

A man with a beard and curly hair, wearing a brown leather hat and a blue denim shirt, is shown in profile, looking upwards. He is working on a large, textured sculpture made of a light-colored material, possibly plaster or clay. The background is a blurred industrial or workshop setting with blue and white vertical elements.

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2026 PROFILE

TIMES
WEST VIRGINIAN



Photo by Ron Rittenhouse
Robert L. [unclear] Outstanding Young Educator; Gary Friggens, Outstanding Young Man; and Mike Oliverio, Distinguished Service Award

Rehabilitation counselor honored

Michael A. Oliverio, a local rehabilitation counselor, has received the 1976 Distinguished Service Award of the National Rehabilitation Counseling Association (NRCA), the top honor to be given by the organization each year.

Oliverio, of 453 Hillview Drive, was selected from among 20,000

rehabilitation counselors from across the nation to receive the award, only one of which is given by NRCA each year.

Currently director of the state Vocational Rehabilitation Office here, he received the honor recently during a meeting of the NRCA in Hollywood, Fla.

Oliverio is past president of the national organization for rehabilitation counselors. He also served as the association's national membership chairman.

He has been National Rehabilitation Association membership chairman for West Virginia and the mid-Atlantic region. Presently, he is president of that organization.

Dad,
You were born a coal miner's son to humble beginnings in Carolina, working hard to graduate from Monongah High School and against greater odds, became a college graduate from Fairmont State. You were a teacher, a counselor, a husband, father, civic leader, an advocate and a true role model. I try to live each day by your example. To serve those without a voice, who deserve to be heard. Thank you for always supporting me, no matter what. We miss you.

Love, Mike

Paid for by Friends of Mike Oliverio - Mike Oliverio for Senate

Welcome to PROFILE 2026

When I applied to my master's program at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky, part of the application process forced me to sit down and take an inventory.

I had to look back on the years in my work life and family life.

I was asked to write about the people whom I considered mentors in my career, which I later realized I had to write a list of folks who helped me along the way and what they helped me with. Consequently, the application also asked me to write about times in which I had mentored others.

Both tasks were challenging, but after I sat down and looked at the names of some really fantastic people, I was content.

The task was illuminating in that it made me realize that

mentors, otherwise known as role models, come in various forms to various people.

Serving as a role model doesn't come from a place of talking down to someone, but a place rooted in the goal of shared growth. Everybody wins when a person grows in their career, their skill level and their self confidence and more.

This year's Profile attempts to share stories just like that. Examples of people who have taken risks, won championships, won contests and served as examples for others to follow.

We present Profile 2026, "Role Models."

Eric Cravey

Editor

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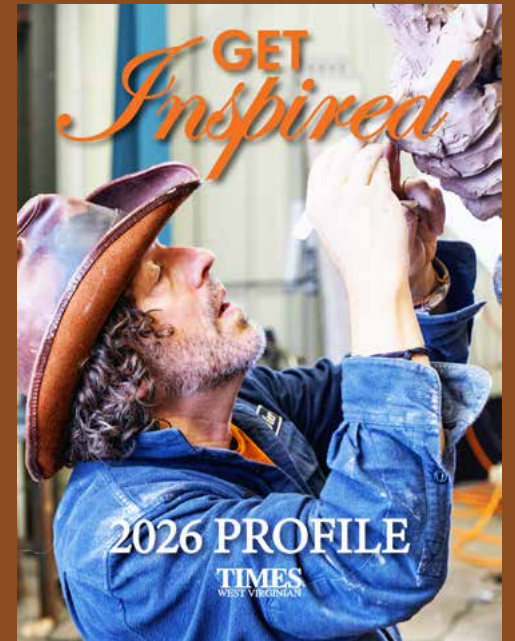
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Role Models Benefits

Positive adult role models benefit kids



Publisher

Terri Hale
thale@timeswv.com
304-367-2560

Editor

Eric Cravey
ecravey@timeswv.com
304-367-2523

Advertising

Cathy Morrison
Beverly Miller

Cover Design

Danielle Eddy
deddy@timeswv.com
304-367-2500

Contributing Writers

Eric Cravey
Esteban Fernandez
Joe Smith
Dee Dee Ellison

300 Quincy Street
Fairmont, WV 26554
P.O. Box 2530
Fairmont, WV 26555

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PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ
Shawna Santee leads a class of young ballet dancers on March 10, 2026.

Entrepreneur gives kids confidence they can use for a lifetime

By Esteban Fernandez

Shawna Santee stands in the foyer of her dance studio, watching as her students arrive for their evening dance classes.

She playfully teases her students as they walk in, they giggle on their way into the ballet studio. The students line up at the ballet barre

mounted on the far wall.

After warmups, Santee goes through the motions with her students. With care, she gently corrects small arms and small legs, bends down and works at their level as she provides instruction.

Regardless of where she is at any

given moment, Santee can't hide her pride for her students from her face.

"There is a certain sort of gratification you get from performing on-stage, and it is incredibly fleeting," Santee said. "It happens in the moment, and then it's gone. It is so much more rewarding, to me

personally, to see the light bulb go off in a child's head when they finally figured out how everything works. You have this kind of moment."

Santee's Fifth Street Center for Dance is a second home to 200 kids, with the school offering more than 30 hours a week. Santee said is

enrollment is a little under 400, since most students attend several classes. On weekends, her students rehearse for their upcoming musical, "SpongeBob the Musical." Students stage between two and three performances a year.

Among the subjects offered are ballet, tap, Jazz point, hip-hop and modern dance. Santee has been at work expanding her space, and has added musical theater, voice lessons and acting workshops.

Santee herself has been teaching since 1997. Santee danced as a soloist in Charleston with the Charleston Ballet, but where she really excelled was with teaching young children. Santee loves working with children. In 2021, after investing in the school she made the move to a more managerial position. Santee still teaches, but only in a few select classes so she can see all her students.

The school has 11 faculty members, almost all of them former dance students who returned after leaving for college and majoring or minoring in dance. The school is also a support structure for people fresh out of college. Santee said that's because her students spend up to 15 or



PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ

Shawna Santee instructs a class of dance students on March 10, 2026.



PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ

Students from Shawna Santee's dance class on March 10, 2026.



PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ

Shawna Santee sits cross legged on the floor as she leads her class of young ballet dancers through exercises on March 10, 2026.

16 years of their lives, from early childhood up to young adulthood, as a part of the school's community.

"You don't get it in other places," she said. "I think that's what makes it so special."

Santee has also used her connections and relationships around Fairmont for the benefit of her students. In 2024, Trinity Rollins, one of Santee's former students, filmed a student film project in the city's downtown area. Santee spent significant social capital to provide extra production value for the shoot. The city's fire department provided some special effects by simulating rainfall and one of the city's police officers had a minor role in the film.

"I think Ms. Shauna is, for all of her students, she's really 100% behind them," Heather Rollins, Trinity Rollins' mother, said. "She encourages them to be not just give the best answer, but she wants them all to be the best student."

"She's always coming in like, 'what are your grades?' she wants to know. And you know, 'you have homework? Well, you're going to sit in the lobby and do the homework before they come into class. She wants them to be the best they can.'"

Heather Rollins said her daughter had attended Fifth Street since she was four. The families form lasting friendships and Rollins

began helping Santee with the administrative side of the school. She said what makes Santee special is that she's been a constant in the lives of her children from the time they were three to when they reached 18. She said there's not many coaches who do that.

Santee teaches her students valuable life skills, such as learning how to process discomfort, learning discipline, stress and time management, Heather Rollins continued.

Santee said the skills they learn in dance school also translate to life in employment. She has three students who are going to West Virginia University for medicine and minoring in dance. She has students going into music education and dance at out of state universities after earning prestigious scholarships.

Art can be transformative, Santee said. It can reach people in a way nothing else can.

"There's always a kid who doesn't think they could ever do anything on stage ever," Santee said. "And they'll come in here and then the next thing you know they're the most successful. It can be the catalyst in someone to give them the confidence they need. And like I said, this all carries over into other aspects of their life."



PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ

Shawna Santee corrects leg placement on one of her student dancers at ballet class on March 10, 2026.



PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ

Shawna Santee greets students as they arrive at Fairmont's Fifth Street Center for Dance on March 10, 2026.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

NASA's Katherine Johnson Independent Verification and Validation Facility's Education Resource Center Program Manager Todd Ensign coordinates and facilitates state and national tournaments either in robotics, drones or other STEM related competitions. The competitions are held at Fairmont State University.

The sky's the limit for this robotics mentor

By Esteban Fernandez

Todd Ensign surveys the VEX Robotics competition from behind the judge's panel.

It's a familiar sight.

For over a decade, Ensign has organized robotics competitions and mentored students in Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics. Ensign used to work NASA's IV&V Facility at the Education Resource Center until federal budget cuts moved his work to Fairmont State full time.

"Academics is great, and learning something in a book is great, in a class, but getting out and doing it,

which is what mentorship provides, that first hand experience, is really one of the most valuable aspects," Ensign said.

Ensign worked with his first AmeriCorps member in 2012, under the VISTA volunteer program. Ensign said the AmeriCorps

mentorship initiative trained young people and AmeriCorps members to run and manage events, referee and judge. Ensign said his group is regularly hired by the Robotics, Education and Competition Foundation for the VEX Robotics Competition.



PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Todd Ensign, program director of the NASA Independent Verification & Validation Center's Educator Resource Center, demonstrates the heat-deflecting capacity of tiles made to cover space shuttles. The blowtorch has heated the front of this tile to a toasty 907 degrees, while the opposite side is a comfortable 79 degrees. Teachers from all over the state visited the center for a training workshop Friday.

At the time, Ensign viewed the program as a way to add an additional staff member to NASA IV&V's Education Resource Center. However, Ensign started to notice how his students found success after their placements with the Education Resource Center.

Ensign began to realize what kind of impact the program had on students who went through it.

"The first AmeriCorps member didn't pursue a career in STEM, but like the second one came in with an IT background and fell in love with working with kids and went on to be a teacher," Ensign said. "I was like, that's pretty cool. And the next one that came on and ended up going to work for another organization, FTC

First Robotics, in a different state — in Maryland. That trend just kept happening."

Ryan Utzman is one of Ensign's former AmeriCorps members. He is now a regional support manager for the Greenville, Texas-based Robotics, Education and Competition Foundation. Utzman got his start competing on a robotics team in high school and, in 2014, learned about an AmeriCorps opportunity through Fairmont State University and NASA IV&V, to help spread robotics programs around the state of West Virginia.

Utzman spent two years in the program.

He said Ensign mentored him during that period and helped him

grow the early parts of his career. Utzman said a lot of Ensign's strengths were complimentary to his own.

"He's very much a people person who's great at building connections, whereas I came into it with more of the like, technical aspect of the competition," Utzman said. "Getting to work with him and seeing how he operated really helped me become more well-rounded and comfortable working with people."

Utzman said Ensign is good at seeing what skill could be a strength in an individual, and pushes them to develop it. Ensign didn't micromanage, instead he identified areas where Utzman needed development. Ensign placed

Utzman in situations where he could adapt and learn, which Utzman said, wasn't pleasant in the moment but he realized those moments have been beneficial in the long run.

Skylar Clagg is in the AmeriCorps VISTA program, which placed him at the Marshall Advanced Manufacturing Center. While Clagg is not currently under Ensign's tutelage, he was three years ago. As a robotics contestant, Clagg met Ensign through a robotics competitions where Ensign was a judge, and eventually Clagg himself began volunteering at the competitions.

One summer, Ensign asked Clagg about his plans for summer, which then turned into a summer



PHOTO BY ESTEBAN FERNANDEZ

Todd Ensign was a judge at the VEX Robotics Competition On March 9, 2026. Ensign worked under NASA until funding cuts moved his work to Fairmont State University full time.

opportunity to work with Ensign.

Ensign's tutelage helped Clagg develop important skills.

"I've been able to manage my time a lot better," Clagg said. "I'm much better at organizing stuff. I used to not be able to do public speaking at all, could not do it. Now, I'm able to talk to teams, I can make announcements. I can do interviews like this."

Ensign said a lot of career progression doesn't come down to know-how, but know-who. As such, he's leveraged the power of his long career in STEM to help connect his students to opportunities in

the STEM world.

Ensign said he actively recruits individuals who he knows are at a good point to change directions or take the next step in their careers.

"Mentorships help build relationships and those relationships are really at the heart of what helps organizations move forward," Ensign said. "Whether it be a STEM organization, academic institution or a company or industry, I think having that personal relationship is important and I think mentorship provides that."

Reach Esteban at efernandez@timeswv.com



PHOTO BY DAVID KIRK

NASA Education Resource Center Program Manager Todd Ensign speaks to students about a straw rocket in his hand that the students will have to shoot out of a tube onto a bullseye.

Renaissance man



PHOTO BY EVAN FEDOORKO

From his warehouse studio in Monongalia County, artist Jamie Lester uses hand tools to shape the clay mold that will be used to bring American pioneer David Crockett to life for the city of Nashville, Tenn.

Artist Jamie Lester's art becomes a national phenomenon

By Dee Dee Ellison

Situated between the juncture of Neville and North Heber Streets in Beckley, West Virginia stands a majestic sculpture titled “Rising Cardinals” that holds court in a space that was once a burned out building.

Erected on September 26, 2021, the piece was a collaboration between sculptor Jamie Lester and the city government.

It now defines an urban space that had been too long neglected. The cardinal, which is the West Virginia state bird, was a logical choice. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, it symbolizes rebirth and renewal, the perfect choice for a city looking for a positive change.

Lester is a prolific sculptor, painter, musician and business man. Soft spoken with a thoughtful intelligence, he epitomizes a modern renaissance man. He started his first business, Lester Sculpture, in 1997 at the age of 23 and it still operates as a sole proprietorship in West Virginia.

“I never dreamed I would become a ‘bronze sculptor’, says Lester, “but I knew I could make money from my art in a commercial field. I made portraits in clay for the monument memorial industry — bronze plaques — mostly for grave markers. I was a tomb sculptor.”

Through the years, his business grew by word of mouth with nearly 20 clients from all over the United States.

“I could have kept working for those clients forever but I wanted a bigger challenge. I created Vandalia Bronze LLC with my friend and business partner at the time (they also founded the Freefolk Brewery in Fayetteville, West Virginia in 2018). We worked as a team with employees for the first time. I started to understand how to run a larger more prolific business and utilize an artistic team.”

His handiwork is ever-present in Morgantown, a city he fell in love with after attending West Virginia University.

His statues of WVU and NBA legend Jerry West and Emmy-winning actor Don Knotts, a West Virginia native, are revered public pieces of art in North Central West Virginia.

He has also completed other creations such as a statue for the Dr. Hamilton Dog Park and K-9 Memorial on Central Avenue in Oak Hill. He also designed the New River Gorge Bridge version of the West Virginia state quarter as part of the U.S. Mint's 50 state quarter program.

Through Vandalia Bronze, Lester has completed about 30 sculptures for the Boy Scouts of America onsite at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in Fayette County. One of the most recent is a Dave Alexander “Be



PHOTO BY EVAN FEDOORKO

When complete, Jamie Lester's David Crockett statue will be erected on top of the Motlow Tunnel on the southern side of the Statehouse in Nashville, Tennessee.



PHOTO BY EVAN FEDOORKO

Multi-media artist Jamie Lester, a native of Oceana, West Virginia, works on a sculpture in his warehouse studio in Monongalia County. In 2025, he was commissioned by the city of Nashville, Tennessee to create a sculpture of David Crockett.

Prepared” piece unveiled in 2018 at the Family Adventure Camp.

Lester hails from a family of artists. His mother is Debbie Lester, a Beckley artist who has been long associated with the West Virginia Water Color Society and the Dan and Cynthia Bickey Art Gallery and who’s work can be found all over

the South. Lester agrees his family influenced and fostered his artistic expression.

“Without my mom’s influence I would probably not be an artist today. Both my parents supported me and provided me with materials, equipment, instruction and the love and foundation that made me who

I am today. Mom and I still make paintings together when we can. I’m still learning from her. She is a very strong and inspiring woman,” he said.

As well as inspiration from his family he is quick to acknowledge the state’s history and reputation for art and its artistic community.

“I love West Virginia. We are a special breed here of self-reliant, ingenious workers who are used to solving problems ourselves. It’s a small community so we mostly know and help each other.”

Lester studied sculpture and ceramics at West Virginia University where he graduated in 1997 with a

bachelor of fine arts. He participated in workshops and studied in China and Italy but says he is mostly a self-taught artist. And as an artist he also understands the importance of giving back to his community.

“I have leaned on a few mentors in my time and now find myself offering mentorship to emerging artists,” he says.

A part of that mentorship includes founding the Love Hope Art Center in Fayetteville. As well, Lester provides apprenticeship for student assistance at his alma mater.

“My current assistant is a recent MFA graduate from Ontario, Canada.”

In May 2025, the Tennessee State Capitol Commission awarded Lester with a \$1 million contract to design, create and install a 10-foot bronze statue to honor legendary Tennessean David Crockett. Described by Lester as “Guardian of the Frontier,” the sculpture will be erected on top of the Motlow Tunnel on the southern side of the Statehouse. Lester’s piece will replace a statue that was erected in

memory of Edward Ward Carmack, a newspaper editor who was killed in a gunfight with political rivals.

With over 50 large-scale art monuments across the United States, Lester’s talent does not stop at sculpture.

“It’s true that I love to work in a wide variety of mediums and sometimes it has vexed me a bit as I have often wondered if I focused on only one medium that I may find more success with it. I actually do not have a favorite medium. I do think one feeds the other and in a sense they are all the same,” he says.

Lester also says he is compelled to work in clay and certainly his clay sculptures are organic, provocative and typically steal the show.

Finally to round out his reputation as a modern day renaissance man, Lester is a talented musician.

His band, The Lords of Lester, is a seven piece folk collective whose style is defined as folk or jamgrass. He has led the band for the last eight years. Their music blends traditional folk music with

country and bluegrass to focus on organic imagery with influences from Appalachian culture. He has released two albums with the band “Live at Whitmore” and “Oracle.”

His music often has a haunting quality that spins tales of struggle, life in Appalachia and a sense of place.

“I am writing and performing solo now and I released my first solo album titled ‘Wonder Lost’ in September 2025. You can find it on all streaming services. I plan to record another album of new songs this spring. My music revolves around a country folk aesthetic for now but I have experimented with many kinds of genres and styles.

“Music is very important to me. Telling stories and evoking emotions through song is a cathartic process. There is nothing like it. Many of the themes in my art flow from music to visual art and back. I don’t see much difference between them really.”

And as for the future of his brand, Lester is optimistic and full of ideas.

“I feel very fortunate and blessed

to have the opportunities that I have at this time of my life and career. I have a wonderful wife and business partner who is a brilliant artist in her own right. We work together managing our team both locally and internationally.

“We have broadened our reach to Europe and Asia working with bronze foundries and fabricators in each location. I am collaborating with Jingdezhen (China) Ceramics University in liaison with West Virginia University and the high tech bronze foundries in that area. This year marks my eighth visit to China. I’m also diving into the world of European art as I will show two new bronze works at the Giardina di Marinaressa in conjunction with the 2026 Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy.

“I am beyond excited to be a West Virginian with an artistic and business presence in the United States, Europe and Asia. The next decade promises to be a roller coaster as we prepare to create art on a world wide scale.”



PHOTO BY EVAN FEDOORKO

Artist Jamie Lester uses a keen eye and precision to shape the David Crockett sculpture in his Monongalia County studio warehouse.

Even while recovering from injury, Morgantown's Kayli Kellogg mentors others

By Joe Smith

Morgantown High junior girls basketball player Kayli Kellogg remembers looking to the older kids around her for mentorship as a young athlete developing her craft.

Now, she's ranked the 89th-best player nationally in the Class of 2027 by Prep Girls Hoops, and is the daughter of Mark Kellogg, who serves as the current women's basketball coach at West Virginia University.

Both of those things have factored into Kayli gaining a bit more attention than the average high school hooper and now she's looking to flip the script and serve as a role model to youth athletes across the state of West Virginia.

"When I was young, I was looking up to people like I am now," Kellogg said. "Now that I'm in those shoes, my hard work and everything just paid off, and I get to be in that situation. Just looking up to people when I was young and how cool that was for me to see other people do it, now that I'm in those shoes, it's pretty cool."

As far as the attention she gets on the hardwood goes, she clearly deserves it.

She missed her junior season due to injury, but as a sophomore, she averaged 21.9 points, 4.9 rebounds, 4.6 assists, and 3.8 rebounds per game for the Mohigans as they finished the season as the Class AAAA runner-up at the WVSSAC State Basketball Tournament.

In August 2025, a law was passed in West Virginia which allows high school athletes to profit from their Name, Image, and Likeness — commonly referred to as NIL — in a similar manner to college students. Kellogg saw the development as an opportunity to use her name recognition to not only benefit herself, but demonstrate to other youth athletes in West Virginia what can be done with hard work and dedication.

With that in mind, Kellogg set out to work on landing herself an NIL deal, and eventually found herself securing a partnership with Vision Homes in Morgantown. When the deal was announced earlier this year, she became the first high school athlete in the state to land such a deal.



SF AUSTIN PHOTO

Morgantown High hoopster Kayli Kellogg, left, poses with her dad, Mark Kellogg, for a photo at Stephen F. Austin University where Kellogg previously coached.

"It caught my eye, it was something really cool I thought I could do," Kellogg said. "Just getting with Vision Homes and [Vision Homes Owner] Rocky Simmons and getting that partnership and being the first to do it is just really cool. It inspires the younger generation to look up to me and motivate them that they can do it too."

John Fowkes, who serves as Kellogg's head coach at Morgantown, was rather impressed by his star player's initiative in securing the deal, viewing it as not only a massive

move for high school athletes in West Virginia, in general, but for women's sports as a whole in the state in particular.

"I think it does a heck of a thing for women's sports in the state," Fowkes said. "I think women's sports are underrated in West Virginia. I think women's sports are underrated in Mon County."

"I think, you know, I just think it does a lot of good things for women's sports. I'm an advocate for women's sports. I think they play at a high level. They deserve just as much as

the guys, to be honest. And, you know, sometimes it's more fun to watch than the guys."

But it's not just the NIL deal where you can see Kellogg's passion for helping develop the next generation of athletes.

It's not uncommon for high school athletes to help volunteer if their school or program is running youth camps or youth leagues during the summer, and Kellogg is always a fixture around such events, which has led to some pretty fulfilling moments for her.

“We have kid camps every year so I get to coach them and have a fun little team,” Kellogg said. “And those girls still come up to me at games and stuff. It’s pretty cool — it means everything. It makes me want to work harder and keep going.”

And when she mentions kids coming up to her at games, she isn’t overexaggerating. In fact, she’s likely downplaying her popularity in the city as an athlete. Fowkes detailed some of the things he’s seen while coaching Kellogg, and it’s more in line with the treatment you’d expect for an athlete at the professional level than the high school level.

“Kids just come up to her like she’s a WNBA player,” Fowkes said. “In Morgantown, she’s just, she’s famous. She has the Kellogg last name. But even better, she’s a heck of a ball player. She’s a division one kid, man. You know these people know that when they watch her play. She’s got people asking for autographs. At her age, that’s crazy.”

And the 2025-26 season, as she dealt with recovery from a knee injury which kept her out of action for the year, she’s also transitioned into an even bigger leadership and mentorship role for her own team on the bench, as she has had to find different ways to impact the program in her absence from the court.

“I’m used to leading by example, and it kind of made me grow my voice and become a better leader off the court,” she said. “It’s been about just being that voice on the team for the leaders. For me as a leader, for our JV and our varsity, just being there in practice



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kayli Kellogg, a junior at Morgantown High where she is a basketball standout, is the first high school student-athlete in West Virginia to get a Name, Image, Likeness deal. She is shown here with Vision Homes’ CEO Rocky Simmons on the day the deal was announced in late February 2026.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Morgantown High basketball standout Kayli Kellogg, center, smiles and laughs during a game during the 2025-26 season where she was out recovering from a knee injury.

and in game, and to be in the situation to give them advice, because we’re young.”

“She’s still a phenomenal leader,” Fowkes said. “And I’ll tell a story, we were playing Greenbrier. The place is packed. It was a real close game, and it’s highly contested. Emotions were high. Our girls were all wound up, and I called a time out, and they’re just kind of freaking out.”

“And Kayli just stood up and said, ‘just settle the heck now, you guys got this.’ And then we went on a big run. I even mentioned that to a reporter down there, and she did the same thing the night before in the Parkersburg game. So she does that for us. She’s kind of an assistant coach right now, so, you know, I asked her opinion a lot.”

Her mom, Trisha Kellogg, said both her and her husband always knew Kayli was a strong-willed athlete, but even they found themselves majorly impressed at how she has responded to the injury and grown as a mentor and as a teammate throughout the ordeal.

“Kayli is very strong, not just physically, but mentally, emotionally,” Trisha Kellogg said. “And her journey with her knee has really shown us how strong she really is. You know, she doesn’t complain. She is a great teammate. She shows up for her teammates, she encourages them.”

“I think since she was younger, she’s always just had this resilience, but she’s never faced anything like this before, so we really didn’t know, honestly, until this happened, what her response would be like, and it’s blown us away at how strong she is and what a great teammate and friend she is.”

What might be most impressive through it all is her ability to handle stepping up as a leader and mentor in a completely different capacity while also keeping a smile on her face and a work ethic that overshadows most other athletes her age, as she hasn’t lost her joy nor her dedication to the craft throughout the past year.

“I’ve been in the gym with some good players, but her work ethic is great, and I think it’s caught on,” Fowkes said. “Some of that work ethic has rubbed off on some of our other kids too. Like she’s a kid that goes and shoots 800 threes a day, even when the knee, she’s still doing that. And her teammates all bought in to working hard, and I think it’s because they see what it does for her, and that it makes her a pretty darn good ball player.”

“I haven’t heard her complain once, which is crazy, and so she’s just a really good example of what it’s like to go through something really hard, but in the midst of it, find joy and encourage other people around her,” Trisha Kellogg said. “So we’re super proud of her.”

And if you ask Kellogg if, through it all, she has a message for the young athletes in the state of West Virginia, her answer is short and sweet, but perhaps it’s one that we should all listen to regardless of our age, given how far it’s taken her.

“Just never give up,” Kellogg said. “Keep going, even when it gets hard.”

Whether it's hip-hop or visual arts, Monstalung continues his father's journey of mentoring

By Joe Smith



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Monstalung also known as Eric Jordan, of Morgantown, tells others artists that they have to married to their craft.

If you know anything about the music scene in North Central West Virginia, there's a chance you've heard of Morgantown-based recording artist and producer Monstalung.

His most recent solo effort came in the form of the critically acclaimed 2024 rap album 'An Appalachian Hip-Hop Story, Pt. 1,' but Monstalung — born as Eric Jordan — has left a massive imprint on the music scene across the state of West Virginia.

"He was one of the originators," said Morgantown hip-hop recording artist Wvlf Jones, who has been making music for 13 years and credits Jordan as a mentor. "At the center of it all, there was Eric Jordan. He'd walk in a room and everyone would go, 'there's Monstalung.' Everyone is appreciative."

But it's not just hip-hop that Jordan is passionate about. He has played a part at various times in helping grow the punk, rock, R&B, and soul music scenes in the Morgantown area, as well mentoring artists of all genres — and other art forms — as they have worked to develop their craft.

It all starts with his father, Norman Jordan, who left quite the legacy upon passing away in 2015. The elder Jordan was a published poet and playwright whose poetry has been published in 38 separate works, including "Make A Joyful Sound: Poems for Children by African American Poets," "In Search of Color Everywhere: A Collection of African American Poetry" and "Wild Sweet Notes: Fifty Years of WV Poetry 1950-1999."

He is also featured in the West Virginia Literary Map, and his poem "One-Eyed Critics" was sampled by Black Star on the song "Yo Yeah." His plays have been staged in Atlanta, Cleveland, New York, and San Diego, and he has been a recipient of a United Nations Playwrights Award and was the first recipient of the Harriet Eells Performing Arts Fellowship at the Karamu House Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

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“He’s a keynote person in the community — in the Black community, and the art community.

He’s a force of nature.

He’s resilient.

He’s fluid.

He’s authentic.

I don’t see him stopping, I don’t see him ever hanging it up.”

Wulf Jones

“All of it, every last bit of it,” Jordan said. “My father was my best friend. I performed with him, I was on stage with him from age eight. I was a part of his production and plays, played drums for him while he spoke poetry. I get it from both my parents — my father was the famous one, but my mother is also a poet.”

Jordan’s father also founded the African American Arts & Heritage Academy in West Virginia in the 1980’s, a week-long summer arts camp for kids ages 12-18. He first set up shop at Camp Washington-Carver in Clifftop, deep in the heart of Fayette County. The camp originally served as the first-ever 4-H camp in the nation for African-Americans.

The academy is now named the Norman Jordan African American Arts & Heritage Academy in his honor. It has since migrated across

the state multiple times, moving to Martinsburg, and then Morgantown, and now being based at West Virginia State University and now that his father is gone, Eric Jordan helps run things.

“I was a student at that camp, I was a counselor at that camp, I was instructor at that camp, and now I’m the administrator of the camp, I run it with my mother,” Jordan said.

“The classes are based on the availability of the instructors. Back then I was teaching hip-hop. Today, they pick a discipline, whether it’s dance, theatre, visual arts, creative writing, or songwriting. They work with their instructor for the week, and they do a showcase at the end of the week.”

That camp is where Jones first was exposed to Jordan, who was an instructor at the time. Jones was a visual artist primarily, but attended

the camp after learning about it from a cousin.

“So when I originally went I was there for visual arts. But when I went to the audio visual program, [Eric] and his brother were running it,” Jones said. “That’s when I first realized I like to write music. But I was nervous, I was skittish.”

But Jordan and his brother, who is known by the stage name 6’6 240 and became a West Virginia celebrity for his song “Gold N Blue” that served as an unofficial theme song for WVU football in the 2000s, weren’t just teaching hip-hop, they were living it.

Jordan, who was born in Cleveland but moved back to his father’s home state of West Virginia in 1977 as a child and graduated from Morgantown High in 1985, started making music in 1988. After graduating college in 1990, he

bounced between Washington, D.C., Atlanta, New York City and Chicago pursuing a rap career.

“During that time I worked with Wu-Tang, I was with Biggie Smalls and Craig Mack just for a weekend, I worked with Harlem World under Ma\$e’s label from Bad Boys, Kanye West — just being in rooms, getting the experience,” Jordan said.

But his brother was still living in Morgantown and making music of his own, and circa 1999, his brother was sending him demos that made him decide it was time for a return to the Mountain State.

“When I heard the demos I knew that’s where I needed to be, I was ready to come home,” he said.

That began his period of prevalence in the West Virginia music scene that has never really waned since. At first, he said, his goal was to start a record label. In the long run, it blossomed into something larger, but ultimately more rewarding. Today, the entity is known as Soundvizion Media.

“I was trying to do a record label, but in hindsight, our strength really was production and artist development,” he said. “And you just don’t know those things sometimes until you do it. Even though we had the hustle to go out and do consignment with local radio stations and eventually got a deal with FYE, our strength was finding and developing local artists and getting in a position to put out music.”

But to make things like the viral hit “Gold N Blue” happen, and to grow the brands and the music scene in Morgantown — where hip-hop doesn’t get as much love or as many opportunities — it took a lot of hard work.

“It was difficult,” Jordan said. “We had to use unconventional methods. We did mash-up shows, doing different genres on one bill, and at the time they were really well received. We had to do shows at biker bars. We had to do shows at VFWs.”

“We used to post up on High Street in Morgantown and sell our music out of the trunk. All the kids from frat row would come down to the clubs and they would buy our music and we’d freestyle for them, and they started booking us for shows.”

And then, he started looking at the bigger picture, and how he could connect other local hip-hop scenes in West Virginia to one another and help develop more opportunities and larger followings for artists all across the state. And once again, he put his feet on the ground and got to work.

“I had to actually go out and talk to hip-hop crews in Charleston and Beckley and Huntington, and said



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Eric Jordan aka Monstalung is passionate about helping grow the punk, rock, R&B, and soul music scenes in the Morgantown area, as well mentoring artists of all genres — and other art forms — as they have worked to develop their craft.

let’s strategically form a circuit of our own,” he said “You come do shows here and we’ll come do shows down there. I was taking a lot of what I had learned from my time in Atlanta and was trying to apply it here.”

“I looked at the state as one big neighborhood. I knew I had to get buy-in from Charleston hip-hop crews and the Huntington hip-hop crews.”

This was another point in time where Jones re-encountered Jordan, and where Jordan began to serve as a mentor and role model for Jones like he has countless other artists throughout the years.

“Around 2014, my first show was ‘You Got Beats, We Got Bars,’” Jones said. “It was this cypher thing he used to do, it was an open-mic invite type of thing. There would be producers, there would be engineers, there would be recording artists.”

“This is where Eric Jordan not only created room for the local hip-hop community but also served as the foundational piece and the glue for the longest time. It was those types of events that really built the community during my time as a performing artist.”

But the bond between the two also became a bit more personal than music, and Jones credits Jordan with a lot of his growth not just as an artist, but as a person.

“The full-fledged mentor-mentee dynamic began in 2013-2014,” Jones said. “It ended up being a father-figure relationship after a while. Both personally and creatively, there’s been a lot of mentorship and trust.”

And these days, while Jordan has taken a step back from promoting to focus more inwardly on his next steps as an artist himself, he is always still willing to help push collaboration in the hip-hop community and between genres in the Morgantown scene as well as in the West Virginia scene as a whole. And he’s always willing to offer advice and guidance to new artists looking to unlock their potential and pursue art or music as a career.

“Whether it’s doing my art camp or doing events, I always encourage collaboration with one another and allow this to be a source and an outlet,” Jordan said. “I’ve always tried to create outlets. And I’ve always wanted to help young artists

that are trying to work on their craft and get their craft heard.”

“I don’t force it, but if kids come to me, I’m always here for that. I’m always a champion of the arts. That’s me and my family, we’ve always been like that. Right now, I’m more focused on my art, but I will always take time to talk to young and upcoming artists that need guidance.”

And his willingness to open himself up in that way has left a lasting impact on the West Virginia music scene and helped countless artists tap into a side of themselves for which they will forever be grateful.

“As a teenager, I was very timid, very soft spoken,” Jones said. “Music as a whole has been the thing that has reinforced my confidence and my self awareness. To sit with yourself and decorate a page with your thoughts, it gives you a liberation. That was my first time standing in front of people performing music, practicing techniques, understanding that the stage is your friend and it isn’t so intimidating.”

“An artist can change the world,” Jordan said. “They need to know the importance of their art and what it can do and who it might impact. That’s our gift that we were given. And on a smaller scale, someone finding their passion is a big thing. There are more people out here who don’t know their passion than those who do. It’s important to me, and I feel like I have to help those that are on the same journey.”

And in the long run, Jordan has likely achieved more than he could ever hope on that front. He’s influenced and inspired numerous artists, and you’re unlikely to run into anyone seriously involved with the Morgantown music scene or the West Virginia hip-hop scene and not know about Monstalung.

And while you might not hear Jordan admit it — in ways he may not even realize — but what he’s done for his communities in the state will leave a legacy that can be hard for even though close to him to put into words.

“I would say he’s a keynote person in the community — in the Black community, and the art community,” Jones said. “He’s a force of nature. He’s resilient, he’s fluid, he’s authentic, and he’s ongoing. I don’t see him stopping, I don’t see him ever hanging it up.”

“He’s genuinely the type of person that he’ll always find a new direction because he’s genuinely inspired by it. I was just talking to him the other day and he told me you need to be married to your craft. And he’s a person I feel like is genuinely married to his craft.”



W.VA. SECRETARY OF STATE OFFICE

From left, Raleigh County Clerk of Court Scott Van Meter, W.Va. Secretary of State Kris Warner and Reese Childers, winner of the first-ever “I Voted!” Sticker Contest held by Warner’s office. Van Meter and Childers are holding rolls of “I Voted!” stickers made with her original artwork.

West Virginia teen wants to share art and the state’s beauty with others

By Eric Cravey

It’s not often that a middle schooler’s artwork ends up on thousands of pieces of clothing, but that is the new reality for Reese Childers, of Beaver.

The Shady Spring Middle School eighth grader is the winner of the West Virginia Secretary of State’s first-ever “I Voted!” Sticker Contest. Reese’s work was selected from art

submitted by more than 1,100 eighth grade students from 42 West Virginia counties. The 42 first-place winners were separated into four regional contests. On Feb. 17, Secretary of State Kris Warner named Childers one of four Regional Winners who would then also serve as finalists for the statewide award.

Reese learned about the contest in

her West Virginia Studies class and, having been an accomplished artist whose award-winning work was displayed at Tamarack in 2025, she knew immediately what she wanted to draw for her contest entry.

“Typically when I set my mind to something, my brain just rushes with, like images or ideas of what I usually want to do, and it’s hard for

me to change from that,” she said. “So, I knew right there on the spot what I was going to put in the sticker drawing. And I rushed home, and I started doodling and sketching it out.”

Childers has been exposed to art and creative pursuits since she was born as her mother, Crista Childers, teaches art at Shady Spring

Elementary. She was also Reese's fifth grade art teacher.

"She just has such a natural gift for it. She's very talented, and it's just something she's always doing," Crista Childers said. "And she's always like, doodling on her hand, doodling in her binder, drawing in a sketchbook. You know, just everything is just like, she said, in pictures to her."

Contestants were limited to using three colors, but Reese chose to use black. The sticker, which will be given to voters statewide in the May Primary, could be placed on lapels all over West Virginia. After all, she used some of the Mountain State's most precious icons to promote the civic duty of voting.

"Well, my sticker showcases all of the state symbols for West Virginia, like the black bear, the monarch butterfly, the state outline, New River Gorge Bridge, the red Cardinal, the Rhododendron and the honey bee," Reese said. "So really, it's just, it's kind of some of them have bright, vibrant colors, but a lot of them also have lots of black in them."

Even though Reese's West Virginia Studies class included a lesson on civics and why it is important to vote in a democratic society, she has had similar lessons in such duties previously. Her grandfather Sam Suttle, of Beckley, has served for years as an election poll worker. When he found out she was a finalist for the contest, he became her biggest cheerleader.

"I put it on Facebook. I told everyone I knew," Suttle said. "I worked in the public for years, and I knew a lot of people, so anyone I saw, I would show the artwork and say, 'She's in this contest. And these are 'I Voted!' stickers. So if you would look for I'd appreciate it.'"

From Feb. 17 until 4:30 p.m. on Feb. 27, the general public was allowed to vote online for their

favorite of the four designs. Warner's office said 15,947 votes came in during the 10-day period.

As the winner of the contest, Reese took home a plaque featuring her artwork, while Raleigh

County Clerk Scott Van Meter took home 11,000 stickers featuring Reese's design.

Warner presented Reese the award on March 11 after his office hosted a forum dubbed "Civic Learning for

"Judging by my sticker, it may change people's minds, to maybe get out more and do more hikes and see the natural beauties we have out here."

Reese Childers



WVA. SECRETARY OF STATE OFFICE

Reese Childers, winner of the first-ever "I Voted!" Sticker Contest held by Warner's office, applies the first sticker on her grandfather's suitcoat lapel. Her design serves as a backdrop during the March 11 event. Her grandfather, Sam Suttle, of Beckley, is an election poll worker.



W.VA. SECRETARY OF STATE OFFICE

Shady Spring Middle School eighth grader Reese Childers, winner of the first-ever “I Voted!” Sticker Contest held by Warner’s office, speaks from the podium March 11 as W.Va. Secretary of State Kris Warner looks on.

a Stronger West Virginia.” The forum and the press conference were held in the Chambers of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals at the State Capitol.

During the ceremony, Reese became the first person to use one of the stickers she designed as she placed it on her grandfather’s lapel.

“Oh, that was a highlight for me

that day. I mean, to think that I got the very first sticker that was to go on people’s lapels after they voted, a symbol that, you know, saying, ‘I voted in a West Virginia election,’” Suttle said. “I mean, it was very flattering.”

Suttle characterized Raleigh County voters as committed and said the County Clerk’s Voter

Registration staff takes a lot of pride in increasing the number of voters each year.

“I mean, they’re very, very excited about the fact that the winner of this contest is from Raleigh County,” Suttle said. “And I think the people that vote in Raleigh County will be excited to know that they’re wearing a sticker that was created by

someone from this area.”

And while art and civic duty are not often paired together, Reese hopes her sticker design will make people think differently.

“And, judging by my sticker, it may change people’s minds, to maybe get out more and do more hikes and see the natural beauties we have out here,” she said.

David Retton shies away from taking on the moniker of mentor

By Joe Smith



PHOTO BY JOE SMITH

Although Fairmont Senior High boys basketball coach David Retton, shown here in center, has a difficult time characterizing his role as a mentor, his former players don't hesitate to lift him up for his mentorship not only about basketball, but life as well.

Fairmont Senior High head boys basketball head coach David Retton has led the program for 29 years, but he couldn't tell you exactly what kind of mentor he is.

He took over as head coach for the Polar Bears in 1997, the son of a local legend and the winningest college basketball coach of all time in Joe Retton. Since then, David has forged his own legacy, becoming one of the most acclaimed high school basketball coaches in the state with several state titles to his name.

But to this day, Retton doesn't have much of an opinion on himself as a role model. He just knows that he got into both coaching and teaching for a fairly simple reason — he enjoys helping children.

"Look, I like helping kids," Retton said. "You know, you're trying to help kids. You're trying to help them grow and understand. As a coach you don't always get it right but you work at it, our kids work at it, and I think we have a good partnership."

But if you ask some of the athletes that have played for Retton, they can tell you all about who he is as a role model and a mentor, and what they've meant for his career.

"Coach Retton is great," said Julz Butler, who was a senior this past season at Fairmont Senior. "I feel like he's taught me a lot, not only in basketball but a lot of life values. He teaches a lot basketball wise, but not only does it apply to you on the court, but it teaches you a lot that's going to apply to you later on in life.

"I've worked harder in life and I've learned and valued things more playing with Coach Retton. I feel like he's a great coach."

"With Retton, he knows what he's talking about," said Zyon Dobbs, who played for Retton from 2015-2019 at Fairmont Senior before playing collegiately at James Madison and Fairmont State. "Sometimes you kind of question what people have going on. With him, you know he brings winning to the table. So he's the type of guy where you want to keep picking his brain."

Retton decided he had a passion for teaching and helping kids as a young man though he didn't decide he wanted to be a coach or a teacher at first. But sometimes, things are just meant to happen, and he eventually doubled back to his passion for molding youth. It's a decision he's glad he made.

“Probably when I was really young, I had an inkling,” he said. “I always loved the game, loved to compete, and loved winning. I started on a different track, a different path, but then came back to teaching and coaching and I have never looked back and regretted it.”

But it’s not just his passion for coaching kids that helped propel him to this point in his career, where he has sent multiple players to the collegiate and even professional level of the sport and can claim multiple state championships. He also had to have his own leaders and role models along the way. The big one, of course, was his father Joe Retton, but there are also countless figures from his stops in Ohio as well as the Fairmont community who he credits.

“Whatever I do, I give my dad credit,” Retton said. “He was a huge impact on my coaching and there have also been a lot of guys when I was in Steubenville, Ohio that were big mentors to me. And guys when I came back to Fairmont Senior, guys like Mark Delligatti, J.L. Abbott, Sonny Bartic, and the list goes on and on. I’ve been



PHOTO BY NICK HENTHORN

Fairmont Senior’s David Retton celebrates the Polar Bears’ state tournament win against Shady Spring in March 2023.

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PHOTO BY NICK HENTHORN

Fairmont Senior head coach David Retton speaks to the crowd at the Fairmont Field House in March 2023 before a replay of the Polar Bears' championship game plays.

very fortunate to have a lot of mentors that have meant a lot to me and that I've learned a lot from."

But now, he's become a role model and mentor in his own right, and an absolutely legendary figure in the community and the state of West Virginia as a whole. And his impact has spilled over to the future generations he has led, developing incredible talents on the hardwood.

"Coach Retton has been great," said Darrell Claybrook, who was a senior for the Polar Bears this past season. "Playing hard, giving me the confidence to be more of a dog type of player, Coach Retton brings it all out of me. I wouldn't be the player I am without him. It's great playing with Coach."

"With him coming in as a freshman, you never know what to expect," Dobbs said. "But he shows that he loves guys who work hard. He's one guy who really got me ready for college. How he coached, how he was in practice, it just carried over to college level. He knows what he's doing and he shows."

And for players like Dobbs, who is currently helping with the program at Fairmont State and considering pursuing potential paths in coaching, it's easy to see how Retton's impact will continue to influence youth long after he's done coaching at Fairmont Senior. And why he even influences those people in their coaching style as well.

"In a way, it's because his record shows

it," said Dobbs. "He doesn't lose too much, and as a coach coming up, that's something you want to happen with your teams. It's good to have someone like that in your program."

When Retton decides to wind down his coaching and teaching careers and is no longer in that role as a mentor to the youth is undetermined, and it's something that only he truly knows. And he doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about what his legacy or impact will be.

"I think that's a great question," Retton said during the end of the 2025-26 season. "To me, I'm a very tomorrow matters type of person. A year from now, five years from now, that's going to take care of itself. Right now, I'm really focused on our practice tomorrow and really getting our guys ready to go. I'm just anxious to get in the gym tomorrow and work."

But in a similar way to how he doesn't know what type of mentor or role model he is but others do, those who have played for him know exactly what they've taken away from Retton and what his legacy is.

"I would say he's well-respected, and that's all you could ask for someone that is putting their time in day in and day out. He doesn't have to do that. But he does. It's amazing to see," Dobbs said.

"It's huge," Butler said. "Everyone loves Coach Retton. He has a huge impact and he's greatly respected around the community and around the state."

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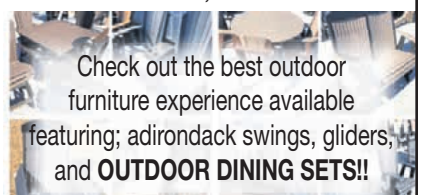
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Positive adult role models benefit kids

By Metro Creative



PHOTO BY METRO CREATIVE

Having the right role models in a child's life influencing them through these formative years can set a foundation for success.

Children begin learning about life early on from the people who surround them. From the earliest age, youngsters mimic their parents and look to caregivers to guide their development and demonstrate proper behavior. According to Words Alive, an organization inspiring a commitment to reading

for life success, 90 percent of a child's brain develops by age five. During these first five years, abilities such as motivation, problem solving, communication, and self-regulation are formed. Having the right role models in a child's life influencing them through these formative years can set a foundation for success.

What is a role model?

A role model is a person whose behaviors are emulated by others, according to Connections Academy® by Pearson. When a child has a positive role model, there is a greater likelihood the youngster will engage in constructive behavior that mirrors the person he or she looks up to.

Why are positive role models important?

Adult-child interactions can help shape an individual. The Center of the Developing Child at Harvard University noted that if an adult's responses toward a child are inappropriate or unreliable, that child's brain architecture may be disrupted and their emotional health impaired. The opposite is true when children have positive influences in their lives who respond properly to a child's behavior.

Choosing safe adults

It is vital to surround children with safe adults who can be positive role models. According to Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics by RAINN, 93 percent of juvenile sexual abuse cases knew the perpetrator, and 34 percent were family members. Safe adults are those who model healthy behaviors and actions to set an example for the child. Although a child's uncle may be a beloved family member, that person may not necessarily be the best to be alone and interact with a child frequently.

What are good role model behaviors?

The following are some key characteristics of a positive role model.

- Lives a healthy lifestyle that focuses on physical and mental well-being. This is a person who eats healthy meals, lives an active lifestyle and makes good health choices like not smoking or drinking alcohol to excess.
- Treats others with respect and practices self-awareness about behaviors. When the role model makes a mistake, he or she owns that mistake and tries to remedy it.
- Establishes goals and shows a commitment to values. A good role model is passionate about what they do, has a strong work ethic, and showcases confidence.
- Tries to keep a positive attitude and is accepting and supportive of others.
- A positive role model also may think about the kinds of people they looked up to when they were younger and the traits those people exhibited. Then those similar traits can be implemented when interacting with children and adults.

Positive role models can impact children's development and put them on the path to becoming well-adjusted, positive and dedicated members of society.

At the Table

Won't you be my neighbor?

By Rose Hollander



ROSE
HOLLANDER

I loved Mr. Rogers. I did not know about him as a child, but as a parent, I watched with my children in awe of how he conducted himself and the messages he conveyed. When a documentary about his life came out in 2018, I was even more inspired. In the documentary, he proclaimed that “love is at the root of everything: all learning, all relationships ... love, or the lack of it ...”

In the first episode of “Mr. Rogers Neighborhood,” King Friday the 13th establishes a border guard to protect against change. In his view, change is bad. He even builds a wall with chicken wire. The people in the kingdom don’t like living with the wall. They float balloons with messages of peace and love over the wall that changes the King’s mind. If only it were that simple.

Fred Rogers died in 2003. I wonder how he would manage explaining the world today. Would it be with the same calm, friendly and caring manner? I think so. These traits were a part of who he was and what he believed in. Throughout his long career, he saw children respond to his attentiveness and kindness, hoping they would grow up remembering

someone cared and accepted them for who they were. He created “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood” because a neighborhood is where people felt safe.

How do we define “neighbors?” Those who live next door or near your home? Of course. But I would add strangers become neighbors when we engage with them. After all, neighbors can be defined more broadly, “... (as) any person in need of one’s help or kindness.” (from Oxford Languages.)

I have hope for the world when I see people responding with kindness to neighbors in need. Giving food is a time-honored practice of showing you care. We give meals to those experiencing loss: the death of a loved one, a house fire, to someone suffering from an illness, or who has lost their job. We also share meals in celebration: anniversaries, birthdays, graduations, homecomings, holidays. We welcome new neighbors with food and throw a party to say goodbye when they

move away.

People also give to those they don’t know. They donate to local food banks and send money for food to the Red Cross during disasters, and to aid organizations in war-torn areas. There are also less traditional ways to give.

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of ICE. Last spring, I saw water jugs left on trails near the Mexico border in Arizona for those who were traveling through the desert mountains. I learned about a group of community members assisting people waiting for permission to cross the border, offering them food and clothing. This year, they are also helping detainees who were returned to Mexico.

How do we become good

neighbors? It is easy to express our love, kindness, and concern through food. It is something we all need, something we can easily share and something we take for granted until an unforeseen event makes food hard to obtain. The term “food insecurity” strikes me hard. I know it is real for more people, our neighbors, in our northern Michigan community than I like to imagine. Saddened by the cutting of funding for school food programs and SNAP benefits, I write my government representatives, asking them to reinstate funding. In addition, when we learn about someone in need whom we can help directly, we do.

Introduce yourself to your neighbors. A good conversation opener? Ask for a story of a food from their childhood and watch them light up, especially if their family roots are elsewhere. You’ve given them a gift by inviting them to share a connection to their homeland and their ancestry, especially if they are from a different region of the United States or from another part of the world. Cooking special dishes can be solace when times are hard, and a joy when times are good. See if they would share the recipe.

Let your neighbors know they can come to you if they need help. Invite them to tell their story and tell them your story as well. Share a meal. Remember that food can be an expression of love, and that love is at the root of everything.

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Rose Hollander

Italian White Beans

Serves 8-10, recipe can be halved

I live with my own Mr. Rogers. My husband Eric gives his attention to children, engages with strangers who walk away feeling like friends, and makes a point to know our neighbors. They call him when they need help, and he is equally good at

asking when he needs help. The world is a better place because of him.

The Italians seem to inhabit the connection of love and food. For my Mr. Rogers, I made the Italian bean dish with a side of grilled sausage. He was happy.

Ingredients

1 lb. dried cannellini beans
2 oz. pancetta (or thick sliced bacon), diced
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
1 medium carrot, peeled and chopped
1 rib celery, chopped
2 C. cherry tomatoes

1 garlic clove, peeled and chopped
1 sprig rosemary, leaves chopped (about 1 T.)
1 bay leaf
salt and ground black pepper
olive oil
1 fresh garlic sausage/person (or any sausage you like) optional

Directions

Rinse beans and put beans and 8 cups water into a soup pot. Bring to boil, then turn off heat and let sit 30 minutes to one hour. Add pancetta, onion, carrot, celery, tomatoes, garlic, rosemary, and bay leaf to the beans and water. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer until beans are tender, about 2-2

½ hours, checking periodically and adding water if needed (although you do want beans in a slightly thickened liquid when done.) Season to taste with salt and pepper. Discard bay leaf.

Split open the sausage like a book and grill or cook in a heavy skillet. Serve beans with some cooking liquid, drizzled with a little olive oil and the sausage on top.



SPECIAL TO THE RECORD-EAGLE/ROSE HOLLANDER

Italian White Beans — the Italians seem to inhabit the connection of love and food.



SPECIAL TO THE RECORD-EAGLE/LESLIE ETIENNE

There are many variations to a Mustard Vinaigrette. I use a mortar and pestle to make dressings, which work great for mashing!

Basic Mustard Vinaigrette

Makes about ½ cup

My Monday morning friend group asked for a tutorial on making vinaigrettes. I shared a recipe for mustard vinaigrette I learned from a very stylish

neighbor when I was a young mom living in Northern California. I loved her confidence as she simply threw it together without measuring.

Ingredients

1 garlic clove, chopped (about 1 t.)
Pinch of salt, plus more to taste
1 T. Dijon mustard

2 T. red or white wine vinegar
Pinch sugar or 1 t. honey
1/3 C. (more or less) good quality olive oil
Fresh ground pepper

Directions

Mash the garlic with the salt using a fork (I use a mortar and pestle to make dressings, which work great for mashing!) Add the mustard, then the vinegar and your choice of sugar or honey, whisk again.

Add oil in a steady stream, whisking as you go. When you have added about 2/3 of the oil, stop and taste by dipping a lettuce leaf. If too acidic, add more oil. If too oily for your taste, add a splash of water. Add some ground pepper.

Correct the seasonings (sugar, salt, pepper) to taste. Can be stored up to a week in a jar with a tight lid.

VARIATIONS: Change up the acids! LEMON: I like a combination of fresh lemon juice and vinegar in my mustard vinaigrette, or for a pure lemon

vinaigrette, I place lettuce in a bowl, and throw some salt and pepper over the leaves, then squeeze a lemon (half is good for salad for four people,) toss, then drizzle a little olive oil and toss again. LIME: 1 clove crushed garlic, 1 T. fresh lime juice (or use a combination of lime juice and vinegar,) ½ t. ground cumin, and ¼ c. olive oil or avocado oil, salt and pepper make a great dressing. ORANGE: Crush 1 clove garlic, salt and ¼ teaspoon whole coriander seeds (or use ½ t. ground coriander) in a bowl, add 2 T. fresh orange juice and 1 T. white wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar before adding olive oil (about 1/3 c.). Add dried or chopped oregano and crushed red pepper flakes to make it spicy-sweet. Good on a spinach salad or over fish.



SPECIAL TO THE RECORD-EAGLE/LESLIE ETIENNE

Apple Cake is delicious and simple but read through the recipe first as there are two steps, and butter, sugar and eggs are divided between those steps.

Apple Cake

Serves 8

My heritage is German and this dessert is German “adjacent” with its cake base creating a tart-like cake with fruit on top. Delicious and

simple but read through the recipe first as there are two steps, and butter, sugar and eggs are divided between those steps.

Ingredients

11 T. unsalted butter, chilled and cubed (divided)
1 C. all-purpose flour
1 1/3 C. sugar (divided)
1 t. baking powder

1/2 t. salt
1 t. vanilla
3 eggs (divided)
3 large tart apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced
1 t. cinnamon

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9-inch springform pan.

In a food processor, pulse 5 tablespoons butter, flour, 1 cup sugar, baking powder and salt into pea size pieces. Add vanilla and 1 egg and pulse until a sticky dough forms. Place dough into prepared pan and press dough evenly on the bottom and halfway up the sides. Arrange apple slices in a tight even circular pattern (could be two layers) over the top of the dough, pressing slices slightly into the dough. Bake until apples are tender and dough is almost cooked through, about 45 minutes. While dough

is baking, melt remaining 6 tablespoons butter, and whisk in remaining 1/3 cup sugar and 2 eggs plus cinnamon. Remove cake from oven and pour butter mixture evenly over the apples. Return to oven and bake 15-20 minutes more. Transfer to a wire rack until cool before removing from pan.

— Adapted from recipe by Molly Wizenberg

Rose Hollander has been a caterer, Idyll Farms chef and cooking instructor who helped initiate the kitchen classroom at the Children’s House. She completed her chef certification at the Ballymaloe Cookery School in Ireland.



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RICK K. Road Trip and
Viva Las Elvis: Tribute Show

Amoricans-
The Black Crowes Tribute
Matt Mullins & The Bringdowns **JUNE 6**

JUNE 13 **Airshow & BareFuzz**

Crazy Train-
America's Ozzy Tribute **JUNE 27**

JULY 4  **Nightrain - The Guns & Roses Tribute Experience**
Byron Cooper & Motorcycle Drive-By

JULY 11 **Everyday Everybody**
The PennSoulvianians, HVH: The Heavy Hitters
& Appalachian Soul Man - Aristotle Jones

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AUG 8 **In The End -**
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Disciple of The Garden-
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