

20 UNDER FORTY

Each year, we honor a new class of 20 professionals who are taking strides in their fields and in our community. Join us in honoring the 2021 class of 20 Under 40 recipients.

BY HANNAH KUECK | PHOTOS BY KEITH BORGMAYER

Chris Horn

Reinsurance Manager,
Shelter Insurance

Chris Horn is a man of honesty and integrity. He's a devoted husband, father, and friend. And, he relentlessly works to give back to his community.

Every day is different for him in his job as reinsurance manager for Shelter Insurance. He and his team of five manage Shelter's U.S., Caribbean, and Latin American markets, and depending on the time of year, they travel to market the company's services and foster new client relationships, work on underwriting and pricing reinsurance treaties, or develop strategic business plans — to name a few of the teams' responsibilities.

Chris has had many accomplishments throughout his career. He started at Shelter Insurance as an intern, and after years of hard work and support from people in his life that believed in him every step of the way, he has progressed to new, bigger roles.

Another notable accomplishment Chris is proud of is being a part of the Leadership Columbia Class of 2019. He says: "That opportunity provided a great learning experience, a wonderful network, and opportunities to serve our community. Together, these accomplishments provide opportunities to help others achieve, which is what makes [the program] so special."

Not only is Chris doing great things in his career, but he is also always doing new things to give back to the community. Most recently, Chris was selected as a school board member for Columbia Public Schools, and he's on the board for Heart of Missouri CASA. Chris also serves on the advisory council of the Inclusive Impact Institute, the advisory board of Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Central Missouri, the committee for the Journey Towards Inclusive Excellence Boone County, the CPS Equity Work Group, and, most recently, he has joined the Columbia Metro Rotary.

Chris stays busy, and he enjoys participating in community service projects and opportunities whenever he can.

He's accomplished so much in his career and community, and he credits it all to his faith in God. "God has always placed me exactly where I needed to be when I needed to be there, and where I am today is no exception," he says. "I am blessed to have many people support my journey."

AGE:
36

Fun Fact: Chris attended the majority of elementary school in Japan.

Sarah Klaassen

Pastor, Rock Bridge Christian Church

"I begin every day with morning prayers and after that, it depends . . . On a given day, I might show the fire marshal around for our annual building inspection, visit a church member in the hospital, unclog a toilet, draft a sermon, join a social justice strategy session, and lead the worship team's evening meeting," Pastor Sarah Klaassen says. For Sarah, the varied days at Rock Bridge Christian Church are meaningful and filled with joy, and she's always on the clock for any member of the congregation — regardless of the hour or need.

Sarah's journey to get ordained wasn't an easy one. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Sarah explains that many faith communities are still unwilling to ordain LGBTQ+ people, including the one she grew up in. But on February 14, 2015, it finally happened, right here in Columbia at Rock Bridge Christian Church. "It was a day that will define my entire life," Sarah says.

As a gay pastor, Sarah says she serves a church that welcomes all to membership and ministry. And every Sunday, the church begins worship by making sure this is known. Regardless of "race, ethnicity, age, sexual and gender identity, economic status, educational level, and differing ability," everyone is welcome.

Sarah is a highly self-motivated person. On top of being the sole pastor on staff, she's on the leadership team for Faith Voices and she's a member of COMO Transit Justice, the Mid-America Alliance Q (also known as Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance) Team. She's been a panelist for the State of Inclusivity Conference, and she's often called upon to speak or pray at rallies, marches, and vigils. These are just some of the ways she stays involved and connected with our community, and she attributes this strong work ethic to her roots — from growing up on a farm to her career as a college athlete, when there's work to be done, Sarah is there to do it.

"Many of us who know Sarah are better off in this life because we have had a chance to work and play with her in these shared years in Columbia," Reverend Jimmy Spear says.

AGE:
37

Fun Fact: Sarah has an identical twin sister who also has a religion degree.

Michael Aslanidis

Co-owner, G&D Steakhouse

Michael Aslanidis's family is the driving force behind everything he does. In fact, it's his family that got him where he is today, but specifically, his grandfather, Gus.

Over 50 years ago, Gus left his small tobacco farm in Greece to find a better life for his family in the U.S. Although this was a big risk, it paid off when he opened G&D Steakhouse, which now has the fourth generation of the Aslanidis family operating the local staple. Michael is continuing his family's legacy while also expanding upon it. He continues to create an inviting social media presence, creates new products like the restaurant's signature Opa Michael's Original Greek Seasoning, and welcomes every customer as his own family.

It was Michael's parents that demonstrated the importance of hard work — a principle Michael values and hopes to emulate for his own two kids. "Everything I do," Michael says, "I do for my family."

Even as COVID-19 made its way to Columbia, causing many restaurants and other businesses to shut their doors, Michael continued to persevere, work hard, and quickly pivot G&D's 50-year-old business model to continue to serve the Columbia community. He used G&D's social media platforms to reinforce the importance of eating local and supporting the town's favorite restaurants and how to use a mask when entering the restaurant. He says, "We have been blessed with the most amazing customers and employees and have really felt the love from Columbia throughout this pandemic."

Kindness, Michael says, is another guiding principle in his life. Whether he's cooking up a G&D regular's order before they're even up, greeting customers with a smile, or helping a friend through a dark time, Michael is a light to many people around Columbia. And so is G&D Steakhouse — Michael has given new life to the restaurant through donations to schools, nonprofits, and other organizations. "Columbia has always been good to our family and it makes us happy to give back what we can," Michael says.

AGE:
37

Fun Fact: Michael enjoys working on small engines in his free time.

Julia Chisholm

Ambulatory Operations Pharmacy Manager, MU Health Care

If Julia Chisholm could do one thing to make Columbia a better place to live, she would provide better access to affordable medications and incentives for wellness.

Affordable prescription medication is one of Julia's passions. She says: "Most people go to a doctor to get a medication, and there are so many new and innovative products available. However, even with insurance, many individuals are still unable to afford the high monthly copays and out of pocket costs."

As the ambulatory operations pharmacy manager for MU Health Care, Julia does much more than count pills. She manages the Mizzou Specialty Pharmacy, supports all of the outpatient clinics at MU Health Care, advises patients — you can even find her at a Saturday drive-thru flu clinic administering shots. On top of all of this, Julia is a mentor for families going through a new hearing loss diagnosis, an academic whose work has been recently published in a pharmacy journal, and a mother to five children.

AGE:
37

Julia loves to make a difference. She has created a new career ladder for pharmacy technicians to advance professionally as a patient medication liaison. This team is focused on connecting patients, providers, insurance companies, and pharmacies — they are not only helping to improve patient care, but they're also making medications more affordable.

Her drive to make a difference isn't limited to medicine. Julia is an active mother at her children's school and after-school activities, and she's an active volunteer. Every year, her family participates in the Voluntary Action Center's Adopt-A-Family Program to help make a family's wish list come true.

Julia's family, team, and patients keep her motivated. "I love making a difference, no matter how small, and I never tire of going the extra mile. The intrinsic motivation of helping someone and contributing to a greater purpose drives me to continue to bring my best every day," Julia says.

She credits her love of reading for where she is today — she's even working on her first book, about her non-traditional career path to leadership in an academic health system.

Fun Fact: Julia is a retired NCAA Division 1 athlete in swimming and diving (emphasis on retired).

Megan Thomas

Director of General Dentistry
Compass Health Network

Megan Thomas has childhood memories of volunteering in her dad's dental office. She remembers providing clerical support and watching her parents' holistic approach to helping their patients. Now, Megan is achieving her long-term career goal of being in the public health field through her role as dental director for five dental clinics in both rural and urban areas.

Megan has a passion for providing quality dental care to those who are vulnerable and in need. She says, "The pandemic is the cause of a considerable amount of mental and emotional stress, and now more than ever, it is important to be supportive of our patients."

Even through the pandemic, Megan has led her team safely. "Creating and implementing safety protocols, researching the most innovative interventions to enhance program development while simultaneously continuing to treat patients within the community for dental emergencies — that was a feat that was not easy, but incredibly important," Megan says.

Safety and accessibility continue to be a priority for Megan and Compass Health. "She is a fearless leader that puts her team and patient's care in front of her own," nominator Nikki McGruder says.

When Megan is not working to better the smiles of Columbia, she stays busy through her community involvement. She mentors adolescent Black and Brown girls within the community through The BOLD Academy. She has created programming for health fairs and back-to-school programs, and she helps to recruit and retain dental health care professionals with diverse backgrounds through mentoring and shadowing opportunities. She even volunteers with youth athletic programs. "I feel a sense of responsibility to the community in which I live to mentor, support and model good citizenship with the healthy balance of being approachable and providing a listening ear," she says.

Megan credits her success to her parents. Her father was one of the first Black dentists in the St. Louis area, and her parents showed her what it looks like to be more than "just a dentist." They created a safe environment for her to learn, and they showed her how to find her voice to support those in need.

AGE:
37

Fun Fact: Megan hoards socks — she loves getting them as gifts or purchasing them for others.

Josh Rein has a passion for beer and cider — so much so that he often wakes up in the late hours of the night thinking of the finer details of the beverages and how he can improve Logboat Brewing Company and Waves Cider Company.

Josh is motivated by an unrelenting desire to prove he can accomplish anything he sets his mind to. And his portfolio shows for it. For the past seven years, Josh Rein has been instrumental in providing Missourians with the refreshing beverages from Logboat, and most recently, Waves Cider, which opened earlier this year. He has created over 50 different beers, helped plan and design five brewery expansions, and now, he runs and operates the cider production for Waves Cider by himself, including sourcing the fresh juice, fermenting, packaging, and developing recipes.

"I am most proud of designing and producing beverages that have been embraced by so many people in the state," says Josh. This, paired with the community support that has allowed the brewing company to grow and employ more talent, continues to bring Josh immense pride. He notes that, "together, we on the brewing staff have won upwards of eight awards for our beer at national competitions."

Apart from designing the beverages for Logboat and Waves Cider, Josh wears several other hats around the companies, including overseeing the entire production crew, quality control, maintenance, and relationships with local farmers to help source apples and handle the company's spent grain, which can be used to feed animals.

Josh has had several mentors that have impacted and encouraged his career. Larry Goodwin, at Flat Branch Pub and Brewing, instilled the confidence Josh needed to pursue his career in brewing further; Stephen Hale, at Schlafly Beer, helped him hone his skills and transform brewing from a home hobby to a career; and Paul Dickerson, at Broadway Brewery, put his trust in Josh to help with brewing when the business first began — the confidence and skills Josh gained during his time helping at Broadway Brewery would later help him navigate his later business ventures.

And of course, Josh credits where he is today to his family — for teaching him the importance of hard work and humility, and for supporting him and his career every step of the way.

AGE:
38

Josh Rein

Head Brewer and Head Cider Maker,
Logboat Brewing Company and
Waves Cider Company

Fun Fact: Josh is an amateur silversmith.

In 2017, when Megan Walters was just 23 years old, she obtained her real estate license, started Homes by Megan, and co-founded Camacho Coffee. Now 26, she has obtained her broker's license and continues to grow and exceed her personal goals.

This journey is something Megan takes immense pride in. When she was 23 and coming out of college with student loan debt, she started Homes by Megan around the same time her husband was starting Camacho Coffee, and while she describes this experience as terrifying — to only work on commission while owning and operating two businesses — Megan defied the odds. Camacho Coffee serves over 50 wholesale clients across Missouri, and Homes by Megan will be in the top 10% of agencies in the Mid-Missouri area. “Statistically speaking, everything that I have done since 2017 should have failed, but I have been overwhelmingly blessed to prove myself,” Megan says.

Megan's success comes from hard work, support from her loved ones, and a lot of multitasking. On days when she's not meeting with clients about buying or selling their homes, or meeting with inspectors, Megan can be found roasting, bagging, and selling Camacho Coffee. She says, “I have a little headpiece I wear sometimes so that when I'm speaking with clients or other agents, I can also bag coffee at the same time.”

Outside of business, Megan is involved with several nonprofit organizations. She's volunteered as a Big Sister for Big Brothers Big Sisters, she's packaged food for the Columbia Food Bank, and she's volunteered with set-up and clean-up for the Changing the Odds program through Women's Network, for women trying to return to the workforce. And with the help of Camacho Coffee, Megan has the opportunity to give even more. She's helped shop and deliver 2,350 diapers for the First Chance for Children Diaper Bank, purchase and deliver fresh groceries to Coyote Hill's foster families, and support local businesses by providing supplies and mentorship as the pandemic threatened business closures.

“It is Megan's way of life to give her time to people and to this community,” Virna Camacho says. “She has a genuinely caring personality; she uses her skills and talents to help others and she excels in all she does.”

AGE:
26

Megan Walters

Broker/Owner, Homes by Megan, House of Brokers Realty Inc.
Co-founder/Co-owner, Camacho Coffee

Fun Fact: With the help of her husband and father-in-law, Megan built her own wedding venue at their farm.

Jerrell Jackson

Co-Owner of API Elite

Raised in a poverty-stricken area, college wasn't even an afterthought for Jerrell Jackson's family. But, he's changing the game.

Jerrell starts his day at API Elite at 4:45 a.m., just in time for the first class at 5 a.m. On top of being an owner of the gym, Jerrell is also a trainer. Whether his client is a college athlete or a new mom trying to gain her confidence back, Jerrell has experience with all ages, sizes, and goals.

“My job as a trainer is to build trust with my client,” he says. “From there, I'm able to shape their mind around the belief that they are champions and nothing can stop them from reaching their goals.”

Since Jerrell came to Columbia for college (he played wide receiver for the Mizzou football team) he has been highly involved throughout the community, and owning his own business has only amplified this. He's hosted school supplies drives, cancer awareness boot camps, and events to benefit the Boys and Girls Club of Columbia. API also offers scholarships to athletes that wouldn't be able to afford the elite training otherwise. “Our

biggest mission is being a gym that is accessible for anyone, even if you can't afford it,” Jerrell says. “Growing up in Houston, I lived in Fifth Ward, which is one of the most violent neighborhoods in Houston. There was no way my mom could afford elite training for me. [The scholarship] allows athletes in a similar situation to take advantage of the opportunity.”

Jerrell is proud to be the first person in his family to attend and graduate from college. He's also fulfilled his dreams of becoming a successful business owner and NFL player, having played for teams like the Kansas City Chiefs, Houston Texans, and the Jacksonville Jaguars. “I now get to be a role model for my family and other young people, and that truly means the world to me,” he says.

His next goals include continuing to improve his business acumen and expanding the gym's Foster a Kid program, which helps kids from low-income families afford classes and access mentorship opportunities.

AGE:
30

Fun Fact: Jerrell loves acting and hopes to appear in a movie one day.

Aaron Emel

Owner and President, Cost Cutters and Supercuts of Missouri; Owner, FCE Capital LLC and FCE Investments LLC

From a young age, the mentality of working hard was instilled in Aaron Emel.

In 2005, Aaron moved back to Columbia after a stint in California with a goal of getting into banking and finance. Despite having no experience, he got a job at a local bank, and eventually became market president after 12 years of hard work and progress. "I believe that success was what gave me the confidence to go into business for myself. There is no replacement for hard work and personal motivation," Aaron says. After 15 years in banking, Aaron has gone on a new path and is now the owner of Cost Cutters and Supercuts of Missouri.

Given the eight Cost Cutters and Supercuts locations in Mid-Missouri, Aaron starts his days in a variety of places. He'll drop his kids off at school, read a financial headline or two, then he'll be off to his office or to meet with his staff. A normal day includes splitting his time between the salons, recruiting new staff members, and making sure everyone has the tools they need to succeed.

Aaron's most important goal for 2020 was to stabilize the company's employee mix and reduce turnover. And he's succeeded by creating several new jobs in Columbia and the surrounding areas. But of course, the year wouldn't be complete without some disruption from COVID-19.

"Plans for expansion in the salon business to alternate markets have been put on the back burner this year as we wait for employers to bring employees back to work and schools to get back to full session," Aaron says. "We did manage to start another new business in 2020 with FCE Investments LLC, which has a focus on alternative investment products."

Aaron's wife, fellow 20 Under 40 winner Ashley Emel, keeps him motivated every day. Together, they spend time brainstorming ways to help each other nearly every night, Aaron explains. And, of course, he finds motivation through his two independent daughters as he strives to be the best dad he can be for them every day.

AGE:
39

Fun Fact: Aaron is the best hair braider in his house.

Kelly Hill

Executive Director
Heart of Missouri CASA

"When Kelly Hill says yes, it's not to dip her toes in the water — she dives right in," former board chair for Heart of Missouri CASA Traci Kennedy says. "She is strategic, analytical, and thorough, with vast experience in social work and child services."

Since Kelly took over as executive director for Heart of Missouri CASA, the nonprofit has seen nothing but growth. The nonprofit has doubled its team and the number of active volunteer advocates, and they've increased revenue by 125%, moved to a larger space, and increased awareness of the nonprofit throughout the community. More children in foster care now have a caring and consistent CASA advocate thanks to this growth. "When I started back with Heart of Missouri CASA in 2016, we were advocating for 22% of the children in need," Kelly says. "Today, we are advocating for 50%. This year we will surpass 300 children served in one year, the most children served in any year of our history." These accomplishments, Kelly adds, couldn't have been done without the help and support of her team.

Prior to her current position, Kelly worked for Love INC, where she would notch of her proudest achievements — the Extra Mile program, a financial management coaching program that has been going strong since its inception in 2012. "That program has impacted hundreds of low-income individuals in Columbia and helped them gain confidence in their financial management skills, get out of debt, and save money," Kelly adds. And while she can't take credit for all of the work Love INC. has done since she left in 2016, she takes pride in the foundational materials she created and being there to guide the program through its first three-year funding cycle with United Way.

Kelly strives to have the work of her life be done in betterment of the community, and through her day-to-day job in the social work field, she gets to do just that, as she has the opportunity to be involved in changing the lives of "unseen and unheard groups of our community."

"Ultimately, for me, my faith is the foundation of my life. I believe that every good thing that has come my way and that is in my life is from God," she says.

Fun Fact: If Kelly wasn't the executive director of CASA, she would be a nutritional therapist or a French pastry baker.

AGE:
35

Joe Seymour

Area Manager, River City Construction

Although he works in construction, Joe Seymour says he's the last person you want swinging a hammer.

As the area manager for River City Construction, Joe starts each day by waking up at 4 a.m. After he completes his main priorities or task items, he never knows what kind of day he will have: Each one brings something new. He might spend the day pursuing new work, solving problems with the project teams, visiting job sites, or meeting with clients — all things on the business side, and away from physical projects and hammer-swinging.

But, one thing is always consistent in his work day. By 5 p.m., Joe finishes his work and goes home to focus on being a dad.

Joe has already accomplished many things in his career — he's responsible for overseeing River City Construction's Missouri office, he's been elected to serve on the board of directors for the Association of General Contractors and the Carpenters' Pension Trust Fund, and he's won the Association of General Contractors Building Excellence Award for the State Historical Society of Missouri Center for Missouri Studies.

AGE:
39

With all of these great achievements under his belt, Joe is just getting started. For 2021, Joe has outlined a few new professional career goals: the successful completion of

the company's key projects, such as the MU Sinclair School of Nursing and Columbia WWTP Digester Complex; partnering with a new volunteer or nonprofit organization; and maintaining the company's vision of being the most respectful and reputable contractor in the area.

Joe grew up in the construction industry. The work ethic of his grandfather, uncle, and father are his guiding life principles. "My family owned a residential construction company and taught me about hard work, ethics, and the construction business at a very young age," he says.

Joe credits where he is today to his wife and kids. "We have relocated three times in the past 15 years for different construction projects and positions in the company," Joe says. "Their resilience, dedication, and support mean everything."

Fun Fact: Joe is a commercial drone pilot.

Wendy Moore

Chief Operating Officer for Healium, StoryUp Studios

TIGER

As chief operating officer for Healium, Wendy Moore is the right-hand woman to CEO Sarah Hill, and she's constantly seeing new opportunities to add to her list of accomplishments. At the top of her list is her job as COO of a startup that makes a difference in peoples' lives through using virtual and augmented reality as digital medicine.

When Sarah hired Wendy just over a year ago as the business development lead, she quickly realized that Wendy was a special asset, saying that, "In a few short months, it was clear I had hired a talented, compassionate leader who leaned into challenges, had the ability to win and lose gracefully, wear a closet full of different workplace hats, and would one day become a global thought leader on selling a new class of 'digital drugs' that mimic the impact of traditional pharmaceuticals." Throughout her past year, Wendy has had the opportunity to speak with the CDC, NASA, Google, and so many more.

But her drive to help people isn't limited to her career. Wendy has a genuine heart. She is "Aunt Wendy" to 15 different kids, a role she relishes. After her best friend's husband was tragically killed in a driving accident, Wendy stepped in to help raise their three young children. She has a passion to help others that are going through difficult times.

AGE:
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Currently, Wendy is a founding member and board secretary of the Women's Investment Network for Entrepreneurs (or WINE), which invests in and mentors women-led businesses, and within the next few years she hopes to serve on boards throughout the community. "I'd love to sit on the board of either REDI or the chamber in the next few years, because I love economic development and business community initiatives," she says.

Wendy's husband and her family motivate her and help her to celebrate life in all of the little ways. These people in her life, paired with Wendy's love for new opportunities and change, makes her the passionate and driven woman she is today. "I get energized by new adventures, whether that's a new business strategy or a new country to explore," she says.

Fun Fact: Wendy is "Aunt Wendy" to 15 kids and counting, and she loves being the fun and adventurous aunt.

Trent Rash is reimagining Columbia's arts scene and bringing symphonic music back into the community spotlight through his position as executive director of The Missouri Symphony.

A former college professor, Trent now spends most days solving problems; building relationships with staff, donors, the board, or patrons; mentoring the MOSY team; or working to make MOSY a better public service to the community. "We offer people more than just music — we offer them hope, comfort, and inspiration, a charge we have tried to live up to, especially over this difficult year," Trent says.

As the pandemic wiped out all in-person events and the organization had to cancel all summer performances, Trent saw these obstacles as an opportunity to innovate. His first instinct was to take care of the musicians in MOSY family. Knowing that these musicians depend on live performances for survival and often don't have full-time incomes during the summer months, Trent set out to create an online fundraiser that would raise more than \$30,000 to help support the MOSY musicians.

Trent's proudest accomplishment, however, is MOSY@Home, an online hub for musical content, which came to existence as a result of the pandemic. MOSY@Home features Mister MOSY, a character idea from former MOSY employee Monica Senecal Palmer that connects kids to symphonic music. "It has been such a privilege to create and play this character during COVID times," Trent says. "His teaching moments to the kids watching were also bringing me direction during a difficult period." Along with Mister MOSY, Trent explains that the hub features MOSY U, a series geared towards student musicians; Virtuosity, the place for online concerts; and MOSY Motifs, a podcast that explores relevant issues in symphonic music.

Trent credits his own inner-strength for where he is today. "Most recently, I came out as gay after having been married with kids for over 15 years," he says. "That took a lot of courage and strength to face the unknown and the consequences that would follow."

AGE:
39

Trent Rash

Executive Director, The Missouri Symphony

Fun Fact: Trent's original plan in life was to be a journalist — he was even on the staff of *The Maneater* at MU.

Jason Gruender

Vice President, Meyer Electric; Manager, Liberty Family Medicine; Owner/Broker, Liberty Insurance Solutions

AGE:
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When Jason Gruender's peers are describing him, they use one word — Superman. Most people know Jason from Liberty Family Medicine, but for 15 years, he has been with Meyer Electric, one of the largest electrical contractors in central Missouri, where he's now vice president. And, to add to the list, he's also the owner and broker for Liberty Insurance Solutions, as well as a husband and father.

For years, Jason has been achieving accomplishment after accomplishment that helps better himself and his community. In 2003, Jason obtained his degree in electrical engineering, but he wasn't ready to stop learning and advancing his skills. So, he set out to obtain his professional engineer license, which would require exams and years of training under licensed engineers, and in 2008, he achieved his goal. He also takes pride in helping to bring the model of direct primary care to Columbia alongside his wife, Dr. Bridget Gruender, at Liberty Family Medicine. He says, "[At Liberty] so many people have been blessed with top-notch care that they would have otherwise not received."

Jason and his family are also passionate about community involvement and giving back. He has several roles throughout the community — he's an ambassador for the Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the small business committee and Women's Network Steering Committee. And at Liberty, the companies have established a scholarship program where they highlight three local organizations and provide monetary donations every month. Some of Jason's favorites include Coyote Hill and Rainbow House.

One topic Jason is passionate about is the gender gap in many industries, including health care and construction — industries that he and Bridget are a part of. "I believe there is a strong chance my daughter will consider following in the footsteps of one of her parents and, for this reason, I plan to do all I can to help her have an equal chance of achieving whatever goals she sets forth," he says.

One of the people in his life that Jason credits with his development is his wife. "No one believes in me more than my wife, Bridget," he says. "I can't remember a single time in our relationship where she didn't support something I wanted to try."

Fun Fact: Jason spent a summer working on the pit crew of a Nascar truck team.



Garrett Pearson

Executive Director, City of Refuge

Fun Fact: Garrett loves to scuba dive.

During Garrett Pearson's college years, he had a dream of changing the world — now, through his role as executive director for City of Refuge, he has the opportunity to change someone else's.

Garrett grew up in a broken home. There was a time when he wasn't certain of who he was or what his value as a person was going to be, but his sister Mallory helped him along. In fact, it was his sister that helped him refocus his enthusiasm from wanting to change the world to changing someone else's world.

Every day is different at City of Refuge, but Garrett makes sure the nonprofit can thrive and serve Columbia's international community. The goal of City of Refuge is to help refugees regain control of their lives and contribute to the city. "Our model of care revolves around two ideas: to help families recover and regain control of their lives," Garrett explains.

Since Garrett was selected to lead the organization, City of Refuge has grown exponentially. Starting with a low budget that limited them to assisting around 500 refugees in 2018, Garrett has expanded

the organization's reach, allowing them to help more than 1,200 refugees each year. By forging strong relationships with businesses and organizations around Columbia, Garrett was able to make this drastic growth possible. Keith Anderson, vice president of the board for City of Refuge, says: "The most impressive accomplishment, in my eyes, is his ability to get the best out of the people he manages. Those people are excelling at their jobs, and they are excited about what the future holds. Garrett does a great job of listening to them and using their input to establish the future needs of the organization."

While Garrett is proud of the work he's doing for Columbia and City of Refuge, his most proud moment dates back to 2012 in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. It was Garrett's first international work experience, and throughout six months, he partnered with a children's home taking care of 20 children while the country was going through an orphan crisis. He focused on youth development, project coordination, and assisted in building a new care home for young, single mothers.

Garrett's family and his experience growing up shaped the value of belonging within him — a value which now drives everything he does and hopes to do.

AGE:
29

Erica Dickson

Assistant Supervisor of Student Services, Columbia Public Schools; COO, Innovated Dreamz; Owner, Xola's Vegan On-The-Go

Entrepreneur. Activist. Advocate. Mother. These are just some of the many roles Erica Dickson has throughout the community.

Erica works as the assistant supervisor of student services for Columbia Public Schools, where she assists families who are homeless, executes equity training, and ultimately does whatever she can to help meet a student's needs. She's also the COO of Innovated Dreamz, a nonprofit organization she co-founded with Cory Crosby. In her role for Innovated Dreamz, Erica works to provide coaching services to those in the community who are interested in starting or growing a small business. And, she's the proud owner of Xola's Vegan On-The-Go, a food trailer that brings fast and nutritious meal options to the community. "A misconception is that I can not do all these things and do them well," Erica says. "A typical day would consist of me doing my best to do both."

Of all of the work and service Erica has done, her work in the nonprofit sector is what she's most proud of. Her first dealings with the entrepreneurial world were with an organization she founded in 2012. As a young single mother, she was struggling to find affordable, quality care for her school-aged son. So she created a space just for that with King's Kids AEO Services Inc. Through this organization, she learned just how challenging nonprofit work can be, but in the end, everyone that came through this nonprofit became family. She says: "My goal was that our parents would never have a lapse in employment due to a lack of care. So, I would like to think this organization played a part in building a stronger economy as well."

Erica's three children, TJ, Mikey, and Xola, motivate her every day to continue helping others in any way she can. "The love is indescribable! And, when I'm out-and-about, moving and working throughout the day, I try my best to see all of the children that I serve through my 'mom lens,'" Erica says. She uses this same lens for the adults that she encounters. "As idealistic as it seems, wanting everyone to experience [love, nurturing, and protection] — the necessity of everyone experiencing that is what motivates me," she says.

AGE:
36

Fun Fact: Erica actually hates talking on the phone.

Jeremy Spillman

Chief Creator, Spillman Homes



When Jeremy Spillman was a teenager, he felt lost. When he was a sophomore in high school, he dropped out. By the time he was 17, he had been sent to prison for four years. After watching people go through the doors just to come back in — and an altercation with a prison-lifer that would try to kill Jeremy — he knew this wasn't the path he was meant to be on.

Now, he has a beautiful family and he owns his own company, Spillman Homes, where he makes home renovation visions come to life.

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Jeremy starts his day around 4 a.m. He'll work on the creative process of designing his company's next round of houses or a project they're currently working on.

When the rest of the office shows up, they will discuss "hot-list items" that need to be discussed and trouble-shoot the situation. The rest of his day will consist of estimating, appointments, and meetings with the experience managers in the field. When there's a free moment in the day, the team will invest it in creating and fine-tuning processes and making everything as systematic as possible. And, it's a lot of work.

Jeremy says: "I don't think people realize how much work it really takes . . . We design a product, manufacture or build the product, manage the business side behind it, manage the compliance side behind it, sell the product, and then we warranty the product." He adds that his team spends a minimum of one year with each client as they work on designing, planning, and building the project.

But regardless of what the client wants, Jeremy comes with enthusiasm and plenty of ideas. "When others thought our renovation project was next to impossible, Jeremy went the extra mile to make our dream a reality," clients Brian and Christine Grace say. "He shared our vision for our home while bringing his own ideas, creativity, and expertise to the project."

No matter what Jeremy's doing, he hopes to change lives — being able to do this is his reward. "We all have life events that give us the unique ability to bring something special . . . The reason I revealed my trials and failures is that I want to use it as a platform to help our youth who are lost and struggling just like I was," he says.

Fun Fact: Jeremy hates adhesive bandages — even if he's getting blood drawn, he does not want any Band-Aid.

Ashley Emel

Chiropractic Physician, Owner, and Principal, Compass Chiropractic and Wellness LLC; Owner, Cost Cutters and Supercuts of Missouri



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As a chiropractic physician and owner of Compass Chiropractic and Wellness LLC, Ashley Emel spends her days helping people flourish. "I love seeing a variety of people and issues," Ashley says. "It brings a lot of joy when we can help those that are in pain or suffering feel better."

Ashley takes pride in her extensive training, specifically completing her CACCP, a certification in pediatrics that took several years to complete. This certification took an additional 200 hours in pediatrics training, two papers, and a test — a curriculum she successfully completed while moving two times and after she gave birth to her youngest daughter, Charly.

This certification is just one of the many accomplishments Ashley has achieved in her career. She also takes pride in the startup and success of Compass Chiropractic and Wellness. The business began as two rooms in another chiropractic office, but less than a year later, the business outgrew the space, and it only continues to grow after the move. In 2014, Ashley began the nutrition side of the practice, which has evolved into helping people in over 20 states address their nutritional needs. Ashley helps wherever she can in whatever community needs her; she regularly goes to Missouri Mennonite communities to help fulfill their wellness needs. She says: "Each Thursday, I go to Sedalia as a satellite day and see dozens of people. This has been on my dream board of things to be able to do the past few years."

And if running the business and road tripping to Sedalia to help underserved communities wasn't enough, Ashley also spends time as secretary for True North, serves on the board of The Missouri Symphony, and, for the past three years, has been the co-leader for her oldest daughter's Girl Scouts troop.

Ashley credits her family for where she is today. Ashley's parents and husband always push her to do her best, and her children give her the drive to keep going. "I truly could not be where I am today without my family," Ashley says.

Fun Fact: Ashley really dislikes the sound of crinkled bags.

Whether he's helping people achieve their dreams of owning a home, fundraising to help rebuild communities after disasters strike, or coaching basketball for Columbia's youth, Marcus Jones lives a life that prioritizes his neighbors.

Prior to Marcus' current role as branch manager and senior loan officer for The Broadway Group, he spent five years with Veterans United Home Loans. Here, through the Veterans United Foundation, Marcus was able to procure \$100,000 on behalf of the American Red Cross after a tornado swept through Jefferson City. But, his list of accomplishments doesn't stop there. "Most recently, opening our branch of Total Lending Concepts, as The Broadway Group, has been an exciting and proud moment as we — partners Joe Newberry and Eric Johnston — are working hard to help people realize the dream of home ownership," he says.

And, that's not all. Marcus stays involved with the youth community, too. He currently coaches fifth-grade Columbia Magic basketball as well as middle school basketball for Columbia Independent School. He serves as the safety and facilities committee member for the Boys and Girls Club and consults with its athletic programming, and he co-founded and serves as the director for three youth teams: Columbia Magic, 94ft Basketball Club, and CarrollGoLive.

Marcus works tirelessly to gain support for these teams so kids with limited resources have the opportunity to play basketball and maybe earn a scholarship for the sport. "He makes sure that finances do not limit a kid's opportunities and gives them the hope that, with hard work and dedication, they can achieve anything they want," local attorney Bogdan Susan says.

"The zeal of kids motivates me," he says. "Seeing children's happiness and success really illuminates me in a way that helps push me further. Coaching youth basketball takes a lot of my time, but watching these children show real joy really gives me the energy to keep going harder."

Marcus' main goal is to enhance the lives of the people around him, and he continues to do this through sharing his positivity and giving his time to various parts of the community.

AGE:
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Marcus Jones

VP of Corporate Growth of TLC; Branch Manager, Senior Loan Officer, TLC — The Broadway Group

Fun Fact: In high school show choir, Marcus performed "Men in Tights." Spoiler: He had to wear tights.

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For eleven years, Kari Hopkins has been helping Coyote Hill children's home grow and transform into the nonprofit organization it is today. "When I started in 2009, Coyote Hill was a small nonprofit, mostly unknown to the community," says Kari, now the organization's chief development officer.

In her day-to-day role, Kari oversees all of the fundraising and marketing efforts for the organization. Some days she'll be planning a fundraiser event, others she might be writing copy for newsletters or taking pictures with big checks that were generously donated to the organization by its corporate partners. But, the best part of Kari's job is connecting the community with opportunities to invest in its future.

Since she's been a part of the Coyote Hill, Kari has helped it triple in size and become a household name throughout Mid-Missouri. She's been there as the organization has built four new homes to accommodate twice the amount of children. She's been there as the organization has tripled its budget while remaining debt-free. She's watched the staff grow from 12 to 43 people. She's been the leadership behind the expansion of the organization's equine program. And, she was there to watch as Coyote Hill hit a milestone of caring for over 500 children.

It's the children who call Coyote Hill their home that motivate Kari every day. "I am driven to give them a childhood they deserve and didn't receive," she says. "I believe child abuse can end with this generation. They can stop the cycle of abuse and neglect."

Kari's mentor through her 11 years at Coyote Hill is founder and executive director Larry McDaniel. Larry, Kari explains, has quietly and unintentionally been her mentor for the past 11 years — he taught her humility, leadership, and boldness, and that getting out of her comfort zone helps her grow. "I have a running note on my phone affectionately called 'Larry-isms', because I want to remember every lesson he has taught me," she says. 📖

Fun Fact: Misspelled words drive Kari nuts — make sure you spellcheck!

Kari Hopkins

Chief Development Officer, Coyote Hill