



GAME

CHANGERS

TOP 10 UNDER 40

GAME CHANGERS

Welcome

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

Introduction

Erin Barger, CEO, Food Bank of Northeast Georgia

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Lawrence Harris, 2022 Gamechanger

Awards Presentation

Closing Remarks

*Josh Podvin, Assistant Director for Community Partnerships, UGA
Office of Service Learning & LEAD Athens Steering Committee Chair*

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 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.

GAME CHANGERS

Danielle Bonanno

Community Engagement Specialist
with Acceptance Recovery Center, Inc.
& President of Athens PRIDE



Bonanno holds certifications in Addiction Recovery Support Services: CPS-AD, FPM, and is currently pursuing a Bachelors degree in Business Management. In her role at ARC and as the President of Athens Pride and Queer Collective, she has been able to partner with the Georgia Council on Recovery to create the first ever queer focused recovery community organization, Inclusive Recovery, which bridges the local gap between the queer community and the recovery community. Bonanno is most proud of being the first trans woman to lead Athens Pride and Queer Collective as President of the organization. Her strongest influence is Brandy Anderson, CEO of ARC. Brandy has helped mold Bonanno into the leader she is today. Anderson has shown her what it looks like to lead with empathy, compassion and integrity. She has also taught Bonanno that it is OK to make noise for what you are truly passionate about. When asked if she had any advice for future Game Changers, Bonanno responded with, "Look for leadership opportunities in your community outside of work. Always use your voice and align your passion with purpose."

GAME CHANGERS

Justin Bray

Executive Director of Books for Keeps



Bray graduated from the University of North Georgia with a Bachelors degree in Public Relations. Prior to taking the executive director position at Books for Keeps, Bray served as the director of operations and program manager for their flagship Stop Summer Slide program. He has served on the ACC Development Authority and, most recently, the Library Board for the county. Bray is most proud of where Books for Keeps is today and the incredible community of people surrounding it. He has had the pleasure of watching his dream of bringing a bookmobile to our organization and community come to fruition while also creating and growing their literacy mentors program from a concept. His strongest influence are the more than 10,000 elementary-aged children Books for Keeps serves annually. One of Bray's greatest motivations is being the adult he wishes he had as a kid, for the children we serve through Books for Keeps and beyond. His advice for future Game Changers is, "There's nobody watching, waiting for you to fail. All you have to do to succeed is to make the thing that only you can. How many people you help is irrelevant, it's enough to help one person, and you have to start with yourself. Be you. You're the only you there is and we need your voice here too."

GAME CHANGERS

Luke Dorman

Senior Project Manager at at DPR
Construction



Dorman has his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Operations Management, from Auburn University. Michael Burnett, Diane Altman and Steven Dasher and their team members at Piedmont Athens Regional Medical Center and Piedmont Athens Foundation have been a pleasure for Dorman to get to know, support and work with over the past four years. He is incredibly grateful to have become friends with David Bradley and his team at the Athens Chamber of Commerce. This year he joined the Rotary Club of Athens where he has cultivated new relationships with servant leaders in the community. The University of Georgia, Office of University Architects and the Athletic Department pours everything they have into providing the best facilities and environment for students, staff and athletes. Dorman is most proud of the successful delivery of the Piedmont Athens Master Facility Project. Construction started in the fall of 2018 and pressed forward through the pandemic. Collaboration with the community, hospital leadership, staff and trade partners enabled this project to completion in Q2 2022. His advice for future Game Changers is, "Dream big. Take action. Serve. Lead."

GAME CHANGERS

Cameron Jay Harrelson

Media Consultant at Cox Media Group, Host at Classic City Crime Podcast, & President Emeritus of Athens PRIDE



Harrelson attended UGA for two years before he decided to pursue other opportunities. In 2021, he returned to school and is currently a junior at the University of West Georgia majoring in Criminology. Currently, Harrelson serves as Media Consultant at Cox Media Group, Host at Classic City Crime Podcast, & President Emeritus of Athens PRIDE. Cameron is the creator, host, writer, and producer of Classic City Crime Podcast, a true crime podcast consumed globally with over 1.2 million listens. In addition to his work with the podcast he is also the immediate past president of Athens Pride and Queer Collective where he coordinated Athens' first ever Pride Parade. He is also a member of the Mayor's Human Relations Commission and an avid advocate in our local government, spearheading the initiative that led to the Athens Rainbow Crosswalk installation downtown in 2022. Harrelson is most proud of his work with Athens Pride and Queer Collective, where he's worked to ensure that every child, youth and adult in Athens-Clarke County knows that their lives are valued, visible, safe, secure, and uplifted. His strongest influence is his community. Athens is filled with diverse people, from all walks of life, backgrounds and stories, who all come together to make Athens-Clarke County. It is all these individuals who continually inspire him to show up and speak up.

GAME CHANGERS

Alesia Mitchell

Branch Manager at South State Bank,
Women Who Work Committee Chair,
& Co-Founder of Im.P.A.C.T for
Advancement



Alesia Mitchell attended Anderson University, where she received her Bachelors in Healthcare Management. Mitchell is heavily involved in the local Athens community. She proudly takes part in different organizations including, the Women Who Work Committee Chair-Kick ATH Women, and Im.P.A.C.T. (Improving Parents and Children working Together) for Advancement-Co Founder, as well as LEAD Athens Alumni Association. Mitchell says that she has been incredibly blessed throughout her life, and is thankful for the strong and independent women that have served as role model throughout her life. There have been a lot of people throughout the years who have truly made an impact on Mitchell's life, but the most influential have been the people closest to her. The most influential people have always been the people closest to her. Her Mema, Mama and Auntie Darlene created a stable foundation, provided structure, guided spiritual beliefs, always forced me to do right by others and do her best! When asked about advice for future Game Changers, Alesia Mitchell responded, "Your attitude determines your altitude!"

GAME CHANGERS

Cody Nicholson

*Chief of Staff at Elwood & Goetz
Wealth Advisory Group & President of
the Board for Athens Area Habitat*



Cody Nicholson graduated top of his class as a First Honor Graduate with an ABJ in Public Relations from the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. Nicholson serves as the Chief of Staff at Elwood & Goetz Wealth Advisory Group. He serves as President of the Board for Athens Area Habitat for Humanity, helping families achieve their dreams of home ownership. He is also a member of the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce's LEAD Athens program and the Athens Kiwanis Club. His strongest influences have been the people closest to him throughout many stages of life. His parents, who taught him to love deeply and pursue his potential, his Nanny, who demonstrated how to put others first and to keep standing up - no matter how many times life tries knocking you down, and his husband, Ben, who stands beside him, walks with him and inspires him to never stop dreaming of and building a better future. Best advice for a future Game Changer: "As Henry David Thoreau said, 'Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.' You must decide what success looks like to you and then get off the sidelines and into the fights that need to be fought. Progress is a process, you can create real change for the people, places and causes that matter most to you."

GAME CHANGERS

TJ Stephens

Owner of Athens Trolley Tours &
Stephens Limousine Service



Stephens double majored in Consumer Economics, Housing at the University of Georgia. As Co-chair of The Benjamin John Stephens Foundation, they partnered with St Mary's Hospital to create a guest house for visiting families of patients to use. The foundation has also created scholarships to support local students. Stephens is a former board member of the Upper Oconee Watershed Network, among others. Stephens is most proud of his family and the community. The people, culture and so many great things make this town The Classic City. When asked where he is from, he's always proud to tell them Athens, Ga., as there is no other place in the world like it! Stephens' strongest influences are his brother and dad. His dad, "Big Dog" Terry Stephens, instilled a strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit into him from an early age. His younger brother, Ben, did more living in 32 years than some will get out of 90, which is where the motto "Live Like Ben" came from. The way Ben lived his life is truly an inspiration and Stephens has made it his mission to carry the torch. Stephens advice for future Game Changers is, "Find your passion, follow your gut and go for it! As the great General Patton once said, 'A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow.' Half of the battle is just getting started. The game plan can be adjusted and adapted to improve over time..."

GAME CHANGERS

Lora Smothers

Founder & Director of Joy Village



Smothers received her Bachelor's degree in neuroscience and behavioral biology from Emory University and her Master's degree in gifted education from the University of Georgia. Smothers' 13 year career in education has included directing Freedom to Grow Unschool, teaching at Athens Christian School, leading outreach for Downtown Ministries and launching the Joy Village School, Athens' only K-8th private school centering the joy and thriving of Black youth. Smothers was also honored to share her unique educational philosophy at TEDxUGA 2014. Smothers' proudest achievement is stepping out in faith to start the Joy Village School. Smothers is inspired by the Black educators of Athens' past who, despite the oppression they faced, created little oases of educational excellence where our people could thrive. She stands on the shoulders of women like Judia Jackson Harris, Annie Burney and Evelyn C. Neely with deep gratitude. When asked if she had any advice for future Game Changers, she responded with, "Don't be afraid to chase your big dream, even if the task is daunting. Your idea just might change the game."

GAME CHANGERS

Katy Tedford

District Translator with Clarke County
School District



Tedford has an Associate Degree with Applied Science in Early Childhood Education and is currently attending Piedmont University for her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education P-5. City of Refuge Athens is a non-profit organization that has been dedicated to helping the homeless in Athens. In the fall of 2019, City of Refuge Athens partnered with Tedford to provide snack bags for students, uniforms, school supplies, clothes, hygiene products, food distributions and more. When COVID-19 hit, they began serving families meals on a weekly basis, along with providing school resources to support their academics and access to COVID tests. Four years into their partnership they continue to serve families in CCSD in multiple schools now. Her strongest influences are her parents. She grew up in a country where most have very little but always share, even if that means giving their time. Her parents taught her to be compassionate, caring, kind and loving to everyone she makes contact with. Tedford's father left a value instilled in her that she is honored to pass on to her family, "Always give to the world what you want to receive."

GAME CHANGERS

Tommy Valentine

Executive Director of Historic Athens



Valentine is a Ph.D. Candidate (ABD) in Public Administration & Policy at the University of Georgia. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Master of Public Administration. In addition to two decades of formal management experience in the public and private sector, much of Valentine's leadership style was defined through his experience as a participant and organizer in the Athens music community. Valentine is most proud of the relationships he's developed as an advocate, friend, husband, father, mentor and community member. Valentine's strongest influences are his family, friends, educators, mentors, books, films, faith, coaches, scouting, service industry, management, UGA, CCSD and the Athens music scene. When asked if he had any advice for future game changers, he responded, "Invest in mentorship, both as a mentor and mentee. Solving problems and growing as a person requires the perspective, wise counsel and inspiration that only mentorship can provide. Mentorship will change you as a leader, public servant and human being."

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