

connections

Du Bois

Young people are indispensable to nonprofits says Nichole Dupont who traveled the county to explore a variety of internship programs

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The mission of Connections Magazine is to forge connections both within the large Berkshire nonprofit sector and the community at-large. By telling our stories, sharing tips and best practices, and including a variety of voices, Connections Magazine helps create a stronger nonprofit sector

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

From The Publisher 3

VOICES

State Representative Smitty Pignatelli 4

1Berkshire 6

Berkshire County Development Alliance 12

PROFILES

Young Leaders 8

Akilah Edgerton 10

TOPICS

VOLUNTEERISM: Teens who Volunteer:
Nature or Nurture? 14

HUMAN RESOURCES: The Berkshire Shuffle 18

SECTOR NEWS: Awards Event 20

ARTICLES

"Role of Young People" Survey 7

Internships (Beyond the Mailroom) 16

GOOD ADVICE: Attracting Young People
to Board Service 19

ON THE COVER:

Members of the Railroad Street Youth Project unveil the new W.E.B. Du Bois mural located in the alley between Railroad Street and the Triplex Cinema in Great Barrington.

Photo: Terry Cowgill



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From the PUBLISHER

**Liana Toscanini, Executive Director
Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires**



HAPPINESS
(in the nonprofit world)
is ...

Hope for our future! This issue focuses on the role of young people in the Berkshire nonprofit sector. While “young” in the Berkshires is sometimes considered anyone under

60, we focused on teen volunteers to young executives no older than 40. We hope you’ll enjoy reading about the many options available to young people, from internships to youth leadership programs, part-time jobs to senior positions. We all benefit from encouraging and appreciating the next generation of nonprofit workers.

Funding! A shout out to the Clinton Church Restoration folks for all their hard work and resulting success as recipients of over half a million dollars in grant awards from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the Town of Great Barrington’s Community Preservation Act funds, and the National Park Service African American Civil Rights Grants Program. This on top of the generous individual donations that enabled CCR to purchase the building in 2017. Wow! What a great start to preserving this important historic treasure in Great Barrington.

When people in the Eastern part of the state remember and recognize the Western part of the Commonwealth! Congratulations to VIM Berkshires and the Berkshire Immigrant Center for being named

finalists for the MA Nonprofit Network’s Excellence Awards. This is a serious honor combined with an exciting trip to the State House on June 4th to celebrate “Nonprofit Awareness Day.” Berkshire Immigrant Center won the statewide award for “Excellence by a Small Nonprofit.”

Focusing on program. We’re excited to launch a Nonprofit Boot Camp on July 11 with a large segment on governance. Soon we’ll be working on the 3rd annual *Giving Back* guide and announcing our fall workshop series. There’s also a new Resource Guide in the works, the formation of a nonprofit advisory board and more.

Sponsors! Quite simply -- sponsors make it all happen in our community. I heartily thank and salute the Berkshire Nonprofit Awards sponsors: **The Berkshire Eagle, Berkshire Bank, Adelson & Co., Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Feigenbaum Foundation, Lee Bank, October Mountain Financial Advisors, NBT Bank, Triplex/Beacon Cinemas, and United Personnel.**

Post Gala relief: Up here on the second floor of 40 Railroad Street, the Southern Berkshire Chamber made it through their Business Showcase, CATA celebrated its 25th anniversary, the Nonprofit Center hosted its first big event (The Berkshire Nonprofit Awards), the BIFF presented its 13th film festival, and Alander Construction has completed its extensive renovation at the top of Railroad Street! How about a celebratory SoCo run?

Happy Summer everyone!



Berkshire Immigrant Center took home the “Excellence by a Small Nonprofit” award at the State House on June 4th. Left to right: Ivan Victoriano, Intake Coordinator, Mary Jo Ramos, Volunteer (2 days a week for almost 3 years!), Lorena Dus, Junior Case Worker, Jennifer Smith, Education Coordinator, Sheryl Lechner, Development Coordinator, Gulmira Churokova, Senior Case Worker, Brooke Mead, Executive Director.

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VOICES:

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SMITTY PIGNATELLI



Young people are the lifeblood of our communities. The vitality they are able to inject into longstanding systems and organizations really is what keeps the world going. Especially now, when things change and advance in the blink of an eye, it's important for communities everywhere, including right here in the Berkshires,


to keep pace with progressions and stay in tune with the rest of the world, most especially through government and nonprofit organizations.

I have always believed in open dialogues with folks from different walks of life so I can become more familiarized with important issues and topics around me, especially as an elected official. I very much enjoy the internship opportunities available to college students and recent graduates in both my district office and my State House office in Boston. I've been blessed to have a number of talented young individuals with an interest in public service and current affairs join my office to gain experience of the legislative process as it exists in Massachusetts. I love to see all of them bringing a new perspective and a fresh take on the way things have always been done in state government.

When I wanted to take a deeper dive in the gun control legislation that my colleagues and I were set to debate, I charged my then-district intern, Solomon Bennett, with collecting information on current laws and compiling statistics and presenting me with his own interpretations so I could ask the right questions and have an open conversation. Similarly, since I was granted the opportunity to serve as House Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture this session, I plan on having an 'environmental intern' over the summer, focusing on environmental protection policy areas, most especially

land conservation and how the different ways lands can be put into conservation each affect the cities and towns where the land is located.

In terms of our local nonprofits -- I have to touch on the Railroad Street Youth Project (RSYP) in Great Barrington. I've continued to advocate and allocate funding for RSYP through the Berkshire Youth Development Project amendment, filed to the annual state budget since the early 2000s, because of the good work the organization does to address the needs of our youth when it comes to countering drug use and encouraging job readiness. The most remarkable thing about RSYP has to do with how it even came to be -- founded in 1999 by a group of area teenagers, led by 19-year-old Amanda Root, who no longer wanted to see their peers succumb to addiction with nowhere else to turn. If that's not a perfect example of the power of young people, I don't know what would be. These young adults saw a problem in their community and decided to meet the challenge head on and the initiative has thrived ever since with their ongoing mentoring programs, apprenticeship opportunities and job training and career readiness counseling.

Young people have always had to rise to meet the challenge of their own generations -- it's a story that's repeated itself over the years. As a true believer of this fact, I'm happy to say a story such as Railroad Street's inception and opportunities including various youth partnerships and internships from my office to Berkshire United Way, to the Boys and Girls Club and the wonderful mentors at the Berkshire South Community Center. I'd be remiss as both the Southern Berkshire representative and the House Chair of the Environment if I forgot to mention Greenagers, which engages young adults and teens in sustainable farming and resource management right out of their headquarters in Great Barrington. There are a great number of opportunities and communities within our community that exist to engage with and provide concrete opportunities for Berkshire County youth, and the Berkshires as a whole must continue to tap into our young people as a readily available resource that will lead us surely and surefootedly into tomorrow. 

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VOICES: 1BERKSHIRE

By Matthew McGrory

Throughout the Berkshires, many aspiring, gifted young adults are seeking opportunities to expand their horizons and develop their skills outside of the classroom. I understand this to be true through my experiences with the 1Berkshire Youth Leadership Program. This program was designed to show a group of high school juniors that showed leadership potential through their academic and extra-curricular excellence the full extent of Berkshire County's strengths and weaknesses and how its businesses and nonprofits contribute to the community as a whole.

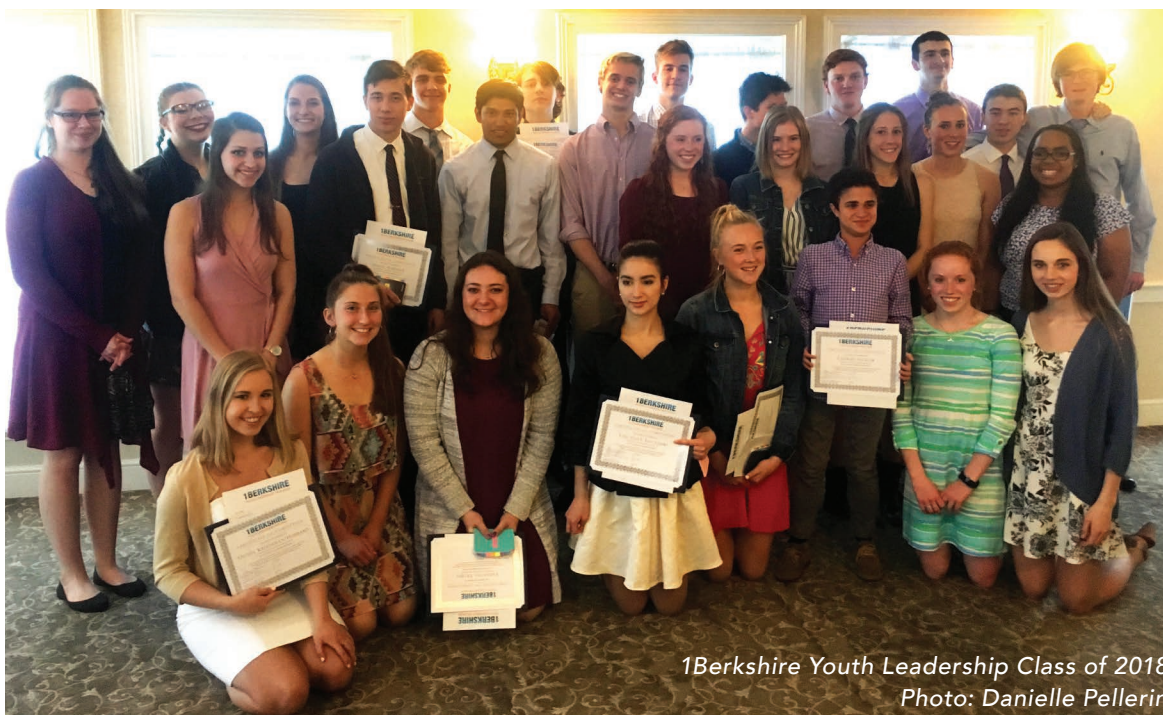
The program accepted thirty young adults from around the area, all of whom fully committed to it and displayed industrious effort in seeing it through to its end. This goes to show how much of the youth in the Berkshires is ready and willing to become involved members of their communities if given a chance. I therefore contend that the greatest barrier that young adults face in engaging with their communities is that they don't see many opportunities to do so.

It's easy for students to get so caught up with academics and planning to see the world, many of them miss opportunities to see what's available to them in their own backyards. If they are interested in doing nonprofit work, they don't know how to get involved. I think the best way to move forward is to encourage

each other to readily seize any opportunities that do present themselves, and for schools to be more active in advertising programs that help students engage with their communities.

In an interview, I asked Laura Heritage of Skills USA what she thought we could do to help young adults become more active in their communities. Skills USA is a national membership organization -- a partnership of students, teachers and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. She went on to say, "I think to help (young adults) be more involved is to have an exposure to these different programs, to develop different programs and incorporate it into classes...and encourage the benefits for it." Laura has been very much involved with the Berkshires herself, being a Skills USA state officer and a frequent volunteer at the Louison House.

My own experiences with community engagement have made me realize that I had to put myself out there in order to gain opportunities, opportunities that I wouldn't have thought would be available on a local level. After all, I, who am considering a possible career in journalism, wouldn't have had the chance to write this column for a local magazine and gain some experience and insight into the field if it weren't for the connections I made through the 1Berkshire Youth Leadership Program. ☺

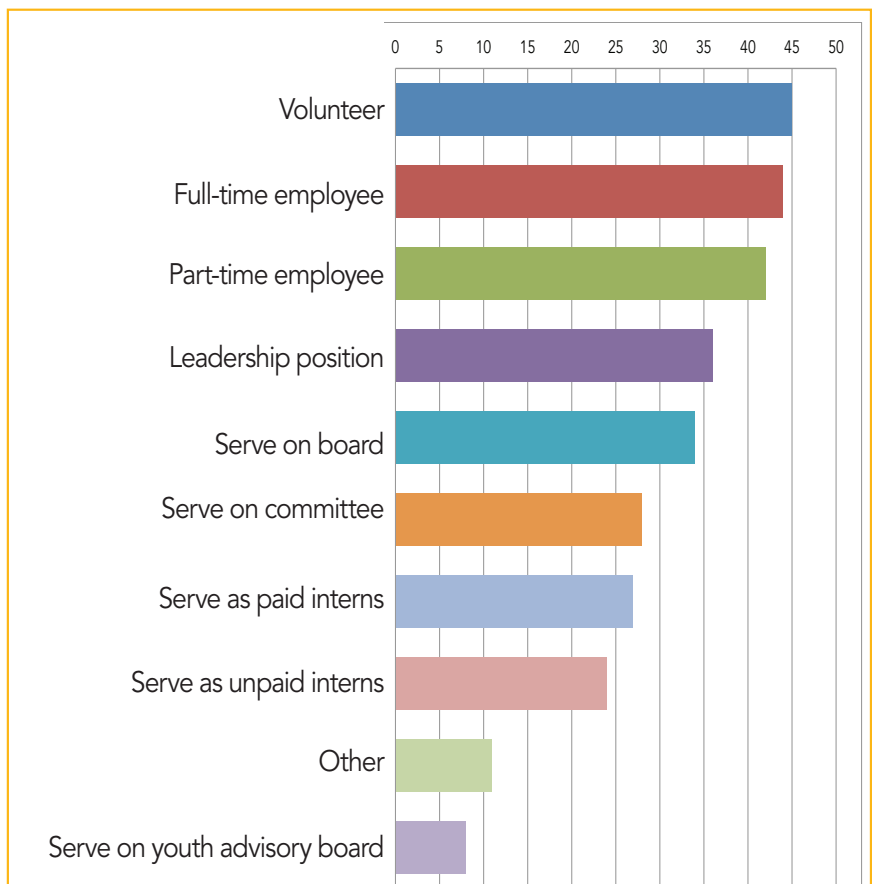


*1Berkshire Youth Leadership Class of 2018
Photo: Danielle Pellerin*

What Roles Do Young People Play in Your Nonprofit Organization?

(For the purposes of this survey, "young" refers to anyone under 40!)

Our thanks to the 75 nonprofits that responded to our one-question survey. The responses would seem to back up our writers' conclusions that young people play a vital role in the Berkshire Nonprofit Sector.



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North Adams firefighters halt basement blaze at Holiday Inn

The fire was reported at nearly midnight, 1211 to Avenue and Main, by a 911 call from the Main Street hotel. Occupied rooms should be closed off from the street, fire officials said. The fire was reported at the first floor, but the report then moved to the 10th floor. A single apartment unit in the hotel was involved, but not until after firefighters arrived. The fire was reported at the first floor, but the report then moved to the 10th floor. A single apartment unit in the hotel was involved, but not until after firefighters arrived.

PROFILE: YOUNG LEADERS

By Hannah Van Sickle

Keeping up with **Alex Reczkowski** is no small feat; the 37-year-old Director of the Berkshire Athenaeum exudes a youthful exuberance that is not only eliciting change but also creating a “new normal” at the 148-year-old institution where Reczkowski has been at the helm for a scant two years. Opposite his desk, in a corner office overlooking the Old Athenaeum building, is a lithograph by Alexander Calder entitled,



Alex (photo by Hannah Van Sickle)

Stone Age. The bold composition, standing in stark contrast to the brick wall on which it is propped, is worthy of a closer look--not unlike Reczkowski whose perspective of the work at hand is both alluring and refreshing. As to his biggest obstacle on the job to date? “There’s a lot of experience and institutional knowledge that’s creeping away,” he admits before making a smooth segue to the really exciting challenge at hand: creating a balance between preserving the aforementioned knowledge while allowing new ideas to come in--a task being tackled by young leaders across the county as they find ways to incorporate the past while making their own marks on the present.

In many ways, Reczkowski has a leg up in the process. Since arriving at his post in July 2016, Reczkowski has thrown the idea of scarcity out the window and replaced it with a focus on the acknowledged wealth that exists. “That’s what’s so amazing about the Berkshires” he nearly shouts. “We have all of these resources,” he says--citing ideas, connections,

individuals--not to mention the excitement that comes from being steeped in this proverbial feast. In fact, much of Reczkowski’s success to date has come from his embracing a simple organizational phrase employed by the City of Pittsfield: How can we?

This simple shift in thinking is not only inspiring and effective, but it is also making room for the library’s evolution from a place of consumption to a place of creation. “People are using the library,” Reczkowski says, revealing a staggering statistic: more than 1,000 patrons come through the library’s doors each day. They are building resumes, printing papers, taking online courses, scouring the archives, using the conference rooms. In short, connecting with one another and the community. Which, for many, is a real shift from the days of no food and shushing --both practices Reczkowski actively avoids. “I don’t get caught up in others’ expectations,” he admits--sage advice learned from mentors along the way. Reczkowski points to a pair of college professors--a married couple who modeled the importance of balancing professional and personal success--as touchstones for his own work. As to their words of wisdom? “We’re not letting your stereotypes, prejudices, and barriers be ours,” he recalls, which gets back to the root of growth-- not from scarcity but abundance. “Advice is good, as is constructive criticism, but leadership is not just being able to take all of that data in. To integrate it and digest it and make something out of it--that’s the thing.” Which, like the artwork that hangs opposite his desk, often requires being bold, daring and creative.

Ananda Timpane, of Great Barrington, is no stranger to this dance. “It’s heartbreaking when young people don’t see a place here for themselves,” says the newly-turned 40-year-old Executive Director at Railroad Street Youth Project--an organization founded by youth, for youth--a post she has held since April 2012. Timpane grew up in South County and counts herself among the generation of youth who started RSYP despite being incrementally removed from the organization’s genesis. “When I was growing up, it was



Ananda (photo courtesy of Railroad Street Youth Project)

hard for young people to feel like we had a space in town or that we were appreciated," recalls Timpane. In many ways, this continues to be the case for young people--both the demographic served by RSYP as well as Timpane's peer group--as Berkshire County struggles to attract and retain young professionals.

"It felt like a really lucky stroke," says Timpane of the position at RSYP opening as she was leaving grad school; not to mention this exciting step in her career path allowed Timpane to advance as a young professional without leaving the area. Timpane's role as Executive Director in no way removes her from the heart of the organization's work-- work that revolves around finding "really different approach[es] to working with young people to be leaders in their own lives and in their community. In fact, she has deep relationships with young people--lifting them up and supporting their empowerment while also fostering intergenerational communication. "I get to do that on a daily basis," she says citing "opportunities to just be awed by what some young people are doing--in terms of projects and just navigating life," as the most deeply rewarding parts of her job.

Timpane's own experience, both having grown up in Berkshire County and now leading a nonprofit here, equates to deep ties within the community. "One of the reasons I really love that I get to live and work [here] is being surrounded by mentors. It's so easy to reach out with a question and have someone really show up with answers or another connection." As to what gems she has picked up from those mentors

along the way? Timpane talks about an unavoidable shift, what she calls "a strong cultural imperative--that we can't get the work done, the nuts and bolts of service, if we don't learn how to address all of these major social issues [facing young people]." Timpane is clear and passionate about the issues plaguing our country on a national level. With huge parts of the population at visible risk of harm--from individuals of color to members of the LGBTQ+ community-- issues of equality are at center stage followed closely by sexual harassment. "It's just impossible to do the work without identifying, grappling with and understanding how these issues have to be interacted with and addressed within whatever the work is we are doing."

Amber Besaw's understanding of these sentiments directly informs her duties at Northern Berkshire Community Coalition where she is working to change the perception of life in North Adams and the surrounding communities. Besaw came to NBCC, after many years working in the mental health field with children and families, to help build The Family Place, a resource center for families. Since being tapped as the Executive Director at NBCC in



Amber (photo courtesy of Northern Berkshire Community Coalition)

December 2016, Besaw has been painted as a real community advocate who quietly prides herself on positively impacting and making a difference in her community. According to Besaw, the rewards of her work are manifold: "I get to meet new people, work


Continued on page 10

Young Leaders continued from page 9

with a diverse group within our community, [and] create opportunities to convene and connect the community.” As to the most rewarding parts? Besaw is bold: “I have the ability to be creative and think outside the box for solutions, and I often get to see, firsthand, new initiatives and work in our community unfold.”

Perhaps Besaw’s most endearing quality is meeting others where they are. “I just try to be myself and get to know [others] for who they are,” she explains. And, not wanting to take too much credit, Besaw speaks at length as to those whom she has met along the way. “All I have learned has come from those who have mentored me,” she says, citing a wealth of individuals who have modeled patience, intelligence, and the importance of “stay[ing] in my lane,” she says, in a nod to finding one’s own way despite the path of predecessors. This striving for balance is most certainly a challenge, particularly when coming into a leadership position. “It can be very challenging to figure out how to maneuver change,” Besaw says frankly. “As a leader, you want to bring a part of yourself to the table...your ideas, your goals.... but it is also important to recognize and preserve those ‘traditions’ that made your organization successful to begin with,” she explains.

Besaw takes a strong stance on finding one’s own way--and the balance needed between “taking some great advice” and “taking time to learn and understand [one’s work] in its entirety” before making too many changes. Her best advice for the next generation of young leaders? “Too much change too quickly can be more harmful than helpful,” she cautions--invaluable considering the relative youth of her own journey at NBCC coupled with the depth of experience she has accrued along the way.

“It’s a typically Berkshire County thing that being 40 is young,” remarks Timpane who has her finger on the pulse of the issues facing young people--and young leaders--in this day and age. “What has existed before is just not true for the current reality,” she says, noting that rapid levels of change and growth in the world “push us to think in a dynamic, fluid way.” Perhaps she shares some of Raczkowski’s How can we? attitude. Regardless, she is but one of a trio of young leaders who--through her persisting--is effecting change and inspiring others in the process. 

PROFILE: AKILAH EDGERTON

By Hannah Van Sickle

Akilah Edgerton is a strong, connecting link, and engaging with the Pittsfield community is her full-time job. She can be found at New Generation Global Ministry, where she is a pastor; at Miss Hall’s School, where she is co-coordinator of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Programs as well as a 10th grade Horizons teacher and dorm parent; at the Rites of Passage and Empowerment Program, where she is a facilitator, mentor and international travel coordinator; and at the Berkshire County Chapter of the NAACP, where she co-chairs the youth committee. Despite the myriad hats Edgerton dons on a daily basis, a common denominator binds her seemingly disparate work: **She is inviting young people to have a seat at the table, and they are overwhelmingly accepting.** In short, Edgerton makes a habit of having tough conversations--and she’s enthusiastically all-hands on deck when it comes to the task. Here, speaking from the “I perspective,” Edgerton takes a moment to talk frankly about the challenges and rewards of helping the youth in Berkshire County to become global citizens.

HVS: What is a global citizen?

AE: “When I think about being a global citizen, I think about someone who is on the road to becoming culturally competent; it is a process, an ongoing process, [that requires] really learning how to interact with various people from various backgrounds. A global citizen is someone who is open minded to learn other cultures, to learn other people’s stories--not write those stories for others--but to learn and understand their stories; and we all have different stories. People who are definitely willing to engage and to get out of their comfort zone and to lead a diverse existence.”

HVS: What are young people craving right now?

AE: “[The creation of] a culture, an environment, where they can feel like they fit in, where they feel like they belong. Where they don’t have to assimilate. Helping them to belong, helping them to fit in, really has to come from listening to them.”

HVS: What is your biggest objective in working with the NAACP Youth Committee?

AE: "We really try to engage with young adults, and listen to their stories and perspectives while helping them to channel what they need in a positive way [which includes] creating action steps. It's one thing to talk and to listen, and then we also believe we have to put steps in place so we can really make change within our community. One challenge is getting the youth to come in and to trust us...to know that we're listening; [to reassure them that] we're not trying to do it for you--that you do have a voice--and we're listening to you. And it's not just us; there are other people in the community who want to listen and who do want the youth in our community to be successful and to move forward in their lives."

HVS: Who is the NAACP for?

AE: "It's so important in the work that we do--diversity, equity, inclusion--[to recognize] it's not just people of color; we have allies as well. There is white privilege that happens, within our country, [and] it's important that our allies use their privilege in order to help further the work of people of color and really help those who are oppressed, and those who have been marginalized. It's systemic, it's institutionalized; it's in our policies, it's in our laws, and [there is a tremendous] amount of push back that I get--that we get--for just naming it. With privilege comes oppression; it's hard to think, I'm in a place of privilege because this group over here has been oppressed. That's hard to think about. Many people haven't had to have this conversation--just to understand the concept, not even the application--has been really difficult."

HVS: What qualities are imperative for the next generation of leaders?

AE: "The ability to listen; actively listen. And to persevere, even in difficult times. As leaders, we often need to make decisions that are not viewed as favorable, or we have to make quick decisions, but to be able to--when the storm hits--ride that storm. To keep pressing forward, to keep pushing forward. And to understand that it's okay to fail; failing doesn't mean that you couldn't do it, failing doesn't mean that it can't happen. If you fail,

it means, okay, this is still my vision, I just have to figure out another way to reach that vision. As leaders, [it is imperative] to go back to the drawing board with the understanding that you can still do it, but you might have to try it a different way. And keep pushing. That is key."

HVS: What is the most rewarding part of your work?

AE: To encounter a young person who says: This is what we want, this is what we need; can you make this happen for us? These are the moments I live for: to know I gave someone the tools to do whatever s/he needs to do. I don't believe in hand-holding, I don't believe in doing things for people--but simply giving them the tools so that they can do it for themselves." 🌱

Hannah Van Sickle works with high school students to navigate the challenges of academic writing as well as the college application essay. She is a regular contributor to various regional publications including Berkshire Magazine and The Berkshire Edge.



Akilah (photo by Hannah Van Sickle)

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VOICES: BERKSHIRE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

By Alex Groff and Jessica Provenz, co-chairs

*Insight gleaned from an interactive discussion on "All Things Galas" with event planner **Amy Rudnick** ...*

To Gala or Not to Gala - Discover Your Signature Event



BCDA Co-Chairs Alex and Jessica

First, question whether your successful fund-raising event should take on the form of a traditional gala affair. Think about your audience and the community you are trying to connect with. Maybe a sit-down dinner and auction aren't the best way to accomplish your goals. Don't be afraid to be

creative and think outside the box. Give your event a fun, creative name and BRAND -- it will help add pizzazz, generate interest, and sell more tickets.

Create a Master Plan and Stick to It

Create a detailed written plan and a timeline at the beginning. This will help you figure out the specifics early on and get everyone on the same page. In your plan, consider your ROI -- return on investment. Every single thing you do or spend needs to have a positive return on the investment of time and energy.

Don't Forget What You Do Best - Let It Shine!

Gala season in the Berkshires is full of events and it can be easy for one cocktail hour to mimic another. Make sure your mission is incorporated into the core of your fundraiser. Remember what makes your organization unique and put it front and center at any given opportunity.

Make Committees Count

Committees present an opportunity to engage with your wonderful community and steward them for the future. And they can be helpful in all kinds of ways, you just have to think about what everyone's unique talent is and how to best harness it. This can range from hands-on help creating flower arrangements to personal outreach to publicizing your event and gaining attendees.

Hire a Professional Benefit Auctioneer

Strongly consider hiring a professional auctioneer -- this person will entertain your audience and can help you double or even triple auction sales. Use great caution with volunteer auctioneers (no matter how charismatic) who may miss easy revenue opportunities. Best case scenario: get someone with experience who can romance your mission and encourage the audience to give.

Mobile and Online Bidding

The jury is out regarding mobile bidding devices or setting up a mobile bidding platform for your guests' phones. Carefully consider whether it's worth the time and expense. Mobile bidding can add an element of fun to your auction and encourage last minute bids on silent auction items. It can also enhance your "Fund a Need" at the end of your live auction. If you use mobile bidding, you MUST be sure there is enough WiFi coverage at your venue. Consider adding mobile hotspots. And be ready for guests to be even more glued to their iPhones. Mobile bidding can help those who can't attend still participate in the auction but you'll have to put out more promotional power to share the platform with non-attendees.

Raise the Paddle ... First

Present a heartfelt, passionate plea on behalf of your organization, and then without further ado, raise the paddle. Don't begin with live auction items first. Don't pause. Instead, get them interested and keep them there. This was a new piece of advice from Amy, who suggested that the result might be a far-more engaged raise the paddle session. If you try to do live auction items first, half the room who are not bidding on those items will lose focus and then you'll have to work to regain their attention. 💡

BCDA is an informal group of 150+ development professionals who represent over 85 Berkshire area nonprofit organizations in a fundraising capacity. Alex is the Director of Development at Jacob's Pillow and Jessica is the Director of Development at Barrington Stage Company. For more information or to become a member of BCDA: agroff@jacobs-pillow.org / jprovenz@barringtonstageco.org.

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VOLUNTEERISM

TEENS WHO VOLUNTEER NATURE OR NURTURE?

By *Hannah Van Sickle*

Michael Goretti's spark for volunteerism was ignited when he was 14 years old; Rob Magadini, a father figure to Goretti, invited the then high school freshman along to Riverbrook Residence in Stockbridge to deliver a basket full of hats, mittens and gloves as gifts for the winter holidays. Goretti, who was familiar with residents from their walks along Ice Glen Road, remembers thinking: This may be something I want to do in the future. This past December, true to the years' prior prophecy, Goretti reenacted his inaugural visit to Riverbrook--a dynamic home environment for women with intellectual and developmental disabilities--where he has become somewhat of a fixture in his free time. In a nod to what he calls "the original spark," Goretti kept with tradition and filled a basket with cold weather gear--purchased with funds earned working for a local land surveyor--and delivered the gifts with a group of peer volunteers from Monument Mountain Regional High School.

"To get kids passionate about helping others--that's my goal," says Goretti who is equally engaging and humble. Over the course of the past school year, Goretti and a team of six to eight regular volunteers spent their Sundays at Riverbrook. In poor weather, the students spent time doing puzzles and drawing with residents; now that warm weather is here, the Monument Monuteers--a clever play on the school's moniker and the group's purpose--enjoy walking with residents. Goretti's black labs, Cruiser and Bodie, are a natural segue for conversation and socialization, and the group has plans to volunteer at Riverbrook twice each week throughout the summer.

"At the end of the day, people are remembered for what they've given to others not what they've accomplished for themselves," is Goretti's take on things. "It's the imprint they leave." Ironically, while Goretti's efforts accumulate

to leave an indelible mark on the residents at Riverbrook, Rob Magadini has left his own mark--if only incrementally removed. "It's not only what [Rob] said but what he did," says Goretti of Magadini's lasting influence. "Not a lot of times do we have the opportunity to do things for others. For me, [volunteering is] my way of giving back--making an impact," says the National Honor Society member and three-sport varsity athlete who will study economics and math at St. Lawrence University in the fall.



Michael

Kamea Quetti-Hall has a passion for social justice movements including women's rights, gun control, race, and poverty issues. She and her friends were leaders in the walkouts at Pittsfield High School and organized a bus of 41 teens who traveled to Washington, DC for the March for Our Lives. "I know change does not happen overnight, but I like to see the change that can come from helping others," says the 2018 graduate of PHS. "It can make a difference, and helps me focus in on what's important in life," she adds. Which, for Quetti-Hall, resides close to home: "My mom is my role model in most things I do," she explains adding, "she showed me that helping others is a great feeling for them and for you as well."



Kamea

Stephanie Quetti took her daughter to a rally in February 2012 to protest the killing of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black man who was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida; Quetti took to the stage at

her daughter's school during Black History Month, where she played the part of a racist woman on a Montgomery, Alabama city bus in 1955 during what came to be an infamous stance by Rosa Parks who refused to give her seat up to a white man. In short, Quetti stood up for what she believed in--both literally and figuratively--which paved the way for her daughter's own activism.

Quetti-Hall, using her experience as a black student in Pittsfield Public Schools, recently facilitated a workshop at MCLA on cultural competency; she hosted a similar workshop at Pittsfield's Lichtenstein Center in June. Both events sprang from her hopes of bringing the community of Berkshire County closer together despite the wealth of differences that exist among us. When Quetti-Hall is not busy advocating for social justice, you can find her at the Berkshire Humane Society where she has been a volunteer dog walker for nearly two years.

As to how she landed that gig? She navigated it for herself, with a bit of guidance. "I used to always want to work there," recalls Quetti-Hall of her early trips to visit with the pets as a child. "My mom suggested I fill out a volunteer application and I was super excited." Her continued commitment to the very organization where the seeds for her own volunteerism were sown is not surprising. "On the one hand it's the small things, but it's also the bigger picture," she says of the benefits that come from community involvement. In September, Quetti-Hall will make a big move to Los Angeles to attend Occidental College where she plans to major in economics and play volleyball.

Marya Makuc grew up in a household where helping others was a priority; not surprisingly, her parents and extended family have been her biggest inspiration. "Whether it was a water emergency or someone needed help shoveling their driveway, my parents were always on standby to help; I strive to emulate the selflessness and compassion toward others that I see in them," explains the recent graduate of Mt. Everett Regional High School. In fact, for over ten years she has spent every Saturday morning at the Monterey Library--almost religiously. What began as matter of convenience--Makuc tagged along with her father, Library Director John Makuc--has evolved into a decade of service that spans more than half of her lifetime. At first unable to sit still, the young Makuc began begging for something to do at the library. The rest, as she says, is history. In an excerpt from her college application essay, Makuc makes clear the progression of her volunteer career: "At the age of seven, I shelved

books. At eight, I processed items. Nine, I ran the hold lists. Ten, I made phone calls. Eleven, I ran the circulation desk. Twelve, I led children's programs. Thirteen, I crafted posters. Fourteen, I created displays. Fifteen, I designed the website. Sixteen, I managed volunteers. Seventeen, I piloted my first capital campaign. Eighteen, I am charged with raising funds for a new multi-million-dollar library." What began as an outlet for her excess energy has become a passion for the sharing and organization of information.

Makuc has always been motivated to help others. In 2016, she became President of the Friends of the Monterey Library, a position she was "completely shocked" to fall into. In this role, she appreciates the simple things: "If I can't figure out how to complete something myself, there are many other people to lean on," she says, which leads to her most heartfelt statement of all: "Above all else, this little one-room library was where I first learned the meaning of community," Makuc shares. "It's such a beautiful thing to grow up in an area where we depend so deeply on each other. Volunteering at the library has only solidified this for me. I've had the chance to learn the stories of so many of the community members, and it is understanding each other that brings us to value and appreciate each and every human being--which we certainly could use more of." Come September, Makuc will attend College of the Holy Cross in Worcester. 🍂



Marya

BEYOND THE MAILROOM

Young people are indispensable to local nonprofits

By Nichole C. Dupont

It's more than a typical 'busy' day at IS183 in Stockbridge. The decades old community art school is gearing up for its annual gala (read: biggest fundraiser). Every year, the gala consumes the faculty and staff. Brielle Rizzotti is at the center of the whirlwind, and manages to remain completely calm.

And why shouldn't she be? Rizzotti, 29, has known the walls of IS183 for nearly a decade. She began as an intern

through the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts' intensive Berkshire Hills Internship Program (B-HIP) after graduating with a degree in arts and arts management.

"Just after graduating, I didn't really know what I was going to do," says Rizzotti. "At IS183 I was really able to jump right in and just keep going and growing from there. I started full time and worked in a lot of different capacities in sort of a catch-all position."

Rizzotti left the Berkshires for a three-year stint in Santa Cruz, where she utilized all of the skills she acquired at IS183 as an intern. But she missed the tiny corner of Massachusetts that

she has come to call home.

"I was more connected here than where I grew up in Rockland County [NY]," she says. "This place pulled me back."

Rizzotti is now the full time coordinator--and a faculty teacher--of IS183's Learning Through the Arts (LTA), an arts integration program that serves more than 1,200 school-age children in the Berkshires in after-school, in-school, and summer classes. And her story is not necessarily an oddity in the life of an intern here.

"Our interns come to us from all over, many with an interest in teaching art," says IS183 director Lucie Castaldo. "I think the best part of the program is that we have returning campers who then become teaching assistants."

Castaldo herself began as a 'camper' at the school, shortly after it opened in 1991 (and was known then as the Interlaken School). She then worked her way through the ranks--summer teaching assistant, faculty artist, associate program director, interim director--before landing, at age 27, as the director. Castaldo says that the school relies heavily on their interns and young helpers to make programming, and life, possible.

"There is definitely a level of training that we give to all our interns," says Castaldo. "We work with them on their resumes and being responsible, on time, all of these things. But even with all that wonderful training, we are totally dependent on their work and their enthusiasm and energy."

Young people across the county have helped shore up the operations of countless non-profits like MASS MoCA's Kidspace, the Berkshire Museum, Community Health Programs, Berkshire County ARC, the Trustees of Reservations, and Berkshire Children and Families to name just a few. They are not the 'coffee getters' of 1980s film lore. Far from it, according to Margaret Keller, executive director of Community Access to the Arts (CATA), which provides arts education programming to people with disabilities living in the region. Interns of all ages intersect with CATA artists; middle-schoolers at the Montessori School of the Berkshires come once a month to help out in art classes, Waldorf High School students act as scribes during poetry and writing workshops, college students from the College Internship Program (C.I.P.) in Lee dedicate themselves to months-long projects, some putting together art exhibits and teaching classes.

"We have a mission of inclusion and the young people who work with us get to see the heart of that mission," says Keller. "Not only do we have plenty of jobs here that need doing, it's very meaningful work. People who were interns here, even years ago, have vivid memories of working with our artists. It has an impact."

That impact can be felt, both by the young people filling critical gaps in nonprofit organizations as well as by the organizations themselves. With most internship and youth work programs in the area, there is a strong social education piece built into the work itself.



Brielle,

(photo courtesy of IS183)

"There is a huge development component to what we do," says Jamie Samowitz, co-director (with Jess Vecchia) of Roots Rising, an agriculture-based youth program that provides stipends to nearly 40 Pittsfield teens to work at local farms, food pantries, and community gardens for five weeks during the summer. "We teach employability skills, and hard work. A lot of these kids are outside of their comfort zone, they're urban kids from very diverse backgrounds. Not farmers."

And yet, every day the van picks up the Roots Rising crews and, rain or shine, they work side by side with local farmers and food planners --- planting, tilling, weeding, hauling, stocking literal tons of food onto shelves and into trucks, harvesting -- doing what Samowitz also calls 'meaningful work.'

"We get a whole lot of work done, and it's important for the teens and the farmers and mentors," she says. "It teaches them about the joy of service from a hard work perspective. And they work really hard." ☺

Nichole Dupont is a freelance writer and editor. Her work has appeared in *Newsday*, *Huffington Post*, *Berkshire Magazine*, *Rural Intelligence*, and other publications.



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Bidwell House Museum's Young History Scholar Internship

*By Heather Kowalski, Executive Director
Bidwell House Museum*

At the end of a winding road deep in the Monterey woods you will find a path to the 18th century at the Bidwell House Museum. Built in the 1760's for Adonijah Bidwell, the first Minister of Township #1 (now Tyringham and Monterey), the Bidwell House Museum has



Current and former interns
Gabriella Makuc, Justin Makuc,
Jacob Makuc, Joe Makuc,
Marya Makuc and Lexi Shumsky.
(photo courtesy of Bidwell House)

been beautifully restored and sits on 192 acres of forest, trails and gardens. Through guided house tours, intriguing history talks and onsite events, the Museum educates visitors about everyday life in the early Berkshire towns.

For the last fifteen years, the Museum has sponsored a program called The Young History Scholar Internship that immerses local high school students in the history of the Berkshires while also sharing the Bidwell story. Each summer, anywhere from six to ten students come to the Museum for two-week long internships. During the first week, the students learn about the history of the house, accompany docents on guided tours and familiarize themselves with the uses of the antiques and decorative items on display. During the second week the students begin giving tours on their own or with the help of a fellow intern, while also writing a short research paper on a topic of historical interest. As they get more confident in their tours, the students learn to create a narrative that is interesting to both the visitor and the guide. Visitors to the Museum are often surprised to have someone so young as their docent, but it does not take long to see how curious and engaged these students are and how much they enjoy telling the story of the Bidwell House Museum.

Over the years the program has blossomed into a wonderful opportunity for local students to learn not just history, but also public speaking and museum management. Many of the interns grow so fond of the house that they return year after year. One student in particular has continued to intern at the museum each summer, even though he is now in college. His experience has been so life changing that he has decided to major in history and hopes to someday go to graduate school for museum studies. ☺

THE BERKSHIRE SHUFFLE

By Elia Del Molino

What most people don't understand about the Berkshire Shuffle is that it is a double-entendre. Defined by 20 and 30 somethings bogged down by a mix of college debt, stagnant wages, increasing costs of living, and a service sector economy, young adults are taking two, three, or even four jobs simultaneously to try and get ahead.

The first part of the shuffle is easy to see. Look for young adults bouncing around the county, driving from one job to the next, eating lunch on the go, looking and acting as if they are being pushed around by the winds of financial necessity on a rudderless boat. One job to the next, over and over, life without end, amen.

The second part is less conspicuous. It's a shuffle of leadened, energy zapped feet over apartment thresholds at the end of a 10-15 hour day, it's the rent you can barely afford, the rent always rising, it's the late-night anxiety over the next grant cycle, it's health insurance premiums going up, cars breaking down in the winter, friends you don't see, friends you lose, and always the question, can I afford any of this and if so, can I get ahead doing it?

There are young, smart, hardworking, beautiful young people in the Berkshires. But not many. Those here probably have family nearby--just look at the results from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's Young Person Survey for evidence. I came back to the Berkshires for family. I had graduated from a small private university with a sizable loan and knew at home, in the Berkshires, I could work for my dad as a stone mason and live under my parent's roof. My plan was simple, save, pay off the loans, then get out. I had every intention of leaving, perhaps to the Rockies, California, Latin America, Europe, really anywhere but here.

However, my migrations west, south, etc. never materialized. Instead, and before realizing it, I had put down roots, had turned internships into paid work and given up stone masonry in pursuit of career building. And after years of hard-work I paid off my loans and crafted the interesting, dynamic, challenging lifestyle that I now know and love.



Presently, I work for a couple of extraordinary environmental non-profits part-time and year-round, coach soccer seasonally, and in the winter, drive a Zamboni. That makes life hectic. My calendar could read: Tuesday morning, moose tracking in October Mountain--afternoon, spring ephemeral class on the River Walk--evening, making ice. Each job requiring a somewhat unique set of equipment and gear. On any one day I could start with a buttondown shirt, khakis, and dress shoes, change into gloves, hiking boots, and adventure pants, then finish up with cleats, shorts, and a cap. Similarly, my morning tools could be pick axes, shovels, a sledge, by the afternoon a laptop, geographic information system software, binoculars, and during the evening a spiral notebook, a whistle, and cones.

That sort of schedule is far from the exception. One of my friends used to wake up at 4:15 am to milk goats, take a nap in the middle of the day, then work as a bartender or waitress until the early hours of the morning. Another would work as a baristo during the day, conjure up time somewhere to work on his independent videography projects between things, and by evening work on his stand-up routine.

For most, the shuffle is not a financially fulfilling endeavor. People struggle to make it week to week and often times end up moving away because of it. My wife and I stayed, toiled and are fortunate exceptions. She also works multiple jobs, shuffling through life, bringing beauty into the world as a plant nursery manager, landscaper, retail saleswoman, and my favorite soccer superfan.

The old adage, variety is the spice of life, definitely holds true for the shuffle. What I lack in employee benefits is more than made up for by the diversity of projects I engage with in a given week. For that reason, more than any other, I am hooked on the shuffle, and reluctant to apply for full-time positions. The shuffle is a hard, time-intensive, relationship insensitive, slog of a great life and I wouldn't have it any other way. 🍷

GOOD ADVICE:

ATTRACTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO BOARD SERVICE

By *Shela Hidalgo*

Berkshire County is a community that inspires philanthropy. It drives residents to be innovators and leaders who create positive and lasting change. Its history of community engagement is evident in the more than 1,000 nonprofits in our region and the role they play in boosting our local economy. As a young professional who has the privilege to sit on several nonprofit boards, I am often asked how to attract more young people to board service. Together, we must engage the trustees of tomorrow, make it clear that volunteerism is worth their time commitment and train them for this important work.

Engagement

Young professionals have a desire to serve, but may be unsure how to approach an organization. They are unlikely to contact a nonprofit outright, state their interest and ask how to get involved. Organizations need to be proactive and build relationships with young professionals. I encourage board leaders to use events as a way to gauge interest and to ask themselves: Is there an individual who regularly attends galas and talks? Is there someone who is always posting positive messages about the nonprofit on social media? These are opportunities to identify and engage young people who are already supporting the organization.

Time

Many young professionals feel they do not have time to join a board, whether they are balancing a career and furthering their education, are new parents, or are unable to take time off work to attend a board meeting during the day. There is also a common perception that board service is reserved for retirees who have a flexible schedule. This is an opportunity for organizations to be clear about the board's role and expectations. There is a difference between a working board and board work. Every young professional needs to decide how much time she can give doing what she enjoys, and organizations can develop tasks that fit young members' needs. Perhaps it is not essential for board members to attend every meeting, and instead they can assist an organization in other ways, such as building a website or managing

social media platforms. Perhaps meeting times can be moved from afternoons, during regular work hours, to evenings. Flexibility is key to attracting younger members.

Training

Board service is exciting and can come with a learning curve, which is why board development and training are beneficial for both young professionals and seasoned trustees. Most of us do not learn about governance, fundraising and finance, or regulations and ethics at our day jobs, let alone make decisions on these issues. Board service is an opportunity to develop and hone these skills. There are many programs in the Berkshires that offer these learning opportunities, including those offered by the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires. (My own employer, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, is organizing a daylong conference on October 13 to engage and educate board members on topics like fundraising, governance and organizational strategy). All new board members, including young ones, can benefit from practices like mentoring programs that pair experienced board members with new ones and help build relationships and connect members to missions.

In the end, it is about individuals and nonprofits linked by the same passion and interest. With the number of millennials expected to outpace the population of baby boomers by 2019, it is vital for the health of our community to support young professionals in board service. 🌱

Shela Hidalgo is a community engagement officer at Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, where she empowers nonprofits and communities to dream big and supports them in their philanthropy. She currently serves on the boards of Hillcrest Educational Centers, Junior League of Berkshire County, and Berkshire Business and Professional Women.



*Shela
(photo courtesy of
Berkshire Taconic
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Not shown:

James Mahon (Berkshire Food Project)

Back row: Elizabeth Stone (NPC), Leigh Davis, Melissa Lydon (NPC Board), Fred Rutberg (The Berkshire Eagle), Liana Toscanini (NPC), Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli.



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