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Dear friends, neighbors and community partners,

Here we are in February, and it is a Leap Year, so we get an extra day to enjoy this month. During February, we take time to celebrate Black History to ensure that the rich culture and diverse contributions of the African American community are acknowledged and honored. We are pleased to invite the community to a special “Black in St. Louis: Then & Now” program on Feb. 29th presented by the UMSL African American Alumni Chapter. At this event we will recognize Black History Month while gaining insights into the historical research of St. Louis historians and father-and-son writing team, Dr. John A. Wright, Sr. and Dr. John A. Wright, Jr. Long-time St. Louis media specialist Bonita Cornute will moderate.

In this edition of *UMSL Community Connection* we are proud to share a few new stories of UMSL alumni, community partnerships and initiatives making a difference in our area. Together we are addressing needs and finding ways to make our community a better place to live and work for everyone!

Gratefully forward,

Kristin Sobolik
Chancellor
University of Missouri–St. Louis



UMSL Community Connection newsletter

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Events & Resources



UMSL exceeds St. Louis Anchor Action Network goals for increased hiring, purchasing in 2023

There has been a campus wide commitment to engage local businesses and recruit staff from north St. Louis city and county.

The St. Louis Anchor Action Network was established to help expand opportunity and direct greater resources to parts of the region that have faced decades of disinvestment. Underpinning those efforts is the shared commitment of network members to change the way they do business by being more intentional about contracting with businesses and engaging with residents within a focused geography of 22 ZIP codes, primarily located in north St. Louis city and north St. Louis County.

The University of Missouri–St. Louis has played a leading role in the network, alongside Edward Jones and in alignment with a key pillar of the university’s strategic plan around community engagement and economic development, since its launch in 2021. UMSL helped the network set an ambitious goal to increase purchasing and hiring within those neighborhoods by 10% in the 2023 calendar year. Before December even arrived, the university had exceeded those targets. Units across the UMSL campus spent more than \$6.4 million contracting with businesses in the focused geography – up from just over \$3.7 million in 2022 – and also employed more than 650 people from those ZIP codes, easily topping the target it set when the year began by nearly 200 employees. [Read more.](#)



As director of community wellness for A Red Circle, recent UMSL grad Nikki Engelbrecht helps improve healthy food access in north St. Louis County

Growing up in a rural community in a family without a lot of money, Nikki Engelbrecht was grateful for the local organizations that helped boost her family up. Now, in her new role as director of community wellness for A Red Circle, she’s helping to provide similar resources to families in north St. Louis County. Founded by Erica Williams, A Red Circle is a nonprofit organization dedicated to “providing sustained, focused attention to the racial equity issues that impact north St. Louis County.” The organization focuses on improving access in three core areas: healthy foods, education and the arts.

“When our foundational institutions are embedded with systemic racism, it really hurts community members, especially in North County, where residents are impacted by red-lining practices,” said Engelbrecht, who graduated summa cum laude from the University of Missouri–St. Louis in December. “And



2024 State of Black Educators Symposium & Professional Learning
Friday, Feb. 23, 2024
8:00 AM – 4:00 PM: learning sessions
6:00 PM: symposium
Touhill Performing Arts Center

The State of Black Educators is an annual symposium and professional learning event focused on supporting and uplifting Black educators and addressing issues and topics impacting education. Professional learning will occur during the day followed by a symposium featuring inspirational speakers and insights into critical issues like diversity, equity and inclusion, racial healing, culturally responsive practices, and more. Visit www.sbe24.com for all event details and registration links. Email us@bmetstl.com with any other questions.



Black in St. Louis: Then & Now - Part II
Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024
6:00 - 8:00 PM
UMSL EdCollabitat
Ward E. Barnes Building
2993 South Drive

All are welcome to join the UMSL African American Alumni Chapter in recognizing and celebrating Black History Month. Presenting are two St. Louis historians, Dr. John A. Wright Sr. and Dr. John A. Wright Jr., moderated by Media Specialist Bonita Cornute. [Click here](#) to register for this free event.



businesses don't invest in communities that lack resources." Engelbrecht, who earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and a certificate from the Pierre Laclède Honors College, was first connected to A Red Circle through a research project she worked on in a qualitative research class with Advising and Associate Teaching Professor Larry Irons. Immediately drawn to the organization's mission of providing healthy food access, she started volunteering and then interned with A Red Circle for about a year before being hired full-time. [Read more.](#)



Arianna String Quartet Series 4

Friday, March 1, 2024
6:45 PM: Pre-show talk
7:30 PM: Performance
Touhill Performing Arts Center

Hailed for their outstanding musicianship, the Arianna String Quartet has established itself as one of America's finest chamber ensembles. This concert will include Schubert: Quartet G Minor, D.173; Trevor Weston: Juba (2017); Dvorak: Viola Quintet in E-flat Major, Op.97, with Ivo-Jan van der Werff, viola. [Click here](#) for ticket information.



Four-time College of Education graduate Howard Fields strives for inclusion and equity in schools

Howard Fields still gets emotional remembering the day he lined up for commencement inside the Mark Twain Athletic Center at the University of Missouri–St. Louis in December 2007. Having completed his associate degree at St. Louis Community College before transferring to UMSL for his bachelor's degree in physical education, Fields – who grew up in the nearby Cool Valley Apartments – was excited to soon become the first college graduate in his family.... Bolstered by his success in the College of Education, Fields – who also met his wife, Nancy, at UMSL – decided to pursue his master's in education administration, hoping to land a position as an athletic director. He earned his master's in 2009 and would go on to receive his EdS degree in 2012 and, later, his PhD in 2017. [Read more](#) about Fields' success in different roles in Education and his current work as a speaker and thought leader focusing on inclusion, student performance disparities, diversity and systemic racism.

Arianna String Quartet Series 5 "Arianna with the Kyo-Shin-An Arts Ensemble!"

Saturday, March 9, 2024
6:45 PM: Pre-show talk
7:30 PM: Performance
Touhill Performing Arts Center

Hailed for their outstanding musicianship, the Arianna String Quartet has established itself as one of America's finest chamber ensembles. This special concert features the Kyo-Shin-An Arts Ensemble. [Click here](#) for ticket information.



Friendship, Faith and Futures

The STLMade Movement, an initiative of Greater St. Louis Inc., story by Valerie Schremp Hahn

Pastors Ken and Beverly Jenkins opened community development hub R&R Marketplace in Dellwood with the aim to change lives.

Ken and Beverly Jenkins used to stand in the parking lot of the old shopping plaza in Dellwood, back when it was a shell of its previous self, and pray. The plaza, at 10148 West Florissant Avenue, had been anchored by a Schnucks supermarket and had stood vacant for nearly 20 years. The Jenkinses, both pastors, saw potential in the plaza, in the community, in its



Community Dialogue on Economic Justice

Thursday, March 14, 2024
3:30 - 5:30 PM
UMSL Campus
RCEW Building
8225 W. Florissant Road

To celebrate the 60th anniversary year, UMSL launched a new Forum for Community Dialogue. Taking place on 314 Day, this session's theme is Economic Justice: What's possible in

people. “We would talk about changing the narrative,” Ken Jenkins says. “Everybody (in the media and from outside the community) that descends in this area, they only talk about the bad things — the racial struggles, and the unrest, and the disinvestment, which has all happened. But we talk about the possibility, of changing a story.” The couple, who live in Florissant, hosted a grand opening in September at the plaza, a \$20 million, nearly 90,000-square-foot development they call R&R Marketplace. It’s owned by their nonprofit, Refuge and Restoration, which started as a transitional home that had helped men who had been incarcerated, unhoused, unemployed, or underemployed.

... The marketplace, they said, isn’t about the shopping center property itself. It’s about transformation. “We get up every day knowing if somebody drives into this lot or walks into this lot, their life is gonna change,” Ken Jenkins says. “And that’s the goal. We find great peace and joy knowing that hey, somebody came out here, and they left a different way.” [Read more.](#)



Sodexo staff at UMSL serves surrounding community through longtime involvement with Meals on Wheels

As many as 35 area residents receive hot meals prepared by Sodexo staff members each day through the Normandy Meals on Wheels program. The volunteers arrive at the loading dock at the north end of the Millennium Student Center at the University of Missouri–St. Louis around 10 a.m. each morning. There are usually four or five of them, and they gather the biodegradable fiber containers of food waiting for them in the stainless-steel hot box and load them into their cars along with brown paper sacks packed with bread, butter, a milk carton, a dessert or pieces of fruit.

Each volunteer will transport up to eight meals per day to homes around the greater Normandy area as part of the Meals on Wheels of Greater St. Louis program. As many as 35 area residents will receive meals in a given day. Only inclement weather ... or major holidays such as Christmas and New Year’s, interrupts this scene from happening every day – Monday through Friday – throughout the year. It’s been occurring for far more than a decade. [Read more.](#)

Share with Us

We’d love to hear your questions and comments about UMSL and stories about great things happening in our communities. Your thoughts will help shape content covered in future newsletters to be pertinent to you and your neighbors. Leave any suggestions, questions, or stories [here](#). Thank you!

the 314. The purpose of the forum is to inspire thoughtful conversation examining differing viewpoints and moving towards common ground around which the community can plan for its future. [Click here](#) to register for this session or share interest for future sessions.



A Red Circle Community Resource Fair
Saturday, March 16, 2024
Noon - 4:00 PM
UMSL Millennium Student Center
17 Arnold Grobman Drive

This event will feature organizations providing resources to area residents. Organizations interested in participating should contact nikki@aredcircle.org for more information. The resource fair is free and open to the public.



CMT Ten Toe Express® Searching for Walk Leaders

The CMT Ten Toe Express® program has introduced more than 8,000 individuals to the region’s transit system. The program links MetroBus, MetroLink, and your own Ten Toes to promote mobility, socialization, and personal health. CMT is currently looking for interested individuals to volunteer with the program as Walk Leaders. For more information, [click here](#).

University of Missouri–St. Louis
Economic & Community Development
1 University Boulevard
341 Woods Hall
St. Louis, MO | 63121

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