

## CHRONICLE OF CHAMPIONS SEPTEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER

### FIRST VIRTUAL SQUAD NIGHT A LESSON IN ADAPTING



As we all learn to navigate the new normal during these unprecedented times, our virtual Squad Night held on Sept. 9 was a success in its own way. Although nothing can replace the warmth of face-to-face interactions, having a virtual Squad Night was definitely an alternative worth pursuing — we can benefit from learning from each other how to adapt and thrive, or simply how to get through another day/week in the midst of the COVID19 crisis.

The structure of the event was quite engaging as it mimicked what is normally done face-to-face (minus the delicious food, of course). After the entire group came together for a brief welcome, the squads were broken down into smaller Zoom breakout rooms, which allowed volunteers and students to interact in a more intimate setting.

The playbook was to discuss how to navigate the challenges of remote learning, but not before the usual icebreaker, which this time was to talk about our favorite vacation spots while displaying photos of those locations in our virtual backgrounds. Students and volunteers chatted about that in the smaller breakout sessions, followed by students' comments on the pros and cons of this new online classroom environment.

The squads came together again to share their thoughts, which sparked discussions and served as a prelude to a presentation by Ronald Johnson, who works for FAU's Center for Learning and Student Success. Ronald reviewed best practices for success and outlined the types of resources available to students.

Before the night was over, Kim went over some housekeeping items and everyone joined in reciting our mantra:  
"Think like a Champion, Speak like a Champion, Feel like a Champion."

Students and volunteers left the virtual meeting in good spirits. Continuing with virtual meetings until things get back to normal is very important, as "We don't accomplish anything in the world alone, and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that create something." – Sandra Day O'Connor, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice

## KISHA'S SUCCESS STORY



Kisha with her children, Makayla and Horatio

Markisha Mehide was in the midst of hard times when she enrolled in Prof. Emmanuel Danso's accounting class at Palm Beach State College in 2018. "I was living in my car," she remembers. "My kids were staying with my mom and grandma. I felt like I had really messed up my life."

Despite those grim circumstances, Markisha – Kisha to her family and friends – kept her eye on her long-held goal of becoming an entrepreneur. She was inspired by things Prof. Danso told the class about his career path. "He worked with one of the Big 4 accounting firms, and then he opened his own practice," she recalls. "He said all his hard work was allowing him to live the life he wanted to live."

In addition to being motivated by Prof. Danso's story, Kisha loved doing her accounting homework. "Making the 'accounts payable' and 'accounts receivable' entries was really cool," she says. After earning an associate's degree in business administration and management from PBSC, she decided to continue her studies at Florida Atlantic University as an accounting major.

From that point on, things began to fall into place for Kisha. Her mom and grandma invited her to move into their Jupiter home, where they were already caring for Kisha's children, Makayla and Horatio. She was introduced to Dr. Kimberly Dunn, a member of the FAU accounting faculty who had just founded an organization at the university called Champions Empowering Champions, which has the mission of helping students who have experienced homelessness or foster care. Kisha was among the first FAU students to become an active participant in the program.

"Champions did everything they could for me, from tutoring to giving me household and school supplies," she says. "My main focus was school, and I never gave up even when it got really hard. I battled with personal shortcomings that changed my life, but I never gave up on school."

She had a role model in her older brother, Quintan. "He was the first one in our family to get a college degree," says Kisha, who attended his graduation ceremony when she was in fifth grade. Today Quintan is employed as a coach by the Palm Beach County School District.

Now Kisha has become a role model for her two kids, who darted about in the background as she received her bachelor's degree in a virtual graduation ceremony on Aug. 8, a week before she celebrated her 28th birthday...

She paid tribute to them in her graduation remarks, saying that even though they are only seven and five years old, they gave her the space she needed to focus on her academic work. “As soon as I opened my laptop, they’d say, ‘Quiet! Mommy’s studying!’ I was honestly surprised that they were so understanding and aware of what was going on.”

Like parents everywhere, Kisha had to home-school her daughter during the spring 2020 semester because of the pandemic. “That was really hard!” she says. “I was amazed that we (she and Makayla) passed everything!” Horatio was able to continue attending his preschool, which remained open during quarantine.

In the fall, Kisha will take a few extra courses at FAU as a non-degree student to get her certificate in public accounting. Later this year, she plans on taking the national CPA exam.

She has not given up her dream of becoming an entrepreneur. She hosts a blog called Opposite Spectrums (<https://anchor.fm/oppositespectrums>). “I’ve been too busy to make regular posts, but now I’d like to get back to it by interviewing entrepreneurial women,” she says. One of her objectives is to inspire other women to start their own businesses.

“It took me 10 years to get my college degree, but I did it,” Kisha says. “I believe I can do anything I set my mind to. I sincerely thank all the people who have helped me along the way, especially Dr. Dunn, Jasmine Moore of Educate Tomorrow, Ashlee Kelly of AOK Scholars, and my Champions mentor, Andrea Reino. I would not be where I am today without their support.”

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SUMMER GRADUATES



Zachary J. McGee  
BA, Psychology

Markisha (Kisha) Mehide  
BBA, Accounting concentration

Sara Nyamora  
BA, Political Science

Champions marked the graduation of three students in an online celebration held Aug. 8. Proud family and friends of the graduates attended the proceedings to recognize: Zachary J. McGee, BA, Psychology / Markisha (Kisha) Mehide, BBA, Accounting concentration / Sara Nyamora, BA, Political Science

Our congratulations and best wishes go out to these successful students, along with a reminder that they will always be part of the Champions family!

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ANDREA REINO

### TOUCHING THE FUTURE THROUGH MENTORING AND TEACHING



Back in the good old days when Squad Nights could be held in person, attendees could not help but notice a young woman carrying a camera, snapping photographs of the events' high points. Over the past year, many of the photos that have appeared in this newsletter were taken by Andrea Reino, who has long pursued her love of photography. "I bought my first real camera five years ago," she says. "Then I bought another a few years later and then another this past November." Her focus is on photographing major life milestones from engagements to maternity portraits to newborn photos to a first birthday.

Photography is just one of Andrea's passions. Above all, she takes great pleasure in helping others clear life's hurdles, a mission that is proving invaluable to many Student Champions. As a Squad Leader, she bonded with Markisha (Kisha) Mehide, who was recognized for receiving her bachelor's degree in accounting during Champions' online summer graduation ceremony. Kisha calls Andrea "inspiring" and thanks her for many types of assistance, including Andrea's borrowing an old accounting textbook from a coworker's office to review some homework assignments with Kisha.

Born and raised in Boca Raton, Andrea attended Pine Crest School from pre-K through 12th grade, graduating in 2005 in a class that included Adam Gordon, son of Champions' founding board chair Jeff Gordon. As an FAU freshman, she set her sights on a biology degree, but soon switched to accounting after her mother suggested she also take a few business courses. "I'm a science/math brain person," she says. "My first accounting class was taught by Dr. Dunn. I loved everything about it from the first day and immediately switched my major to accounting."

Kim Dunn was quick to recognize Andrea's academic talents, organizational skills and leadership gifts. She advised Andrea to enter the Accounting Scholars Program, which offers outstanding students the opportunity to earn their bachelor's and master's degrees simultaneously. Andrea excelled in the program and was named Student of the Year in 2011. Among the contributions she made to other FAU students was serving as a math tutor at the campus Athletic Center and a teaching assistant for Dr. Dunn. "I love being able to help students," she says.





Andrea graduated from the Accounting Scholars Program in May 2011. After considering going to law school, she took Kim’s advice to study and sit for the national CPA exam, which she passed in March 2012. She was licensed in 2013. Shortly after graduation, Andrea was named coordinator of the Accounting Scholars Program, and she also became an instructor in the College of Business, teaching several undergraduate accounting classes. Additionally, she served as faculty advisor to FAU’s chapter of Beta Alpha Psi, the international honor society for students in accounting, finance, and information systems. Andrea has been firmly rooted in an accounting career since then, working for several well-known accounting firms before joining ADT, a publicly traded security company based in Boca Raton, in 2015. She originally handled SEC reporting and technical accounting responsibilities, including taking part in the company’s IPO in 2018. She is currently a Senior Manager in the Accounting department, focusing on the finance and accounting implications of mergers and acquisitions in which ADT is involved.

During her busy career, Andrea received a text message from Kim suggesting that they get together to “catch up.” Over a quick bite to eat, Kim told Andrea about the launch of Champions and asked her if she would like to become a charter member of the advisory board. “Yes, of course,” Andrea replied, “whatever I can do to help.”

“I am forever grateful that Andrea and I connected in a class of more than 200 students just over a decade ago,” Kim says. “She has come to my rescue professionally and personally on more occasions that I can remember. She is the perfect mix of dependability, ambition, passion, and compassion. Andrea inspires me and everyone around her to be healthier, organized and the absolute best version of themselves.”

In addition to serving as a Squad Leader, Andrea is a member of Champions’ Marketing and Development Committee. At home, she is the proud mother of Maverick, a four-year-old Maltese she adopted from a rescue organization in December several months after her beloved dog Darwin died. In her commitment to animals and people, Andrea is always focused on helping – just as her camera is focused on recording events worth remembering.



## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: CHARLES HENNEKENS

PROFESSOR CHARLES H. HENNEKENS: AN ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER OF CHAMPIONS

As one of the world's most accomplished clinicians, teachers and medical researchers, Professor Charles H. Hennekens, M.D., Dr.PH., has been credited by ScienceWatch.com with avoiding more than 1.1 million premature deaths. The website ranks him No. 81 in the history of the world, ahead of such luminaries as Jonas Salk and Henry Heimlich. He has made groundbreaking discoveries about the treatment and prevention of heart disease through therapeutic lifestyle changes and adjunctive drug therapies, including statins, aspirins, converting enzyme inhibitors and blockers, and beta blockers.

Professor Hennekens was born in Brooklyn, NY, to working class, uneducated but loving and nurturing parents. The family later moved to Queens, NY, where his mission in life came into tragic focus at age 17, when his father, a lifelong smoker, died suddenly from a heart attack. A gifted athlete and student, Professor Hennekens attended the Wharton School of Business for one year and later graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Queens College. Today he is the only graduate in the college's 80-year history to have been inducted into both the achievement and athletic halls of fame. He earned a medical degree from Cornell University, completing a residency in internal medicine. For two years, he was a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Public Health Service, assigned to the Centers for Disease Control as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer. Upon discharge, he relocated to Boston where he lived for 30 years, earning a doctorate in epidemiology from Harvard University and rising to become the university's First Eugene Braunwald Professor of Medicine.

In 2004 Professor Hennekens joined the faculty of FAU's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, later transitioning to the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, where he serves as the First Sir Richard Doll Professor and Senior Academic Advisor to the Dean. Professor Doll was a mentor, colleague and friend who greatly inspired Professor Hennekens when he said "death is inevitable but premature death is not."

On his involvement with Champions, Professor Hennekens says, "I wholeheartedly support the enrichment, empowerment and advancement of college students emerging from foster care or homelessness, which makes my experiences seem like a cakewalk."

Professor Hennekens has helped improve the lives of our Student Champions through a generous donation. If you would like to join him in supporting Champions, please visit <https://empoweringchampions.org/support-us>. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

You also can mail in your donation, payable to Champions Empowering Champions, Inc to the address:  
**Champions Empowering Champions, Inc. / P.O. Box 880476 / Boca Raton, FL 33488-0476**

Newsletter Production Team: Writers/Editors: Aline Silva, Andrea Reino, Lynn Laurenti

Photographer: Andrea Reino

Graphic Designer: Scott Abel