The Journey
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RON BROWN SCHOLAR PROGRAM
SPRING 2021

The Ron Brown Scholar Program (RBSP) celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. As I think about where we began, I am astounded by how far the Program has come, how vastly our constellation of Scholars stretches and how bright they shine as leaders and thinkers effecting positive change. Because of our undying commitment to mentorship and giving back, over 2,000 high achieving young leaders now form a network with an exponential impact. Amazingly, our incoming 2021 Ron Brown Scholars already sense that they are joining a family that wants to help their potential be realized and their successes amplified.

This issue of The Journey is full of good news: fellowships won, degrees earned, businesses and nonprofits founded! Two Scholars, Angela Smedley (2000) and Michael Thompson (2001), made partner at their law firms. RBS physicians, scientists, and public health officials are working diligently day-in and day-out to help us return to normal. And our young leaders—from public officials to community organizers—are fighting to make sure that this “new normal” doesn’t repeat the follies and injustices of the past.

Ron Brown Scholars are changing the world. But as a group, we are not immune to the pressures, challenges and grief that life can throw our way. To those Scholars who feel like you’re struggling just to keep your head above water: we are equally proud of you. These are historically difficult times; as we find ourselves pulled in a million directions, we also have to look to our own mental and physical wellbeing. I know full well how hard it can be to juggle all the demands life can throw your way; add pandemic, dysfunctional politics, shuttered businesses, and remote schools, and it’s no wonder the stress is taking its toll. Just remember, we are here for each other in good times and bad, a cheering section as well as a support system. Scholars realize that if they need help or a friendly ear, all they have to do is pick up the phone to connect to a RBS friend, advisor or staff.

In spite of the challenges we are all facing, RBSP has a lot to cheer about. A $5M gift from the Norman and Ruth Rales Foundation has allowed us to double the number of scholarships we award for the next 5 years! Starting with this year’s incoming class, we awarded 45 Ron Brown Scholarships instead of the usual 20-25. To honor the Rales family, whose definition of a meaningful life is rooted in service and an uncompromising belief in the promise of the future, we’ve renamed our Leaders Network. With pride, we salute The Ron Brown - Ruth and Norman Rales Leaders Network – a trusted source of job and internship opportunities for Scholars and Captains facilitated through networking, recruiting, resume collections, seminars and annual conferences.

Message from the President

(continued on page 2)
Your continuous generosity and that of friends like Josh, Mitchell and Stephen Rales has created the dynamic community originally envisioned by Anthony Pilaro. We call upon the entire Ron Brown community to lean into our network of Scholars, mentors and friends and to continue to lift each other.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Mallory
President and CEO

Kelly Raymond Celebrates 25 years with RBSP

The 25th anniversary of the Ron Brown Scholar Program also marks Kelly Raymond’s 25th year with the Program. A graduate of George Mason University, Kelly was the first hire under Mike Mallory, and suffered through the growing pains as she and Mike learned how to get a small nonprofit up and running. She has done it all, acting as Mike’s assistant, mail sorter, business manager, chief data officer and mentor. Kelly’s primary area of focus is on keeping the financials of the Program in order. She is probably best known by RBS as the most important person at the Program, as she has written every scholarship check administered to students.

Thanks Kelly!

The Ron Brown Scholar Program is excited to announce a $5M gift from The Norman R. and Ruth Rales Foundation. This game-changing grant will double the number of scholarships the Program is able to award over the next five years. The Rales Foundation’s underwriting of one hundred twenty-five additional scholarships increases our incoming cohorts to almost 50 freshmen, each of whom will receive $40,000 toward their educational expenses. In making this generous grant, the Foundation recognized the life-changing impact this Program has had on a generation of talented but underprivileged young African Americans.

We look forward to 2021 — our 25th year — with optimism and a renewed sense of purpose. The Rales Foundation gift is a strong foundation for our next 25 years. The ripple effects of their generosity are incalculable: twice as many Scholars means twice as many transformative leaders. Ron Brown Scholars have already become innovators in fields as diverse as the arts, science, and public service. This next generation of Ron Brown Scholars will have double the opportunity to promote racial equality in America, and with your help, we will be there to support them all the way.

RBSP will continue fundraising to maintain our own commitment to supporting 20-25 Ron Brown Scholars annually. We ask that you continue your support of our work to benefit this expanding base of Scholars. Together, we can advance the ongoing leadership development of these students — and the more than 2,000 students enrolled in our three signature programs: the Ron Brown Scholarship, Leaders Network, and the Guided Pathway Support Program.

About Norman & Ruth Rales

The Norman & Ruth Rales Foundation is dedicated to supporting children and families facing hardship by creating opportunities for them to realize life’s potential.

The foundation strives to advance the legacy of Norman and Ruth Rales, two individuals from modest means who built an extraordinary life together based upon the values of integrity, compassion, hard work, and giving back to others. Norman Rales, raised in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in Harlem during the Great Depression - where he learned lessons about the value of community, striving, and resiliency - was honored to be the 2010 recipient of the Ron Brown Scholar Program American Journey Award.
Leaders Network Partners Bolster Virtual Learning for Ron Brown Students

The Ron Brown – Ruth and Norman Rales Leaders Network has always been a community of achievers with high ideals who come together for inspiration and opportunity. Never has this community been more important than in the past year. Our Partners have played a critical role in delivering opportunities for our students to grow their professional skills and knowledge through virtual events including career education and awareness of jobs and internship openings. Students tuned in over the past few months to learn and discuss topics such as Personal Branding with Travelers and the growth of the Clean Energy Sector with Apex Energy.

In the coming months, we will continue learning and connecting through webinars and our Professional Development Panel Series. This series is designed to inspire our students with stories from incredible leaders who share insights and advice from their own career journeys as they ascended into leadership positions. We are also offering leadership opportunities for Partners to engage with Alumni (young and mid-career) through our recently launched series, Alumni Office Hours.

Our popular Ron Brown Leaders Summit will be held online from June 22-26, 2021 and although we will miss being in-person, we are able to build in additional days and programming to the event. We hope you will save the dates and follow updates at ronbrownleaderssummit.org.

Thank you to all our Partners and community of volunteers. Events like this would not be possible without your support. Your investment of time and resources into these types of educational programs are extremely valuable to the development of our Ron Brown students.

Ron Brown Leaders Summit
June 22 – 26, 2021 | All Events Online

Partner Latham & Watkins Student Internship Reflection

Grant Alexander, RBS 2018, a junior Economics major at Morehouse provides reflections on his internship experience with Leaders Network partner, Latham & Watkins LLP.

“This past summer and winter, I had the amazing opportunity to intern with Latham & Watkins LLP, one of the most prestigious law firms in the world. I worked remotely as a Global Recruiting Intern in the Orange County and New York offices and honestly, throughout my experience working, I never felt like an intern in the conventional sense. I was assigned various projects that involved working with attorneys on interview scheduling and feedback loops as well as staff-side higher ups in HR among other departments that dealt with data entry, outreach, and general office research and responsibilities.

Oftentimes, my supervisors would ask for my opinions on various topics and projects, and it didn't feel like there was a rigid hierarchy at all. They spoke to me as if I was their equal, not just an intern there to do the work that no one else wanted to do. Later, when projects would be published or presented, I would see my actual work and input in the final product, and that showed that they didn’t just ask for my input for the sake of asking, but that my voice actually mattered. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot happened on my end personally regarding my family, and they were extremely accommodating and understanding. They even sent me my own firm laptop to complete assigned work and care packages that included gifts and goodies for the whole recruiting team. Overall, my experience was amazing, and I’d love to work with Latham & Watkins again in the future!”
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE

Serkute Abebe  
Holly, NC  
Political Science & Sociology

Yasmeen Adeleke  
Waldorf, MD  
Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

Sade Adeniran  
San Diego, CA  
Business Administration

Chidimma Adinna  
Ontario, CA  
Chemical & Physical Biology and Psychology

Jerron-Michael Arline  
Beaumont, TX  
Neuroscience & Social Policy Analysis

Devonte Billings  
Sunrise, FL  
Computer Science

Nicole Campbell  
Milton GA  
Cognitive Science

Jaylen Cocklin  
Columbia, SC  
Political Science/Government

Jean Colas  
Immokalee, FL  
Biochemistry

Fatimah Coppin  
Fresh Meadows, NY  
Biological Sciences

Bank Daniel  
Independence, MO  
Computer Science & Government

Amalia Desir  
Massapequa, NY  
Neuroscience/Cognitive Sciences

Mohamed Elhassan  
Hammond, MD  
Symbolic Systems

Elishevlyne Eliason  
Aurora, CO  
Political Science

Peirce Ellis  
Bromall, PA  
Economics

Dinan Elsyad  
Lorton, VA  
Neuroscience & International Relations

Abel Geleta  
Arlington, VA  
Political Science

Rediet Ghebrehiwet  
Silver Spring, MD  
History & Public Policy

Marlon Griggs  
Jacksonville, FL  
Chemistry & Political Science

Makayla Harris  
Ann Arbor, MI  
Undecided

Mia Hurts  
Houston, TX  
Public Health

Robert Igbokwe  
Chicago, IL  
Undecided

Kadija Ismail  
Springfield, VA  
Computer Science & Public Policy

Shaltiy-El Jackson  
Houston, TX  
Biology

Eric Jones  
Saint Rose, LA  
Biomedical Engineering
2021 RON BROWN SCHOLARS

Nicholas Joyner
Jacksonville, FL
Nursing

Katherine Keaton
Cary, NC
American Studies or Ethnicity, Race & Migration

Faith Kumi
Marietta, GA
Political Science

Moses Matanda
Plano, TX
Biomedical Engineering

Mikayla Merin
Philadelphia, PA
Sociology

Ahmed Muhammad
Oakland, CA
Computer Science & Engineering

Kennedy Odiboh
Stone Mountain, GA
Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology

Emmanuel Okyere
Columbus, OH
Computer Science

Norah Ostin
Pittsburgh, PA
Environmental Engineering

Bryant Perkins
Ocean Springs, MS
Computer Science

Ja’Karri Pierre
Boston, MA
Public Health & Public Policy

Maximillion Shearod
Houston, TX
Cognitive Science

Lydia Shimelis Belay
Aurora, CO
Neuroscience, Computer Science & Philosophy

Kynnedy Smith
Shaker Heights, OH
Computer Science & Music

Da’vion Tatum
Houston, TX
Biomedical Engineering / Pre-med, Pre-law

Sebastian Ward
New Haven, CT
Political Science

Madison Webb
Fairburn, GA
Sociology

Kyle Willard
Fairburn, GA
Sociology

Malaya Williams
Lakeland, FL
Sociology

Jamaal Willis
Apple Valley, CA
Political Science/ Government

CELEBRATING

25 YEARS

OF RON BROWN SCHOLAR IMPACT

Spring 2021
Finding the right college can be a daunting process. When the pandemic forced universities to adjust admissions policies, parents and students had more questions about test optional policies, grading, how to participate in club activities, application requirements, financial aid and gap years.

As of this year, the Guided Pathway Support Program has offered front line college counseling services to over 4,000 African American high school students across the country. GPS convenes African American high school sophomores, juniors and seniors to an online college access community for counseling and support.

“I never thought one application would positively impact my life so much, but the GPS community proved me wrong,” said Jalexis Edwards, GPS Class of 2020 student. “Being a part of the GPS community changed my life and my future. From editing college essays, having mock interviews, leaving positive comments and sharing numerous opportunities, I’m grateful for the resources GPS has offered me. However, I am even more so grateful for the sense of purpose and direction my GPS family provided me.”

One of the country’s few African American college counseling organizations, the Guided Pathway Support Program works to keep students updated on the constantly evolving college admissions process and connected to leadership opportunities.

“I want to extend a HUGE thank you to the GPS family for absolutely everything,” said Kristian Hardy, a member of the GPS Class of 2020 and Ron Brown Captain. “This is a super special community and I’m very thankful to be here!”

This year, GPS partnered with Google's Applied Digital Skills Group in a collaboration to ensure that GPS students develop the digital literacy skills needed to succeed on the modern campus and in the modern workplace. The program also empaneled its inaugural student-led GPS Leadership Council, which will coordinate service projects in areas such as mental health and professional development and improve engagement within the GPS community. The Ron Brown Scholar Program has partnered with venture capital firm General Catalyst to develop a virtual, venture capital exploration externship for selected Guided Pathway Support Program students this summer 2021.

Senior GPS advisor and Ron Brown Captain Candace Howze is motivated to work with GPS students because she knows firsthand how beneficial, and rare, it is to have personalized attention in the college admissions process. “Black students face additional and unique challenges to opportunity,” said Candace, who initially worked with GPS as a volunteer. “It’s incredibly rewarding to guide students through the process and ensure that they have an advocate who affirms their potential and their dreams.”

African American high school sophomores, juniors and seniors are encouraged to apply to the Guided Pathway Support Program at rbsgps.com. GPS accepts applications and serves students throughout the calendar year.
“I’m fighting to ensure that everyone in my community has a stable roof over their heads, food on the table, quality health care, a good education, and a habitable planet. I hope that my greatest impact is to help others realize that such a world is not only possible -- it is within our reach.”

A product of East Ramapo public schools, Mondaire was raised in Section 8 housing and on food stamps in the working-class Village of Spring Valley by a single mother who worked multiple jobs to provide for their family. He saw firsthand the role that government must play in ensuring that all members of our society are able to live in dignity.

Mondaire’s understanding of what he saw around him would both deepen and mature through his involvement in the NAACP during high school and eventually as a 19-year-old committee chairman on the organization’s National Board of Directors.

Mondaire arrived at Stanford University planning to major in English and change the world through a career as a novelist, but gradually changed his mind. His continued participation in the NAACP, his leadership in the Associated Students of Stanford University (through which he served on the Undergraduate Senate and as Student Body Vice President, and led numerous successful initiatives), his summer internship at the Stanford Legal Clinic and his studies, all convinced him that he could be most impactful through political and legal advocacy.

A recipient of Stanford’s prestigious John Gardner Public Service Fellowship, Mondaire worked in the Obama Administration in the Department of Justice Office of Legal Policy. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 2013. Mondaire clerked on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York and spent years in private practice, where he was recognized by the Legal Aid Society of New York for his pro bono service.

Mondaire is a co-founder of the nonprofit Rising Leaders, Inc., which teaches professional skills to underserved middle-school students in three American cities, and has served on the board of the New York Civil Liberties Union. Prior to running for Congress, Mondaire was a litigator in the Westchester County Law Department.

After his election to Congress in November 2020, Mondaire was unanimously elected by his classmates to be the Freshman Representative to Leadership in the 117th Congress, the most influential position available to a freshman member. He will make history as the nation’s first openly gay, Black member of Congress.

Google Applied Digital Skills & RBSP Partner

The Ron Brown Scholar Program (RBSP) and Google's Applied Digital Skills (ADS) have formed a new partnership aimed at closing the digital divide. ADS a Google initiative designed to address the structural inequalities built into the current distribution of technological literacy. Put simply, it aims to ensure that all people—regardless of race, gender, age or income—can acquire a working understanding of the basic digital tools necessary to succeed in the twenty first century. As a part of this effort, students from all three RBSP initiatives—Captains, Scholars and GPSNavigators—have the opportunity to master the nuts and bolts of digital tools they’ll need to gain acceptance to college, thrive once they matriculate and go on to successful careers after graduation.

Guided Pathway Support Program (GPS) team members, Candace Howze and Ray Pryor, have spearheaded the integration of this curriculum into their popular weekly college advising webinar series. Covering the entire college application process, from searching for schools to filling out the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), Candace and Ray have combined the ADS curriculum and their own expertise to demystify even the most daunting parts of the process. GPS Navigators have the chance to learn, to ask questions and to apply the skills they’ve learned to their own college journey. One of the great things about the GPS platform is that it engages students both synchronously and asynchronously—for every student we have tuning in to these live webinars, four more will watch the recordings, which are posted to the platform and available on-demand.

Barbara Kessler, longtime friend and volunteer with RBSP is bringing her extensive experience as an Academic Services Mentor and Director of Human Resources at the University of Virginia to the undergraduate members of The Ron Brown – Ruth and Norman Rales Leaders Network. Her series of professional development webinars focuses on the skills and documents necessary to translate students’ academic and pre-professional experiences into further opportunities, be they graduate or professional school, work or service. Her resume and cover letter workshops, which this year supplemented the Leaders Network’s annual clinic, have proved particularly popular, and her first-come, first-served office hours have given current undergraduates an opportunity to review their materials one-on-one with a real expert.

The Ron Brown Scholar Program's partnership with Google's Applied Digital Skills will ensure that every student in our network—from the newest GPS Navigator to our senior Captains and Scholars—has both the tech savvy and the cultural skills they need to succeed. ADS lessons provide an engaging, interactive introduction to the technological cornerstones of the modern workplace, from spreadsheets and word processing to online research and multimedia presentations. Our team provides the all-important human connection, the individualized attention and outreach that have always been the hallmark of the Ron Brown Scholar Program.
Scholar Profile: Amanda Bass (RBS 2006)
Supervisor, Capital Habeas Unit
Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Arizona

Amanda Bass has just been promoted, yet hopes that there will soon be no need for her job. As Supervisor in the Capital Habeas Unit at the Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Arizona, she advocates for death-sentenced people in their federal appeals, people whose humanity have been devoured by a corrupted criminal justice system. Primarily, Amanda’s goal is to challenge wrongful convictions and sentences; demonstrating how an individual’s constitutional rights have been compromised and whose imprisonment is therefore unlawful. Her work involves collaborating with a team to tell her clients’ stories, navigating around and through the procedural hurdles that complicate post-conviction capital punishment trials, and now as Supervisor, mentoring younger lawyers who are new to capital habeas litigation.

When Amanda, whose path into the field was not a straight line, is asked whether she could see herself in this work long-term, she responds, “Well, hopefully we will not be doing this for a while.” Like many, she envisions a future in which the barbaric practice of the death penalty is obsolete, but until then is focused on stepping in where lives are at stake because of racism in policing and punishing, and challenging the larger framework of our legal system which allow for the utmost violation of human rights.

Amanda has always been passionate in her pursuit of social justice, but while studying Mathematics and Black Studies at Amherst College was unsure about the direction of her career. She took a semester off in order to serve as a community organizer in Georgia during the Obama 2008 campaign. Working primarily on voter registration initiatives, Amanda was confronted by the ways that allegedly race-neutral voting laws disenfranchise poor and working-class people of color for whom access is limited to state IDs, boards of elections, and other basic needs that would enable them to cast a ballot. This explicit discrimination against people in marginalized communities fueled Amanda’s desire to attend law school where her coursework in more specialized subjects such as critical race theory and international human rights law, combined with her experience as a law fellow with the Equal Justice Initiative, eventually led her to the
capital habeas space. Here, she says, she found the compelling intersection between racial and economic justice, human rights and the procedural morass that is habeas in federal courts.

A capital defense requires scrupulous knowledge of legal restrictions that are often politically motivated. But in a successful argument, Amanda emphasizes that the greatest importance is being a master not just of the system in which you are operating, but of your record – that is, knowing a case and a client’s story in and out, being able to speak from a factual perspective, and to always speak the truth, even if it makes people feel uncomfortable. For a successful defense in or outside the courtroom, she says that one must advocate from a position of strength and that means having full mastery of your record.

Amanda’s wholehearted drive to interrupt the fatal dysfunction of our justice system and humanize the victims of it, is apparent in the 2018 ABC docu-series produced by Viola Davis, “The Last Defense.” The series features Julius Jones who was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death at 19-years old. Amanda served as the assistant federal public defender in Jones’ federal appeal and saw this documentary as a way to draw awareness not just to his case, but to the issues that plague the law and punitive procedures in the U.S., leading to wrongful convictions and deaths. Throughout the three-part series, Amanda helps to convey the circumstances of Jones’ case and argues for clemency. His, which received far more media attention than most, is emblematic but not isolated.

In Amanda’s new role, she enjoys spending more time as a mentor to less experienced capital habeas lawyers, helping them give voice to people facing injustice. This, just another way she has committed to leaving the ladder down since being named a Ron Brown Scholar in 2006. Looking back, Amanda thanks the Program for how it allowed her the freedom to consider what she truly wanted to pursue as a vocation without having to think about debt, encouraging that she take time off during college for meaningful work on the ground, and for the community that has been instrumental to her professional growth.

Now living in Phoenix, Arizona, when not in the office or court room, Amanda rejuvenates by stepping outside for a walk, or into her desert garden where Sonoran trees and cacti grow.

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**RBS Good News!**

Congratulations to Ron Brown Scholars, **Angela Smedley (RBS 2000)** and **Michael Thompson (RBS 2001)** who were recently named Partners at their law firms – this is a first time any Ron Brown Scholars have made Partner.

Angela focuses her practice, at Winston & Strawn LLP, on complex commercial litigation, leveraging insights from her federal court clerkship to defend financial services clients against individual and class actions across multiple jurisdictions. Angela also employs her years of sports litigation experience to represent professional sports unions and athletes in labor arbitrations, antitrust litigation and complex disputes at the trial and appellate levels.

Michael is a business litigator with Prince Lobel Tye LLP and represents clients in a broad array of industries, including technology and biotechnology, healthcare and insurance. He is experienced in diverse commercial litigation and appellate matters, including litigating and advising clients concerning complex business disputes; purchase price adjustment, indemnity and other post-transaction disputes; start-up and early-stage companies’ legal matters; business torts; and insurance and reinsurance litigation matters.
The Importance of Mentoring

In an article published by The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, Incorporated, Dr. Stephen Gunther, long-term friend, donor and mentor of RBSP, and Joel Bervell, Ron Brown Captain write about the importance of mentoring, providing perspective on the value of the relationship as a mentor and mentee.

The article was dedicated to Dr. Gunther’s father, Dr. Stephen F. Gunther, an orthopaedic leader and mentor, who died from COVID-19 infection on December 26, 2020.

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THE ORTHOPAEDIC FORUM

What’s Important: Diversity Mentoring and Advocacy in Orthopaedics

Stephen B. Gunther, MD, and Joel A. Bervell, MS

Orthopaedic surgery is the least diverse surgical specialty in medicine.1 One recent report showed that, from 2005 to 2014, racial and ethnic minority applicants enrolled in orthopaedic residencies at a notably lower rate than White applicants.2 A number of avenues exist for encouraging greater diversity in our profession. We present a unique example of diversity mentoring and advocacy from 2 perspectives: the mentor and the mentee.

Becoming a Mentor

I met Joel Bervell at a Ron Brown Scholar Program gala event in March 2019, when my wife introduced me to this wonderful organization for young African American scholars. An affable, accomplished, and enthusiastic Yale graduate, Joel now attends Washington State University Medical School. His parents were born in Ghana and Ivory Coast. As Joel expressed a keen interest in orthopaedic surgery, we chatted about orthopaedic career options. I tried to impart as much helpful knowledge as possible. However, I wondered about Joel’s career opportunities. I was touched by meeting this young man, and I contemplated whether I could help him on his career path. Did he have a clear picture of what an orthopaedic career entails? Did he understand the complexities of navigating the orthopaedic residency selection process? Had he completed any research projects? Did he have any mentors in orthopaedics?

As Joel finished his first year in medical school, he inquired about research opportunities. I invited him to collaborate on my research on inset glenoid fixation. He participated in manuscript writing and revisions and created multiple 3-dimensional animations to demonstrate the advantages of the inset glenoid surgical method. It was my hope that our collaboration would assist Joel in learning about the research process, orthopaedics, and this particular area of shoulder surgery. He made substantial contributions to his first published article, “Inset Glenoid Technology: A Paradigm Shift in Shoulder Replacement Surgery,” which was published in the Journal of Orthopaedic Experience & Innovation in July 2020.

When the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated Joel’s summer internship at New York University, I wanted to play a stronger role in Joel’s orthopaedic mentorship. I felt fortunate to meet a great candidate for our profession. Joel is smart, energetic, passionate, and humble. He has advanced leadership experience, and he cares deeply about other people.

On Being Mentored: Joel Bervell’s Perspective

When Dr. Gunther generously offered to fly me to Charlottesville, Virginia, for a 5-week mini-orthopaedic surgery experience, I was thrilled. It was one of the kindest gestures anyone has ever offered to me, and it turned out to be one of my greatest summer experiences.

Over the span of 5 weeks, I learned about various aspects of orthopaedic surgery, such as reading radiographs, performing orthopaedic examinations, and tying surgical knots, while also having the opportunity to observe surgery. The experience offered a bridge from school to the real clinical environment.

Beyond the hospital, I learned about the intangibles of a career in medicine. Since I lived with the Gunther family for 5 weeks, I became part of their family. Dr. Gunther’s 14-year-old sons have become my adopted younger brothers. His wife, Dana, taught me about business and cooking. I learned how surgeons balance the demands of work stress and call coverage with their outside interests and family obligations. These insights are not taught in medical school. The more time I spent living with Dr. Gunther, the more I realized that my desire to be an orthopaedic surgeon was attainable.

Throughout my life, I have been fortunate to be involved with incredible mentoring and leadership opportunities. In high school, I was selected as a Jackie Robinson Scholar and was a Ron Brown Scholar Program Captain. In college, I was the director of the Jones-Zimmermann Academic Mentoring Program. Now, as a medical student, I am student body president, an Nth Dimensions Scholar, and chapter president of the Student National Medical Association (an

(continued on page 11)
NOTE: The authors dedicate this article to S.B.G.’s father, Dr. Stephen F. Gunther, an orthopaedic leader and mentor, who died from COVID-19 infection on December 26, 2020.

Valerie is a retired Associate Dean of Admission and the Director of the Outreach Office at The University of Virginia. She received a BS in Early Childhood Education from Hampton (Institute) University and M.Ed in Administration and Supervision from the University of Virginia. After being a teacher and principal for many years she came to the University of Virginia as an Assistant Dean of Multicultural Recruitment where later she became an Associate Dean of Admission and the Director of Outreach. This team was created in the office of admission to assist families from underrepresented and underserved groups with the college admission process. She was in this position for twenty-two years during which time she conducted workshops and webinars on minority recruitment best practices, presented at regional, statewide and national conferences on topics such as college admission, essay writing, financing a college education, writing effective recommendations and diversity initiatives. During her time at the University she received several awards and recognitions for her work with diversity and inclusion, community service, college admission, and her support and mentoring to specific populations.

Valerie joined the RBSP team in February as the College Transition Program Coordinator. Working with Rales Scholars at Success Academy Charter School in New York as she, gives guidance with their scholarship selection process and college transition through mentorship. It is not only important to get scholars admitted to college but also making sure they graduate successfully, ready to give back to society which is what Valerie hopes to share through the Ron Brown Scholar Program.

Ray joined the RBSP team this past December, primarily working as a College Advisor through the Guided Pathway Support Program (GPS). He is a 2015 Ron Brown Scholar as well as the first recipient of the Ron Brown - Thomas Hale Boggs, Jr. Endowed Scholarship. Ray graduated from Duke University in 2019 with a B.A. in Public Policy.

His passion for education, particularly for boys and young men of color, rooted in his own experience and his work with students in college, drove him to pursue his career as an educator. Prior to GPS, he worked for college access programs in Mississippi and North Carolina and was also a middle school math teacher in Tennessee.

Ray is a proud alumnus who would never have known about the Ron Brown Scholar Program had it not been for a college access and advising program similar to GPS that he was a member of in high school. Therefore, he is excited for the opportunity to give back to the Program that made college possible for him and his family, as well as leave the ladder down for GPS students navigating similar challenges and circumstances that he did.

(Mentoring, continued from page 10)
Profile of a Time-Honored Volunteer

Dr. Phyllis Leffler, reader and volunteer with the Program since its inception 25 years ago, believes that the Ron Brown Scholar Program is building the future of our country one Scholar at a time.

A native of New York, Phyllis moved to Charlottesville in 1986 with her husband, Mel Leffler. She had previously lived in Columbus, Ohio (where she received her Ph.D.) and then Nashville, Tennessee where she taught at The University of Tennessee (UTN), and later at Tennessee State University (TSU). While at TSU, she taught mostly first-generation Black students and saw first-hand the struggles they endured to get their degrees. She engaged with Black colleagues who had earned their Ph.Ds at first-rate universities but were unable to get jobs elsewhere. In short, she saw the ways that race discrimination played out and limited educational opportunity.

Coming to The University of Virginia presented new opportunities for Phyllis. After a year in the Department of History, she joined the UVA College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s Office. Dean Alex Sedgwick (a devoted Ron Brown Scholar Program volunteer reader until his death) asked her to help design the Transition program – an advising service providing additional advising and mentoring support to at-risk students. Through that endeavor, she came to know and work with Mike Mallory, Assistant Dean for Minority Admissions and the first Director for Minority Recruitment. Phyllis says that she developed deep respect for Mike’s ability to warmly embrace anyone with a shared mission and to work diligently in the effort to admit minority students who would be able to successfully earn their degrees at UVA.

When Mike left UVA to become the Executive Director of the newly created Ron Brown Scholar Program in 1996, he reached out to people he knew to become local readers of semi-finalist applications. (The program receives more than 4,000 applications annually; 75-85 of those applications achieve semi-finalist status and approximately 24 volunteers read and offer their evaluations of these applications). Phyllis signed on immediately because she loved working with Mike and respected his aspirations for the Program and because she

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Coming Full Circle — How Life Has Evolved for Desiree Montgomery (RBS 2008)

For Desiree Montgomery (RBS ‘08), “working from home” has taken on a special meaning. This past February, she accepted a position as Director of Major Gifts for One More Child, the nonprofit formerly known as Florida Baptist Children’s Homes. But when Desiree first arrived it was as a teenager with her two younger sisters, a trash bag full of clothes, and an SAT prep book. Now, when Desiree walks out onto the Florida campus, she can see the old house she used to live in, but through new eyes as one of the leaders of the organization. New to the world of fundraising, her primary responsibility is to share the stories of the organization to the community and invite them to support and participate in its mission—serving vulnerable children and struggling families.

Desiree, who became a Christian while living there in her childhood, is deeply invested in this pursuit. Her own discovery of freedom, love and purpose was life-changing. Along the way, she uplifted others and now draws from her past to help change the lives of the children served by One More Child.

When describing one of the driving forces that led her back to the organization, Desiree mentions a Bible verse about comforting others through their troubles with the same comfort we have been given during our own. She says her life’s purpose is to share the redemptive story of Christ and the good news of God, but her compassion and dedication to service shone brightly even before finding her faith. Throughout her teenage and college years Desiree tutored students both in school and at the children’s home; served on a board that advises the Florida Legislature on foster care issues; and was renowned among classmates, teachers, and counselors for her generosity. She graduated as salutatorian from Kathleen High School, earning both the Ron Brown Scholarship and Bill Gates Millennium Scholarship. Donna Cross, her revered college advisor and one of her main champions, knew that Desiree’s compassion for others and exceptional achievements made her a promising candidate for both opportunities. We soon saw that same generosity firsthand when Desiree started

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Scholar Profile: Tyrell Russell (RBS 2012)
Owner & Founder, Tykoo Eats Co., Ltd.

The Ron Brown Scholar Program is one in a million. There is no other suitable introduction or qualifier for describing this program.

My journey with RBSP began in 2011 when my mother explained to me that it was the scholarship to which I had to apply. Application season for scholarships was well underway, and for the life of me, I couldn’t understand what made this scholarship, “The One.” So, I applied to the Ron Brown Scholar Program (RBSP) with a level of blindness. I only knew what I needed and that Ron Brown, the man, sounded a lot like who I wanted to embody. Above anything, my application was honest. I wrote and spoke thoroughly about who I was, what I wanted to see in the world and my responsibility for bringing that image forth. I had no idea of the scale of the Ron Brown scholarship or the talented pool of applicants but RBSP showed me.

The rest of my experience was breathtaking. RBSP completely transformed my notion of what a scholarship program could be. It was deeper than money. It was about being amongst people who looked like me and dared to live and serve to their fullest potential. That’s revolutionary. I remember the 2012 Selection Weekend as vividly as I remember my first day of elementary school. The level of inspiration that I received from the Scholars, scholarship committee and the Program affiliates was enough to fuel me for a lifetime. That is the level of empowerment that I took with me to college.

My university experience was polished by RBSP. The Program aided me in so many firsts, both financially and in knowledge. After graduating from Southern Methodist University and subsequently relocating to China, I began to embody the RBSP creed, The Value of One, The Power of All. The strength, vision and leadership that I had gleaned from my peers would underscore the impact that I had on people in a brand-new country. And so, I became a teacher. As a teacher in China, I began coaching a younger generation of students who I believed could one day shape the world. It was imparted upon them, every day, that what they learned was shaping them to be global citizens that made society more harmonious, more compassionate and more humane. They were being taught by a Ron Brown Scholar.

Through several years of experiences and milestones, the spirit of RBSP was a mainstay. Today, years later and starting my company, The Kookie Box, the idea of dedicating a cookie flavor to the Ron Brown Scholar Program feels so right, so natural and necessary. The cookie dedicated to RBSP is the “Red Velvet Cookie.” Not only do I want to give back to the program that poured so much into me, but I feel that as many eyes as possible should be on RBSP. That by doing something as seemingly small as buying a cookie, people were contributing to the future of a program that continues to mold the next generation of world changers.

Remembering Our Dear Friend
Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.
(August 15, 1935 – March 1, 2021)

Vernon Jordan (far right) meets with Scholars at the RBS Alumni Association meeting, March 2011
**Fundraising Call To Action**

When the challenges of COVID-19 and the continued events highlighting the change for racial equity, the Ron Brown community generously stepped up with their support to the Program. That generosity helped us meet the unprecedented challenges of 2020, providing our students with the necessary resources to continue to grow and thrive during these challenging times. 2020 saw the Program reaching a couple of fundraising milestones (see charts below):

- The generous gift of $5M from The Norman R. and Ruth Rales Foundation provided a major vote of confidence in the mission of the Program and the resources to double the number of scholarships the Program is able to award over the next five years; twice as many Scholars means twice as many transformative leaders!
- In 2016, our Board of Trustees announced we would be entering an endowment campaign to raise $20 million by the end of 2020. On December 30th, 2020, we reached our campaign goal!
- Ron Brown Scholars have always remained committed to giving back to the Program in many ways, whether financially or otherwise, and no-one appreciates the importance of this Program more than its beneficiaries, which is why with the challenges of 2020, they donated over $147,000.00 to the Program.

We know our work is far from done as 2021 continues to present challenging times for our Scholars, Captains and Navigators. If you would like to support the Program, below is a list of options for your consideration. Your generosity will go directly towards providing scholarships and leadership development opportunities for over 2,000 students, and will continue to make an extraordinary impact on the lives of these talented young people. A gift envelope has been enclosed should you wish to make a donation, or you can donate online at www.ronbrown.org - we appreciate every gift, no matter the size.
WAYS TO SUPPORT

Emergency Funds/Donations and Monthly Gifts
Visit ronbrown.org/section/contribute/start-giving-today or send a check made payable to Ron Brown Scholar Fund and mail to 485 Hillsdale Drive, Suite 206, Charlottesville, VA, 22901

Matching Gifts
Matching gifts are offered by many companies to encourage philanthropy giving amongst their employees. Please check with your company to learn if they participate in a matching gift program.

Share Information with Friends
We encourage you to share information about the Ron Brown Scholar Program and the Scholars with friends/family/colleagues who may be interested in learning more or making a donation. Or let us know if you would like us to reach out to anyone directly.

Host a Virtual Fundraiser
Please consider hosting a virtual fundraiser or set up a fundraiser on social media to support the Ron Brown Scholar Program.

AmazonSmile
We are an official organization recognized to participate in the Amazon Smile Charity Giving Program. Please designate the Ron Brown Scholar Fund as your favorite charity so that a portion of the purchases you make through Amazon (.05%) will be donated to the Program. There is no additional cost to you to do this.

Scholarship Agreements
Fully fund a $40,000 scholarship to support a Ron Brown Scholar. Option to pay $10,000 per year for 4 years. Please contact Michael Mallory mmallory@ronbrown.org or Anita Karadia akaradia@ronbrown.org.

Partnership Agreements
Leaders Network Partnership
Consider joining the Leaders Network partners to help achieve your company’s diversity and inclusion goals. Please contact Holly Duke hduke@ronbrown.org

GPS Educational Partnerships
By partnering with GPS, you would enjoy access to the entire GPS community, comprised of 1,000+ high school juniors, seniors, and their parents, and advance your recruitment efforts. For more information contact Kiy Jones kjones@ronbrown.org or Randy Tripp, Jr. rtripp@ronbrown.org

New Partners

The Ron Brown Scholar Program (RBSP) depends upon support from corporate partners and scholarship sponsors. They play a critical role in support of our vision to build a transformational network of diverse leaders who drive change in the workplace and our communities. We are excited to welcome Plume Design, General Catalyst and Brown Advisory to our network of partners supporting Scholars, Captains and Navigators across all three initiatives of RBSP.

We thank all our corporate partners, foundations and scholarship sponsors for their support and opportunities provided to our Ron Brown Scholars, Captains and Navigators and ensuring that our country always has a deep and diverse pool of leaders.

Brown Advisory
Thoughtful Investing.

Our most recent partnership with Brown Advisory provides direct funding towards Ron Brown Scholarships for the classes of 2021 and 2022. Brown Advisory is a private, independent investment and strategic advisory firm committed to making a material and positive difference for clients by delivering a combination of first-class investment performance, strategic advice and the highest level of service.

Plume

A partnership with Plume Design will provide Ron Brown Scholars and Captains in The Ron Brown – Ruth and Norman Rales Leaders Network with opportunities for internships and mentoring support within the tech space. Plume Design is a cloud-based software and smart services company providing products for optimizing the wireless performance of consumers’ smart devices in the home and protection against cyber threats.

General Catalyst

For our Guided Pathway Support Program students, RBSP partnered with venture capital firm General Catalyst to develop a virtual, venture capital exploration externship for selected students this summer. General Catalyst invests in powerful, positive change that endures — for entrepreneurs, investors, people and society. They support founders with a long-term view who challenge the status quo, partnering with them from seed to growth stage and beyond to build companies that withstand the test of time.
thought this offered a small way to support students of color. She voices a common sentiment of RBSP “Reader” volunteers when she states, “Reading applications of semi-finalists was inspirational and eye-opening. Seeing the remarkable journeys of high school students who accomplished so much against daunting odds kept me coming back year after year to continue to read applications. I consider it a privilege to have served in this way. I think I missed only one year in the 25-year Program when Mel and I were in Oxford, England for the year and therefore could not get the files!”

Phyllis believes that Mike’s unique ideas and enthusiastic leadership coupled with Vanessa’s calm creativity and thoughtful initiatives have been a winning combination that continues to make everyone involved feel valued and part of the “family.” She is thankful for the numerous ways she has been able to partner with RBSP. For example, while a faculty member at UVA, Phyllis worked closely with the late Julian Bond on an oral history project called “Explorations in Black Leadership.” They interviewed over 50 leaders, placed those interviews on a website [blackleadership.virginia.edu], and Phyllis wrote a book entitled Black Leaders on Leadership: Conversations with Julian Bond. As part of the process, they interviewed three young Black leaders from RBSP; those interviews became part of the RBS Read to Lead program that brought these materials to middle and high school students. Upon retirement from UVA in 2015, Phyllis was pleased to get involved in writing, The Value of One: The Power of All -- a 20th anniversary book about the Ron Brown Scholar Program. As an historian, she deeply appreciated this review of the evolution of the RBSP over its first 20 years.

Recently, Phyllis and her husband Mel donated a generous and much-appreciated gift to the Ron Brown Scholar Program. They explain: “In this time of national urgency, we grapple with the growth of white supremacy and the hateful extremism that targets so many minority populations. It is more important than ever to support the kind of leadership from within minority communities equipped to challenge that destructive mindset and lead us to a brighter future for all. Within the Jewish community, we teach the ethical concepts of justice, righteousness and Tik'un Olam – or repair of the world (often through the pursuit of social justice). My husband Mel and I are pleased to make a philanthropic gift that supports this transformational program so committed to those values. It has been a privilege to watch the Program grow and to participate in small ways in its evolution.”

Desiree clung to her education, to which she accredits unlocking her future after foster care. But many kids in the system are not prepared with the training necessary to make them successful adults. For example, when Desiree turned 18, she had to use her own savings to pay for driving lessons, something parents (or schools) might normally to provide. Her license enabled her to work another job – on top of the tutoring she was doing – while studying at Southeastern University.

One of Desiree’s life goals is to change the narrative around foster care. For many, guardianship is rife with negative connotations: kids who end up in care because of something they’ve done and whose pasts will dictate their futures. Desiree knows that if these low expectations settle into their minds, children will only rise so high. That’s why Desiree wants to change the perception of why kids are in foster care, what they are capable of, and why she has always worked so tirelessly to help ensure their long-term success.

When describing what it has been like returning to a place where she once lived and experienced significant growth herself, she references a quote by T.S. Eliot. “We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.”