

# OUR neighborhood

Evanston-Northwestern  
Community News  
Winter 2020

NEWS

## Divas in the Digital Spotlight

**N**orthwestern's Nichole Pinkard knows the value of creating supportive learning spaces, both on- and offline. The associate professor of learning sciences works to blend technical platforms and social relationships to create optimal environments for young girls interested in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Pinkard's Digital Youth Divas program is designed to involve local girls in STEM activities beginning in fourth grade and track the outcomes all the way through high school. "Data tells us that girls do not engage in computer science," she says. "If a middle school girl is not participating in STEM activities, like robotics or coding club, regardless of how she does academically she won't decide to pursue a STEM major in college."

Over 60 "divas" meet on Saturdays to socialize, learn, and work on projects that include coding and 3-D design. Older girls and young women—Evanston Township High School students and Northwestern undergraduate STEM majors—mentor the younger girls. The program is free.

"We know that in order to increase the pipeline, we have to target girls who don't think STEM is their cup of tea," Pinkard says. "If we create places that are inviting, they may discover an interest. Our goal is to create an ecosystem of engaging programs for girls in



general, but particularly girls of color, so they don't feel they have to choose between STEM activities and activities with friends."

With funding from the National Science Foundation, Pinkard's team will study what happens once girls enter high school five years after starting in the program. "Are they more likely to enroll in STEM courses? We believe our program's evidence of success

should show up with more girls taking computer science and engineering courses at ETHS—that's our first sign of impact," she says. The program's first cohort is now in sixth grade.

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## Elevating Evanston Youth

“We really want to . . . make sure they become a vibrant part of the community. A career that pays enough means they don’t have to leave.”

While Evanston may be known as a college town, around 200 students from Evanston Township High School graduate each year without further schooling plans, and 25 percent of those who go to college don’t make it through the first year.

In June 2018, the Mayor’s Employer Advisory Council (MEAC) was created to foster connections between ETHS and local employers and to provide career opportunities for young people who don’t want to go to college. Part of mayor Stephen Hagerty’s Elevate Evanston initiative, the council (pictured) links students with career opportunities in the community while providing local businesses with a well-prepared talent pool.

“Evanston is fortunate to have a thriving, diverse business community, great schools, and a strong network of organizations,” Hagerty said when announcing the program. “Working together, we have a marvelous opportunity to elevate our youth, elevate our city, and create a better Evanston for everyone.”

“ETHS graduates about 850 students a year—that’s a great population,” says Neil Gambow, who chairs the MEAC. “We began working with the high school to develop a process for employers to come in and show students what local careers look like.”

The program starts when students enter high school. “We invite all students, because we want to make sure young people understand there are career opportunities that



you can get into right out of high school and make a great living, but you have to be prepared,” he says.

Run by volunteers, the initiative eventually needed a full-time advocate. Hagerty designated money from Northwestern University’s Good Neighbor Fund to hire Tana Francellno, who works directly with ETHS administrators. The school now organizes career months, each focused on a different pathway, such as manufacturing, healthcare, IT, or public service.

The Northwestern funding is a game-changer, Gambow says, providing resources “to establish this program as sustainable, with a solid bridge between employers and ETHS.”

Already the program has reached 422 students. Seventy-three have taken a full-day field trip to three manufacturing employers that offer summer internships, and local healthcare providers Erie Family Health Centers, AMITA Health, and Presbyterian Homes participated in a panel for over 50 students.

AMITA also provides scrubs to the students in ETHS’s health science class. During the last part of the school day every other Friday, they’re taken by bus to job-shadow in various hospital departments.

Gambow notes that the initiative is important to the city because young people represent its future: “When you see young people being priced out of Evanston, that leaves a hole. We really want to fill that hole and make sure they become a vibrant part of the community. A career that pays enough means they don’t have to leave.

“I’m absolutely amazed at how far we’ve come in 18 months and by how many people want to be part of this,” he says. “And now kids and teachers are saying, ‘Let’s do more.’”

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**TO LEARN MORE** about the council, email Neil Gambow at [neilnexe9@gmail.com](mailto:neilnexe9@gmail.com).



## Levy Senior Center: An All-Stop Shop



The center's popular lecture series presents experts who speak on topics ranging from resistance in Nazi Germany to the history of candy in the US. The hourlong talks often draw on the expertise of Northwestern faculty; School of Education and Social Policy professor Cheryl Justice recently spoke about interracial relationships between white men and black women.

Seniors in Evanston, Skokie, Chicago, and surrounding cities are engaging with peers, continuing their learning, and improving their quality of life thanks to Evanston's Levy Senior Center. At the city's second-most-used center, older adults take art and fitness classes, organize trips to cultural events, get help with tasks like signing up for Medicare and renewing driver's licenses, and receive regular health screenings.

"We're an all-stop shop here," says Judy Newton, president of the Levy Senior Center Foundation, which funds the center. Open to those ages 55 and above, yearly membership costs \$34 for Evanston residents and \$54 for others; membership is free for those 90 and older.



Lectures are held in the center's Linden Room, where a donation from Northwestern is funding a new sound system for hearing impaired seniors. Further improvements include exercise-friendly flooring, new chairs, and a video system. Says Newton, "Northwestern was the first donor—they're our advocates."

The new Jamming Jean Concert Series, named in memory of Northwestern alumna Jean Levy London, presents well-known musicians at free Friday evening concerts that attract over 300 attendees. "Our goal is to bring the community together," Newton says. "Many seniors are alone during the day, and our events give them something to look forward to."

She adds that center staff are excited about the warm reception they get from Northwestern's community relations office: "I know I can go to them and get ideas and follow-through—they have been extremely supportive and offer good ideas about how we can partner with the University."

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**TO LEARN MORE** about center activities and to support the foundation, visit [lscfevanston.org](http://lscfevanston.org).

### STAFF PROFILE: ASHLEY WANLAND



Northwestern welcomes Ashley Wanland as assistant director of community relations for athletics. Wanland works with local busi-

nesses, community groups, and organizations and coordinates outreach activities for student athletes.

In an example of Wildcat athletes' community involvement, Wanland helped organize a December food drive in which all 19 of the University's varsity teams gathered canned goods to benefit families in Evanston's Fifth Ward.

Wanland also identifies programming, event, and competition opportunities to bring Evanstonians into the University community.

"We want to show our commitment to the city and to being a good neighbor," she says. "At the end of the day we're all on the same team."

## Digital Divas

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“Technology is not going anywhere—we’re going to be using it in all aspects of our lives,” Pinkard adds, noting that smart appliances are increasingly important to how we engage at home. “That means we need women to also design technology. It’s not just about equal numbers—you need people personally connected to what they are using. There is a need to have all genders, races, and socioeconomic statuses as part of the tech community.”

Digital Youth Divas is currently housed at Evanston’s Family Focus; Pinkard is working with Northwestern’s neighborhood and community relations office and the city to expand the program to the new Robert Crown Community Center.

Pinkard says the uniqueness of the Divas mentoring model is allowing girls to see someone taking the next step: “Everyone doesn’t need Steven Spielberg—if you’re making movies for the first time, you just need someone to show you that you can create something interesting. Women won’t go into STEM unless they have a history of solid success. Our model helps girls see that it’s doable.”

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**TO LEARN MORE** and to enroll, visit [digitalyouthnetwork.org/divas](https://digitalyouthnetwork.org/divas).

### EVENTS

#### **MODERNISMS THROUGH APRIL 5**

*Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive*  
With works from NYU’s Abby Weed Grey Collection, this free exhibit surveys art from Iran, Turkey, and India—three nations where unique and vibrant forms of modernism sprang forth in the 1960s and ’70s.

#### **MEN’S BASEBALL NORTHWESTERN VS. KENT STATE FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 3 P.M.**

*Rocky and Berenice Miller Park,  
2751 Ashland Avenue*  
Cheer on the ‘Cats at their home opener! Visit [nusports.com](https://nusports.com) for more information. Tickets are \$7 for adults and \$5 for youth.



#### **89TH ANNUAL WAA-MU SHOW: STATE OF THE ART FRIDAY, MAY 1—SUNDAY, MAY 10**

*Cahn Auditorium, 600 Emerson Street*  
In this student-produced original musical, follow a covert group of artists vandalizing world-renowned pieces of street art in a metropolis of the not-so-distant future. When the mayor’s misfit child crosses paths with the vandals, the city elite find themselves caught between their dream of the city on the national stage and the truth behind the young citizens’ acts of resistance. Tickets \$10–\$30.

### CONNECT WITH US

Our email newsletter includes a monthly Northwestern events calendar. Email Shayla Butler at [shayla.butler@northwestern.edu](mailto:shayla.butler@northwestern.edu) to sign up.

Do you have a business or non-profit in Evanston? We can help increase your visibility, facilitate connections to the Northwestern community, and find student volunteers.

For details, visit [northwestern.edu/communityrelations](https://northwestern.edu/communityrelations) or contact Neighborhood and Community Relations executive director Dave Davis at [dave.davis@northwestern.edu](mailto:dave.davis@northwestern.edu) or 847-467-5762.