



ATHENS AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

GAME

CHANGERS

TOP 10 UNDER 40

PRESENTED BY EXPRESS EMPLOYMENT

GAME CHANGERS

Welcome

David Bradley, President/CEO, Athens Area Chamber of Commerce

Introduction

Rhodes McLanahan, First American Bank & Trust

Presenting Sponsor

John Culpepper, Express Employment

Keynote Speaker Presentation

Erin Barger, CEO, Food Bank of Northeast Georgia

Closing Remarks

Evan Elder, Synovus/LEAD Athens Alumni

A primary objective of the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce is to help foster leadership for this community now and for the future. With this new initiative we hope to raise the profile of young leaders in the community that are helping develop a better Athens. Today we honor ten young people who lead by example and collaboratively seek to implement a bright vision for the community.

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John Morris

Advantage Behavioral Health Systems
Street Outreach Coordinator



John Morris received a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Georgia. While pursuing his degree, he experienced several internship opportunities including Muse UGA, Extra Special People, & Athens PBJs. John began his career as Project Coordinator for Envision Athens before transitioning to his current role with Advantage Behavioral Health. He continues his service to the Athens community as a board member for the Athens Homeless Coalition and volunteer with Access Point of GA. John prides himself on the relationships he has built with his clients as he provides support in identifying and pursuing solutions. He has been fortunate to meet many influential people along his journey in community-based work and credits Erin Barger, Charles Nelms, and fellow Gamechanger, Laura McCoy with having had a remarkable impact on his life. "Meaningful work takes time, relationships, and really getting to know people. With knowing someone or a community well, you can best support them in achieving their own identified goals themselves. That is work that is empowering, lasting, and meaningful", John said of his experience working in the Athens community.

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Monique Sanders

Janssen Pharmaceutical, Inc.

Project Manager



Monique Sanders received a Bachelor of Science in Biological Engineering from Louisiana State University and an MBA in Project Management from Columbia Southern University. Monique has served as an engineer for a global healthcare organization for over 10 years. She is now sharing ideas and developing strategies to help other young innovators solve global problems through innovation. In addition to her extensive professional experience, Monique serves the Athens community as a member of the ACC Planning Commission, Project Safe Board of Directors, Service to Youth and Communications Chair for Athens Chapter of the Links, and CEO & Founder of Get Stimulated, LLC. Her goal is to implement a legacy of excellence for the younger generation through initiatives to enhance STEM education and technical skill development in Athens. Monique said, "I live by Mahatma Ghandi's quote, 'The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.' Listen to your heart and follow your spirit's path of least resistance. It's in the authenticity that one finds their purpose. We are all blessed with unique gifts and talents, so use yours to create a segue to enhance the quality of someone else's future."

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Katie Williams

Athens Convention & Visitors Bureau

Director



Katie received a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Public Relations from the University of Georgia. She worked in tourism in Thomasville and Dunwoody before returning to the Classic City to accept the role of Director for the Athens CVB. Katie took on a unique challenge stepping into the role at the onset of the pandemic and handled the difficult task with grace and compassion. Katie's resume boasts many accolades including awards from Destination Marketing Association International, Points North Magazine, Connect Magazine, and Southeast Tourism Society. In addition to her rich career, Katie serves the industry and communities as a member of the Board of Directors for the Georgia Association of convention and Visitors Bureaus, Spruill center for the Arts, Atlanta Metro Travel Association, and DeKalb Police Alliance. She is a member of the current LEAD Athens class and recommends the experience to anyone who wants to become a Gamechanger in the community, saying, "Get involved in LEAD Athens. It has hands down been the best professional experience of my life and has forever changed my relationships in Athens".

GAME CHANGERS

Alex Borges

Office of Community Engagement
and Strategic Partnerships

District Translator & Community Liaison



Alex Borges received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Shorter University and a Masters in Business and technology from the University of Georgia. Alex has served the community in a number of capacities throughout his professional career and service work. He feels especially connected to Casa de Amistad where he served as Executive Director from 2013 to 2016. He describes it as a small but mighty organization that serves the Athens Latinx community through advocacy, social services, and adult education. He is currently working with Clarke County School District to ensure that important communications are shared with the community while advocating for students and families. He has played a vital role in expanding access to language services for the English learner population. Alex said of service work, "Bringing change to a community requires a lot of work. Sometimes, it may seem as if your efforts are not really moving the needle. Believe me, they are. And, there are times when you might feel like you don't belong. But if you feel that fire within you pushing you to bring change, even if it's just a spark, then you do belong. Believe in yourself, surround yourself with your tribe, and keep grinding!"

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Laura McCoy

Advantage Behavioral Health Systems
Street Outreach Coordinator



Laura McCoy is a Certified Peer Specialist in Addictive Diseases and Mental Health and a Forensic Peer Mentor in Criminal Justice. Throughout her career, she has found her passion in working with individuals experience substance use disorder, mental health diagnoses, homelessness, and criminal justice involvement. In her current role as street outreach coordinator, Laura focuses on providing information, referrals, and resources to clients and collaborates with community based organizations and key stakeholders to address community initiatives. Laura is connected to many recovery organizations throughout Clarke and Jackson Counties including PLR, DIVAS Who Win Freedom Center, Reboot Jackson, Envision Athens, The 9th District, Athens Alliance, Coalition, Bigger Vision, and more she works closely with the Homeless Day Center and their corresponding teams. While Laura's career boasts many accomplishments, she is most proud of finding recovery, being part of her family's lives, and giving back to her community. A word of advice from Laura to those seeking to become a Gamechanger is, "Find as many resources as you can, make partnerships in the community, and just do it!".

GAME CHANGERS

Lawrence Harris

Clarke County School District
*Chief of Community Engagement &
Strategic Partnerships*



Lawrence Harris earned his Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Georgia, Master of Science in Education from the University of Pennsylvania, and returned to UGA for his Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Policy. In addition to his impressive education and career trajectory, Lawrence founded College Factory, Inc. in 2014 and has since served at the organization's president. College Factory helps high school students in Northeast Georgia successfully transition to post-secondary education and supports low-income students after their transition to college. Lawrence has also served the community through a number of other organizations including Envision Athens, Clarke County Mentor Program, United Way of Northeast Georgia, and his brother's organization, Chess and Community. Lawrence displays a strong drive to contribute to students' success through his work, which has impacted the future of children and families in our community. His word of advice to future gamechangers is "Find a mission or purpose that is driven by helping others that gets you excited to wake up every day and you'll never work a day in your life."

GAME CHANGERS

Johnelle Simpson II

Fortson, Bentley, and Griffin

Attorney



Johnelle Simpson earned his Bachelor of Business Administration in Risk Management & Insurance as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Georgia. He received his Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Tennessee College of Law. During his time as a student, Johnelle thrived in leadership roles from student government to student bar association and campus advisory board. Before his legal career, he worked for several years at the Athens Community Career Academy where he learned about the Athens community and organizations that contribute to work-readiness. His family has had a strong influence in his life as he has watched them build success through hard work and perseverance. Their drive, ambition, and love for people influenced him to make a difference in every space he's afforded to be in. "I would tell someone who wanted to be a gamechanger in their community to be passionate and intentional. Your passion will lead you to the causes you care the most about. Being intentional will help you develop your strategy and plan for success", said Johnelle.

GAME CHANGERS

Zander Mason

Raymond James

Wealth Advisor



Zander Mason earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting from the University of Georgia. He gained career experience during his education as an intern with The Avenue Wealth Management Group and as a tutor for student athletes. In his professional career, he has served as an audit associate for Frazier & Deeter and a wealth advisor with Raymond James. Zander feels strongly about serving his community and feels most connected to Athens Jaycees, Athens Academy, Classic City Church, and the Chamber of Commerce. He also has ties to the Palm House and Sparrows Nest. He is most proud of the meaningful relationships he has formed throughout his business and service work in the community as it has provided an avenue for him to help people through his network. Zander's advice for someone who strives to be a gamechanger in their community is, "Get involved and say yes. The first word that is the catalyst to making changes is 'yes'. Once you say that word the snowball will start rolling down the hill and lead to bigger and better influences, relationships, and change for the community. Don't be afraid to ask people for things, and be willing to give something in return."

GAME CHANGERS

Elisa Zarate

Athens-Clarke County Courts
Court Administrator



Elisa Zarate earned a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies from Georgia College and State University and a Master of Social Work from the University of Georgia. Since moving to Athens in 2005, Elisa has volunteered with, worked alongside, and supported a number of the organizations that make Athens a unique and wonderful place to live. She has been amazed by the work of Athens' Accountability Courts, Envision Athens, Athens Wellbeing Project, and Get Comfortable just to name a few. Among her many achievements, Elisa's greatest pride and joy is her five year old son who she describes as compassionate, kind, caring, animal-loving, and imaginative. While she has worked with many influential people throughout her life and cites her clients, co-workers, judges, and community partners as her inspiration to remain optimistic in helping others. Her advice for future game changers is, "Just try to be a good person and love your neighbors and your community and demonstrate it by being a part of the change process to make your community stronger, whether it be through volunteerism, supporting local businesses, engaging in local community events, or lending a helping hand."

GAME CHANGERS

Deanne Rosso
Elevate Wealth Advisory
President/CEO



Deanne S. Rosso graduated from the University of Georgia's College of Family and Consumer Sciences. She is President and CEO of Elevate Wealth Advisory (formerly Vickery Financial Services). A 16-year veteran and current owner of the firm, Deanne is passionate about continuing the legacy of personalized wealth advice and client relationships cultivated since the firm's inception in 1982. Deanne is involved with several local organizations and the Junior League of Athens holds a special place in her heart. The organization focuses on women in leadership and contributed to her leadership training, networking, and opportunities to serve. Deanne cites her parents as her greatest influences and notes that they instilled a sense of responsibility and confidence that are the pillars of any of her achievements. She also consistently works with coaches and mentors - someone who can be an objective voice, accountability partner, and help her evaluate personal and professional situations. Her advice to future gamechangers is, "Know yourself first and find your 'why'. When you know your 'why', and keep it up front and center, your passion for it will naturally move you forward".

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