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. Arriving 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

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 involved 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 Jeji, 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 Jeji. “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 Jeji. “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.”

Most students in K - 12 want their parents and family involved at the school level, Jeji points out. “So even if they say don’t come, go anyway.”

Finally, for students to benefit the most from their education, a partnership must exist between the student, parents, teachers and staff. “We must all work together collaboratively to make sure students are successful.”

by Peggy Magee
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 Brenda Braden had been active as a school volunteer in the Rockwood district as long as Jaronda can remember, her mother Ronda Braden had been active as a school volunteer in the Rockwood district. Jaronda Braden’s high level of involvement in the Rockwood district inspired her daughter Jaronda to become an active member of Marquette High School. She was a class leader and participated in many organizations, all while enrolled in Normal High School. It was a positive and valuable experience for her, and now she is just as active at Truman State University.

Over the years, she has helped with school projects and field trips, served on committees to provide input to Rockwood administrators about issues, served as a volunteer, and participated in activities and meetings with the staff. She is proud of the children that each other parents could benefit from this also. So I encouraged them to get involved.” The parents should take the initiative and encourage the students to get involved. With each other.

Jaronda’s broad circle of parents and staff expanded her daughter’s own “big network” of people. Jaronda reports, “When my mom met families, she encouraged them to get involved.” The parents were pleased with the improvements although the “construction zone” will always be “Highway 40” to me.

When Jaronda looks back on her high school days, she feels grateful for 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 from her mother how valuable school involvement is, Jaronda dived into many activities on her campus, including the Resident Hall Association, the Association of Black Collegians and serving as a student 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 Montano

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 work with students and teachers in public education is extremely exciting to me.

I’ve been fortunate and, foremost, my major 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 succeed.

I will continue to negotiate. My life and career has been marked by working collaboratively with others. I personally know and am friends with many educators and teachers in our county districts as well as many of our area legislatures. These 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 both. I believe that likely to be affected by the change. St. Louis has undergone a number of changes in the transportation system, over two years as 1+1 (and as a living in St. Louis since arrived it will always be “Highway 40” to me) has been renovated and expanded. So now that is reopening, everyone is delighted with the improvements although the “construction phase” certainly created some challenges. Using I-64 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 at. While I look forward to hearing from everyone – parents, students, employees and the community – on your specific ideas on how we can continue to improve and serve transfer students and families and accomplish our mission.

As the months and years progress, I look forward to working with our legislative leaders in Jefferson City and Washington, D.C. 20202-4605

There is a set of information that VICC has designated as directory information. This information includes names, addresses, phone numbers and such other personally identifying information that VICC has designated for inclusion in the student’s educational record contains information that VICC has designated as directory information with respect to each student. It will be provided to the parent or eligible student when the parent or eligible student requests it, and the student is notified of the right to a hearing.

The provisions of FERPA and to afford parents and eligible students a fair opportunity to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her responsibilities for VICC with respect to transfer students and to enable students to bring attention to portions of the record they believe are inaccurate or misleading. Parents or eligible students may ask VICC to amend a record that they believe 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 file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education.

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. Making the announcement the other unforeseen circumstances affect bus schedules.

Also, please be sure that students are at the assigned stops at least five minutes prior to their pick-ups.

Francois, 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.

Finally, if you have questions, please contact us.

Parents and Guardians

Annual Notification

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords students who are 13 years of age or older (“eligible student”) certain rights with respect to their education records. Although VICC does not apply to VICC, VICC can and will comply with the provisions of FERPA and do all that the student has been notified of the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education.

By David S. Glaser

Message from the New VICC CEO

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