

the SUMMIT

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS, PROMOTING DIVERSITY

Magazine

FINANCIAL LITERACY

The Importance of Teaching Teens and Young Adults

SIX REASONS

Your Business Should Work with a Virtual Assistant

AULTCARE'S PRIMETIME HEALTH PLAN

NEO Award-Winning Medicare Advantage Plan

STARK COUNTY MINORITY BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Achievements

FAMILY & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Veteran Services

Tara Harkness
HARKNESServices

*Summit County,
Committed to Diversity and Inclusion.*



YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR SUCCESS!

- Creating and retaining local jobs while enhancing and improving workforce development.
- Improving diversity and inclusiveness in Summit County's hiring, contracting and board & commission appointments.
- Leading initiatives that focus on the health, safety and well being of our communities.
- Investing in our community through the Land Bank, infrastructure improvements, and economic development projects.



- Maintaining the financial stability and strong financial management practices of the County.
- Continuing a collaborative government that is focused on improving services for the public.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

The Summit County Department of Community and Economic Development
(330) 643-2533



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The Summit Magazine Issue 38



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Publisher's Page

Dear Readers,

Since 2012, the Summit Magazine has been a key tool in business outreach and a primary means through which small business, corporations, city departments and state agencies have communicated with the general public. These partners have been a crucial to the success of the Summit Magazine. We are able to give the Ohio business community a voice which reaches thousands of potential clients due to the support of our advertisers.



Advertisers play a crucial role in our success and continues business advocacy. It is thanks to all of you that we are able to facilitate our statewide outreach events and sustain the summit Magazine publication. As businesses become more diverse it is imperative that there exists a promotional tool to help businesses of all sizes promote their services and contribute to their outreach initiatives for the benefit of the community and future entrepreneurs.

We encourage you to lend us your support.

For over seven years we've have the distinct honor of working with the County of Summit and the City of Akron in our shared mission of "Creating Partnerships, Promoting Diversity". We've also had a number of partners join us in this mission including Summa Health, Cleveland Clinic Akron General, Huntington Bank, and many others.

This issue of the Summit Magazine reaffirms the shared mission of all Ohio businesses to build a community of success stories that collectively make Ohio great. It is our sincere hope that you will continue to support us and look forward to each issue with enthusiasm. It is your contribution to the diverse wealth of talents in our communities that makes these endeavors.

Thank you!

Bob Lanier
Publisher and CEO



By: James Roscoe, James Harris-Doug Williams Fellow

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE TOGETHER: THE BLACK COLLEGE FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME CLASSIC WEEKEND

Energy! Excitement! Community! As a recent graduate of Howard University (“HHHH-U”), I loved the atmosphere when we were participating in a Classic. As the newest Historically Black College and Universities (“HBCU”) graduate to have the honor of being the James Harris-Doug Williams Fellow at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, I can’t wait to experience the same atmosphere at the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic (BCFHOF Classic) in Canton, Ohio, this Labor Day Weekend.



In fact, I am not just going to experience this Classic, I am part of the team making it happen. And while this is the fourth year of the BCFHOF Classic, THIS year is

going to be like no other year in terms of honoring the traditions of a Classic and bringing a fresh, new energy for alumni, fans and supporters of all ages to enjoy.

THIS CLASSIC HAS WHAT NO OTHER CLASSIC HAS... THE GREATEST HBCU PLAYERS, COACHES AND CONTRIBUTORS, EVER!

All Classics are celebrations. The celebration of HBCUs. The celebration of African-American history and culture. The celebration of the Divine Nine. The BCFHOF Classic will indeed celebrate all these things. But what makes the BCFHOF Classic unique is that it also celebrates and honors the legacies of the members of the Black College Football Hall of Fame. **JERRY RICE. WALTER PAYTON. ART SHELL. MICHAEL STRAHAN. MEL BLOUNT. SHANNON SHARPE. ED “TOO TALL” JONES. CHARLIE NEAL. GREG COLEMAN. PARNELL DICKINSON. JIMMIE GILES. DEACON JONES. WILLIE**

LANIER. EDDIE ROBINSON. GREG LLOYD. ROBERT MATHIS. STEVE MCNAIR. EVERSON WALLS. BEN COATES. LESLIE FRAZIER. And 100 more!



The Black College Football Hall of Fame was founded in 2009 by trailblazing Grambling quarterbacks, James “Shack” Harris and Doug Williams to preserve the history and honor the greatest football players, coaches and contributors from HBCUs. The Pro Football Hall of Fame has committed to building a “museum within a museum” to house the Black College Football Hall of Fame.

The story of Black college football is about so much more than the sport of football. It’s about community, unity and education. The story

Continue on Next Page



of Black college football is like no other. It's a story of perseverance, competition, and triumph. It's a story of character and talent and the transformation of not just sports, but America itself. Black college football, as noted by award-winning author, journalist and educator, Samuel Freedman, is "an essential chapter in sports history, Black history and, most of all, American history." Thus, this Classic pays homage to the pioneers, legends and trailblazers who have shaped the landscape of football and HBCUs and celebrates the American heroes and trailblazers whose foundation was laid at an HBCU.

MAKING THE CLASSIC EVEN BETTER...

When it comes to the Classic Weekend, we proclaim "It's More Than A Game!" and that couldn't be truer this year. We have evaluated our Classic for the past three years and discovered that we needed to make some improvements. For example, we have not effectively partnered with the Divine Nine. These organizations represent a critical component to the climate and culture of a Classic and they have not been given enough prominence. So we are now collaborating with local chapter leaders who have agreed to become "ambassadors" for

the Classic. For the first time, the Classic Tailgate will feature a "Greek Row" to encourage fellowship of each organization on the grounds of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. In addition, the game will include a "D9 Roll Call". And the D9 will continue to spearhead the Reading the Playbook event that coaches elementary students to an education touchdown through a time of reading and inspiring a strong first-quarter start in life.

Another change we are making this year is reimagining the game-day experience. I want to introduce to you, The Yard. For hundreds of thousands of folks who have attended HBCUs since the first historically Black college, Cheyney, Pennsylvania's The Institution for Colored Youth, was established in 1837, The Yard evokes a myriad of images. The Yard is a celebration of unapologetic Blackness. It's the gathering place on campus where students can hang out, catch up between classes, break intellectual bread, get it in at the campus party or fall in love. The Yard helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and '60's. The Yard is a place of regal pageantry where the school marching band is as celebrated as star athletes. It's where a diverse background of kids from around the country and across the globe will experience Black Greek life for the first time. The Yard is where you will undoubtedly see a beautiful mix of people of all shades, ages, and social backgrounds. The Yard is the soul of the HBCU.

While we can't recreate nearly 200 years of history at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, we can and will create

a space that shares with some and reminds others of the feelings of connectedness experienced by so many. The Yard at the Classic will be the central hub of the game and a place to come together. The Yard will make you dance with a live DJ. The Yard will make you think with trivia about HBCUs, The Yard will fill you with pride as you listen to live interviews from our heroes, such as Doug Williams and Mel Blount. The Yard will be the place where you will go home a winner of a great giveaway. When you leave the Classic after the Fifth Quarter and attend your Labor Day cookout, you will be telling your friends and family about The Yard!



Another major enhancement to the Classic Weekend is the return of the golf outing at the historic Clearview Golf Club. Clearview, founded by William Powell in 1946, is the FIRST constructed, owned, and operated African American golf course in the United States. Now under the leadership of LPGA and PGA Hall of Famer Renee Powell, Clearview has hosted some of the country's great celebrities and dignitaries. Hall of Famers will participate in this one-of-a-kind event that brings individuals, businesses, and other supporters of the Classic together.

BUT IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

Music and entertainment is a traditional element of a Classic. In 2021, the BCFHOF Classic became the first Classic to exclusively feature Gospel entertainment. Marvin Sapp kicked it off strong in 2021. Fred Hammond rocked the house in 2022. This year, the Faith, Family and Football Gospel Concert Presented by The Good Feet Store will feature none other than Grammy Award-winning artist, Tamela Mann. And the best part of all, the concert is free!



Before the concert, you don't want to miss the HBCU Family Block Party presented by CSE Federal Credit Union where you can shop, eat and enjoy music and entertainment all day long. Like in previous years this day highlights regional and local vendors, businesses, and talent in a safe and family-friendly environment.

UPLIFTING THE COMMUNITY.

The BCFHOF Classic is also about giving back to the community. In partnership with Ohio Means Jobs, we will hold our second annual Job Fair featuring over 40 employers. In collaboration with Habitat for Humanity of East Central Ohio, we will hold our third annual

community service event which last year saw over 250 volunteers



participate. And back for year three is the BCFHOF College Fair. We already have 1500 students and nearly 50 colleges registered. And if it's anything like last year's, students will walk out admitted to college with scholarships in hand.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN HBCU PARTY!



If some adult fun and beverage is what you are looking for, we've got you covered. You can enjoy an evening of live music and end it on the dance with old school, new school, Hip Hop and R&B with a DJ who promises to "sweat ya perm out!" at the Red Carpet Affair. And you can pack your flyest all-white outfit for **The OFFICIAL ALL WHITE PARTY** which is "strictly for the grown and sexy!"

THE CLASSIC: MOREHOUSE v. VIRGINIA UNION.

After all these events are over, it will be time to support the teams, cheerleaders and bands from Virginia Union University and Morehouse College at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium. The game showcases the exceptional talent, teamwork and determination of these students as they earn their education and mature into our future leaders. And we will honor the newest inductees into the Black College Football Hall of Fame.



THE EXCITEMENT IS CONTAGIOUS!

As the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic Weekend nears, the continued feeling of excitement within me grows fast. To see what I have helped build come to life for all to enjoy is indescribable. The experience that lies ahead is one I proudly invite you to come enjoy in Canton, Ohio at the Pro Football Hall of Fame this Labor Day Weekend. Look forward to seeing you there! YOUU KNOW!

For a full schedule of events and ticket information, visit <https://www.profootballhof.com/classic>



BLACK COLLEGE FOOTBALL **HALL OF FAME** CLASSIC

Presented by



IT'S MORE THAN A GAME!

D9 Roll Call
Battle of the Bands
College Fair

Gospel Concert
Step Show
Family! Food! Fun!

MOREHOUSE
COLLEGE



VIRGINIA UNION
UNIVERSITY



TICKETS START AT JUST \$25

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ProFootballHOF.com/Classic



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Summa Health proudly supports the Annual Greater Summit Business Conference and Expo.

At Summa Health we are committed to creating and sustaining an environment that actively embraces diversity and inclusion.



LOCATED JUST A COUNTY AWAY IN STARK, PRIMETIME HEALTH PLAN IS NORTHEAST OHIO'S LOCAL, MEDICARE ADVANTAGE (MA) PLAN.



Through a unique combination of healthcare programs and services and superior customer service, PrimeTime Health Plan members receive a value that extends beyond a health plan.

That value begins with PrimeTime Health Plan's 5-star rating for 2023 awarded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This is the second consecutive year PrimeTime has been awarded with this pristine recognition.

Medicare Star Ratings provide an indicator of how well a healthcare plan is performing. These ratings help Medicare eligible individuals compare healthcare plans to ensure they will receive a high

level of quality care and quality service. A 5-star rating is the highest recognition CMS awards to healthcare plans.

In calculating Star Ratings, CMS carefully examines the many areas of a healthcare plan, including how members rate a plan's services and care, how well physicians detect illnesses and keep members healthy, and how efficiently a plan helps members use recommended and safe prescription medications.

"To be recognized as a 5-star Medicare Advantage plan by CMS for the second year in a row is an incredible honor. This recognition is a testament to the superior quality of care and service our members receive from our colleagues and

providers," said Vice President of AultCare Mike Novelli. "We look forward to sharing why PrimeTime Health Plan is deserving of this 5-star recognition year-round."

PrimeTime Health Plan is also recognized as one of the Best Medicare Advantage Plans in Ohio by U.S. News and World Report for 2023. PrimeTime has received this honor six of the past seven years.

Associated with the CMS star ratings, U.S. News and World Report selects MA plans rated highly by CMS as "best." Again, this top rating is a result of PrimeTime's dedication to quality of care and quality of service.

Part of PrimeTime's popularity amongst its members is the educational telemonitoring services offered to assist members with chronic conditions, such as congestive heart failure and diabetes. Members with these diagnoses may opt-in to these services, working with a health coach and having exclusive access to educational materials to understand their healthcare needs.

Members can be part of special support groups to learn about specific issues related to their heart failure or diabetes diagnosis,

and lean on other members going through similar experiences. With the aid of a registered nurse, members work together to increase self-management of their healthcare and take control of their well-being.

Between unique programs and services and award-winning recognition, there is one common denominator across everything PrimeTime Health Plan does: their customer service.

It is that singular commitment to customer service that distinguishes PrimeTime from its competitors. Members and even prospective members may call, email or visit their local offices to speak with a Medicare specialist. Medicare can be challenging, and the Medicare specialists are always available to meet and guide individuals toward their best decisions.

“At PrimeTime, we want our members to have the quality of care and service they need and deserve. We want them to feel like family,” said Jodi Edmunds, director of clinical quality and disease management.

If you have a question, you can call PrimeTime and a person - who understands you and the culture of your community - will help you with your needs. PrimeTime’s outstanding customer service is one of the reasons why it is easier for members to navigate the healthcare system. PrimeTime employees are part of the community in which we all live. Our knowledgeable representatives are always willing to meet with members in-person or over the phone. We want our members to know that customer service is our No. 1 goal, and it will

continue to be so in the coming years.

To learn more about PrimeTime’s award-winning MA-plan, visit www.pthp.com or call 330-363-7407 (TTY: 711), Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

PrimeTime Health Plan is a HMO-POS plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in PrimeTime Health Plan depends on contract renewal. Every year, Medicare evaluates plans based on a 5-star rating system. For more information, please contact PrimeTime Health Plan at 330-363-7407 or 1-800-577-5084 (TTY users should call 711). Our Call Center is open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. From Oct. 1 through March 31, the Call Center is open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ■



WE'RE IN GOOD COMPANY.

At FirstEnergy, we believe the success of our company relies on the diversity of our suppliers and employees. By working together, we will succeed together.

We're pleased to support the Greater Summit Business Conference & Expo and its mission of encouraging diversity in business.

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AULTCARE'S PRIMETIME HEALTH PLAN



HERE FOR YOU.

Experience an award-winning
Medicare Advantage plan!



To learn more, call 330-363-7407 (TTY 711) or scan the QR code to schedule a meeting to get answers to your most-asked questions.



For more information, please contact PrimeTime Health Plan at 330-363-7407 (1-800-577-5084 or TTY 711) Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Oct. 1 - March 31, we are available 7 days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.), or visit www.pthp.com. PrimeTime Health Plan is an HMO-POS plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in PrimeTime Health Plan depends on contract renewal. Every year, Medicare evaluates plans on a 5-star rating system. For accommodations of persons with special needs at meetings, call 1-800-577-5084 (TTY 711).

Veteran Services a Division of Family & Community Services

By Brandi Shamara Parker



I would like to introduce two leaders in the Veteran Housing space, Nathan Chambers and myself Brandi Shamara Parker.



Nathan Chambers



Brandi Shamara Parker

Nathan Chambers is our Director of Veteran Services I am Brandi Shamara Parker, Assistant Director of Veteran Services a division of Family & Community Services, FCS. I was born and partially reared in Detroit, our family relocated to Youngstown, Ohio. I moved back to Detroit at 1996 and returned to Youngstown in 2017. I am a by-product of perseverance, determination, resiliency, and dedication. During my youth, I experienced extreme hardships as a product of a single



parent home, parental drug and alcohol abuse and poverty. Post high school graduation, I was a “fighting Hornet” at Alabama State University for three years and took some gap years. I obtained my Bachelors in Human Services 2011 and Master of Public Administration 2015 both at the University of Phoenix. In 2009, my internship was introduced to the homeless Veteran shelter, Michigan Veteran Foundation in Detroit as Executive Director Assistant. This turned out to be the greatest experience in my life; providing service to our Veterans who volunteered and sacrificed their lives for our freedoms. Beginning my career at FCS as Program Manager in 2018 to now Assistant Director has enabled professional growth and knowledge of developing and

implementing programs and services and stakeholder awareness. I firmly believe that my combined experience and competencies enabled me to expand management across multiple counties and multiple programs.

Family and Community Services, Inc., FCS, began in 1941 as the Catholic Charities Bureau of the Ravenna Deanery with just two programs and two staff members. Today, FCS is a diverse social service agency that operates over 80 programs with nearly 600 staff members sprawling across all Northeast Ohio with programs in Michigan and Pennsylvania. Our Veteran Service Division covers 6 counties: Summit, Stark, Mahoning, Lorain and Portage counties where we provide transitional and

permanent supportive housing for homeless Veterans in partnership with Veterans Affairs (VA)! Our Summit county's programs, under FCS umbrella of programs, are Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home, Miss Liberty House, Veteran Family Services, SOARS, After-Care Case Management, Intensive Out Patient contract beds and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) all located under one roof in Akron.

Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home

Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home began housing Veterans in 2013 and currently undergoing second phase of renovations. Valor Summit is a Grant and Per Diem, GPD, transitional housing program for up to 30 homeless male Veterans funded and monitored by Veterans Affairs, VA. Valor Home's mission is to support homeless veterans in our community in their efforts to achieve greater self-sufficiency, including the ability to secure and maintain permanent housing. Valor Home provides 24/7 staff support with structured and engaging weekly therapies which include art therapy, music therapy, yoga, and creative writing. With current renovations to facility, each Veteran is provided an individual bedroom and bathroom during their stay and resides at the Valor Home for an average of 6 to 9 months with an end goal of acquiring permanent housing while participating in weekly case management for their initial three months then tapered to one a month promote independency. We work in tandem with VA to provide adequate resources and services to ensure Veterans thrive and acclimate to normalcy of maintaining housing. VA provides the following services

to Veterans and program: Clinical case management, free dentistry for Veterans after 60 days of program participation, provides program a dedicated nurse, program liaison, dietitian; conducts annual and intermittent inspections, HUD/VASH housing options to eligible Veterans. Eligibility requirements for GPD:

- Must be a **HOMELESS male Veteran**
- **At least 18 years of age**
- **Able to live in an environment with people from a variety of backgrounds, sexual orientations, race, color, cultures, disabilities, and ages**
- **Able to manage on a day-to-day basis with background practical support, the level of which may vary according to different needs**
- **Able to manage own medication, if prescribed and with support**
- **Able to manage simple household tasks (with assistance if needed)**

Miss Liberty House and Summit Veteran Family Services

Miss Liberty House is a partnership forged between FCS Summit Veteran Family Services Division and the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority. Miss Liberty House provides a total of four two-bedroom furnished apartments dedicated to female Veterans and their children. FCS provides case-management to the female Veteran participants. Summit Veteran Family Services serves veterans with children under the age of 18. Eligibility for enrollment with Summit Veteran Family Services includes:

- **Summit County residency**
- **Veteran with at least one minor**

child

- **Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless**
- **Low income (200% federal poverty limit)**

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery, SOARS

Our SOARS representative, Works with disabled homeless Veterans by supporting them through assisting them through the processes of applying for and obtaining Social Security benefits. Our SOARS representative remains with the Veteran throughout the entire process of applying for claims to possibly assisting with appealing possible denials. SOARS representative assist with filling out application, obtaining medical/work records, collaborating with other providers to receive pertinent information for positive decision from Social Security Administration.

After Care Case Management

After Care Case Management Program provides assistance to Veterans to maintain their permanent housing for up to 6 months. This program is available to all eligible Veterans how have experienced homeless episodes. Our case managers provide home visits, referrals for wraparound services, and financial management to assist Veterans. This program is case management driven and only for Veterans who are permanently housed. A great component to the program is incentives which include transportation, furniture/household goods, and groceries after completing 30 days in the program.

Intensive Out Patient (IOP) Contract Beds

Intensive Outpatient Program,

IOP, is funded by the VA 24/7 community-based temporary residential housing program designed for Veterans who are struggling with problems associated with addictions, substance use and abuse, or the co-occurring disorders associated with substance use and mental health challenges. IOP bed program offers supportive housing and services for hard-to engage Veterans who are challenged with a substance use disorder along with a co-occurring mental health diagnosis. At Valor Home, provide 6 beds dedicated to IOP Veterans.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families

SSVF serves low-income veterans and their families who may be experiencing a housing crisis. Assistance can be provided to single adults and couples with or without

children. Our veteran advocates meet you where you are. It is our goal to provide assistance with the least amount of barriers possible. Services include rapid-rehousing, homeless prevention, temporary financial assistance, landlord mediation, housing counseling, income support, budgeting resources, legal services, and healthcare referrals. SSVF staff also provide referrals to local resources throughout the community.

To be eligible:

- You or the head of the household must be a U.S. military veteran
- The veteran must have served active duty
- The veteran cannot have been discharged dishonorably
- You must be low income
- You must be homeless or at risk of being homeless

Additional FCS Veteran Housing Program

As mentioned previously, our Veterans Division provides several housing programs sprawling across six counties:

Veteran Haven – Trumbull and Mahoning

131 W. Boardman St Ste A
Youngstown, OH 44502
330.409.9139

- Transition In Place (TIP)- Male/Female Veteran and Family
- Traditional 10 bed GPD shelter- Male Veterans
- IOP – Male Veterans

Freedom House – Portage

1213 Anita Drive
Kent, OH 44240

- Traditional 14 bed GPD shelter – Male Veterans

Lorain Valor Home – Lorain

221 W. 21st Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440.387.4293

- Traditional 30 bed GPD shelter – Male Veterans

Honor Home – Stark

2832 34th Street
Canton, OH 44705
330.752.2134

- Traditional GPD- Male/Female Veterans
- IOP – Male/Female Veterans



The Samuel A. Felton, Jr. Valor Home of Lorain County Transitional Housing Program for homeless male veterans and Veteran Service Center for all local veterans and families. Contact: 440-387-4293. Facebook: Valor-Home-Lorain-County.



Veteran's Haven of Warren and Youngstown Counties goal is to promote housing stability, to male and female veterans and their families. Through transitional housing for male veterans, Transition-In-Place housing for veteran families and a Service center which is open to all veterans in the community. Contact: 330-409-9139. Facebook: Veteran's Haven.



Honor Home of Stark County Transitional housing facility for homeless single male veterans and women veterans with children. Support is provided via the Advisory Committee. Contact: 330-631-3075. Facebook: Honor Home.



The Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home of Summit County Transitional housing program for homeless male veterans. Contact: 330-773-7000. Facebook: Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home of Summit County.



Freedom House of Portage County. Transitional housing program for all single veterans. Contact: 330-673-0705. Facebook: Freedom House



Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), provides services to low-income veterans and families in order to assist in stabilizing housing. Available to those living in Lorain, Ashtabula, Stark, Medina, Summit, Portage, Geauga, Trumbull and Mahoning counties. Veterans experiencing COVID-19 housing emergencies call 855-234-7310 or email ssvf@fcsohio.org

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Nathan Chambers, Director | **Email:** nchambers@fcsserves.org | **Phone:** 440.935.5570
Brandi Parker, Assistant Director | **Email:** Bbpaarker@fcsohio.org | **Phone:** 330.979.9900

Any Veteran experiencing homelessness or in imminent homelessness, please call 1.855.234.7310

Tara Harkness

"Give to the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you."
Proverbs 3:6; "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."



Growing up in the close-knit community of Norwalk, Ohio, on a street filled with family members, I was raised with the wise words of my dad constantly echoing in my ears: "Your mind has not caught up with your body." As a young dreamer, I yearned for exploration and unique experiences, knowing deep down that I wanted to be a boss, to chart my own course in life. My dad was employed by a tier-one automotive company as a press operator. To supplement his income, my dad owned Harkness Hauling, a residential/business trash removal company. He later shared that he was bought out by a large waste removal company. My mom did domestic work for several families and businesses. She set her schedule so she would be at home when we arrived from school. Little did I realize then that both my parents were true entrepreneurs,

laying the foundation for my own entrepreneurial journey.

Years of diverse work experiences and various roles shaped my skills, and in 1993, I took a leap of faith and founded my first company, Link to Success Inc., which later became the parent company of HARKNESServices and Sweetness of Ohio. With over two decades of experience, I have grown into a savvy businesswoman, driven by a passion to assist and consult small businesses, particularly those owned by minorities and women.



HARKNESServices

Link to Success, Inc., my Ohio-based consulting firm, focused on

Sweetness of Ohio™

developing strategic partnerships by identifying companies' strengths and the best opportunities for maximizing success. My involvement with the City of Columbus, Ohio introduced me to the world of Minority and Women Owned Businesses. Obtaining certification from the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) broadened my network, resources, and visibility for my clients. My time at Staples Office Supplies further honed my marketing and sales skills, empowering me to equip my clients with powerful presentation, negotiation, communication, and leadership abilities.

One of the significant milestones on my entrepreneurial journey was the creation of HARKNESServices. Although it may have seemed like a departure from my previous ventures, it was a natural progression, grounded in my commitment to fostering viable businesses through strategic partnerships. Launched in 2011, the idea for HARKNESServices arose from a

connection with a hood cleaning business owner, and upon analyzing the opportunities for women and minorities, we ventured into this niche market.

Our journey began as subcontractors, but it soon became evident that taking control of our own projects was the path to thriving. Swiftly adapting and excelling in thorough documentation became one of our greatest strengths, earning us a reputation for exceptional Hood Management Services. From cleaning popular fast-food chains to serving prestigious establishments and institutions, McDonalds, Burger King, Dominos, Donato's Pizza, Columbus City Schools, Ohio State University, Cedar Point, Hollywood Casino, Correctional Institutions for the State of Ohio, Summa Hospital, Mount Carmel Hospitals and Convention Centers, we learned invaluable lessons and transformed into a resilient and dedicated team. Chris Harkness, COO, and Cornell Smith, Service Manager.

Our growth didn't stop there. We embarked on a vertical market in March 2023, a market encompassing a group of companies and customers that are all interconnected around a specific niche. By forging strategic partnerships, we ventured into the realm of restaurant kitchen equipment providers, aiming to serve a broader audience. Through our online Amazon store, we provide opportunities for those who prioritize supporting minority and women-owned businesses. This exciting chapter in our company's

journey inspired me to dig deeper and expand our horizons, driving us to achieve excellence in restaurant kitchen equipment provisions and make a lasting impact on broader vertical and horizontal markets. Horizontal markets are the opposite of vertical markets in that they sell their goods across multiple industries.

But my journey isn't solely about business success. I created Sweetness of Ohio in 2022 with a vision to celebrate the great faces, places, and products of our small communities, mirroring the one I grew up in. So, you may see me on weekends at a farm market, festival, in a small boutique or just maybe on a golf course (if I'm lucky) This endeavor allows me to give back and shed light on the hidden gems within our neighborhoods. It brings me great joy to share the stories of these communities and acknowledge the vital role played by small business owners, the true backbone of our towns.

I love to shop for seasonal vegetables, herbs, and microgreens pulled directly from Ohio's land. I met the famous Mr. Farmer Lee Jones®, owner of The Chef's Garden of Huron, Ohio. During my visit we talked about his great products, not knowing for over 30 years this hometown farm has been delivering exceptional products to many restaurants all over the USA. With the changes from the pandemic, the Chef's Garden made a shift by delivering these goods to homes. The brick-and-mortar location is on

Scheid Road in Huron, Ohio, and is open to the public.

Because every moment of the day offers opportunities to grow and spread what we've learned, I began to ask people what does community mean to you? How are people going to remember you? What legacy do you leave behind? People that inspire us deserve recognition and that is where our great faces come into play. Like Principal Valerie Janice Smith, of Norwalk, Ohio, who is dedicated to spreading kindness within our youth. Oftentimes we call this the ripple effect because kindness spreads like ripples in the water... to our children, our families, then through our communities. This leads to a stronger community where each generation can flourish.

Another great face of Ohio, Thomas H. Stephens, is the author of books including, "Life Changing Solutions Through Inspiration," "Why Have Faith In Jesus" "A Recipe for Success" and "Trails to the Truth." Thomas uses his Gospoetic expressions to not only reach the congregation, but he has also developed the Stop the Violence Initiative. This program targets at-risk youth and uses rhythm and hip-hop lyrics to share the gospel through mentorship and ministries. Thomas works with the youths, serving on various boards, and delivering Meals on Wheels with his wife. He has been honored by the Ohio House of Representatives for 1000 hours of community service. Additionally, Thomas has been honored in Who's Who in Black Columbus, Trailblazer in African

American History, Ohio State University Extension Outstanding Volunteer Award, NAUB Speakers Award, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning, and Outstanding Speakers Award.

Thomas presented me with a written Sweetness of Ohio's Poem; later to become our theme song recorded by Aaron O'Bryan Smith.

Lyrics to Sweetness of Ohio

Sweetness of Ohio with a spirit-filled twist.
Stories that touch lives that should not be missed.
We find places that you might not know.
Supporting local businesses to help them grow.
We meet individuals and mom and pop teams.
People who have passion to fulfill their dreams.
Captured by inspiration, including creative arts-
Stories we highlight feature people who do their part.
Connecting people, products, and places as directed by
God's hand.
The Hocking Hills, The Amish Country, every corner

of Ohio's land.

Finding sweet and unique places, as we enjoy our work and play.

Seeing the beauty in Ohio each and every day.

As I continue to serve my passion for the development of small businesses, my involvement with various organizations allows me to contribute to causes close to my heart. My guiding mantra has always been, "Give to the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you." It fills me with gratitude to have my husband, Steve, as my biggest supporter, encouraging and standing by me every step of the way.

My entrepreneurial journey is far from over, and my ambition knows no bounds. Through strategic alliances, dedication to excellence, and a passion for giving back, I hope to empower those who believe in the power of diversity and inclusivity. Together, we can create a world where dreams are nurtured, unique experiences are celebrated, and every business has the chance to thrive. ■




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DANIEL HARRIGAN, MAYOR

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Six Reasons Your Business Should Work With A Virtual Assistant

As a business owner, you work harder than you ever did as an employee. You are the one person who must make sure that everything gets done correctly and on time. You must manage all your menial and your important tasks. You are responsible to make sure that you are and stay legally compliant. You must make time for visiting with clients, marketing your business, creating schedules, running payroll and so much more. There is no way you can do all this in a regular work week. In fact, you cannot get all of this done even if you worked an 80-hour work week.

As your business begins to grow, so does your workload. At the end of the day, you are left feel unproductive and stressed about how you are going to manage your tasks, your time, and your life.

The pandemic has provided brand new opportunities for business owners to find better alternatives to hiring full-time employees in the form of professional Virtual Assistants.

If you are wondering what a virtual

assistant is and does, let me explain:

Simply put, a virtual assistant is a self-employed expert who works for business owners from a remote location. Virtual Assistants have specific skill sets that allow for them to serve multiple clients and work on different projects. They work within specifications supplied by the clients and offer a wide range of affordable services.

With their expertise and level of skill, a virtual assistant can get things done easily within a set deadline.

If you are interested in learning whether a Virtual Assistant might be right for you and your business, keep reading...

1 Reduce Your Workload

If your workload does not allow time for you to do the things that grow your business and make you money, or if you find that you aren't able to take time for yourself or your family due to the amount of time you are sitting at your desk working, you should consider working with a virtual assistant.

Virtual assistants can focus on some of your crucial and menial tasks, such as:

- General Administrative Tasks
- Digital Marketing
- Data Entry
- Market Research
- Transcription
- Calendar Management
- Scheduling
- Transcription
- Answering Calls and Emails
- Content Creation
- Customer Support

and many other tasks that help you to keep your business running smoothly.

2 Get More Work Done In Less Time

There is a great benefit to outsourcing some of your tasks to a Virtual Assistant. Virtual Assistants have a high-level of ambition. They take pride in their work and work hard to meet deadlines. They are also particularly good at project management and can help you strategize your menial, high-priority and important tasks so that you can focus on the projects that only you can do.

Your Virtual Assistant will already be experienced and knowledgeable. She will not need much training and she will have processes and equipment in place that will allow for quick turnaround of your tasks and projects.

3 Focus On Growth & Development

A good rule of thumb for outsourcing is to remember that you should consider delegating things that you cannot yourself and things that you should not do yourself. If you are working more than the standard 40-hour work week and feel that you have not gotten much accomplished or you're finding that you don't have time to complete tasks that are important for your company's development and growth, you are doing too much. You should consider working with a Virtual Assistant, even if you only hand off a few of your larger admin or marketing tasks to your dedicated assistant.

4 Decrease Operational Costs

Hiring a virtual assistant is a great way to cut down on the costs of hiring a full-time office employee. Here are a few ways that working with a virtual assistant can decrease the amount of money you spend on more permanent employees:

Save On Expenses You Would Incur For:

- Office Space
- Purchasing or Leasing Equipment and Furniture
- Maintenance Costs
- Employee Benefits

- Training
- Paying for employee breaks, gaps in work, meetings, etc.
- Additional Taxes

Your Virtual Assistant already has an office, equipment and all the systems in place that are necessary to help you manage your business. This is the perfect solution for the small business owner who cannot yet afford to cover all these expenses.

5 Boost Business Growth

Increase your skill set by utilizing the advanced level of expertise your Virtual Assistant has to offer. Having brainstorming sessions during your work sessions can help generate ideas that will both increase your visibility and revenue-growth potential.

Most likely, your personal assistant will be able to help you manage your business, take care of tasks through processes and systems you know nothing about and train you on those systems so that you can work projects together.

Additionally, your Virtual Assistant will be comfortable working without direction. You can give her the specifications for each project and let her handle it. She may even be able to help you find ways to manage your workflow and time better. She can set you up in systems that help you to be more productive and streamline your tasks, some to happen automatically through specialized software.

6 Scale Your Operations:

There may be times that your turnaround for deliverables is compromised. Things may be moving along slowly, and you cannot meet project deadlines. This is an

indication that you need to scale your business. To do that, you need to increase your manpower so that the increase in your workload can be managed properly. Working with a Virtual Assistant allows you to do that with minimal risk while allowing your business to control expenses.

Summarization:

If you are wondering why you should hire a Virtual Assistant, consider this: Your assistant can help you streamline your workflows in no time. Some Virtual Assistants offer a lot more than general administrative services.

There are many Virtual Assistants who are trained and experienced in marketing, graphic design, content creation, course creation, business coaching, scheduling, customer calls and emails and other services.

A Virtual Assistant can free up your time so that you can focus on core activities. You can delegate all the tasks you do not want to or cannot do to your Assistant so that you can take care of the most important things and have more free time. Virtual Assistants do not need constant supervision and they can set up systems and processes that help you to be more productive while saving you time and money. ■





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FINANCIAL LITERACY

The Importance of Teaching Financial Literacy, and Credit to Teens and Young Adults

By Joi L. Wilson

The Tax & Credit Queen” and owner of JLW Tax & Financial Services



Joi L. Wilson

Financial Literacy has always been a topic that I quickly realized was not being taught but necessary in my community. It was not taught to my mother, who was a college graduate, nor was it a topic of discussion among anyone in my family. Once I became educated about Financial Literacy and Credit, I began to teach my own community. I also vowed to make sure that my own children, twins, would be better prepared than

I was to face adulthood and not fall into an early life abyss of debt.

In today's fast-paced and complex world, it is necessary for all young people to be equipped with the essential skills and knowledge to navigate the financial landscape successfully. Teaching financial literacy and credit education to teens and young adults is of utmost importance. Having young adults, myself, I am glad that I made these decisions to teach them early on about their finances and how to understand money.

Financial literacy refers to the ability to understand and use various financial skills, including personal financial management, budgeting, saving, investing, and understanding financial products and services.

It is essential for all young people to develop a strong foundation in financial literacy to make informed decisions about money, both in their

personal lives and in the broader economy.

Expanding one's knowledge in financial literacy, credit management, and wealth is vital in molding young adults for success, especially since they are in the pivotal phase of transitioning into adulthood. The importance of understanding the value of money, spending wisely, making investments, and boosting their credit scores has never been more pressing. The younger generation needs to be educated on the significance of having good credit, as it determines their eligibility for loans, mortgages, and other financial opportunities. With proper financial education, young adults have the necessary tools to make informed financial decisions and investments, providing them with a solid foundation for long-term financial stability and growth.

Introducing financial literacy and credit education at a young age has numerous benefits. Firstly, it fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability for one's financial decisions. By learning about money management early on, young people develop good habits that can last a lifetime. Secondly, early education in these areas can help prevent financial mistakes and setbacks later in life. By





understanding the consequences of poor financial choices, young adults are more likely to make informed decisions and avoid unnecessary debt or financial hardship.

It is crucial for parents and educators to emphasize the importance of financial literacy from a young age. By doing so, we are helping to set up young adults for success in managing their finances in the future. Providing children with the necessary tools and resources to learn about financial literacy can help them create a strong financial foundation early on in life. This could include teaching them about budgeting, saving, and investing. Without a strong financial foundation, it is easy for young adults to make costly mistakes that can have long-lasting effects. By prioritizing financial literacy education, we are equipping our children with the skills and knowledge they need to make informed financial decisions and achieve financial stability in the future.

Having a solid financial grounding from a young age can have a

significant impact on a person's life. Investing in financial education can play a vital role in providing young adults with the knowledge and skills they need to make smart decisions about their money. By acquiring this education, they can learn how to create and stick to a budget, save for both the short and long-term, and start building a strong credit history. All these skills can help them avoid getting into unnecessary debt and enable them to live within their means. Furthermore, by learning early on how to manage money, young adults can take full advantage of investment opportunities while minimizing risks and maximizing gains. Therefore, investing in financial education for young adults may well be the best investment parents and educators can make in their future.

Credit plays a significant role in our lives, as it determines our ability to borrow money, secure loans, and make important purchases such as a car or a home. I started my children's journey to building credit when they

were 16 years old. I added them as authorized users to one of my major credit cards. When they turned 18, they had 2 years of excellent credit history, which earned them good credit. Unfortunately, many young people enter adulthood without a clear understanding of how credit works and the potential consequences of misusing it. By teaching teens and young adults about credit, we empower them to make responsible financial decisions, build a positive credit history, and avoid falling into debt traps.

Furthermore, I believe that teaching financial literacy and credit education to young people promotes economic empowerment and reduces the wealth gap. This is why from the age of 10, in the 5th grade, until they were seniors in high school, I offered their schools a free Financial Literacy program for their students. Our program was designed for children aged 8-18 years old. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to make sound financial decisions, we can empower

them to break free from the cycle of poverty and create a better future for themselves and their families.

To effectively teach financial literacy and credit education to teens and young adults, it is crucial to make the learning process engaging and interactive. Traditional classroom lectures may not be as effective as hands-on activities, simulations, and real-life examples. By incorporating practical exercises, such as creating a budget, investing in a virtual stock market, or analyzing case studies, young people can apply the knowledge they acquire and develop a deeper understanding of financial concepts.

To ensure the widespread adoption of financial literacy, and credit education, collaboration between schools, parents, and financial institutions is essential. Schools

can integrate these topics into their curriculum, providing students with structured and comprehensive education. Parents can reinforce these lessons at home, encouraging responsible financial behavior and fostering open conversations about money. Financial institutions can play a vital role by offering educational resources, workshops, and partnerships to support financial literacy initiatives.

In conclusion, teaching financial literacy, credit, and wealth education are essential for teens and young adults in today's world. It is crucial for their long-term financial well-being and not only ensures a secure future, but also empowers them to make smart decisions and investments. By providing them with the necessary tools and resources, we can help them avoid financial pitfalls,

create a strong financial foundation, and set themselves up for success. Having a good understanding of finances enables individuals to make informed choices concerning investments, loans, and savings. It also allows them to navigate financial situations with confidence and ease.

Moreover, acquiring financial knowledge at a young age can lead to better financial habits in the long run, resulting in improved financial stability and reduced debt. In short, financial education is crucial for young adults to attain financial freedom and success. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the younger generation is prepared to navigate the complex financial landscape they will face as adults. Let us invest in their financial education today for a brighter tomorrow. ■



WILL DENT

PRESIDENT AND CEO



About Will Dent

Will Dent has been leading The ABCD, Inc for 51 years, making a difference in the lives of thousands of people. He is the President and CEO of a non-profit Community Development Corporation that is related to the Office of Community Developers of the United Methodist Church. The letters “ABCD”, stands for A Better Community Development.

Mr. Dent graduated from McKinley High School and Wilmington College. He is married to his lovely wife, Bonnie, and has five children and four grandchildren.

Community Leader

Will Dent is a servant of God, a visionary, a leader, and a motivator who has dedicated his life to helping others. He is a champion and hero who deserves recognition for his contributions to Canton and the vicinity.

Will Dent serves on several boards and councils related to community economic development, minority business assistance, correctional treatment, and family impact.

Affiliations:

- Current member – LIFE Ministries International Church
- Member of Kappa Tau Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity
- Served as Basileus for 10 consecutive years
- Served as the 4th District Marshall
- Assistant Treasurer - National Black United Fund
- One of the founders of the Stark County Minority Business Association, established in 2008.
- Board Secretary – Stark County Minority Business Association
- Executive Director – Canton Black United Fund

Member of:

- National Action Network
- Rainbow PUSH
- American Civil Liberties Union
- Former training consultant with the General Board of Global Ministries of the
- United Methodist Church

Former Chief of Staff and Minister of Economics for the:

- Society for Cooperative Improvement of Africans and Midwest Regional Coordinator
- Pan-African Society
- Former member of Turner Chapel
- Former member of James S. Thomas United Methodist Church

While at James S. Thomas UMC: Served as Chairman of the Administrative Council and Secretary of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race

Community Economic Development

Sponsoring a Center for Entrepreneurship Development that houses minority-owned, service-oriented businesses and agencies. - Sponsored the Association for Urban Training Opportunities (AUTO) which houses the Transportation Services, an ASE Certified Automotive Mechanics Training Program, a Commercial Driver [Symbol]s License Preparation Program, an Auto Repair business, and a Trucking Company. - Organized the Stark County Minority Business Association (SCMBA), a membership-driven, non-profit organization that provides services to minority businesses and serves as a resource for referrals and recommendations. SCMBA was created to enhance partnerships between minority business members and majority-owned businesses to help with access to capital, education, and contracts. ■

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Greater Summit County Minority Business Association – Why?

Stark County Minority Business Association – Achievements!!!

By Tony Bishop

Yesterday I attended a Financial Literacy Workshop Series kick-off sponsored by Stark County Minority Business Association (SCMBA). Huntington Bank, KeyBank and PNC Bank were the presenters hosted by (SCMBA) from 7:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m., and it was excellent!

The program had five distinct sections: The Big Picture:

Credit Reporting and My Business

The Impact of Personal Credit on My Business

Business Credit Reporting

How Lenders Evaluate Your Creditworthiness

Credit Reporting and Business Operations

Presented from a 52 page syllabus – Money Smart for Small Business Building Credit. In addition I had recently seen the SCMBA newsletter which I found to be one of the best that I've ever seen online created by one of Akron's own Graphic Design and Marketing prodigies, Elise Watkins who is their new marketing person.

I present this information in detail due to the fact that I have been teaching business plan writing and development for almost a decade in Canton and Akron at the behest of the Akron Urban League and Canton Score organization. During this time I have had the opportunity to be involved with SCMBA much of the decade as a member. As a result of the challenges I see before African-American and minority entrepreneurs, it is my firm belief that personal credit, business credit building and access to capital are the essential pillars of successful entrepreneurship in addition to a competitive advantage.

This article is titled **Greater Summit County Minority Business Association – Why? ...and subtitled Stark County Minority Business Association- Achievements!!!**. I have witnessed many of the significant

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efforts that SCMBA has waged. The progress they have made and the achievements they have captured may be a model for the State of Ohio, minority business in general and Akron, Ohio specifically.

Akron is about to have a new mayor now that the primary is over with an uncontested election in 2024. It is my supposition that if we do not have Greater Summit County Minority Business Association in place and an effective force to address minority business concerns and growth for his inauguration, we may not have a voice, or choice or enough influence to command, demand or beget significant funds to build the future of minority business. These are the pivotal years, to prevent us from the prediction of succumbing to zero net worth nationally, as a race by 2053, if not before, like African Americans currently in Boston Massachusetts!

MONEY

REPORT: BLACKS IN BOSTON HAVE A MEDIAN NET WORTH OF \$8, WHITES HAVE \$247K



See Black Enterprise article: <https://www.blackenterprise.com/blacks-boston-median-net-worth-8/>

To this end, I was fortunate enough yesterday to be able to interview the CEO of SCMBA – Leonard Stevens, Will Dent – one of the primary SCMBA Founders &

Continue on Next Page



Leonard Stevens,
CEO
SCMBA



Will Dent, One of the
Primary Founders
SCMBA



Tom West, Former
House of
Representatives

Supporters who is also President and CEO of The ABCD Inc. (A Community Development Corp.) and former State Representative and Canton Mayor candidate Tom West. I believe these Pioneers have provided a road map for success, influence and impact for the future, to survive and thrive. Our conversations follow.

In talking with Leonard Stephens CEO, about the history of SCMBA, he said “let’s take a ride” and took me to meet with Will Dent-President and CEO of The ABCD, Inc. There, Will Dent told the story of how Stark County and Mahoning County had continually been left out of funding for minorities and the multiple minority organizations that had made requests for funding and assistance. Will said “it wasn’t until “Phil Shotwell from the governor’s office got involved and several Black legislators, did a permanent organization evolve-SCMBA in 2009 and then contracts began to include more minorities.”

Former State Representative Tom West said another “significant turning point in the growth of SCMBA was the infusion of \$300,000 dollars from the State of Ohio, money to hire staff to work rather than just Volunteers, 150,000 dollars for each of 2 years in 2019. The Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce offered SCMBA free office space, computers, parking space and Support Services including reception, meeting rooms, greater access, visibility, credibility and presence coupled with the evolving Football Hall of Fame. This leverage ignited a movement and momentum that drove membership from 80 to over 300 members currently under the leadership of CEO Leonard Stevens, Tom West was the catalyst “to get Governor Dewine to earmark funds the prior year in the budget with the Senate and the House of Representatives for SCMBA as a pilot project.”

Will stated that once “Leonard Stevens got Involved, He became the lightning rod to grow the organization. Through Ohio Means Jobs, a State Agency, SCMBA was

able to get 25,000 scholarships to become involved in the Elite Program sponsored by the London Stock Exchange for businesses that were doing a million dollars or more and wanted to expand internationally. SCMBA was able to negotiate the entry threshold down to \$300,000 in sales and provide two cohorts of 15 companies with the distinct advantage of participating and going through this extensive program. “Many of these companies are flourishing today” CEO Stevens said proudly as he rattled off a dozen or so. The Business Doctor, LLC was one of the companies selected for the Elite Program.

In response to the training topics discussed repeatedly and aired SCMBA was able to secure \$300,000 of funding from the State to do a needs assessment for minority businesses. The result was the creation of the Expanding Resources for ALL (ERA) program which the City of Canton provided \$169,000 for each of two years and a third grant for training, in Management, Business Law, Accounting, Banking Relations and more as well as \$5,000 during the pandemic for 15 and 20 businesses respectively.

The Partnership with the Hall of Fame and the local, state and federal entities has yielded over 20 contracts and over a million dollars and greater Advocacy for contracts which has created jobs, taxes and greater minority participation. There was actually a construction Remodel Project that was done exclusively with SCMBA as the acting as general contractor with over 15 black subcontractors.

SCMBA also has created A Youth Entrepreneurship Program (YEP) for eighth graders, 12 chosen out of a class of 300 to become entrepreneurs and business owners, taught by business owners to develop, a viable business idea, mission, teamwork, logo, financial literacy, savings and pitch skills, for the Mayors Pitch Contest like Shark Tank. Each of the participants was awarded stock in the Hall of Fame 100 shares valued at 50 cents at the time, which is now valued at over \$10 per share. Market 55 Design and Malone University were instrumental in executing and supporting this program. This will be the second year for this program which is about to start.

SCMBA has had many initiatives which also includes the Lunch-n-Learn monthly program on different business topics with notable accomplished guest speakers. CEO Stevens also mentioned the SCM Forward Group that

initiated working with minority CEOs and the black community with a monthly call and Brand Promise to help black businesses participate with the purchasing departments of larger companies like Altman Hospital that spends over 300 million dollars a year. The Hall of Fame Centennial Plaza uses SCMBA Food Vendors exclusively up to 40 one year of the last four years to host the Fun Fest, and HBCU Minority Business Reception to name a few notable initiatives.

Last but definitely not least, is that SCMBA has become a MBAC – Minority Business Assistance Center for the State of Ohio certified and awarded a budget as a Tier 1 MBAC which means that they will be serving Carroll, Tuscarawas, Holmes, and Columbiana Counties in addition to Stark County.

Leonard Stevens, stated that “when the State of Ohio gave us \$300,000 twice for a total of \$600,000 they never imagined that it would produce 10 to 12 million dollars in additional funding, contracts, jobs, taxes and opportunity.”

As a participant in some of the programs that Stark County Minority Business Association has sponsored, mentored and initiated, I believe at the very least they have done an outstanding job of surviving and thriving in meeting their mission of establishing greater equity on the field of business for African Americans and minorities. It is my hope that Greater Summit County Minority Business Association will be able to follow the precedent and roadmap to similar success along with the other major cities and black communities in the State of Ohio as well as the nation. I believe this to be a fundamental way to overcome the blight of “zero net worth” studies predict for African Americans by 2053. ■



For additional information on Stark County Minority Business Association and Greater Summit County Minority Business Association, please contact Tony Bishop – The Business Doctor, LLC at 330.283.0158 or Bizdocllc@gmail.com.

All the best for your success!!!

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People are at the heart of what we do.

It can be easy to forget to stop and appreciate this place: our community. At Huntington, we see it as our responsibility to not just appreciate the Akron area, but to always be looking for ways to make it better. That's why we're making a number of investments right here. Check them out at [huntington.com/Community](https://www.huntington.com/Community). Because when our communities thrive, we all live better.



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