew up in Lakewood and he is currently 32 years old. Nguyen went to Rocky River High School, then to Case Western Reserve University for college. In college he started out as an engineer but didn’t like it, so he switched to psychology because he thought that it was cool and interesting. Nguyen doesn’t have children but has a wife and hopes to have kids one day.

When Nguyen was younger he wanted to be a comic book artist. He said he was lazy about it and didn’t have the talent or the drive at that time in his life. His mom and grandma each had a restaurant, so he grew up in the restaurant business. “I took what my family did, and then put my own spin on it,” Nguyen explained. He came up with the characters in the restaurant but he had a friend do the drawings. Ninja City was decorated by an interior designer. His favorite video game is Street Fighter.

The chef has more business responsibilities these days. He still cooks sometimes and comes up with recipes for both kitchens. The menu at Ninja City is more like street market food, where Bac is more “Asian bistro.” Personally, he likes to eat everything, including Five Guys hamburgers and pizza. His hands are full all the time with everything from taxes to payroll. His biggest challenge was getting people to invest in his restaurants. He loves his job. When asked about a scare, he said he lost his temper and punched a wall but has learned his lesson and has since calmed down. Nguyen also gives great advice, such as to worry about yourself and not to worry about what anybody thinks.

*By Geoffrey Jalila and Keion*

## BAC MENU ITEMS:

- Sweet potato tempura fries
- Pho beef noodle soup
- Crispy walnut shrimp
- Hot spiced brownie

## NINJA CITY MENU ITEMS:

- Chili garlic wings
- Bacon and egg ramen
- Vietnamese noodle bowl
- Fried ice cream



# DR. PABLO ROS



“There is a certain quality that exists in many places of being nice and approachable that I really like a lot about Cleveland.”

Dr. Pablo Ros is the Radiologist in Chief and Chairman of Radiology at University Hospital. As a radiologist, he reads MRI and CT scans and does procedures on the abdomen. However, Dr. Ros's responsibilities extend beyond that of a typical radiologist. He has three roles at University Hospital, including administering the department, but his favorite is being a doctor. Dr. Ros also works on the academic side of medicine as the Chair of the Department of Radiology for the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. He has written 21 books such as *Abdominal Imaging*, which has four volumes. “It took three years of my life,” Dr. Ros added.

Dr. Ros is from Barcelona, Spain. “I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would live or work anywhere else than in my city where my family and friends and everybody was there,” Dr. Ros recalled. Dr. Ros attended *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* medical school. He had learned English in middle school and was sent to Ireland and England. When he was in residency, his boss realized he spoke English and sent him to the United States to learn about CAT scans.

When Dr. Ros saw how advanced the technology was, he stayed in Miami for his residency. When he was finishing up, his department sent him to Washington, D.C., for a rotation every American radiologist does. Dr. Ros loved it so much, they offered him a position as the chief of the section of gastrointestinal radiology at the *Armed Forces Institution of Technology*. “I couldn't believe it because I thought the people who taught me for the eight weeks were the greatest radiologist and they offered for me to be there,” Dr. Ros recalled. Even after he moved to other positions, Dr. Ros returned to educate new residents, and he taught more than 30,000 residents over 17 years.

Next, Dr. Ros moved to Boston, where he was the executive vice chair at one of the Harvard medical hospitals. He also attended Harvard for a master's degree in healthcare management. Now, Ros has been in Cleveland for almost six years. His favorite thing about Cleveland is the people because they're genuine, nice, polite, and not arrogant. “There is a certain quality that exists in many places of being nice and approachable that I really like a lot about Cleveland,” Dr. Ros said. “It translates into the way the city sees itself.”

Of his three roles, Dr. Ros likes best his work as a doctor. “Typically 1-2 days a week, I wear my white coat and I go to read X-Rays and do procedures on patients,” he explained. Dr. Ros also does procedures regularly on the belly, the scientific name of which is abdomen, like liver tumors and pancreatic inflammation. The other four days of the week, Dr. Ros runs the department, leading the extensive radiology staff in their important work. “We do over 1 million exams a year for people of Northeast Ohio,” Dr. Ros said. They have 1,500 employees, including a faculty of almost 100 physicians and scientists.

“I personally help patients by doing their procedure or reading their scan and helping their doctors,” Dr. Ros said. “I help directly the people I touch through medicine. Indirectly, I help organize the department.”

Dr. Ros really wanted to be an architect when he was younger but a family member helped show him what he was really meant to do. “I was struggling with physics and math but really drawing,” he said. During this time, his uncle made him realize that being an architect isn't what he wanted to do. One day Dr. Ros's uncle called him into his office and told him to draw a horse. When he finished, his uncle said that the picture wasn't good enough for him to enter a profession that required drawing skills. Instead, his uncle appealed to him to continue the family tradition, as both his uncle and grandfather were radiologists. That's when Dr. Ros became interested in becoming a doctor to carry the family tradition along.

Now, when Dr. Ros thinks about the future of medicine, he considers how technology is advancing in his field. “With more and more computerization, the same way your life is now, imagine a world where you can have Wi-Fi no matter where you are,” he said. Imagine if Dr. Ros could look inside of you with a hologram. Dr. Ros could be across the world and you could consult him and he'd answer. It is a fascinating future, and Dr. Pablo Ros is an inspiring person who's helped a lot of people at University Hospital.

By Mya [redacted]

# DR. PABLO ROS



“I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would live or work anywhere else than in my city where my family and friends and everybody was there.”

Dr. Pablo Ros was born in Barcelona, Spain. Now, Dr. Ros is a confident, amazing, intelligent radiologist. Dr. Ros did not originally wish to become that confident, amazing, and intelligent radiologist he is today. When Dr. Ros was 12, he really wanted to be an architect. Later, he started college pursuing an architecture degree. One day his uncle called him into his office to see if he was sure about being an architect. Dr. Ros's uncle gave him a piece of paper and told him to draw a horse. 15 minutes later he brought his drawing back. His uncle said, “Do you think they will accept this?” Even though he struggled with some of his subjects, he mostly struggled with drawing, which is a necessary skill in architecture. His uncle said, “Well, you could really continue the tradition of the family and be a doctor. It will be much more rewarding.” That is what Dr. Ros decided to do, and he has found it to be very rewarding throughout the past four decades.

Dr. Ros finished medical school, graduating with honors from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His first job was a residency in radiology in Barcelona, Spain, where Dr. Ros was born and raised. He had learned English in middle school when he was sent to school in Ireland and England. Because of this, his boss sent him to Florida to learn more about CAT scans. Dr. Ros finished his residency there, and also worked in Washington, D.C., teaching new radiology residents. Dr. Ros is a hard worker, made obvious by his tenure as Chief of the Section of Gastrointestinal radiology of the Armed Forces Institute of Technology. He was there for three years full time and taught more than 1,000 residents a year. Then, during the following 17 years he kept going to every class five times a year and taught a total of 30,000 residents. From

there, Dr. Ros moved to Boston and worked at one of the Harvard medical hospitals. Throughout this busy schedule, Dr. Ros is a hard worker because he earned his master's degree from Harvard in healthcare management.

Dr. Ros moved to Cleveland eight years ago. He improves Cleveland by helping patients with abdominal issues like inflammation or a tumor. He also helps Cleveland by cheering up his patients with his warm personality. Also, if someone has something really wrong with their body, Dr. Ros can see what's going on in their body by using a technique called nuclear radiology. Nuclear radiology is when a doctor uses a variation of light to see from the inside out in order to diagnose and treat disease. “The best day of the week is the day I work like a doctor,” Dr. Ros explained. “The other four days of the week, I administer the department.” The department of radiology consists of 18 hospitals and 1,500 employees. Dr. Ros is a hard worker because he has been able to balance working as a doctor and administrator, and he has written 21 books, including four volumes about Abdominal Imaging, which took him three years to write.

In the future Dr. Ros wants to continue helping patients by reading their scans and doing their procedures. Dr. Ros also helps other doctors improve their skills and become more confident. “I try to be calm and think about the patient and do the right thing for the patient,” he said. Thank you, Dr. Ros, for all you do to help your team and improve the quality of life for the people of Cleveland.

By Tonyae

# WILLIAM TARTER



“I have been very blessed to have examples in my life of public servants, so I hope to continue to find ways to help people.”

“My favorite thing about Cleveland is the people. I love the pride of the people of the city and striving to create a better city,” William Tarter, Jr., said this, and judging by passion of his words and actions, he really cares for his city. His love for his city extends through even his career, working as a community engagement specialist at a non-profit organization, OneCommunity.

Tarter is 32 years old and from Cleveland, Ohio. He was born at St. Luke’s Hospital in 1983. He lived in East Cleveland for the first five years of his life. When he was five, he moved to South Euclid. He now works primarily in downtown Cleveland. Tarter is one of four children. He has two older sisters and a younger brother. Tarter’s brother is a part-time actor and singer, “My younger brother was always the creative one,” Tarter explained. “I was always the one in the shirt and tie.”

Tarter attended Ohio University. “Initially my major was meteorology. I changed my major between my sophomore and junior year to communication,” Tarter said. He started graduate school in 2007 in public administration. In the same year he was accepted into a fellowship at the Ohio House of Representatives. In 2008, Tarter was hired to work in the Secretary of State’s Office in Cleveland, where he focused on voter registration and helping people in the process of starting their own businesses. “I think voting is really important,” Tarter said. He believes that all eligible voters should vote because voting helps make decisions for both our city and the country as a whole. Tarter commented, “Civic engagement doesn’t stop on election day. It’s actually just beginning.”

Tarter loves his job, but he especially loves the public speaking aspect of it. “I enjoy educating people about different topics,” he said. Tarter grew up enjoying public speaking. His dad was a teacher for 30 years so Tarter had a lot of experience with education while young. Tarter has even met President Obama and had a discussion with him. At OneCommunity, Tarter educates the public about how technology can improve the economy. The local fiber optic network can help schools, hospitals, and real estate, and Tarter is in charge of communicating with them. “How can we make sure that the people here have access to jobs and economic development? How can we maximize the return on investment to the people?” Tarter asked. “I think technology is one way to do that. With our network, we basically complement a public project.”

Tarter has a 17-month-old daughter named Abigail. Tarter’s wife is from England, but she has lived in the United States since she was 11. They were married in 2011. She now works as a doctor at Akron City Hospital.

In the future Tarter plans to continue educating the public on ways they can be involved with technology and the economy. “I have been very blessed to have examples in my life of public servants, so I hope to continue to find ways to help people,” he said.

By Ariana [REDACTED]

# WILLIAM TARTER



**“Civic engagement doesn’t stop on Election Day. It’s actually just beginning.”**

Cleveland is already a great city, but there is a group of people trying to make it perfect. One of them is William Tarter, Jr. This man has the ability to change the world. Tarter was born in Cleveland, went away to college at Ohio University, and came back in 2008. He has lived in greater Cleveland for most of his life. “My favorite about Cleveland is the people,” Tarter said. “I love their passion for the community and all of the diversity that’s here.”

Tarter is passionate about improving Cleveland through his job at OneCommunity. He is in charge of civic engagement, which comes from his experience helping people vote. He used to work for the Secretary of State’s Office helping people register to vote and start businesses. “Civic engagement doesn’t stop on Election Day. It’s actually just beginning,” Tarter said. One thing he loves about his job is public speaking, which he learned from his dad. His dad was a minister and an English teacher for 30 years at Cleveland Heights High School. When Tarter was younger, he wanted to be an astronomer and a meteorologist, but now he works in public administration, in which he holds a master’s degree.

As part of his job, Tarter educates the public about how technology can help Cleveland grow. “I explain to people what fiber optic cables are and how they can be used to create economic development,” Tarter explained. “Anything that’s coming down the line, our fiber network is already there. It won’t just be there for a year but 10 years, even 20 years from now.” Tarter was involved

in downtown Cleveland development for 2.5 years and is also a member of other groups. “I’m involved professionally in a lot of things but I’m also involved civically as well,” he added. One group he founded is the Cleveland Young Professionals Senate, a nonprofit that promotes civic engagement to help young people ensure their interests are represented. Tarter also has been a part of the Cuyahoga Charter Review Commission. He was the youngest person to be on the commission, which reviews laws and rules of government.

Tarter’s wife is from England. She is now a doctor of internal medicine in Akron. They were married in 2011 and have a 17-month-old daughter who he loves taking to the park. He has two sisters and one brother who really loves singing and acting. Tarter said he wishes that he would have tried to learn more on field trips in school and also wishes he had learned a foreign language, but he did visit Hong Kong in 1992.

Tarter loves helping people make their start in Cleveland, and strives to make it a better place, which is why so many people look up to him.

*By Damonte*

# WILLIAM TARTER



“While Cleveland is a geographic place, it’s the people who live here or have come here that help contribute to the identity of Cleveland.”

William Tarter, Jr., grew up in a family of public servants, including a teacher, a nurse, and a post office worker. It’s no surprise that Tarter is now a public servant himself. He was born in Cleveland, and he has lived in greater Cleveland for most of his life. He’s a really cool guy and loves outer space. That’s why he wanted to be an astronomer, someone who studies the stars and the planets. However, when he got to high school, his interest in space shifted to weather. He wanted to become a meteorologist and work for the N.O.A.A or the N.S.S.L. In the end, he got his master’s degree in public administration and followed in his family’s footsteps.

Tarter went to Ohio University in 2001. His major was in meteorology, but he changed his major between his sophomore and junior year to communication. In 2007, he was accepted into a fellowship at the Ohio House of Representatives. The next year, he got hired at the Secretary of State’s Office. The Secretary of State is in charge of voting and elections but also helps people in the process of starting their own business. Tarter became passionate about voting when he was in college, and he continued that work at the Secretary of State’s Office. “People who are engaged in their community and feel a part are more likely to stay in their community,” Tarter said. “Voting is a really great way to be part of the decision-making process.”

Tarter’s current career is working at a nonprofit organization in downtown Cleveland called OneCommunity. He is in charge of community engagement because he’s very interested in public policy. His master’s in public administration taught him how to be engaged in community development, including how to use technology as a way to foster economic development. His current job also involves convening, creating places where people can come together and talk about technology and what’s going on in the city and how we can make the city better using technology.

Tarter loves his job, and he loves the city of Cleveland. One thing he loves about his job is public speaking; he enjoys educating people about different topics. It must run in the family because his dad was an English teacher at Cleveland Heights High School for 30 years. Tarter’s favorite thing about Cleveland is the people. He loves the people, specifically their passion for the community. “I love the pride of the people in the city striving to create a better city,” Tarter said.

Cleveland is home for Tarter. He was born at St. Luke’s Hospital in 1983. He lived in East Cleveland for the first five years of his life, and then he moved to South Euclid in 1988. Tarter has two sisters and one brother, who loves singing and acting and still does it from time to time. In contrast, Tarter was always the one in the suit and tie and still is.

At One Community, Tarter keeps track of events that communities sponsor or can participate in. He also creates the calendar of events they put on and how they can engage with the community and different things they want to achieve. For example, at a recent event called the Innovation Olympiad, young women ages 13 to 18 were challenged to create ideas using technology because in 2020 there are going to be 50 billion devices connected to the internet.

In the future, Tarter’s work on technology and the fiber network will maximize the return on investment to the public. “It won’t just be there for a year, but 10 years or even 20 years from now,” he explained. It will even be there as his 17-month-old daughter Abigail grows up. Tarter’s work for the city of Cleveland is vital to the city’s success, just like the work of the other public servants in his family.

By Lonnie [REDACTED]

# JASON TILK



“I hope that I’m happy doing my work in the future, that it keeps me engaged and I keep learning. I hope that I keep learning, period.”

Jason Tilk loves the culture in Cleveland and likes that Cleveland still has a lot of its older roots. Tilk was born in Lakewood and he lived there until age two. Afterward, he grew up in Medina. His parents built a house there because they wanted to live in the countryside. From 1992 on, he has lived in Cleveland.

When Tilk was younger, he wanted to be a racecar driver. In high school, he wanted to be involved with the arts, especially anything performance related, like playing music. He was even interested in becoming a visual artist. “My favorite class was art, but there weren’t a lot of outlets for art for me at my high school, so I played a lot of music,” Tilk said. If Tilk could give advice to his younger self, he would say, “Don’t be afraid, and try everything. You try to think about the future all the time and what is the right thing to do, what I need to do and learn, rather than going and trying and doing.”

In college, Tilk decided to focus only on visual arts. He gave up the music part and just pursued visual art at the Cleveland Institute of Art (CIA). He went there for five years. “It goes back to ... not being afraid and trying everything. The only way I’ll be great at something is if I only focus on that. If I play music and do art, I won’t be good at both,” Tilk said. He took metals classes, ceramics classes and even glass blowing. He fell in love with glass blowing. Eventually, he decided to major in glass art. “That work helped me get my portfolio,” Tilk stated. Tilk’s terrific portfolio helped him get hired at General Motors because of his creativity. Further, GM appreciated Tilk’s use of alternative materials, and the thought process that accompanies that process. He worked there for four years designing cars.

Now, as a product design specialist at Nottingham Spirk, Tilk designs on a daily basis. He comes up with new ideas and draws them for his team. Tilk usually works on 5-6 major projects each year; right now he is working on two. Tilk said he is lucky to be able to both lead a team and still design. After sketching out his

ideas, Tilk builds things on the computer with 3-D modeling software, similar to how effects are built for video games. Tilk’s products have ranged from candy to vacuum cleaners. He said designing super sour Warheads was “really fun,” but working on medical products is “more rewarding” because he is helping save people’s lives. Tilk’s goal is to design products that are easier to use and more comfortable for people, but his favorite thing is getting to learn while designing. “Every single project that I work on, I get to learn about something brand new,” Tilk added.

What is perhaps Tilk’s greatest achievement so far is the Cardio Insight Vest. It is a piece of wearable technology designed to help doctors figure out what is wrong with a patient’s heart. “It has 252 sensors that go around your trunk and detect what’s going on electrically in your heart. A doctor can then kill nerves on the heart, called ablating to stop the irregular heartbeat,” Tilk explained. The vest has won several awards, including the prestigious Edison Award, which recognizes the most innovative products, services, and business leaders in the world.

His whole life, Tilk has loved making things, and he said that’s just who he is. “In my career as a designer, every day I work on making something. A big part of making something new is being able to draw it,” Tilk explained. “If you think of something in your head, the easier way to communicate it is to draw a picture of it.” Tilk’s artistic background and classes at CIA are a huge asset to him and his work at Nottingham Spirk because he understands how to work with various materials.

Jason Tilk is so important for Cleveland’s future because his products save and improve people’s lives. What he loves most about Cleveland is its culture. When he was younger, he wanted to be a racecar driver, but Cleveland should be happy it didn’t turn out that way because he is a great artist and designer.

By Deonte [REDACTED]

# JASON TILK



“Every single project that I work on, I get to learn about something brand new.”

Jason Tilk has lived in the greater Cleveland area his whole life. Tilk was born in Lakewood and lived there until he was 2, after which he grew up in Medina. His parents built a house there because they like the countryside. When he was little, he wanted to become a racecar driver, but in high school he wanted to become a visual artist and play music. His parents recognized his talent early on and sent him to art classes.

In high school, Tilk continued both art and music, but decided to pursue just art. He spent five years at the Cleveland Institute of Art, where he learned how to build things out of different and unusual materials. He took classes in metals, ceramics, and glass. Eventually he became a glass blower, saying of the switch, “Who gets a chance to blow glass their life?” After majoring in that subject at CIA, Tilk had an impressive portfolio, which got him hired as a car designer at General Motors. He worked there for four years and then got a new job at Nottingham Spirk, a design firm that appealed to him because of their small, personal teams.

Tilk loves making things as part of his career as a designer. One of his projects is the Cardio Insight Vest, which has won several awards. The Cardio Insight Vest help doctors figure out what’s wrong with a patient’s heart. The vest uses 252 sensors to

monitor electrical pulses in a person’s heart and if it detects an irregular heartbeat, can issue electrical signals to stabilize the rhythm. This incredible machine was even featured in Popular Science. Tilk said, “I feel it’s really rewarding to work on medical products because I’m helping people’s lives.”

Tilk is satisfied with his job in part because he began at an entry-level associate designer position and now holds a management role. Tilk said he is lucky his company is small enough that he can manage a team and still be responsible for designing things on his own. Tilk works on 5-6 major projects every year. Now he has 15-16 patents, although GM owns his earliest patent.

Tilk and his wife have been together for nine years and have two girls, 9 and 12 year old. Tilk still works with glass and makes sculptural work like vases, cups, plates, and bowls. In the future he hopes his work keeps him engaged and that he keeps learning. He really loves what he is doing and is happy he realized what he really wanted to do. He said, “I don’t think I’m special because everybody has the ability do to anything they want if you put their minds to it.”

By Maryann

## PRODUCTS BY NOTTINGHAM SPIRK

- SpinBrush Electric Toothbrush
- M&M’s Personalized Kiosk
- Mars Pure Dark
- Cleveland Clinic 360-5 Wellness
- Fridge Fresh
- Twist & Pour Paint Container
- Try Me Package





# JASON TILK



“I don’t think I’m special. I think everybody has the ability do to anything they want if you put their minds to it. If you follow your passions, you will be able to accomplish what you want.”

When you visit a store, the shelves can be lined with thousands of products. Have you ever wondered where they come from? They were created by a product design specialist like Cleveland resident Jason Tilk. He started at his company, Nottingham Spirk, in 2004. Prior to that, he worked at General Motors designing cars for four years. Every year Tilk works on 5-6 major projects. At this point in time, Tilk has 15-16 patents. General Motors owns Tilk’s first patent; it has been referenced by Motorola and Apple.

When Tilk was younger, he wanted to be a racecar driver. Once Tilk got into high school, he wanted to do something performance related or with the arts, like playing music or being an illustrator. In high school Tilk played music and created a lot of art. Tilk went to Ohio University for one year; then, Tilk decided to focus only on visual arts. He gave up music and just pursued visual art at the Cleveland Institute of Art. Tilk went there for five years and majored in glass art. “The interesting thing about going to art school is that I learned to be creative and understand materials,” Tilk added.

Tilk has “loved making things” his whole life; that is just how he is. Every day as part of his job Tilk works on making something. Tilk said, “A big part of making something new is being able to draw it.” Tilk’s degree from the Cleveland Institute of Art helps him greatly with this. According to Tilk, “When you think about something in your head, the way to communicate it is to draw it up,” he explained. Tilk is so good at designing is because he took metals classes and ceramics classes. “I learned how to explore and build things out of different materials and how different materials behaved,” Tilk explained.

Tilk was born in Lakewood and grew up 40 minutes south of Cleveland in Medina because his parents built a house in the countryside. From 1992 on, Tilk has lived in Cleveland. The thing Tilk likes the most about Cleveland is the culture, like the Westside Market, for example. “Cleveland still has a lot of its older roots. There are Clevelanders who are still rooted in their ancestors’ histories,” he said.

What’s going on electrically in your heart? One of Tilk’s famous designs is the Cardio Insight Vest. It has won several awards, including an Edison Award for being an innovative product. Tilk designed it to help doctors figure out what’s wrong with their patients’ hearts. The vest has 252 sensors that go around a person’s trunk to detect what’s going on, electrically, within their heart. In addition to the vest, Tilk has designed products ranging from the Health Spot, which allows sick people to video chat with a doctor, to everyday household items like vacuum cleaners.

Tilk has other hobbies, like playing the accordion and putting on a traveling act with his wife, who is an expert in a Japanese form of juggling. They even put together a circus tent. “That was a great combination of my joy of performance and my joy of making things,” Tilk added. He and his wife have performed across the country at festivals and high-school proms.

In his future, Tilk would like to keep doing what he is doing, designing products. “That keeps me engaged and I keep learning,” he explained. “I hope that I keep learning, period.”

By Tyrell

# EILEEN WILSON



“You meet people from all different countries and hear their circumstances and realize that the number one issue with language is that it’s very isolating not to be able to communicate with your neighbor.”

Eileen Wilson has a goal for the city of Cleveland. She wants to see the city finally “make it.” Wilson, the director of refugee ministries for Building Hope in the City, said, “Cleveland is a city that is always trying to make it. ... They’ve started and stopped so many times in my life. It’s a city that’s big enough that it has a lot of things to offer.”

Wilson has lived in Cleveland all of her life. Wilson’s mother is from Ireland and her father is from Scotland. She said that when she was younger, people used to tell her she was born old. She said of one of her earliest memories, “[I was] looking around in first grade at my classmates on the playground thinking, ‘They’re so young.’”

When she was younger, Wilson thought she might be an artist or write a book, and she still thinks she will do that someday. “When I was in high school I remember thinking I would like to be in something that was interesting and artsy,” she said, but the aptitude tests said otherwise. “Every time I was tested it always came up that the way that I thought was a good match for information technology,” Wilson said. When she was in the 8th grade, it all started and she learned how to program in BASIC.

Prior to Building Hope in the City, Wilson worked in information technology. “I was an enterprise architect, someone who looks at information systems and determines the best plan.” She said, “It was a very intensive job. I managed a team of people between Ohio, Kansas, and India.” Wilson started and stopped college, but managed to earn a technical degree and then went on to finish her four-year degree 26 years later. If she could, Wilson would go back and tell herself that focusing and finishing her college degree is important and to get it done. “Make the difficult decisions you have to make at that age and persevere,” she said. “You can finish your degree. It’s never too late.”

Wilson was already volunteering for Building Hope in the City for seven years before she started there full-time. Building Hope in the City is a faith-based organization with several ministries, including the one Wilson currently leads to help refugees. A refugee is someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution and is forced to flee their land. Wilson was volunteering as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher working with refugees from Bhutan, and soon Wilson wanted to do more. “That caught my attention and created a place in my heart and gave me the desire to understand who the people were and how they came to be here,” Wilson recalled. She added that not being able to speak the language in a place can be very isolating and create a sense of fear.

In addition to providing quality ESL classes, Wilson also helped create the Hope Center for Refugees and Immigrants. The center is in an area that has more than 1,000 refugees in two square miles. They serve refugees from all over the world. Wilson hopes it will become a place where people walk in and find a friendly face of someone who can help them and get to know them and their culture. “They are here but don’t really understand the culture and are afraid to leave their apartments and this is a next step,” she said. Through various programs and partnerships they have also been able to mentor over 170 refugees in the Greater Cleveland area.

Wilson graduated from the University of Phoenix with a business administration degree, which she says has been great background for what she’s doing. “All of the skills I’ve learned through corporate America and my life have been useful in many ways in working with the refugees,” Wilson explained.

In the future, Wilson plans to continue to give back to Cleveland. “When I retire, my goals are to be a redcoat at Playhouse Square and to give Segway tours of Cleveland,” she said.

By Samaria [redacted] and Nay’Dria [redacted]



# SPECIAL THANKS

Cleveland State University The Cauldron editors Kevin Buryanek and Abe Kurp for helping us revise our article drafts.

Kristen Keck for the design and layout of this book.

Dr. Carrie Buchanan of John Carroll University for her guest lecture on interview techniques.

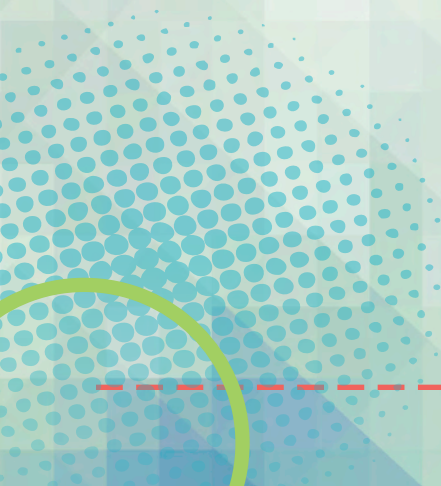
Shelly Saltzman, Michael Slopnick, and Sydney Gruhin for supervising our interviews.

Jamie Prabucki for connecting us with interviewees for this book.

Lori Billington, Katie Howell, Mike Mozina, and Mike Singer, our math and science teachers, for their support during the interview and writing process.

Lin Bartel and the residents of Judson Manor for listening to our articles and discussing our reflections.

All of the interviewees for visiting our school or welcoming us to their workspaces and answering our questions so thoroughly.





# ABOUT CLA

Citizens Leadership Academy (CLA) is a new and innovative middle school in Cleveland, Ohio, near University Circle. It is Northeastern Ohio's first Expeditionary Learning School, joining a network of 165 schools throughout the United States that embed foundational academic skills in long-term projects that take the students into the community and bring community experts to the school. CLA is also the middle school for the Citizens Academy, the Blue Ribbon elementary school, and is part of Breakthrough Schools (BCS), a network of high-performing charter schools in Cleveland.



CLA has a very collaborative teaching community with small classes and involved parents.

Since it opened in August 2011, CLA students have

- researched and written a grant that earned \$2,000 from Whole Foods for a school garden
- worked with a textile artist to design a contemporary quilt depicting perspectives of people on the Underground Railroad for a local college
- demonstrated their civic engagement through Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service, marching from City Hall to the Rock Hall, writing award-winning essays for World Water Day, and creating social injustice nonprofit proposals
- published four books, two based on interviews with veterans and two based on interviews with Rustbelt reformers
- worked with Ph.D. students from Case Western Reserve University and a director of the sickle cell clinic at University Hospitals on a genetics study



# ABOUT EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Expeditionary Learning partners with school districts to open new schools and transform existing schools at all levels, pre-K-12, and in all settings—urban, rural, and suburban. The EL school model challenges students to think critically and take active roles in their classrooms and communities, resulting in higher achievement and greater engagement in schools. EL has 20 years of experience developing the capacity of new and veteran teachers to strive for the expanded definition of student success – a vision that combines rigorous academics with critical higher order thinking skills – laid out by the Common Core State Standards.



Most recently, the NYC Department of Education recommended EL's Common Core ELA & Literacy Curriculum for Grades 3-8, for use in New York City's schools. The curriculum combines high quality, rigorous, standard-aligned content with effective instructional practice, bringing together the "what" and the "how" of the Common Core standards. It is designed to help teachers envision and implement engaging instruction that allow all types of learners to succeed. The EL network includes more than 160 schools, 4,000 teachers, and 45,000 students.

For more info, visit [www.elschools.org](http://www.elschools.org).

