

# African American Leadership Initiative



## 2019 Year In Review

**The mission of AALI** is to identify and cultivate African American leaders in Mansfield and Richland County. AALI functions to create a network of diverse leaders with relevant opportunities to connect and contribute to their community. This initiative provides an environment for members to examine leadership theories that yield necessary skills to effectively participate and enrich our community.

AALI was designed to provide meaningful opportunities for African American leaders to broaden their experience and hone leadership skills. The program targets individuals desiring to grow personally and professionally by engaging in their community to address its needs. The current climate shows us the racial disparities that exist between people of color (POC) and other demographics result in severe consequences such as higher rates of poverty and unemployment, and lower rates of educational attainment. The combination of historical and present-day forces keep communities of color disconnected from networks of economic opportunity and upward mobility. AALI is a leadership development program that serves to establish these essential connections and provide access that results in personal growth, knowledge attainment, capacity building, and social and economic mobility.

# AAI Speaks

AAI Speaks is a monthly professional development luncheon featuring speakers on topics of interest to African-Americans. From black history to current issues related to racial inequality and minority health disparities, a diverse array of talks were offered in 2019.



**February 11, 2019**

## **The Company Line - Justin Zink and Andrew Sewell**

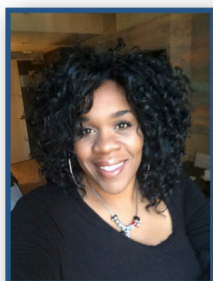
The Company Line neighborhood was one of the first African American neighborhoods in Mansfield. Justin Zink and Andrew Sewell, principal investigators at Lawhon and Associates in Columbus, spoke to us about their work excavating the site of the former neighborhood. More than 1,200 artifacts were uncovered and Sewell brought a few along to display to the audience.



**March 11, 2019**

## **Candid Conversations: Community Engagement - Edward Akinyemi with guest Councilman at Large Don Bryant**

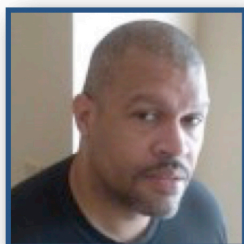
An open and frank conversation about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the educational school systems and how its effectiveness impacts community and civic engagement.



**April 8, 2019**

## **Emotional Regulation - Buffi Stillwell-Williams, LISW, MSSA, LSW, LCDC-III**

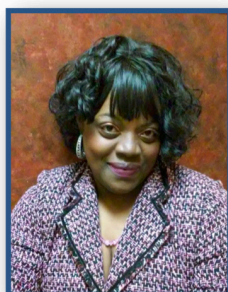
A licensed social worker with more than twenty years of experience, Buffi spoke about her work that emphasizes solution focused thinking, and the use of emotional regulation in discipline.



**May 13, 2019**

## **Racial Inequality- Dr. James Jones III**

Mansfield native, Dr. James Jones is a professor of African American History, Modern American History, African and African American Studies and African History at Prairie View A&M University in Texas. Dr. Jones gave an inspiring talk regarding racial inequality. He defined race as the problem of the 20th century and explained the difference between prejudice, discrimination, bigotry and institutionalized racism.



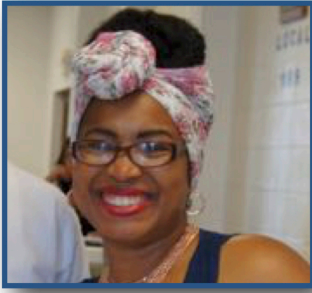
**June 10, 2019**

## **Soaring with Help, Hope & Healing - Nicole Brown-Horston**

Nikki Brown is a motivational speaker based out the Columbus area but originally from Mansfield, OH. Brown is an administrative retiree from Columbus Public Schools. After being diagnosed with fibromyalgia back in 2013 and suffering a number of economic hardships, she found healing and hope through her faith and shares her story to uplift and encourage others.

# AAI Speaks

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**July 8, 2019**

## **Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice - Nyshia Brooks**

Mansfield resident Nyshia Brooks is a chapter leader of the Mansfield Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (CSSJ). CSSJ chapters strive to create avenues for crime survivors to tell their stories and influence the debate about crime policy. Brooks educated the group on local CSSJ efforts and how to get involved.



**August 12, 2019**

## **Entrepreneurship – Trai'Shaun Beard**

Trai'Shaun Beard is the owner of Akua's Hair Clinic in Mansfield, Ohio. Beard shared both the trials and triumphs of finding her passion and starting her business. Beard is also a business coach and provided some tips for the audience regarding idea development, marketing and start-up costs. All members in attendance received a free copy of Trai'Shaun's e-book "Mind the Business that Pays You".



**September 9, 2019**

## **Health Disparities in the Black Community – Yvonka Hall**

Yvonka Hall is the Executive Director of the Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition (NEOBHC). NEOBHC is one of the first of its kind- an organization dedicated to health outcomes in the African American community. Yvonka shared interesting information regarding historical policies and practices that have adversely affected African American communities for centuries. Hall also emphasized the importance of participating in local efforts to gather health information for African Americans to ensure pressing issues are being brought to the forefront of the medical community.



**October 14, 2019**

## **Mental Illness – Carla James**

Carla James, Mansfield resident and Family Life Educator, alongside her mother Melodye James own and operate Restored Visions which is a nonprofit organization dedicated to Mental Health. James provided the group with important statistics regarding Mental Health awareness in the African American community. Carla expressed the importance of destigmatizing Mental Illness and strengths-based solutions for communities.



**November 12, 2019**

## **Criminal Justice – Lodema M'Poko, J.D.**

Lodema M'Poko is a practicing attorney with a passion for criminal justice reform. M'Poko spoke to the group about the unfortunate circumstances many returning citizens find themselves in when trying to reintegrate into society. She also emphasized the message that criminal justice reform begins with civic engagement by describing the organizational structure of the justice system. Using our vote is the first way to affect change in the justice system given that our vote impacts who gets appointed to office in the system.

# AAI Journey

Arguably the most valuable component of the entire AALI program, AALI Journey is a leadership development webinar series which addresses topics of concern for community leadership. In order to make it accessible to as many people as possible, AALI Journey in 2019 was a 6-session webinar series that can be accessed online.

## Meet Facilitator Renée Thompson



As the founder and president of Unlimited Potential for Achievement (UPA), Renée Thompson combines her experience and passion to teach individuals and organizations about their unique potential and strengths. Identifying and building on diverse skills and experiences have been constant themes found throughout Renée’s professional career.

Before launching UPA, Renée served as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Ohio State University Mansfield. During her time at OSU Mansfield, Renée gained a reputation for reframing the conversation of diversity to one that celebrates all aspects of diversity. On campus, students and faculty alike found Renée to be a committed advocate for students who represented various aspects of demographic and experiential diversity. Beyond the campus community, Renée championed ‘diversity’ as one of the greatest untapped resources for our 21st century workforce.

Renée began her business career in the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD), Small Business and Minority Business Division. There she assisted in the review and re-writing of legislation to support statewide procurement and set-aside programs for minority and women-owned businesses. After her work at ODOD, Thompson served as an Assistant Vice President in the Corporate Training Division of Chase Manhattan Mortgage Corporation. While there, Renée developed customer service curricula and program development for the national division of corporate employee training.

She continued to use her training and business development skills as the Director for the Midwest region of the New York-based National Development Council (NDC). At NDC, Renée provided training and technical assistance in housing and economic development to government, corporate, community, and faith-based entities throughout the country.

Throughout her career, Renée has been blessed to have the support of her children and her husband, Bobby. In addition to UPA, Renée has a full life researching her ancestry, traveling, writing and mentoring youth.



Renée Thompson and Dr. Sabrinah White



Christen Lee, Renée Thompson, and Dr. Victor Coleman Jr.

# AAI Journey

## **Session 1: Finding Your Voice Amidst the Changing Demands of Our Communities**

In this session, panelists discussed the leadership demands of the workplace and civic communities, and what characterizes leadership within these contexts. Session panelists: **Dr. Victor Coleman Jr.**, Regional External Affairs Manager at FirstEnergy Corp., **Deanna West-Torrence**, Founder of and Executive Director at the North End Community Improvement Collaborative, and **Leona Smith**, Community Development Coordinator at the North End Community Improvement Collaborative. Assigned reading: Harvard Business Review, “Businesses Exist to Deliver Value to Society”, by Adi Ignatius (March/April 2018).

## **Session 2: How Are Identities Reflected In Leadership?**

For session 2, **Renée Thompson** discussed the relationship between identity and leadership. How are identities reflected in leadership? Does this matter? Which area of diversity most profoundly impacts leadership? Thompson and Mansfield podcaster **Javontae Feagin** explored the definition of diversity, its influence upon leadership, and how effective leadership must move beyond the personal identities of its leaders.

## **Session 3: Are Leaders Made or Born? Do They Merely *Inspire* or Do They Actually *Impact*?**

In Session 3, **Renée Thompson** and her guest MBK Americorps VISTA, **Christen Lee** discussed various theories of leadership and explored the question of if and how leaders are made or born. Far from being simply ‘academic’, the discussion provides insights into the business and civic leaders we engage with and what motivates us to follow them.

## **Session 4: The Influence of Implicit Biases and Values upon Leadership Styles**

For Session 4, Renée interviewed **Dr. Phil Mazzocco**, Associate Professor of Psychology at the Ohio State University and discussed the issue of biases when it comes to leadership. Assigned reading: Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2002, Vol. 82, No. 1, 62-68, “Implicit and Explicit Prejudice and Interracial Interaction”, by Dovidio, Gaertner, and Kawakami.

## **Session 5: Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, Temperament, Resiliency, and Grit**

In session 5, **Renée Thompson, and her guest, Americorps VISTA Dr. Sabrinah White** discussed how emotional intelligence, temperament, resiliency and grit can redirect personal biases and their influences upon one’s leadership style. They also explored the various aspects of our cognitive and experiential diversities to refine our perceptions of the impact of multiple, diverse identities. Assigned reading: Harvard Business Review, “What Makes a Leader?”, by Daniel Goleman (January 2004).

## **Session 6: Conflict & Crucial Conversations**

In Session 6, **Renée Thompson, MBK Americorps VISTA, Christen Lee, and Dr. Victor Coleman Jr.** explored the relationship between effective leadership and the ability to defuse and resolve unavoidable conflict. They also discussed how “conflict” and “crucial conversations” are unavoidable elements of constructive leadership.

# AAI Social

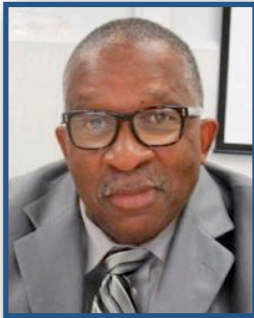
AAI Social is a series of events intended to provide a space for socializing and networking with peers. Despite some early challenges with low attendance, engagement increased after AALI Social events were organized around a theme celebrating the work of local African-American artists, leaders, and entrepreneurs.



**June 28, 2019**

## **Braxton Daniels III – Faces & Places of the North End**

A true success story, Braxton Daniels III is a photographer and entrepreneur who grew up on the North End of Mansfield. Braxton's photos embody the true essence of the neighborhood, and feature prominent North End landmarks, people and places. Braxton's work was commissioned by NECIC and is now a permanent part of our office decor, paying homage to the place we diligently work to improve every day.



**July 26, 2019**

## **Stan Jefferson - Mansfield City Schools Superintendent Meet and Greet**

Stan Jefferson, or Coach J, as many know him, returned this year as superintendent of the Mansfield City Schools. Years ago, Jefferson served as principal of Mansfield Senior High School before he went on to coach for OSU and start his own business. He is proud to return to Mansfield and excited about the future of the district. The event was an opportunity for the community to meet the new superintendent and for Mr. Jefferson to share his vision for the district.



**August 30, 2019**

## **Meet the Authors**

The August AALI Social event recognized and highlighted local African American authors. Featured authors included NECIC's own Edward Akinyemi "Community Heroes", Jeffrey Jones "Seeing is Believing", Brigitte Coles "Women of Courage: Volume II", and Loretta Hilliard "A History of Notable African Americans, Richland County, Ohio".



**September 27, 2019**

## **Julian "BaShawn" Windham - Meet the Artist and Exhibition**

JB Windham, otherwise known as BaShawn, is a talented local painter. BaShawn is a Mansfield native that has always had an affinity for drawing and painting and in recent years, decided to pursue this as a full-time career. BaShawn aims to portray beauty, truth, sadness, strength, and happiness in his work and his pieces made for great conversation throughout the night.



**November 15, 2019**

## **End of the Year Celebration**

This event was an opportunity to look back and celebrate a productive inaugural year of the African American Leadership Initiative. All the speakers, presenters, and participants were invited and were presented with a certificate of appreciation for their part in making AALI 2019 a great success!

# Supporting African-American Owned Businesses

One of the simplest ways to promote inclusion and diversity is by providing opportunities for minority owned businesses. Deliberate and intentional spending is a powerful way for consumers of goods and services to shape the local economy and keep more dollars in the community. **In 2019 NECIC spent \$90,659.20 with African-American owned businesses, consultants, entrepreneurs, and artists.**

## African-American Owned Businesses

The Food Lab  
Ms. Lil's Catering  
A-1 Yard and Lawn  
Mansfield Cleaning  
Studio 45 Multimedia

## Consultants and Speakers

Walter Bonham  
Lodema M'Poko  
Sophia Buggs  
Unlimited Potential For Achievement (Renee Thompson)  
N Step Promotions (Nicole Brown Horston)  
Islay, LLC. (Trai'Shaun Beard)  
Brigitte Coles  
Dr. James Jones III  
Xavier Hiddleston  
Falon Allen  
Martin Rawls

## Sponsorships

Wahnita Johnson: Many Shades Of Pink  
Martin Rawls: "Once On This Island" play  
Millennials Create  
Brolic Elite



Many Shades of Pink



# Community Leadership

One way that NECIC can identify and support neighborhood leaders is through monthly Neighbor Up Night gatherings, and the NECIC Small Grant Programs. North End residents are encouraged to work with their neighbors to develop projects with a public benefit and to apply for grants up to \$250 to implement their ideas.

## African-American Led Small Grant Projects

Prom Edition Workshop & Dress Giveaway: Rosie Curry, Bessie Wilkins, Elizabeth Curry  
Field Day at Johns Park: Brittney Miner, Shannica Black, Landenazuia Brie  
Joy Fest Food Truck Event: Darrell Smith, Toccara Reynolds, Quinness Howell, Nydaisia Hardin  
Hidden Gems Beauty Pageant: Xavier Huddleston, Michelle Stewart, Tiffany France, Teresa Grimes  
Friends & Family Day at Johns Park: Lillie Coffee, Delmar Miner, Julian Windham, Priscilla Coffee  
Book Club For Women: Ebbie Jennings, Darewin Jennings, Falon Allen, Keisha Allen  
Community Block Party: Keisha Allen, Wayne Lee, Dennis Baker, Parnell Allen  
Cheer Rain Gear: Myliesha Bradley, Brianna Lindsay, Samara Miller, Margaret Davis  
Connecting People Porch Party: Brenda Morris, Delores Jones, John Henry  
Let Us Break Bread Together: Karla Hale, Sonya Osborne, Monette Hilory, DeShaun Black  
Feed The Families (American Legion Matching Grant): Douglas Beard, Brenda Morris  
Holiday Dinner & Program: Ann Lindsay, Mary Miner, Ruth Miner, Carolyn Adkison  
Feed On Thanksgiving Day (Friendly House Matching Grant): Theresa Williams, Terry Conard  
Clara's Porch: Theresa Williams, Clara Givens, Jackie Rawls, Willie Perkins, Jeremiah Cline

## Giving Back: African-American Board Service

Deanna West-Torrence: Richland County Children Services, Ohio Health, Richland Area Chamber of Commerce (ex-officio), Richland County Regional Planning Commission Executive Board, Richland County Foundation Women's Fund  
Nyasha Oden: Catholic Charities Advisory Board , and The Harmony House  
Edward Akinyemi: Mansfield Area YMCA  
Leona Smith: Richland County Regional Planning Commission Transit Board, The New Store



Book Club For Women



Hidden Gems Beauty Pageant



Joy Fest Food Truck Event