

parentlink

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Qualities Cultivated in Rockwood Schools Serve Working Professional Well

When Derick Cunigan, 24, jumped into television advertising sales right out of college, he discovered that his broad range of experiences and perspectives would

serve him well in his position working with a multitude of clients representing all types of businesses. He points to his education in the Rockwood school district with laying the foundation for his well roundedness, which he continues to develop in order to be even more successful in the workforce.

Armed with a broadcasting degree from Northwest Missouri State University, Derick landed in Kansas City as an account executive for the CW television network affiliate before accepting his current position of client specialist with its sister station there, the ABC affiliate. In that

capacity, he works with 14 account executives and management at both stations, putting together ideas and presentations for clients. "I saw this position as an opportunity for me to learn as much as I can about the television industry and to build relationships with more of the sales staff."

His desire to continually broaden his base of knowledge and contacts was stoked at Rockwood, where he spent his entire education.

The 2003 Rockwood Summit graduate says, "My eyes were opened and I was encouraged to learn and grow through the combination of great academics provided in a socially diverse environment. I feel blessed to have been involved in a program that gives inner city youths the opportunity and chance for success."

He took that opportunity and ran with it. Derick's high school involvements, including football, track, basketball, choir, musicals and a variety of organizations, kept him "busy and focused," he says. "The social skills I acquired helped with my personal development, both in the classroom and in my personal life." Even now as a young married professional, he keeps up with some of his high school friends and returned to his alma mater last fall for a football game and to celebrate his five-year reunion.

Derick commends the educators and mentors he had in Rockwood. "They wanted to see students succeed and had a positive influence on our lives." He cites two role models, in particular, who "led by example and pushed excellence and responsibility." At Stanton Elementary, it was Dr. Jerome Woodson, one of the first African-American principals in Rockwood. "Dr. Woodson was a strong role model, not for entertainment or athletics, but for education and I think that was an important influence for me at the time." The other was Roland Garrison, a teacher at Rockwood Summit and head track coach. "Coach G was more than my coach, he was my mentor and someone I now call my friend. He always encouraged us to strive for excellence on the track and that really transferred over to tasks in life."

Derick also names his mother Carla Cunigan as one of his mentors. Carla taught at several Rockwood elementary schools, from 1989 to 2006, and now serves as an elementary principal in the St. Louis district. "Not only is she my mother, but she is a successful African-American woman. I commend her for her accomplishments and for the way she and my dad raised me and my two siblings. We have all either graduated from college or are currently enrolled, but their message was clear: we must finish."

Derick's mature thinking and promise in life undoubtedly make his parents and Rockwood proud.

by Peggy Magee



Derick Cunigan, right, client specialist for a Kansas City television station, appreciates that his "eyes were opened" in Rockwood schools and that he was "encouraged to learn and grow," something he continues to strive for as a working professional. Derick's fond memories of Rockwood brought him back to Summit High School last fall for a football game and five-year reunion. Here he catches up with his former football teammate John Allman with whom he remains friends. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Parent Involvement Pays Off

For parents to be involved in their children's education is important and necessary. That probably isn't news to you. But reminders are always good and knowing the advantages of being an involved parent might just convince you to become one, if you aren't already.

At a recent family meeting at the City Museum hosted by the Parkway district, Charlotte Ijei, director of Pupil Personnel and Diversity, told parents that research shows there are numerous benefits to students when their parents are involved with the school. The benefits are:

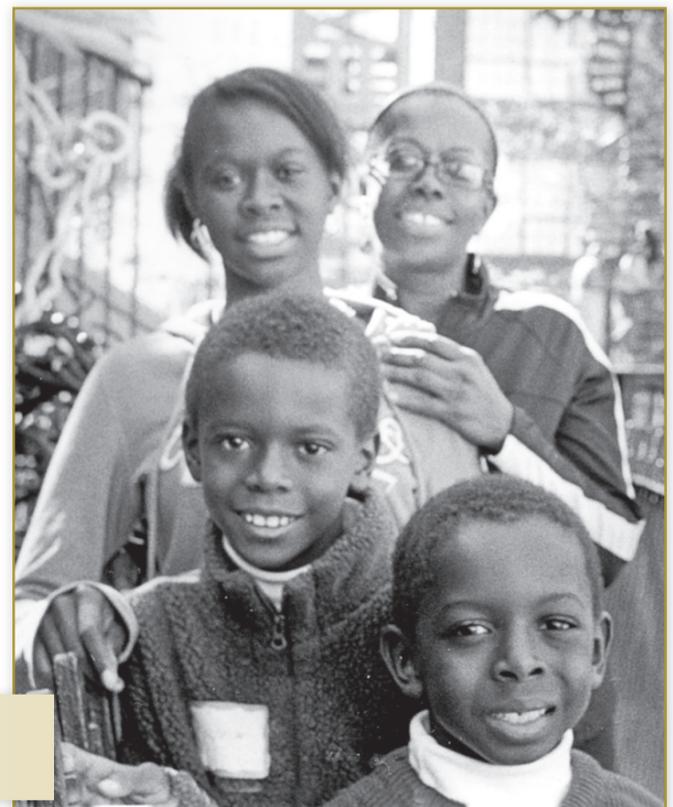
- higher grades, test scores and graduation rates
- better school attendance
- increased motivation and self esteem
- lower rates of suspension
- decreased drug and alcohol use
- fewer (or no) instances of violent behavior
- a greater chance of going on to college and other secondary education

Parent involvement can occur in various ways: attending open houses and parent teacher conferences, volunteering at the school and even stopping by the school to see what the students are doing. But most important is having regular dialogues with teachers and staff about your student, reports Ijei. "Teachers and administrators need to hear from you what your child's strengths and challenges are. The more informed they are, the more effective they can be. You know your child best so help them to understand your child."

Checking in periodically with the school to ask about your child's performance and behavior is also recommended by Ijei. "This will give you a heightened awareness about your student and shows the school that you want your child to be successful."

Additionally, when your children see that you are in communication with the school, "it reinforces to them that school and home are connected and that school is an integral part of the family's life," she notes. "This can have a huge impact on the student's learning."

A Parkway family has fun exploring the City Museum, the site of a meeting co-hosted by the district's transfer student office. The meeting featured speakers from various departments and included a talk about the benefits of parent involvement in the education process. Pictured are Sharon Harper and her three children, Jazmyn, Max and Xavier. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman



Like Mother, Like Daughter

Marquette Student Follows Mother's Lead of Getting Involved, Networking

Jaronda Williams learned from the best when it came to stepping forward to get involved in activities and assume leadership positions at Rockwood's Marquette High School. For as long as Jaronda can remember, her mother Ronda Braden had been active as a school volunteer in the Rockwood district and in parent organizations affiliated with the voluntary transfer program.

"My mom was always busy going to meetings and helping with this and that," reports Jaronda, now in her first year at Truman State University. With six children spanning the ages of 16 to 25 – all enrolled in the VICC program at some point – the north St. Louis mom spent many hours tending to school business in the county. "I wanted to make sure my kids got a good education and to be available to the teachers and staff in making that happen."

Over the years, she has helped with school parties and field trips, as well as served on committees to provide input to Rockwood administrators about issues affecting voluntary transfer students. Her interest and enthusiasm pulled in other city parents. "I always found it valuable to hear about programs and activities and to meet the staff who heads them up. I thought other parents could benefit from this also. So I encouraged them to get involved." The parents shared information, resources and contacts with each other.

Ms. Braden's broad circle of parents and staff expanded her daughter's own "big network of people," Jaronda reports. "When my mom met faculty or staff, they figured out that I was her daughter and I too got to know them. As mom made friends with other parents, I became acquainted with their kids. These connections opened doors for me to network and to better myself."

It was from another student that Jaronda learned about the summer Bridge program for high schoolers at UMSL in which she participated. "It was a pre-collegiate program that I found quite valuable," she points out.

Another program that she had heard about and got involved in was the Seventh District Leadership Academy,

a Saturday program sponsored by then State Senator John Loudon. High school students learn how state government operates by touring places such as St. Louis County Election Board and the State Capitol in Jefferson City. "Being part of that program is how I became interested in politics and the law," explains Jaronda who is now majoring in political science with plans to attend law school.

It is amazing just how much the strikingly pretty and outgoing teenager was able to juggle in high school. After serving as vice-president of her junior class, she rose to president her senior year. She also ran cross country and was manager of the girls' basketball team. She helped with Marquette Renaissance, a student recognition program, Teens for a Cure and was part of the Successful Women's Group. In addition, her course selections were challenging, with many advanced placement classes including U.S. Government,

English Literature and German. Immediately after graduation, she traveled to Germany with other St. Louis area students for the UNESCO Youth World Festival, an opportunity she was made aware of by her German teacher.

This would be a lot for any student, but particularly intense for someone who had to leave the house each

morning at 5:50 a.m. to catch the bus from her north St. Louis neighborhood and didn't return home until 6:30 p.m. "I learned from my mom how to balance my work load. If I couldn't attend a meeting or event, I kept in touch with people to find out what I missed."

When Jaronda looks back on her high school days, she feels grateful for all the opportunities she had to learn and grow. "I loved being involved in so much – having all the different experiences I had and getting to know people I may have never met otherwise."

Having learned in high school how valuable school involvement is, Jaronda dived into many activities on her college campus, including the Residence Hall Association, the Association of Black Collegians and serving as a representative for the Student Center and the Student Affairs Committee. "It's a great way to meet people and to learn a lot," she notes.

by Peggy Magee



Ronda Braden's high level of involvement in the Rockwood district inspired her daughter Jaronda to take on a lot at Marquette High School. She was a class leader and participated in many organizations, all while enrolled in upper level classes. It was a positive and valuable experience for her, she says, and now she is just as active at Truman State University.

Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman



Message from the New
David S. Glaser

CEO
CEO

Involvement. Networking. Change. These are all themes included in the articles in this issue of the *Parent Link* and they all became suddenly quite relevant to me as I thought about my excitement and enthusiasm as the new CEO of the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC). It has been one of my life-long dreams to serve as the CEO of an organization and the opportunity to fulfill this dream while continuing to serve students and work in public education is extremely exciting to me.

I will be involved. First and foremost, my primary job is to represent, support and encourage the students who participate in the St. Louis Student Transfer program and their families. To be successful in this goal I plan to get to know as many transfer students and their families as possible and to be involved in their education. I hope to accomplish this goal by visiting schools, participating in parent advisory meetings and serving on various task forces. I have already participated in several of these meetings and I look forward to participating in many more. I have also become involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization and quickly recognized that the students, parents and I are blessed to be surrounded and supported by a highly dedicated, experienced and caring staff. My goal is to provide them with the necessary support and direction so they can continue to support you.

I will continue to network. My life and career has been marked by working collaboratively with others. I personally know and am good friends with many leaders and teachers in our county districts as well as many of our area legislators. Those relationships are key in enabling VICC to accomplish its mission of providing outstanding educational opportunities and promoting diversity for both city and county students so that all students can achieve their full potential. I look forward to working with the superintendents, principals, teachers and others in the St.

Louis Public Schools as well as the participating county districts to realize this goal. I also plan to continue to strongly advocate for the St. Louis Student Transfer program with our legislative leaders in Jefferson City and Washington, D.C. I commit to being the spokesperson for our program and to help our elected officials recognize that St. Louis has one of the largest and most successful student transfer programs in the United States.

I will make some changes – but I promise to only make changes after consulting with and involving those people likely to be affected by the change. St. Louis has undergone a massive change in its transportation system these last two years as I-64 (*and as a life-long St. Louis area resident it will always be "Highway 40" to me*) has been renovated and expanded. Now that this is nearing completion, everyone is delighted with the improvements although the "construction phase" certainly created some challenges. Unlike the highway prior to these improvements, VICC is a strong and healthy organization so major changes are not required. But I do believe that the biggest room in any of our homes is the "room for improvement." We all have areas and opportunities to improve and get better and so does VICC. I look forward to hearing from everyone – parents, students, employees and the community – on your specific ideas on how we can continuously improve to enable us to better serve students and families and accomplish our mission.

As the months and years progress, I look forward to us getting to know each other better, not only professionally but also personally. We are here to serve you and we look forward to doing so in an exemplary manner.

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NEWS from Transportation

The State Highway Department has indicated that I-64 (Highway 40) will open on Monday, December 7, more than three weeks ahead of the December 31 scheduled opening. Following the reopening, lane changes to get both I-44 and I-70 back to normal will be implemented. These changes will eventually result in a re-shifting of traffic patterns. An attempt to shorten ride times will be made as soon as possible.

As a reminder, please make sure your district contact person has your current phone numbers so we can contact you in case inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances affect bus schedules.

Also, please be sure that students are at their assigned stops at least 10 minutes prior to their pick-up times.

Finally, due to safety reasons, someone who is middle school age or older must be waiting at the bus stop in order for kindergartners to be released from busses.

Annual Notification Regarding Student Records Maintained by VICC

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords to parents/guardians ("parents") of students, and to students themselves who are over 18 years of age ("eligible students"), certain rights with respect to the student's education records. Although FERPA does not apply to VICC, VICC as a matter of policy intends to comply with the provisions of FERPA and to afford parents and eligible students certain rights set forth in FERPA with respect to education records maintained by VICC.

These rights, as they pertain to education records maintained by VICC, are outlined below:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days of the day VICC receives a written request for access. Parents or eligible students should submit to VICC's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) a written request that identifies the record(s) they wish to inspect. VICC's CEO or his/her designee will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.

2. The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate or misleading. Parents or eligible students may ask VICC to amend a record that they believe is inaccurate or misleading. They should write VICC's CEO, clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it is inaccurate or misleading. If VICC decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, VICC will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and advise them of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

3. The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent. One exception which permits disclosure without consent is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official includes a person employed by VICC as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, counselor or support staff member; a person serving on VICC's Board; a person or company with whom VICC has contracted to perform a special task (such as an attorney, auditor, transportation contractor or transportation manager); any of the member school districts participating in VICC and the school officials, employees and agents of such districts; or a parent, student or other person serving on an official VICC committee or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her responsibilities for VICC with respect to transfer students and the transfer program. Upon request, VICC discloses education records without consent to officials of a school district in which a student seeks or intends to enroll.

4. Although not applicable to VICC, FERPA generally affords the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged violations of FERPA by school districts receiving federal funds. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

**Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-4605**

There is a set of information that VICC has designated as directory information. This set of information is not considered to be part of the student's educational record and may therefore be disclosed at the discretion of VICC. A parent/guardian or eligible student may have all or part of the information about the student withheld from being classified as directory information by annually informing VICC's CEO which parts should not be so classified. This must be done in writing within 20 days after this notification has first been disseminated in the school year.

The following is the list of information that is classified as directory information with respect to each student unless VICC is notified to the contrary as stated above:

1. Name
2. Date and Place of Birth
3. Gender
4. Grade Level
5. Dates of Attendance
6. Degrees and Awards Received
7. Photograph
8. Participation in Officially Recognized Activities and Sports
9. Weight and Height of Members of Athletic Teams
10. The Most Recent Previous Educational Institution Attended by the Student

Any claims or disputes arising under or relating to the matters set forth in this notification are subject to the binding arbitration provisions and remedial limitations contained in paragraphs 23 and 24 of Appendix C of the 1999 Settlement Agreement.