

Our Mission

To help low-income children by providing mentoring from the fifth grade and supplemental college funding upon graduation from high school

How Does It Work?



Raytrevious Peterson, a rising freshman at Columbus High and a member of the football team, enjoys the sunshine at the Columbus Scholars July Enrichment Session held on West Point Lake.

Bright fifth graders (most from single-parent families) are selected with the help of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Chattahoochee Valley. Mentors are provided by BBBS to guide them through junior high, high school and college. Donations are set aside in a Columbus Scholars Fund at the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley, Inc. to help meet the Scholars' college needs.

By relying upon existing groups and resources, Columbus Scholars operates on a minimal administrative budget, and has no fulltime staff or paid office space. Mandatory monthly enrichment sessions provide additional educational and other cultural opportunities. Students with any grade of "C" or below must attend Columbus Scholars-sponsored tutoring sessions until the grades improve. Each summer, Scholars are divided into three groups by grade level for summer educational camps.

The rising 6th graders attend a weeklong art school administered by the Columbus Museum and sponsored by Mayor Teresa Tomlinson and her husband and Board member Trip. The 7th through 11th graders attend an ACT/SAT prep program which provides practical test-taking skills for college entrance exams. Rising high school seniors attend a two week College Application workshop, where the goal is to actually transmit the application to multiple colleges. We provide meals to our Scholars at all CS activities.

Graduating Class



Columbus Scholars will graduate its first class in 2017.

Our five rising seniors are:

Jha'Meisheia Griffin, Columbus High School

Rawlanda Hercules, Hardaway High School

Royale Lampley, Jordan High School

Quandre Lewis, Columbus High School

Niki Stout, Columbus High School



In March 2016 Melanie Slaton-Holden, Bianca Hudson-Brown, Ramon Brown, Ben Holden, and Kimbi Bagnal escorted our five rising high school senior Scholars to Atlanta for college visits. They toured Morehouse College, Spelman College, Georgia Tech, and Emory University. We are grateful to Headquarter Nissan for the donation of a van for the trip. All of these Scholars have taken the ACT and SAT. Columbus Scholars has partnered with College Resource Center, LLC., whose partners, Jean Flowers, Genie Mize, and Hope Phillips, operate our College Application Workshop for rising high school seniors.

Board's Eye View

By Ben Holden

JUNE 3, 2016

Since our first class of Scholars was interviewed and selected at the Ledger-Enquirer in November 2009, the Columbus Scholars Project has grown and improved. In the early days, CS was comprised of a small group of fifth-grade Muscogee County public school students.

It is hard to believe that those bright-eyed 10 year olds – Royale Lampley, Rawlanda Hercules, Jha'Meisheia Griffin, Quandre Lewis and Niki Stout – are now rising high school seniors who have taken their college board exams and are in the process of narrowing their college wish lists.

We began way back in 2007, with a series of lunch meetings at the Ledger-Enquirer, arising out of a race relations forum held earlier that year at the Cunningham Center of Columbus State University. As the editor of the paper sponsoring the event, I wound up with a microphone in my hand, and foolishly invited the whole town to my home for fellowship and a backyard barbecue. According to my wife Melanie, a local lawyer and CS board member, half of them came.

The weather was breathtaking and the food by Chef Stacey was good. The conversation was even better. People from all over town, from all races, from all economic strata, arrived with hearty appetites and an open mind. There was no real agenda, but the undercurrent of many conversations was: "How do we make Columbus a better, more fair and just place to live for all its citizens?"

Around the same time, Steve Melton, then president of Columbus Bank & Trust, came to my office to suggest that "Columbus likes Big Ideas." And to warn that we should not "lose this momentum."

I told Steve that I had only one Big Idea. That poor kids deserve the same shot at a good education as rich kids.

Soon a few others bought into this Idea – political consultant Karl Douglass, dance studio owner Patty Taylor, lawyer Jorge Vega, among them. We were the first board, and a few key decisions were made early. Karl gave us our name. Patty advised to limit membership to MCS D students, for reasons of both logistics and civic pride. Jorge drafted the bylaws and crafted the partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Chattahoochee Valley. Together, we stumbled upon the following basic concept, that more or less exists today: Step 1, we solicit applications from girls and boys of all races who are economically disadvantaged MCS D 5th graders with high grades, high test scores and high potential; Step 2, we interview and evaluate students based on a mix of factors including the child's economic need, family college history, proven academic performance and teacher recommendations; Step 3, we select up to 10 children to be Scholars; Step 4, we hold a signing ceremony to honor the kids, their parents and their elementary school supporters.

But before any of that happens, we raise \$7,500 per selected Scholar and we direct those funds to the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley. Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Chattahoochee Valley then matches our Scholars with a local mentor who supports the dream of college education. The newest Scholars selected earlier this year bring our total number above 50, ranging from the 6th through the 12th grades.

After admission to the program, the Scholars attend monthly enrichment sessions where they learn about everything from the criminal justice system to etiquette. During the summer, Scholars participate in mandatory SAT/ACT camp at Columbus High School that starts the summer prior to 7th grade.

We also purchase a laptop computer for every high school Scholar and have limited pre-college financial educational assistance on a case-by-case basis.

We have recently entered into an agreement with College Resource Center, a local educational consulting firm, to help manage the increasingly complex college application process for our 12th graders.

All administrative expenses of CS have been borne by the board members or friends of the program, who contribute to a separate administrative fund. Donations can be sent and made payable to Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley/Columbus Scholars Fund, 1340 13th Street, Columbus, GA 31901.

Additional information can be found at www.columbuscholars.org. You may also contact Administrative Coordinator Kimbi Bagnal at (706) 718-9607 or kimbi1963@aol.com or me at BenHolden01@gmail.com or at (706) 332-8426.

Enrichment Sessions

Life Skills, Columbus, GA
Richards Middle School
Saturday, September 19, 2015

The History of Hip Hop Culture
Liberty Theatre, Columbus, GA
Saturday, October 17, 2015

Veterans Day Celebration Parade
Columbus, GA
Saturday, November 14, 2015

Christmas Parade with Mayor Tomlinson
Phenix City, AL to Columbus, GA
Saturday, December 12, 2015

Columbus Scholars Induction Ceremony,
Richards Middle School, Columbus, GA
Saturday, January 30, 2016

Center for Civil and Human Rights
Atlanta, GA
Saturday, February 27, 2016

The "Race" Movie
Carmike Theater, Columbus, GA
Saturday, March 19, 2016

Chattahoochee Heritage Center,
Local Indian History
Fort Mitchell, AL
Saturday, April 16, 2016

Oxbow Meadows
Exploring Local Wildlife, Columbus, GA
Saturday, May 21, 2016

Summer Pool Party – Home of Ben and Melanie Holden
Midland, GA
Saturday, June 18, 2016

The Floating Classroom
Alkalinity & Aquatic Life, West Point Lake, GA
Saturday, July 16, 2016

Columbus Scholars Visit the Civil And Human Rights Museum

By Emily Lopez and Chanyha Cobb

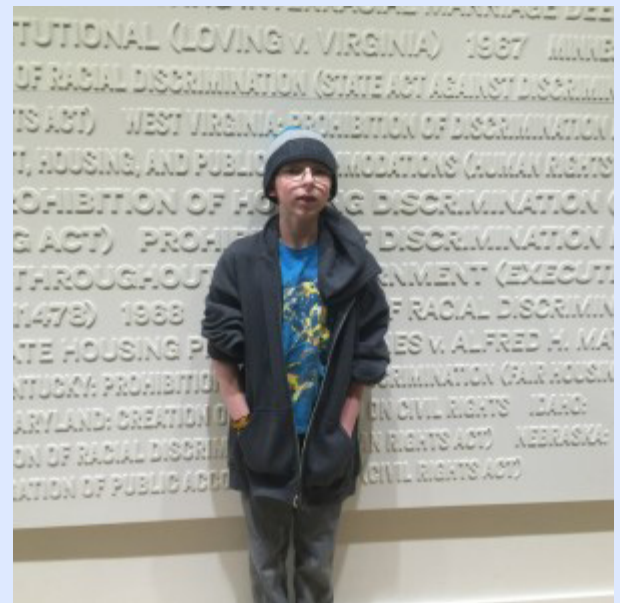
The Columbus Scholars monthly enrichment session was held at the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta on Saturday February 27.



Many scholars said the visit was an intense yet educational experience. The Center, which is essentially a museum, consisted of many different displays that addressed a variety of subjects. Most of these subjects revolved around the issue of inequality. There were also many interactive exhibits that kept the tour interesting.

One section of the museum was centered completely around embracing who and what you are. A ninth grade Scholar, Jasmine Simpson, said: “[People] will be able to look at this display and have a change of heart.” In this exhibit you were given the opportunity to take your own picture and complete the sentence “I Am...” as a caption.

A tenth grade Scholar, Chanyha Cobb, called the trip “a very empowering experience.”



Another exhibit in the civil rights museum simulated the experience of being an African American sitting in a diner while being tormented by words and acts of prejudice and hatred. The situation is supposed to feel as realistic as possible. It features sound canceling headphones and physical vibration effects. A tenth grader, Mallory McKelvey, said: "It made me extremely angry". The Scholars agreed that the trip to the Civil Rights Museum was in all a positive visit. New things were learned, and helped to open everyone’s eyes to our American past, and how far we’ve come. They explored the both impressive and emotional exhibits and left with a new understanding of the importance of civil and human rights.

The Scholars met at the Mildred L. Terry Library on Veterans Parkway at 7:15 a.m. to set up before they actually boarded the bus to take on this adventure. Once everything was in place the bus left for Atlanta around 8:00 a.m. Upon arrival the Scholars entered the museum "curious" according to McKelvey.

They then got on the bus once again and left to grab lunch in Newnan, Ga. before heading home.



The inspiration for this enrichment session came from Columbus Scholars board member Karl Douglass. He explained his idea for the session: "I wanted the Scholars to tour the Center for Civil and Human Rights because I wanted to make sure that they have a chance to acknowledge and appreciate the sacrifices people make to secure their human rights."

Bianca Brown, also a Columbus Scholars board member, said: "Because the enrichment session was in February, Black history month, we wanted to incorporate civil and human rights and also do something more interesting and different."

Chelzi Williams, who is a 6th grader at Richards Middle School, attended the session. "The museum was very interesting. I liked it," Williams said.

There was a simulator where you could hear how rude and mean some people were during the Civil Rights Movement. "They were kicking the chair and smashing bottles; it was intense," Williams said. She also liked how the museum had videos and lots of pictures from back then. "The story of the four little girls was so tragic," Williams said.

Induction Ceremony at Richards Middle School

January 30, 2016

Guest Speakers:

MCSD Superintendent Dr. David Lewis

MCSD School Board Member Kia Chambers

The New Scholars Are:

Jayda Beard – J. D. Davis Elementary School

Mariah Bell – Fox Elementary School

KayLeauna Daugherty – Waddell Elementary School

Kenya Pickard – Fox Elementary School

Malachi Irby – Lonnie Jackson Academy

Michael Martin – Downtown Elementary Magnet Academy

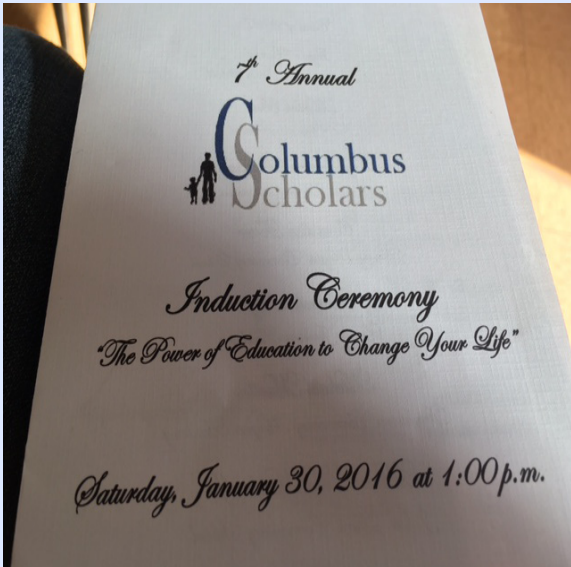
Marcus McMickle, Jr. – J. D. Davis Elementary School

Brayan Mejia-Rivera – Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School

Quinlyn Robertson – Wynnton Arts Academy



Donate



100% of every dollar you donate to the Columbus Scholars Fund is held by the Community Foundation for the direct benefit of a deserving college student. Board members and other donors pay all overhead, fund raising and program expenses from a separate administrative fund.

If you want to make a donation, please send a check to:

Columbus Scholars Fund, Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley, Inc.

1340 13th Street Columbus; GA 319012345

You can also go online to www.cfcv.com and make a donation by credit card through the Community Foundation website. You must designate the funds to the Columbus Scholars Fund.



Our Board Members:

D. Hal Averett

Hal is a semi-retired builder of luxury homes in Columbus.

Karl Douglass

Karl is a political consultant based in Georgia, who has managed major state-wide races.

Lou Dillard

Lou is a business system consultant in the Global Products Division at Columbus-based TSYS.

Joy Holden

Joy is a junior at Northwestern University and a 2014 Columbus High School graduate.

Benjamin Holden, Esq., Chairman of the Board

Ben teaches media law at the University of Illinois and is the former editor in chief at the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer. He is one of two CS Fund Managers.

Bianca H. Brown, Esq.

Bianca is a lawyer in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and was the 2014 Big Sister of the Year for the six-county Chattahoochee region of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

LaRae Moore, Esq.

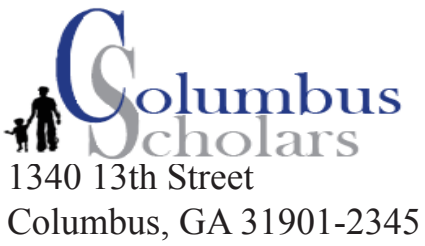
LaRae is a partner at the law firm of Page, Scrantom, Sprouse, Tucker & Ford

Melanie Slaton-Holden, Esq.

Melanie is a partner at the law firm of Hall Booth Smith, PC. and Counsel to Columbus Scholars.

Wade "Trip" Tomlinson, Esq.

Trip is a partner at the Columbus-based law firm Pope, McGlamry and the spouse of Columbus Mayor Teresa Tomlinson. He is one of two CS Fund Managers.



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