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NOVEMBER 2, 2009

40 Under 40

Gambit's annual 40 Under 40 issue salutes young New Orleanians – people who have already achieved amazing accomplishments, as well as some with great promise. The nominations came from you, our readers, and you responded with enthusiasm. This year there were well over 200 worthy candidates; as usual, the problem was narrowing down the list.

This year's winners include businesspeople and volunteers, doctors and chefs, entrepreneurs and Mardi Gras Indians — all of whom make our city a better place to live. Meet some of the people who will be instrumental in shaping New Orleans' recovery and its future.

Profiles by Ariel Charbonnet, Will Coviello, Alejandro de los Rios, Kandace Power Graves, Lauren LaBorde, Noah Bonaparte Pais, David Winkler-Schmit, Missy Wilkinson and Alex Woodward

Jennifer Avegno, M.D., 37

Associate Program Director, LSU Emergency Medicine Residency

Medical Director, ILPH Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Dr. Jennifer Avegno studied sociology as an undergraduate and attained a master's degree in the field at Tulane because she wanted to work in a career geared toward helping people. Eventually she decided to pursue medicine to have more direct contact with patients, and she settled into working and teaching on the front lines of medical care: the emergency room.

"I treat everyone regardless of who they are, where they come from, whether they have insurance or not," Avegno says. "That is what medicine is all about. I see it as a great way to serve this community and affect people from all walks of life."

Besides working long 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. day shifts — or the flipside night shifts — Avegno teaches new doctors. She is the associate program director for the LSU Emergency Medicine Residency and director of the emergency medicine rotations for all Tulane and LSU students, the largest such rotation in the nation.

"If you study hard enough, you can memorize everything you need to know," she says. "But that's a lot easier than teaching people what it is to be a true doctor: to empathize; to learn how to reach people who may not look like them, or talk like them, or who may be having the worst day of their life because they have been in a car accident."

LSU Health Sciences Center residents awarded her an Excellence in Teaching Award in 2008 and Clinical Faculty of the Year Award in 2006.

Avegno also is medical director of the ILPH Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, which provides care for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence and facilitates cooperation with police. — *Coviello*

Ashley Belding, 31

Pediatric Social Worker, Ochsner Health System

Fundraiser and Board Member, Camp Pelican

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Do the results of the recent election give you optimism about New Orleans in the near future?

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Photo by Cheryl Gerber

For Ashley Belding, advocating for children is an around-the-clock job. She is a pediatric social worker for Ochsner Health System, where she deals with difficult situations such as child abuse and aiding parents who are grieving a lost child. She is immersed in her work, covering her desk with patients' pictures and tirelessly fighting for justice.

"There's no question I will fight until the end for the kids. I'll do whatever I have to do to make sure the right thing happens," she says.

Outside of work she remains involved in a cause that's been close to her heart since age 15. As a teen she started by working as a counselor for Camp Pelican, a free weeklong camp for children with lung disease. Sixteen years later, she sits on the board of the camp and is the creator — along with her best friend Brandy Landry — of the camp's biggest fundraiser, Pelicanpalooza. Local bands volunteer to play the event, which is in its seventh year and has raised thousands of dollars for Camp Pelican.

Belding's longtime involvement with the camp stems from the reward of seeing the kids who have diseases like cystic fibrosis or debilitating asthma enjoy a week of fun.

"Some of these kids literally live for the camp," she says.

Besides planning the next Pelicanpalooza, Belding can see herself advocating for child-protection legislation or possibly working in the music industry in the future. She has no plans to leave New Orleans.

"This is the biggest small town — everyone knows everybody," she says. "I can't see myself moving (away)." — *LaBorde*

Chana Benenson, 29

Educator, New Orleans Charter Science and Math High School

Facilitator, Teach For America and TeachNOLA



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

"Teaching in New Orleans is the greatest thing in the world, but you absolutely have to be willing to do anything," says educator Chana Benenson.

As a leader in education, Benenson takes her own advice to heart. Since coming to New Orleans in 2004 with Teach For America, she has singlehandedly built a foreign language lab at New Orleans Charter Science and Math High School (where she now teaches), trained three new teachers, served as a school culture coordinator and raised funds to take her students to Spain and France. Benenson is literally a lifesaver for one student, whom she resuscitated after he nearly drowned in a hotel pool during a field trip.

In addition to her work leading the foreign language department, Benenson interviews, selects and trains new teachers for Teach For America and TeachNOLA, two programs that have made enormous strides in recruiting talented young graduates to revitalize the public school system. This fall, she was nominated to review the Foreign Language PRAXIS exam and to write the New Teacher Project national curriculum for Foreign Language Content Seminars.

Benenson loves the unique challenges and incredible rewards of teaching in New Orleans.

"New Orleans students are hungry for learning and knowledge because they have been bounced around [from school to school]," she says. "If you go above and beyond to teach your students how to learn and love the content, regardless of what they have been through, you can see so much growth and build wonderful relationships." — *Wilkinson*

Brian Bordainick, 24

Athletic Director, George Washington Carver High School

Founder, 9th Ward Field of Dreams



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Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Winkler-Schmit

Brian Bordainick had a dream, but he didn't have a dollar. In November 2008, Bordainick, the athletic director at George Washington Carver High School, which was destroyed by floodwaters following the levee failures, came up with a plan, the 9th Ward Field of Dreams, and decided to apply for a \$200,000 National Football League grant.

"We wanted to restore our sports program, but we had no money for uniforms, equipment and a facility," Bordainick says.

The problem with the NFL grant was that it required matching funds. Bordainick had only 35 days to go from \$0 to \$200,000, — not much time for the native New Yorker who first came to New Orleans as part of the Teach for America program. Through an email blitz of 250 messages a day that sold \$100 donation bricks for the new athletic facility and larger donors, Bordainick managed to secure the grant.

The proposed state-of-the-art sports facility, which also includes a football field and Olympic-sized running track, will cost \$1.85 million, and fundraising has become more or less Bordainick's full-time job. So far, the 9th Ward Field of Dreams (www.9thwardfieldofdreams.com) has raised \$1.25 million, and Bordainick has enlisted the aid of numerous local businesses like architectural firm Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, which volunteered to provide the plans for the project. Bordainick says he'd love to see the field open in time for the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, and while that might sound difficult, never underestimate Bordainick or his adopted city.

"Only in New Orleans, in my opinion, would this even have a shot," he says. —

Will Bradshaw, 32

Reuben Teague, 33

Owners, Green Coast Enterprises



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Will Bradshaw and Reuben Teague, owners of Green Coast Enterprises, refuse to be typical real estate developers. So when they research a potential proposal, they look beyond the financial end of the deal.

"We can't be just about making a profit there has to be more," Bradshaw says. "That means taking on only triple-bottom-line projects, which have an economic, social or cultural and environmental benefit."

Project Home Again (PHA) fits the Green Coast model. Bradshaw and Teague have served as project managers for the nonprofit development in Gentilly, which is being financed by Leonard Riggio, founder and CEO of Barnes & Noble. Gentilly was severely flooded after the levee failures, with several thousand houses rendered uninhabitable. To date, PHA has rebuilt 32 single-family homes that are energy-efficient and built above standard elevation requirements.

In order to qualify for one of these homes, an applicant must earn a living that is at or below 80 percent of the area's median income and not have the resources to rehabilitate a house they own that was made uninhabitable by the flood. When the newly constructed house is completed, the resident swaps his old property for his new residence.

"That's social justice," Teague says. "You're bringing people home."

Although the two entrepreneurs partner with numerous nonprofit organizations on environmentally conscious programs such as the Salvation Army's \$2.25 million EnviRENEW initiative that provides green makeovers for qualifying homeowners, they also work on their own construction projects. Their first endeavor was the Arabella, a four-plex condominium in classic Greek Revival style near the Fair Grounds. It was built to be affordable, energy efficient and weather resilient. The new condos were so appealing that Bradshaw and Teague, recent transplants to the city, each decided to buy a unit to live in, once again fulfilling the Green Coast mission of sustainability, affordability and social progress by bringing two bright and innovative businessmen to New Orleans. — *Winkler-Schmit*

Joshua Bruno, 28

President/CEO, Brono Inc.

Board Member, Multifamily Council Executive Committee



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Photo by Cheryl Gerber

When Joshua Bruno first started his real estate development company, his business plan had to do with acquiring and selling. After Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the property in the city, that plan changed. "Now we buy, build and hold," he says. "We saw this as an opportunity to invest heavily in the area due to a change in the market conditions."

The change, of course, was a devastated market. Bruno Incorporated decided the best way to help the city recover was to make sure residents had comfortable, hurricane-proof housing that would allow them to stay here in the long term.

Along with large-scale commercial buildings, Bruno oversees construction of large multi-family housing for low-income, blue-collar workers who are the lifeblood of the city's recovery effort. That means building housing that is both cheap and durable — and that doesn't run the risk of being destroyed should another major storm hit the area.

Bruno says his company follows Florida's Dade County hurricane regulations and features high-end luxuries like built-in high-speed Internet and Wi-Fi. It also follows energy-efficient guidelines to help the environment and keep costs down.

"Our main [goal] is to bring people back," he says.

Whether through constructing ultra-modern buildings to attract out-of-state businesses or working with individual residential tenants to ensure they can make their payments, Bruno emphasizes his company is dedicated to "making sure we're helping residents and rejuvenating the area." — *de los Rios*

Amy Chenevert, 34

Gretchen Gilich, 36

Co-owners, Tru Colors Apparel



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Besides the excitement die-hard football fans feel when their team is 6-0, Amy Chenevert and Gretchen Gilich get something else with the Saints' winning streak: more business. "A win is really good for us," Chenevert says. "The more hype, the better our business."

The former college friends and loyal LSU tailgaters noticed a dearth in clothing for female football fans. Choices for female-friendly game-day fashions were limited to boxy men's jerseys or pink football gear meant to cater to women. The duo sought to tap into the market of women who enjoy football, want to show team spirit and endeavor to look good while doing it.

Now in its second football season, Tru Colors Apparel is a large collection of trendy dresses, tops and outerwear in color combinations difficult to find outside official team gear. Even as the brand continues to expand — Tru Colors is sold at more than 75 boutiques in New Orleans and in Southern college towns — Chenevert and Gilich are the main forces at the helm. They spend a lot of time driving to college towns to host trunk shows and seek out trends in game-day apparel — and, of course, they make time to tailgate when possible.

As the Saints continue to put numbers in the "Win" column and fans get fired up, the two can think of nowhere they'd rather be. "We really enjoy working in New Orleans," Gilich says. "I don't think I'd want to start a business anywhere else. Everyone's so spirited here, and that's what our line is about." — *LaBorde*

Justin Devillier, 28

Chef, La Petite Grocery





Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Chef Justin Devillier is giving his own meaning to "making groceries." He was among the opening kitchen staff at La Petite Grocery, having moved with chef Anton Schulte from Peristyle. He since has risen to the position of executive chef and plans to take a majority ownership stake this fall, along with wife Mia Freiburger. In preparation, they've researched the corner groceries that have preceded the restaurant and collected historic photographs to redecorate it.

"The current building goes back to 1908, when it was rebuilt after a fire," Devillier says.

The grocery concept fits some of the flourishes Devillier has brought to the restaurant since taking over as chef. He strives to use as much local produce and dairy as possible, makes butter in house and uses homemade preserves and pickles in many dishes. His approach to cooking seeks to enliven down-home cooking with refined French techniques, he says.

Devillier grew up in Southern California, but has ties to south Louisiana. His father is from Opelousas, and he has spent time in Acadiana, picking up his family's cooking repertoire.

"They gave me an education in butter beans and rice, gumbos, rice and gravy," he says. "I am well versed in that type of cooking."

Devillier also is no stranger to fresh seafood. In California, he frequently cooked tuna, yellowtail and other species he caught spearfishing.

Since moving to New Orleans in 2002 and taking a position at Peristyle under the restaurant's former chef Anne Kearney Sand, he has refined his technique and gained a greater appreciation for letting ingredients' flavors shine at their peak freshness — perfect training for the proprietor of a refined grocery. — *Coviello*

J.O. Evans III, 36

Partner/Director, FutureProof LLC



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

J.O. Evans says he's a "whole systems thinker." With hands in both art and sustainability and a diverse background in environmental policy and conservation, the FutureProof partner and director is thinking more than just tree planting. Evans came to New Orleans from Alabama to help "morph the community into a more sustainable New Orleans," he says. His diverse background helps the sustainable design and consulting firm connect neighborhoods to nature, working with programs to develop renewable energies, architecture, storm-water solutions and industrial ecology, among others. Recent projects include replanting 17 acres at the U.S. Coast Guard facility in Michoud with almost 500 trees and 160 native species in the endangered Cajun Prairie.

Evans continues his "human interface with natural systems" crusade with Groundwork New Orleans, which he joined as vice president last year. The nonprofit develops rain gardens, improves streets and brings communities together, he says: "We work to restore natural functioning to ecosystems, even if it's an urban ecosystem, to see some functionality return to the soils or hydrology."

The environment also is a catalyst for Evans' art projects, including a sound, video and sculpture installation displayed during last year's Prospect.1 art biennial.

Currently, Evans is developing the Urban Garden Silo initiative at the New Orleans Healing Center, where he plans a farm to supply fresh produce to the center's food co-op, local schools, a day care center and restaurant — all within wheelbarrow distance. "It's part of an initiative I have personally to get permanent agriculture in the city — food that will continue to produce with minimal maintenance for years and years," he says. "We call it a healing art in this case, as we are looking to heal the land and bind the community together." — *Woodward*

Megan Faunce, 35

Youth Director, Liberty's Kitchen



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Megan Faunce, youth development director at Liberty's Kitchen, says her favorite menu item at Liberty's Kitchen Cafe is the roasted veggie sandwich. "No, the black bean burger," she corrects herself. "And the brownie is ridiculous. Oh, there are so many!"

At Liberty's Kitchen, Faunce develops programs that provide employment skills, job training and GED and educational support to underserved youth ages 16 to 20.

"We hold our kids to a really high standard and are realistic about where they're coming from," she says. "Our goal is not to get them into menial jobs, but to get them into a career path."

Faunce discovered her passion for working with youth during a stint as a teacher at an underserved high school. "I loved the kids; I just didn't love teaching," she says. "I started looking at working with kids and found the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL). I moved to New Orleans in 2003 so I could work with kids."

During her time with the JJPL, Faunce crusaded for youth rights, suing the state of Louisiana over the conditions of juvenile prisons, co-founding Juvenile Regional Services (a new public defenders office for kids), and writing *Treated Like Trash*, a scathing report about the horrific conditions that children endured while evacuated to Orleans Parish Prison during Hurricane Katrina. She also helped reconnect these children with their families.

"Kids need advocates, people who are willing to be a voice for them," Faunce says. "They need better schools, support and opportunities." — *Wilkinson*

Nolan V. Ferraro, 38

Personal Trainer, Life Coach and Owner, Salire Fitness



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

For Nolan Ferraro, rebuilding the Salire Fitness center he opened shortly before the levee failures of 2005 inundated the business with 6 feet of water was not enough. He felt a duty to reinvigorate his community one soul at a time. When his customers showed an interest in Pilates, he added classes. When people found it difficult to deal with life in post-Katrina New Orleans, he offered life coaching.

He later initiated fitness boot camps to reach even more people and has dedicated a large portion of the profits to charitable organizations, most notably \$13,400 to the Susan G. Komen Foundation, as well as continuing donations to City Park and Desire Ministries.

"One of the main reasons we [started doing the bootcamps] was because I saw the writing on the wall that more and more people couldn't afford my services," Ferraro says. "I thought with the boot camp, more people would be able to afford to be fit. I thought donating proceeds from the boot camps was a good way to give back."

Life coaching was a natural addition to his fitness training, and he is branching out into consulting, motivational speaking and workshops "I was already helping people with their personal psyche, so I thought I could approach it from a holistic direction, incorporating fitness, nutrition and life coaching: the physical, mental and spiritual. I think it helped me become a more rounded stakeholder in those people's lives." — *Graves*

Robert X. Fogarty, 26

Founder, Evacuteer.org

Office of Community Development, City of New Orleans



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Among the many changes native New Orleanians have experienced post-Katrina, perhaps the most noticeable has been the influx of young men and women who have moved to the city to help in the recovery.

Robert X. Fogarty is keenly aware of his place among New Orleans transplants. In a commentary he wrote for *The Times-Picayune* in September, Fogarty wrote, "Transplants must all remember that native New Orleanians are a courageous and competent bunch. We will learn more from you than you'll ever learn from us."

A 2005 graduate of the University of Oregon, Fogarty left a job as a bank recruiter in New York City in 2007 to join Mayor Ray Nagin's office through the Americorps Vista program. Now, along with working in the mayor's Office of Community Development, Fogarty has also helped launch Evacuteer.org, a Web site aimed at helping train and organize hurricane volunteers in advance of major storms.

For Fogarty, the decision to stay beyond his volunteer stint and make New Orleans a permanent home came through how well-received he's been despite being a transplant. "I've just been thankful for having all these doors opened for me," he says. "The feeling of being welcome in this historic recovery has really been one of the best experiences of my life."

New Orleans culture has already taken root with the young man from Omaha, Neb. After this year's quiet hurricane season, he helped plan a "Bye-Bye Hurricane Season" party for Dec. 2 at Republic New Orleans. "In a city that celebrates everything, I think a party for a safe hurricane season is appropriate," he says.

Spoken like a true New Orleanian (transplant, that is). — *de los Rios*

Eric Heigle, 25

Founder, WhatNoise? Studios

Drummer, Music Producer, Sound Engineer



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

A go-to studio for local and national acts, Eric Heigle's WhatNoise? Studios is the 25-year-old's vision come to life. "It's kind of a niche," he says. "It's not a major commercial studio, so the cost is more efficient for the client, but it's also a better quality than doing it in your living room."

Heigle pursued engineering while attending Jesuit High School and drumming for the now-defunct rock band Ellipsis. He enrolled in Loyola University's music industries studies program after graduation but left to tour with the band. "I wanted to be in the music industry as opposed to studying the music industry, so I just went out and did it," he says.

Heigle returned and earned a psychology degree from the University of New Orleans in 2008 — all while setting up WhatSound?, engineering at Tipitina's, session drumming, freelance audio engineering and doing post-Katrina construction work. "My schedule is kind of like the Star of David," he says. "I'm going from here to there to there."

His current "there" is Swelltone Labs, a local film audio post-production facility. Heigle works with Larry Blake, an Academy Award-winning sound "guru," as Heigle calls him, working on films like *Snow Angels*, *Che* and *The Informant!*. "I do a lot of work with indie filmmakers, from providing music to production and sound," he says. "That's a labor of love."

Heigle is pulling for these new entertainment ventures to take off nationally as part of the city's rebirth.

"Hopefully the entertainment industry will open their eyes," he says. "If the world is what it should be, Britney Spears would be serving Ernie Vincent Cristal on a silver platter." — *Woodward*

Leilani K. Heno, 39

Founder, X-Trainers

Personal Trainer, Life Coach, Motivational Speaker



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Personal trainer, life coach and motivational speaker Leilani K. Heno is a bundle of energy who never seems to tire of empowering others on their roads to success. Her process is fairly simple: Incorporate your mind, body and spirit into the process of reaching your goals.

"For any goal that you set, you have to think about the outcome you want, think about being where you want to be, and then take the action," Heno says. Her two X-trainers fitness centers boast a 91 percent success rate for participants maintaining weight loss for a year. Losing weight, however, is a side effect of her main goal of helping people become healthier and more successful.

"People come to me because they want to look better," Heno says. "We work on health. By working on health, you tend to eat better (and lose weight), and that proper nutrition causes your (brain) synapses to work faster and you think clearer. It's almost a snowball effect. People who are healthy and think faster tend to be put in leadership positions."

To promote her personal goal of reducing childhood obesity, Heno is a partner in Studio Zen, which focuses on youth fitness and is located next door to X-Trainers so young people can work out at the same time as their parents, making fitness a family value.

She also conducts seminars for both adults and children, with a focus on health as a pathway to success. When it comes to improving health within the community, she puts her money where her mouth is, sponsoring Sacred Heart's Fun Run, earning the Top Fundraiser in June for the March of Dimes' premature babies program and raising funds for Smile Train, which repairs cleft palates of

children, allowing them to smile. "It's a simple surgery, being able to make someone smile," Heno says. "Your whole self-esteem comes out through your smile." — *Graves*

Randy Horner, 38

Head Swimming and Diving Coach, University of New Orleans

Photo courtesy of UNO



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Randy Horner has made a big splash since moving to New Orleans as UNO's head swimming and diving coach following Hurricane Katrina. He built a small women's team into one of the top mid-major programs in the country and started a men's program that, along with the women's team, has earned nine national championships.

"We had a very successful first year," he says of the women's team. "Last year was the first season for the men's team. It was the 18th-best recruiting team in the nation."

Although the teams have enjoyed great success in the pool, Horner makes sure his student athletes also keep their academic priorities straight. "We were an Academic All-American squad last season," Horner says of the men's team, which has a cumulative GPA of 3.0. "We strongly believe the two (athletics and academics) play off each other. You don't excel in one and not the other. There are very few people who can make a living through swimming. [The athletes are] really here to get their degree. We look at swimming as tools for them to get what they want in life."

Horner says he's never regretted his decision to move to post-Katrina New Orleans and he finds the same enthusiasm from athletes he recruits from across the United States and countries including Iceland and Germany. "When I came down, I was sold," he says. "I saw the potential. It's not really a hard sell for young athletes. Many of the people you want on the team are visionaries, and over the course of their four years here, they get to see the city transform." — *Graves*

Eric Jensen, 28

Director of Youth Engagement, Afterschool Partnership

Founding Member, Young Planners Network



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Eric Jensen arrived in New Orleans through the Teach for America program in 2003 and never left. He has worked ever since to empower area youth, although it sometimes proves difficult.

"One big thing I've seen is when you work with a community that has been marginalized for so long, you start to battle a mentality of 'I can't do anything to make change,'" he says. "Seeing the ability of young people, it doesn't take long to figure out that they deserve a place at the table."

In his work as Director of Youth Engagement at the Afterschool Partnership, a group that provides resources to programs outside of schools, Jensen strives to put the power in young people's hands. His major undertaking is the organization's Youth Mapping Initiative, which endeavors to create a Web service that identifies youth-serving resources in the city. Participating students canvass neighborhoods to look for resources, while gaining skills in data entry, interviewing, Web design and more.

"It's unique in that it's completely youth-driven," Jensen says. "They are the Web site — I'm just the facilitator."

Jensen also is a founding member of the Young Planners Network, a national group that seeks to engage young people in urban planning. His next project involves encouraging youth to advocate for themselves in the upcoming mayoral election.

"Being in New Orleans, I've developed a passion for youth development," he says. "Young people here are very easily marginalized. I've spent the past six years trying to empower young people in various ways." — *LaBorde*

Shannon Jones, 30

Executive Director, Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Initiatives, Tulane University



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Shannon Jones' mission is a simple one: to make sure every child in New Orleans has access to a great school. As the founding executive director of the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University, Jones is creating a model that other research universities can use to improve public schools in their communities.

"Most communities have bad public schools, and the research universities ignore them," she says. "Tulane is the largest employer in New Orleans. We are figuring out how to use its employees, faculty, researchers and political capital to impact and transform public schools."

Jones has secured more than \$10 million in funding for the Cowen Institute, launched a college readiness program that provides college-level classes to public high school students and assembled two reports on the state of public education in New Orleans. Those reports are crucial to securing legislative solutions and gaining the attention of nonprofit organizations.

"On the research side, we have a very decentralized, confusing system," Jones says. "We make sure legislators and nonprofits understand the challenges facing New Orleans schools and put money where it is needed."

New Orleans public schools are experiencing a period of intense reform and positive change, but with so many new policies and programs, it's sometimes difficult to figure out what is really working, she points out.

"We go to each school and see which policies and programs are driving that change," Jones says. "We want to be able to go to other school districts in Louisiana and say, 'Here is what we did, and here is what it costs.'" — *Wilkinson*

Nomita Joshi-Gupta, 39

Owner, Spruce

Vice President, New Orleans Film Society



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

It's a Monday, which means Spruce is closed and Nomita Joshi-Gupta is enjoying a relaxing day off. Think again, says the owner of the Magazine Street interior design shop.

"It's my baby!" exclaims Joshi-Gupta when *Gambit* busts her playing reverse hooky. "It's like my third child. I was waking up in the middle of the night: 'Oh my God, I've got to do this and that.' It's hard when you have your own business."

The chic, eco-friendly Spruce opened in September, but it's actually Joshi-Gupta's second unveiling. She and business partner Cheryl Nix-Murphy founded the business in December in a Warehouse District building owned by Joshi-Gupta. After the opportunity arose to sell the space, the pair jumped at the chance to reimagine Spruce as a retail showroom for eye-catching green lifestyle products.

That idea dates back to 2005, when the architect and urban planner was renovating her flooded Fontainebleau Drive home. "I was looking for well-designed eco-friendly products," Joshi-Gupta says. "I didn't want to settle for the design, and I didn't want to settle for the eco-friendly aspect of it either. It was really hard to find stuff."

That stuff now includes environmentally conscious wall coverings, surfaces, indoor/outdoor decor and cutting-edge items like the Australian EcoSmart Fires, alternative open fireplaces that look like a magic trick and run off clean-burning ethanol. "Our No. 1-selling and (most) interesting product," says Joshi-Gupta, whose second love is film. On actual off-days, she serves as vice president of the New Orleans Film Society. — *Pais*

Ashlye Keaton, 31

Supervising Attorney, ELLA Project

Founder, Sweet Home New Orleans



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

As a ballet teacher and choreographer, Ashlye Keaton helps children express themselves through physical movement to music. As an entertainment lawyer, she helps New Orleans musicians navigate the often-confounding world of contract law, intellectual property and licensing.

"I love art and music, so I'm in the perfect city," Keaton says. "And I have always been a big fan of the underdog."

To that end, Keaton co-founded two pro-bono organizations to provide free legal assistance to artists: the Entertainment Law Legal Assistance (ELLA) Project (funded by the Arts Council, Louisiana Bar Foundation, Tipitina's Foundation, and Tulane Law School), and Sweet Home New Orleans (funded by the Ford Foundation), which provides social services to New Orleans' culture-bearing groups, including Mardi Gras Indians.

"New Orleans artists have been exploited because of lack of education, awareness and access to resources," Keaton says. "My vision is about more than just legal advice and education; it's about penetrating the business-as-usual model that has been ever-present in New Orleans."

With a 90 percent case resolution rate for her hundreds of pro-bono clients, Keaton is well on her way toward shifting the dynamics of the music business. As a teacher of second- and third-year law students at Tulane University, she is also ensuring that future lawyers will be prepared to carry her torch of arts advocacy.

"Louisiana music is arguably our greatest export," Keaton says. "And my work is ultimately self-serving, because if people get to stay here in New Orleans and make a living, then I get to see their art." — *Wilkinson*

Zachary Kupperman, 26

Founder, PolicyPitch.com

Attorney, The Steeg Law Firm



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

In creating [PolicyPitch.com](#), Zachary Kupperman gives a whole new meaning to the term "participatory democracy."

Kupperman, an attorney for Steeg Law Firm, wanted to apply the interactive nature of user-generated content Web sites like Yelp and Wikipedia to the world of public policy. The result is a Web service that allows users to propose ideas, which can be anything from income tax laws to plans for outdoor movie screenings, then rally support for these ideas. His goal is to engage normal citizens — not just the upper echelon — in the political process.

"What I'd love to see happen is for a neighborhood group or nonprofit that doesn't have the financial means to hire a lobbyist to post ideas online and spread the word, get people to endorse the ideas and gain enough momentum," he says.

Kupperman is working on the final stages of the second version of the site, which will include proposed bills for Louisiana, Arizona, California and Kentucky, with the goal of eventually aggregating bills from all 50 states. He's also behind an effort to place political power literally in people's hands. In late November, iPhone users will be able to download Campaign Tracker, an application that provides information on the New Orleans mayoral and City Council elections.

Kupperman, who also helped create the New Orleans Young Urban Rebuilding Professionals, Destination Broadmoor and WorkNOLA, has big plans for his latest effort to make politics more user-friendly.

"iPhone users are a very small group of people," he says. "Eventually we'd like the application to be available for all phones." — *LaBorde*

Damien LaManna, 29

Entrepreneur

Co-founder, Zymeaux and Net2NO



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

When Damien LaManna represented New Orleans' tech and social entrepreneurial community at South by Southwest interactive festival last March, his message to the competition wasn't a threat, it was a promise.

"We showed [representatives from New York and San Francisco offices] that we are not only open for business, we will steal your business," LaManna says.

Since moving to New Orleans a year-and-a-half ago, LaManna has made enormous strides toward turning it into the tech capital of the South, launching two start-ups and co-founding Net2NO, a local chapter of Netsquared. Net2NO, a nonprofit organization made up of members of the tech community who share a common vision of using online tools to enact social change, now boasts 415 members with an impressive array of accomplishments.

"[Prior to Net2NO], Web developers and programmers didn't know their neighbors," he says. "There was no place for them to connect on a regular basis. Now, lots of little organizations have sprouted. All these amazing things have come out of our membership, and that's what drives the group itself."

In addition to being honored by *New Orleans CityBusiness* as a 2009 Innovator of the Year, LaManna has watched one of his start-ups, Zymeaux (a New Orleans-based mobile marketing company co-founded with Eric Morgan) rise to prominence by being used in the upcoming mayoral race. The love LaManna feels for his adopted home appears to be mutual.

"Why not focus on luring creative industries to New Orleans?" LaManna asks. "We should make it a model of how to revitalize a city, infuse new talent and

embrace existing talent." — *Wilkinson*

Karen Decker McCrossen, 39

CFO, Baker Ready Mix Concrete



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Karen Decker McCrossen is a Saints season-ticket-holding native New Orleanian, a volunteer at the Satchmo Summer Festival and the French Quarter Fest, and a University of New Orleans alumni. So it was only natural that she would become integral to New Orleans' recovery post-Katrina, rebuilding the city literally from the ground up as the CFO of Baker Ready Mix Concrete.

In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, McCrossen put together a financial strategy that enabled the New Orleans-based, minority-owned business to stay afloat. Despite having a plant completely destroyed and out of operation for six months, Baker Ready Mix didn't miss a single bank payment. "We were a 2-year-old company with a lot of debt when Katrina hit," says Arnold Baker, president of Baker Ready Mix. "Karen was the financial compass that got us through those perilous times."

"I try to do whatever I can to help the company move forward and expand," McCrossen says. "We've expanded by 20 percent every year since Katrina." Under McCrossen's financial guidance, the company has garnered numerous accolades, including induction into the Chase Junior Achievement Hall of Fame in 2008, the National Black Chamber Trailblazer Entrepreneur Company of the Year in 2007 and the National Black Chamber Business of the Year in 2006.

More important, the company has played a vital part in rebuilding New Orleans. "We worked on two critical flood walls, levee armoring projects, two housing projects and numerous infrastructure projects," McCrossen says. "I think it is an exciting time right now to be in construction." — *Wilkinson*

Ajsa Nikolic, M.D., 35

Medical Director, New Orleans Urgent Care



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

After Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Dr. Ajsa Nikolic could have moved nearly anywhere — literally. Fluent in German, French, Italian, Croatian, Spanish and English, the American-born, Austrian-trained physician instead took a gamble.

"I realized the potential to create something like New Orleans Urgent Care was much greater in a city with much need, as opposed to a more established city like New York or Chicago," says Nikolic, who also works as a wound-care specialist and emergency room physician. "Here, you can be a big fish in a little pond as opposed to a little fish in a big sea."

The scarcity of physicians and overcrowded hospital emergency rooms in the city after Katrina prompted Nikolic to open New Orleans Urgent Care, a clinic designed to provide timely, cost-effective medical care to the community. After renovating a dilapidated corner building in the Warehouse District, she officially opened the medical center in November 2007.

The doctor's New Orleans nexus spans several years. As a child, Nikolic, whose parents are Croatian, lived in the city for two years before attending high school, college and medical school in Vienna, Austria. Returning more than 5,000 miles to the city she left behind as a young girl, she completed her medical residency in New Orleans and has since resided in the city.

"I am so excited for New Orleans to have a place that shows the high class of health care that you can have," she says. "I hope we keep that standard up." — *Charbonnet*

Brandan Odums, 24

President, 2-Cent Entertainment

Filmmaker, Artist, Activist



Photo by Que Duong

Behind the lens of a video camera, filmmaker, artist and activist Brandon Odums bridges the generational gap by combining satire and comedy with a revealing take on cultural, political and social issues.

"Young people don't want to be preached to," says Odums, president of 2-Cent Entertainment. "But we can trick them into being preached to if we present it in the right way."

The New Orleans native, also known as BMike, started 2-Cent in early 2005 as a medium for young people to express their opinions on a variety of topics, including violence, racial profiling and politics. Backed by local musicians and artists, Odums spearheaded a group of socially conscious New Orleans college students to begin a filmmaking collective featuring documentary-style exposes, comedic skits and popular spoofs.

Using his video camera as a weapon for positive change, Odums and his 2-Cent crew have made their presence known throughout the city, giving presentations at various schools, organizing antiviolenace initiatives and, most recently, hosting a "Change We Can Create" summer camp.

Quoting the likes of Mahatma Ghandi, Huey P. Newton and James Baldwin, the young director, editor and producer has an aura far exceeding his 24 years. This, combined with his avant-garde attitude, has attracted a mix of supporters. 2-Cent has landed interviews with rapper and actor Mos Def, author and activist Cornel West and Hollywood icon Kirk Douglas.

"That's, to me, the most beautiful thing about 2-Cent. It's not focused on one person or group of people," he says. "Everyone has an opinion." — *Charbonnet*

Andre Perry, 39

Associate Dean, University of New Orleans College of Education and Human Development

CEO, Capital One-University of New Orleans Charter School Network



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Andre Perry's ascendance to the forefront of New Orleans' charter school movement can be traced back to a decidedly nonacademic dare: Put your money where your mouth is.

"I was a town grunt," says Perry, associate dean of the University of New Orleans' College of Education and Human Development and a frequent commentator on education reform. "Eventually someone called my bluff and said, 'Hey, you talk a big game. How about trying to run some schools?'"

He took the challenge. Appointed CEO of the Capital One-University of New Orleans Charter School Network by UNO education dean James Meza, Perry oversees four area campuses: Medard H. Nelson, Gentilly Terrace Elementary, Thurgood Marshall Early College High School and Pierre A. Capdau, which is notable as the first Type 5 charter school under Louisiana's 2003 "takeover" legislation for failing institutions. "It set a trend as to the primary mechanism used to reform New Orleans public schools, and that was the charter," Perry says.

Each of the schools had received failing marks before UNO assumed control. None are failing under Perry, whose theories, posited for years in op-eds and on radio, are now being put into real-world practice. "New Orleans is a good place to test theories," he says. "Why not? Because we know what occurred pre-Katrina was not acceptable. To not take risks is inexcusable. If you want justice brought to these kids, we have to incite change." — *Pais*

Arwen Podesta, 39

Psychiatrist

Medical Director, Odyssey House Louisiana



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Dr. Arwen Podesta says her progression from San Francisco Bay Area massage therapist to molecular biologist to psychiatrist seemed perfectly natural. She has similar sentiments about moving to New Orleans.

"When I came to interview for a psychiatry residency at LSU, it just fit," she says. "I canceled all my other interviews."

After completing her residency, Podesta stayed in New Orleans, and after Hurricane Katrina, she initiated mental health outreach to homeless people.

"There was a great need to do psychiatric intervention with the homeless for purposes of housing and referral for (medical and psychiatric) services," she says. Working with Unity for the Homeless, she evaluated people and referred them to appropriate treatment and providers. She also became the medical director of Odyssey House Louisiana, where she treats patients, particularly those with substance-abuse issues. Odyssey House offers outpatient behavioral health services and has a 20-bed facility for medically assisted detox treatment and 126 residential treatment beds.

Podesta also spends two days per week working at the East Louisiana Mental Health System in Jackson, La.

Although she didn't enter medical school until her late 20s, Podesta had helped others as a volunteer for years, first working with the homeless and substance abusers in the San Francisco Bay Area. While in medical school at the University of Southern California, she did outreach on HIV/AIDS awareness issues. And she recently began volunteer work with the NOPD Crisis Transportation Unit. Through the group, volunteers work with police responding to 911 calls involving people suffering from mental illness. — *Coviello*

Miranda Restovic, 30

Co-director, Prime Time Family Reading Time

Founding member, Connect2Educate Collaborative



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Born in Croatia, Miranda Restovic escaped war-torn Yugoslavia at the age of 12 to live in New Orleans with her then-estranged father and stepmother. Thrust into a new country without knowing the language can be tough for a teenage girl, but Restovic found a city that welcomed her with open arms.

"When you're taken out of your environment and you're dropped someplace completely new and experience the kindness of other people, that inspires you to pay them back in a global sense," she says.

Restovic and her sister benefited from caring parents and an understanding faculty at the Louise S. McGehee School, which eased their transition into American life. "I think partly they were intrigued by these refugees, but mostly they were just such kind people," she says.

It was that kind embrace from her family, friends and educators when she was a child that has inspired Restovic to devote her life to the children of New Orleans. As co-director of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, she's overseen the nationally acclaimed Prime Time Family Reading Time program that supports family literacy in the Crescent City. She's also a founding member of the Connect2Educate Collaborative, working with Orleans Parish public schools as a community resource for education professionals in the area.

Restovic also works with the New Orleans Kids Partnership trying to help lower Orleans Parish's 50 percent high school dropout rate, all while tutoring second-grade students every Saturday morning for nine months out of the year with the Start the Adventure in Reading program. — *de los Rios*

Thena Robinson, 30

Attorney, Southern Poverty Law Center's School-to-Prison Reform Project

Board Member, Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

As a law student at Loyola, native New Orleanian Thena Robinson became passionate about mentoring youth and reforming the criminal justice system. Now, as an attorney for the Southern Poverty Law Center's School-to-Prison Reform Project and a board member of Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools, Robinson has merged her causes.

"Mentoring youth and working on justice reform are so closely tied together," Robinson explains. "The majority of incarcerated juveniles were pushed out of school by an increased amount of expulsions and suspensions. Zero-tolerance policies in schools have led kids from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse."

In her work with the School-to-Prison Reform Project, Robinson strives to dismantle the phenomenon called the "school-to-prison pipeline" by representing children diagnosed with behavioral disorders and learning disabilities. "These are the kids who will be pushed out of school and end up in the criminal justice system," she says.

As a board member and mentor for the Rethinkers (a network of New Orleans students who convene every summer to make recommendations for improving public schools), Robinson learns about school issues from the real experts: the kids themselves.

"They are wiser than most adults," she says. "We need to listen and empower them and help their ideas become a reality."

By employing new strategies to keep kids in school and handling conflicts differently, Robinson is confident the destructive impact of incarceration on families, communities and individuals can be curbed.

"This is something we can fix," she says. "It just takes a collaborative effort with everyone in our community working to bring about change." — *Wilkinson*

Gary Rucker, 37

Lucas Harms, 34

Megan Sauzer Harms, 29

Kelly Fouchi, 37

Co-founders, FourFront Theatre Company



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

The devil may be in the details, but today, he's at Toys R Us. Any children who happened to catch *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* at the University of New Orleans in September might be disturbed to see Beelzebub browsing for playthings.

Fear not, youngsters: Gary Rucker — *Iscariot's* Satan ("many say the part I was born to play — didn't head to Metairie for souls. He came for props.

"I'm almost done, actually," says the actor, director and FourFront Theatre co-founder as he prep hunts for the nascent company's next production, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Nov. 6-22 at Muriel's Cabaret at Le Petit Theatre). "I was worried — we need a big trophy for the show. [A shop] gave us one, so it saved a couple hundred dollars."

Resourcefulness is one reason FourFront's five shows — three in its inaugural season and two so far this season — all finished in the black. Rucker credits low overhead (roving between Southern Rep, Le Chat Noir, NOCCA and Le Petit), smart show selection (following the "extremely funny" *Bee* are the slapstick *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and David Mamet's political satire *November*) and a secret weapon: Kelly Fouchi, who he met at Rivertown Repertory Theatre. "She thinks of incredible strategies for each show: what to target, where to place ads. Part of it's just word of mouth."

After a buzz-worthy debut, the collaborative brand is gaining steam in Act II. "They're extremely talented people, and I trust them," Rucker says of Fouchi and other FourFront members Lucas Harms and Megan Sauzer Harms. "A lot of the stuff we're doing, there's no way it could happen if the four of us weren't working together." — *Pais*

Amber Seely, 32

Director of Finance, Renaissance Neighborhood Development

Co-founder, SPARKS Insight



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Amber Seely is not the typical student who came to New Orleans for spring break and ended up moving here. When she traveled to the Big Easy in spring 2007, it was to conduct research for a graduate school project on economic development strategies in post-Katrina New Orleans.

"I got the sense there was a lot of opportunity and challenge here," she says.

After graduating from the Milano New School for Management and Urban Policy in New York City, she pursued a Rockefeller fellowship with the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Redevelopment Excellence. As a fellow, she took a full-time position as director of finance for Renaissance Neighborhood Development, which is a local subsidiary of Volunteers of America. She currently is dealing with construction of 350 mixed-income housing units split between sites on Tulane Avenue and in Gentilly. Another 150 mixed-income units are in predevelopment in Covington and the Lower Garden District. While her expertise is in real estate development and securing financing, the small staff at Renaissance has allowed her to do community outreach as well. In the process she has become a New Orleanian, retaining her post after the fellowship ended.

"I talk to my friends in New York and other places, and I tell them about all the things I am working on," she says. "It seems like I have been here five to 10 years already. It's been so welcoming. I feel like I am part of the city, even though I have been here two years."

Together with four colleagues, she recently started SPARKs Insight, a market analysis provider that incorporates information beyond property values and vacancy rates in rapidly changing and developing neighborhoods. — *Coviello*

Derrick Tabb, 34

Drummer, Rebirth Brass Band

Co-founder, Roots of Music



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Jazz funerals are unique to New Orleans' culture, and brass bands are an integral part of that tradition. Yet Derrick Tabb, snare drummer for the Rebirth Brass Band, decided to stop playing these events.

"I wasn't really tired of playing them," Tabb says, "but I was tired of seeing a kid in the casket."

Tabb wanted to change kids' lives the same way the late Donald Richardson, former band director at Andrew J. Bell Junior High School, had made such a difference in 12-year-old Tabb's life, when he needed it most. The result is Roots of Music (www.therootsofmusic.com), an after-school music education program that Tabb co-founded along with Allison Reinhardt in June of 2008. Currently, ROM, which includes a marching band, has 104 kids and a waiting list of more than 400.

Tabb designed ROM as a way to get kids off the street, teach them music, improve their grades and even prevent violence. ROM operates five days a week in the historic Cabildo building and is free, but participants must maintain a 2.5 grade-point average. The program also provides free transportation from various parts of the city. On the surface, that sounds like a good way to ensure participation, but on a deeper level it reveals Tabb's urban wisdom.

"I know how to stop turf wars," Tabb says. "You have to get kids coming from different turfs and have them meet at a neutral spot." A safe place, where they can learn together and play beautiful music, marching in the streets together instead of dying alone. — *Winkler-Schmit*

Dariel Thompson, 14

Flag Girl and Assistant Designer, Young Guardians of the Flame

Dondriel Thompson, 17

Assistant Director and Flame Keeper, Young Guardians of the Flame



Photo by Kandace Power Graves

Sisters Dondriel and Dariel Thompson are helping to keep the culture of the Mardi Gras Indians alive among their generation through their work with Young Guardians of the Flame. They also are students in the Guardians Institute Sankofa Saturday, a family-oriented program that promotes reading, civic engagement and mentorship.

Dondriel is assistant director of the Young Guardians of the Flame and a vocalist at the group's performances in the Kids' Tent at the Jazz and Heritage Festival and other celebrations. "I want to be a singer, and I also want to be a social worker," she says of her future plans. "I want to work with [youthful offenders] — being a mentor."

The Young Guardians also visit shut-ins and the elderly, performing traditional Indian songs and sharing Mardi Gras traditions with those who no longer can attend events on the

streets.

Dariel, who hopes to become a fashion designer, learned to sew at the age of 12 and helps design Mardi Gras outfits for the Guardians of the Flame Indian group. She likes working with the Young Guardians as a Flag Girl, which she says teaches responsibility and mentoring, plus "You get to learn about your past," she says, as well as expanding women's roles in the usually male-dominated Mardi Gras Indian tradition.

The sisters also volunteer long hours collecting, sorting and delivering books for the Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr. Book Club, which has distributed more than 15,000 books to area youngsters. — Graves

Jefferson Turner, 34

Musical Director for Musicals and Cabaret

Musical Theater Teacher, New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Unlike many professional musicians, Jefferson Turner grew up in a home almost bereft of music. "I think I wanted piano lessons because I wanted to play the theme from *Murder She Wrote*," he says.

His parents relented to requests for lessons when he was in junior high school, and by the time he was a junior in high school, he knew he would pursue a musical career.

An accomplished pianist and singer, Turner left his hometown of Jackson, Miss., for Loyola University to study voice and has been a New Orleanian ever since. Part-time music jobs started immediately, and Turner recently retired from a 12-year stint as the organist at St. Stephen's Church. Following Hurricane Katrina, he took a position teaching musical theater at New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, and he maintains a busy schedule of cabaret performances and musical director positions.

"I tell my students that it's often not the most talented people who succeed," he says. "It's the people who work the hardest."

Turner continued his own studies at the prestigious Cabaret Conference at Yale in 2006. His upcoming projects include opening a 1940s-style musical show at the National World War II Museum's soon-to-open Canteen. He's the musical director for ForeFront Theatre company's *The Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which opens this week. And in December, he will join Ricky Graham and Varla Jean Merman on a tour of their original show *Scrooge in Rouge*, for which Turner wrote original music. He is a frequent collaborator with Amy Alvarez, and the two won the 2009 Big Easy Entertainment Award for cabaret theatre. — Coviello

Christy Valentine, M.D., 35

Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, Tulane University



Photo by Cheryl Gerber

Dr. Christy Valentine, associate clinical professor of pediatrics at Tulane University, says the purpose of her medical practice isn't simply to treat illnesses. She also shows people how to take care of themselves and each other, healing the New Orleans community one patient at a time.

"When you go to the doctor, you see him for a few minutes, but you spend your time living your life," Valentine says. "I want to empower people to make healthy decisions as they live their own lives."

She established Valentine Medical Center in November 2005 to bring affordable, quality health care to New Orleans, which had minimal infrastructure and drastic physician shortages because of the levee failures. In her subsequent appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Valentine brought national attention to these needs.

New Orleans' rebuilding process has come a long way, but Valentine still sees many issues plaguing her patients. First, many of them can't afford their medications. Second, they don't always eat properly.

"In New Orleans, we love food, but that can cause a lot of problems with health," she says. Valentine is organizing a citywide food drive to benefit Second Harvest Food Bank. The theme, "Strive for Five," urges locals to diversify their palates by selecting food from each of the five basic food groups.

"We have to take care of each other," Valentine says. "That's what helped us get to where we are today. That is why the food drive comes to mind; we have enough of us here that we can help ourselves." — *Wilkinson*

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COMMENTS

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11/ 2/2009 - 10:05pm



40 under 40? Sure it's nice to give props to people in the prime of life who are doing things, achieving goals and whatnot, but isn't that what you're supposed to do in your 20s and 30s when you're young, healthy and energetic? I want to see a feature called "40 OVER 40." 40 middle aged or older people who aren't just coasting to retirement. 40 people over 40 who are still making a difference. 40 people over 40 who are embarking on a second or third act in life. 40 over 40 who still push on despite the miseries age can inflict.

Come on Gambit, bring it!

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[fernqrrl](#)

11/ 3/2009 - 2:40pm



How about "50 at 50"?

And how about focusing on some of the New Orleanians who came back after Katrina, but who had been gone long before? Some of us left 20 years ago, but, after Katrina, chose to come back. Now, "that" makes an interesting set of perspectives!

It's good to hear about transplants, and about volunteers who came and stayed. And it's good to hear about people who evacuated and came back.

But there is a third category out there that has a unique perspective: We grew up here, left for jobs/marriage/curiosity and experienced other cities' and states' politics, customs, etc. for many years, then chose to come back.

Now, that's another good story.

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LegalNola

11/ 3/2009 - 2:52pm



The 18-35 demographic brings in more advertising, EasyDog.

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VerbalGurl

11/ 4/2009 - 5:18pm



Wow! Nice negativity, y'all! These people are achievers and they're making a real difference in our city. Why don't YOU do something positive and maybe Gambit will devote an ENTIRE article to you?

[Report this comment](#)

RfrancisR

11/ 5/2009 - 1:27am



Wow! Why are so many people upset over this feature? Older citizens get the benefit of anti-discrimination protection on the job (age bias laws don't apply to those under 40). Young people are far more likely to live in poverty, they have higher unemployment rates than older people, they are just getting started in life thus don't have the experience advantage of their elders, therefore what these individuals have accomplished already bodes well for the future. Most professional success doesn't occur until one is middle aged, these people are finding it when they are young. That's great for our community and its future. You should be proud of these young people who are making a difference despite the disadvantages they have in the professional world in comparison to the middle aged.

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EasyDog

11/ 5/2009 - 12:27pm



Um, nobody said that these outstanding individuals shouldn't be profiled and lauded for their achievements. Just saying it would be nice to see another slant on the 40/40-50/50-whatever-format, or to get rid of it altogether.

Personally, I'd rather just see features on achievers, period, no matter what their age. Seriously, what difference does it make if the achiever is 38 or 41, except s/he gets included at 38 and left out at 41. It's a ridiculous way to quantify accomplishment (and one that promotes ageism both among the young and old), but it certainly makes for a nice headline for the target demographic, doesn't it?

[Report this comment](#)

dwharrington

11/18/2009 - 1:46am



Wow! I am really impressed with these people. A refugee who founds her own organization, puts herself through college, and tutors every day? I can barely make it work tutoring all on my lonesome (<http://www.harringtonwritingpros.com>). No that's not really true. I don't understand the controversy that some readers are noting. Pointing out some under 40s doesn't detract from notable people over 40. Isn't Nagin over 40? Jefferson? It's hard to be corrupt until you're old enough.

[Report this comment](#)

Josh Bruno

2/14/2010 - 4:04pm



Josh Bruno is a fraud. The business tactics he uses are ruthless and illegal. He has had numerous lawsuits filed against him for fraud. Google his name and you will find just a few of the skeletons in his closet, such as those mentioned on the Ripoff report. Additionally, the condo association of his own residence has filed lawsuits against him for countless violations of the condo rules and regulations. Not only does he disregard the rules, but he flaunts them in the faces of the tenants of his building. He is disrespectful, arrogant, and rude. He vandalizes his own residence in retaliation for any action taken by the residence. He has also made personal and racial slurs against the staff of his own residence when reprimanded for breaking rules. Congratulations Josh Bruno for making the world a better place.

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