In 1988, Frank Batten, Sr. and Joshua P. Darden, Jr., our founders, started a three-year pilot project called The Tidewater Scholarship Program in five Norfolk public high schools. In those early days the goal was simple: find a way for students to access the hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal, state, and local money allocated for lower-income students to attend college each year that would otherwise go unclaimed. I accepted a position as secretary with this small organization, not knowing that it would turn into a 30+ year career helping students go to college.

What you now know as ACCESS College Foundation has grown and changed in so many ways over the past three decades. Today we’re in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Suffolk and Northampton County, serving students as early as middle school and following them well into their careers. I believe we have been able to accomplish all these wonderful things because when we see a need, we find a way to meet it.

Perhaps one of our Scholars will find the cure for cancer, write the screenplay for an Academy Award winning movie or, who knows, even become the President of the United States! We truly believe education and training beyond high school changes lives, families and communities, and we’re doing our part here in Hampton Roads to make that happen.

Enjoy this special 30th Anniversary Annual Report, and dream big with us. We have so much more to look forward to over the next 30 years.

For the past 15 years, I’ve worked with the talented group of volunteers on the ACCESS Board of Directors and witnessed firsthand the fantastic work that the ACCESS staff does in our schools.

This year, I’m delighted to have the opportunity to chair the ACCESS Board of Directors. I’m inspired by the entire team who is dedicated to the students and families we serve, and excited to work together.

My dad, Frank Batten, Sr., was one of ACCESS’ founders. He would be thrilled to see how much the small pilot program he launched in 1988 has expanded. Over three decades the organization has grown exponentially and now serves 30 high schools, added early awareness programs in 26 middle schools and even follows students through their college careers on 13 campuses across Virginia.

People need quality, good-paying jobs to support their families, and more often than not, these jobs require education beyond high school. Each student ACCESS assists has the opportunity to not only change his or her life, but to impact their parents, siblings and even future generations.

Congratulations to ACCESS College Foundation on this momentous anniversary. I am looking forward to helping plan for the future of the organization, setting big goals, and continuing to help students find success.
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Dionne Scott
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Tallwood High School
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Oscar Smith High School
Gabriel Hall
Deep Creek High School
Charlene Harvin
First Colonial High School
Nansemond River High School
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Stephanie Carswell
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College Success
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Western Branch High School
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Adrienne Miller
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Great Bridge High School
Grassfield High School
Adria Phillips
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Natasha Sackey
Indian River High School
Mary Carter Scott
Norview High School
Megan Ulaniich
Granby High School
Jacqueline Whitehead
Booker T. Washington High School
Cameron Williams
Green Run High School
Kyle Williams
Program Specialist
Hickory High School
THANK YOU TO OUR 2017-18 Event Partners

Gifts to the Annual Support Campaign allow us to deliver encouragement, support and assistance to students across the region. For some students, the path to college is not an easy one. Between college tours, application fees, SAT and ACT registration costs and tuition, the dollars add up.

Your contribution to this year’s Annual Support Campaign ensures that today’s students have the resources to become tomorrow’s leaders. A donation of any amount will make a difference.

Donate Today!
www.accesscollege.org/donatenow
## OUR 2017-18 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### EARLY COLLEGE AWARENESS PROGRAM
- **13,000** 7th and 8th graders attended an early awareness event
- **26** low-income middle schools
- **2,643** families attended parent night workshops

### HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM
- **20,000+** high school students met with Advisors
- **25** Advisors served 30 public high schools
- **$625 million** leveraged in scholarships/financial aid

### ACCESS LAST-DOLLAR SCHOLARSHIPS
- **$800,000+** scholarships awarded and renewed during the school year
- **617** scholarships awarded

### COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM
- **13** Virginia college campuses
- **1,000** students received advisory services
- **90%** six-year retention rate*

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*national average is 59%
The audience inside the ballroom at Hilton Norfolk The Main during ACCESS College Foundation’s 30th Anniversary Gala had already enjoyed a delicious meal and an emotional retelling of the 1988 founding of the ACCESS Program when 34-year-old Dr. Melody Shelton Williams took the stage. There was not a dry eye in the house when she finished.

Dr. Williams described a “volatile home environment” with a father who developed substance abuse problems and a mother who struggled to raise five children in Virginia Beach. Eventually shuffled between public housing and relatives’ homes, Melody became so distressed at age 12 that she considered suicide.

However, it was her mother’s dedication to raising the children in church that grounded Melody in faith and kept her moving forward. Melody used this faith to persevere and eventually met an adult who could help the struggling teen realize her full potential - Karla, Bayside High School’s ACCESS Advisor. “She challenged me to think about what I could do with my life and about going to college. It was an ‘Aha!’ moment for me, because I never thought that was a possibility.”

While in high school, Melody buckled down to focus on her studies and work alongside her siblings to help support the family. “The counselors told me about AP classes and that if I did well in them, I could earn college credit.” At the time, not many students at Bayside were taking the AP exams, figuring they were too costly and rigorous. “My ACCESS Advisor got me a fee waiver for the AP Biology test,” says Melody. “It was a lot of pressure, but I believed I could do it.” She did, becoming the first Bayside Marlin ever to pass it, an indicator of things to come.
With little knowledge at home on how to apply for college, Melody leaned on her ACCESS Advisor for help with her family's tax returns and completing the complex FAFSA form. Through ACCESS she was also introduced to the vast array of colleges to consider once she graduated in 2002. She chose Virginia Commonwealth University and quickly found her stride. Naturally introverted, Melody came out of her shell during her higher education journey, earning a bachelor's in English, then a master's and a doctorate in rhetoric and textual studies at Old Dominion University, finishing in 2014.

Today Dr. Williams is a mother to a five-year-old daughter. She has her own website (www.drmelodywilliams.org) and recently launched her own nonprofit, the DREAMS Institute, “created with the belief that individuals who succeed in pursuing their God given purpose are of greater service to others in their communities.” To learn more about how to bring faith to that initiative, which she hopes to turn into a full-time career, Melody is commuting to Richmond to pursue a Doctorate of Ministry, from Virginia Union University.

“Thanks to college, I can take care of myself and not be dependent on others unlike the many women who may be less fortunate and have not had my same opportunities,” she says. “So now I want to do for others what people like my ACCESS Advisor did for me and pay it forward.”

Melody’s remarks on October 24 were the perfect cap to an evening of remembrance and hope. Before Dr. Williams, Gerald Baliles, who was governor of Virginia when Frank Batten and Josh Darden launched ACCESS in 1988, spoke about the genius and vision of the founders and those who have followed them. Two other educational legends, Dr. Lucy Wilson, an Associate Dean at Old Dominion University and a Norfolk School Board member at the time, and Dr. Gene Carter, Norfolk’s school superintendent, also took the podium. They looked back on ACCESS’ early days and marveled at its current status. Today, as a staple in several dozen middle and high schools in southside Hampton Roads and Northampton County and on 13 college campuses, ACCESS helps its Scholars reach their higher educational goals.

“Between Melody’s inspiring story and the opportunity to reconnect with those who were instrumental in the growth of the Foundation, I left the event knowing that our best days are still ahead,” says Bonnie Sutton, ACCESS’ second employee and its President and CEO since 2000. “It was a night I will always remember.”

Dr. Melody Shelton Williams
2002 Bayside High School
2005 Virginia Commonwealth University, B.A.
2009 Old Dominion University, M.A.
2014 Old Dominion University, Ph.D
ACCESS LAUNCHES A CAREER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The ACCESS College Foundation was in its infancy in 1991 when Greg Canada was a senior at Churchland High School. Indeed ACCESS had just expanded a year earlier into Portsmouth, which was fortunate for Greg who received a “Last-Dollar” Scholarship from ACCESS to attend Penn State University.

After deciding not to continue at Penn State, he returned home and enrolled at Virginia Wesleyan College (now University). Oddly, that is when ACCESS came into his life in a way that ultimately shaped his professional future.

“ACCESS asked if I would agree to mentor some high school seniors in the area and encourage them to go to college,” he recalls. “It ignited something in me.” What it stimulated was a desire to work in higher education, to promote the “liberating and transformative experience” college offers. Greg studied philosophy and history at Virginia Wesleyan, figuring he might become a professor someday. When he completed his degree summa cum laude, the college hired him to work in undergraduate admissions.

Itching to get back in the classroom, Greg moved north to pursue a Masters in Philosophy at Boston College. There he tutored student athletes and became the assistant director of BC’s First Year Experience. He then moved to the west coast to work at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, where he served as the school’s Director of Admissions. (At the ripe age of 28, he was four years younger than the average student at the graduate school.)

The University of California Hastings, College of the Law called next, hiring Greg to be Director of Admissions, and promoted after three years to Dean of Admissions. “I found it so empowering to help incredibly bright, passionate students who wanted to become leaders in their communities and promote the rule of law,” says Greg. “A lot of them, especially those who came from similar social economic backgrounds as mine, didn’t think they could go to law school. But like the students I worked with at ACCESS, I insisted that they not restrain themselves, urging them to follow the advice of Emerson and ‘hitch your wagon to a star’.”

After Greg’s marriage to Rachel Martinez and the birth of their second child, they looked to relocate somewhere closer to their families. In 2015, he landed a position as the Assistant Dean of Admissions at Indiana University’s Maurer School of Law.

Greg insists he owes much of his professional journey to ACCESS. “I will never forget the generosity of that organization to support me and so many others with the financial assistance to afford college.” But what is more, “ACCESS unwittingly launched my career that has spanned over 20 years, inspiring students to pursue their educational dreams.”

Greg Canada
1991 Churchland High School
1995 Virginia Wesleyan College, B.A.
1999 Boston College, M.A.
ACCESS inspires students like Brandon Eley to reach their potential through higher education. Brandon’s achievements despite hardships has made ACCESS and everyone who knows him extremely proud.

As Nansemond River High School’s 2018 Valedictorian, he graduated with a 4.51 GPA. Well liked and ambitious, Brandon was a drum major in the marching band, active in his local church, a member of the National Honor Society and voted Homecoming King. He was also a member of the Beta Club, serving as the State Vice President and 2017-2018 National Leadership Ambassador.

At the ACCESS Suffolk Donor’s Luncheon in March 2018, Brandon spoke to a group of supporters about the hardships he had to overcome during his high school years. First his parents announced their separation, and then he learned he would have to switch schools. Both circumstances could be life shattering for the average high school student. Brandon set his sights on college instead.

“As a potential first-generation college student, I wasn’t quite sure where to start,” says Brandon. He went to the guidance office in the fall of his junior year to get more information. That’s where he met ACCESS Advisor, Shawn Foster.

“Mrs. Foster was able to provide me with fee waivers for my SAT and ACT tests, as well as an AP test,” says Brandon. “During my senior year she was able to help me with college applications and provided fee waivers for those as well. I don’t recall paying for anything in the process of applying and testing.”

Brandon did not think much of the waivers until he spoke with a friend who had paid nearly $300 applying to college. “I didn’t realize what a tremendous privilege this service was,” he shares.

Next came the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). “I was unaware of what the FAFSA even was at the time. “ After the FAFSA was filed, Foster helped him apply for scholarships that required information from the FAFSA. “You can imagine how much of a help she was in this process,” Brandon says.

One of the scholarships Foster helped Brandon apply for was the illustrious Gates Scholarship for academic excellence, awarded to only 300 graduating students across the country each year.

“With her help,” Brandon says, “I am now a Gates Scholar. I no longer have to worry about paying for my undergraduate studies and can focus on putting my best effort forward in accomplishing my academic goals over the next four years.”

Today as a freshman at the University of Virginia, Brandon plans to study architecture. He wants to help build educational facilities in underprivileged communities.

ACCESS looks forward to celebrating all of Brandon’s future successes. “Without the help of ACCESS, I am not sure that I would have been as successful. I am truly thankful for ACCESS College Foundation.”

Brandon Eley
2018 Nansemond River High School
2022 University of Virginia
On a sunny afternoon this past June at the Virginia Beach Convention Center, ACCESS staff waited excitedly for students and their families to begin arriving for the annual Scholarship Awards Luncheon.

ACCESS’ 30th graduating class of Scholars greeted their Advisors as they reached the registration tables and stopped to pose for a photo. Many students were joined by family members and friends whose expressions mirrored their excitement and pride.

Before ACCESS, many of these students believed that education after high school was not an option for them. Whether they were the first in their family or believed that gaining a certification or degree was not affordable, ACCESS was there to guide them and help them understand all the steps associated with attaining a higher education.

During the program, ACCESS alumna Gwen Green encouraged students to be bold and pursue their goals with confidence knowing ACCESS will always be there to support them. With the help of her ACCESS Advisor, Gwen was able to attend and graduate from The College of William and Mary and then earn acceptance to several prestigious law schools, including UVA, Stanford, Harvard, and NYU. She ultimately decided to attend Harvard. Today, Gwen is an attorney in Washington, DC representing clients in complex international matters.

The program’s keynote speaker was actor and producer Darryl Bell, known for his portrayal of ‘Ron’ in the ‘90s sitcom A Different World. Bell congratulated students on their success and enthusiastically promoted the value of college.

ACCESS awarded scholarships to 144 students during the event. These scholarships totaled over $800,000 with amounts ranging from $5,000 to $25,000 to be used over their four years in school. One special Portsmouth senior, Benita Sivells, had the surprise of a lifetime when she was awarded the inaugural $25,000 scholarship in memory of Dollar Tree’s Macon F. Brock, Jr.

For Benita and the other scholarship awardees, it was a perfect way to bring their high school careers to a close as they prepare for the next chapter in their lives.
### CHANGING Students’ Lives

Through Education and Training Beyond High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The Tidewater Scholarship Foundation is established in five high schools in Norfolk, VA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>The first class of Scholars graduates from Norfolk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Tidewater Scholarship Foundation expands to five public high schools in Portsmouth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>The first class of Portsmouth Scholars graduates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Tidewater Scholarship Foundation began offering services to 9th graders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>The first class of Scholars graduates from college!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- **1994**: Tidewater Scholarship Foundation receives its first endowment gift.
- **1995**: Becomes one of nine founding members of the National College Access Network.
- **1996**: $181,000 in Last-Dollar Scholarships is granted, the largest amount since Tidewater Scholarship Foundation’s founding.
- **1997**: $2 million is added to the endowment thanks to a generous $1 million matching challenge.
- **1998**: Pell grants increase to $3,000, enough to cover the average tuition at a public 4-year college.
- **1999**: Tidewater Scholarship Foundation expands services to two public high schools in Virginia Beach.

- **2000**: Awarded grant to study a centralized college center to provide college access services to unserved students.
- **2001**: Expands to two Chesapeake public high schools - Oscar Smith and Deep Creek.
- **2002**: The Chesapeake expansion continues into additional high schools.
- **2003**: Expands to three public high schools in Suffolk, VA.
- **2004**: Tidewater Scholarship Foundation is renamed ACCESS College Foundation.
- **2005**: Expansion to every public high school in South Hampton Roads is complete.

- **2006**: Standardizes the level of services in each high school served.
- **2007**: The ACCESS College Success Program is created to serve Scholars at five Virginia colleges/universities.
- **2008**: ACCESS celebrates 20 years and now serves 10,000 students each year.
- **2009**: The Early College Awareness Program is implemented in Norfolk middle schools.
- **2010**: More than 1,300 7th and 8th graders meet with an Advisor during the first year of the Early College Awareness Program.
- **2011**: After four years of the College Success Program, ACCESS Scholars have a 91% retention and graduation rate on 13 campuses.

- **2012**: Leveraged $17 in financial aid and scholarships for every $1 ACCESS spent on the program.
- **2013**: The ACCESS Board of Directors creates the $20 million dollar endowment campaign to expand services within our four core initiatives.
- **2014**: Awards the Class of 2013 $1.1 million in ACCESS “Last-Dollar” Scholarships.
- **2015**: Expands to Eastern Shore and adds $1 million for scholarships for Northampton High School graduates.
- **2016**: Completes the endowment campaign, raising $20.3 million.
- **2017**: Adds the Career Connection Program funded by the Bank of America Neighborhood Builders Grant.

- **2018**: Helped more than 60,000 students and leveraged $625 million in financial aid and scholarships.

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...ONE MILESTONE at a Time.