

# parentlink

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## Generations of Families Committed to Transfer Program

### Benefits Abound, Then and Now

by Peggy Magee

For many current voluntary transfer students, there is a lot of family history associated with their county school districts. Parents, uncles, older cousins have pioneered the way before them, setting a positive precedent for the younger relatives. And while each story is unique, the common thread, overwhelmingly, is how beneficial the experience was for those earlier participants and for the family members who now follow in their footsteps.

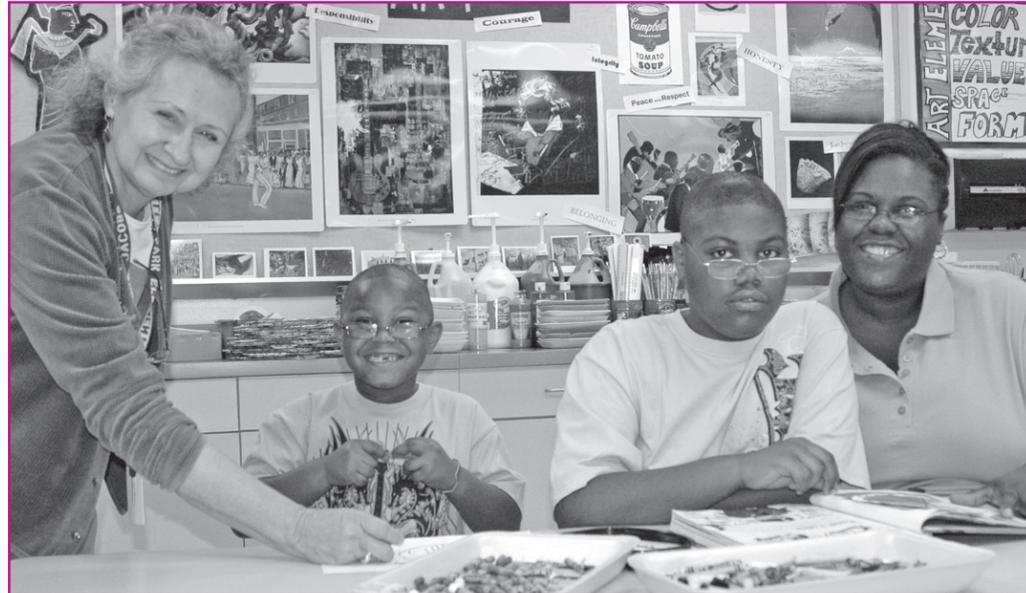
**Tracy Williams Peoples**, who resides downtown, describes her family's affiliation with the Parkway district as "generations of family successes." She and her brother were both impacted in a good way by their Parkway high schools, she says, and now Tracy's oldest daughter, in her 10th year in the Parkway district, "just loves it."

Amber, a freshman at Parkway South, holds the same fondness and respect for her principal, Gary Mazzola, that her mom felt for him when she attended Parkway

North and he was a teacher there. "Mr. Mazzola encouraged and empowered students each and every day," recalls Tracy, a 1995 graduate of Parkway North. Tracy's brother, Quincy Williams, vouches for Mazzola's inspiration. "He pushed me to be the best person I could be – on and off the court." Now at Missouri Baptist College on a basketball scholarship, Quincy will graduate this year with a degree in engineering.

The best part of the transfer program, according to Tracy, is the exposure it provides. "It allows students to experience new things, meet new people and opens their eyes to all the possibilities for their future," she says, adding that most inner city youth are not exposed to enough, she believes. Her dream is to use the degree in business that she is currently pursuing at St. Louis University to operate her own community center.

**Angela Hasson**, of midtown St. Louis, conveys feelings of nostalgia and pride when she talks about her family's roots in the Valley Park district. "We have a lot of history in Valley Park," she notes, naming



The positive experiences of past VICC students, such as Angela Hasson, right, have prompted them to enroll their children in the program. Here, Hasson, a 1990 graduate of Valley Park High School, joins her sons, Angelo, kindergarten, and Clarence, fifth grade, in Lois Jacob's classroom at their school, Valley Park Elementary. About the Valley Park district, Angela says, "They have great teachers and administrators who really care about the students." Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

all the family members who have attended: herself – a 1990 graduate, her brother, four nieces and nephews and now her two children, enrolled at the elementary school.

Angela points out that, physically, much has changed in the district since when she was there 20 years ago. But one important thing has stayed the same, she observes: the quality of the staff. "They have great teachers and administrators who really

care about the students." She cites one such teacher, Mike Menley, her children's P.E. instructor. Angela and Mike attended Valley Park High together and now see each other at parent events. "They are wonderful students," Mike says about Angela's children – Angelo, in kindergarten, and Clarence, fifth grade. "They remind me of Angela because they have great smiles and are happy kids."

**Lisa Fairbanks Mack**, a 1989 graduate of Ladue High, sums up her reasons for attending school in the county and now having her two children in the Clayton district: "I think that venturing outside our neighborhood gives us more opportunities for success."

Lisa, of west St. Louis, points to the variety of courses she had in Ladue, including Latin, pottery and accounting, the latter which "steered me toward my career interest." She studied accounting at the college level, first at UMSL and then through University of Phoenix on-line courses while working full-time in mid-management at AT&T. Her plans are to go back to school for a master's degree in accounting or business.

Even some of the challenges Lisa faced while attending school in the county during the infancy stages of the desegregation program are now viewed by her as positive, in retrospect. "The feeling of separateness that I felt at times and learning how to deal with it was good preparation for life," she concedes. Currently, her children – middle schoolers Quincy and Kennedy – don't feel a chasm between the races. "My son especially has a diverse circle of close friends."

In addition to providing her children with an accepting school environment, Lisa is pleased with Clayton's many options for extracurricular involvement and, most of all, its high level of academics. "My children will be well prepared for college," she notes.

For **Maya Washington Pierce**, a schoolmate of Lisa's who remains close friends with her, the appeal of Ladue High was that, "It had everything I wanted all together – sports, academics, even courses in home economics." Now a north St. Louis parent, she is pleased with the education her daughter Jade receives in the Clayton district and is looking forward to next fall when daughter Brooklyn enters kindergarten there. Maya is especially impressed with the great communication between school and home.

The former Maritz travel director, who now serves as community development manager for the Girl Scouts of Eastern Missouri, credits Ladue with helping her land at Alabama A & M where she earned a degree in telecommunications. "Going to Ladue gave me a lot of confidence and groomed me to be successful outside the familiarity of my hometown." About

## Despite Challenges, Rockwood Grad Thanks Mom For Enrolling Her Heeding Teachers' Advice, She Created a Plan

by Peggy Magee



After 23 years in the hotel industry, Adrienne Lathan, a 1988 graduate of Lafayette High, is now a general manager in training for Lodging Hospitality Management, owner of several Hilton and Sheraton hotels. When her unplanned pregnancy at age 17 wreaked havoc with her plans for higher education, she made a decision to get ahead by working her way up in a company. She said that the teachers in Rockwood had always reminded students that they were in charge of their own destiny. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Over the years, voluntary transfer students have shared many of the same experiences: adjusting to a new environment in their county schools, rising early in the mornings to take on the long days that followed, and trusting that these and other commitments would be worth it in the end.

No one knows those range of emotions better than Adrienne Lewis Lathan, whose education in the Rockwood district was interrupted by an unplanned pregnancy at the age of 17. But even before then, Adrienne's years in the far west county district were "stressful," she admits. The year was 1983 and, "We were one of the first families from the city to go out to Rockwood," she says about herself and her two brothers. She and brother Russell entered Crestview Middle School and brother Benjamin started at Pond Elementary School. "We didn't know what to expect; there was racial tension. It was difficult."

The situation did improve, though. She realized that the level of academics she was receiving was "top of the line" and that reassured her. Also, at Lafayette High School she found her niche in the Air Force ROTC. About performing on its drill team, she says, "We got to wear a uniform and travel. I loved it."

But her routine changed dramatically when she became pregnant. "I knew I had to finish high school. I still had my goals, but now I had a different focus. I had to figure it all out." With the support of her mother and grandma, she did. While pregnant, she stayed focused on her school work and after delivering her baby, Keona Jefferson, she returned to school. "I walked her to the babysitter before catching my bus. When I returned home, I picked her up." Adrienne says she was

See *Despite Challenges* on reverse side.

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See *Generations* on reverse side.

# Lafayette Student Shines in Summer Pharmacy Program

## Determination and Hard Work Key to Her Success

by Peggy Magee



Last summer, Jaelynn Hopgood, a transfer student from Rockwood's Lafayette High School, was one of the top students in her class of 20 incoming juniors at the selective BESt Pharmacy Institute. The six-week program, sponsored by Express Scripts, Barnes-Jewish Hospital and St. Louis College of Pharmacy, introduces minority students from St. Louis area high schools (sophomores, juniors and seniors) to the pharmacy profession. The goal is to increase diversity in the pharmacy profession and develop future leaders in the community.

Jaelynn says her success in the program is the result of the academic preparation she has received in Rockwood. She admits that initially "it was a struggle" for her to keep up when she transferred to the district in the seventh grade. The change in routine and what was required of her was such that, "I had to use all my resources," she reports, referring to the determination and motivation she mustered from within to be successful. She knuckled down, stayed focused and worked hard.

It paid off. By eighth grade, she was taking Algebra (not pre-Algebra) and enrolled in Honors History and Honors Physical Science. In high school, nearly all of her classes have been honors level or advanced placement. She earns A's and B's.

Jaelynn's interest in the medical field prompted her to apply for BESt, which requires two letters of recommendation from teachers, an essay and a personal interview. Last summer, of the 150 applications received, 40 incoming

Jaelynn Hopgood studies brain anatomy, with the help of teacher Chris Lofgren, in a lab activity of the Human Anatomy course she is taking at Rockwood's Lafayette High School. The science and math curriculum at Lafayette, along with her extracurricular involvement, prepared Jaelynn to be a top student in her class at the BESt Summer Pharmacy Institute.

Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

sophomores and juniors were selected. "It was a very valuable experience and I enjoyed it a lot," she says about the program, which combines academics, exposure and professional development. Academics focus on improving mathematics, science, language arts and ACT/SAT skills. Students get exposure to the pharmacy profession through pharmacy lectures and site visits. They receive a \$1400 stipend, the majority of which Jaelynn banked for college.

Another program at Lafayette that helped her excel in BESt, Jaelynn says, is the Outdoor Skills Education Program (OSEP) in which leadership, communication and decision-making skills are honed through hiking and camping activities. "The program prepares us to take on the challenges of the real world by making us step out of our comfort zone," she says. The qualities she demonstrated in her BESt classes – "a willingness to step forward, talk more freely and offer comments" were shaped as a result of her participation in OSEP, she points out.

Jaelynn hopes to return to BESt next summer, feeling that it is good preparation for what she may study in college – either a medical-related field or maybe psychology. "I'd like to go to college out of town so I can explore new places and meet new people," she says, with a hint of maturity and confidence.

## Transportation News

Summer school transportation cards should arrive in the mail approximately one week in advance of the start of your summer school.

- If you need any changes for summer school, such as a different daycare address, please let your school know before May 1.
- Any transportation changes, such as route or time changes, made after the start of summer school will be communicated to you by your child's school. Please be sure that your child's school has good phone numbers on file for you.
- Anytime temperatures are forecast to be above 95 degrees, your child will be permitted to bring a water bottle to school to be filled only with water at the school for the afternoon ride home.

## Generations of Families

attending school in the county, she says, "I loved it and now Jade loves it too."

**Raquel Cook Cooper** is a 1988 Clayton High graduate whose son Simeon began kindergarten in the Brentwood district last fall. "I wanted him to attend my alma mater, but because that wasn't possible, I chose Brentwood."

Raquel thinks back to 1981 (in her words, the "pioneer days" of the program) when, as a sixth grader, she entered Clayton's Glenridge Elementary School: "Of course, I was very nervous at first, but all of the students and teachers extended a warm welcome and made me feel like part of the Glenridge family." She sums up her years in Clayton: "I was exposed to many different cultures and experienced so many adventures. I went cross-country skiing at Hidden Valley Ski Resort, sailed a hobie cat on Lake Carlyle and had many dinners and sleepovers at my friends' homes in Clayton. None of this would have been possible had I stayed in my home district." She now maintains "lifelong friendships" with some of the friends she made at Clayton, "compliments of Facebook," she notes.

From Clayton High, Raquel went on Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA where she earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in public administration. She remained in Baton Rouge until recently when she, her husband and their children moved back to her hometown, making their home in north St. Louis. Currently, she is seeking employment in her specialty area, Human Resources.

Raquel says she and her husband Thomas are "ecstatic" about having their son in the Brentwood district. "His learning appears to be a not only a priority of ours, but of his teacher, principal and district superintendent as well. It does take a village to raise a child and we are thrilled to be partnering with the Brentwood district in this endeavor."

## Despite Challenges

determined to take care of her baby and complete her high school studies. "I wanted to receive my diploma and walk with my class."

That she did and after graduating in 1988, she began the long road of working her way up in the hotel industry, starting as a housekeeper cleaning 20 rooms a day. She had attended Florissant Valley Community College but realized that in order to support her baby, she had to work. So she created a plan. "I figured that if I was going to land a good job, I had better work my way up at a company."

Adrienne's logic was fueled by the preachings of her Rockwood teachers. "They always told us, 'Don't complain about your situation; do what you need to do to fix it.'" And so she forged her own path, setting goals for herself along the way.

Flash forward 23 years, and Adrienne, age 41, is in the general manager training program for Lodging Hospitality Management, owner of several Hilton and Sheraton hotels. Her current position is director of rooms at the Airport Hilton, but she has worked at nine hotels around St. Louis in just about every department. "I helped open the smaller Hilton downtown and also the Four Seasons," she points out with pride.

Adrienne's allegiance to the Rockwood district prompted her to enroll her daughter Keona in the transfer program. Because there were no openings in Rockwood, she attended Parkway and graduated from Parkway North in 2005. Now 24 years old, Keona works for United Healthcare and wants to return to school to train for the mortuary science field.

Adrienne and her husband Fred, residents of south St. Louis, have two children currently enrolled in the Parkway district – Fred Jr. at Parkway South Middle School and Mya at Hanna Woods Elementary. Both children are thriving academically, involved in their schools and popular with their classmates, according to mom. "Their teachers and principals are welcoming and there is great communication between home and school," she reports.

Adrienne looks back on her more challenging days in those early years of the transfer program and recalls what her mother told her. "She said, 'One day you will thank me,' and I do!"



## Message from the

David S. Glaser

# CEO

The theme of many of the stories in this issue of the Parent Link is that earlier generations of families involved in the voluntary transfer program so valued the experiences they received, that they are now making a similar choice for their children. Reading about current students and their parents who have been involved in the transfer program was truly heartwarming to me. It is exciting to see the continuity of multiple generations of families being served by the program and children making connections with teachers and administrators who also served their parents.

In our increasingly mobile and global society it is nice to read about families with strong roots and foundations in the community and in the VICC program. I guess I personally relate strongly to these stories as our children are now fourth generation students in the Rockwood School District. Both my grandfather and father attended school in Rockwood before it was even named Rockwood. My grandfather graduated from eighth grade in 1915 and went on to be a successful owner of many small businesses. My grandfather also built Rockwood's first bus garage, a facility that housed the four buses owned by the district in 1940. (The district purchased its first two buses in 1932.) My father started one of those buses every morning and was the first student on the bus and the last one off. He attended a four room school for grades one through eight and graduated from Eureka High School in 1946 prior to the district being reorganized and named the Re-Organized District Number 6 in 1949 and subsequently changed to Rockwood District R-6 in 1960. On the other hand, my mom lived in the city of St. Louis and graduated in 1949 from Beaumont High School. Personally, I graduated from Lafayette High School in 1975 as that year's Valedictorian and also served as Rockwood's

Chief Financial Officer for fourteen years prior to assuming my current position with VICC. Our daughter graduated from Lafayette last year and our son currently attends Lafayette. Only time will tell if their children will also attend Rockwood Schools!

So I can completely relate to the stories in this issue about generations of families being committed to the transfer program. Indeed, in today's fast paced and often transient society, it is nice to have a long history of roots and commitment to our community. In fact my eighty-three year old father has always lived within two miles of where he was born!

While residential mobility can be positive and often indicates personal success as families move to a newer community, the stories in this issue of Parent Link show the benefits of remaining firmly planted in the same community. I am reminded of the song from the show *Cheers* where they sing about it being nice to come back to a place "where everybody knows your name." As families and their children return to the school and/or classroom of their parents, many times it is indeed comforting to attend a school where everybody knows your name.

Whether that is your personal story or not, I trust and believe that one result of the customer-focused approach of each school participating in the voluntary transfer program is that they do indeed know not only the names but also the personal needs of each of our students and their families and work diligently to meet those needs.

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