

BUILDING BREAKOUT CITIES

CITYAGE



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Dedicated to city builders all over the world making their communities more equitable, sustainable, and liveable.

Vibrant and innovative cities are built by courageous and determined people.

Think of the last city you visited that blew you away. A city that left you with a lasting, indelible impression.

Maybe it was a city that had a cool factor you couldn't quite put your finger on. Or perhaps it was a city that surprised you - one that has a particular image or reputation that didn't match up with the reality you saw. Maybe it was a diverse city that had people of color and women in leadership positions. Or it could have been a city that's building a future different from its history.

There are many different types of Breakout Cities. What they all share though, is that it's people who are building them.

In this Ebook, a compilation of human-interest stories, CityAge spotlights eight people who are building America's Breakout Cities, with a special focus on cities that support and empower entrepreneurship, equitable workforce development, and a sense of community.

We hope these people inspire you to embark on your own kind of city-building where you live.

Alon Marcovici

Managing Director
CityAge





A message from our sponsor, the Kauffman Foundation

What do you think of when you think of a city? Is it a skyline, tall buildings, corporate offices? If so, it's time to shift focus to what makes cities thrive – people. How people live, contribute, and exist in a community is important to a city's success.

Building entrepreneurial and inclusive workforce ecosystems can help move cities toward equitable and innovative economic development.

At the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, we want people to have the tools, resources, and knowledge to be successful in their jobs and careers. All people should have the opportunity to achieve economic stability, mobility, and prosperity without race, gender, and geography as a determining factor in an individual's journey.

But barriers to business starts and growth exist; in order to achieve true equity, everyone must be economically empowered to contribute to the improvement of their communities.

To do that, each individual person has a role to play. Think of a city as an ecosystem – each moving part is necessary for the community to keep thriving.

While entrepreneurs are busy running the day-to-day tasks of keeping a business going a system of support is vital to help them thrive.

Policymakers can reduce legal red tape to owning a business. Civic leaders can support a thriving childcare system to support workers and business owners. And banks and local lenders can fuel access to capital for underrepresented entrepreneurs and nonprofits.

Part of Kauffman's work focuses on the role of city leadership in creating the programs, policies, and practices that support entrepreneur-focused economic growth.

Local policymakers like mayors are uniquely positioned to advocate for entrepreneurs and connect them with the right resources within the community. Organizations like the National League of Cities are helping mayors across the country make public commitments to implementing new practices that will directly lead to the inclusive growth of their city and community.

With all these individuals working and living together in the same space, innovation is bound to happen. Innovation is vital to knocking down outdated rules and laws that keep people from truly flourishing in their community.

So when you next think about what makes a city, think of the people working together to create a thriving community that benefits all – and the possibilities that can happen when the growth of a city is determined by equitable success of the people living there.

LAFAYETTE CRUMP: RECONNECTING MILWAUKEE

Lafayette Crump has a big job on his hands. He's the Commissioner of City Development for Milwaukee, one of America's most segregated cities.

Ensuring that the city's future growth is equitable, sustainable and smart, while driving commercial and real estate development brings all sorts of competing priorities and challenges.

As his team works to attract more business development to the city, Crump wants to make sure that the communities that have lacked investment in the past not only have a say in the city's growth, but benefit from it.

"Planning in the past very intentionally divided certain parts of our city, very intentionally even walled off parts of the city from other parts," Crump says.

Like many other cities across America, highways have disconnected neighborhoods as a result of various urban renewal practices. For decades Milwaukee's downtown has seen

investment while the neighborhoods on the edges of the city are cut off from it, especially Black and Brown majority communities. It's what has led to food deserts. For Crump, this is what Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg means when he talks about "racist infrastructure".

But if this is the challenge, Milwaukee has the right person on the job.



When you make decisions about infrastructure that deliberately exclude certain populations from accessing certain things...you are making a value judgment. Not just about what matters but about who matters."

their consulting firm, Prism Technical. It offers consulting on equitable and inclusive workforce development. He started advising his parents on the direction of the company in addition



Photo credit: Aliza Baran



Photo credit: VISIT Milwaukee

to his legal work, before taking those experiences to the Democratic National Convention, which was coming to Milwaukee in 2020, as the Deputy Chief of Staff Diversity Vendor and Outreach Officer. Crump took on the role as Commissioner in July 2020, on the heels of the racial reckoning across the country.

Now he's correcting the city's past development decisions.

Affordable housing is on top of his list. He's been working on [an inter-agency housing plan](#) for more than a year to address the disparity between Black and Brown homeownership and White homeownership. Milwaukee needs roughly 32,000 more housing units to eliminate that disparity. The plan identifies the root causes of the current housing challenges, and tackles them directly.

On top of affordable housing Crump is focused on making sure that businesses coming to Milwaukee understand the value of community engagement and hiring diverse workers in the construction process. When companies receive financial assistance from the city Crump ensures they hire diverse workers and contractors. He also wants incoming businesses to approach community engagement as something they get to do, instead of something they must do (even though that might be the case).

"It's getting people to recognize the value of solving the problem...recognizing the value of that outreach and not just looking at it as some-

32,000

The number of housing units needed to eliminate the disparity between Black and White homeownership.

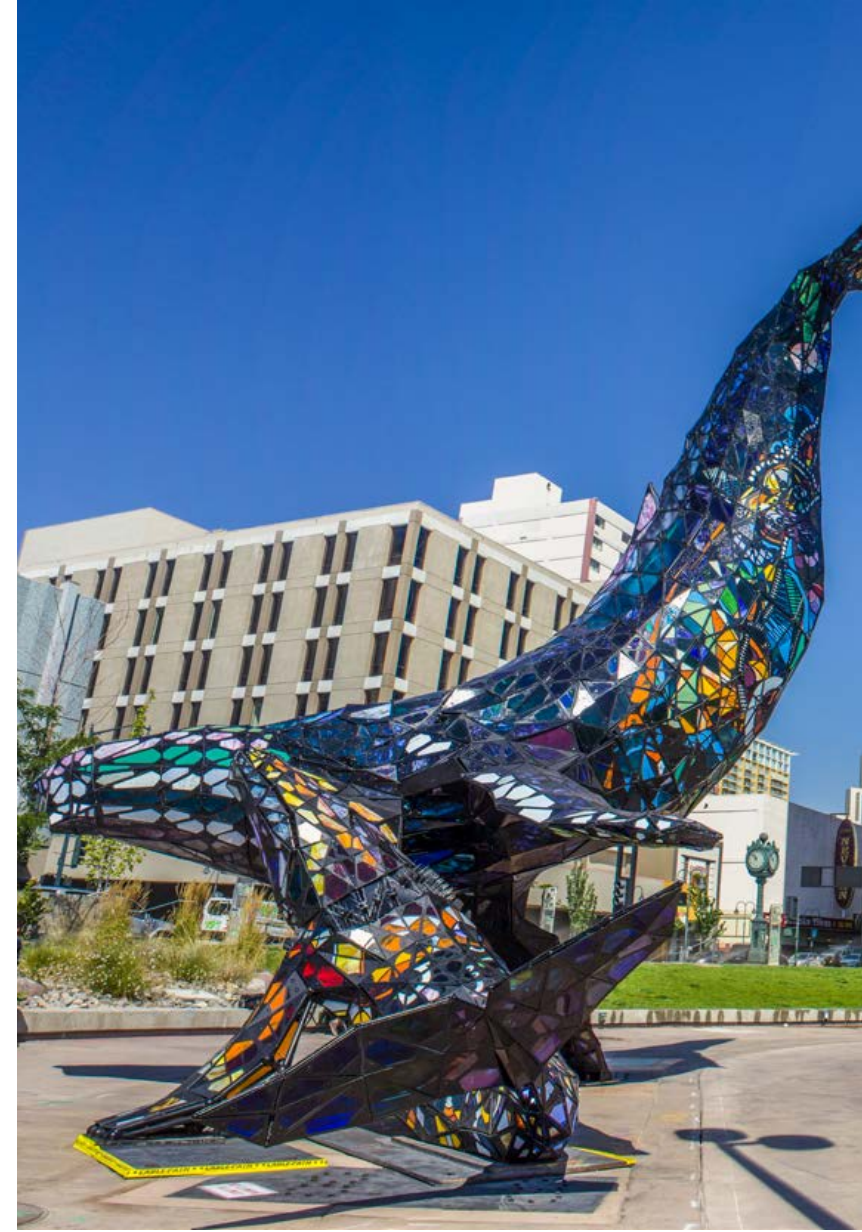
thing that you have to check off a list", he said.

Crump says businesses can look to the city's Community Advisory Committee for its Downtown Plan Study as an example of how community outreach can be done. The city is paying participants for their time, sending the message that the community is offering value.

After all, in Crump's view, community engagement isn't just a favor to the neighborhood, it's a tool to build successful companies and spaces. A community that trusts a new business and feels included in its development is more likely to support that business in the future. One successful investment leads to more. Crump hopes that will be the trend going forward for Milwaukee neighborhoods, which would be a stark difference from its past.

"Investment begets additional investment... we're trying to create those virtuous cycles versus just vicious ones."





HILLARY SCHIEVE: HELPING RENO FIND ITSELF IN BURNING MAN

Hillary Schieve grew up in Reno. If you had asked her at the time, though, she would say she was from Lake Tahoe.

“I was embarrassed by this image of Reno, obviously Reno 911, things like that,” she says.

Burning Man was another item on that list. Schieve became the Mayor of the Biggest Little City in the World in 2014, though, and she soon discovered that embracing some of those signature qualities could actually drive economic and cultural growth. Especially Burning Man.

“For many years, I don’t know why, but the city really kept Burning Man as this deep, dark, dirty secret,” Schieve says. After her first trip to the Nevada desert as Mayor (which wasn’t exactly protocol) she knew that keeping Burning Man at an arm’s length was a mistake.

“I saw an economic opportunity, obviously for our small businesses in town. Whether you’re a motel or a hotel, a casino, a mom and pop hardware store...we should really be sending the message that we welcome Burning Man

here, for our small businesses, our economy, but also the creativity. If we could do that we could probably attract more artists to live here.”

The week of Burning Man is now the busiest time of year for the Reno airport. Reno’s Home Depot gets a huge bump in sales during the festival, too. The festival contributes roughly \$70 million into the local economy each year. Schieve decided that publicly supporting Burning Man would send a message to other business leaders and residents that Burning Man offered something of value to Reno, generating even more cultural and economic output.

She was right. The change in tide for Reno and Burning Man over the last few years has been well documented. Burning Man founder, Michael Mikel, says there’s one key indication of that in plain sight.

“Just look at all the Burning Man art downtown.”

The city started weaving iconic Burning Man art installations through the city core to



**Arts are the way
you package a city.”**



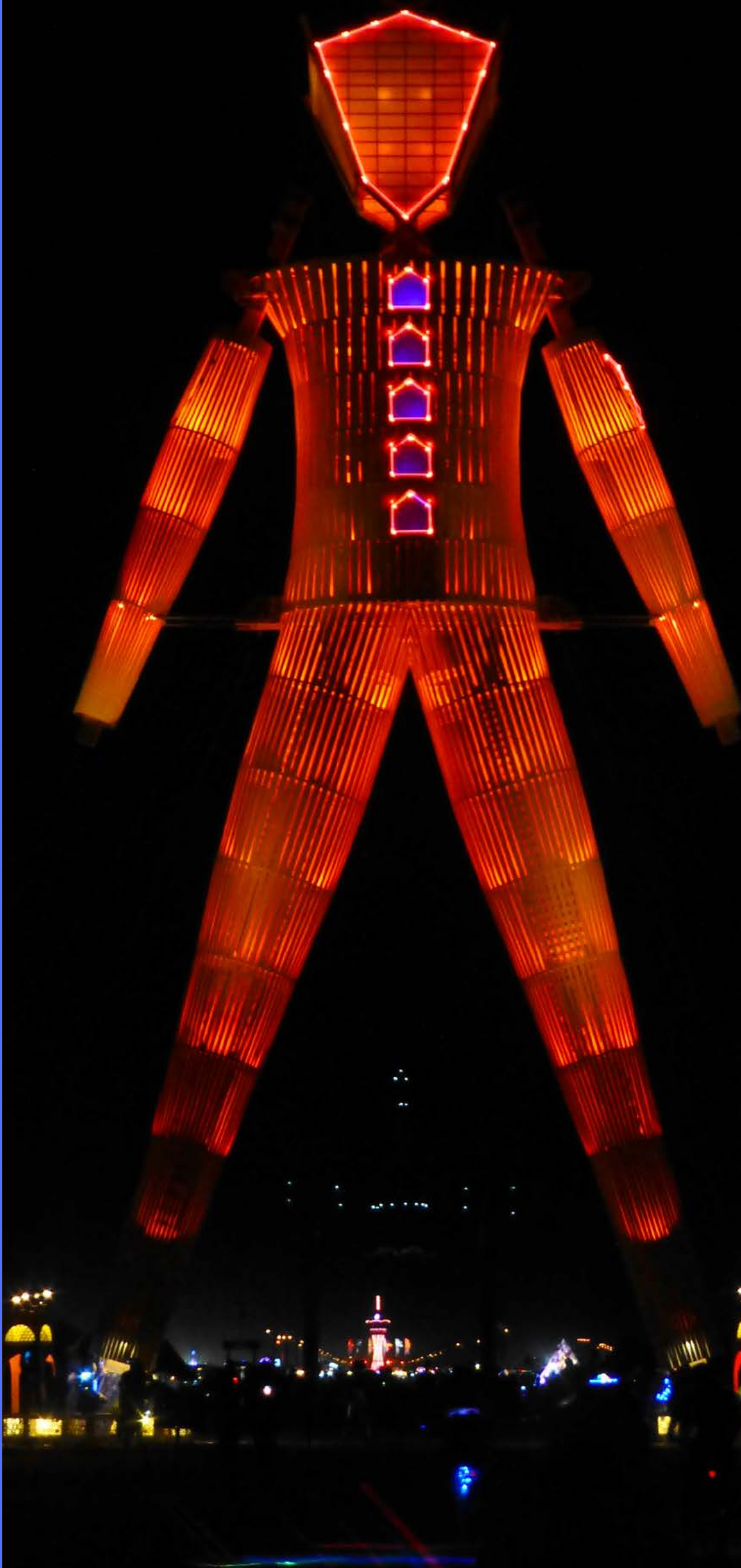


Photo credit: VisitRenoTahoe.com



Photo credit: VisitRenoTahoe.com

show its embrace of the festival. The 40-foot Space Whale that sits in the city Plaza is now recognized as a symbol of Reno. The 12-foot tall Believe sculpture, another signature Burning Man piece, sits in the Plaza too. Both were installed in 2016.

Private developers are following the city's lead.

Burning Man sculptures line the Neon Line, for example, developed by Jacobs Entertainment. The project celebrates Burning Man as one of Reno's "biggest draws".

Burning Man art has become a staple of this up-and-coming arts and culture scene, helping define the city and form an identity that sets it apart on the national stage.

Schieve's decision to embrace Burning Man might just be what the author of the New Localism, Bruce Katz, meant when he told cities to follow the advice of Dolly Parton: "Figure out who you are, and do it on purpose".

\$70 MILLION

The amount of money, roughly, that Burning Man contributes to Reno's economy.

CHRISTOPHER CABALDON: A CAREER OF HOME RUNS FOR WEST SACRAMENTO

Christopher Cabaldon has been giving speeches on the importance of education since he was 12 years old. He was a founding student at Los Angeles's first racially integrated magnet school.

When asked about the impact of that experience, Cabaldon says: "The person that was formed at that moment was formed around education and education's role in society in terms of equity, democracy, and economic empowerment. That will never cease to be a part of who I am."

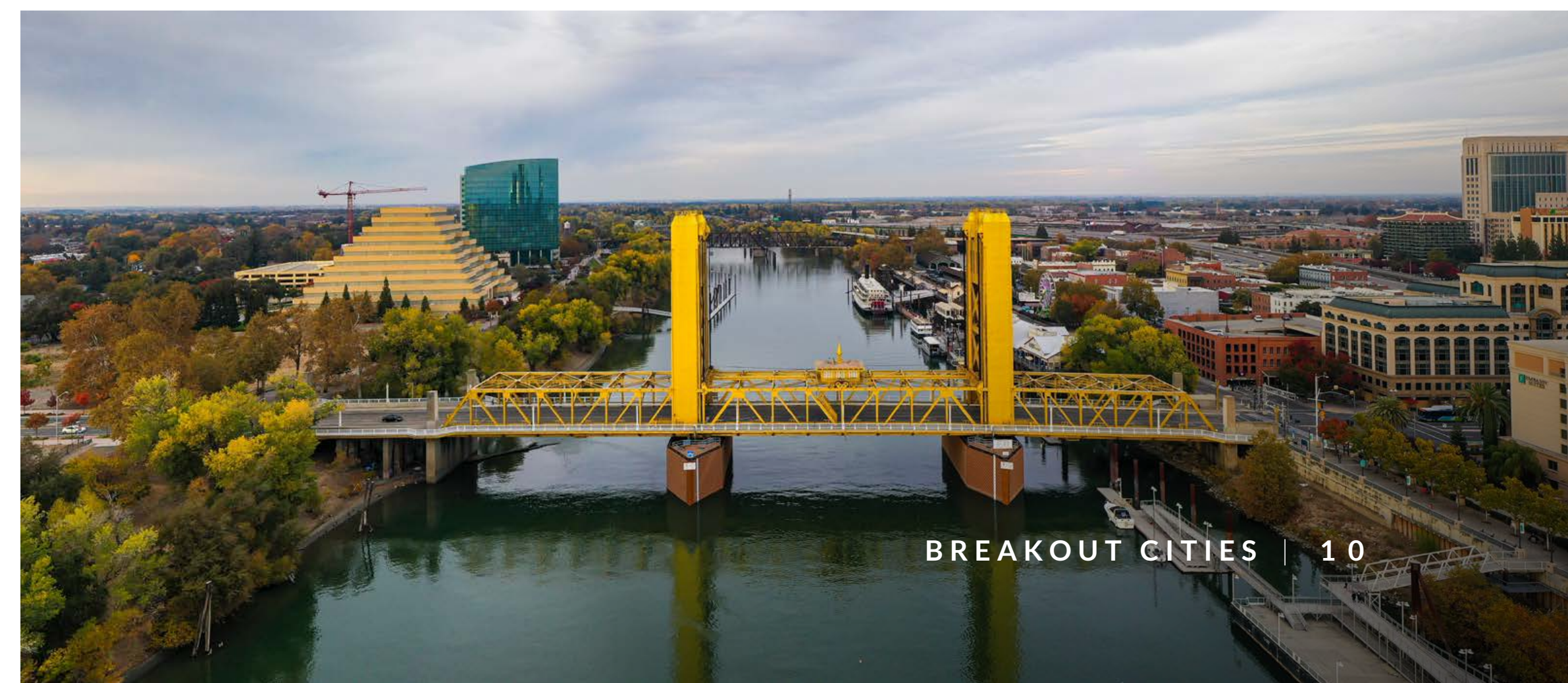
Years later, as a young adult working in the state capital of Sacramento, Cabaldon purchased a home in West Sacramento – a place he referred to as "the other side of the tracks." But soon he realized that none of the revitalization efforts his real estate agent (who was also the high school music teacher) had promised, were happening.

Never one to wait for others to get things done, Cabaldon decided to run for city council and won a seat on his second try. Not long after that, he was occupying the mayor's office – a position he held for the next 22 years.



We deserve better. It's possible, but we have to work for it, and we have to make some sacrifices, but we can do it. That mindset is absolutely essential for sustainable change to happen. It can't just be a single leader or a handful of leaders driving it by themselves."

During that time, the self-described "brash punk" launched a staggering number of initiatives that transformed West Sacramento from an industrial port town into one of America's Most Livable Cities. Early on, Cabaldon was presented with the opportunity to build a minor league ballpark in the area – a project whose building costs more than doubled his city's entire budget. But the whole region rallied around it and his office got it done. And what this ultimately brought to the city, Cabaldon explains, was far more meaningful than cachet or even economic development. "With the ballpark came an awakening,



a fundamental level of pride that's necessary to build a better future."

Next, Cabaldon changed West Sacramento's city zoning codes to permit urban farming, launched a bike share program that eventually made West Sac America's largest electric bike share network, and initiated the creation of an app to locate homeless individuals and bring services to them.

But education equity never left Cabaldon's radar and soon he was championing the Kids Home Run initiative. Funded by a voter-approved tax increase, the program ensures all area students from pre-school to college have the chance to participate in quality education. Since its 2017 launch, more than 1,600 students have completed high-quality pre-school in 21 newly certified schools; 170 high school students have received paid internships, and close to 300 high school graduates have received automatic admissions to Sacramento City College where they can attend two years tuition-free.

"In 2020 every single high school student got a letter of acceptance to college," Cabaldon says. "Whether they applied or not. And a scholarship. The idea was to try to change the set of expectations for the individual and inside the family by bringing together these possibilities. That's the home run."

300

The number of high school graduates who have received automatic admissions to Sacramento City College and 2 years tuition free, since the 2017 launch of the Kids Home Run initiative.



SHARON EBERT: REIMAGINING RICHMOND'S DOWNTOWN

Sharon Ebert is used to just getting it done. Currently, she's the Deputy Chief Administration Officer for the city of Richmond, VA. But it's her 25 years of experience working in various local and state governments that taught her to turn walls into doors, even going so far as to rewrite city code when it didn't serve the city.

"I saw the obstacles I was facing and thought 'I'm going to rewrite the code.' And I did."

It's this kind of approach that makes Ebert one of the driving forces behind Richmond's new City Center Innovation District. Meant to breathe new life into downtown Richmond, the area is envisioned as a multi-use, technically wired space where citizens can live, learn, collaborate, and create — all within a high-density, walkable, full-service environment complete with mixed-used housing, office, retail, and multi-modal transportation.

According to the development plan, there are three "big moves" that are critical to achieving this vision, including rezoning the city center for mixed-uses; reducing the municipal footprint by renovating, replacing, or relocating vacant, city-owned properties; and expanding education offerings by developing a high-tech high school and campus for higher education.



The majority of our Black and Latino business owners are women, and the numbers are growing. They represent a strong coalition, and we want to make sure everyone has a seat at the table. Not just in the construction phase, but ongoing."

An encouraging metric? In 2019, for the first time ever, most adults living in Richmond's Downtown had, at least, a Bachelor's degree.

The Innovation District's crown jewel is 26 acres of government-owned land, which is where Ebert comes in. Leveraging public-private partnerships, she intends to transform the space into something that works for all Richmonders.

As a city, Richmond has long struggled with the effects of racial inequality, including segregation and the impact



of “white flight” that decimated the once-vibrant downtown. Now, in 2022, Richmond is still reeling from the protests following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020.

When Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney declared Juneteenth a city-paid holiday, encouraging citizens to engage in “reflection, service, and healing,” no one in his office took the day off.

“We used the time to meet and talk about equity with city administration,” Ebert explains.

Now, her overarching goal is to lift those in poverty via initiatives focused on affordable housing, equitable economic development, and job training.

Ebert’s team is also engaging minority-led businesses through Richmond’s Office of Minority Business Development, which works to match struggling or emerging businesses with established mentors in critical operational verticals like marketing, accounting, and legal.

“And we’re setting minimum goals for

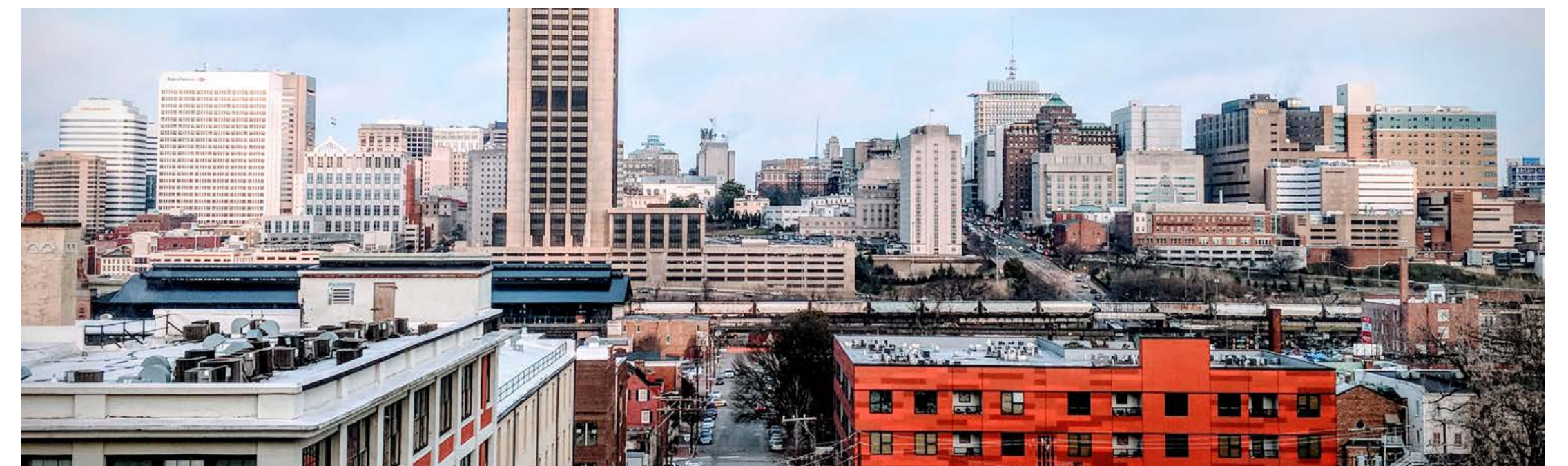
minority representation in terms of filling storefronts, and we’re subsidizing rents to help level the playing field,” Ebert says.

“In 2019 the poverty rate was 19%. Then it went up to 21% because of Covid. And now I’m working on a plan to reduce it by 5% in the next five years.”

Not an easy task to be sure. But if anyone can do it, it’s Sharon Ebert.

5%

The reduction in Richmond’s poverty rate that Sharon Ebert is targeting in the next five years.



ALISIA McCLAIN: LEADING LOUISVILLE'S DATA SCIENCE REVOLUTION



There is one fundamental question driving Alisia McClain, Executive Director at the Louisville Future of Work Initiative:

“How do we creatively address workforce development issues while highlighting and supporting the assets that exist?”

The Future of Work Initiative, powered by Microsoft, aims to make Louisville a regional hub for Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, and the Internet of Things, by doing exactly that.

As a city heavily invested in manufacturing and health care, Louisville is at the forefront of the data economy. And because most jobs lost to automation are held by women and workers of color, these groups are at the highest risk for employment disruption as the nature of work evolves. McClain’s mission, therefore, isn’t just to recruit traditionally underrepresented workers, but to address the cultural and social realities that are embed-

ded in the transforming future of work.

“I started at Future of Work in February 2020,” McClain says, “and it wasn’t just the pandemic that was happening, but a social justice reckoning too. And because Black and

Brown people are disproportionately affected by automation, the question soon became ‘how do we marry social justice, data science, and workforce development?’”

To answer that, McClain knew she had to start by acknowledging the elephant in the room.

“I understand that for some employers, hiring non-traditional tech workers feels risky. They’re not going to say that, but I will,” she said.

The program has been successful so far because McClain’s team doesn’t deny that risk exists. Instead, they shoulder some of it themselves.

“We can take on some of that risk and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in a way



Research about what attracts people to the field is very important. We knew we needed to create a sense of belonging and then teach them the skills of tomorrow.”

that feels good for everyone,” McClain said, describing the Future of Work Initiative’s comprehensive approach.

It’s anchored by enhancements to school curriculums, data analytics training for middle and high school educators, paid project-based learning, and mentorship opportunities. Together, these programs give underserved groups the opportunity for skills development and interaction with prospective employers. Perhaps most importantly, they also encourage employers to see non-traditional computer science workers in a different light.

The Future of Work Initiative is an important piece to Louisville’s digital inclusion strategy - which landed the city a spot on [the list of Digital Inclusion Trailblazers](#), issued by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance.

It’s clear that this is a life-long passion for McClain, a former calculus teacher. She is also the founder of TECH-Nique, a non-profit organization dedicated to welcoming and celebrating underrepresented minorities in the field of technology.

“We as a society need to think differently about the stigma around who can do these jobs...this is the path forward – a way to move both innovation and society forward at the same time.”





Photo credit: James Ewing / JBSA



RYAN LEVASSEUR: BUILDING HOUSTON'S ION

On the heels of a global pandemic that forced millions of workers to isolate, the team behind Houston's Ion District is betting on a new way for workers to connect, while taking Houston's start-up scene to the next level.

The Ion is a dynamic mixed-use facility bringing Houston-based start-ups, established corporations, academic institutions, and investors together. The space will include offices, event spaces, classrooms, communal areas, and creative lounges.

This is all thanks to financing from Rice Management Co., the company responsible for overseeing Rice University's \$8-billion endowment.

Rice Alumnus Ryan LeVasseur relocated from New York City to become Managing Director of Real Estate for Rice Management Co. He says the global pandemic bolstered Houston's need for the Ion (they broke ground in 2019).

"The pandemic really affirmed that our original ideas were good," LeVasseur says. "People

want to come together; in fact, we long for it. And that's the core of what the Ion is."

LeVasseur is excited about the symbiotic relationships that will develop between tenants as diverse as Microsoft, Chevron Technology Ventures, and Common Desk.

"Attracting new talent is a big part of the vision for the Ion. The newer organizations have the opportunity to receive mentorship and guidance, and the older organizations are getting new talent," LeVasseur says.

He also notes that young workers are now deciding where and how they want to live, instead of a job offer dictating their lifestyle. This makes quality of life a key element of what the Ion aims to provide. That's a job made easier by Houston's recent \$100 million investment in parks, transit, and cultural institutions.

The Ion is one part of Houston's broader strategy to support tech innovation in the city. There are more than 60 "startup development organizations" in the city now (accelerators, co-working spaces, incubators, etc). That



It's about developing a city brand and providing amenities to attract new talent. Providing quality of life is Rice's obligation, and it's what the market wants."



ONE-TENTH

The Ion District is 1/10th of the way finished and will consist of about three million square feet upon completion.

influx of start-up support reflects the growing number of tech start-ups choosing Houston as their home: [Startup Genome ranked the city](#) number five on its list of up-and-coming startup ecosystems in the world.

“The talent existed in Houston before the Ion, but was spread across many different industries, all isolated from each other. This site is unique in that it will allow us to integrate and amplify true tech jobs and attract talent,” LeVasseur says.

The Ion’s name reflects another key goal for the city: to lead the transition to clean energy. As the energy capital of the world, [Houston is putting itself at the forefront of implementing low carbon solutions.](#)

The start-up presence and culture of innovation that the Ion is highlighting, and building upon, are critical ingredients to Houston’s success in taking on that leadership role.

CANDY JOHNSON: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY IN START-UP HOT SPOT CHATTANOOGA

Curiosity and collaboration are the hallmarks of Candy Johnson's leadership style. It's not hyperbole to say that Candy has spent her entire career in pursuit of this goal. At 25 she became the youngest ever elected City Council member before going on to numerous roles in policy development, education, and consulting—including a stint as senior advisor to the Mayor of Chattanooga.

It's not an overstatement to suggest that few individuals are better suited for their current role than Johnson either. "Throughout my career, I've experienced bias on three fronts: racial, gender, and age bias. Fortunately, there have been a couple of male allies and mentors in my corner who helped to elevate me professionally," Johnson told *The Women Leaders* magazine. "Having this type of social capital

and ultimate sponsorship from my male mentor was a large part of my career success."

At the ULGC, Johnson and her team promote entrepreneurship as a key strategy in helping marginalized individuals excel.



Transforming economic parity for Black residents means transforming the environment for Black entrepreneurship. And because entrepreneurship is correlated to higher lifetime income, higher community incomes, and lower rates of poverty, Black households, and the entire city and region are beneficiaries of these gains."

Through programs like Inclusion by Design, which supports high-level career advancement among women and minorities in corporate Chattanooga, and Next Level, which helps small, minority-owned businesses grow through the provision of know-how, training, and network development, participants receive both tangible and intangible benefits. Says Johnson, "At the end of the seven-month program, participants leave with renewed mindsets, fresh perspectives, and a

three-year strategic growth plan and support network."

At the ULGC, Johnson and her team believe



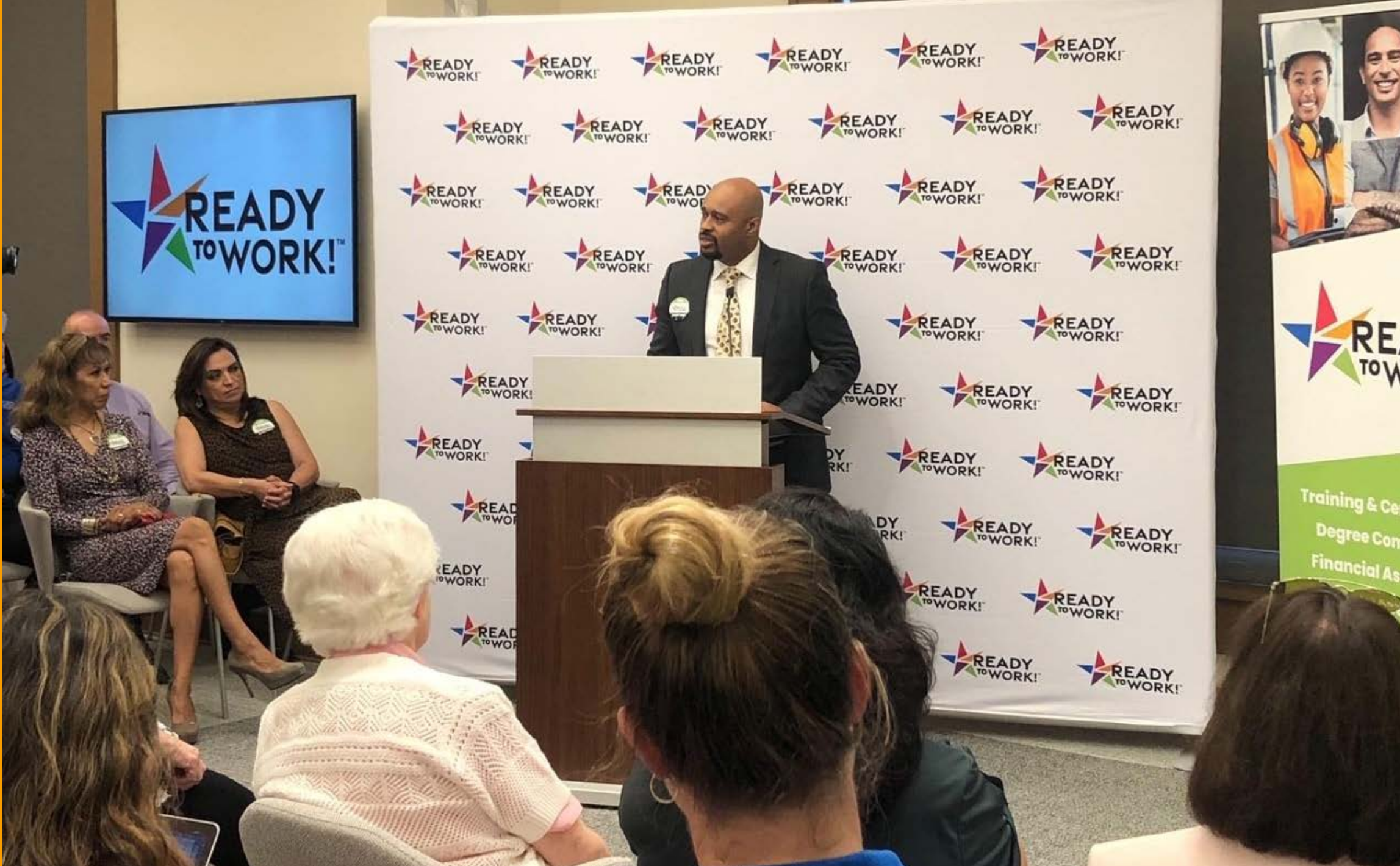
the path to economic power runs right through ownership—female ownership, in particular. As Johnson told The Women Leaders, “Sometimes women just need a boost of confidence and to be given the opportunity to lead. My goal in working with other women is to show them they are capable of leading from where they are, help them build relationships, and provide the opportunity for them to learn and grow within a supportive environment.”

Chattanooga is quickly becoming a destination for entrepreneurs. Venture Capitalist, Steve Case, named it as one of the top three “hot-spots for surprising startup activity” this year. Johnson’s work is ensuring that the economic opportunities coming to the city are expanded to all.

Under Johnson’s leadership in 2021, the ULGC launched the Center for Education, Workforce, and Family Empowerment; the Center for Economic and African American Business Success; and the Center for Equity and Inclusive Leadership—all designed to foster greater social and economic capital.

But Johnson won’t be stopping there, telling The Women Leaders, “We are breaking down the barriers of systemic and institutional racism to build brighter economic futures for those we serve. We will scale our efforts and build stronger partnerships, inviting others to the table that we are building—not for the institution, but for the people. We will be drivers of change for equity.”





MIKE RAMSEY: POWERING THE FUTURE OF WORK IN SAN ANTONIO

He's only been on the job for 14 months, but San Antonio's Executive Director of Workforce Development is determined to change the narrative around America's seventh-largest city.

"There's a belief that people don't want to work, the myth of the great resignation," says Mike Ramsey. "But I beg to differ because what's happening here is not about the will of people to work, it's about the need for skills, and overcoming systemic challenges and barriers."

Ramsey spent most of his career in Florida where he developed a talent for creating community and business partnerships that would improve training and workforce development opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students.

Now, Ramsey is responsible for overseeing San Antonio's Ready to Work program—an ambitious multi-year, taxpayer-funded initiative that aims to enroll 28,000 workers in approved training programs and place 15,600 of them in quality jobs over the next six years.

Thanks to the availability of more than \$110 million in tuition assistance, applicants can pursue high school equivalency, certification courses,

associate degree courses, or bachelor's degree courses. They can also work with a personal coach who will help with course selection, online résumé building, interview prep, and soft skills training.

The crown jewel in the Ready to Work program is its Approved Training Catalog—a 300-page catalog featuring high-demand, well-paid jobs from more than 200 partner employers.

"The reception we've received from businesses is one of the most pleasant surprises of Ready to Work," Ramsey says, noting "Without employer buy-in, we couldn't move the needle. Jobs, sustainable work, and companies that invest in employees are what's going to help us break the cycle of generational poverty that's gripped our city for decades."

That support makes one thing especially clear: it's not just Ramsey who's dedicated to changing San Antonio's story. The business community that's rallying behind the program and the city's work to organize and coalesce that support into actionable initiatives shows the kind of progress cities can make when local government and industry work together.





28,000

The number of workers the initiative aims to place in quality jobs over the next 6 years.

“


The city looked at the problem through an equity lens because we knew we didn't get here overnight, or by accident. Intentional, systemic policies like redlining have played a role. And we wanted to be just as intentional about providing opportunities.”

“We recognize that some of our applicants need stabilizers before they can matriculate through the program,” Ramsey further explained. “And having the city as a convener means Ready to Work can function as a kind of north star, enabling key cornerstone agencies to work together in a less siloed, more connected way.”

This is no small feat in a city with one of the highest poverty rates in the nation—and a problematic intersection of low-skill jobs, an historically marginalized workforce, and low rates of higher education.

“Even before the pandemic we knew we had a skills problem,” Ramsey says. “We knew we needed to make people more resilient. We needed to transform San Antonio into a place businesses can come to find skilled labor and improve their own economic outlook.”

The program has attracted close to 72% of its annual goal for applicants—further proof that the citizens of San Antonio, like Ramsey, are ready to work.



Founded in 2012, CityAge is a platform that brings together a community of leaders who are building the future of our cities and planet. Through in-person, hybrid and digital events, along with original content distributed to our community of thought leaders through various channels, we highlight the ideas, people and technologies creating new opportunities and solving some of society's biggest challenges.

To learn more about CityAge please visit our website: cityage.com