

MAY 2021

# MAKING THE GRADE

Official Newsletter of Chester County Futures



Dear Friends,

Slowly, cautiously we emerge from the pandemic, seeking reunions with friends and family filled with joyful hugs and sighs of relief. How fitting that we experience this in spring, a time of renewal and promise. Imagine these feelings for our high school seniors. So much of their final year in high school compromised by the pandemic. Still, they emerge; ready to head to the college of their choice in the fall.

This newsletter was one of the most difficult our team has pulled together. Our students have experienced many challenges, from inadequate internet connections to sliding grades and chronic absenteeism, as well as growing pressures to add to household income. Our programming continued with virtual afterschool sessions, virtual mentors and other digital learning. The lack of in-person program delivery provided few images, and fewer moments of joy to share with our donors. That is, until those acceptance letters poured in.

What we hope to give you in this letter is an understanding that Chester County Futures (CCF) is a place where the learning continued for our students. We are determined to grow from the experiences of the pandemic. We know the academic skill gap became wider this school year. In response, we will work over the summer to combine digital programming with our traditional model of seeing the students after and during school hours. It is clear to us that the personal connection our students have with CCF staff provides the encouragement and guidance they need to succeed.

Thank you for your support this school year. Together we can narrow the academic gap in the years to come.

With gratitude,

Maria McDonald  
Executive Director



## Announcements

### NEW BOARD MEMBERS



**MICHAEL RYAN**  
Vice President  
Preconstruction,  
IMC  
Construction



**LUIS M. COLMENARES**  
Customer  
Success  
Executive,  
SAP America



**JEEWAT BIJLANI**  
SVP and  
Managing  
Director,  
Americas  
Quaker  
Houghton



## SEI Mentor Program

BY MARIA MCDONALD

SEI entered a four-year partnership with CCF to pilot an exciting professional development program for our Steps4Success college students. The program includes a one-to-one virtual mentoring component assigning participating students to an SEI volunteer for a semester. Mentors and students discuss professional aspirations and practical advice regarding how to achieve post-baccalaureate goals. Additionally, SEI and CCF management will collaborate on three workshops each semester. In January the first year workshop topics were selected by CCF college students, including discussions on Networking Tips, Resume Writing and College Debt Reduction.

## Why Choose WCU?

BY TORI SPRINGFIELD

12th grade's meeting with Stephen Castaneda, Assistant Director of Admissions at West Chester University, must have really made an impact. So far we have had 15 students apply, 9 accepted, and several ready to put down their new student deposits for fall 2021.

When asked, students like the idea of being close to home and the school's great academic programs. Earlier in their CCF careers, many seniors had the opportunity to tour WCU's campus, and see for themselves what it is like to be a Ram. Mr. Castaneda wowed everyone with his purple and gold power point. Many students were surprised by the number of programs and areas of study, and asked questions about the study abroad slide. Everyone was very excited to learn that there is a Chick-fil-a on campus!

## CCF New Hires!

PRISCILLA OCASIO,  
Communications  
Coordinator



Priscilla is a CCF alumna who graduated from Oxford High School in 2015, and Denison University in 2019 with a B.A. in Cinema. As CCF's new Communications Coordinator, she manages all of our social media accounts and marketing materials to help boost our online presence. In her free time she loves learning new things, making art, and taking spontaneous day trips with her friends and family.



## Support Through EITC

BY CLARENCE JOHNSON

Chester County Futures is a yearly participant in the Pennsylvania Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. This program allows businesses tax credits equal to 75 percent of its contribution up to a maximum of \$750,000 per taxable year. This credit can be increased to 90 percent of the contribution, if the business agrees to provide the same amount for two consecutive tax years.

We would like to thank our community partners who have contributed through EITC to Chester County Futures during this fiscal year.

REPUBLIC BANK	2,500
SEI	20,000
MERIDIAN BANK	2,000
RELIANCE STANDARD LIFE	20,000
IMC CONSTRUCTION INC.	2,000
MID PENN BANK	3,500
PECO ENERGY	15,000
WSFS	10,000
FIRST RESOURCE BANK	7,500

**"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."**

**~Malcom X**

## CCF New Hires!

TAKERRA FLOWERS,  
Intern

Takerra is a Senior student at Millersville University of Pennsylvania where she is pursuing a Social Work degree and a minor in African American Studies. She is an alumna of the Chester County Futures program and is also currently interning with them for 2021 year. She is a 22-year-old that loves deep meaningful discussions, learning, and approaching her goal of becoming a part of the helping profession. She loves to inspire others her age to be an advocate in similar ways. When she isn't humming along to the latest songs and spreading fun with little jokes, she is working hard towards the future!





## Effects of COVID-19 on College Applications

BY PRISCILLA OCASIO

With the switch to online learning, this year’s senior class has been faced with a very unique college application process. On November 16th, 2020, our students participated in Instant Decision Day: a virtual college fair where students presented their applications to college admissions representatives and were given an answer on the spot as to whether they would be accepted into their choice of schools. We have also seen changes in admissions requirements. For instance, many universities have shown flexibility by changing the SAT/ACT requirement to "test optional", as well as extending Early Decision deadlines. However, we have been seeing a nation-wide spike in students withdrawing from college courses to re-enroll the following semester, as well as students taking gap years. This trend is indicative of the fact that students are realizing the virtual learning environment is not for them, and have decided to hold off on taking college classes until they are able to safely do so in person again. Although despite these challenges, our students have already received acceptance letters and committed to their choice of schools!

## Changing Lives With Virtual Mentoring

BY MARY WILLIAMS

One on One Mentoring in a pandemic? Oh yeah, we got this! Chester County Futures is 100% camera-ready and ZOOMing into a new (virtual) world of making meaningful connections in a time a separateness. While COVID-19 has made daily interactions challenging at best, our mentors remain a reliable source of coaching, consulting and cheerleading in the lives of our students. We work diligently to prepare our mentors for success in a virtual environment, enabling them to deliver a consistent schedule of “face to face” meetings and check-ins with their mentees. Our virtual mentoring continues to put essential and academically supportive scaffolding around the goals and aspirations of our students.

**Congratulations to Board Member Mike Cieri and wife Katie on the birth of their son, Michael Alexander!**





# Student Profile

BY ALONDRA H.

My name is Alondra H. and I am a current Senior at the Kennett High School in Kennett Square, PA. I am a 17 year-old daughter of divorced and undocumented parents who both immigrated to the United States at the young age of 17 and 18 in search of a better future. Being the first individual in my family to go through the college application process has definitely not been easy, but with the help of college readiness programs such as Chester County Futures, I have learned more about the many requirements that colleges expect as well as ways to sell myself to my dream universities.

Throughout my years at Kennett High School I have increased my participation in activities and have been presented with many great opportunities to serve my community. I have been Class President for three consecutive years, a member of our school’s Marching Band for 4 years, Hermanitas Secretary Junior year and Vice President Senior year, and have also been a member of the Walk In kNowledge (WIN) program, Talented Tenth, and Chester County Futures program. Outside of school, I am the Junior Member of the Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs (ACOLA) of Kennett Square, a council created in efforts to identify and propose solutions to problems that our Latinx community faces in our borough. I have held a job as a barista for Starbucks since September 2020 and have truly enjoyed the opportunity and amazing partners I work with. I am an A-B honor roll student and have been presented with the Longwood Rotary Club Student of the Quarter Award in my Junior year due to my “Service Above Self.”

I plan to pursue a career in Foreign Policy and International Affairs with the goal of one day working for the United Nations as an ambassador.



**"So far I have been accepted into Millersville and Elizabethtown... My dream school is Georgetown, but I know I will end up where I am meant to be."**

~Alondra



## New Developments in Community Partnerships

BY CLARENCE JOHNSON

Chester County Futures is experiencing exciting things in our Development Department:

### FUNDRAISING AND VOLUNTEERISM

CCF continues to build strong relationships and partnerships with many members of our community. Small businesses, corporations, faith base groups and individuals all serve as tremendous resources in supporting our mission. We value volunteers whether it be for fundraising events, mentors, classroom presenters or serving on a committee. Our volunteers serve as the foundation of our programs success.

### MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

CCF, with the help of some of our community partners, is pleased to have a number of marketing materials currently being built to be put on display this coming spring.

Calling all big-time social media users.....Chester County Futures is on a social media platform near you. We are making a huge effort to communicate with our community in many different forms. You will not only receive vital and exciting information by email, but we will make sure to include program happenings on the following platforms:

Facebook: @ccfutures

Twitter: @ccfutures

Instagram: @chestercountyfutures

LinkedIn: Chester County Futures

So follow, like and share your support for Chester County Futures!

# Save the Date!

## 21st Annual Golf Classic

Tuesday,  
September 7th, 2021

1:00pm Shotgun  
Start

Register online at  
[ccfutures.org](http://ccfutures.org)

