

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE DIVERSITY LEADERS INITIATIVE

UNITE

SOUTH CAROLINA

Cycle for Change

BIKE PROGRAM PROVIDES
MENTORSHIP AND ADVENTURE

GOOD EATS

FOOD-SERVICE WORKERS PREPARE
HEALTHIER MEALS

SAFE SUMMERS

CAMP HOPE CREATES NURTURING ENVIRONMENT



Phil Lackey, right, offers an up-close view of a Michelin tire to Lakeview Middle School students from left: Liliana Ochoa, Samantha Dawson and Jackie Gallman. The Michelin plant tour is part of the Dream Connectors project.



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All stories and photographs by Jean Shifrin

Team photos courtesy of the Riley Institute

Front cover: Holly Carlisle, 15, left, a sophomore at Clarendon Hall, and Britany Nelson, 17, right, a senior at Scott's Branch, repaint the Unite Summerton logo on the basketball court at Wausau Park. Unite Summerton is a group of students from the public and private high schools in the small town of Summerton, SC who are working to improve race relations and beautify the town.

Back cover: Jada Wilson, 6, lets her beads fly as she jump ropes at McPherson Park, one of 13 parks the Mobi-Rec van visited in its first year.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION



JUAN JOHNSON

For the past 10 years, it has been my honor and privilege to serve as designer and facilitator of the Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI). This innovative leadership development program, offered across South Carolina by the Richard W. Riley Institute of Furman University, is unique in several ways. First, it maintains a broad and all-inclusive definition of diversity, versus many diversity training programs which tend to focus primarily on race, gender and legally defined “protected characteristics.” In the DLI, we recognize differences in knowledge, experience and perspectives as well as personal background. Therefore, we address challenges and opportunities that are not limited to particular groups of people. For example, if a child is born into poverty, it doesn’t matter their race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or geographic origin. The experience of poverty can be the defining diversity dimension that impacts their life. By using an all-inclusive definition, the program brings everyone into the diversity tent; not just women and people of color, who are sometimes assumed to be the only focus of diversity initiatives.

A second unique aspect of the DLI is that the leaders who participate in the program come from all sectors of society: business, education, government, faith-based, nonprofit, etc. The diversity of roles, experiences and perspectives of these leaders provides excellent opportunities for cross-learning as well as relationship building. Lastly, the DLI ensures that the program is not simply an academic experience by requiring participants to apply what they learn to real-time issues facing their communities.

The DLI structure includes a three-hour orientation and five full workshop days spread over a five-month period. The program’s content includes lectures, case studies, audio and visual learning tools, and individual and group competitions, all designed to stimulate productive dialogue and build leadership skills. Over the five-month period, program participants work in small groups to identify, analyze and develop solutions for real-time issues. These community action projects are the highlight of the program and the focus of this publication.

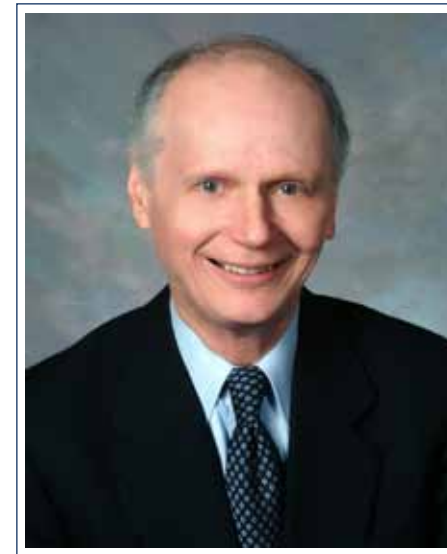
Having completed nearly 30 separate five-day workshops over the past 10 years and graduated more than 1,300 leaders across South Carolina, the DLI has produced dozens of community action projects. In celebration of the 10-year milestone, we have selected 10 projects to highlight and share in this publication. These projects, and the many others that cannot fit into these limited pages, are positively impacting the lives of many South Carolinians. And the groups that are most frequently the target of these projects are South Carolina’s most vulnerable: children in underserved or difficult circumstances. Working in tandem with existing organizations and groups, these projects are building brighter futures for our kids.

Juan Johnson
President, Diversity Leadership in Action

**DIVERSITY
LEADERSHIP IN
ACTION**

A SPECIAL THANK YOU AND SALUTE

...to the honorable Richard W. Riley, who continually inspires everyone he meets to greater levels of leadership and service.



RICHARD W. (DICK) RILEY

Richard W. (Dick) Riley, for whom the Riley Institute at Furman is named, is a former two-term governor of South Carolina and served as U.S. Secretary of Education throughout the two terms of the Clinton presidency. Secretary Riley is senior partner in the law firm of Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough and its affiliate, EducationCounsel. He counsels local, state, national and international clients regarding business, governance, financial, legal, government process, advocacy and education matters.

Riley remains a prominent and active ambassador and advocate for improving education in the United States and abroad. A former chair, he currently serves on the Board of Trustees at Furman. Riley has been named a distinguished professor at the University of South Carolina. In addition, the College of Education at Winthrop University and the College of Education and Leadership at Walden University and Leadership at Walden University bear his name. Riley also co-chairs the

National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future and works with other national and international organizations that promote progressive education improvement.

In 2009, TIME magazine named Riley one of the top 10 best cabinet members in our nation’s history. Early in 2010, he was inducted into the South Carolina Hall of Fame. Later that year, he received Leadership South Carolina’s inaugural Dick and Tunky Riley Legacy of Leadership Award. He is the recipient of numerous other education and public service awards, as well as honorary degrees from universities and colleges in the United States and abroad.

Riley earned his bachelor’s degree, cum laude, in political science from Furman in 1954, and his J.D. from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1959. Riley and his late wife, Ann “Tunky” Yarborough Riley, have four children and 14 grandchildren.





DON GORDON

A Message From Don Gordon,
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Fifteen years ago, as the Riley Institute was launching, Secretary Dick Riley, Furman president David Shi and I met frequently to consider a long-term plan for how the Riley Institute could best help remove barriers to economic and social progress for all of the people of our economically relatively resource-poor state.

Dick Riley was confident that South Carolina was small enough that a moderately small, able and determined group of people across the state could effect real change for all our citizenry. We decided that the essential drivers of that change were to strengthen public education and to engage with a leadership body that understood how to leverage the rich talents and creativity of our diverse population. A few years later, when Michelin chief diversity officer Calder Ehrmann brought information about Juan Johnson's unique approach to diversity leadership to us, we immediately recognized its value and potential for moving us toward our goals. This was the genesis of the Riley Institute's Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI).

Now in its 10th year, DLI is a resounding success. There are more than 1,300 Riley Fellows — 1,300 triple-nominated, handpicked DLI alumni in South Carolina — who now comprise that small, able and determined leadership group Dick Riley predicted could change the future of the state. And they are doing so through various means; the 10 outstanding community

action projects detailed in this publication, along with the many others, serve as valuable community assets across the state, through their shared understanding that embracing our diversity will help us maximize the opportunities we face, and, perhaps most importantly, through the enduring relationships that form among them, their fellow alumni and the Riley Institute. These relationships have fostered collaborations driving such important statewide outcomes as the establishment of the New Tech schools network in South Carolina, which stands to change the way South Carolina does public education and improve the lives of children and communities around the state.

In everything we do — whether convening state, national and world leaders around issues of critical importance to the state, instilling leadership skills in students, bringing teachers to the nation's capital for first-hand civics lessons, helping establish diversity guidelines for a new medical school, teaching education professionals how to impact policy, helping put innovative education programs on the ground in South Carolina, we call on our DLI alumni for their time, talent and support. And they always respond. Wildly and wonderfully divergent in every aspect of diversity, DLI alumni are united in their commitment to progress in South Carolina, and great things are happening. We are grateful for all they do, and we're looking forward to the next 10 years.



Diversity Leaders Initiative Team

Back row from left: Cathy Stevens, Benny Walker, Jacki Martin, Calder Ehrmann, Megan Dodgens; Seated front row: Don Gordon, left, Juan Johnson, right.

DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Diversity Leadership in Action, formerly Juan Johnson Consulting & Facilitation, LLC, was formed in 2006 to help community groups and business organizations equip their leaders with skills to lead more effectively in an increasingly diverse environment. Over the years, it became apparent that one of the most pressing challenges in the diversity arena is moving groups and organizations into "action mode." Diversity training has historically focused on improving interactions between people of different backgrounds. This approach, while beneficial when done well, fails to recognize, appreciate and leverage the incredible upside potential that diverse groups offer. The focus of Diversity Leadership in Action is helping groups and organizations actively leverage diversity to enhance individual engagement and group performance. The key differentiators to achieve this are two-fold: bringing everyone into the definition of diversity and connecting the work to a common mission. This creates the platform for moving into action mode: building a vision, developing strategic objectives, aligning resources; updating and evolving infrastructure and creating accountabilities and management routines. The groups and organizations that have successful diversity initiatives are those that put these types of actions in place.

The stories set forth in this publication represent examples of leaders taking actions to build better communities and organizations. Diversity Leadership in Action is honored to be part of this process.

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SAFE SUMMERS

Camp Hope creates nurturing environment for underserved children in Charleston

Senior patrol officer Jeff Ward visits with children from Camp Hope during a cruise on the Charleston Harbor. Ward's presence at all Camp Hope activities helps foster positive relationships between children and the police department.





On a hot and muggy summer evening on Charleston's East Side, children from the nearby housing project gathered in the cafeteria of Sanders-Clyde Elementary School and sat down to what for some was their first substantial meal of the day. Many went back for seconds.

After dinner, a volunteer helped a small group of children arrange letters as they played Boggle, a challenging word game. On the other side of the room, a huge map of the United States was spread across the table as children had fun trying to identify different states, capitals and landmarks.

It's all part of Camp Hope, a summer evening camp for low-income and underserved children that combines an educational component with personal and social responsibility, cultural awareness, and health and wellness. The camp provides a safe and positive environment where children are exposed to a variety of options they might not otherwise have known about.

The idea for Camp Hope began soon after City of Charleston Police Chief Gregory Mullen arrived in the fall of 2006. Mullen walked through the East Side, a neighborhood he said was, and still is, "very challenged."

"On one of my first walks through the East Side, I encountered a kid that was eating dirt — literally eating dirt," Chief Mullen said. "And most of the kids I saw would not even look at me. They would run away when I walked down the street, and I found that totally unacceptable. So I decided right then that we would do something to change the perception of police in that community."

In addition to the negative attitudes toward police, Mullen saw kids on the street with nothing positive to do as the long days dragged on. He knew the dangers of what he calls "negative traps" — poverty, hopelessness, idle time and temptations — that could lead to violence and incarceration. Mullen knows that children from the inner city and other low-income neighborhoods face a multitude of challenges that can lead to situations that may not be positive for them.

Thus was born the aptly named Camp Hope, a community action project from Team Mozaik, a Spring 2007 Lowcountry DLI class of which Mullen was a member.

Serendipitously, Paul Stoney, president of the YMCA of Greater Charleston, also was a member of Team Mozaik. Stoney grew up in an east coast neighborhood much like what Chief Mullen described, where he saw young men like himself with nothing to do as day grew into night. Some of those young people got into trouble and entered the criminal justice system.

In an effort to prevent that from happening to Charleston's children, Chief Mullen suggested his team create an evening camp during the summer for children from those underserved neighborhoods. It would



Top left: Savannah Boyd, left, and Jo'Mori Hicks play a game of Apples to Apples during the educational component of Camp Hope. Top right: Kathy Parks, a retired elementary school teacher, uses a large map to teach children about geography and the weather. Above: Campers do their own version of stretches after a fitness class.

be a place where the longer days would be spent in productive activity, with no opportunity for boredom or negative influences. It would be a place where the children would feel safe and learn about a world of opportunities outside their own communities.

Stoney, who has been with the YMCA his entire career — and in Charleston since 2006 — was very familiar with day camps, and didn't see why the same concept couldn't be applied to a night camp. The rest of team Mozaik agreed, and they all got on board.

By summer 2007, just a few months after team Mozaik came up with their idea, the first evening camp was in session. Now in its

seventh year, Camp Hope is similar in concept to traditional day camps, except sessions are held in the evening for five weeks during the summer.

Stoney had expertise in running programs for children and Mullen obviously carried weight with the police department. Each team member drew on their contacts and resources and every Mozaik member gave money the first year. Combined with support from local businesses, law enforcement, nonprofit and faith-based sectors, the program was up and running very quickly.

While acknowledging that he and Chief Mullen provided the impetus and foundation for Camp Hope, Stoney is quick to point out that the success of the camp is due to a team effort. All Mozaik team members leveraged their resources and were able to secure in-kind donations for most of the camp's needs.

Some of the camp staff are paid, but it takes many volunteers as well to create the success they have seen. Stoney said they carefully select staff and volunteers who share the same goals, which are providing a safe and positive environment in which to teach children the skills they need to succeed in life. They set high expectations for the children and then lead by example.

And while Chief Mullen and Paul Stoney may have been the driving force, Stoney believes that if the two of them left tomorrow, he is confident the staff could run it efficiently and the camp would continue to succeed.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Camp Hope is now a joint venture between the YMCA, the police department and the city of Charleston. More than 20 agencies provide in-kind donations, including recreational activities, space, expertise, time and food. The program is free for all participants and the only requirement is the children must live in Charleston County. Approximately 50 children from ages 5 to 12 participate from June through August. Beginning in June 2014, another camp will open in Bridgeview, which is also a challenged community.

The annual budget is about \$5,000, but with in-kind donations and the generous support of the community, children were able to take swimming and tennis lessons, visit museums, and cruise on the harbor — all completely free of charge.

Each evening has a specific focus, such as health and wellness, cultural affairs or personal and social responsibility. There also is an emphasis on building self-esteem and life skills such as decision making and mentoring. No activities begin, however, until the children sit down to a nutritious dinner, provided by the Low Country Food Bank.

There is a set curriculum but the staff and volunteers are flexible. For example, many of the children had never seen, much less ordered from, a menu. Many poor neighborhoods are food deserts: areas where healthy, affordable food is difficult, if not impossible to obtain. The only menu most of them had seen was on the wall behind the counter at a fast food restaurant.

So Sharon Robinson, director of Camp Hope, designed a menu describing the three offerings being donated one evening by Taco Boy. The kids were given the menus and after looking over their choices, placed their order at the mobile truck set up near the school.

"Chief Mullen and I remain in the background," Stoney said. "It's the people on the ground floor who make it work. It's the ones in the trenches who know every child and every family. It's the ones who are keeping the children safe and having fun that make this program what it is."

And one of those people is Robinson. From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Robinson is the administrative assistant to Chief Mullen. Then from 6 to 9 p.m., for five weeks during the summer, she works overtime to run Camp Hope.

"These kids tug at your heartstrings," Robinson said. "They mostly live in the surrounding housing projects, but just because you're from this environment does not mean you have to be a product of this environment."

Chief Mullen is adamant that Robinson's passion and dedication to Camp Hope have really made it a success. And that passion and dedication are obvious. For the camp's first year, she personally cooked the dinners herself so that each child would have a hot meal. Now, a staff member helps serve meals provided by the food bank.

Robinson is helped by Sandra Simmons, a senior camp counselor at the YMCA. Simmons, who has served as liaison between the two organizations since Camp Hope began, also works with the campers in the evening.

Robinson knows each of the children and is attentive to their individual needs. She puts together a curriculum that covers topics such as bullying, conflict resolution, physical fitness, educational activities and visits to cultural events.

Even though these kids live on a peninsula, many of them have never been to a beach and most don't know how to swim. Museums are just minutes away, yet most have never stepped a foot inside.

"These kids don't see much outside their community," Chief Mullen said. "We want to show them that there is more beyond the four corners of their neighborhood."

"They have not been exposed to much," Robinson added, "so to be able to teach them new things and see them smile is all worth it. It touches my heart to see how much these kids appreciate what we do."



Sharon Robinson has been director of Camp Hope since its beginning in 2007.

Greg Mullen, Charleston Chief of Police, has a heart-to-heart talk with Quantez Spann, 8, during a cruise on the Charleston Harbor. Chief Mullen tries to attend at least one Camp Hope activity a week.



FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

Building on the success of Camp Hope, another summer program called Friday Night Lights launched in June 2013. This is an offshoot program between the Charleston police, firefighters and the recreation department — and just one more piece of the initiative that began with Camp Hope.

“What we’re trying to do is build relationships, build trust and provide an opportunity for these kids to come out and see police officers and firefighters in a completely different role and understand that we’re their friends and we’re here to help them,” said Chief Mullen.

The program targets youth and offers them a safe place to go on Friday evenings, from 6:30 to 10 p.m. during the summer. A variety of fun, educational and character-building activities include flag football, arts and crafts, basketball, swimming, music, dance, educational sessions and movies on an inflatable screen.

Organizers of Friday Night Lights hope the mentors and positive role models will attract older youth as well. Activities, which take place at different locations throughout the summer, are designed to increase self-awareness and encourage socialization.

The program got a considerable boost in October 2013, when it received a \$42,000 grant from the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing, to enhance and expand Friday Night Lights. The grant will improve the department’s violence reduction initiatives and will help fund additional educational segments dealing with youth engagement in problem identification, analysis and solutions for the next two years.

Robinson has been with Camp Hope since the beginning, and the growth and changes in the children are noticeable. She has seen improvements in their attitudes, social skills and vocabulary.

“If the children look good, feel good, get good grades and good nutrition, they will feel better about themselves,” Stoney said. To that end, Camp Hope instills in them a healthy sense of self-esteem and even includes lessons in proper etiquette so the children know which knife and fork to use.

When one of the staff members noticed that the girls’ nails needed attention, she brought in some brightly colored nail polish and gave the girls a manicure, which they proudly showed off to everyone they met.

In addition to the educational component, fitness classes and lessons in social skills and responsibility, the children are exposed to activities that might seem routine for many people — but for them may be life-changing. For example, Camp Hope includes tennis and swimming lessons because these are costly activities lacking in the poor, urban communities they serve.

FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Perhaps one of the most important things Camp Hope instills is a healthy relationship with the police department.

“When we first came into the community, we recognized there was a lack of trust in the police department,” Stoney said. “The community is trained not to trust police officers.”

To foster a better relationship between the community and the police department, Senior Patrol Officer Jeff Ward is present every night of camp and at every single activity. His constant presence in the neighborhood during the day and at camp at night helps the children get to know him. Ward said that when he and other officers spend time around the children, it humanizes them and helps take the fear out of it for the kids.

“These kids tug at your heartstrings. They mostly live in the surrounding housing projects, but just because you’re *from* this environment does not mean you have to be a product of this environment.”

— Sharon Robinson, director of Camp Hope

“Kids are taught by adults to fear the police,” Ward said. “But at Camp Hope they can interact with us and get to know us.” Ward patrols the same neighborhood where these kids live, so the kids also see the good work that police officers do. “It’s not all just locking people up,” he said. Now when the kids see him on the street, they come up to him to say ‘hi.’

A hoped-for measure of success for Ward would be to see some of the kids who participate in Camp Hope come back as counselors. “That would be ideal,” he said.

Stoney emphasized that it’s important to get the parents on board too so they see the positive work of the police department. In addition to the summer camp, police officers participate in the Lunch Buddy program, where they eat lunch every other week with the same child throughout the school year. He said the parents and children now realize that they are there to help improve their lives.

While Officer Ward attends every night, whether it’s at the school, the annual harbor cruise or a trip to the beach, Chief Mullen and Stoney try to make it to at least one event a week.

On the harbor cruise this past summer, both Officer Ward and Chief Mullen took time to talk with the kids and even more importantly, listen to them. While Officer Ward was playfully joking with some of the children, Chief Mullen was deep in a serious conversation with one of the young boys.

“These kids see a lot at their age — it is what it is,” Officer Ward acknowledged. So Camp Hope works to expose them to different experiences they might not get otherwise, such as tennis lessons, ball games or a field trip to Boeing.

One of Camp Hope’s goals is for the kids to learn while they’re playing and having fun. For example, on Health and Wellness evenings, Anthony Shuler, with Life 4D Living, uses fitness to help the kids develop an overall sense of discipline and a strong work ethic. His philosophy is that if you can successfully accomplish basic exercise, you can apply that same focus and determination to daily life.

And it’s not just calisthenics he’s teaching. Shuler’s seemingly endless energy and use of positive reinforcement makes it easy for the kids to get up and move their bodies. And in neighborhoods plagued by obesity, this is an important piece of the overall message Camp Hope delivers.

Chief Mullen hopes Camp Hope can help to break the cycle of negativity that plagues poor, inner city neighborhoods. His goal is to keep these kids from becoming the next generation of negative statistics, which is why he says it’s important to work with the children before they get into the criminal justice system.



School Resource Officer Neshia Rampersant shows Destiny Nelson, 12, left, details of the women’s basketball team locker room at The College of Charleston.



Mikaela Hopkins, 20, leads a group of middle school campers on a tour of The College of Charleston. Hopkins is a junior on the basketball team and volunteered with Camp Hope for the first time in 2013.

CAMP HOPE EXTENDED TO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

It didn't take long to realize that the kids needed the same positive messages and support after the age of 12. Since 2011, Camp Hope has been running two similar programs for middle school students aged 13 to 16. These camps, which run during the day and serve 40 kids each, are at West Ashley Middle School and Haut Gap on John's Island.

Chief Mullen says that middle school students are particularly vulnerable during the long summer days with nothing to do. He saw a need for a camp focusing on personal and social responsibility.

"A lot of these kids see family members involved in the criminal justice system," Chief Mullen said, "and we want to show them that if they make good choices, learn to read and graduate, there are lots of opportunities for them."

"On one of my first walks through the East Side, most of the kids I saw would not even look at me. They would run away when I walked down the street, and I found that totally unacceptable. So I decided right then that we would do something to change the perception of police in that community."

— Charleston Police Chief Gregory Mullen

School Resource Officers, or SROs, accompany the middle school students each day, so the police presence and commitment continues. And much like the evening Camp Hope, the day camp for older children has a different focus each day. One day it might be personal and social responsibility, another emphasizes mentoring and college guidance while another focuses on the history of Charleston with visits to historic sights. The

students also learn about crime prevention and self-awareness and even take a photography class. Free meals are provided by the school district.

SRO Nesha Rampersant is the coordinator for the Middle School Camp Hope. She designs the curriculum based on a personal social responsibility model. In addition to the activities and field trips, Rampersant selects a different word each week, such as empathy, respect or responsibility, and asks each child to apply that word to their life.

One day last summer, Rampersant and several other SROs accompanied student basketball player Mikaela Hopkins, 20, as she led a group of campers on a tour of the College of Charleston. They walked the brick sidewalks of the old campus and visited an original classroom with vintage wooden desks. They walked through the library and heard words of wisdom and inspiration from the athletic director. But the highlight of the tour was when the students got a chance to shoot some hoops in the practice gym.

A DREAM REALIZED

Reflecting on the accomplishments of the last seven years, Stoney said Mozaik team members "didn't know in the beginning what we were creating — it was like Frankenstein."

"It's an honor to know that a seed we planted seven years ago has now germinated into a successful program that others want to emulate," Stoney said. "Just to be associated with something like Camp Hope is amazing, and to know that I helped develop it is equally amazing."

For Chief Mullen, success is measured in different ways. "If we go through the summer and no kid gets hurt from violence, if they don't get into trouble and if they have fun and learn something — that is success for me," he said.

But perhaps most rewarding of all, Chief Mullen said, is the change he's seen in the relationship between the police department and the kids from that "very challenged neighborhood."

"Now when I walk through the East Side, kids don't run from me anymore," Chief Mullen said, "they run to me."



From left: Gregory Mullen, Bill Settlemeyer, Tim Scott, Tasha Gandy, Elise Davis-McFarland, Paul Stoney, Jeanette Florence



During a tour of the Michelin plant, Phil Lackey explains how tires are made to Lakeview Middle School students Nathan Posey, 12, left, and Cierra Page, 13.

Dream CONNECTORS

Business leaders help middle school students envision career possibilities

Members of the Dream Connectors team took on a lofty goal: to open the minds of seventh-graders so that they can create a dream for themselves — and then help them connect those dreams with their education and future careers.

Dream Connectors exposes seventh-graders from Lakeview Middle School and Hughes Academy of Science and Technology to diverse career opportunities with Michelin, BMW and Greenville Health System. Whether they will get a high school diploma or continue on for an advanced degree, students learn firsthand about career opportunities in health care and manufacturing, and they see the effect education has on their job opportunities.

“There are certain segments in our community where there are young people who don’t make the connection at all between what they’re doing in school today — particularly middle school — and the opportunities that exist in our community,” said Pete Selleck, chairman and president of Michelin North America and a Dream Connectors team member.

To ensure students make the connection, Dream Connectors has taken a three-pronged approach to exposing seventh-graders to career opportunities they might not otherwise have known or thought about. First, employees in health care and high-tech manufacturing jobs visit the classroom to explain a variety of job options across all segments of a business. Second, the seventh-graders participate in on-site visits to the hospitals and manufacturing plants, and finally, the students receive follow-up sessions in the classroom.

The project is a collaborative effort between teachers and administrators at the schools, the Greenville County School District and the Dream Connectors team.

“The key is getting the teachers excited about connecting what they’re teaching to real world applications,” said Dr. Maureen Dowd, director of education and economic development for Greenville County Schools. “Students need to see what’s going on outside the classroom that will bring to life what’s in the textbooks.”



Dr. Donald Wiper, of Greenville Health System, uses a medical manikin to demonstrate possible emergency medical scenarios to students from Hughes Academy. Students, from left: Efen Hernandez, 12, Molly Irwin, 12, and Savannah Jaynes, 12.

Fortunately, one of the teams in the Spring 2012 Diversity Leaders Initiative had members from BMW, Michelin and Greenville Health System, as well as others from the nonprofit sector. As team members began exchanging ideas, they discovered that the large manufacturing companies struggled to get the talent they needed, and many students didn't understand the connection between their school experience and jobs or careers. Thus Dream Connectors was born.

HOSPITALS PROVIDE DIVERSE CAREER CHOICES

The students at Hughes Academy of Science and Technology had a unique experience when Dr. Donald Wiper visited their school with a life-size medical manikin, complete with a multitude of realistic looking wounds and injuries — including burns, lacerations, broken bones and even an amputated toe.

"Some of these students live with their grandparents, or they may have an accident or a friend may get injured during a sport," said Dr. Wiper, chairman and medical director in the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Greenville Health System. "So this experience can apply to real world situations."

With the help of three paramedics from Mobile Care Ambulance Service, the students learned how to recognize a concussion, stroke or cardiac arrest — as well as what to do in each situation. They practiced CPR on a manikin and sat inside an ambulance while they learned about the life of a paramedic.

Dr. Wiper, who taught seventh and eighth grade before he became a doctor, said the Dream Connectors chose to work with seventh-graders for a strategic reason.

"We recognized there is a disconnect between what companies need and what schools are doing in terms of human capital," Dr. Wiper said. "You lose these kids or not in middle school, and there are huge, lasting implications for the decisions they make when they're 12 or 13 — so we want to give these kids a glimpse of what they can become. The underlying message is to choose a pathway that leads to career opportunities."

"Our hope is to give 12- and 13-year-olds a chance to get in the door and get excited about what their future might be."

— Dr. Donald Wiper, Dream Connectors team member

Once the initial shock of seeing a simulated burned hand or an amputated toe had elicited typical comments like "Ew!" or "I'm gonna be sick," the students were able to settle in and concentrate as Dr. Wiper prompted them to figure out what the best course of action would be if their friend was unconscious, was struck by lightning or lost a toe while mowing the lawn.

Hughes Academy student Michael Mitchell, 12, left, receives instruction on how to use a bag valve mask from paramedic David Thornal.



"It was cool, but it was gross," said Molly Irwin, 12. "I want to be a doctor but not like this. More like my mom; she's an internist."

To reach that goal, Molly knows she will have to pay attention in math and science and get good grades.

Dalevarious Arnold, 13, also sees the connection between school and his future. "Science teaches us about stuff we need," he said. "And we need good grades now so we can get into a good college."

Dalevarious, who has picked up some medical information from his firefighter father, had no trouble answering Dr. Wiper's questions. The seventh-grader said at first he wanted to be a veterinarian but is now considering medical school.

Greenville Health System is a self-contained universe with about 1,200 different kinds of jobs, according to Dr. Wiper. Career opportunities go far beyond being doctors and nurses. The hospital system employs just about any job you can think of — including engineers, accountants, police officers and food-service workers. And like BMW and Michelin, Greenville Health System prefers to hire locally.

"Our hope is to give 12- and 13-year-olds a chance to get in the door and get excited about what their future might be," Dr. Wiper said.

INDUSTRIAL IMAGINATIONS

For a glimpse into manufacturing job opportunities, Lakeview Middle School seventh-graders toured the Michelin US 1 plant factory in Greenville, where passenger and light truck tires are made.

After donning bright yellow vests, earplugs, metal toe protectors and safety goggles, the students saw up close how a tire is made. Much of the process is automated, but there are many job opportunities throughout the plant — from manufacturing to management to legal services.

Tour guide Phil Lackey, a project training manager at Michelin, led the students through the manufacturing process. After entering the plant, one of the first things they noticed was the strong scent of rubber and loud noises from an array of machinery.

While Lackey described the tire-making process — starting with pieces of rubber and metal that are assembled on machines — which are then cured at various times and temperatures before



Lakeview Middle School students get a close-up look at the production of Michelin tires during a plant tour. From left: Liliana Ochoa, 13, Samantha Dawson, 13, and Jackie Gallman, 13.



Students from Lakeview Middle School work together as a team in the pen assembly exercise.

final inspection and shipment - he added information about the different types of jobs available throughout the company.

One student who took notice was Antonio Campos, 13, who said, "I might want to work at Michelin because it's very interesting how they make tires."

Lakeview seventh-grader Cierra Page, 13, said she knows math and reading will help her get a job. "I'll probably end up working at Michelin because a lot of my family works here. But I'm not going to stay around where they cook the tires because it's too hot."

FAST TRACK TO OPPORTUNITY

For the third component of the Dream Connectors experience, students from the two middle schools learned about different job opportunities at BMW. The Spartanburg plant builds 1,000 cars a day and employs about 7,000 people. Many of the jobs involve building cars, but there is also a need for human resources personnel, electrical engineers, accountants and attorneys.

Dream Connectors team member Werner Eikenbusch, head of talent management for BMW Manufacturing Co., LLC, emphasized that different jobs throughout BMW require different levels of education. And since students are required to pick a career cluster in eighth grade, he said they want students to know that manufacturing is a career option.

"We concentrated on Title 1 schools," Eikenbusch said, "because those kids may be at a disadvantage in terms of their awareness of the connection between their education and their careers."

To help make that connection, Eikenbusch and other BMW employees visited students at Lakeview to show them what goes into manufacturing the high-quality cars. After a slide presentation about the company's history and operation of the plant, the students participated in a hands-on exercise. Together, the BMW team members taught the students about quality, metrics and throughput time with a pen assembly exercise. The students worked in teams — with each member assigned a specific task — and had three chances to figure out the most efficient process

to produce the highest number of quality pens in a fixed amount of time.

"I learned that if you're not all on the same track, you'll get confused and it will be harder," said Ebony Tyler, 14, of the pen assembly exercise. "But if you work hard enough you'll improve."

After completing the pen exercise, David Buena Lopez, 14, said he is going to study more math, even though he hasn't decided on a career yet. "I like math," he said, "so maybe I can work at BMW."

Eikenbusch said the Dream Connectors want to be transparent that there are good job opportunities without a four-year college degree. Not everyone is a candidate for a four-year college, he said, but many manufacturing jobs are available with a two-year associates degree.

Perhaps the mission of Dream Connectors is best summed up by Troy Matthews, Title 1 coordinator at Lakeview Middle School: "I think all of our students have potential. They have dreams and hopes and aspirations, but they're limited as to what they've seen and what they know is out there. So I think this opportunity is going to provide them some insight into the many different career opportunities within an organization."

DREAM CONNECTORS TEAM



Front row left to right: Deborah McKetty, Kimberly Witherspoon, Courtenay Nantz, Amy Olson; Back row left to right: George Singleton, Werner Eikenbusch, Pete Selleck, Jacob Ehrmann, Donald Wiper



Werner Eikenbusch, from BMW, shares a presentation about the history and operation of the BMW plant in Spartanburg with students at Lakeview Middle School.

Five-year-old Anna Cross, left, used to be afraid to touch water, but with the help of the Sunday Super Stars program and therapy, she is now comfortable playing at the WaterWise! exhibit with her sister Lauren, 8.



Sunday Super Stars

SPECIAL-NEEDS KIDS GET SPECIAL DAY AT THE MUSEUM

Seeing a smile spread across her face as 5-year-old Anna Cross reaches into a tub of water to fill a bucket might not seem like a big deal. But until recently, Anna was terrified of water. She didn't want to touch it, let alone play in it. Anna has a variety of sensory issues, and her mom Fran said that she literally used to gag at the thought of touching water.

Anna and her family have been coming to the Children's Museum of the Lowcountry for about two years, taking advantage of the Sunday Super Stars program where children with special needs can explore the museum at their own pace before it opens to the public. The children can roam from one exhibit to another, without the crowds or overstimulation that may be an issue for many children with special needs. And there is no cost to the families.

"When Anna first came to the museum, it was an overwhelming sensory experience for her," her mother, Fran, said. At first she would stand along the back wall and just watch other kids play at the WaterWise! exhibit. Then she would simply hold a brush or a boat, but not touch the water. Eventually, she grew comfortable enough to play in it.

With therapy and patience — and the help of the Sunday Super Stars program, Anna has come a long way.

The program got a big boost when Team D-LIGHTT (Diversity Leaders Initiative Group Helping Teach Tolerance), a 2009 Lowcountry DLI group, partnered with the museum to support and expand Sunday Super Stars.

Team member Jennifer DeWitt Jabon, former executive director of the Low Country Manufacturers Council, said her team discussed various ideas, eventually settling on a project that would involve education and children. When one team member suggested the Children's Museum of the Lowcountry, that idea took hold for several reasons. First, they would not be reinventing the wheel because they would partner with an existing program. Second, their philosophy aligned with the museum's, which is to offer interactive learning through imagination and play.

Jabon said one of the most important aspects of Team D-LIGHTT was asking Denis Chirles, executive director of the museum, to identify the needs, issues and challenges facing the museum, rather than bringing to him a predefined project that may or may not have been beneficial.

"We reached out to Denis and asked him, 'What can we help you with?'" Jabon said. "We found that to be a more effective approach, versus having a strict plan or idea in place that in practice may not have been effective or served the needs of the museum."

EXPERIENCES ALL CHILDREN CAN ENJOY

There is no denying that the museum is a great place for children and their families. There are nine hands-on interactive exhibits, including a Medieval Creativity Castle complete with costumes and secret passageways; WaterWise!, where kids can race plastic boats down the rapids or just splash around; and a pirate ship ripe for exploring. One of the most popular exhibits is the Charleston Market, a miniature grocery store where kids can fill a pint-sized shopping cart with food, scan products and work the cash register or prepare a sandwich in the deli.

But for children with special needs — whether it's autism, developmental delays or physical disabilities — exploring the museum when it's noisy and crowded can be overwhelming.

Chirles said the program started in 2006 as Medically Fragile Mondays. Sessions were held once a month, on a day when the museum was normally closed. Children came with their therapists or families and soon participation grew enough to warrant two days each month. At that point, the program evolved into Sunday Super Stars, with the museum opening two hours early on the second and fourth Sundays to serve children with special needs. The program averages about 140 participants a month.

The team's initial focus was the Sunday program, but as they leveraged their different areas of expertise and wide array of networks, their focus expanded to other museum activities.

One team member found tax opportunities, another donated a boat that was used for an interactive book exchange in the lobby and another worked on the website. The team also secured a flat-screen TV that hangs in the lobby and is used to highlight upcoming programs, display photos and acknowledge donors. Each winter holiday season, children are gifted with cookies when they arrive at Sunday Super Stars.

A TEAM EFFORT

“One of the biggest benefits of working with this great DLI group is that we talked a lot about the Sunday Super Stars program and how important it is and how we could beef it up,” Chirles said. “It led to some great conversations and thinking outside the box.”

“Each team member added value to the project, and it just started to grow,” Jabon said. “Once we felt like we were accomplishing something, it really built momentum and enthusiasm. Everyone was participating, and everyone was involved.”

Her advice to other DLI teams is to keep your goal simple — don’t approach it with the thought that you have to “tackle” something because that can be daunting. She said it’s important to let everyone share ideas and contribute so that no one person drives the bus.

Jabon also advised not setting too lofty a goal, but rather have realistic expectations for something the team can accomplish.

The project can be on a small scale, she said, as long as it has impact.

“You’ve got people on this team who are in the upper echelon of Charleston’s business community, and they’re taking the time and using their resources to help this program and get the word out — that really elevated the museum and the Super Stars program.”

— Denis Chirles, executive director of the Children’s Museum of the Lowcountry

Jabon acknowledged that the fundraising aspect of a group project might be intimidating for some people. Her advice is to not let fundraising be the main focus or strategy for a DLI project. In fact, she doesn’t even like the term “fundraising,” instead preferring “identifying funding sources” through the team members networks. For example, some companies may offer a matching program, grant opportunities or have a relationship with a foundation that can offer support.

Team D-LIGHTT members were able to identify funding opportunities through a variety of grants and foundations. In one instance, team member David Dunlap, president and CEO of Roper St. Francis Healthcare, worked with grant writers at his organization to assist the museum in identifying not-for-profit or government grants.

Another team member, Joe McKeown, who was a councilman, helped the museum identify and qualify for \$6,600 in A-TAX funds. And MWV Specialty Chemicals Division donated \$500. With in-kind donations, grants and other sources, the team identified about \$10,000 in funds to help the museum.



Children and their parents wait in the check out line at the Charleston Market exhibit. They can shop, work the register or make sandwiches in the deli.



Top: Rimel Thomas, 5, races boats down the rapids at the WaterWise! exhibit. Rimel, who prefers the water activities, has been coming to the Sunday Super Stars program for more than a year. Top right: Lauren Cross, 8, waits as her little sister Anna, 5, scans her items at the check out counter at the Charleston Market exhibit. Smaller crowds and less stimulation at Sunday Super Stars allows Anna to enjoy the museum.



Jevic Scott, 11, takes orders and prepares sandwiches at the Charleston Market deli counter with the help of his mom Tami Kichline.

RAISING AWARENESS

One of the team's goals was to help the museum advance its mission of helping children interact in an educational and enriching environment that supports tolerance, understanding and appreciation for all types of people regardless of race, culture, age, class, gender or physical ability. That goal included increasing community awareness of the museum, and the Sunday Super Stars program in particular.

Team members also helped the museum identify organizations that serve children with special needs and connected them so that they could work together.

"The DLI team really gave the museum credibility and clout," executive director Chirles said. "You've got David Dunlap, the CEO of the city's largest hospital, telling the community how important the Children's Museum and the Sunday Super Stars program is."

"You've got people on this team who are in the upper echelon of Charleston's business community, and they're taking the time and using their resources to help this program and get the word out — that really elevated the museum and the Super Stars program. It gave us a lot of confidence and a lot of faith that we're doing the right thing and we're on the right path."

In their effort to enrich programs and services, Team D-LIGHTT helped develop an initiative to bring in Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) therapy students to work with the children. The therapy students get hands-on experience working with special-needs children, and the children benefit from having a buddy to help them navigate the different experiences at the museum.

On a recent Sunday, children in the Charleston Market exhibit filled small carts with bread, fish and cleaning supplies while first-time visitor Jevic Scott, 11, worked the cash register. With the help of Chelsea Wagor, an occupational therapy student at MUSC, Jevic scanned the items and rang them up with confidence and enthusiasm.

"We constantly hear from parents about how appreciative they are and how powerful this program is," Museum Director Chirles said. "It's important to them to do something together as a family that focuses around their child with special needs, while at the same time their other children don't feel like they're stuck doing something they don't want to do. Coming to the museum is a fun family outing."

"We wanted to first identify the needs of the museum, then see what we as a group could do to help."

— Jennifer DeWitt Jabon, Team D-LIGHTT

And beyond the obvious fun or learning aspect, Chirles said it's a great resource for parents to connect not only with other parents who may be dealing with similar challenges, but also with the MUSC students, Special Olympics or even yoga therapists.

Like many parents of children with special needs, Anna's parents realize the value of Sunday Super Stars and love the fact that it is family oriented.

"Having her big sister Lauren there is a very positive and wonderful experience for both of them, and for me and my husband as well," Fran said. And the fact that the museum is less crowded is particularly beneficial because Anna doesn't have the added stressor of lots of people around her.

Fran said there are still times when Anna withdraws if she's in new surroundings or is overstimulated, but as far as the museum goes, it's now a positive experience and she looks forward to something that used to be scary and overwhelming for her.

"The Children's Museum doesn't feel like therapy," her mom Fran said. "It's a real world experience. And the Sunday Super Stars program is great because if Anna were in a room full of kids, it would be sensory overload for her and a whole different experience. It's great to be able to have that comfortable place to go and make happy memories."



Front row from left: Victoria Middleton, Joe McKeown, Jennifer DeWitt, Dinos Liollio; Back row from left: James Ward, LaSonya Berry, David Dunlap, Mark Aukamp, Robin Berlinsky (guest), Denis Chirles (guest)



Jevic Scott, 11, paints at the "Pop-Up Atelier" in the arts-and-crafts room at the Children's Museum of the Lowcountry on Super Star Sunday.



Cycle for Change

Bike program provides mentorship and adventure for youth in challenging circumstances

When three slightly nervous young men approached the well in the House Chambers at the State Capitol to present their bill on bullying, they were part of a unique group that day. Among the roughly 1,500 middle and high school students from across South Carolina, they stood out as members of the only bike club to be represented at the annual YMCA Youth in Government conference in Columbia, S.C.

Amidst the throngs of teenagers from public and private schools throughout the state, the 12 members of Greenville's Momentum Bike Clubs held their own. In fact, the boys from Nicholtown Bike Club got their bill passed by the House and the Senate, and then signed by the youth governor.

This is not the scenario that first comes to mind when you hear "bike club" — and is certainly well beyond the expectations of the DLI-ted to Bike team members when they proposed their bike-mentoring project.

But once-insecure teens standing confidently before the state legislature to present their bills are now the norm ever since nine Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI) members got together at the spring 2010 Upstate class. Their project started with the desire to help children whose parents were incarcerated, and soon expanded to include an element dealing with childhood obesity, which led to the idea of a bike club for middle school students.

The Sterling Spinners, the first of several bike clubs that eventually became Momentum Bike Clubs, started as a summer program to help kids who often face challenging life circumstances. Through the club, they would strengthen their self-esteem, build friendships and get some exercise — all under the guidance of adult mentors.

It became evident fairly quickly that this project would become bigger than anyone could have imagined. The path they took was unknown and often led by what some might call fate. And like the roads the bicyclists travel, there have been new, exciting adventures around each corner — as well as some unexpected bumps along the way.

Nicholtown Bike Club members from left, Jailyn Taylor, 13, Shannon Butler, 13, and Tycorje Jones, 12, stand at the well to present their bill on bullying at Youth in Government at the state capitol.

LAUNCHING THE PROGRAM

DLLI-ted to Bike team members identified the Sterling community in Greenville because there are relatively high rates of parental incarceration, as well as childhood obesity, among its residents. And they targeted tweens and teens because that is a critical age when kids are beginning to mature, while at the same time dealing with their own insecurities. And instead of wandering aimlessly, the bike club would provide supervised summer activities.

The nine members of DLLI-ted to Bike each brought a different perspective and area of expertise to their project. Among them were a teacher, journalist, pastor and a health care worker. Team member Pam Jamarik, who was the director of diversity at Michelin North America at the time, said they wanted to take a holistic approach in working with kids.

"We didn't just want to deal with obesity — we also wanted to address self-esteem, relationships and handling property that had value," Jamarik said.

Fortuitously, one team member was familiar with Building Dreams (now called Momentum Bike Clubs), a mentoring program at Clemson University. Team members met with David Taylor, the Upstate director of that program, and laid out their idea. Taylor, who knew the power of mentoring, immediately agreed to partner with DLLI-ted to Bike. And from that moment on, the project has been about much more than just riding bikes.

Each team member solicited resources from their respective companies and they raised enough money to fund the program for the first two years. Once they purchased the first set of bikes and secured partners, DLLI-ted to Bike stepped back and let Taylor run the show.

"This has gone far beyond what we ever thought would happen with just a bicycle group," founding member Jamarik said. "We gave them a little something to get started and they just flourished."



David Taylor goes over the rules of the road before the Sterling Spinners begin their ride.



The cyclists gather around David Taylor for "circle up" time before each ride. Taylor uses this as a chance to offer up life lessons, often dealing with momentum and how bike riding can parallel life.

To qualify for membership in the bike club, students must be in at least sixth grade, file an application and go through an interview process. To stay in the club, they need to be a regular participant in bike club activities, advance to their next grade and stay out of legal trouble.

Upon acceptance, each member is outfitted with a 7-gear Trek Navigator hybrid bike, which has a wholesale value of \$350. Taylor purchases the bikes at cost from Great Escape, a local bike shop. The Safety Foundation of the Greenville Spinners, a local adult bike club, donates helmets. The bikes and helmets are stored at the Sterling Community Center, where they meet before each ride.

Before they can go on their first ride, each new member is given lessons in bike safety and rules of the road. And they must pass a basic bike maintenance course and demonstrate they can change a flat tire, as well as adjust the brakes and gears. Each ride has at least two adult mentors and maybe more, depending on how many students participate.

If participants remain an active member for one year, the bike is theirs to keep. And, if they're interested in joining the more advanced Challenge Team, they can trade in their Navigator for a customized road bike courtesy of Lucky Bike Shop.

In December 2010, the Sterling Spinners graduated their first nine members. By summer 2013, there were 23 students participating. And while the bike club was originally intended to be a summer program for middle school students only, members did not want to stop riding once school started, or leave when they entered ninth grade. So Taylor extended the activities through the fall and upped the age limit to high school seniors. Now, some of the older students serve as junior mentors to the incoming members.

Taylor also created the aforementioned Challenge Team, a second bike club for members who have been active for at least a year and want to go on longer and more challenging rides. The Challenge rides can include elevation changes of 2,000 feet and rides of 50 miles or more.

The powerful impact of the bike clubs led to the rebranding of Building Dreams to Momentum Bike Clubs, as the focus has shifted to mentoring exclusively through bike clubs. Taylor said Momentum Bike Clubs is a powerful means of supporting young people because they combine the mentoring piece, the fitness piece and the peer support. The participants must do their part as well. Aside from meeting the requirements to join and then remain in the club, Taylor said they set boundaries and expectations about what it's like to be in a mutually respectful relationship.

"MR. DAVID"

Now, "Mr. David," as the students call him, raises the necessary funds through various grants and foundations, as well as securing donations from local businesses for everything from helmets to meals to hotel stays. Taylor wears many hats at Momentum — he is fundraiser, grant writer and program director, and he also fosters partnerships and recruits adult mentors.

Taylor was confident in his mentoring skills, but he hadn't ridden a bike since his kids were young, and they're now in college. Before becoming involved in the bike club, Taylor said the most physical activity he got was when he and his wife walked their dog. So Taylor bought the same Trek Navigator bike the kids ride. "Now I'm just totally loving riding with these kids while getting in shape," he said.

"I was not a cyclist, and now I'm doing rides up Caesar's Head and Paris Mountain. Personally, it's been wonderful for me to get on a bike and challenge myself to longer and steeper rides. It's

been incredibly gratifying for me from a fitness aspect."

Even more than that, Taylor said, is the thrill of exposing the kids to new experiences and challenges. "When they think they can't get up the hill, and then they do, it's very gratifying".

Taylor said the kids in the bike clubs don't necessarily have the same opportunities, resources or exposure to things that other kids might have. "So all we're doing is walking alongside them," he said, "and reminding them of the potential that their life has and helping them chase their dreams."

"The privilege of forming a relationship with a kid who doesn't have that kind of support, and then helping them discover the gifts within them, and then providing support and encouragement so they can begin to build a life of meaning for themselves — I mean, what a privilege," Taylor added. "That in essence is what we're doing."

Tim Granger, one of the adult mentors, gives Taylor much of the credit for the success of the bike clubs. "David is the reason the bike club has been successful," Granger said. "The energy he's put into making it work has been incredible. He's the one texting the parents, texting the kids, following up with emails, making the phone calls. If anybody deserves credit for what's happened, it's the combination of Sylvia and David."

The Sylvia who Granger referenced is Sylvia Vandross, manager of the Sterling Community Center. Once DLLI-ted to Bike settled on the Sterling community, they contacted Vandross to see if she could help. Vandross agreed to store the approximately 15 bikes, as well as provide a place for them to meet. She also was instrumental in identifying the founding members and keeps an eye out for potential members.



Decivius Williams, 12, straps on his helmet in preparation for a ride with the Sterling Spinners. He especially likes the scavenger hunt rides.



The Sterling Spinners ride through Falls Park in downtown Greenville.



The Sterling Spinners and their mentors pose at a scenic spot near the Swamp Rabbit Trail.

But Vandross' involvement goes even further: Two of her daughters, a son and a granddaughter are members of the Sterling Spinners. For her children and the other members, Vandross said the social aspect of the bike club gives kids something to be a part of. "They are free to be themselves, but it's also a monitored activity," she explained. "They get socialization in a protected environment."

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

As many of the bike mentors like to say, it's not just about the bike.

"The kids in the Sterling community have multiple risk factors," Taylor explained. "It may be persistent poverty, instability in the home life, or they may encounter addiction or mental illness among caregivers. And there may be parental incarceration."

"What these kids get from the bike club is not something they're easily going to find somewhere else. It's a sense of belonging, a safe place, which is important to them. And a freedom to explore their community."

Part of the added benefit, Taylor said, is the bike clubs provide a conduit for middle school students to plug into connections and groups that will help further their development.

"A lot of what we do is build friendships, apart from bikes," Taylor said. "It's about relationships first and foremost. It's about mentors who make a commitment to consistently be a part of these kids' lives. That's not something these kids always see — some of them have adults that come in and out of their lives. It's treating each other with respect and having these kids see that the world is not always a hostile place. They can encounter experiences that are welcoming and warm and affirming."

One of those adult mentors who made a serious commitment to the bike clubs is avid cyclist and racer Tim Granger.

Right from the start, Taylor knew he needed to find someone who was knowledgeable about biking and bike safety, as he was not a cyclist and didn't even own a bike. So Taylor went to a board meeting of the Greenville Spinners, a local bike club with more than 700 members, to present his idea and request help. Fatefully, Tim Granger was present at the one and only board meeting he ever attended. At that time, Granger was co-manager of a race team and they had one seat on the board. Normally, Granger's partner attended the board meetings while Granger handled other duties. However, on this particular night his partner was unavailable. That meant Granger was at the meeting when Taylor made his presentation, asking for someone who could help teach the kids basic bike skills and safety of the road. Granger thought that would be a good match for his skills, and he agreed to help the novice cyclists.

Granger was skeptical about whether kids today, who are raised with high-tech toys and games, would be interested in joining a bike club. But his concern quickly dissipated. After a few weeks Granger learned the kids names and before he knew it, he was emotionally invested. Now he hosts cookouts at his farm outside Greenville and the mentors and students bond over bonfires and s'mores.

Granger, who is a flight test engineer at Edwards Air Force Base, never made the conscious decision to be a long-term mentor. He just kept coming back week after week, offering ideas for new places to ride and explore.

Adult mentors made a big impact in Granger's life and he feels a certain responsibility to pay it forward. "If there are things you can have even a small positive impact on, just do it," Granger said. "Don't do it because you expect recognition. Don't do it for any other reason than it's the right thing to do."

GROWTH AND EXPANSION

As word spread and interest grew, Taylor created two more bike clubs in the Momentum Bike Clubs family — the Nicholtown Spinners, another community-based club, and the Berea Spinners, a school-based club operating out of Berea Middle School. By the fall of 2013, Lakeview Middle School became the fifth bike club in Greenville, with teachers serving as the mentors. There are now about 55 kids in the five bike clubs, which meet weekly or bimonthly throughout the year. Each club has its own activities, and all five clubs participate in joint ventures as well.

Momentum Bike Clubs recently tracked mileage and time spent together over a six-month period. In that time, the kids and mentors traveled more than 3,000 miles on bicycles and spent more than 3,000 hours together.

And the expansion is continuing at a rapid pace. Sullivan Street, a new community-based bike club, and Camp Opportunity, a club for kids in the foster care system, both launched in March 2014. Sullivan Street is a former mill community with demographics similar to the Sterling community. And yet another bike club is in the works at Legacy Charter School.

With funding from the Junior League of Greenville, Taylor plans to start two all-girl bike clubs, with members of the Junior League serving as mentors. Taylor said there will be some gender-specific activities as well as others that all bike club members can participate in together.

At the beginning, Taylor was fully hands on. He was involved with every aspect of the bike clubs, including going on every ride. Now, the growth is beyond what Taylor can handle on his own. Once he helps launch a new club and finds lead mentors, Taylor steps back as the clubs become self-sustaining.

NEW EXPERIENCES

As new worlds open up to the participants with every trip, they're also gaining independence and a sense of responsibility. They venture outside their communities, many for the first time, to explore

all of the vibrant scenery and activities Greenville has to offer. The bike club members cycle along the Swamp Rabbit Trail, or to local museums and the library, the Furman campus and the Greenville News. They also take annual four-wheeled trips to the Greenville Symphony or Clemson football games. And Camp Greenville hosts the bike club members for a weekend of kayaking, hiking, rock climbing and mountain biking. All events, including gear, travel, meals and lodging, are provided at no cost to the students.

One of the cyclists' favorite four-wheeled trips is to YMCA Youth in Government (YIG) at the state capitol in Columbia. Taylor said the experiences they gain at the mock legislative event help boost the students' self-confidence, while raising their comfort level with public speaking. Momentum Bike Clubs is the only non-school affiliated group participating in the three-day event, which exposes the students to a whole different world. Aside from seeing the inner workings of state government and all that entails, Taylor added that they're dressing up, staying in a hotel and eating in restaurants — thanks to sponsorship from the YMCA of Greenville.

"What these kids get from the bike club is not something they're easily going to find somewhere else. It's a sense of belonging, a safe place, which is important to them. And a freedom to explore their community."

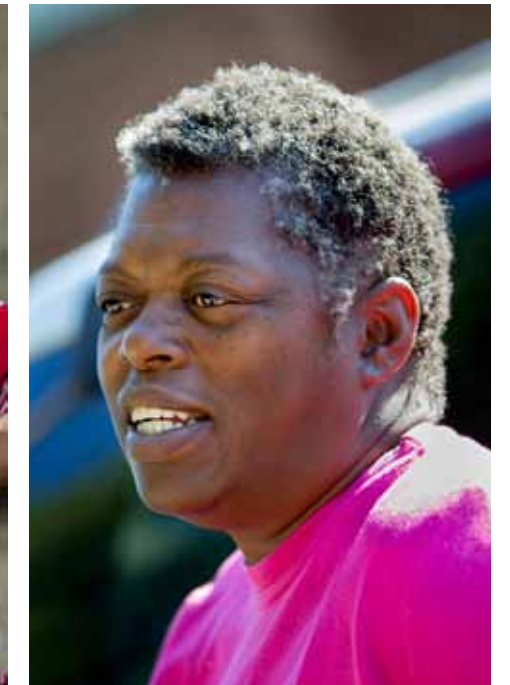
— David Taylor, executive director of Momentum Bike Clubs



Tim Granger has been an adult mentor with the Sterling Spinners since it began in 2010.



Amius Williams, 14, has been a member of the Sterling Spinners for three years.



Sylvia Vandross is the manager of the Sterling Community Center.

LIVES TRANSFORMED

Ashia Davenport, 16, has been a member of the Sterling Spinners since eighth grade. In the three years that she's been riding, Ashia has made dramatic changes in her life.

"I joined because I needed to get fit, and where I live you can't really ride your bike on the street," she said. Since joining, Ashia has lost more than 20 pounds. She said she used to sit around and watch TV or play video games, but now she'd rather ride her bike.

And because of the well-rounded approach that "Mr. David" takes, Ashia said her communication skills have improved significantly. "I used to be anti-social, but once I joined the club I started interacting more and made friends."

In fact, Ashia heard about the bike club from a friend who was already a member. "It's been really fun," she said, "because we always ride to new places. I never even knew about the grocery store on the Swamp Rabbit Trail, and I never knew about the downtown waterfront." Realizing how much she didn't know about Greenville, Ashia said to herself, "Wow, I've been missing a lot and I've lived here a long time!"

She enjoys it so much that Ashia is now a member of the Challenge Team. On her first challenge ride — a 22-mile round trip that included a steep climb to the North Carolina state line — Ashia fell behind and wanted to give up. She told Granger, one of the adult mentors, that she just couldn't make it. Granger reassured her that there was no time limit and she could go at her own pace. And then he started talking to her. He talked about anything and everything — except riding a bike up the hill. Together, they talked about how neither of their parents liked the music they listened to, and as they continued talking Granger slowly started to move forward. This made Ashia move ahead and before she knew it, she had reached the state line at the top of the hill.



Ashia Davenport, 16, rides along the Swamp Rabbit Trail in downtown Greenville. She has been a member of the Sterling Spinners since eighth grade.

SPINNING SISTERS

LeAndrea Sligh is an outgoing and confident 16-year-old. Yet, according to her, she wasn't always that way. LeAndrea says she was an overweight child who was ridiculed by her classmates. But at 13, she heard about the Sterling Spinners bike club and thought it might help her lose weight.

It did, but she also gained so much more.

"Ever since I joined the bike club, I fell in love with it. I'm a little girly, so sweating is not my thing — but I love the trips we take, the travel and especially Youth in Government. I love it. I love it," she said. "You learn a lot and you experience a lot because you're around all different types of people and different personalities. It's fun, but at the same time it's based on important issues that need to be discussed. You'd be surprised at what things people my age try to change about the world."

"I've come a long way," LeAndrea said with confidence. "My stepdad used to tell me that I've grown into a beautiful swan. And I have. When I was younger I was heavy-set, but now I've slimmed down."

Beyond the physical benefits, LeAndrea says the bike club has had a huge impact on her life. Besides her newfound confidence, LeAndrea's experience with YMCA Youth in Government — where she recently completed her fourth trip — has triggered an interest in public speaking.

For the last several years, LeAndrea has been talking to various groups, young and old, about the bike club and her experiences. "I'm very social now; you can ask anybody," she said.

And while she loves the bike club and all it has to offer, LeAndrea also developed a passion for theater, and that now competes for her time and attention. It's a delicate balancing act to juggle school, theater and bike club, but LeAndrea rides when her schedule allows and she never misses the annual Youth in Government trip.

"Through repertory and bike club and public speaking, I feel more 'me,'" LeAndrea said. "I'm more comfortable with myself now. I feel beautiful and I'm not ashamed to tell anybody. I'm not afraid to say what's important."

The changes have not escaped her mother's notice either.

"LeAndrea used to be a couch potato," her mother Andrea Sligh admitted. "Joining the bike club got a little bit of the lazy out of her, and she really blossomed after that."

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Not wanting to be left out of all the fun and adventure, younger sister Ollicia Burnside, 12, joined the Sterling Spinners as soon as she was eligible. She was familiar with some of their activities, but said it is so much more than she thought.



Sisters LeAndrea, 16, left and Ollicia, 12, front, pose on their front porch with their mom Andrea Sligh. Both girls are active participants in bike club activities.

Her favorite part by far is Youth in Government in Columbia, where she recently completed her second trip. Her team from Momentum Bike Clubs introduced a bill to raise the age limit for all social media from 13 to 16. And even though the bill didn't pass, Ollicia said the experience was valuable, allowing her to debate issues and hear different points of view. She also enjoyed meeting a variety of people while learning about some of the problems others face in everyday life.

And Ollicia shares her big sister's love of theater. In fact, Ollicia got involved in theater first, and this past summer both girls had lead roles in local productions.

While she also balances her time between school, repertory and bike club, Ollicia rides as often as she can — even venturing out with her nieces and nephews outside of bike club.

Ollicia's ongoing commitment to cycling is even more impressive, considering her history. On her very first ride with the Sterling Spinners, she was hit by a motorcycle. She broke her tibia and her fibula and faced a long recovery. She told her mother that she never wanted to ride again.

"It was the scariest thing I've ever been through," Ollicia said. "And it being my first ride, I was like 'really?'"

While she was recovering, Ollicia got a call from supermodel Kiara Kabukuru, who had previously shared her own bicycle accident story with bike club members. (See Model Citizen sidebar on page 37 for more about Kiara.) Kiara offered Ollicia encouragement and by the time she recovered several months later, she was ready to ride again. She said the decision to not give up made her stronger and gave her even more confidence than she already had.

No one is prouder of LeAndrea and Ollicia than their mother. Not only has their experience in the bike club boosted their confidence and self-esteem, she said, but the sisters also have been exposed to many things they might never have experienced otherwise.

"I'm just so happy they're doing things that are constructive," Andrea said. "There are positive people in their lives, keeping them busy and keeping them out of the street. And to have people helping them to decide which way they want to go — that's a big thing for me."

Both girls are planning to go to college, and they know there is a world of opportunity waiting for them.

Andrea wants her daughters to know how proud she is of them, so she covers the walls of their home in Greenville's Sterling community with awards and achievements recognizing both girls. Among them are Outstanding Leadership Awards, Teen of the Year, Repertory Theater Award, Sterling Spinners Achievement Award, and Outstanding Bill Award from Youth in Government.

Andrea said she's pretty sure her daughters get other awards and certificates they never even bother to tell her about. So she keeps a stash of empty frames on hand just in case.



Ollicia Burnside casts her vote during Youth in Government in Columbia, SC. Momentum Bike Clubs is the only non-school affiliated group represented at the annual mock legislature event.

Ashia intends to stay with the Sterling Spinners until she graduates high school. After that, she hopes to attend the Air Force Academy in Colorado, and she plans to take her bike with her.

For brother and sister Mikey and Rosie Hayes, participation in the bike club has led to positive changes as well. Mikey, 15, used to get easily frustrated and sometimes had trouble seeing things through. Now, his mother AnnMarie said, he has learned to finish what he starts and has overcome many hurdles.

His first trip to Youth in Government was a new and frustrating experience, but Mikey persevered and won an Outstanding Bill Award. His grades also have improved since joining the bike club. His mom said Mikey used to be an average student who did only what he needed to get by, but his last report card had all A's and one B, and he was student of the week.

Mikey has asthma and was sick a lot as a child, his mother said, but through bike club he has built up his endurance, learned to pace himself and is a member of the Challenge Team. Taylor said Mikey is a poster child of what bike clubs can do for a kid. "He's very eager and soaks up everything. He's very gifted and takes on any challenge. He could even be a racer one day," he said. In fact, Mikey has already started training with the cycling coach at Furman University.

Mikey's younger sister Rosie, 12, watched with envy for a year as her older brother went on scenic rides throughout the city and took exciting trips to football games or cookouts.

"He told me you get to go to places you can't really see from a car," Rosie said. So as soon as she was eligible in June 2012, Rosie signed up. In sixth grade, she got all A's.

"This is stuff you should want your kids to be doing when they're growing up," AnnMarie said. "Parents have to want this for their children because it is a sacrifice to be away from your kids many evenings and weekends. But it's worth it, she said, because of the experiences your children will have.

"My kids are exposed to worlds outside their own communities, and they have an alternative vision of what life can be, different from their own world right around them."



The Sterling Spinners take a break during a ride along the Swamp Rabbit Trail.

"This has gone far beyond what we ever thought would happen with just a bicycle group. We gave them a little something to get started, and they just flourished."

— Pam Jamarik, DLI-ted to Bike team member

SOWING THE SEEDS

Taylor said that initially the kids think it's pretty cool to own a bike with a retail value of nearly \$500. But again, he said it isn't really about the bike. It's the relationships and the experiences that make it such an amazing opportunity for these kids.

"Mentoring can change the trajectory of a child's life," Taylor said. "It's not a quick fix and we're not about rescuing kids, but if we can — through support and encouragement — give them more purpose, hope and connection, then that's a good thing."

Taylor recognizes that he and the other mentors may never really know the full impact they've had on a child's life. The seeds they're sowing now may not come to fruition for years to come, but he is confident they are making a positive difference in these children's lives.

And those relationships and experiences are not one-sided. "My life has been so beautifully enriched by my involvement with the bike clubs," Taylor said. "I hope I'm giving back as much as I've received. And I hope to be involved in these kids lives 10, 15, 20 years from now — I want to go to their weddings and I want to meet their kids."

DLI-TED TO BIKE TEAM



Front row: Lorraine Henderson, Renee Romberger, Valerie Williams, Pam Jamarik; Back row: E Richard Walton, Gus Suarez, Joe Mullen, Matt Matthews, Bill Griffith

MODEL CITIZEN

When Alice Kabukuru rides with Momentum Bike Clubs, she's not there as Kiara the supermodel; she's there as a survivor of both childhood trauma and a horrific bicycle accident, sharing her story and mentoring kids who may be living with traumas of their own.

Alice's story would be unbelievable if it were not true. She was born in Uganda in 1975 during a time of major civil unrest. In addition to experiencing parental incarceration, domestic abuse and poverty, Alice says her father was angry, violent and involved with anti-government rebels. Her early years were spent running and hiding as war and bloodshed surrounded her. When her father was marked for assassination, her parents left the country and Alice and her three siblings went into hiding with her grandparents.

A year later, when Alice was 6, Amnesty International helped reunite her family in Los Angeles, where she grew up and attended high school. She remembers people telling her she could be a model, but Alice just didn't see it. The standard of beauty for her tribe, the Banyankole, favored voluptuous women — and Alice thought she was much too thin and boyish.

"I didn't grow up feeling I was as beautiful as everyone else because I wasn't typically beautiful for my tribe," she explained.

And because she was somewhat sheltered in a Ugandan community in L.A., she didn't realize there were different standards of beauty in the United States. Alice says while growing up she was so self-conscious of being unattractively skinny that she used to layer her clothes. It wasn't until she got older that she realized being thin was an asset for models.

When Alice was 16, she went to the local mall to pick up a Mother's Day gift, when, as if out of a movie, a photographer approached her. He told her she had real model potential and they did some test shoots together. Alice was only 17 when she landed her first modeling gig in a Coca-Cola commercial.

Not only did her life veer in a completely new direction, but even her name changed. If she was going to be a model, her agent said, she would need a more exotic name — and Kiara was born.

The Coca-Cola job led to a Levi's ad in New York, and it snowballed from there. Kiara made the rounds at the design houses and eventually met with Calvin Klein, who immediately put her to work. Before long, she was hanging out with the biggest names in the modeling world and working for the top fashion magazines and runway shows in New York and Europe.

LIFE-CHANGING TRAUMA

At the height of her career in 2000, Kiara was living in Manhattan and about to sign a contract with CoverGirl. Then, while riding her bike on Memorial Day weekend, an unlicensed semi-truck driver slammed into her. Screaming, Kiara was dragged underneath the truck by the back of her head. When the truck finally stopped, Kiara, who had somehow maintained consciousness, started picking up her teeth from the pavement.

At the hospital, she said no one would bring her a mirror.

Her injuries were severe and particularly devastating for someone whose career depended on her looks. The skin on her arms and back had been ripped off. She broke her ribs, pelvis, pubic bone, sacrum and right ankle. Eventually, Kiara would have seven surgeries just to reconstruct her mouth — including rebuilding her jaw with metal, prosthetic tooth implants and gum grafts. Amaz-

ingly, she healed with no visible scars. After years of rigorous physical training, Kiara slowly worked her way back into modeling in 2008 with a shoot for Vogue Italia's all-black issue. Then, when she was 35, Kiara returned to New York to resume her modeling career in 2010, as well as delved into acting, writing and speaking to young people.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Kiara's sister Annah is in the PhD program at Clemson University, in the same department where David Taylor runs a mentoring program called Momentum Bike Clubs (formerly known as Building Dreams). All Taylor knew about Kiara at the time was that she had been discovered as a teenager and became a supermodel. He knew nothing of her life story, her bike accident or her long recovery.

Taylor asked her sister if Kiara ever supported charitable causes and the answer was "absolutely." So Taylor sent her a packet about the bike club mentoring program and Kiara responded that this was the answer to her prayers — she had been looking for a way to give back and this was just the place to do it.

Kiara helped raise awareness for bike clubs when she came to Greenville in 2012 to emcee a fashion show called "My Mentor and Me." During a ride with the Sterling Spinners that same trip, Kiara casually mentioned that it was the first time she'd been on a bicycle since she was dragged under that semi truck 12 years ago.

That first ride after the accident was "very scary and really quite emotional," Kiara said. "It's interesting that when you do things for other people, you really find so much more strength within yourself. I probably would not have gotten back on a bike for any other reason except for riding with the kids in that bike club."

Kiara came back to Greenville in 2013 to spend Memorial Day weekend — the anniversary of her accident in 2000 — riding with the students, mentoring and sharing her story. Kiara said she feels empowered by her life experiences and has liberated herself from shame and guilt. By talking about things like domestic and sexual abuse, Kiara said she can own it and not feel ashamed or damaged by it. And since she has experienced some of the same traumas

that the bike club kids struggle with, Kiara hopes that by sharing her personal story she may help liberate others as well.

"The accident sent me on a whole different trajectory of healing," Kiara said. "I wasn't necessarily focused on my career; I really was focused on just being well. Now all of my personal experiences over my life have become these goals that I can share with young people."

And Kiara's connection to these kids, Taylor said, is remarkable. Not only can she relate because of her traumatic childhood, but she has the bicycle connection as well.

Kiara said that once she recovered, her ambition for life came back and she now has a drive to make a difference. She said she always knew it wasn't right for kids to experience trauma, pain and abuse, and she feels a calling to work with people who don't have a voice or can't stand up for themselves. Kiara made the decision to take her life-changing traumatic events and turn them into something good.

While Taylor was thanking Kiara for all she had done for the bike club, she told him the relationship was definitely reciprocal. Kiara said connecting with the kids and hearing their stories gives her courage. And while she hopes to inspire the kids, she always comes away inspired.

"These kids are so much fun and they have so much potential," she said. "I'm moved every time I get to hang out with them."

"I think mentoring is an incredible thing. For me to be able to help other people, the way that other people helped me, it just all makes sense."

Kiara said she had a wonderful mentor when she moved to the states, a woman who adopted her entire family. "She made such a huge difference in my life," she added, "and I think of her all the time. She taught me forgiveness and compassion and acceptance. She was so kind and understanding and such a soft place to land for all of us [after] going through all of that violence as children."

Kiara believes we should not be limited by where we come from geographically or biologically, especially if you are not getting what you need from those places.

"I think sometimes when your own supposed family, or immediate family or biological family, can't support you in the way that you need, we as a community — as a human community — would do well to pitch in and support everyone so that everybody has someone to go to and someone to talk to or someone to rejoice with or someone to cry with. I really do think that we are all one," she said.

"There's a lot of anguish and trauma in this world and this life," Kiara said, "and I think that, when things like this happen, you can either become a victim and get destroyed, or you can say, 'OK, so what can I do with this that's going to make the world a better place?'"

"I think mentoring is an incredible thing," Kiara added. "For me to be able to help other people, the way that other people helped me, it just all makes sense."

Members of the Sterling Spinners ride along the Swamp Rabbit Trail in downtown Greenville. The scenic trail is a popular spot for the riders.





Top: Chef Patrick Wagner prepares a roux as food-service workers from Greenville County elementary schools watch. Left: Braden Williams, 7, licks his fingers after eating the baked chicken at school. Braden says he likes the chicken and the locally grown apples the best.

GOOD EATS

Food-service workers learn how to prepare healthier meals for elementary school students

A dramatic increase in childhood obesity rates during the last 30 years has caused some experts to fear that this may be the first generation of American children who will have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

The Gladiators, a spring 2011 DLI team, made it their mission to make sure this doesn't happen.

The statistics are staggering: In the 1970s, only 5 percent of children in the United States were overweight. Today, 30 percent are overweight and 18 percent are obese. Closer to home, more than 40 percent of all Greenville County youth are overweight. And nearly one in three high school students in South Carolina are overweight or obese.

The consequences go far beyond physical appearance. Childhood obesity can lead to heart disease, diabetes, liver or kidney disease and cancer — and at ages much younger than ever seen before.

It is not uncommon now to see type-2 diabetes in 10- and 12-year-old children. And a direct consequence of the obesity epidemic means there will be significant amounts of chronic disease and disability. In the HBO documentary "The Weight of the Nation," Dr. America Bracho emphasizes that obesity negatively impacts families, the workforce, productivity and health care costs.

To help combat this trend in Greenville County, the Gladiators team worked with the Greenville County School District and the Culinary Institute at Greenville Technical College to support and promote "Culinary Creations," a healthy eating program in elementary schools throughout the county.

AJ Whittenberg Elementary School was the first school to take notice. To try to reverse the obesity trend, AJ Whittenberg began this innovative program in August of 2010. It features a menu created by a professional chef focusing on minimally processed foods, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and reduced sodium — all within the school's budget restrictions.

Because there is a correlation between obesity and poverty, children who eat a significant portion of their meals at school are at greater risk. When at least 40-50 percent of a child's daily caloric intake is consumed at public schools, what those kids eat becomes extremely important. At some Title 1 schools such as AJ Whittenberg, many children eat breakfast and lunch at school.

For their project, the Gladiators knew they wanted to help battle childhood obesity by promoting and encouraging healthier nutrition in the Upstate. And they wanted to work with AJ Whittenberg, but the team didn't have a specific project in mind.



Colette Williams, from Hollis Elementary School, keeps her eyes on the instructor during her one-week Culinary Creations training.

Finding Focus

While visiting the school in the spring of 2011, team members met with Ron Jones, culinary specialist for the Greenville County School System, and joined him for lunch in the school cafeteria. Several team members commented on how good the food was and asked about the nutrition program at AJ Whittenberg. Jones told them about Culinary Creations, the new healthy eating program the school instituted in 2010. He said there were plans to expand the program to at least 10 other Greenville County elementary schools.

So with their goal of helping to reduce obesity — especially among impoverished children — the Gladiators committed to support the school district's initiative in several ways. First, the team members raised \$10,000 to offset a portion of the costs for the one-week culinary training program for food-service workers from the schools.

They also put together an incentive prize package for each school's food-service workers who completed the training. The winner was chosen based on test scores, the final exam and subjectively, on the team's attitude. Heritage Elementary School came out on top and shared in the prize package, which included gift cards, health screenings donated by Greenville Health System and a trip to the high-performance track at BMW. But perhaps the most coveted prize of all was the use of a new BMW for one week. Because Heritage Elementary had multiple team members, the winner of that prize was drawn out of a hat.

Jones said the program quickly gained momentum and interest and he was able to secure funding through a variety of grants and donors, which has enabled them to sustain the program.

Culinary Training

Each summer for the last three years, elementary school food-service workers have come to the Culinary Institute at Greenville Technical College for intensive, hands-on training under the watchful eye of Chef Patrick Wagner, instructor at the Culinary Institute. They learn how to prepare the new menu items, as well as basic cooking skills that can be applied every day.

By the end of summer 2013, food-service workers from all 51 elementary schools in Greenville County completed the one-week program. When school started in the fall, the Culinary Creations menus were served in all 51 schools. Cafeteria workers from the 19 county middle schools will begin their training in the summer of 2014 and high school cafeteria workers will train in 2015.

The five-day curriculum covered topics such as the proper use of knives and preparing vegetables while maintaining their nutritional value. Students teamed up to make a variety of soups from scratch, some of which were recipes from the Greenville County school system.

Chef Wagner said the food-service workers needed to learn basic cooking skills first, as well as how to work within the school kitchen environment, all while meeting their budget.

"We're incorporating more fruits and vegetables into the menus while creating standardized recipes to help manage time and function," Wagner said. "They're learning basic techniques so that they can prepare any recipe."

Other topics covered in the Culinary Creations training include salads, such as edamame succotash, a hummus plate and couscous,



Chef Patrick Wagner gives a tour of the Culinary Institute's herb garden, which includes rosemary, lavender, basil and tarragon.



Dawn Fowler, left, and her classroom partner Stacey Merck work together to prepare broccoli cheddar soup.



Stacey Merck, left, stirs her soup while sharing the stove with Heidi Yonkin, center, and Tena Johnson.

as well as homemade salad dressings. Chef Wagner taught them about different types of grains and gave the students a tour of the Culinary Institute's herb garden. The students worked in teams of two to prepare a variety of soups from scratch, including tomato chickpea with basil, chicken tortilla and basic chicken noodle soup.

Dawn Fowler, cafeteria manager at Armstrong Elementary, was one of 44 food-service workers who received training last summer at the Culinary Institute. Fowler and her cooking partner Stacey Merck, from Chandler Creek Elementary, were assigned broccoli cheddar soup, enough to serve 100 people. During the challenge, they had to find the necessary cooking supplies, the proper ingredients and prepare the soup from scratch — all within the allotted time.

After grabbing mounds of carrots, Merck looked at the recipe and asked nervously, "You mean we've got to dice these all up? Oh, I don't do that — my husband does all the chopping at home."

Merck said she and the other cafeteria workers at her school did some cooking, but nothing like what she and her partner were about to undertake.

After an hour of scurrying, chopping, dicing, roasting and stirring, about a dozen soups filled the kitchen with a mix of tempting aromas. Merck said the experience was nerve-racking because it was fast-paced and they were working in an unfamiliar kitchen.

But soon the participants got to taste the fruits of their labors, and the results were impressive. Merck said her and Fowler's broccoli cheddar soup received high marks from their classmates.

As for the program that began at Armstrong Elementary in the fall of 2013, cafeteria manager Dawn Fowler said she was anxious to see how the kids would react to the new menu.

"There will be some foods the kids won't be familiar with, like a frittata," Fowler said. "And I know some of them don't even know what a squash is."

"We used to serve the kids chicken nuggets and pizza," Fowler added, "but now we're offering homemade soups and salad bars." She acknowledged there would be a period of adjustment, but Fowler said she and her staff will be positive and encourage the students to try new things. "We'll offer samples, and go out into the cafeteria with tastes of things they may not have seen before, like black bean burgers."

And to help the kids learn which foods provide the most nutritional value, the schools have implemented a "Go, Slow and Whoa" labeling system. The schools track calories, sodium, fat, saturated fat and vitamin content of the foods they serve. A stoplight decal indicates each item on the line with a green "go," a yellow "slow" or a red "whoa."

A recent lunch at Armstrong featured roasted chicken with whole-wheat rolls, a made-from-scratch veggie burger, homemade broccoli and cheddar soup, a salad bar, mixed vegetables, yogurt, canned pears and peaches, fresh grapes and locally grown Gala apples. Most items were marked "go," although a few were labeled "slow," mainly because of the cheese or syrup in the canned fruit, but there were no "whoas." Jones said the only "whoa" he can remember was a cake offered at Thanksgiving time.



An array of made-from-scratch soups ready for taste testing.



Ron Jones, culinary specialist for Greenville County schools, teaches the classroom part of the Culinary Creations program.

“My fourth-grader at Tigerville Elementary thinks the food is great! The breakfast and lunch menus sound delicious to me. School lunches have come a long way since I was in school. Floppy cardboard pizza and petrified fish sticks... um, no thanks! I'll take some hummus or tomato soup any day!”

— mother of grade-school student



The “Go, Slow and Whoa” labeling system helps students identify which foods are most nutritious so they can make better choices.



Since the implementation of Culinary Creations, a typical lunch at Armstrong Elementary School includes baked chicken, whole grain rolls, a salad bar and mixed vegetables.

Second-grader Da’Kius Ballenger, 7, is a huge fan of the soups. “Last year they had applesauce and they didn’t have soup every day,” Da’Kius said. But he likes the lunches much better this year because they have a different soup every day. “Soup’s my favorite lunch. When I was sick my mom fixed me chicken noodle soup, and I’ve liked it ever since.”

The food on classmate Braden Williams’ tray was a little different. “I like the chicken the most and the apple,” he said. Comparing this year’s lunches to last year’s, Braden, 7, said he prefers the new menus because he likes to try new foods. He especially liked the baked Mexican macaroni that was introduced this year. “It was the best macaroni and cheese I ever tasted,” he proclaimed enthusiastically, “because it had tomatoes in it!”

And if the students’ assessments aren’t enough, more affirmation of the success of Culinary Creations is indicated by the number of staff members who eat the lunches, particularly the soup-and-salad bar.

Ron Jones said feedback on the new menus has varied from school to school, but for the most part it has been very positive. In particular, a post by one mom on the Greenville County School Facebook page praised the new initiative with this comment:

“My fourth-grader at Tigerville Elementary thinks the food is great! The breakfast and lunch menus sound delicious to me. School lunches have come a long way since I was in school. Floppy cardboard pizza and petrified fish sticks... um, no thanks! I'll take some hummus or tomato soup any day!”

The new culinary venture has a great deal of support from the top down. “My principal and administrative staff are right with me,” said Fowler, the cafeteria manager at Armstrong Elementary. “They know it’s the right thing to do for the kids.”

GLADIATORS TEAM



Front row from left: AnnMarie Higgins, Katy Smith (guest), Tonie Edwards, Becky Godbey; Back row from left : David Williams, Harold Thompson, Mitch Kennedy, Ken Tuck, Tom Praktish, Ed Memmott



Da’Kius Ballenger, 7, heads to his table after choosing a nutritious lunch at Armstrong Elementary. He likes the made-from-scratch soup so much that he eats it every day.

UNITE SUMMERTON

HIGH SCHOOLERS LEAD THE WAY FOR RACIAL UNITY
IN SUMMERTON, S.C.



Downtown Summerton is a mix of small businesses and boarded-up storefronts. There are only two stoplights in the town of less than 1,000 people.



Members of Unite Summerton repaint their logo on the basketball court at Wausau Park. The original logo was painted in 2009 when the group of students from the public and private high schools was formed.

To understand why white students and black students working side by side on a community improvement project in Summerton, S.C., in 2013 is significant, you must first know the history of Summerton.

In the 1950s, Summerton, like most southern cities, was racially segregated. The inequities across the south during that era are commonly known. Black residents had to sit at the back of buses and in balconies of movie theaters, and they had to use separate bathrooms and water fountains.

However, what's not commonly known is that the landmark legal case which ultimately ended school segregation actually started in Summerton. The origins of the case trace back to the 1940s, when white children rode school buses to a well-maintained brick school with separate classrooms, lunchroom and science labs. Meanwhile, black children often walked eight miles or more to their small wooden schools, which had only one or two rooms and often no electricity or running water.

It began with a simple request. In 1947 Reverend Joseph DeLaine, a concerned parent, asked school officials to provide just one school bus for the black children; after all, the white children had dozens. R.M. Elliott, the local school board chairman, denied his request, reasoning that black citizens did not pay enough taxes to warrant a school bus and it would be unfair to ask white taxpayers to provide transportation for black children.

Three years later the NAACP, with the help of Thurgood Marshall, brought forth a case that had developed into more than just a transportation issue. Over 100 local parents of black school children signed a petition asking for equal educational opportunities

in Clarendon County, where Summerton is located. The first two names on the petition were Harry Briggs, an auto mechanic, and his wife Eliza, who worked as a hotel maid.

As the case progressed, it went from pursuing equal education for blacks and whites to demanding integrated schools. Eventually, the case named Briggs v. Elliott was appealed to the United States Supreme Court, where it was combined in 1954 with four other desegregation cases to become Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.

The cost was high to those who signed the petition or took a stand against segregation. Most of them lost their jobs, and many had to leave the state for their own safety.

And even though the landmark case legally ended segregation in public schools, integration didn't begin in Summerton until the mid-1960s. By 1970, "white flight" led most of the white students to Clarendon Hall, a private Christian academy that was founded in 1965. The first black student wasn't admitted until 2000.

Sixty years after Brown vs. Board of Education, 94 percent of the 301 students at Scott's Branch, the public high school in Summerton, are African American. And of the 76 students enrolled at Clarendon Hall, only one is African American.

And so it is because of this history, and the still mostly segregated schools, that black students and white students working together on a community project in Summerton warrants attention.

Nineteen students from Scott's Branch and Clarendon Hall spent a chilly fall day in 2013 sprucing up Wausau Park on the city's

west side. They planted trees, cleaned playground equipment and repainted the faded logo of two interlocked hands — one white, one black. The hands are a symbol of their group called Unite Summerton, which is a grassroots organization formed in 2009 with the goal to enhance public education and bring students from the two high schools together in an effort to break down racial barriers.

Adults serve as advisors and facilitators, but the students from both schools make the decisions about what activities they participate in and how often they meet. The students also wrote their mission statement:

"The mission of Unite Summerton is to improve the town of Summerton by uniting as one, providing service through leadership, to break down racial barriers and to beautify the community."

And that's where the Spring 2009 Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI) Fusion team comes in. Two of the seven Fusion members live in Summerton (school superintendent Dr. Rose Wilder and Jim Darby, who was then executive director of Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments) and they suggested the team concentrate on their small, rural town.

Dr. Wilder was familiar with Unite Summerton and thought the Fusion team could work with the existing group to expand and strengthen the community projects and leadership training for local students. And Jim Darby, who had been working with a biracial group called Summerton Revitalization, was familiar with the issues and needs of the community. Their goal was to broaden the base of support and help fulfill the mission of Unite Summerton.

Fortuitously, several of the adult volunteers already associated with Unite Summerton were DLI alumni, so they were able to use their networks and knowledge of the town's history to help the Fusion team reach their goal.

CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE

Fusion worked from the premise that young people are the future leaders of South Carolina, and their goal was to build leadership skills, facilitate relationships among the public and private school students and have them work together on a community improvement project.

Fusion team members recognized the need to have a leader who could relate to the students from a contemporary perspective, so they recruited Elliott Epps, then executive director of City Year Columbia. City Year is a national organization that unites young people ages 17 to 24 for a year of service, while providing organization and leadership skills. Fusion member Amy Love was on the board of City Year and knew that Epps, whose strength is working with high school and college students, could provide focus and motivation to the group.

Fusion members raised \$5,000 to bring Epps, a DLI alum, to Summerton. Epps' model is based on four words: imagine, recruit, transform and inspire. He and members of the City Year corps worked with Unite Summerton students to form a model for their project, as well as allocate resources and execute the projects. He held dialogues with the students from both schools, and conducted ice-breaking exercises so the kids could get to know and bond with one another.



Kevin Baxter, a senior at Scott's Branch, applies a fresh coat of paint to playground equipment at Wausau Park.

Their first project was to refurbish Wausau Park, a dilapidated park on the city's west side. The intertwined hands logo painted on the center court was the most visible symbol of their efforts. Epps said as soon as the students started working together, "a whole wonderful energy starting taking place."

After about three months, Epps felt his mission was complete and he left Unite Summerton in the hands of the students and adult facilitators.

ALTERED PERCEPTIONS

As Unite Summerton was forming, representatives approached the parents of public high school children for their input on how to improve public education and the community of Summerton. The response was less than enthusiastic, so they went directly to the future leaders of the community: the students themselves. Students from both high schools were eager to share their thoughts on what they liked and disliked about Summerton and what they hoped would change.

"The No. 1 thing they all thought was wrong with Summerton is that there was no forum through which they could talk or get to know each other," said Anne Darby, wife of Fusion member Jim Darby and a DLI alum who volunteers with Unite Summerton.

“The mission of Unite Summerton is to improve the town of Summerton by uniting as one, providing service through leadership, to break down racial barriers and to beautify the community.”

— Mission Statement of Unite Summerton

“We had 30 kids at an event and only two of them knew each other — and we’re a tiny town. I think that’s just evidence of the separateness here in Summerton. Socially it’s just not there.”

They soon realized that perceptions each racial group had of the other were often inaccurate. Early on, Unite Summerton facilitated tours of each high school — Scott’s Branch students toured Clarendon Hall and vice versa.

During the tours there were surprises on both sides.

“The Clarendon Hall students were awestruck at the technology and the physical structure at Scott’s Branch (built in the 1990s on the outskirts of town). The hallways were quiet, and the school was beyond their expectations for a public school,” Jim Darby said. “It was a wake-up call to know how far off their perceptions of the others’ school environment was.”

Conversely, when the public school students toured Clarendon Hall, Darby said they were surprised at how small and outdated it seemed.

To further emphasize the point, Ann Darby tells a story of one of the first meetings between the public and private school students. Both schools had great football teams the same year, and two of the high-profile players from Clarendon Hall were talking about where they had applied to college. They turned to one of the Scott’s Branch players and asked him where he thought he might go to college. He answered, “probably Annapolis, but Duke is also looking at me, or maybe Ohio State.” The Clarendon Hall players were surprised, she said, that someone from Scott’s Branch could be that successful and sought after by top-ranked colleges.

That Scott’s Branch player became a starting fullback at Annapolis.



Top: Tyasia Mulky, 16, a sophomore at Scott’s Branch, repaints the line on the basketball court at Wausau Park. Tyasia joined Unite Summerton because she wanted to help improve race relations in Summerton. Bottom: Anne Darby, a volunteer with Unite Summerton, oversees the refurbishing of Wausau Park by students from Clarendon Hall and Scott’s Branch high schools.

THE SLOW MOVE TOWARD CHANGE

Summerton is a little more than an hour’s drive southeast of the capital city of Columbia. Less than 1,000 people live in Summerton today, and more than 60 percent are black. There are two traffic lights, a few downtown storefronts and a Piggly Wiggly. The town is still largely divided along racial lines. A traffic light separates the black west side of Summerton — with its small houses and mobile homes — from the white east side, where stately homes sit atop landscaped lawns.

And on the side of a former service station next door to the historic Summerton Diner, there are three doors; the signs are gone now, but at one time they read Men, Women and Colored.

Although slow, some progress has been made in Summerton in recent years. Unite Summerton has been working for several years to improve relations between the future leaders of both races. There are African Americans on the school board and city council, and the local Rotary Club is equally divided by race and gender. DLI Fusion member Dr. Rose Wilder, the African-American superintendent of Clarendon School District 1, was named the 2013-2014 South Carolina School Superintendent of the Year.

“This is a small town,” Dr. Wilder said, “but there are separate worlds in this little small town.”

COMING TOGETHER

Over the last several years, members of Unite Summerton have participated in a variety of events, including a pep rally, a parade and community service projects. They have spruced up downtown storefronts and cleaned yards for people who couldn’t. And every year, they do a service project on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

To become a member of Unite Summerton, students must complete an application and write an essay. A committee makes the final decision on who gets in, and in an effort to keep the group small and manageable, they have to turn away candidates every year.

Anne Darby, one of the Unite Summerton volunteers, said early projects drew media attention to the biracial group of high school students. She said the students didn’t understand why the media came or why there was any outside interest in them at all. It became clear to the adults that a history lesson was in order.

The students gathered to watch a PBS documentary called “Soundtrack For a Revolution.” The film used the music of the ‘60s, combined with news footage of marches, police dogs, water hoses and lunch counter sit-ins, to tell the story of the civil rights movement. For some of the students, this was their first exposure to not only the graphic visuals of that era, but also to the humiliation and degradation suffered by so many.

“The students didn’t understand why the fact that they didn’t know each other in a town of only 1,000 people in the 2000s was incredible,” said Sherry Stewart, one of the Unite Summerton volunteers and a DLI alum.

Through the efforts of the Fusion team and Unite Summerton, at least some of those students from the two schools on opposite sides of town are getting to know one another.



Top: This plaque at the old Scott’s Branch High School recognizes local residents who were instrumental in the historic Briggs vs. Elliott desegregation case. Bottom: DLI Fusion team members Jim Darby, left, and Dr. Rose Wilder were instrumental in bringing their team’s project to Summerton.

"I know some people think the races can't get along," said Tyasia Mulky, 16, a sophomore at Scott's Branch High School. "But with Unite Summerton that's not true. Everyone is very nice, welcoming and intelligent. They're not mean at all."

Tyasia said her participation the last two years in Unite Summerton has changed her whole outlook on different races. She said at first she wasn't sure much had improved, but after learning about the history of Summerton and the civil rights movement, Tyasia said she's learned that some things have changed for the better.

As the students grabbed paint buckets, brushes, shovels and trash bags, they spread out across Wausau Park on a crisp fall day to plant trees, pick up trash and repaint peeling playground equipment. The crowning glory was the fresh coat of paint on the large logo of intertwined hands.

As Holly Carlisle, 15, a sophomore at Clarendon Hall, sat side-by-side painting the Unite Summerton logo with Brittany Nelson, 17, a senior at Scott's Branch, Brittany reflected on her journey.

Before getting involved with Unite Summerton, Brittany said she saw kids from Clarendon Hall but never actually met them. "We weren't encouraged to go to the other side of the block," she said.

"This experience will benefit me because now I feel I can be myself around people of different races," Brittany said. "Before, I used to be conscious of my behavior and more reserved."

And Brittany, who has been a member for three years, said not only is the experience fun, but "the kids from Clarendon Hall are just like us. They want to see growth in the community."

As for Holly, she said she joined Unite Summerton two years ago because she wanted to be a part of bringing the students together as well as contribute to the beautification of their town.

"I don't mind talking to anybody," Holly said. "I'm not afraid. We're all the same."

Jessica Green, a 17-year-old sophomore at Scott's Branch said her Unite Summerton experience has opened her eyes as well.

"Now I feel more relaxed when I'm around different people," she said. "It's not awkward anymore."

GOING FORWARD

For now, Unite Summerton does no formal fundraising. Overhead is extremely low, consisting mostly of paint and supplies for their beautification projects. Anonymous gifts and donations given in the name of a local schoolteacher who passed away have been enough to keep the program going the last several years.

With no immediate concerns for funding issues, there is every indication that sustained interest in Unite Summerton will keep it going. Plans for 2014 include a talent show and a community-wide field day.

Jim Darby acknowledged that the issues in Summerton are complex and the work can be arduous. "From a socioeconomic perspective, not much has changed," Darby said. "But you don't have the raw edges that used to be there."

And while Darby thinks it is too soon to know how successful the efforts of Unite Summerton will be, he is hopeful that positive and productive change can happen. He said the students have to acquire the necessary social and economic skills to become successful in the highly competitive society they'll face after graduation.

"In order to have economic and social successes, we have to have a local investment in each other," Darby said. "We need enough of them to nurture the population that's still here."

"Even if just two or three kids come back to Summerton and are employed at the local bank or in the industry sector, particularly in some type of managerial role, that's big. Because then they can come back to the schools and say 'I'm one of you. That is what I look like and I know where you came from and you can do it. I did it and this is what it took and Unite Summerton helped enable me to do it.'"

"This experience will benefit me because now I feel I can be myself around people of different races. Before, I used to be conscious of my behavior and more reserved."

— Brittany Nelson, Scott's Branch student and Unite Summerton member

Echoing similar concerns, Unite Summerton volunteer Sherry Stewart added, "We don't want all of them to move away and live somewhere else. When these students become adults and live in the community, they'll know each other and will have a history together. So those barriers will begin — and they have begun — to come down."

Superintendent Wilder said she has met wonderful people through her DLI experience and she feels good about the accomplishments of her Fusion team, particularly the goal of bringing the students from both high schools together. Admitting that it's an ongoing experiment, Wilder said the kids are getting to know one another and are surprised to find out they share many of the same concerns.

"I would love to see some of our young people return to Summerton after college and make a real positive difference here in the community," Wilder said. "That would do my heart justice if I could just hear them say 'I came back because I wanted to make it a stronger and better place.'"

FUSION TEAM



Left to right: Rose Wilder, Harold Reaves, Anthony Cooper, Trip DuBard, Paige King, Kimberly Davis, Amy Love, Jim Darby

ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS

Autistic children work with non-autistic youth to create art and understanding



Autism Academy student Blake Ravenell, 4, right, gets some help from big brother Chip, 5, while painting a tile that will become part of the EDDIE interactive art exhibit.



Caityn Blocklinger, 6, works with determination as she moves the puzzle pieces around to form the face of EDDIE.

For parents of children with autism, trying to understand what their children are thinking or feeling is like trying to solve a puzzle.

So it is fitting that an interactive puzzle is the project created by members of ASK4HD (Ask For Human Diversity), the spring 2013 DLI team whose goal was to provide children who have autism with an opportunity to work together and complete a project with children who don't have autism. Together, they created a puzzle art exhibit for EdVenture Children's Museum in Columbia, S.C.

Team member Dan Unumb, executive director of the Autism Speaks Legal Resource Center, said the idea grew from the team's desire to do a community action project involving the arts, children and diversity.

"Our goal was to utilize all of the talents and knowledge of our group members — whether arts, education or health — to create a lasting exhibit that would bring together and educate the community about kids with and without autism," Unumb said, "and to show they can interact and relate to each other while creating a beautiful work of art."

The eight members of ASK4HD built on a previous DLI project from 2012. Dan's wife Lorri Unumb, who is vice president for state government affairs for Autism Speaks, was a member of that earlier DLI team. Her team's project, called "Mix It Up Day," brought together children with and without autism for a day of fun activities including arts and crafts, outdoor play and lunch.

"This project is an affirmation of the value and worth of kids with autism, and a sense of affirming that our kids are part of the community along with everyone else, and to have it in such a prominent display shows a measure of support that I think is so important."

— Dan Unumb, ASK4HD team member

Where Mix It Up Day was an opportunity to interact, Dan said his group's project added the component of interacting with a mission. In addition to facilitating autistic and non-autistic children working together, the exhibit also raises awareness and educates people about the developmental challenges that make up the autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Alongside the art installation are displays and brochures providing resources and information about autism.

"It is important for people to understand the capabilities of people with autism and their tremendous potential," Unumb added. "We wanted a project where everyone's contribution to the final product is critical to the success of the project."

For team member Heather Brandt, helping the kids paint was an opportunity for her to work with children, something she rarely does as a social and behavioral scientist researching cancer prevention.



Left: The interactive sliding puzzle created by children with and without autism is displayed in front of EDDIE, the ambassador for EdVenture. Top: After painting their puzzle tiles, artist Jim Lalumondier helps children explore their artistic sides. Above: ASK4HD team member Dan Unumb and his wife Lorri, a DLI alum, are dedicated to helping autistic children.

"Our society is becoming increasingly diverse," Brandt said, "and I am a firm believer that exposure to diversity early and often can help to enhance our appreciation of differences. Our project was a small step toward the larger idea of inclusivity."

The execution and display of the art exhibit encompasses those aspects of inclusion and diversity. Together, the individual puzzle pieces painted by the children make up the face of EDDIE, the ambassador for the Children's Museum. EDDIE represents a typical 10-year-old boy and is meant to be representative of not only all people in South Carolina, but his physical appearance was designed to represent the diversity of America.

Billed as the world's largest child, EDDIE is the first thing visitors see when entering the museum. The sculpture, which is 40 feet tall and weighs 17.5 tons, was built so that children and adults can climb in and through him. Visitors can climb up EDDIE's vertebrae to his brain, crawl through his heart and then bounce around inside his stomach before sliding out his intestines.

CREATING THE ARTWORK

The project was designed and assembled by Jim Lalumondier, artist in residence at the Hammond School in Columbia. Since a puzzle

piece has become the recognized symbol for autism, he decided to create a sliding puzzle of EDDIE's face, where the pieces can be mixed up and then put back together. Lalumondier volunteered his time and talent to create the template and wooden tiles that the children painted. He then assembled the sliding pieces into a brightly painted table accessible to small children.

On a December weekend in 2013, children from the Autism Academy of South Carolina worked side by side not only with their behavior technicians and families, but also with BioInvestigators from the Children's Museum. BioInvestigators are middle and high school students with an interest in science, technology, engineering and math who want to develop career and life skills through their volunteer work with children.

Lalumondier sketched out EDDIE's face onto 35 square wooden tiles that would eventually be assembled into a sliding puzzle measuring about 36 square inches. Children from the Autism Academy chose a tile and with their art partners, they began painting.

Some of the kids worked with silent deliberation, while others enthusiastically dipped their brushes before applying paint with a flourish. And some of them worked independently while others were lent a guiding hand by a parent, sibling or behavior technician. By the time the painting was done, all of the participants had contributed.



Ryan Unumb, 12, gets a helping hand from behavior technician Courtney Lindler as he paints a tile for the puzzle exhibit at EdVenture.

Taken one at a time, each tile amounted to not much more than a few lines and colors on a wooden tile. But once assembled, the face of EDDIE comes into plain view.

The finished piece is prominently displayed in front of EDDIE on the second level at EdVenture. During a test run before the permanent installation, children were drawn to the bright red table and interactive nature of the display. While passing through the lobby, children of all ages stopped to arrange the mixed-up tiles to form the face on the giant sculpture in front of them.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A CAUSE

Once the DLI team settled on their idea, ASK4HD team member Sam Tenenbaum, who is on the board of trustees at EdVenture, facilitated the connection between the groups and the project became a joint venture between the Autism Academy of South Carolina and EdVenture.

The costs for the project were relatively low and the team wanted to move forward quickly, so Unumb fronted the money for supplies. "My mom gave me some birthday money," Unumb said, "and I just added a zero."

Lalumondier completed the puzzle assembly in early 2014, and it was officially unveiled at EdVenture during Autism Awareness month in April 2014.

Unumb said the relationship with EdVenture is important because the children's museum is a focal point in the Columbia community. Not only is there an explanation of how and why the puzzle was created, the exhibit will also help educate and raise awareness of autism. And the ongoing relationship with the museum means there is the potential for more projects in the future.

"This project is an affirmation of the value and worth of kids with autism," Unumb said. "And a sense of affirming that our kids are part of the community along with everyone else, and to have it in such a prominent display shows a measure of support that I think is so important."

THE AUTISM CONNECTION

For ASK4HD team member Dan Unumb, this was more than just a community project to create a piece of art; it was personal. Unumb and his wife Lorri have three sons: Ryan, Christopher and Jonathan. Their oldest son Ryan, 12, has autism.

In 2005, Lorri authored legislation to help families in South Carolina get insurance coverage for medical treatment of autistic children. In 2007, South Carolina was one of the first states to pass Ryan's Law, named for the Unumbs' son, which mandates that health insurance cover medically prescribed treatment for autism spectrum disorder. Currently, 34 states have passed Ryan's Law legislation. While Lorri works to get the law passed in every state, it is Dan's job to enforce that law and make sure insurance companies comply with it.

In 2010, Dan and Lorri, both attorneys, founded the Autism Academy of South Carolina, a nonprofit school offering intensive, individualized instruction for students aged 3 to 21, who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And Lalumondier, the artist, has an autism connection as well. His 9-year-old nephew Cole is autistic. When Cole showed an interest in art, Lalumondier started thinking about how art might be a vehicle of communication for kids with autism.

"What's really neat about being an art teacher is I can connect in a way with these kids that doesn't have to be verbal," Lalumondier said. "My nephew and I have spoken only a few sentences to each other, all because of him initiating it, but we do have a connection through his art."

WHAT IT MEANS TO THE ARTISTS

For sisters Isabella and Anne Bigda, the art project was an opportunity for them to unleash their creative energy together. Isabella, 5, and Anne, 4, who has autism, sat across from each other while both painted with enthusiasm.

Their mom, Liz Bigda, was thrilled about the opportunity. "I'm really excited for both of the girls; especially Anne though, to see the work she did being used in an exhibit," Bigda said. "She may not have shown it at the time of the event, but I know that she was completely thrilled."

Liz said this project was especially interesting for her daughter with autism because she is terrified of EDDIE. "We don't usually spend a lot of time at the museum because it's so difficult for Anne," Liz explained. "So I'm interested to see if EDDIE may seem a little less scary for her once she sees all the paintings put together."

This experience was also important to Katie Coon, mother of two sets of toddler twin boys, all on the autism spectrum. Coon, who is studying to be a special education teacher, said she thinks in pictures and is especially interested in art and how it might help children with special needs.

"It's good to put kids into challenging situations because you never know what exposure or event may spark an interest or showcase a talent," Coon said. "They could discover a talent for art or music that you didn't know they had."

For the BioInvestigators who volunteered with the project, it was their first time working with autistic children. Peace Ajukwa, 17, said she had a very positive experience. "The kids are all so bubbly and have really different personalities and I love that," she said. "We painted blocks of EDDIE, and it was amazing to see them do it on their own. To see the smiles on their faces really made me happy."

Jenny Nankoua, 14, also had fun working with the children from the Autism Academy — and she learned a valuable lesson about the capabilities of children on the autism spectrum. "Honestly, I couldn't even tell that these children were autistic because they're full of life and they're very talented," she said. "Some of them draw better than I ever will!"

For Dan Unumb, whose son Ryan participated in the project, the experience was affirming in many ways.

"I think a lot times when parents of children with autism are struggling they just feel isolated; they feel like they're always under the gun," Unumb said. "They feel like they always have to explain their kids, they feel like they're not a part of the community, and the fact that this keystone institution in the community has reached out and is welcoming us and wants our kids to be featured as part of what they do is tremendously rewarding."

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors.

ASD is estimated to affect more than 2 million individuals in the United States and tens of millions worldwide. According to Autism Speaks, one of the world's leading autism science and advocacy organizations, autism affects 1 in 68 children and is more common in males. About 1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls are on the autism spectrum. Abnormal development is evident before 3 years of age.

April is Autism Awareness Month and April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD), also known as Light It Up Blue day. On that day every year, major landmarks around the world are lit up with blue lights, the color associated with Autism Speaks. The worldwide event is used to shine a light on autism as a growing global health issue and to raise awareness about autism and the importance of early diagnosis and intervention.

Bob and Suzanne Wright, founders of Autism Speaks and the grandparents of a child with autism, had the idea to light up buildings around the world in recognition of WAAD. Major landmarks that have participated include the Empire State Building in NY, the Sydney Opera House in Australia, the Torch in Doha, Qatar, the Ada Bridge in Belgrade, Serbia, the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro and the Dragon Bridge in Slovenia.



ASK4HD TEAM



From left: Heather Brandt, Dan Unumb, Dee Crawford, Samuel Tenenbaum, Ann Marie Stieritz, Ken Walden; Not pictured: David Blackman, Darion McCloud

Kids run to the Mobi-Rec van as it arrives at Greenville's McPherson Park. The van, which is stocked with various play and sports equipment, stopped at 13 parks throughout the city during its first year.



RECREATION ON WHEELS

MOBI-REC VEHICLE BRINGS FUN, HEALTHY ACTIVITIES TO CHILDREN

As the brightly colored van pulled up to McPherson Park in Greenville, S.C., children came running from all directions. The doors opened at the back of the van and out came Hula-Hoops, basketballs and ankle skippers. Immediately, the children began playing and laughing because finally, they had quality recreation in their neighborhood.

Thanks to the Mobilizers, a team of nine dedicated and passionate people from the Fall 2012 Diversity Leaders Initiative, children in underserved areas of Greenville now have access to safe, quality, structured play and recreation.

It was a perfect fit from the beginning. When the Mobilizers contacted Dana Souza, director of the City of Greenville Parks and Recreation, to gauge the city's interest in receiving a mobile recreation van and partnering with them, the answer was a resounding "yes."

Of the Mobilizers community action project, Souza said it's been an amazing effort. "First, they saw the need for a mobile recreation vehicle, which is a great concept," he said. "One of the team members, Andreas Kalscheuer, who is from Germany, suggested the idea. He said they have them there and they have been very successful. I thought immediately that it was a great idea."

It didn't hurt that Souza was already familiar with the concept of mobile recreation vehicles. In the 1970s, he worked on a Rec-on-Wheels in Massachusetts and saw firsthand what a positive impact it had. Souza had no doubt that Greenville's community could benefit as well.

Thus began a vital partnership between the Mobilizers and the City of Greenville Parks and Recreation. Staffed by Parks and Recreation employees, the Mobi-Rec travels to targeted neighborhoods to engage children in play and recreation.

Souza said Greenville has five community centers but they're not all accessible for people without transportation. They were built as neighborhood centers, and they're not usually on bus lines. So for children who can't come to one of the city's recreation centers, the Mobi-Rec comes to them.

"We can get to neighborhoods where there is no structured activity," Souza said, "and get the kids away from computer screens and away from being couch potatoes."

And since children who are from lower socioeconomic areas are at greater risk of obesity and other related health issues, improving access to activities that promote exercise and a healthy lifestyle is vital. Currently, about 30 percent of children in South Carolina are overweight or obese.

"I think we were all just quickly fascinated with the concept of a mobile recreation vehicle," said David Lominack, a Mobilizers team member and a driving force behind the success of the project. "We all agreed there is unequal access to safe, neighborhood parks. And with the growing obesity problem, it just seemed to hit so many social issues at once. After the team started putting the pieces together, it was very easy to get passionate about this project."

Lominack, Upstate/Midlands market president for TD Bank, said that because Greenville is a philanthropic city, it was not difficult to raise funds once the Mobilizers laid out their plan to potential funders.

"People quickly grasped what we were trying to do," Lominack said. "They understood that there is an obesity epidemic, that there is a lack of exercise and that this is a way to take exercise into the community."

IDEAS INTO ACTION

But having a great idea is not enough to insure success of a project. It had to be impactful, and it needed to be sustainable. To accomplish this, the team set three major goals: First, find a partner who could take over the project to ensure sustainability, which they did in the City of Greenville Parks and Recreation Department. Second, target and engage the neighborhoods. Third, secure funding to purchase the van.

Lominack said the Mobilizers team was successful because each member brought a specific skill set to the project. Some conducted neighborhood interviews to determine the areas of need, while others researched the van and what equipment would be needed. And all of the Mobilizers worked on fundraising.

The nine members of the Mobilizers raised \$50,000, which was enough to purchase a new Chevrolet Express 3500 commercial van, as well as the branding wrap around the van, and shelving and equipment. There are even enough reserve funds to replenish equipment when it wears out. The branding is important, Souza said, because like the ice cream truck, they want the van to be recognizable to neighborhood children who will anxiously anticipate its arrival. But instead of ice cream, the kids will get healthy treats like play and exercise.

Mobilizers team member Dr. April Buchanan, a pediatrician with the Children's Hospital of Greenville Health System and assistant dean for Clinical Clerkship Education at the University of South



Top: A big red ball brings delight to 2-year-old Cooper Wall at a Mobi-Rec stop at Cleveland Park. Bottom: Jasmine Wilson, 7, left, plays catch with Kamiyah Hagood, 5, using plastic lacrosse sticks at McPherson Park. Right: Micheal Davidson, 10, plays a game of catch.



Carolina School of Medicine Greenville, said from the beginning the entire team wanted to do a project focusing on childhood obesity, which is a preventable problem.

"We wondered whether [childhood obesity] was too big," she said, "but we were all so passionate about it that we went for it."

The Mobilizers wanted to create opportunities for children to play outdoors by providing options that would keep them active. Buchanan said there are other programs in the city addressing childhood obesity, so the team decided to emphasize exercise and a healthy lifestyle, hoping that children and their families would have fun while at the same time realizing positive benefits.

"We all agreed there is unequal access to safe, neighborhood parks. And with the growing obesity problem, it just seemed to hit so many social issues at once."

— David Lominack, Mobilizers team member

Adding to Lominack's sentiments that the entire team worked together, Buchanan also praised the neighborhood associations for their support and involvement. After identifying neighborhoods that could benefit from the Mobi-Rec, team members attended neigh-

borhood homeowner association meetings and surveyed residents to get their input on activities and equipment.

Emphasizing their commitment, Souza said that after the Mobilizers team graduated in the fall of 2012, they stuck with it and continued to raise money long after they graduated. "They were very engaged and interested in seeing it come to fruition," he said. "They didn't have to follow through; they could have just left it, but they didn't."

Lominack's advice for other DLI teams with ambitious projects that require significant fundraising is to quickly identify what a project will address, demonstrate what success looks like and show that it has sustainability.

"You should also try to identify organizations that more naturally fit the purpose of your project," he added. "For instance, we went to hospitals first as they have shown a desire to be proactive and fund projects that help create healthier lifestyles for people in the community."

OFF TO A GOOD START

Souza said there are many neighborhoods in Greenville that could benefit from the Mobi-Rec. For the first year, the Parks and Recreation Department identified eight neighborhood parks, three community parks and two regional parks. Neighborhood associations help spread the word about the mobile van and let residents know when and where the van would be parked.



Top: Phoebe Martinez, 4, uses sidewalk chalk to explore her artistic side. Middle: Vanessa Fuentes, 8, takes her turn at hopscotch at McPherson Park. Right: Madison Lavington, 7, is adept with an ankle-skipper on her first try.

Souza said he had to get creative with staffing the Mobi-Rec. By using floating employees and temporary staff, he was able to provide at least two people for each of the two-hour outings.

The mobile recreation van is stocked with a variety of play and sports equipment, including soccer balls, footballs, baseballs, Hula-Hoops, jump ropes, ankle skippers, volleyballs, and arts and crafts supplies.

The first Mobi-Rec went to the Nicholtown Community Center on July 11, 2013, the same day the van was unveiled at a press conference. During its inaugural year, there were 63 park visits and Mobi-Rec reached approximately 945 children. And while it was a busy first summer for the mobile recreation van — which often stopped at two locations in one day — plans are for the Mobi-Rec to be available year round.

Lominack said when he sees the Mobi-Rec van cruising the streets of Greenville, it makes him smile, knowing that he had a small part in helping bring the idea to fruition.

And the most rewarding aspect for Buchanan, the pediatrician, is seeing her team's vision become a reality as the kids run up to the van — leaving their video games and computers behind — filled with excitement as they kick around a soccer ball, give Hula-Hooping a whirl or blow bubbles in the wind.

At a Mobi-Rec outing to Greenville's Cleveland Park, one mom watched with excitement as her daughter enthusiastically alternated between playing pint-sized basketball and Hula-Hooping.

"This is more interactive," Mahogany Jones said as she watched her daughter Aaliyah, 4. "It's more like what we used to do a long time ago; it's things that the kids don't do anymore."

Watching the flurry of activity, Jones reminisced about her younger days and said she had a video game but she quickly bored of it and would go outside to ride bikes or roller skate. "I was never in the house when I was a kid, so I get emotional seeing this."



MOBILIZERS TEAM



From left: April Buchanan, Paul Thompson, Arelis Moore de Peralta, Mike Posey, Ann Bourey, David Lominack, Patricia Ravenhorst, Lynne Fowler, Andreas Kalscheuer



High school students from
Wando and Burke walk
along Boneyard Beach at
Bulls Island.



NATURAL DIVERSITY

Students discover the value of diversity through nature trips

Thomas Sanders, 17, left, a junior at Wando, takes in the view at Boneyard Beach with his new buddy John Godfrey, 18, a senior at Burke.



While huddled together in a flatbed trailer on a remote barrier island, students from two culturally diverse high schools bonded over beef jerky. When one student offered to share his snack, a lively discussion ensued and suddenly, teens who minutes earlier were strangers, began comparing the merits of homemade versus store-bought jerky.

In a brief departure from today's high-tech world, 11 students from Burke High School, in Charleston's inner city, and 14 students from Wando High School in the upscale suburb of Mt. Pleasant, spent a chilly fall day together exploring the rich biodiversity of Bulls Island. Not only did the students discover they shared more similarities than differences, but they also learned that diversity is essential to a healthy community.

The idea came from Over the Horizon, a fall 2011 DLI project team in the Lowcountry. The nine members of the team knew they wanted their community action project to include kids. Team member Raye Nilius, who oversees four national wildlife refuges in South Carolina, suggested their project also include the outdoors.

"Today, most Americans are growing up separate and apart from the natural landscape. About 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in densely populated, urban areas," Nilius explained. "And if you add in the rise of technology, the Internet and social networking, you end up with a reduction in personal interaction with one another and less contact with the outside environment.

"So the disconnect that we all live with today sometimes obscures our view," Nilius added, "and we fail to see the link between healthy environments and the water we drink or the air we breathe. Sometimes we need a little help seeing over the horizon."

To help facilitate that connection, team members brought together students from culturally diverse areas of Charleston — Burke High School in downtown Charleston is 99 percent minority, while only 22 percent of students at Wando are minorities — and exposed them to one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on earth.

THE BULLS ISLAND EXPERIENCE

At 5,000 acres, Bulls Island is the largest of four barrier islands that make up the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. The diverse ecosystem features a maritime forest, saltwater marsh, sandy beaches and a variety of trees including live oaks, cedar, loblolly pines, Sabal palmettos and magnolias. Bulls Island also is home to a variety of wildlife including deer, alligators, raccoon and black fox squirrels. But what the island is most known for are more than 293 species of birds, which include eagles, hawks, falcons, raptors and owls.

Over the Horizon team members worked from the premise that just as a healthy ecosystem supports diversity of wildlife, a healthy community supports diverse groups of people. Their hope is that by exploring the biodiversity of Bulls Island while interacting with one another, the students will learn about and appreciate the benefits of diversity.

The day starts when students meet at Wando High School for breakfast and are encouraged to sit with someone they don't already know. The bonding begins on the bus ride, where students are usually singing together before they reach the dock. Then they board a ferry for the 30-minute trip to Bulls Island.



While on the estuary cruise to Bulls Island, Chris Crolley juxtaposes stories about the diversity of the wildlife refuge with human diversity. The animal bones and shells are used in his lessons.

On the ferry ride, Chris Crolley, owner/operator of Coastal Expeditions, acts as guide and interpreter. He weaves in a message of diversity while juxtaposing the natural history of the island with human history.

As the ferry glides through the estuary, Crolley points out that it is a monoculture because marsh grass is the only plant growing there. But as they get closer to Bulls Island, considered “the gem” of the refuge, there is an abundance of biodiversity. Crolley explained how this rich environment containing forest, marsh and beach is sustained because of the diversity of plants and wildlife, whereas the estuary with only one plant cannot support a diverse environment.

While still on the ferry, Crolley uses an analogy that to build a house, you might need 15 people. But you don’t need 15 architects or 15 electricians; you need one electrician, one plumber, one carpenter, one roofer, etc. The end product is a strong, beautiful house, but it took a diverse team to create it.

Once the group docks at the no-cars-allowed island, Crolley guides the students through the different ecosystems while also explaining the history of the island. The students see the human influence in the remnants of tabby houses, which were constructed mainly of crushed oyster shells and lime, and in a structure that controls water to benefit ducks and rice growing.

“The real magic of this program is the experiential part: what these students are learning through this self-discovery experience,” Crolley said. “Everything they’re seeing and hearing is just reinforcing what they’re experiencing for themselves in real time.”

FORGING NEW FRIENDSHIPS

For Wando junior Thomas Sanders, 17, the opportunity to interact with kids from Burke was a positive experience, as was learning about the biodiversity of the island.

“Living in Mt. Pleasant, we don’t see a lot of diversity,” Sanders explained, “because it’s mostly affluent and upper class. Burke High School is downtown, and it’s nice to experience this kind of diversity that we’re not exposed to every day.

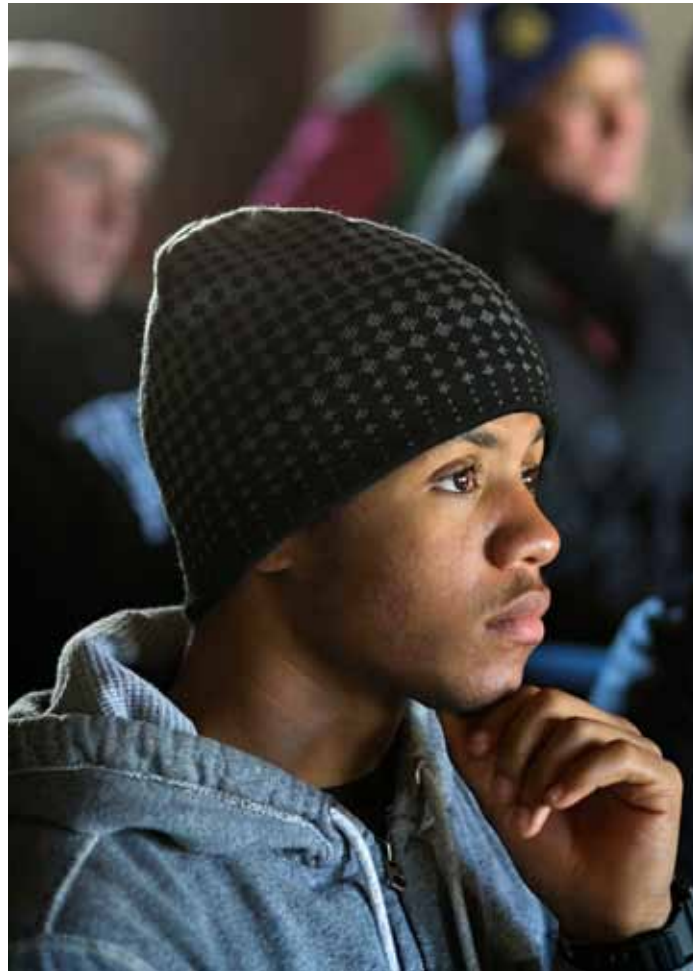
“It was eye-opening to see how similar we all are,” Thomas added. “We talked on the bus ride like we’ve known each other for a while. I thought we’d all be shy, but we blended well together.”

For his new buddy John Godfrey, 18, a senior at Burke, the experience was equally rewarding. The two boys connected over their shared interest in sports and quickly found things to talk about.

“I didn’t know what to expect,” John said, “but me and my buddy Thomas got along really nicely. I didn’t think I’d have anything in common with kids from Wando, but Thomas is an athlete just like me.”

For Mat Norman, 17, a senior at Wando, the experience was interesting for several reasons. Mat is taking a wildlife class and he said it was cool to connect what he’s learning in class with seeing the real things up close in the wild.

As for his buddy Jonah White, 17, a junior at Burke, Mat said they shared similarities in their schedules and love of sports, but there also were some unexpected differences.



Jawan Redden, 16, is mesmerized while listening to Vera Manigault tell tales of growing up poor and black in the south. Redden is a junior at Burke High School.

“The real magic of this program is the experiential part, what these students are learning through this self-discovery experience. Everything they’re seeing and hearing is just reinforcing what they’re experiencing for themselves in real time.”

— Chris Crolley, owner/operator of Coastal Expeditions



Vera Manigault shows the locally gathered grasses she uses to sew sweetgrass baskets.

“Jonah takes the bus to school and I drive myself,” Mat said. “And he relies on school lunches and vending machines for snacks, but my mom makes my lunch and packs extras for snacks.”

From Jonah’s perspective the trip also was rewarding.

“I learned how diversity helps you in life so you should learn about it early on,” Jonah said. “And I got to meet a new friend who told me things to look out for in my senior year.”

SEEN AND HEARD

One of the most unique parts of the experience is surely the visit to Boneyard Beach, considered the “jewel of the island.” Here, hundreds of fallen trees that have been bleached by the sun and weathered by the salt water are strewn about like skeletal remains along a three-mile stretch of sand. This is a favorite spot for newfound friends to pose with each other for photos.

Along with the biodiversity lessons, the students hear from Vera Manigault, a descendant of African slaves who worked the rice plantations in South Carolina. Manigault strives to preserve the 300-year-old culture and traditions of the Gullah-Geechee people with demonstrations of how she sews sweet grass baskets using locally grown bulrush and yellow and green palmetto. She uses the same technique that has been handed down from generation to generation.

Manigault explained that the baskets were originally made to carry rice from the fields, and the craft born of utility is now a respected art form collected in museums. The rapt audience learned that it takes about 12 hours to “sew” a simple sweet-grass basket and several months for a more complex design.

THE PROJECT TAKES OFF

In March 2012, just five months after the team conceived their project, 15 students from each school were heading out on the first of what are now twice-yearly excursions, one each in the fall and spring.

Team members quickly gained support from the two schools because not only would the project benefit the students, but it also fit into the school’s curriculum for history, science and social studies.

Each team member brought a valuable skill to the project. Former Army officer Brian Wells, who is Chief of the Operations Division at the US Army Corps of Engineers, used his organization and logistics skills to coordinate the planning and line up transportation. Acclaimed writer Jack Bass wrote up the plan and handled media coverage while also securing \$1,500 from the Zucker Foundation to pay for the first trip. And as project leader for the Lowcountry Refuges Complex, Raye Nilius’ connection to and knowledge of the island was invaluable.



“It’s a very enjoyable day for a lot of reasons. It’s really cool seeing the kids interact. Some of them have never been on a boat or to the beach. It’s an experience they’re not going to forget.”

— Brian Wells, Over the Horizon team member

In the early years, funding came from a mix of private donations, the Zucker Foundation and even from team member Brian Wells’ own pocket. Now, the Charleston County School District funds the trips to Bulls Island.

Representatives from each school select students who fill out a questionnaire explaining what makes them a good candidate, what they think they will get from their experience and why it’s important to learn about diversity. Participants are chosen based on a combination of attributes such as confidence, leadership skills and personality traits.

The curriculum and schedule are consistent from one session to the next, so the only variable is the students. The entire team knew that once the first trip was successful, it would be fairly easy to continue. Raye Nilius and Brian Wells remain active participants and attend nearly every session.

“It’s a very enjoyable day for a lot of reasons,” Wells said. “It’s really cool seeing the kids interact. Some of them have never been on a boat or to the beach. It’s an experience they’re not going to forget.”

For Nilius, watching the kids interact and enjoy nature is especially rewarding.

“Because of social networking, young people’s experience with the outside world may be virtual. And that’s not something you can touch or taste or smell or feel,” Nilius said. “They have to get outdoors and get sand on their toes and the sun on their faces. If they can touch the saltwater and taste it, that can really make a lasting impression on these young people.”

“You can see the kids change from the morning, when they’re a little bit hesitant and a little bit nervous being around different people,” Nilius said, “but in a very short period of time they’re happy, they’re smiling and some of them are singing songs. It’s an inspiring and uplifting time.”

Left top: Sarah Dawsey gets up close with an alligator on Bulls Island. Dawsey is refuge manager for Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. Left, bottom left: Kimberlin Green, 16, left, talks with team member Raye Nilius during the ferry ride to Bulls Island. Left, bottom right: Brian Wells, a member of Over The Horizon, has been instrumental in the ongoing success of the project. He has been on nearly every trip to Bulls Island since the first one in 2012.

Students from Burke and Wando high schools walk together to catch the ferry to Bulls Island.



OVER THE HORIZON TEAM



From left: Andy Gowder, Brian Wells, Deb Campeau, Leigh Jones Handal, Wanda Gonsalves, Raye Nilius, Kevin Carpentier, Jack Bass Not Pictured: Cedric Green



Interns and young professionals of DRC member organizations enjoy an outing and baseball game at Fluor Field in Greenville.

THE DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT CONSORTIUM

A game-changing approach
to diversifying South Carolina's workforce

By Juan Johnson

After 10 years and more than 1,300 graduates, the Riley Institute's Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI) has built a critical mass of leaders dedicated to building all-inclusive communities and organizations in South Carolina. A natural next step for this community of interest is to explore opportunities to achieve common goals that benefit the entire state. One area of focus that has been identified by numerous DLI graduates is the challenge of attracting a broadly diverse talent pool to the state. For a variety of reasons, arguably some valid and some not, in many quarters outside South Carolina, the state is sometimes viewed as less than progressive on matters related to diversity and inclusion. This perception can be a barrier to South Carolina-based organizations attracting broadly diverse professional talent. The Diversity Recruitment Consortium is an innovative initiative that brings together many organizations across the state to support each other in their efforts to attract and retain a diverse talent pool.

A RECURRING THEME

"Are you seriously considering moving to South Carolina?" Michelle asked. Laura paused before responding to her best friend. "Well, this law firm has an excellent client base and it's the type of work I've dreamed of doing," she responded. "The attorneys on staff are impressive and everyone made me feel really welcome and wanted." "Maybe," Michelle countered, "but it's still South Carolina. Do you really think that's a good place for a young, single, African-American female attorney to start her career? You've been in D.C. all your life. You're used to a progressive community with lots of diversity. Plus, of the D.C. firms that have offered you jobs, all have a number of African-American partners that have already paved the way. Down there, you would be their first African-American attorney. And need I say it again? We're talking about South Carolina."

"I know, I know. It's not lost on me", Laura responded. "I wish I could connect with some other African-American attorneys, engineers or accountants and get an authentic assessment of what it's like to live and work in South Carolina. Maybe it's not as bad as we think. But they don't have anyone at the firm for me to talk to. And it's not like I can express my real concerns with the firm's recruiters. You're probably right. I'd love an opportunity to do the work they're offering, but I don't want to work and live in a place that is not progressive," Laura concluded.

The story above, although fictitious, is representative of stories played by both recruiters for South Carolina-based organizations, and job candidates who've expressed pause regarding relocating to South Carolina. For a state that has a low cost of living, appealing climate, exceptional geography, including the Atlantic Coast, and wonderfully diverse artistic offerings, it seems surprising that firms located here would have difficulty attracting talent. And yet, when it comes to attracting a more diverse professional talent pool, in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, and other dimensions, many South Carolina-based organizations struggle. Perceptions regarding the state are sometimes a barrier to relocation opportunities.

Reconsider the story above. What if indeed Laura was provided opportunities to connect with other African-American professionals who have made a home in South Carolina? People with similar backgrounds who work in a variety of companies and industries who are not only thriving professionally, but also have built happy personal lives. What if Laura could engage them in confidential conversations in which she could ask any question, express any concern, and get honest feedback and an authentic picture of life in South Carolina: pros and cons; opportunities and challenges; resources and limitations? This additional information could be very helpful to Laura as she decides where to launch her career. Indeed, an authentic picture of life in the state, from the perspective of people with similar experiences, needs and concerns, might tip the scales in favor of South Carolina.

NOT JUST ABOUT RACE AND GENDER

The Diversity Recruitment Consortium (DRC) exists to provide people such as the fictitious Laura with opportunities to connect with people beyond the recruiting organization, to learn more about the experience of living and working in South Carolina, from "people

like them." And importantly, the "people like them" referred to here is not limited to traditional diversity dimensions like race and gender. Many professionals being recruited to the state are people who bring a broadly diverse array of needs with them. Needs that give rise to questions about the cultural environment of the state and the resources available to address them. For example: a parent of a child with special needs; a Muslim, atheist or Orthodox Jew; a lesbian or gay couple with an adopted child; a single dad who's also the sole caretaker for his elderly parents; and the list goes on. Any of these recruits might find it beneficial to connect with someone with similar circumstances who can share their experience of living and working in South Carolina.

HOW IT WORKS

In response to requests for help from DLI graduates, the Riley Institute convened a group of DLI alumni to explore ideas to address recruitment challenges faced by many organizations across the state. They started with a set of hypotheses and through a series of brainstorming sessions the group concluded that an innovative infrastructure, a consortium of organizations, could help address these challenges. If a group of organizations came together and identified a broadly diverse cadre of professionals from each of their ranks to serve as "ambassadors," it would be possible to provide candidates access to people who may share similar backgrounds, experiences, needs and concerns. And if those ambassadors would share their authentic experiences, professional and personal, then perhaps the candidates would be better positioned to make a more informed decision.

So, in 2013, a group of 29 visionary organizations became the founding members of the Diversity Recruitment Consortium. (See sidebar.) Each agreed to identify ambassadors from their organizations, and all agreed to support each other and future member organizations, in their recruiting efforts. Although the founding members invested a modest amount to develop collateral materials, a website and to fund ambassador training, etc., membership in the consortium is free of charge for all other organizations. The only requirement is to provide ambassadors and to actively participate in DRC activities. In less than one year, the consortium membership grew to more than 50 organizations with approximately 150 ambassadors across the state. To ensure appropriate legal boundaries are maintained, each ambassador must complete a training program, which sets out legal limitations and protects member organizations from any misrepresentations or unauthorized commitments.

A secure website facilitates connections between candidates and ambassadors, and all interactions are confidential. Once interested candidates input an access code and select their areas of interest, they receive a list of names and contact information of ambassadors who meet their criteria. They can then communicate with the ambassadors by email, phone or over lunch or a cup of coffee. Candidates wishing to share stories of how the DRC helped in their decisions are welcome to do so but this is not required.

Since the DRC is a virtual entity, it requires an innovative management structure. The consortium is sponsored by three nonprofit organizations: The Riley Institute at Furman, the South Carolina State Chamber of Commerce and the Greenville Chamber of Commerce. The Greenville Chamber deserves special recognition for stepping up to provide the day-to-day leadership, operational management and communication. Activities are typically structured around a region: the Upstate, Midlands and Low Country.

RETENTION AS WELL AS RECRUITMENT

The founding member organizations serve as a steering committee to identify programming opportunities that go beyond the work of the ambassador network. During early brainstorming, it was quickly determined that this network of organizations could support each other in strengthening retention as well as recruitment. Not just retention of current employees, but retention of talented students who may be considering leaving the state upon graduation. A series of activities were planned for the first year. The first two activities were focused on an often-overlooked diversity dimension: generational differences. Steering committee members noted that their organizations make substantial investments in interns and new hires just out of college and sometimes those employees don't stay. Their hypothesis is that this is due in part to cross-generational communication challenges or, in the case of interns, simply not meeting others in their age group that could be part of their network of friends and associates.

The first DRC activity was an outing for young professionals and interns at a minor league baseball game of the Greenville Drive at Fluor Field. These millennials — or generation Y cohorts — came together in a social setting to meet others in their age group and extend their network of friends. Ideally, this will heighten the likelihood that interns will return for permanent employment and young professionals will deepen their roots in the community.

The second program was a workshop for recruiting professionals from member organizations titled, "Future Workplace." The workshop provided research on employment interests and desires of millennials as well as strategies to help recruiters become more competitive by better aligning the strengths of their organizations to the needs and interests of millennial candidates.

GOING FORWARD

The DRC established plans for additional activities during its first year of operations. This includes a seminar for employee resource groups of member organizations. Many of these organizational subgroups have similar objectives that can be better achieved through a critical mass of participants. The seminar will facilitate these connections while also offering strategies that can help the groups add more value for their organizations as well as their members. Another innovative program forthcoming is a "road show" for graduate schools across the state. South Carolina boasts numerous graduate schools for business, law, medicine, etc. The DRC plans to host receptions on campuses to send a simple message to South Carolina's graduating professionals: "We want you." The hope is that these talented professionals, who may be considering leaving the state, will opt to give South Carolina-based organizations serious considerations. Lastly, the DRC plans to hold ambassador receptions to thank them for their contributions while also facilitating opportunities for them to extend their networks.

Having a growing statewide network of organizations offers significant opportunities for innovative recruitment and retention activities. In time, some of the mythology that plagues the state may subside as more professionals from a multitude of backgrounds make South Carolina their home.

THE DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT CONSORTIUM FOUNDING MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

AnMed Health
BlueCross BlueShield
Bluestein, Nichols, Thompson, & Delgado, LLC
BMW Manufacturing Co.
Bon Secours St. Francis Health System
City of Columbia South Carolina
Clemson University
Diversity Leadership in Action
Elliott Davis
Fisher & Phillips, LLP
Gallivan, White, & Boyd, P.A.
Greenville Chamber of Commerce
Greenville Health System
Greenville Technical College
Haynsworth, Sinkler, Boyd, P.A.
Integrated Media Publishing
Michelin North America
Medical University of South Carolina
Nexsen Pruet
Ogletree Deakins
Palmetto Health
Parker Poe
The Riley Institute at Furman
Roper Saint Francis
South Carolina Chamber of Commerce / Diversity Committee
South Carolina Research Authority
Southeastern Freight Lines
Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System
Wyche Law Firm, P.A.



CONTRIBUTOR SPOTLIGHT: UNITE SOUTH CAROLINA'S PUBLISHER JUAN JOHNSON

Juan Johnson is the president of Diversity Leadership in Action (DLA), a management consulting firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Formerly Juan Johnson Consulting & Facilitation, DLA offers leadership development programs for groups and organizations seeking to build diversity leadership skills while also initiating "action" projects to build better communities and organizations.

As designer and facilitator of the Riley Institute's Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI), Johnson has worked with hundreds of leaders across South Carolina, supporting their efforts to make the state a better place to live and work. Prior to launching his consultancy in 2006, Johnson had an extraordinary 21-year career with The Coca-Cola Company. With a background in accounting and finance, Johnson built a broadly diverse career and skillset at Coke, including leadership roles in accounting, finance, corporate communications, marketing and human resources.

In 1993, at 35 years of age, Johnson was elected a full corporate vice president by Coke's board of directors, making him one of the youngest board-elected vice presidents in the company's history. In 1999, when Coke faced a class action racial discrimination lawsuit, Johnson was tapped to become the company's first vice president for diversity strategies reporting directly to the CEO. In short order, Coke settled the lawsuit and went on to receive considerable recognition and awards for its successful diversity program.

A deep concern for issues that polarize American society led Johnson to dedicate a substantial focus on community building through diversity leadership development. In addition to the Riley Institute's DLI which operates leadership programs throughout South Carolina, Johnson facilitates Advance Kansas, a similar program with Butler Community College in Wichita, Kansas. Both programs bring together leaders from all sectors of society: business, education, government, faith-based and nonprofit. And both programs use real-time action projects to build diversity leadership skills while also building brighter futures for America's most vulnerable — underserved youth in challenging circumstances.

Beyond his work in community building, Johnson also works with a broadly diverse slate of corporate clients, including Michelin, N.A., Inc., BMW Group, Spirit AeroSystems, Inc., Medical University of South Carolina, AnMed Health, Roper Saint Francis, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System, Spartanburg Water, Hill Holliday / Erwin Penland Ad Agencies, Greenville Technical College, Greenville Health System, and Georgia Pacific, among others.

Johnson holds an MBA degree from Atlanta University and a bachelor's of science degree in accounting from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He achieved certifications as a CPA and CMA. Johnson received an honorary doctorate of humanities degree from Furman University in 2010.

CONTRIBUTOR SPOTLIGHT: UNITE SOUTH CAROLINA'S PHOTOGRAPHER AND WRITER JEAN SHIFRIN



After 25 years as an award-winning newspaper photojournalist, Jean Shifrin launched her own photography business focusing on babies and children in 2005.

Jean received her bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism, and has worked at small, medium and large newspapers. In her illustrious career, Jean traveled the world to document people and places that many people might never have seen otherwise. As a photojournalist, Jean saw the best and worst of humanity. One day an assignment might take her to a drug-ravaged neighborhood and the next day to a doctor who reconstructed the disfigured face of an impoverished Guatemalan girl.

During the course of her career, Jean has photographed many famous people, including Morgan Freeman, Woody Allen, Maya Angelou, Usher and Matt Damon. And while it was exciting to sit down with celebrities, her favorite subjects have always been everyday people, whether that was a farmer in rural Georgia, a teenager in suburbia or a woman holding her family together after the sudden death of her husband.

Jean has received international recognition for her documentary photography. Her photographs showing the effects of Islamic fundamentalism on Muslim women won the 1992 Overseas Press Club Award for Best Correspondent In Any Medium Showing A Concern for the Human Condition. That project also was awarded the Society for Professional Journalists Award for Non-Deadline Reporting.

While at the Kansas City Star, Jean received the Nikon Documentary Sabbatical Grant in 1989 to document grandparents raising their grandchildren. And in 1998 she won a Clarion Award for her yearlong project titled "When Children Die," which chronicled the work of hospice nurses and the terminally ill children they cared for.

Based in Atlanta, Jean has traveled extensively to photograph a wide range of stories, from Muslim women in the Middle East to a gospel group traveling through the rural south. Since 2006, she has documented the work of Rising Star Outreach, a nonprofit organization in India, whose goal is to eradicate the scourge of leprosy and to improve the lives of those who are affected by it.

In addition to the work in India, Jean volunteers with Flashes of Hope, a nonprofit organization that partners with professional photographers to create stunning portraits of children with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses.

With her current clientele, Jean takes the same fly-on-the-wall approach she used as a newspaper photojournalist, utilizing her narrative skills to capture storytelling moments of babies and children. Her philosophy is that photographs are the historians of our lives, and the precious moments of everyday life will not only bring joy today, but will become treasured heirlooms for future generations.

In 2012, Jean was inducted into the Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame.

For more on Jean Shifrin and her work, visit www.shifrinphotography.com.

Za'Nayah Washington, left, and Samuel Boyd spot a dolphin while on Camp Hope's annual cruise of Charleston Harbor.





LET'S PLAY!
JUGUEMOS!

Mobi-Rec
GREENVILLE.GOV/PARKREC

Charitable Foundation
Children's Hospital

FACE

LOVE

PEACE

POWER

WISDOM

HOPE

FAITH

CHARITY