COMMUNITY LEADER
NORTHEAST OHIO'S VOICE FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS
FEBRUARY 2016

The POWER100
NORTHEAST OHIO'S MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

BANKING ON THE FLATS
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP REVITALIZING WATERFRONT

Beth Mooney
Chairman and CEO, KeyCorp

SUPER LAWYERS
ANNUAL LOOK AT OHIO'S TOP ATTORNEYS
2016 POWER 100 LIST

Robyn Minter Smyers, partner-in-charge, Thompson Hine

Barbara Snyder, president, Case Western Reserve University

Michael Symon, chef and owner, Lola, Lolita, B Spot and Roast

Dan Walsh, CEO, Citymark Capital

Scott Woitek, president, The Woitek Group; CEO, Starwood Retail Partners

Brian Zimmerman, CEO, Cleveland Metroparks

Ann Zoller, executive director, LAND Studio

LAKE/GEauga

Morris Beverage Jr., president, Lakeland Community College

Jennifer Deckard, president and CEO, Farmount Minerals

James Hambrick, chairman, president and CEO, Lubrizol Corp

Cynthia Moore-Hardy, president and CEO, Lake Health

Daniel Troy, Lake County commissioner

LORAIN COUNTY

Dennis Cococo, co-director, Great Lakes Innovation & Development Enterprise

Jim Cordes, administrator, Lorain County

Kevin Flanigan, president, General Plug and Manufacturing Co.

John Kahl, CEO, ShurTech Brands

Ted Kalo, commissioner, Lorain County

Ed Oley, president and CEO, Mercy Regional Medical Center Lorain

Donald Sheldon, president, University Hospitals Elyria Medical Center

MAHONING VALLEY

Warren Anderson, president and owner, Anderson-DuBose

Anthony Cafaro Jr., president, The Cafaro Co.

Jim Cosaler, CEO and chief evangelist, Youngstown Business Incubator

Sam Covelli, owner and operator, Covelli Enterprises

Denise DeBartolo York, chairperson, The DeBartolo Corp.

Tom Fleming, president, Aim National Easie

Thomas Humphries, president and CEO, Youngstown-Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce

Anthony Paylillas, president and CEO, Avi Foodsystems Inc

John Pogue, partner, Harrington, Hoppe and Mitchell

Tim Ryan, U.S. representative

Jim Tressel, president, Youngstown State University

Gordon Wean, chairman, Raymond John Wean Foundation

ee Friedman had de-
voted a career in com-
munity and economic
development to build-
ing a better downtown
Cleveland, a place where
people wanted to live
and play as well.
But the Beachwood native learned that the state of downtown Cleveland wasn’t what concerned C-suite executives most
during her tenure as president and CEO
of the Cleveland Leadership Center, a
position in which she brought the city’s
top leadership programs — Leadership
Cleveland, Cleveland Bridge Builders,
Cleveland Executive Fellowship, (c)Clev-
eland and Look Up to Cleveland — under
one organizational structure.
Instead, they worried about how they
would fill the jobs they were creating
in a city where only 22 to 25 percent of
residents ages 25 and older hold an as-
cociate’s or bachelor’s degree — a city
that ranks last in educational attain-
ment among similarly sized Midwestern
municipalities.
“It just resonated with me that even
when you can make a beautiful down-
town or beautiful pockets of neighbor-
hoods — which Cleveland has done — at
the end of the day, it doesn’t really affect
the whole way the making sure every
person has the the opportunity to participate
in the local economy,” she remembers.
The realization sparked a passion for
programs promoting postsecondary
education. In early 2019 she met with
Pat Mullin, then managing partner at
Deloitte & Touche and board chair of
Cleveland Scholarship Programs. The
45-year-old nonprofit was quietly provid-
ing guidance and funds to help low-
income high-school students, mainly in
Cuyahoga County, prepare and pay for
college.
“He said, ‘We’re really looking to kind
of turn the volume up on this organiza-
tion,’” she recalls.
Friedman has done that and more dur-
ing her five years as the organization’s
CEO. Under her direction, the nonprofit
changed its name to College Now Greater
Cleveland and began presenting itself as a
frontline economic development force
that could help employers meet their
hiring needs. The result is an annual
budget that has almost tripled, from
approximately $5 million to $12 mil-
on, and a staff that grew from 45 to 160,

CAP AND GOWN TOWN

COLLEGE NOW HAS HIT ITS STRIDE AS IT SEEKS TO MAKE COLLEGE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERY CLEVELANDER.

BY LYNNIE THOMPSON
serving about 25,000 learners a year. The nonprofit has counselors in public high schools, libraries and community centers throughout Cuyahoga, Lorain, Medina and Summit counties, where they begin broaching the subject of college and education-to-career pathways to students as early as the ninth grade. Assistance ranges from help preparing for the ACT and improving essay-writing skills to completing scholarship applications and evaluating financial aid packages.

Friedman's fundraising pitch is a powerful one based on fact. A $500 donation will yield eight counseling sessions and an average of $79,000 in financial aid for an eligible student.

"This town is very generous," she says matter-of-factly. "If you have a mission that resonates with civic, philanthropic and corporate leaders and you can find a way to strategize the mission and then create a business plan around it that makes sense — that can be measured, that can show impact and return on investment — you have a pretty good recipe. That's really what's happened here in these last 5 1/2 years.

One of the most notable ingredients in that recipe is a mentoring program for low-income students receiving a scholarship directly from College Now. (The nonprofit also manages scholarships for at least a hundred foundations and companies.) The initiative, launched three years ago, matches volunteers who have a bachelor's degree with College Now scholarship recipients via a computer program. "It's a little like eHarmony," Friedman jokes. The students and their respective mentors meet twice a year and engage in e-mail conversations prompted by a computer-generated question sent from mentors to students every two weeks. Those inquiries cover everything from buying books and seeking out instructors during office hours to writing resumes and landing internships.

"They're helping these students develop strategy skills and thinking skills," Friedman says. "Most college kids don't come with them. I don't care what their backgrounds are."

The program has grown from 42 to almost 1,300 student-mentor pairs. The mentors represent more than 300 NorthEast Ohio companies, including KeyBank, Medical Mutual and Deloitte & Touche. Those mentors, Friedman observes, double as potential recruiters who can introduce the best and brightest to their employers. "They're doing this to give back, " she observes. "But they're also doing it out of enlightened self-interest, to create a pipeline of talent."

The program is on track to improve scholarship recipients' on-time graduation rate defined as earning a bachelor's degree in six years or an associate's degree in three years to approximately 80 percent — far better than the national rate of 57 percent and one that even beats the 75 percent rate for the nation's most affluent students. The on-time graduation rate for low-income students like the ones College Now serves, in comparison, is 15 percent.

Devon Brantley admits that he didn't think he needed a mentor when he enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 2014. The Cleveland Heights native had been the man of the house since he was 14 years old, helping his mother raise his three younger sisters and pay the bills with money earned by working at his uncle's towing company. At the same time, he managed to excel in advanced placement courses and graduate from Cleveland Heights High School with a 3.8 grade-point average.

"I was like, Well, I might as well see how it is before I actually come up with these assumptions and make it into a negative thing," he says of the program, which stipulates that participation is mandatory for College Now scholarship recipients.

Now Brantley describes his mentor, retired professor Tim Stuhmer, as "a best friend," a guy he texts, calls and regularly meets up with at the Cleveland Museum of Art. He credits Stuhmer with helping him improve his writing skills and better balance a full load of classes and multiple jobs — demands that had him so stressed last year that his mother feared he might quit school. Stuhmer advised him to take breaks and go out with his friends, keep communicating with those who love and support him, and ask for help when necessary. "Even if college gets stressful, he makes sure that I still have my head on straight," Brantley says.

The nonprofit also has developed programs for groups of disadvantaged students with like challenges — or, as the case may be, advantages. Friedman mentions the Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars Program as an example. The initiative markets the top 50 Cleveland Metropolitan School District students to the nation's elite institutions of higher learning in part by taking them on an annual summer trip to schools such as Harvard and Columbia universities and funneling approximately $15,000 in financial aid to each.

"[College Now mentors] are helping these students develop strategy skills and thinking skills. Most college kids don't come with them, I don't care what their backgrounds are," Friedman says. "And the schools want these kids, because they're looking to broaden their diversity."

Friedman and her colleagues are working to obtain the funding necessary to put counselors in middle schools outside the Cleveland Metropolitan School District so they can begin discounting the prospect of attending college with more students at a younger age. The early dialogue is particularly important for kids growing up in homes where college is never mentioned or dismissed as too expensive to consider. Friedman notes that two-thirds of all jobs created will require some sort of postsecondary education by 2020.

"Kids that age are very focused on instant gratification — they'd rather be playing a game on a cell phone," she says. "So you've got to give them an aspiration or relevance: 'Stick with this. Have patience. Delay the gratification and focus, because there's such a greater good for you.'"

The effort to expand services extends to College Now's Tower City resource center, where the nonprofit offers the same free counseling it provides in high schools to adults interested in continuing their education. The budget for those programs has increased from $100,000 to almost $600,000, not including scholarship dollars. Friedman points out that there are approximately 40,000 open jobs in Northeast Ohio right now — jobs that might be filled by some of the half-million adults who started college and never finished.

"You can't fill that pipeline on the backs of 18-year-olds coming out of high school," she says. "You've got to reach in to the undereducated, underemployed adults." Educating adults helps further College Now's founding mission. Friedman points out that whether a child has a parent that went to college is the biggest predictor of whether he or she will venture onto that path.