

LUMINA FOUNDATION

# FOCUS™

*Fall 2006*



## Front-porch pathfinders

Pre-college access counselors  
meet students where they  
live – and lead them higher



# NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN WILL URGE TEENS TO

## 'KNOW HOW TO GO' TO COLLEGE

**A** two-pronged national college access campaign set to launch this fall will encourage low-income students to take the necessary steps to college and connect them with helpful information and resources.

Public service announcements (PSAs) will be distributed this fall to more than 200 media markets nationwide. The PSAs will be part of a multimedia campaign using television, radio, print, billboard, bus and shopping mall signage, and the Internet.

For the target audience of eighth-, ninth- and 10th-graders, the PSAs are intended to be a "wake-up call" to convey an urgency that college requires years of preparation and planning.

"Good grades and big dreams aren't enough to get into college," according to the first TV spot. "There are actual steps you need to take. Finding someone to help is the first and most important." In this spot, students send paper airplanes aloft, each plane signifying the

sender's college dreams – and a call for help.

The media messages will refer viewers to a national Web site ([www.KnowHow2Go.org](http://www.KnowHow2Go.org)), where students will be linked to a database of local resources and support organizations.

In some media markets, the PSAs can be customized to highlight state or local Web sites that are operated by higher education agencies or other entities. To customize and "co-brand" the campaign, these partner organizations will be asked to refer students to local college access programs, universities, schools, youth organizations and community groups. These affiliates will form a support network to respond to students who see the media campaign.

The American Council on Education is coordinating and mobilizing this network. The Ad Council is producing and distributing the media campaign, which is being underwritten by Lumina Foundation for Education.

**On the cover: At the rural home of Leroy Green (left) near Chattanooga, Tenn., University of Georgia senior Cara Ables (center) acts as a gentle advocate for Green's granddaughter, Amanda Green (right). Amanda has long dreamed of studying nursing at Vanderbilt University, but Green has reservations – financial and personal – about his granddaughter attending college "over there" in Nashville.**

# L E T T E R S

## First-generation students share powerful stories

Raja Fattah met me in a deserted parking lot on a Saturday morning at Kent State University. Rain threatened, and his eyes looked red and tired under the bill of his baseball cap. He had squeezed in our interview between his classes and his 40-hours-weekly job at a grocery store in the poor section of Cleveland where he grew up.

Against the odds, Raja, the son of Palestinian immigrants, was about to graduate from Kent State with a major in justice studies and a transcript full of A's and B's. A first-generation college student himself, he was ready to tell others what he had learned in four years. "I wouldn't recommend working full time and taking 15 hours of class," he said. His girlfriend had dumped him because he had no time for her. "And when you don't have time for anything other than school or work, you get frustrated. You find short cuts, or you stop going to class, just to rest. You won't learn anything that way."

Now, with 15 other first-generation college students of many different descriptions, Raja is

passing on what he has learned: How to get into the high school courses that will get you into college. How to connect with the adults who will write the recommendations and help you fill out the financial aid forms. How to leave your friends behind and enter a new culture.

Counsel like this – especially when it comes from peers – can get first-generation college students from their early high school years to their college commencement. In a pair of books and a DVD, Raja and the other students who worked with me serve it up straight, as *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students*. Lumina

Foundation provided support for research, writing and publication by Next Generation Press.

I sought out students for this project who could speak of very different backgrounds and experiences. Eric Polk, for example, went from the poorest section of Nashville to highly selective Wake Forest University in North Carolina. Aileen Rosario started community college in Paterson, N.J., where she lived with her family, Dominican immigrants. She transferred after two years to Montclair State University, hoping to study law. Debra Graves, a sixth-grade dropout with several children, began community college in Denver at age 26.

Since the first step to a degree is getting on the college track early, I started by organizing students' advice into a short book subtitled *Your High School Years*. The students told poignant stories of gaining admission to college without the safety net of parents and teachers behind them. Often, the intervention of one interested adult made all the difference.

In the second *First in the Family* book, subtitled *Your College Years*, the same students describe their hurdles once in college. Only 41 percent of low-income students entering a four-year college graduate within five years, according to the U.S. Department of Education, compared to 66 percent of high-

income students. Money, inadequate preparation, discouragement, family pressures – the students I worked with persisted despite the obstacles that stop so many.

Raja's college journey is ending now. And as I said goodbye to him on that stormy June afternoon, I could see the determination mix with his pride like rain on a sweaty brow.

"I had never heard of scholarly journals, coming out of high school," he told me. "Now I find articles on things I never even knew existed: death penalty issues, discrimination laws, all types of things. It really expands your horizons." With his diploma in hand, he is hoping for a job at the FBI. Someday, we'll be hearing from him again.

Kathleen Cushman,  
Author and educator  
New York, N.Y.

**Editor's note:** Cushman's books – *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students* – were written under the auspices of a grant to What Kids Can Do, Inc., and can be purchased from Next Generation Press, [info@nextgenerationpress.org](mailto:info@nextgenerationpress.org). Volume 1, *Your High School Years* (2005), is \$8.95; Volume 2, *Your College Years* (2006) is \$9.95. Quantity discounts and an accompanying DVD are available.

## A global example

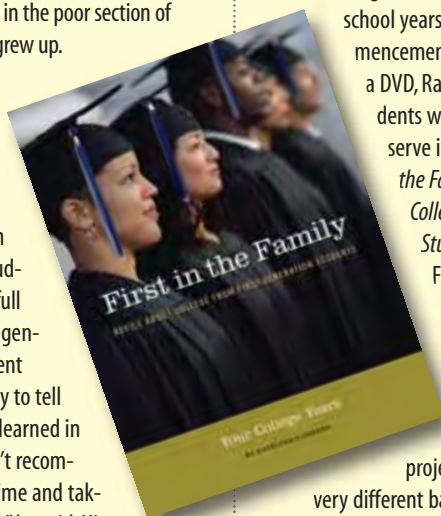
Thank you so much for the *Focus* magazine (Winter 2006). What inspiring stories! In my school, few students can read and understand English, but you cannot imagine how much the stories in your magazine are opening the minds of our students here on the other side of the world. You enlightened us.

Many of our students come from very poor families who cannot afford the school fees of \$150 per year. Reading other peoples' stories – in which standing up and trying are the main keys – is very illuminating. It encourages my students to stand up on their own and believe in themselves – especially the forgotten girls.

Thank you very much. Or, as we say in Kiswahili: *Asante sana!*

Sincerely,

Fulgence Mluwili, Principal  
Hanga Vocational Training Center  
Sangea, Tanzania



### Tell us what you think

We encourage readers to share their views on this issue of the magazine, and we'll share those letters, as space allows, in subsequent issues.

Please send your letters (400 words, maximum) to "Lumina Foundation Focus" Letters, c/o David Powell, P.O. Box 1806, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1806. Or e-mail (with "Lumina Foundation Focus letter" in the subject line) to: [dpowell@luminafoundation.org](mailto:dpowell@luminafoundation.org).



Helping rural students step up: [Page 3](#)



A better life, a good example: [Page 12](#)



Success stories in the Southwest: [Page 14](#)



Once refugees, now scholars: [Page 19](#)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At Lumina Foundation for Education, we are committed to increasing students' access to and success in education beyond high school. Our mission is vital, not only to the lives of millions of individual students, but to the social and economic future of this nation.

Our mission also is increasingly urgent. As global economic competition intensifies, the need for an adaptive, well-trained American workforce – a college-educated workforce – becomes ever more critical. At the same time, huge demographic changes are altering the face of our nation, putting increased pressure on our higher education system to serve higher proportions of students who traditionally face the highest barriers to success. Clearly, we can't delay our efforts to address this problem. The challenges are too great – and the stakes too high – for us to wait.

This issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* magazine is all about people who refuse to wait.



In "Front-porch pathfinders," noted education journalist John Pulley takes a close look at the heroes of college access: the counselors, mentors and advocates who work one-on-one with today's young people to help them become tomorrow's college students – and future graduates.

You'll read the story of Cara Ables, a college senior who is helping teens in rural Tennessee follow in her footsteps. You'll learn about Ginny Donohue, who works tirelessly to help inner-city students in Syracuse, N.Y., formulate and realize their college dreams. You'll read about Brenda Chavez and Violetta Bluitt, counselors in a New Mexico program that helps Latino students enter and succeed in higher education.

These and many other inspiring, real-life stories – supported by insights from noted researchers, educators and experts across the nation – speak volumes. They underscore the importance of mentoring and guidance, and of families and students starting early to prepare for college success.

Those messages of mentoring and early preparation – major tenets of a nationwide public information campaign that will soon be launched (see item on the inside-front cover) – have always been central to our work at Lumina, and to the efforts of our grantees. We're proud in this issue of *Focus* to put the spotlight on some of those efforts.

As always, I welcome your feedback on this issue, and I look forward to your continued help in the important work of enhancing college access and success.

*Martha D. Lamkin*

Martha D. Lamkin  
President and CEO  
Lumina Foundation for Education

# FRONT-PORCH

From rural hollows to inner-city streets, college-access advocates help students' dreams bloom

# Pathfinders



**Cara Ables aids aspiring students at a rural Tennessee high school.**



**a** visit with her Aunt Terri, a nurse, lit a spark inside a Tennessee schoolgirl named Amanda Green. "That's when I realized what I wanted to be," Amanda says, recalling that visit of more than a decade ago.

Around the same time, a fleeting glimpse of the Vanderbilt University campus fanned that spark into a flame.

"We were in Nashville, we drove past it, and I loved how it looked," recalls Amanda, now a 16-year-old senior at Sale Creek High

By John Pulley

## The challenge of our changing economy: Déjà vu all over again

The alarm sounded during the '90s: America's educational system was under capacity and overwhelmed. The national economy was evolving in dramatic ways, the demand for skilled workers was escalating, and millions of uneducated people were pouring into cities to find jobs. America's educational system, circa 1895, was ill-equipped to produce qualified workers in adequate numbers.

More than a century later, the pace of change has escalated again. And once again, the country's educational system is misaligned with the demands of that change.

A century ago, the national economy was evolving from agrarian to industrial, and manufacturers were demanding workers with critical skills – not the least of which was the capacity to adapt from farm to factory. The best way to transform field hands into an urban, assembly-line workforce? High school. It would take 50 years, however, before a majority of the country's K-12 students would earn a high school diploma.

These days, we don't have decades to get it right, experts say. Old-line manufacturing jobs have automated or moved offshore, the country's immigrant population is swelling, and the

dizzying pace of advancement has dramatically raised the bar for technological literacy. In the past decade or so, we have abandoned forever our old analog world and embraced a digital existence of ubiquitous cell phones, cheap computing power, wireless Internet, cloning, iPods, nanotechnology and genetically altered soybeans. What would those 1890s farmers think?

The world is spinning faster, and, in the vernacular coined by best-selling author and columnist Thomas L. Friedman, it is getting flatter. Americans who once competed among themselves for good jobs and economic supremacy are now vying against competitors from China, India, Pakistan, the Ukraine and other distant points. Anyone with a high IQ, marketable skills and Internet access is a contender on the global economic playing field.

In an era of velocity – fast connections, next-day delivery, instant messaging – the fastest-growing segments of the American population are the least-well served by an educational system that plods along like the clackety relics of the Industrial Revolution. Immigrants and their first-generation children, people of color, the poor, sons and daughters of parents who didn't attend college, non-English speakers, and people from other groups that are less likely than average to get an adequate education represent an ever larger portion of the nation's population. Failure to make education accessible and attainable for them could result in a new underclass that will be mired in a cycle of intractable cross-generational poverty.

Moreover, the nation will face predictable consequences: shortages of knowledge workers, slowed economic growth and loss of global competitiveness.

A leading indicator of the problem is the state of K-12 instruction and the gulf between it and postsecondary education. A high school diploma is no longer an indicator of meaningful educational attainment, college preparedness or suitability for a decent-paying job with growth potential. Yet even that modest level of academic accomplishment eludes many. Nationally, more than 30 percent of ninth-graders fail to earn a high school diploma, and only one in five earns a four-year college degree within six years of high school graduation.

"The truth is, we are in a crisis now, but it is a crisis that is unfolding very slowly and very quietly," writes Friedman in *The World Is Flat*, a trenchant analysis of global economic trends and, for many, a manifesto for change. "This quiet crisis involves the steady erosion of America's scientific and engineering base, which has always been the source of American innovation and our rising standard of living. ... For the first time in more than a century, the United States could well find itself falling behind other countries in the capacity for scientific discovery, innovation and economic development."

The *Trends in International Mathematics and Science* study, which in 2003 tested 500,000 students from 41 countries, found that 44 percent of eighth-graders in Singapore scored at

School about 30 miles north of Chattanooga. "I was just 5 years old, but I remember telling my grandma that I wanted to go there. She looked back at me and said, 'I hope you get there.'"

Her grandmother told her that Vanderbilt had "the best nursing college you can get into around here," Amanda says. "I wanted to go to the best and be the best. If that's the right university, that's where I want to go."

Almost a dozen years later, on a warm June morning in a rural corner of Hamilton County in southeast Tennessee, Amanda and two other people gather on a home's front porch to chat before the air turns thick.

Amanda's grandfather, Leroy



From his front-porch perch, family patriarch Leroy Green makes a point.

Green, 75, settles into an aluminum frame patio chair. Resting on his knee are the weathered hands he has used to make his way in the world – hands that kept him employed, in the prime of his working years, as a heavy-equipment mechanic on the construction site of the nearby Sequoyah Nuclear Plant.

"My Papaw built our house with his hands," says Amanda, sitting on the porch boards at his feet. She and her parents live with Papaw and his wife. Amanda's father, an Air Force veteran, is now unemployed. Her mother works in a pencil factory and admonishes her daughter: "Don't end up like me."

The third person on the porch this morning is Cara Ables, a senior

the most advanced level in math. In the U.S., just 7 percent of students scored that well, the study showed.

The United States ranks 17th in the world in the number of 18- to 24-year-olds who earn science degrees, down from No. 3 three decades ago, Friedman reports, citing data collected by the National Science Board (NSB). In China, 59 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded in science and engineering. The equivalent figure in the United States is about 32 percent.

Often, the die is cast early in a student's academic career. The NSB found that engineers and scientists who enter the workforce with advanced degrees had opted in middle school – some 14 years earlier – to take the courses that would enable them to tread such a demanding career path.

Yet many students lack the resources to make wise choices and persist in their educational pursuits. Many barriers impede academic attainment, including insufficient financial resources, poor academic preparation, cultural norms and inadequate information about the college-going process. The lack of reliable information derails students at each phase of the process. Without knowledgeable parents, engaged guidance counselors or other effective mentors, students simply fail to take the steps to become educated.

Overcoming obstacles – academic, attitudinal, financial, informational – that bar the doors of college for poor, non-white children from undereducated families is a stiff challenge. "You

almost have to double and triple your efforts for this population to have a chance," says David W. Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia.

The convergence of several disturbing trends – rising tuition, Pell grants' eroding purchasing power, reduced state support of higher education, students' increasing reliance on loans, and growing populations of low-income, minority and other "at-risk" students – looks to Breneman "like a train wreck."

Still, there is precedent for responding to such challenges. In the late 1940s, the GI Bill paved the way for millions of veterans to attend college. Two decades later, the federal student loan program began to open the doors of college for even more Americans. And more recently, prompted by a creeping crisis of access in the 1960s, educational leaders created the community college system to provide educational opportunity for millions of baby



**"The truth is, we are in a crisis now, but it is a crisis that is unfolding very slowly and very quietly," says author Thomas L. Freidman.**

boomers reaching college age. Today's college students face a different challenge of perhaps even greater proportion. For underserved students in particular, access to and success in higher education requires unflagging vigilance to pre-college preparation. To be most effective, preparation should begin in middle school. Thousands of programs throughout the country are trying to help these students prepare academically, financially, socially and logistically.

Models vary, but many take a holistic, comprehensive approach that seeks to involve entire communities in the education of children. From the traditionally Hispanic border states in the West to newly emerging communities of Mexican and South American immigrants in the South, from the inner-city housing projects in the North to

enclaves of poor whites in Appalachia and elsewhere, these programs seek to alter the trajectory of lives and thereby change a nation.

"If we don't do something out of the ordinary," Breneman says, "we are going to consign a very significant percentage of this next generation of young people to third-class citizenship."

at the University of Georgia. She has come to help Amanda aim higher. Cara is working at Sale Creek High School as a summer intern, a position developed through a pre-college access and preparation program called the Partnership for College Access and Success (PCAS). Cara's job is to help the school's upperclassmen and their families explore postsecondary aspirations. Cara is taking the students on college visits, helping them to refine their post-graduation education plans, and meeting students' families in their homes – and on their front porches.

As the sun rises, two young women and an old man warm to the topic.

"I guess money is the main thing," says Papaw. "She wants to go to Vanderbilt. I don't know right now. It would have to be looked into."

Cara mentions that the University of Georgia is a good school, too, and that her own grandfather was a huge fan of the Bulldogs football team. (But Cara knows the obstacles Amanda faces. Cara doesn't

mention it, but her grandfather was adamant that college wasn't an option for his own daughter. As a result, Cara's mother, the first person in her family to graduate from high school, has held jobs cutting hair, working in an artificial-turf factory and staffing the desk at a real-estate development company.)

Papaw worries about boundaries. Pausing to shoo a small, mixed-breed dog off the porch, he reveals his fear that Amanda might leave home. "That would be another thing, going over there and staying over there," Green says. "We'll have to decide later about Vanderbilt or Georgia."

"She has a cousin at Bryan," Green goes on, referring to Bryan College, a Christian institution in nearby Dayton, Tenn., that is best known for the Scopes "Monkey Trial" held there in 1925.

"The preacher up here is a Bryan graduate," Green says, hopefully.

Cara tries to redirect the conversation. "It's hard to get a good job now without a college degree," she says.

*Continued on Page 7*



As an intern at Sale Creek High School, Cara Ables (left) meets regularly with students such as Amanda Green (center) and Niki Hackney. Cara's job, developed as part of a program called the Partnership for College Access and Success, is to help students at the rural high school formulate and implement a concrete plan for college enrollment.

## Just a few of the organizations that promote pre-college preparation

For those interested in learning more about pre-college access programs — or seeking to assist such a program in their communities — one of the best organizations to know is the **National College Access Network (NCAN)**. As its name implies, NCAN is a network of organizations that operate and support college access programs throughout the nation.

NCAN's mission is to improve access to and success in postsecondary education for disadvantaged, under-represented and first-generation students. It does this by supporting a network of state and local college access programs that provide counseling, advice and financial assistance; sharing best practices among the network; providing leadership and

technical assistance; and helping establish new college access programs.

The organization's Web site — [www.collegeaccess.org/NCAN/](http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCAN/) — includes a state-by-state listing of member organizations, including many of those listed below.

Another source of information about these programs is Lumina Foundation's **McCabe Fund**, a grant-making initiative aimed solely at supporting pre-college access programs. Though the McCabe Fund is no longer accepting inquiries for 2006 grants, basic details about the initiative — and a catalog of recent grantees — are available on the Web at: [www.luminafoundation.org/grants/mccabefund.html](http://www.luminafoundation.org/grants/mccabefund.html).

Below are a few specific pre-college access programs. (Though this list is by no means comprehensive, it does represent the types of pre-college access programs now at work across the country.)

- **TRIO programs:** Originally three programs (hence its name), Congress established TRIO to help low-income Americans enter

college, graduate and move on to participate more fully in America's economic and social life. The expanded cluster of programs, all funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, work to help students overcome class, social and cultural barriers to higher education.

([www.trioprograms.org](http://www.trioprograms.org))

- **Cristo Rey Jesuit High School:** Serving immigrant families of Chicago's near southwest side, this high school offers a Jesuit college-preparatory education through a dual-language curriculum and participation in corporate internships. ([www.cristorey.net](http://www.cristorey.net))

- **Ohio College Access Network:** The first statewide coordinating body for college access programs in the nation, OCAN was founded in 1999 by KnowledgeWorks Foundation, in collaboration with the Ohio Board of Regents and the Ohio Department of Education. OCAN is focused on helping Ohio residents pursue postsecondary



## FRONT-PORCH PATHFINDERS

Papaw, undeterred, stays on topic. He concedes, though, that Amanda "hasn't mentioned Bryan too much, but that's one that's close. I think it might be kind of hard to move away."

"You wouldn't like me going away?" Amanda asks.

"I don't know," says her Papaw, a man who has never strayed far from where he was born, at the foot of Bakewell Mountain and in the shadow of Flat Top Mountain, about a mile away. "I'd have to see where you'd stay."

"I'd be willing to start out at a community school," Amanda offers, "but I'd eventually like to venture out into a bigger college. I want to be able to know that I can handle things on my own."

"I want to experience other stuff," she says later. "I want to get out of this town and see what else is out there."

What's "out there" is a world quite different from the one Leroy Green grew up in. It's a new world whose interconnected, digital-driven economy requires skilled, adaptable workers. It's a world in which education beyond high school is a necessity for entry into the middle class. (See related story, Page 4.)

"The knowledge and skills you need to succeed in postsecondary education are those that you also need to have access to a job that pays reasonably well with growth potential," says Michael Cohen, president of Achieve Inc., a nonprofit organization created by the nation's governors and business leaders to help states raise academic standards and achievement.

Yet students from groups with low college-going

rates continue to encounter barriers that block them – especially if they are first-generation students, low-income students or students of color. Impediments come in many forms, from inadequate information about college to insufficient financial resources, from cultural barriers to inadequate K-12 education, from indecipherable financial aid forms to a simple lack of planning.

Students, families and communities seeking to clear those hurdles must be more purposeful, organized, comprehensive and diligent in their preparation for college, experts say. Hundreds of programs have sprung up to help, many in the past decade. (See the list below for a representative sample.)

Drawing attention to the barriers – and the help that's available to overcome them – is the point of a new public service campaign that will soon hit the airwaves. (See inside front cover.) The effort, developed by the Ad Council with funding from Lumina Foundation for Education in partnership with the American Council on Education, is called the National College Access Campaign. It seeks to convince low-income, prospective first-generation college students in grades eight to 10 that, if they want to go to college, they can't leave it to chance.

Research conducted by the campaign's creators reveals that more than 90 percent of low-income students aged 14-16 plan to earn a college degree. Those aspirations plummet by the time those students reach college-going age. More often than not, their once-high expectations vanish.

education by building and supporting local college access programs throughout the state.  
([www.ohiocan.org/OCAN/](http://www.ohiocan.org/OCAN/))

- **Boys and Girls Harbor:** Founded in Harlem in 1937, this program seeks to empower children and their families to become full, productive participants in society through education, cultural enrichment and social service. Through the development of a positive self-image and a keen awareness of cultural heritage, the program annually helps more than 4,000 individuals gain the skills and confidence necessary for long-term success in education, careers, family and community life.  
([www.boysandgirlsharbor.net](http://www.boysandgirlsharbor.net))

- **Advancement Via Individual Determination:** AVID was created at Clairemont High School in 1980 in response to San Diego Unified School District's court-ordered integration of the city's schools. The program

has evolved into a fifth- through 12th-grade system that prepares students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility. Beginning with one high school and 32 students, the AVID system is now on the march toward nearly 4,400 schools in 2010.  
([www.avidonline.org](http://www.avidonline.org))

- **Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs:** GEAR UP is a discretionary federal grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school.  
([www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html))

- **Admission Possible:** The mission of this program is to help make college admission possible for talented, motivated and economically disadvantaged students in Minnesota by providing ACT test preparation services and admissions and financial aid counseling.  
([www.admissionpossible.org/home.html](http://www.admissionpossible.org/home.html))

- **College Begins in Kindergarten:** Based on the theory that early exposure to music and other arts can help to develop the brain's circuitry, students at Crafton Hills College and its Baroque Festival act as mentors and assistants to provide elementary students opportunities for growth, experimentation and success.  
([www.craftonhills.edu/chc/CHCcommunity/kindergarten/kindergarten.htm](http://www.craftonhills.edu/chc/CHCcommunity/kindergarten/kindergarten.htm))



**College students Jehoshuah Johnson (left) and Clarence Goines (center) speak to students at Red Bank High School in Chattanooga, Tenn. The classroom visit, part of the Partnership for College Access and Success program, gives teens real-world advice about college from peers who have been there.**

The ad campaign, set to roll out this fall, hopes to overcome a lack of information that undermines the aspirations of disadvantaged teens who “live in a kind of bubble,” say the campaign’s architects. “They know very little about how to pursue their dream of a college education. ... The students are not connected with resources that can help them. ... Instead, [they] say that college will happen if they just get good grades and don’t get into trouble at home or in school.”

Among other barriers, low-income, ethnic, first-generation students that aspire to graduate from college often attend high schools that inadequately prepare students for academic success and have too few resources to help them successfully navigate the college-admissions process.

There are cultural impediments, as well. The conversation on Leroy Green’s porch speaks volumes about an ambivalence toward higher education that often plays out in rural areas, where college campuses are sometimes viewed with a measure of suspicion.

“There are perceptions of colleges being immoral places that don’t share the rural values that predominate in Chattanooga, the buckle of the Bible Belt,” says Dan Challener, president of Chattanooga’s Public Education Foundation (PEF). “Parents know that if they send their kids off to college, they might not get them back.”

Then there is the issue of money. College costs are rising more quickly than the availability of funds to help students with financial needs. For as long as Amanda Green can remember, for example, she has wanted to study nursing at Vanderbilt, but she and her family

haven’t saved nearly enough to cover the private institution’s annual tuition, fees, room and board, which last year totaled about \$42,000.

Still, Amanda perseveres. “I’m a Christian, so I believe that God will take care of me,” she says. “I put my trust in Him.”

## Working to rewrite the song of the South

Like many communities, rural Tennessee is undergoing rapid change. As recently as 30 years ago, foundries, factories and farms employed more than half the workers in Chattanooga, which was known as the Dynamo of Dixie.

With no historical imperative for postsecondary education, Tennessee’s proportion of adults with four-year college degrees is 19.6 percent, ranking it 42nd among the 50 states. Between 10 percent and 15 percent of graduates of Sale Creek High School are the first in their families to earn a high school diploma.

Lately, however, most of the well-paying blue-collar jobs have left the South. Today, less than 20 percent of Hamilton County’s workers are employed in the manufacturing sector, and farmland is being overtaken by residential development. Interstate 27, formerly a two-lane road, became a divided highway a decade ago, a development that has helped transform rural Hamilton County into a burgeoning bedroom community of Chattanooga.

## FRONT-PORCH PATHFINDERS

Some longtime residents of the area do not seem to fully grasp the implications of these changes. When Sale Creek's guidance counselor, Jenny Smith, arrived at the school four years ago, students joked that they planned to attend "Lazy Boy University," referring to the local furniture manufacturer. Layoffs at the company have all but ended admissions at "LBU," but many parents still remain unsure about packing their sons and daughters off to college.

"Their mamas and daddies are afraid that they will get lost, or that they'll be hungry," says Devota Barnes, principal at Sale Creek.

Chattanooga's educators are working to overcome the barriers that are holding people back. PEF is the lead local agency for the Partnership for College Access and Success (PCAS) initiative, an eight-city program funded by Lumina Foundation for Education and administered by the Academy for Educational Development. PCAS brings together a broad variety of organizations – the local school district, institutions of higher education, community- and faith-based organizations, businesses and government – to help prepare students to succeed in college.

"The idea was, rather than having isolated programs, we should all be working together," says Susan Street, founder of Chattanooga's College Access Center, which works to increase the number of residents from Chattanooga and Hamilton County who attend and complete college. "We've operated in isolation for too long."

PCAS aims to increase family awareness of opportunities for getting into and paying for college. To achieve those goals, the partnership is focusing on three Hamilton County schools that represent diverse urban, suburban and rural populations. Among the strategies being employed are:

- College night programs.
- Retreats for seniors and sophomores.
- College tours.
- Test-preparation activities.
- Training for faculty and administrators.

Chattanooga's College Access Center also is the county's representative for Tennessee's annual College Goal Sunday event, a program that encourages and helps families to complete financial aid forms. The bottom line is helping students and parents know how to get into and pay for college.

PCAS chose Chattanooga as one of its eight sites, in part, because of initiatives already under way there. The city participates in the Carnegie Foundation's Schools for a New Society school-reform initiative. In addition, Hamilton County's elected officials have taken the controversial step of abolishing the high schools' multitrack curriculum in favor of an academically rigorous single track designed to challenge and prepare all students.

"When that was pushed here, there was a real donnybrook," recalls PEF's Challenger. "The university and the business leaders turned the tide."

Employers and educators understand that high school

graduates, even those with high grade-point averages, often are unprepared to do college work. For instance, Amanda Green, who has a 3.4 GPA heading into her senior year, scored well below the national average the first time she took the ACT.

"I'm really bad with tests," she says. "I tend to freak out."

Of course, standardized tests can't measure work ethic or grit. Still, in her low moments, Amanda questions whether she will attain her dream.

"Sometimes I get kind of worried that I won't be able to," she says. "I feel like I'll be here, going to a community college. That's something I really don't want. I can't explain why. I guess I want to explore more than here."

The story is a familiar one to students who struggle to overcome demographic disadvantages. Consider Jacob Huskey. A popular high school athlete at Red Bank High School just north of Chattanooga, Jacob took what he thought were the classes he needed to prepare for college, earning academic honors. In his senior year, he took Advanced Placement literature and composition. Following graduation, he planned to attend the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga.

His plans began to unravel at college orientation. Because he had not scored well on the ACT, he had to take a college placement test – without the aid of the pocket calculator he had relied on in high school math classes. The result was that Jacob had to take developmental classes in math as well as writing before he could begin taking regular college classes. (More than half the students who attend local colleges require remedial math, Susan Street says.)

Discouraged, Jacob thought about ditching college and joining the military. A relative encouraged him to consider enrolling in a new program called Camp Tiger at Chattanooga State Technical Community College. Developed as part of the PCAS program, Camp Tiger is an intensive 10-day summer college-prep program. It exposes students to a range of topics that can help them navigate the transition to college, including lessons on effective listening, time management, writing and note taking, college reading strategies and business etiquette.



**"We've operated in isolation for too long," says Susan Street of Chattanooga's College Access Center.**

Jacob completed Camp Tiger and enrolled last fall at Chattanooga State, where he took the required developmental classes, among other courses. He finished the year with a 3.64 GPA and plans to transfer this fall to UT-Chattanooga.

Administrators have already moved to align the educational standards of Hamilton County and Tennessee with the ACT test that helps determine high school graduates' postsecondary options. That move acknowledges that graduates with high grade-point averages often perform poorly on standardized tests and are unprepared for a rigorous college-level curriculum. To underscore the seriousness of the overhaul, Sale Creek's administrators are requiring teachers to take the ACT themselves.

The misalignment of high-school curriculum with college-entrance tests is pervasive, says Achieve Inc.'s Michael Cohen.

A study completed by the group two years ago determined that, for high school graduates to be prepared to succeed in college, they need four years of college-preparatory English and four years of math, including Algebra I and II, geometry and a fourth year of rigorous math. A subsequent survey of the 50 states found that only two require Algebra II. In addition, the survey looked at proficiency exams that students must pass to earn a high school diploma in some states. Close to 60 percent of the "algebra" questions on those tests actually

measured "pre-algebra" skills, Cohen says. "One reason our kids don't learn a lot is we don't expect or demand a lot," he points out.

In rural areas and elsewhere, collaboration between high schools and local colleges is a big step in the direction of bolstering K-12 education and closing the proficiency gap between high school and college, educators say.

What's making the difference in high schools? "Dual-enrollment programs and close connections with community colleges and other higher education institutions nearby," says Rachel Tompkins, president of the Rural School and Community Trust, a national nonprofit organization based in Arlington, Va. "Kids are able to take some college-credit courses while they are in high school. They're building relationships with nearby colleges. When that happens, you see kids making the transition to college an easier one."

The Trust also helps schools to develop community-based learning that engages students. Among the programs that work, she says, are oral history projects with local historical societies and science projects that have clear, practical applications in the local community. For example, at Jackson Middle School in Louisiana's East Feliciana Parish, students are studying the spike in automobile crashes involving a growing population of deer, which have been driven into the area by hurricanes and land development.

*Continued on Page 12*

## Program for Latinos creates diverse and powerful partnerships

When she was a girl growing up near the Rio Grande River in the South Valley area of Albuquerque, N.M., Karen Sanchez-Griego told her family she dreamed of being a lawyer. Family members cheerfully dismissed the little girl with smiles and condescending pats on the head.

"They were like, '*mijita*, that's good,'" recalls Sanchez-Griego, using the Hispanic term of endearment. "I wasn't encouraged to go to college." Later, she took the ACT, and like many students at high schools with large numbers of poor ethnic students whose parents didn't attend college, she didn't score well on the test. Confronted by a guidance counselor who suggested that she downsize

her expectations, Sanchez-Griego recalls her dispirited reaction: "I diminished in the chair."

Shaking off her disappointment, the stubborn girl persevered, persuading an adult from her church – a college graduate – to help her. With the assistance of this mentor, she enrolled, earned a bachelor's degree, went on to earn a master's degree and became the principal of a public school in Albuquerque. Today she is executive director of ENLACE (Engaging Latino Communities for Education) in New Mexico. The program essentially seeks to re-create Sanchez-Griego's experience on a larger scale.

"Somebody helped me," Sanchez-Griego says. "If I can't help somebody else, what's the point?"

With 13 programs in seven states and a five-year record of success, ENLACE is one of the nation's thousands of initiatives that seek to better prepare underprivileged students for college. ENLACE aims to strengthen academic achievement and aspirations and to raise college awareness through the involvement of families and community institutions. ENLACE



**Karen Sanchez-Griego, executive director of Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE) in New Mexico, was a first-generation college student herself. "Somebody helped me," she recalled. "If I can't help somebody else, what's the point?"**



**Jacob Huskey's road to college had a few unexpected bumps, but a 10-day summer college-prep program called Camp Tiger gave him the tools he needed to succeed. With his developmental classes complete, he'll soon attend the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga.**

also works to improve the alignment of K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. The program essentially tries to break down divisions and barriers so that it can create a *familia* of educators working toward a common goal.

The impetus for the program is found in top-line statistics: Latino students are the fastest-growing population in schools today. Nationally, only about 10 percent of Latino high school graduates attend college. Latino and other low-income students are significantly less likely than their peers from middle- and high-income families to complete a college-prep curriculum in high school, according to ENLACE.

As a result, Latino students and students from other ethnic backgrounds are less prepared than white students to do college work. Among Hispanic high school graduates who go to college, 58 percent require remedial courses in literacy or math, according to data compiled by the New Mexico Higher Education Department. The remediation rate

is 66 percent for American Indians, 55 percent for blacks (a small percentage of New Mexico's population), and 36 percent for whites.

Funded by a \$4.6 million startup grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, New Mexico's three ENLACE programs – in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and the northern part of the state – bring together diverse participants. In Albuquerque, those partners include the University of New Mexico and its law school, the local school district and its administrators, elected members of the school board, teachers, guidance counselors, parents and students in various stages of the educational pipeline – including law school students, undergraduates, high school students and middle school kids.

A critical aspect of ENLACE's efforts is the collaboration between local universities and school districts. "Given the changes in demographics, if we don't do a better job of closing the gap between Latino and Anglo [high school] graduation rates, the entire university system in New Mexico will go into an enroll-

ment death spiral," says Dr. Reed Dasenbrock, provost of the University of New Mexico. "Our ability to reach into the school system and affect the culture is crucial."

ENLACE also complements states' initiatives. New Mexico is among a number of states that provide a financial incentive for students to stay in school and prepare for college. The New Mexico Lottery Success Scholarship promises to pay tuition for recent graduates of state high schools (and earners of general equivalency degrees) who enroll full-time in college immediately after graduation. To be eligible, a student must be a New Mexico resident, complete at least 12 credit hours during the first semester of college with a 2.5 GPA, and enroll full time for each semester thereafter. Students who remain eligible can receive the scholarship for up to four consecutive semesters at a two-year institution and up to eight consecutive semesters at a four-year institution. By law, students are eligible for scholarships regardless of their immigration status.

"They're using GPS (global positioning system technology) to help the highway department know where to put signs," Tompkins says.

Such programs help break through the persistent, negative stereotypes about the rural poor – stereotypes that, if not confronted, have a way of becoming internalized.

"There is a culture of low expectations that has to be challenged," says Leslie Lilly, president and CEO of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, based in Nelsonville. "When the name Appalachia comes out, people think about shoeless hillbillies ... or they think about this remote, rural place where people live in the hollers."

"Right (near) here in Athens, we have this world-class university (Ohio University), but people growing up in the shadows of the university don't think it's for them," Lilly says. "They think it's for somebody else. They feel they aren't worthy of it and can't afford it."

## A difficult past, but a hopeful future

To celebrate her 27th birthday this summer, Angela Sepulveda attended a Pat Benatar concert. The rocker's hit songs include *Hit Me With Your Best Shot*, an anthem of perseverance in the face of hard knocks. Sepulveda can relate.

She became pregnant in the 10th grade and dropped out of West Mesa High School in Albuquerque, a decision she didn't regret one bit at the time. With the exception of English, she disliked her classes, especially math. And she had even less affinity for the "rude" white women who taught them.

"Class was just not interesting," Sepulveda recalls. "Nowadays they have a lot of hands-on stuff. When I went to school, it was just blah-blah-blah."

She gave birth to a daughter, Erika. Sepulveda says she left Erika's father to escape his drinking and physical abuse. She met another man, and he fathered a second daughter, LeAnn. He went to prison for trying to stab Sepulveda.

She dreams of earning an associate's degree in business and getting a good job that will afford her girls a better life. "I picture working in a big, huge, major company or a law office or something," she says, but she has a long way to go. The first step is to earn her general equivalency degree (GED). So far, she has passed all but one part of the test. Her old nemesis, math, continues to trip her up.

Sepulveda is matter-of-fact about her troubles, but her demeanor changes when the conversation turns to her children's future.

"Now you're going to make me cry," she says. "I want them to graduate school. I want them to have a good job. I don't want them going down the same path I did."

*Continued on Page 14*





With younger daughter LeAnn Young in her arms, Angela Sepulveda talks with ENLACE counselor Brenda Chavez about how to stay on track to earn her GED. Sepulveda hopes to go on to college, in part to show her two daughters the path to a better life.

In Albuquerque and other Latino strongholds, parents like Angela Sepulveda are getting involved in their children's schools through a Lumina-funded program called Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE). (See related story, Page 10.)

ENLACE is a multiyear initiative working in seven states to strengthen the educational pipeline and increase opportunities for Latinos to enter and complete college. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided startup funds for the program, which creates partnerships among universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, students and parents.

Eager to promote parental involvement as a key means of improving children's preparation for college, ENLACE has worked with educational leaders to establish 25 on-site family centers in Albuquerque schools. ENLACE envisions the centers as safe places where parents and other community partners can support, empower and encourage Latino students and families.

Students come to the centers to get help with their homework, to prepare for the ACT and SAT, and to be around supportive adults. The parents learn about college entrance exams, financial aid forms and other intricacies of the college access maze.

"Our networking comes from talking to the nurse, the teacher, the principal, the counselors – talking to the janitor and the maintenance man. It's a total community," says Brenda Chavez, who works in the ENLACE centers. She has a daughter and a niece in the program, and she has been a mentor to Sepulveda. "It's [about] working together. It's the environment of leaning on each other."

"We already know that kids want to learn," Chavez says. "The obstacles that come in between all that make it hard for kids."

## Collaboration is key

And it's not only the youngsters who confront obstacles. For instance, before the family centers could be effective, many Latino parents had to overcome their fear of public schools. Then, after the parents had discovered their voice, some school administrators deemed the parents overly assertive. A few years into the experiment, however, both sides say the difficult period of accommodation was worth the struggle.

"This is a collaboration among communities," says Judy Touloumis, principal of Carlos Rey Elementary School. That type of collaboration is key to a successful program, experts say.

A recent Lumina-funded project surveyed a number of ENLACE-type programs to learn what makes them effective (see box above). This study shows that the most important step is to transform parents from individual, passive bystanders into a network of active community leaders.

## Here's what works

According to Amy Aparicio Clark, director of the Postsecondary Access for Latino Middle Grades Students (PALMS) Project, five traits characterize successful pre-college programs:

1. Visiting parents and students in their homes.
2. Offering parent-child learning activities.
3. Having a professional home-school liaison to connect parents with teachers and administrators.
4. Developing the skills parents need to be involved in their children's schools.
5. Encouraging parents' ownership of programs designed to help their children succeed in college.

"Our biggest word is collaboration," says Violetta Bluit, who began mentoring and tutoring students at Washington Middle School through ENLACE's Los Compañeros program while she was an undergraduate student at the University of New Mexico (UNM). After graduating from UNM in 2004, she became an ENLACE educational-site coordinator.

The Los Compañeros program brings undergraduate and graduate students into high schools and middle schools to promote academic and personal success through culturally relevant mentoring. During a recent visit to Washington Middle School's family center in Albuquerque, students clustered according to immigrant status (with American-born kids of Mexican parents congregating in one group, the Mexican immigrants in another, and so on). High school and college students helped the middle-schoolers with their schoolwork, acculturation and social development.

The children are well aware of the immigration debate that raged in Congress this spring, including a proposal to make felons of people who are in the country illegally.


"Kids with illegal relatives at home tend to shrink from public engagement at schools for fear of drawing attention to the family," says Alex Chough, associate director of policy, research and evaluation services at the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships. Threatening to make felons of illegal immigrants "will drive parents deeper underground and make them less involved in school," he says.

"A lot of the students have just gotten here from Mexico," says Bluit. "I had students who were having problems at home. A lot of them were living with grandparents they called 'mom and dad.' Some of the parents were in jail or in another state. ... A lot of them are here illegally. They come here for a better life."

As a Latina herself, Bluit says she understands cultural issues, such as machismo and the tyranny of low expectations, which can undermine college aspirations. "They feel like they're going to be made fun of," she says of

*Continued on Page 16*



A group of young men are gathered outdoors. In the center, a young man with glasses and a blue button-down shirt is sitting and smiling, with his hands clasped. To his left, another young man in a blue polo shirt stands with his arms crossed, looking towards the center. To the right, another young man in a blue shirt is partially visible, looking towards the center. In the foreground on the right, the back of a young man's head and shoulders in a light blue shirt is visible, facing the group. The background shows green foliage and a stone wall.

Francisco Hernandez (center), a student at Washington Middle School in Albuquerque, talks with a visiting college student during a mentoring session. The sessions, part of ENLACE's Los Compañeros program, help children from immigrant families make the transition into the college-going culture.

students on the periphery. "As a Mexicana (an American-born child of Mexican parents), I always underestimated myself. ... No one told me I could take AP classes or honors classes."

Bluitt, who is married and raising two children of her own, sees her role with Los Compañeros as being a crucial catalyst for change. "As long as you help that one student, that student will help another," she says.

"Parents need to be very involved if they want their children to succeed," Bluitt adds. The biggest hurdle that underserved children must overcome is "not believing in themselves. They take every little thing as a sign that 'I can't go to college.' Sometimes they just need somebody to say 'Good job! I knew you could do this.'"

Jacqueline Montoya, a 10th-grader who wants to be an engineer, began hanging out at an ENLACE family center that is frequented by her adult aunt, Brenda Chavez. ENLACE is "an opportunity to keep me out of trouble," says Jacqueline, who sees danger at every turn. Her friend, a former cheerleader and straight-A student, dropped out of school last year when she became pregnant. Jacqueline's father, who has struggled with drugs, is absent. Then there are the gangs, which have flourished in Albuquerque for generations. "Gangs are a big problem," says Jacqueline's mother, Sharon Montoya, who works in a public school. "I hear kids say: 'I can drop out and sell drugs.'"

Chough, of the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, points to studies that show "students set academic ambitions no later than seventh grade, but for a seventh-grade Latino student, there are barriers everywhere."

"Our model for higher education just isn't working for lower-income students," says Chough. Many of those barriers are perceptual, he adds, noting that Latino families consistently overestimate the cost of college, a miscalculation that can have dire consequences.

"If you don't think you can afford college, why take chemistry and physics?" asks David Murray, president of Murray & Associates and the National Center for College Costs, which helps families prepare for college, in part by helping them to understand college costs.

Murray and his staff offer workshops for students at middle schools and high schools that serve high percentages of low-income, potentially first-generation college students. When families have the tools to demystify the processes of college admissions and financial aid, students are more likely to take rigorous high school classes, earn more honors diplomas, score higher on the SAT, and change their college enrollment plans, Murray says. Programs like these are vital, he says, because too little public money is available to offer such programs in schools where they're needed most.

"When it comes to investing in education, for the last 20 years, nationally, we've lost sight of that investment. It's all coming home to roost now," Murray warns. "If we don't get a handle on that and get the investment back into education, we're going to suffer serious economic and social consequences."

*Continued on Page 18*





Chase Frazer, a 22-year-old senior at the State University of New York-Albany, talks about college dreams with Emmanuel Flowers, a fifth-grader at Martin Luther King School in Syracuse, N.Y. The discussion was part of the Early Awareness Program of On Point for College, a Syracuse-based pre-college awareness and access organization.

## A transformative program begins with one person

Teenagers Chase Frazer and Tamica Barnett had no reason to believe that a savior would appear to them at the Fayette Street Boys and Girls Club in Syracuse, N.Y. They figured the first time they met Virginia Donohue would be the last.

"When Ginny showed up (in 1999), there had been a lot of people coming into the inner city trying to start programs, and we figured that she was just another person coming in trying to get government money," said Chase, 22. "Ginny kept coming back every single week. People started to notice that she cared about what was happening with kids in the community."

Donohue is the founder and driving force behind On Point for College, a non-profit organization that helps inner-city students get into college. She and the program's two full-time counselors work on the theory that little things can make a big difference. They help students with financial aid forms, transcripts, immunizations, mentoring, test taking, campus visits, pre-college orientations and other aspects of

paving the way to college. The program has paid fees to release transcripts needed by students seeking to transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions. One time Donohue even wrote out a personal check for \$35 to cover the cost of a student's language proficiency test – a last-minute rescue that prevented the student from forfeiting \$35,000 in scholarships.

About the same time that Chase met Donohue, he lost his best friend – a young man gunned down on the streets of Syracuse. Chase had befriended the teen after moving east a few years earlier with his family to escape street violence in Los Angeles. Chase's father is in prison, serving a life sentence.

"On Point was a great help in getting me really excited about college," says Chase, a senior at the State University of New York-Albany. His goal is to earn a doctorate and become a college professor. "I don't think Ginny knows how much of a change she's actually made."

Before meeting Donohue, Tamica Barnett had spent her entire life in a crime- and drug-ridden Syracuse

neighborhood. She had moved out of her parents' house and taken up residence with her grandparents, near the Boys and Girls Club.

"I had a few friends who got caught up hanging out on the block, friends who got pregnant – the norm," Tamica recalls. "If it wasn't for On Point, I honestly don't think I would have gone to college. I really didn't have the parental support. ... "I didn't know the first thing about filling out financial aid papers."

With help from On Point, Tamica found her way out of the streets and into St. Bonaventure University, a private Catholic university three hours away. She graduated recently and now aspires to earn an MBA degree.

It can be dangerous for Syracuse teens to venture into unfamiliar neighborhoods – three kids in the program were murdered last year – so On Point comes to them, making regularly scheduled visits to 15 or so Boys and Girls Clubs and other places where students gather, such as the Southwest Community Center.

During a recent visit there, Donohue and counselors Karaline Carr and Sam Rowser fielded questions and offered advice to several would-be students, including a 26-year-old single mother, a 1999 high school dropout who wanted to attend a nursing program.

About a third of the kids that On Point sends to college have a GED in lieu of a high school diploma, says Donohue. Many of those GEDs were earned in jail or prison. More than half of the African-American students who drop out of school can expect to be incarcerated, she says.

On Point connects with kids in part because the program is connected to the streets. Rowser understands that life. He's from "the Bricks," the term locals use for the brick buildings that constitute Syracuse's housing project, and he's had his share of troubles. (See Page 19 for another tale from "the Bricks.") When Rowser was younger, involvement with drugs bought him a two-year prison term, an experience that gives him credibility with some inner-city youngsters.

"When a kid comes to me and says, 'I have a felony.' I say, 'Me, too.' When a kid says, 'I've been on crack,' I say, 'What's next?' I made some bad decisions and had to pay the consequences," Rowser says. "I do what I do because I understand that kids make mistakes. ... It's hard for the kids to see beyond what is immediately in front of them."

*Continued on Page 20*



**Virginia Donohue, founder of On Point for College, has been known for years on the rough streets of Syracuse as "the college lady."**

## From refugee camp to urban peril to college campus

**T**wo boys meet at a refugee camp on Africa's west coast and become best friends. They discover much in common. They love to play soccer. They dream of a better life, though visions of college aren't part of that dream.

Messan Agbossoumonde and Dodji Koudakpo were not yet 10 in 1993, when they and their families fled a war in Togo and crossed that country's eastern border to take refuge in the republic of Benin. The camp was a dangerous place. Messan's father died there. The focus was on staying alive.

In 2000, the boys immigrated to the United States. Messan arrived in Syracuse, N.Y., and, after a two-year stay in Texas, Dodji moved to Syracuse as well.

Syracuse, they learned, has problems, too. Crime, drugs, gangs and prostitution challenge the city, particularly in the poorest neighborhoods, including the housing projects known as

"the Bricks." Seduced by the streets, kids drop out of school at an alarming rate. Half of the city's public-school students don't make it to 12th grade. Less than 30 percent of African-American males get that far. The odds didn't bode well for a couple of African immigrants.

The boys got lucky, though. They met Ginny Donohue, founder of On Point for College.

The program is a classic grassroots, church-basement program that started by accident. In the late 1980s, Donohue's daughter asked her to help a high school friend gain admission to college, and she did. Then two students in a program for chronically homeless students asked her for similar help.

For years Donohue operated her fledgling enterprise out of a black Toyota Camry "that bot-tomed out because of so many college catalogs in the car," she recalls. She put 250,000 miles on that vehicle, which became well-known in Syracuse as "the college lady's car." Donohue likes to tell of the time that a 6-foot-7 kid stepped in front of her Camry and blocked her path out of the projects. She assumed a car jacking was in progress, but the young man only wanted to ask her if she could help him get into Morrisville State College.

"The word had spread," she says.

In 1999, 10 years after helping her daugh-

ter's friend, Donohue quit her job as a corporate vice president, founded On Point, and became a full-time advocate for inner-city kids who want to attend college. The program turns away no one. Many of the kids it has helped have enrolled in college in spite of significant barriers. Donohue expects to pass a milestone this year: 1,000 college placements.

By the time Dodji and Messan happened along, the program was in full swing. A man from Catholic Charities introduced Messan to Donohue in 2001. She helped the boys with college visits, applications, clothes and rent money. At the time, Dodji and Messan were working 20 to 30 hours a week in retail jobs to pay the rent on their apartment. (Occupancy limitations precluded them from living with their families.)

"Ginny was there," says Dodji, a rising senior at Syracuse University, where he is majoring in information technology. "She's like a second mom for us."

Messan recently graduated from St. Lawrence University, where he majored in French and sociology. He's thinking about studying law at Syracuse. "A lot of teenagers and people my age really need help, but people don't know how to take advantage of it," he says. "Ginny has an answer for every question."



**Dodji Koudakpo (left) and Messan Agbossoumonde, who were refugees in the war-torn West African country of Togo, have found new hope in New York.**



**Students from Capital High School in Santa Fe, N.M., are getting a leg up on college thanks to a rigorous college-preparatory program called AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). Participants include (clockwise, from left): Jeanette Rodriguez, teacher Channell Wilson-Segura, Luis Rosales, Carmen Gallegos, Erika Reyes and Valithza Lopez. Reyes, who completed the program, is now studying nursing at Santa Fe Community College.**

On Point shepherds kids through the gauntlet of college admissions by breaking the process into manageable steps. Rowser says he is careful never to give prospective college students more than they can handle. Usually that means no more than three tasks at a time. "I try to not let them see the whole process," he says. "You piecemeal it to them so that they don't become overwhelmed."

Several times a week, the program arranges to take students on visits to college campuses. Donohue has recruited some 90 volunteers to drive the vans, including Tom Young, a former mayor of Syracuse. On Point, which also ferries students to and from their campuses, logged 377 college trips last year alone.

"A big reason local kids fail is transportation," says Donohue, who has seen students drop out of college for lack of a ride back to campus after coming home for Thanksgiving. "If it's a choice between food and a bus ticket, food will always win."

On Point acknowledges that poor, first-generation college students also need support after they enroll. The program provides students with clothing, bedding, backpacks and school supplies. It also tries to identify a campus "angel," usually an admissions officer or a vice president, who will help students when problems arise.

To expand its reach, On Point enlists its "graduates" to recruit other kids into the program and to give campus tours when the program's vans visit their colleges. Eager to reach youngsters earlier in the educational pipeline, On Point's Early Awareness Program brings its ambassadors into community centers and elementary schools. Chase and Tamica recently spoke to a group of fifth-graders at Martin Luther King School, one of a dozen Syracuse schools that have asked On Point students to visit.

Chase and Tamica talked to the kids about the importance of staying in school and challenging themselves academically, and of associating with the right kinds of people. "College is essential," Tamica told them.

She and Chase asked the youngsters what they want to be when they grow up. Hands flew into the air. Most of the kids said they want to be singers or professional athletes.

"They think they can be in the NBA or be a rapper, but that's not real life," Chase says later. "We have to change their perspective of what success is."

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