

Changemakers:

Visionary and Transformational Leadership

February 2024



De Novo (New & Emerging CU) Spotlight

Unity of Eatonville: Rooted in History, Growing Toward the Future



About Unity of Eatonville FCU:

Location: Eatonville, FL

Asset Size: \$2.7 Million

Number of Members: 334

Designations: LID, MDI

unityofeatonvillefcu.com

Unity of Eatonville Federal Credit Union may be one of the country's newest credit unions, but its roots run so deep that you'd have to look back to the nineteenth century to truly understand its history.

The town of Eatonville – located a few miles north of Orlando, Florida – is the oldest Black-incorporated municipality in the United States. Established in 1887 by African American freedmen, Eatonville became a symbol of freedom – providing opportunity for self-governance, economic development, education, cultural expression, leadership and autonomy for once-enslaved men and women.

Contributing to its historical significance, Eatonville's rich literary history is thanks to former resident and world-renowned writer, anthropologist and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston. A leading voice of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston – perhaps best known for her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* – celebrated African American culture and depicted African American life in the South throughout her revolutionary work.

Budding Hope in a Banking Desert

Despite its incredible historical accomplishments, the city of Eatonville has continued to face significant economic challenges over the years.

Before the credit union was established in 2022, there was not a single financial institution in Eatonville. Members of the community and local businesses were forced to travel outside the city limits for even the most basic financial services.

James Rivera, Unity of Eatonville's Branch Manager, paints the picture of what it was like for the financially underserved community prior to 2022.

"It's really hard to get to Eatonville," he says, explaining that the town has a two-mile stretch of main road, with no direct exit to the main interstate highway.

"There is a traffic jam every day getting in, during lunch, and on the way home. If you're looking to do your banking, imagine if you're a senior – a large population here – you take a bus or have to walk in order to do anything. You're talking two or three miles to get to a bank or ATM."

It is thanks to a Pastor by the name of Willie C. Barnes from Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church that a credit union now exists in the city.

"This community has been underserved in so many ways for so many years – a financial desert and also a food desert because a lot of businesses do not come into this

"It was a very exciting day for the church and for the community because they had been working so diligently to provide the underserved community with something that could be a catalyst for so many different things."

part of town," Rivera says. "Pastor Barnes had been in the community for 30 years and had a vision to really improve the city."

Pastor Barnes put together a task force, and together the group set out to accomplish his vision – starting with forming a credit union. Although very few charters are granted, Unity of Eatonville received its federal charter in December 2021.

"It was a very exciting day for the church and for the community because they had been working so diligently to provide the underserved community with something that could be a catalyst for so many different things," Rivera explains.

Building Trust by Building Relationships

Eatonville has seen its share of businesses come and go, leaving behind a level of distrust within the community, according to Rivera. Unity of Eatonville is working hard to break down the walls the community has put up when it comes to trusting businesses.

"We are doing it grassroots – door to door and church to church – letting them know there is a credit union looking to be their support," Rivera explains.

Since Rivera came on board in June 2022 as the credit union's first hire, Unity of Eatonville has grown to approximately 360 members.

"Of course, we want things done quickly, but there's nothing quick about this," he says. "It's about standing side-by-side with the people in the community. It's about people seeing you in the community and getting a chance to speak to you and develop relationships."

"We are doing it grassroots – door to door and church to church – letting them know there is a credit union looking to be their support."

And while community buy-in does take time and effort, the credit union is making big strides as more individuals – as well as local businesses – continue to recognize the value it provides.

Rivera believes Unity of Eatonville has the influence to bring in more commerce to the area. They hope to have an ATM soon, as well as to eventually become a full-service credit union equipped to handle business accounts.

"So, we are starting by earning the trust of local businesses – a restaurant that needs to break a fifty-dollar bill so their customers can eat. The restaurant doesn't have an account here, but we want to be there for them,"

Rivera explains. "We believe that will help us bring in more businesses and be their credit union of choice. We want businesses to last so that their money can stay here and be reinvested in the community."



Supporting Credit Unions Where They Are

As the credit union looks to build a solid future, the Unity of Eatonville team will continue to work hard to give and receive support. Rivera said their goal over the next few years is to employ a full staff of Eatonville residents who understand the community and support one another. He would also like to see Unity of Eatonville support other communities by opening an additional branch in another underserved area.

In order to accomplish these goals, Rivera said it will require the support of outside groups who recognize the value the credit union is bringing to Eatonville and surrounding areas.

"We are really looking for more groups like Inclusiv," he explains. "I had been searching for financial support for months. Inclusiv came in and within a month had awarded us a grant and were very supportive right off the bat."

While Rivera's outlook is optimistic, he does still have moments where he wonders what the future holds.

"How would this community look without us in five or ten years?" he wonders. "It would be a setback. It would be a disappointment. This is a huge endeavor. The community deserves a financial institution looking out for them."

Rivera explains that helping ensure Unity of Eatonville's success begins with the credit union movement as a whole.

"Inclusiv came in and within a month had awarded us a grant and were very supportive right off the bat."

"It starts with supporting small credit unions like us so that we don't have to merge," he explains. "We need to support credit unions where they are."

The impact Unity of Eatonville has on the community goes beyond member deposits and providing local restaurants with change for their customers.

"We have senior citizens who live across the street from our credit union. Before, they needed to take a bus or ask someone to help them. Now, I watch them walk out of their homes and across the street to do their banking. We know all their names," Rivera says.

"This is a huge endeavor. The community deserves a financial institution looking out for them."

"What it comes down to is we all just want to feel valued. When we are older or for people who don't have the transportation or support of family or who feel stuck, they can feel empowered just to do things on their own. That's what it's all about. Community."

CEO Spotlight:

Delana Huling

President/CEO,
Baylor Health Care
System Credit
Union



About Baylor Health Care System Credit Union:

Location: Dallas, TX

Asset Size: \$83 Million

Number of Members: 5119

bhscu.com

A True Teller-to-CEO Trailblazer

From the teller line to the CEO office, Delana Huling has run the gamut of experiences in the financial services industry. She started her career in 2002 as a bank teller, rising quickly through the banking services ranks. Huling then entered the credit union world as a branch manager at Texas Trust Credit Union in 2008.

In 2022, Huling achieved her current role as President and CEO at Baylor Health Care System Credit Union. Upon acceptance of the position, Huling also became a trailblazer in two areas: She is Baylor's first female CEO and the first – and so far, the only – African American woman who is CEO of a credit union in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

"That's the real trailblazing part of this opportunity," Huling says. "The credit union will be celebrating its 67th anniversary. To be the first in this role is incredible. It's an honor."

Diversity Drives Better Results

At Baylor, the words diversity, inclusion, and belonging are more than just buzzwords. With Huling at the helm, they are a road map for every step Baylor takes to better serve their members.

For Huling, who is a Certified Diversity Professional through Cornell University, education and awareness are at the core of her work and who they are as a credit union.

"I don't believe diversity and equity should only be practiced when the world feels the weight or the emotional pressure of issues that impact our communities. Everyone wants to do something in those moments when the lights are on," Huling says. "It's about what we are doing in the quiet moments, in the stillness of our homes when injustice and disparities are still lingering in the background. It's asking ourselves how are we showing up for the underrepresented in our daily lives, when there's no outside noise."

For workplaces like Baylor, inclusion and belonging are a way of life – and also a sound business practice that starts with organizational culture.

"We know diverse perspectives drive better results," Huling explains. "Creating a culture where employees feel valued has a direct correlation with our performance. And, if you take care of your people, they will take good care of your members."

Huling says that keeping diversity, equity, and inclusion at the forefront of Baylor's work begins with holding herself accountable and maintaining connections with the communities the credit union serves.

For workplaces like Baylor, inclusion and belonging are a way of life – and also a sound business practice that starts with organizational culture.

"First, it's about listening with a servant's heart," Huling says. "It's also about teaming up with industry experts in this space like America's Credit Unions, AACUC [African American Credit Union Coalition], Inclusiv, CUWLA [Credit Union Women's Leadership Alliance], and GWLN [Global Women's Leadership Network]. Leveraging insights and resources from organizations like these who are committed to being the change that the world needs to see."

Innovative Opportunity, International Initiative

Following the pandemic, there was a shortage of nurses in the Dallas area. Baylor Scott & White Health (BSW Health) participated in a program that brought 500 nurses from the Philippines to work in the United States. Recognizing that the nurses were new to the country and unfamiliar with the banking system here, the credit union teamed up with BSW Health in a joint effort to support their onboarding and financial wellness.

"We are really proud of the program – it's been very impactful and well received," Huling says. "The participants are coming to a new country and that's already overwhelming. And then the banking side of it is different than what they've experienced in the Philippines, so we work to help make it a seamless process for them."

Baylor has been providing financial services and counseling opportunities for participants and their family members on a regular basis to accommodate training and work schedules – with several Baylor staff members who speak the nurses' native language.

As a result of this initiative, the credit union has been working with BSW Health to expand financial wellness opportunities to all employees throughout the organization.

Lessons in Leadership

Huling says she has gained valuable leadership lessons over the years, both from leaders she has worked for and with, as well as from her own personal leadership role experiences.

"I think of leaders I have worked for who have been most impactful, and who I've worked best under, and then I try to emulate that," she explains.

"Leadership plays such a critical role in shaping and maintaining a strong company culture. I am committed to leading by example, demonstrating the values and behaviors expected from employees."

Huling also says that one of the most critical characteristics of a credit union leader is the ability to build a good team through effective communication and providing a clear vision.

"As a new CEO with such tenured employees, I knew that open and transparent communication would be key to building trust and fostering a work environment of inclusion and belonging," she says, explaining that within the first couple of weeks on the job she had met with every employee at the credit union.



"It didn't matter what role they were in, I needed to understand who they were and what made them stay. I'm always listening, and they are always sharing. I want them to feel empowered and understand how their role impacts the overall success of the organization, which I think is really important," Huling says.

"Over the years our credit union has done an excellent job in managing the financial landscape of the organization, but we had some immediate opportunities with internal talent development and succession planning. Since coming on board, we have reevaluated roles and responsibilities, moved some cheese and created upward mobility. With a third of our team knocking on the doorsteps of retirement, we needed to put a plan in place to capture that legacy and future-proof our credit union."

"What I have learned in my leadership over the years, and with organizations like Filene Research Institute, is that sometimes seeking the answer is as equally important as presenting the answer."

One of Huling's frequent reminders to herself and others is that sometimes you have to "go slow to go fast."

"I've found that when I'm presented with challenges as a leader, because I am solutions-driven I immediately

start solving. What I have learned in my leadership over the years, and with organizations like Filene Research Institute, is that sometimes seeking the answer is as equally important as presenting the answer," Huling explains.

"Now, when a challenge is presented, I take time to dig in, identify specific problems to solve, and build around those problems. Obviously, some challenges require immediate action. But for those that allow for greater insight in finding a solution, I have found tremendous success in approaching it with an answer-seeking mindset."

Giving Back to Those Who Gave to Her

Huling credits the AACUC with helping her find the confidence needed to be a successful credit union leader. In 2021, she attended an AACUC strategic planning session as the Texas Chapter President at the time. She remembers that prior to that event, she had never seen such an incredible number of African American CEOs.

"I walked into the room and there were so many new and retired African American men and women CEOs," she recalls. "It brought so much light to me that I could see myself in them. I knew I had the skillset and experience and passion. But I hadn't seen it in my immediate community, which was discouraging. After seeing them and speaking to them directly about my journey, I received so much encouragement. I knew I could do the job."

Huling joined the AACUC Board of Directors in 2023 and is thankful to be in a position to give back to an organization that has been so invaluable to her and her work.

"They have given me so much time and information to prepare me for this role. I'm indebted to them, and I will help them in any way I can," she says. "Being able to serve is my way of giving back to them for what they have given to me."

CEO Spotlight:

John Bissell

President and CEO,
Greylock Federal
Credit Union



*About Greylock Federal
Credit Union:*

Location: Pittsfield, MA

Asset Size: \$1.6 Billion

Number of Members: 100,314

Designations: CDFI, LID, Juntos
Avanzamos

www.greylock.org

A Full-Circle Journey to CEO

When John Bissell became President and CEO of Greylock Federal Credit Union in 2015, it was a full-circle moment. Bissell remembers going to the credit union as a young boy with his dad, whose membership dated back to the 1960s.

At that time, Greylock – then known as Pittsfield G.E. Employees Credit Union (PGEECU), founded in 1935 – served General Electric Company (G.E.) employees and their immediate family members in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

“I have memories of going to the one and only credit union branch, the original headquarters near the G.E. facility,” Bissell recalls. “That personal connection was really important for me.”

At its peak, G.E. employed around 12,000 people out of a city of 60,000 people. However, in the 1990s, G.E. began pulling out of the Pittsfield area. As a result of this downsizing, the credit union decided to expand its field of membership and change its name to Greylock.

Bissell’s dad, who worked for G.E. for 30 years, was among the first wave of employees who took early retirement at age 56.

“That’s really poignant to think about,” he explains. “In one generation all these jobs disappeared. The industrial powerhouse vanished, but the credit union is still here.”

Today, the credit union has 14 branches and more than 100,000 members across parts of Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont.

Rebuilding a Hard-Hit Community

Bissell grew up in the Berkshires region of Western Massachusetts. Following college graduation, he and his wife moved to Seattle, Washington, where he pursued a journalism and marketing career. As the couple grew their family, they felt a pull to return to their hometown.

What they discovered was a community still reeling from the hit to the local economy. The neighborhood of Morningside – which housed Greylock’s original headquarters – had fallen on hard times.

“When we moved back, Morningside had the highest unemployment rate and the lowest home and vehicle

ownership in any neighborhood in Pittsfield. Greylock had built a new headquarters downtown, and our original headquarters building reflected disrepair and neglect,” Bissell says.

After telecommuting for three years, Bissell wanted to spend more time with his family and to play an integral role in rebuilding the region.

“There was still shellshock from losing G.E.,” he recalls. “A lot of people were stunned or stuck. The area had a ton of potential, but it would require a lot of work to rebuild economically. I knew Greylock could be a force to do so.”

In 2003, Bissell was hired as Greylock’s Vice President of Marketing and Administration.

“It was a great opportunity to understand the engine of the credit union, which is our people who work here and the relationships we build in the community,” Bissell explains. “I couldn’t have had a better job as my first step toward being CEO.”

After a national search following the retirement of then CEO Marilyn Sperling, Bissell was named the credit union’s new President and CEO in 2015.

Earning Relevance by Listening and Adapting

Just prior to taking on his new role, Bissell attended the Inclusive Conference held in Detroit, Michigan. He recalls this event as being a strategic turning point.

“I realized that there were a lot of other credit unions serving low-income communities better than we were because they were intentional about it,” he says. “They had a playbook for how to engage the community. We were trying to adapt the traditional banking model to a market that had changed fundamentally.”

The credit union knew changes must be made to reflect the community’s increased population of immigrants and people of color. They started listening to member needs and making changes to products, services, and recruitment tactics.

“When we started intentionally engaging, it made a world of difference,” Bissell explains.

In 2015, the credit union received certification by the U.S. Treasury Department's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund to offer expanded services to low- and moderate-income families.

Committed to serving and empowering Hispanic and immigrant consumers by providing safe and affordable financial services, Greylock became a designated Juntos Avanzamos credit union in 2019.

That same year, the credit union opened the Greylock Community Empowerment Center (CEC) – a space for free financial counseling and education classes, which are available in English, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese. The CEC is housed in the Morningside neighborhood branch, in which Greylock invested \$4.5 million to renovate.

Greylock also began offering ITIN (Individual Tax Identification Number) applications – free of charge – to individuals who need to pay taxes, build credit and access lending products, but who are unable to obtain a Social Security number.

Since 2019, the credit union has helped more than 1,400 individuals obtain an ITIN. In 2023 alone, Greylock helped submit 602 ITIN applications to the IRS, opening the door to financial resources for community members who need this access to support their financial wellness.

In an effort to better understand the factors impacting homeownership and generational wealth over the years, Greylock conducted a study in 2021 on implicit bias in credit scoring. Under the leadership of Dr. Frances Jones-Sneed, the credit union also commissioned a study on historic redlining practices in Pittsfield.

An ally in African American homeownership, Greylock partnered with Westside Legends, a local 501(c)3, to establish the Opportunity for Home Ownership Program in 2021.

This affordable loan program reduces barriers such as down payment requirements and minimum credit score. Participation also includes financial education as well as the benefits of strong community connections, led by Greylock's designated Community Lender Myla Franklin.

Providing a path to homeownership for buyers who would otherwise be denied or discouraged from applying, Greylock has lent over \$7M to 37 African American households since the program's inception.

"It all started with the Inclusiv Conference and the recognition that we needed to be listening and adapting," Bissell recalls. "That's become my mantra with my employees. Survival isn't a given. Relevance isn't a given. We have to earn it."

A Guiding Light in the Industry

Bissell's contributions to Greylock have been numerous throughout the years, especially as the credit union focuses on the community's marginalized members. However, he says the deeper they go with equity and inclusion work, the more they realize how far they still have to go.

Bissell's goal for Greylock is to reflect the community they serve, all the way up the ranks.

"I would like to see people of color, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, veterans, and people with physical disabilities at the highest level of decision making," he explains. "There is a community of people with disabilities who have unique financial needs that we're just starting to understand. We need to do a better job serving them."

A \$1.6 billion credit union with a proven history of adjusting to changing times, Greylock is a guiding light for other credit unions.

Bissell believes that the credit union industry as a movement can better serve the underserved by building trust, listening to their people, and being highly adaptable in ways that banks don't want or need to be.

"For hundreds of years the banking system was set up to exclude lots of people. Its primary function is to judge people," Bissell explains. "If we want to be inclusive, if we want to grow, we have to suspend our judgment and show up differently."

An Honor to Serve

Bissell applauds both Inclusiv and the African American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC) for being influential forces within



the industry. A relatively new member of AACUC's Board of Directors, Bissell is honored to be part of the organization.

"Their conferences and events are life-changing," he says. "You see a beautiful image of what America is and can be. AACUC is making sure the credit union movement grows in the right direction – with a strong moral compass, but also in a joyful way."

"Unlike elements of the banking system that just keep replicating themselves year after year to produce more White wealth, AACUC is intentionally focused on highlighting Black excellence and Black professionals."

Bissell is grateful that his team at Greylock is also benefitting from having the AACUC as a reliable resource in their work and career paths.

"For some Greylock employees, the AACUC has elevated their aspirations of what they can achieve professionally," he says. "I try to lead with humility and openness, but I have a very specific cultural background. When it comes to the different experiences for someone who is African American, I lack that lived experience and perspective. The folks at the AACUC can help bridge that gap, show them what their career could look like, and let them know that they are surrounded by Black excellence throughout the movement and the country."

CEO Spotlight:

Harold Roundtree

President and CEO,
UNCLE Credit Union



About UNCLE Credit Union:

Location: Livermore, CA

Asset Size: \$726 Million

Number of Members: 35,938

www.unclecu.org

A Winning Game Plan for Lasting Leadership

When it comes to successful leadership in today's credit union industry, Harold Roundtree, President and CEO of UNCLE Credit Union in Livermore, California, says he relies on a winning formula to help him, and his team, excel.

"For me, it's all about communication and transparency," Roundtree says. "It's not sexy and it can be repetitive, but for me it works."

Roundtree compares this leadership approach to his experience playing college football.

"It might sound funny, but it's pretty serious business," he remarks. "Everyone needed to understand their role and they also had to know what everyone else was doing. I try to bring that philosophy to the credit union. We each need to understand everyone's purpose. And, as their leader I can't just tell people what to do; they need to know why they are doing it."

Roundtree believes that it's his responsibility to make sure the people around him clearly understand what is expected of them. By setting specific goals and having regular communication, Roundtree says he's well-positioned to help his team succeed in their current roles, as well as in their long-term careers.

"I think the key is to take the good, the bad, and the ugly as you go through your career," he says, stressing the importance of feedback and opportunities to adjust.

For Roundtree, regular performance feedback and check-in meetings are crucial to any successful team – whether on the field or in the office.

"It's important for us to get together and say here's what we are doing well, here's where we are behind, and here's where we need help. That's how we come up with our game plan."

Getting More Loans to More People

Thanks in part to open communication and consistent transparency, Roundtree has led his team to many wins over his 12-year tenure.

In 2022, Roundtree oversaw UNCLE's merger with Moore West Federal Credit Union, a small San Leandro-based credit union experiencing difficulty providing expanded financial products and services to their membership.

As a result of the merger, UNCLE acquired nearly 800 new members and \$12 million in assets. UNCLE also welcomed the employees of Moore West to their staff. Together, the team continues to serve the expanded membership base.

Also in 2022, the credit union saw a significant increase in loans, with over 23% annual growth.

"My claim to fame at UNCLE is getting more loans to more people," Roundtree says. "Credit unions were founded all those years ago to help people get access to loans. That's a key focus here at UNCLE."

UNCLE has also taken steps toward achieving their goal to be a leader in the payments frontier of financial services. Under Roundtree's leadership, the credit union launched the implementation of Zelle, a digital payment platform that offers real-time money transfers. Members are now actively using Zelle to easily and conveniently transfer money to other people that have accounts at different financial institutions.

They also recently implemented an artificial intelligence bot to help expand their bandwidth for member service through online chat. The bot, which the staff named "Zoey," was met with a small amount of pushback prior to launch. However, Roundtree acknowledges it was an opportunity to practice their "Crawl, Walk, Run" approach, which he credits to Diane Dykstra, President and CEO of the California Credit Union League and her motto to "Think big, start small, scale fast."

"We believe in the approach of let's try it, pause, correct it, go a little more, pause again, and keep it going," he explains. "We like that model of thinking. It's not always going to be pretty at the beginning – it takes time."

Leading the Digital Conversation



Roundtree got his initial start in the financial services sector in the Officer Development Program at First Interstate Bank. He graduated from college on a Friday and started work the following Monday.

"I'm fortunate to say I've had a continuous career without interruption all these years," says Roundtree, who has over 25 years of senior executive management experience in the financial services industry.

It was a natural progression from the banking sector into the credit union world. He served as the Senior Vice President of the Retail Banking Division at Technology Credit Union, located in San Jose, California, before joining UNCLE.

"It's been an amazing 12 ½ years with UNCLE," Roundtree says. "It's been a great experience being at the helm. You get the wins but there are also some challenges."

With his technological background and experience working in Silicon Valley, Roundtree occasionally finds challenges in his current role with getting people to adopt technology at a more rapid pace.

"We are highly regulated and sometimes stakeholders don't want to take on the risk out of fear that something bad will happen," he explains. "I try to tell them if you're going to fail, fail fast. Sometimes it's just a necessary evil in order to continue to grow."

And when it comes to growth, UNCLE is ready to continue making big strides.

"I would like to see our trajectory of growth continue," Roundtree says. "It's important for us to continue to be part of the digital conversation and to be a fast follower for payments and wealth management."

He adds, "We want to use more intelligent data to better understand the needs of our members and holistically serve our community – meeting them where they are and when they need it."

Continued Trajectory of Growth

When asked about his thoughts on how the credit union industry as a whole can provide better access for the underserved, Roundtree actually turned to more old-school tactics for reaching these communities.

"I think we have to reach out to them and go where they physically are and not just rely on our digital footprint," he

"We want to use more intelligent data to better understand the needs of our members and holistically serve our community – meeting them where they are and when they need it."

advises. "Be active in those environments, actually go out to those communities."

"It's not the coolest or latest and greatest, but it's simple. You can't expect them to walk through your doors or

know where your website is. Who knows if there's even digital access in the household. You have to take the game to them."

Roundtree is confident in the future of his credit union, which grew \$100 million each year throughout the pandemic, and anticipates seeing the trajectory of growth continue.

"I'd like to see us continue to grow, but to grow based on our own expectations and not on world events like sky-high interest rates or the political environment, which can be unstable," he says. "I would like to see continued sustained growth. I think UNCLE is a \$1 billion credit union in the near future."



Partner Spotlight:

Terrance Williams

TruStage



Tell us about your professional journey to TruStage and the major milestones leading up to this position.

I am one of those unique people who, from an early age, knew that I wanted to pursue a career in the insurance industry. A close family member helped me see the value that insurance brings in protecting people against life's unexpected risks. Fast forward 30+ years, and I feel fortunate to say I have had a wonderful career in the industry. It has been an incredible journey, spanning multiple markets, several relocations, and a variety of roles. I have witnessed the significant changes that this industry has made. Throughout this time, what remains constant is what led me to insurance: helping others prepare for the unexpected.

More recently, I joined TruStage from Allstate, where I served as President of Protection Products and Services. There, I led a portfolio of non-property-liability businesses. Before joining Allstate in 2020, I spent more than 20 years at Nationwide, where I held many roles -- including Chief Marketing Officer and President of the Emerging Business Group, where I led innovation and digital strategy.

Please give us an initial snapshot of your observations so far since arriving at TruStage.

The TruStage mission – ensuring that brighter financial futures are accessible to everyone – is something I am personally passionate about, and I am excited to continue to advance the cause as CEO. TruStage employees are committed to this mission and have deep pride in who we are and what we do. That passion is an incredible asset and one of the reasons I look forward to coming to work every day. Also, TruStage's core tenets of inclusion, trust, and the

betterment of the community, match my personal beliefs, which I have carried throughout my life and continue to place front and center in my career.

What do you see as the unique strength of the credit union sector?

Credit unions are uniquely positioned to serve middle-market consumers and our increasingly diverse customer base across this country. Since their founding, credit unions have focused on breaking down barriers that exist in our industry and expanding accessibility of financial services to more people.

Organizations like the African American Credit Union Coalition and Inclusiv are powerful advocates through their work supporting economic vitality in underserved communities. As an industry, we have more progress to make on this front, but I believe that credit unions are leading the way.

TruStage was born out of the credit union movement, and I am proud to lead an organization that will continue to partner deeply with, and be a leader in, that movement.

What do you see as the major challenges ahead?

We pay close attention to market forces and trends like inflation, cost of living and job security, all of which place extra pressure on the already tight finances of the middle-market consumers we serve. People are still bouncing back from the financial and emotional turbulence of the pandemic, even though we are cautiously optimistic for the "soft landing" that economists now predict.

We also expect continued political volatility amid large-scale armed conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East, while facing a potentially complicated election cycle in the

U.S. Although not every issue will drive change in U.S. business strategies or for credit unions, it is important that we closely track the issues that affect our employees and customers.

From a business perspective, one of our main goals is that of maintaining relevance. Younger consumers do not view financial institutions the same way their parents did. We need to meet our customers where they are, anticipate and address their needs, and deliver against their expectations of seamless interactions with their providers. Remaining relevant requires continuous innovation and progress in digital, data and service. What is unchanged is the need to build trust and loyalty through easy and reliable experiences. TruStage is committed to being a trusted provider, bringing value to credit unions and their members.

Please give us your thoughts on innovation and growth opportunities at TruStage.

We have tremendous opportunities to support members at every stage of life. Right now, TruStage is focused on connecting our solutions to support members in a more holistic way across all stages of their life. We want to be thoughtful about using data and analytics to personalize our offerings and make them more affordable and accessible. We believe this is key to helping credit union members ensure their financial well-being.

We are also continuing to invest in fintech startups and connecting them with credit unions. The TruStage Ventures Discovery Fund is leading that charge, focused on addressing inequities in the financial sector by investing in underrepresented entrepreneurs working on solutions for inclusion. The fund works to invest \$5 million annually in early-stage fintech companies led by BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and women founders.

What can we do as a movement to better serve the needs of the underbanked and unbanked?

Credit unions exist to serve those who have less access to financial services. To make that mission a reality, we need to look at who is unbanked or underbanked and make a concerted effort to reach them by offering affordable and accessible products and services that meet their needs.

I believe it is also important that we, as an industry, acknowledge the wrongs of our past so that we can find ways to move forward collectively. I know that our movement can, and will, continue to open doors for the underserved. We must focus on building trust and providing accessible solutions to those that need us most.

TruStage has been one of the leading organizations to celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the credit union movement. What are your thoughts about the DEI climate today?

Most industries are operating in a challenging climate right now. Whether it's your peers, customers, partners, employees or policymakers, there are a lot of conflicting opinions that manifest in a variety of ways when it comes to DEI.

I believe there is significant momentum for effecting change from inside companies and industries. What impressed me about TruStage from the beginning is our commitment to DEI and the acknowledgement that, while we have made progress, there is still more to be done. At every level, we have employees who are engaged in this journey. As a leadership team, we are focused and intentional in our efforts to make improvements not only within our company, but also in our communities and

marketplace. If we can be the bellwether for our industry, and others in different sectors join us, we can make real progress in the face of these obstacles.

A focus on DEI isn't just a decision of today, it's rooted in the very founding of the credit union system and is embedded in our mission: ensuring brighter financial futures are accessible to everyone.

Finally, how will your leadership style and approach impact the TruStage culture?

For me, leadership is about creating followership through authenticity. I believe in setting a clear vision and direction for where we are headed, helping people grow and develop through mentorship, and in fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

TruStage has a strong mission-based culture of people helping people. My goal is to build upon that foundation to support a growth-minded workforce that's continuously looking horizontally to make experiences easier for our customers at every stage of life. I believe TruStage has a historic opportunity to lead the industry into its next phase and change the way people think about insurance. I cannot wait to see what we will accomplish together.

Volunteer Spotlight: *Economic Mobility Corps*

Alisha Adams Stepping Stones Community FCU



About Stepping Stones
Community FCU:

Location: Wilmington, DE

Asset Size: \$4.6 Million

Number of Members: 2,303

Designations: CDFI, LID, MDI

www.sscreditunion.org/

In 2021, the Community Development Financial Institutions' (CDFI) Fund and AmeriCorps teamed up to launch a new initiative, Economic Mobility Corps (EMC). As part of this innovative joint partnership, Inclusiv and Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) – a nonprofit that connects communities with resources – work together to place AmeriCorps members in Certified CDFIs.

Participants receive training to help CDFIs provide financial services, education, counseling, and access to capital and credit in underserved communities.

The inaugural round of the EMC program placed full-time national service members in 24 CDFI credit unions throughout the United States – including 16 cooperatives in Puerto Rico.

Alisha Adams participated in the program's first cohort through Stepping Stones Community Federal Credit Union in Wilmington, Delaware. When Adams received the call outlining the details of her new role from Blanche Jackson, President and CEO of the credit union, she knew she was all in.

"At that point in time, I had already been working in the financial education and coaching industry for over 20 years, including providing programming in Delaware's correctional facilities," Adams explains. "So the EMC opportunity working with Stepping Stones sounded like an excellent fit for me."

Financial Transformation for Justice-Involved Members

In her role as Financial Education and Empowerment Coordinator for Stepping Stones, Adams works to meet member needs through financial coaching and counseling,

and by conducting community-based money management workshops.

Adams also provides financial education programming and promotes the credit union's savings accounts to individuals who are currently involved in Delaware's judicial system.

A particular client stands out to Adams for having a unique impact on her work and how she approaches it.

"I had the wonderful opportunity to financially coach one of the credit union's justice-involved members," she says. "And to say this gentleman was at 'ground zero' financially at the start of our coaching relationship is an understatement."

Adams explains that not only was this individual in debt, he also had unstable housing, a low-paying job, no car, no budget, and no savings. However, he was willing to be vulnerable and do the work. Through financial coaching, they developed a plan to completely change his financial picture.

By the time their financial coaching journey ended, he had a better paying job that he loves, his own apartment, a new

"For me, assisting in this financial transformation reinforced the importance of knowing how to connect with people, and meeting them where they are."

car, a workable budget – including a debt elimination plan – and was regularly contributing to an emergency fund.

"To this day, whenever I run into him, he exudes a level of positivity and enthusiasm that was not previously evident," Adams says. "He says he is the happiest he has ever been. For me, assisting in this financial transformation reinforced the importance of knowing how to connect with people, and meeting them where they are before jumping in and trying to offer solutions in their respective situation."

Improving the Economic Health of Distressed Communities

Throughout her many years of work in this area, Adams has witnessed discriminating practices across the country and in the judicial system that have impacted underserved communities.

She says the most prevalent forms of discrimination to un- and under-banked communities include the lack of accessibility to financial education and to affordable and safe financial products and services.

Unfortunately, these communities often fall prey to the unending cycle of debt created by payday lenders and title loans – which are often the only "financial services" available locally in these areas.

"We all know those are financially detrimental to individuals who use them," Adams says. "I can't tell you how many times I've personally heard the horrible stories from people who have gotten themselves caught up in the vicious cycle of trying to handle a short-term financial emergency with these types of exploitive products."

Without access to institutions that provide financial education, savings and checking accounts, and affordable

loans to help families safely handle life's financial challenges, it's no wonder these underserved communities are in such distress.

"That's why community-based credit unions like Stepping Stones are vital to the economic health of the people they faithfully serve each and every day," Adams says.

A Full-Circle Experience

Adams' role at Stepping Stones through EMC was originally scheduled to conclude at the end of February 2024. She recently learned, however, that it has been extended for another full year and is thrilled to continue working with the credit union.

Adams is pleased with how this important work has advanced over the years. After spending so long teaching Delaware's incarcerated individuals about the importance of saving money, without the availability of a savings product to help them to do so, Adams' work has now come full circle.

"Little did I know way back then that I would have the wonderful opportunity to play an integral part in the development of a savings account that is now being offered in these same correctional facilities," Adams says.

"It absolutely does my heart good to now be able to tell my program participants they can immediately start saving money, in preparation for their eventual release, while still incarcerated."

She adds, "And without question, these savings accounts – which are often the first one in these families – not only provide a sense of pride and dignity for many of these individuals, but it also serves as the first step on their road to

economic empowerment and financial independence. How awesome is that?"

Adams is grateful to be working with Blanche Jackson, who she says has given her a birds-eye view into the inner workings of how a successful credit union provides access to financial services for all people.

"I can undoubtedly say it's been a joy to come alongside Stepping Stones to champion such a noble initiative, as well as assist members in taking full responsibility for their own financial well-being," she says.

Adams explains that having the opportunity to do this type of work means more people – who would not ordinarily have access to critical financial products and services – now

"And for me to personally play an essential role in such a crucial endeavor is both humbling and totally rewarding."

have the chance to create a financial future that is both promising and life-changing.

"And for me to personally play an essential role in such a crucial endeavor is both humbling and totally rewarding," she says. "I am wholeheartedly grateful to the staff at LISC and AmeriCorps for providing me with this EMC partnership opportunity. I am honored to offer my experience and expertise to Stepping Stones, as we unite forces to help the communities we serve to grow financially."

CEO Spotlight

Karen Madry

President and CEO,
Afena Federal
Credit Union



About Afena FCU:

Location: Marion, IN

Asset Size: \$97 Million

Number of Members: 8,672

Designations: CDFI, LID

www.afenafcu.org

From Humble Beginnings to Hall of Fame

Karen Madry, President and CEO of Afena Federal Credit Union, doesn't have to imagine the struggles that so many of her members face – she has lived them. Having survived an abusive relationship and filing for bankruptcy years ago, Madry once found herself living at the poverty level.

Madry, who made the switch to the credit union world after years of banking experience, is very open about her past. She believes sharing her story and how she made it through such difficult times allows her to better serve others experiencing similar challenges.

"I feed off my life's experiences to help make decisions concerning how we interact with people," says Madry. "I think my willingness to share my story and my journey has allowed others to trust me."

Finding a Way to get to Yes

A desire to remain in the Midwest to be close to family brought Madry to the Marion, Indiana, area. Madry says she did her research on Grant County – where Afena is located – before accepting the CEO position in 2014.

What she learned was something that would stick with her for a long time. In the first two articles that came up in her search, she discovered that Grant County had the highest child poverty rate in Indiana, and that more than 70% of families in the county were living below the poverty line.

"Those two things spoke to me. Something about Grant County, Indiana, spoke to my spirit and said this is where I am meant to be," she recalls.

Upon accepting the CEO position, Madry's goal was to build a credit union that focused on serving low-income and marginalized people.

Under Madry's leadership, Afena received Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) certification

in 2019. The only CDFI in Grant County, Afena is dedicated to improving banking access among the community's underserved and financially challenged individuals.

"We pride ourselves on finding a way to say yes," she explains. "We don't always say yes to what you want, but we do say yes to what you need."

"Our mission is to educate our members and help them understand how to make wise money management decisions to avoid future financial pitfalls in their life's journey."

Madry, who empowers her team with formal empathy training, says they take the time to truly listen to their members' stories and imagine walking in their shoes.

"We understand life happens, that people have bumps and bruises along the way," she explains. "Our mission is to educate our members and help them understand how to make wise money management decisions to avoid future financial pitfalls in their life's journey. And we want to put them on a path to financial health and wellbeing so that they can leave a legacy they are proud of for the people who come behind them."

Afena uses this information to continuously adjust their products and services to meet the needs of current and prospective members, especially those individuals who have been turned down by other financial institutions.

One of their unique products, born through a collaborative effort with the Community Foundation of Grant County, is Afena's Bridge the Gap Loan. This is a safe, affordable alternative to payday lending. Through this program the

credit union provides small-dollar, low-interest loans with flexible terms specifically for low-income families. These loans are designed to help borrowers build good credit, grow their emergency savings, and improve their financial literacy. Each participant receives free personalized coaching from Afena's certified financial counselors to set them on a path toward financial wellness.

Creating Access for All

Of Madry's many accomplishments during her tenure at Afena, the credit union's rebranding efforts in 2016 stand out for her.

A focus of the rebrand was to emphasize its commitment and mission to serve all people.

"For me the rebrand was all about promoting our desire to be a financial institution that is different from any other in the community," Madry explains. "We focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, being there for every resident of our community regardless of their socio background or race. We want to be an equitable institution for all."

Madry is also proud of the relationships she and her team have cultivated with other community businesses

"We focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, being there for every resident of our community regardless of their socio background or race."

and nonprofits. The credit union receives many referrals from these organizations, including – perhaps surprisingly – banks.

"We challenge our community banks by asking them, 'When you say no to people applying for loans, instead of

having them go to the payday lender, wouldn't you rather see them come to us?' Giving us an opportunity ensures residents are receiving affordable financial assistance."

When meeting with banks, the Afena team emphasizes how payday lending puts the money people have with banks at risk, so a partnership makes sense for all parties involved – and the community as a whole.

"Instead of seeing banks as our enemy, we see them as our partners in the community," Madry says.

Madry is also proud to report that her original goal for the credit union is being achieved every day – over 70% of the loans Afena approves are to families considered to be low- to moderate-income, with an average credit score of 560-570. Over the last three years, the credit union's loan portfolio achieved double-digit growth.



In addition to her wonderful team, the credit union's board and other supporters, it's this laser-like focus on their main mission to serve the underserved and to always treat members like family that Madry credits for much of Afena's success.

"We are big on using the word family and we mean it," she says. "Our employees treat one another like family. We welcome each member to our family and treat them as such. We attribute this culture as a key factor in our ability to accomplish great things in Indiana and in our community."

Honored for Doing What Comes Naturally

In March, Madry will be recognized for her work and dedication to the credit union industry by being inducted into the African American Credit Union Coalition's Hall of Fame.

This virtual hall of fame was created to honor and recognize African American men and women who have contributed to the credit union movement. The prestigious award is presented annually to individuals who have made a remarkable impact on the members and communities they serve.

"Every time I think about that I tear up," Madry admits. "I am in awe. It is such an amazing honor, and I don't know what I've done to deserve this recognition."

"I treat people the way I want to be treated, with love and respect. And so, to be honored just for doing that... words escape me."

Madry says that having come from humble beginnings, receiving this honor is beyond anything she has ever dreamed.

"All I do is what comes naturally; I try to do the right thing by people," she says. "I treat people the way I want to be treated, with love and respect. And so, to be honored just for doing that... words escape me."

Madry adds, "I am grateful to God because it's what He inspires, encourages and motivates me to do. To me, it's an award for being an obedient and faithful servant."

CEO Spotlight

Gary Perez

CEO,
USC Credit Union



About USC Credit Union:

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Asset Size: \$764 Million

Number of Members: 78,921

Designations: CDFI, LID, MDI,
Juntos Avanzamos

www.usccreditunion.org

35 Years of Experience, Expansion, and Equity

Having recently celebrated its golden anniversary in the golden state, USC Credit Union is fortunate to have had Gary Perez leading the way as CEO for 35 of its 50 years.

Founded in 1973 by a small group of University of Southern California (USC) staff members, the credit union set out to meet the needs of individuals at the university with modest means.

When Perez came aboard, he brought a unique industry perspective and resume – having worked for firms that bought liquidated credit unions, as well as experience in an auditing role.

“My early years in the credit union space was a great table-setter for me in that I got to see first-hand what led to the demise of these credit unions, as well as to the success of others,” Perez recalls.

That insight and experience would prove invaluable to Perez as he embarked on the most significant role of his career.

From Chances to Triumphs

After a short time as the CFO of another Los Angeles credit union, Perez joined USC Credit Union as CEO in 1988.

“It was a tiny credit union with a lot of promise that was willing to take a chance on a 29-year-old,” he says.

The chance paid off. In the late 1990s, USC Credit Union expanded its membership to include students and alumni of the university – followed by a community charter to serve those with low to moderate income in the areas surrounding the USC campuses.

The credit union also experienced overwhelming success in the 1990s after introducing its student loan program. USC Credit Union soon led the entire credit union industry in volume of student loans.

Perez explains that an increased partnership with the USC community was forged, leading the credit union to add students to their board of directors.

“These amazing board members have taught us so much. We are proud to be at the forefront of empowering young people to make significant contributions to the industry,” Perez says.

Always aiming to deepen relationship with its low- to moderate-income members and the minority community, today USC Credit Union is the only credit union headquartered in the City of Los Angeles that is concurrently designated as a Community Development Financial

“These amazing board members have taught us so much. We are proud to be at the forefront of empowering young people to make significant contributions to the industry.”

Institution, a Minority Depository Institution, and a Juntos Avanzamos Institution – a recognition of their commitment to serving and empowering Latino consumers.

Positioned to be Part of the Solution

In January 2024, USC Credit Union was granted approval for an expanded charter to include the entire county of Los Angeles in addition to Orange County.

“There is a lot of need here in Los Angeles, and we think we are uniquely positioned to be part of the solution,” Perez explains.

What this expanded charter means for USC Credit Union is still being ironed out. As a small credit union, Perez says it's not possible to adopt the traditional approach of opening branches in each of the 120 cities they now cover. Instead,

they are creating a hybrid model of service, which includes brick-and-mortar branches for those on and around the USC campuses, while digitally reaching members further away.

"Our traffic is terrible, and our public transportation is challenging. If the only way for us to serve those outside



of the campus community is for them to drive to a branch, we lose," Perez says. "We need a robust digital offering to reach everyone."

The credit union is continuously upgrading its comprehensive digital channels to include not only access to transactional deposit and lending services, but also much-needed financial education.

DEI is in Their DNA

USC Credit Union is deeply committed to a strong workplace culture where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are at the heart and soul of its service.

"DEI is in our DNA," he explains. "It's not something that we pivoted toward or reactively endeavored to do – to demonstrate our allyship with persons of color, women, those who are disabled, and other minority and under-served people. It's just naturally part of our living and breathing passion to fully represent and serve the vibrant campus-adjacent minority communities that we are so fortunate to be at the center of."

The credit union recently created a new c-suite position, bringing aboard Rocio Flores as Chief Social Impact Officer.

"We believe that everything we do should be evaluated in the context of how it impacts our membership and the entire community we serve," Perez says. "I am so proud of Rocio for all of the terrific ways she brings social impact to the forefront of our offerings."

Perez relies on organizations like the African American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC) to model true inclusiveness, leadership, and dedication. As a board member, Perez attributes AACUC's deep impact on the industry to AACUC's Board of Directors, its President and CEO Renée Sattiewhite, and the strong, diverse team she has built.

"When I am at an AACUC meeting, I feel I am in the presence of true greatness," Perez says. "Renée has risen

"We believe that everything we do should be evaluated in the context of how it impacts our membership and the entire community we serve."

to icon status in my eyes. I have learned so much from her and admire her passion. The leaders on that board are so accomplished. They are the leaders I aspire to be."

Poised for Future Accomplishments

From a \$15 million credit union in 1988 to now having over \$750 million in assets, USC Credit Union has grown 50-fold under Perez's leadership. He admits that, like any longtime CEO, there have been hits, which he is proud of, and misses, which he is responsible for.

In reflecting on his 35-year tenure as CEO, Perez is confident in the direction the credit union is headed.

Poised for future accomplishments, USC Credit Union will be introducing new digital services, as well as a new wealth accumulation and management program aimed at helping young people on their financial journey.

Perez says that everything on the horizon is aimed at addressing the area's massive housing and sustainability problems – and that he hopes his successor will continue the credit union's focus on being the leading green lender in LA.



"At 65, I'm not going to be around to see all of this come to fruition," Perez explains. "I know we are going to bring in great young leadership to maximize these final acts of my stewardship and I am just honored to have played a role in it."

CEO Spotlight

Girado Smith

President/CEO
Educational
Systems FCU



About Educational Systems FCU:

Location: Greenbelt, Maryland

Asset Size: \$1.3 Billion

Number of Members: 87,428

www.esfcu.org

Please tell us a bit about how your credit union got its start and how it has evolved over the years?

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union was started in 1955 by a group of educators who were looking to solve a common problem – gaining access to financial resources. These educators came together and pooled their savings to help their colleagues finance their cars, so they had a way to get back and forth to work every day.

At that time, the credit union operated out of a classroom in Bladensburg High School and was managed by volunteers. Since that time, we have been committed to serving the education community through financial products and services that are designed to meet the unique needs of educators, organizations that support education, students, and their families.

We also have a long history of charitable giving. We have been active participants in donation campaigns collecting winter weather accessories for students. Annually, we have awarded \$80,000.00 in scholarships and professional development awards through our Support Education Foundation. In 2024, we anticipate increasing this number.

We continue to focus on expanding our reach to provide broader access to our members. Through our Business Development team and by optimizing technology where appropriate, we are able to serve more members of the education community across a wider geographical area. However, at our core, we are still grounded by the original mission of serving the education community.

Please tell us a bit about your start in the credit union industry and your professional journey leading to your current role?

I started my career with Educational Systems FCU over 25 years ago as the Accounting Manager. At the time, the

credit union's assets were \$106 million. Through the years, I transitioned into the roles of AVP of Accounting, the VP of Finance, and then the SVP/CFO.

In 2004, I became the EVP/CEO. Since then, we have had a few successful mergers and as of the end of January 2024, our assets are slightly over \$1.3 billion.

I would say, during my tenure, I remained focused on a few key points. Number one, being a student of my discipline has always been a priority. I am a strong believer in the fact that knowledge is a significant success driver. I also believe it's important to stay humble, never becoming too significant in your mind, where you might lose empathy and compassion for others. I strongly believe real success comes from the individuals that you work with. At the end of the day, your most significant assets are your team members.

Finally, it's important to me to be a steward of the industry, which includes being well informed about the world around you. I do this by staying connected to other industry leaders, attending conferences, roundtables, and other industry events that are on the leading edge of our market.

What are some innovative accomplishments you have helped Educational Systems FCU achieve in your role?

I can think of so many things that our credit union has accomplished over the years. I was instrumental in establishing the Support Education Foundation – the Credit Union's first 501(c)(3) organization. I had the honor to be the first Chairperson of that Board. The Foundation continues to strengthen and expand its reach by volunteering more, giving more, adjusting our programs to meet the needs of our students and educators and offering a wider range of scholarships and professional development awards.

I led the credit union's partnership with the African American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC) to form the Rosemary Brinkley C-Suite Leadership Development Program. I am particularly proud of this accomplishment because this program is designed to prepare credit union professionals for senior management roles, and frankly the future of the industry.

During 2023, my first year as Educational Systems FCU's CEO, the organization embarked on a few important initiatives. One thing that we wanted to do was to reimagine our corporate culture. We formed our first Culture Committee, comprised of a diverse group of Ambassadors from different departments with different personal backgrounds and a wide array of unique perspectives.

We are also conducting organization-wide surveys, and we're actively creating more opportunities for communication and collaboration across the organization. There are a lot of exciting things happening at our credit union.

What does Diversity, Equity and Inclusion mean to you and to Educational Systems FCU, and why is it important? How does DEI influence your activities, products, services, etc and the way you serve your members?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mean that we make space for people to bring their unique perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences to our organization. Having differences of opinions, outlooks and prisms creates healthy friction, and this produces more successful outcomes. When we embrace a wide assortment of contributions and we actively seek to eliminate the barriers that could cause someone to hold back their authentic selves, we allow for the best, brightest, and most impactful contributions to come to light.

DEI is important because people are important, people matter most, and everyone deserves to be heard, respected, and valued. It's important to lean in and engage with diverse people and different perspectives rather than shy away from our differences. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that individuals, our people, are the secret to long-term success and that means embracing differences and creating an environment where open communication, transparency and inclusion is expected.

When we consider potential activities or services and offerings, we think about how it may be received and how to make it most accessible to all, and the truth is that we need insight from a diverse group of people to fully assess the possibility at hand. At Educational Systems FCU, we are making progress on this by disseminating ideas and information to larger groups of Ambassadors, volunteers, and members for feedback.

We've also formed a Culture Committee to help senior leadership connect with our Ambassadors and understand them more closely. Inclusion and equity are required to ensure fairness. Opening the circle allows us to create an environment where more people feel represented, heard, and appreciated. This is the baseline for allowing people to do great things and grow in their commitment to our organization, the credit union movement, and more importantly, their own personal lives!

Finally, we serve a diverse group of members and I believe they consider the diversity within the organizations that they do business with, not only in the faces that they see, but in the actions we take.

What successes and challenges stand out for you when you think about your leadership over the years?

As I reflect on my career, successes have a few common denominators. I learned very early on that making people

a top priority, staying open and honest, being open-minded to different ideas and ways to do things, building and maintaining trust, and finally, staying grounded and humble are key factors to success.

Where do I start - challenges are everywhere, and they never go away. One thing that you must remember is that there is always something to learn. Be leery when you think



you have all the answers. As you progress in your career, stay humble; you need people to be successful. One of my more significant challenges has been being crystal clear about my intentions and expectations. People cannot read my mind. So, providing clarity is imperative. Lastly, you must remember to take care of you! We often forget this, and the consequences can be severe.

What leadership characteristics do you think are necessary for building a strong credit union?

To be an effective leader today, you must have a clear vision of the future, be willing to hire the right people and believe in their abilities. I know it is cliché, but always look to hire people smarter than you are! You must work well with people at all levels, inside the credit union and outside of your credit union.

– Contined on page 20 –

Continued

CEO Spotlight

Girado Smith

President/CEO
Educational
Systems FCU



Leaders and future leaders must have and maintain a heart of service to our members. Let's never forget who we are here to serve! There is so much competition and change in our industry; creating an environment that allows you to change and pivot to adapt to a variety of factors is going to be increasingly important moving forward.

Where would you like to see Educational Systems FCU in five or ten years and how do you envision your role evolving?

I would like to see our credit union grow in all aspects. Internally – I hope that our Ambassadors continue to be happy and proud to work with us. I expect that they will have opportunities to make meaningful contributions no matter their specific role or experience level.

I hope that everyone feels compelled to recommend us as an employer and as a financial services provider to their friends and colleagues. From a member perspective –

I would like Educational Systems FCU to be a household name among those in the communities we serve.

I expect that our members will have various ways of doing business with us and that their experience will be efficient and seamless whether through our branch network or through a digital channel. We will continue to find the most efficient ways to serve the needs of the members in the communities that we serve. I envision my role potentially transitioning from working within our credit union to increasingly working within our communities to create and deepen partnerships that allow us to reach our members and new members in more meaningful ways.

What can we do as a movement to better serve the needs of the un- and under-banked?

This is an on-going problem that we face in this country and credit unions are well positioned to be a part of the solution. As a credit union, we should be consistently examining our practices and identifying potential barriers of entry and identifying ways to break those barriers down.

We should be working with other organizations serving areas or populations that are under-banked and considering their perspective on how to best position ourselves to be accessible, reachable, and relevant to these groups. As a movement, this topic should be top of mind, so that ideas and resources can be shared openly.

In what ways have you partnered with AACUC and what advantages have you found from doing so?

I have been a long-time advocate of the work that AACUC does. In many ways, the organization has transformed the way the industry sees and addresses inequities. AACUC has broken down barriers and provided access to education and professional growth opportunities in an unprecedented way.

As I reflect personally, I have met individuals who are now lifelong friends through the AACUC. The comradery that is built when participating in any of the sponsored programs or activities is often unmatched. When I participate or attend AACUC conferences or special events, my enthusiasm and perspective around what we do, and the lives that we impact, is always renewed.

2023 AACUC 25th Annual Conference



25th Anniversary AACUC Annual Conference took place July 16-20, 2023 at the Atlanta Evergreen Lakeside Resort in historic Stone Mountain, GA. The AACUC Annual Conference is one of the organization's signature events, attended by members, non-members and supporters from across the country. Credit union professionals from all levels of their organizations, credit union board and supervisory committee members, plus individuals from financial services organizations, attend the conference for training, networking and educational opportunities.

AACUC Accolades



Neoteric Changemaker Award

In July 2023, during the CU Leadership Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, Renée Sattiewhite was bestowed with the inaugural Neoteric Changemaker Award. This award is a national recognition given to an individual who has demonstrated personal perseverance, advanced the cause of 'people helping people' and advocated for relevant ideation coupled with creating positive programming for leaders. The annual award will be renamed in Renée Sattiewhite's honor in 2024.



ACCOSCA's Distinguished Service Award

In July 2023, AACUC President/CEO Renée Sattiewhite and TruStage President Emeritus Bob Trunzo were awarded ACCOSCA's Distinguished Service Award during the 25th Anniversary AACUC Annual Conference. They were later presented the award at the Foundation Dinner in Botswana. ACCOSCA, the African Confederation of Cooperative Savings and Credit Association, plays an instrumental role in promoting financial inclusion in Africa and empowering SACCOs (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations) in Africa through technical programs.

AACUC 2024 Hall of Fame



AACUC 2024 Hall of Fame Inductees

The African-American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC) will induct five credit union leaders into the AACUC Hall of Fame during its Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony at America's Credit Unions Governmental Affairs Conference. The conference will be held in Washington, D.C. on March 5, 2024, at the OAS House of the Americas.

The African American Credit Union Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who have contributed to the credit union movement by providing financial services and access to financial capital for African Americans and people of color.

2023 Inclusiv Conference



The Inclusiv annual conference is the largest gathering of credit unions with a mission of financial inclusion in the U.S. The conference brings together thought leaders, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in the fields of financial empowerment and community development to address the tough economic and social justice issues affecting credit unions today. Inclusiv's 2023 conference was held at the historic Peabody Memphis hotel in Memphis, Tennessee with over 600 attendees.

Notes From The Field

Inclusiv and AACUC Work Together on Advocacy Letter



In August 2023, Inclusiv worked in partnership with AACUC, the National Association of Latino Credit Unions and Professionals (NLCUP), and America's Credit Unions (formerly known as the Credit Union National Association) to submit a letter of feedback on the MDI Preservation Program. We gathered insights from the field by hosting a joint briefing and feedback session for MDIs and submitted a sign-on letter to the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA).

HBCU Innovation Incubator



In 2023, Inclusiv and AACUC partnered with Filene and Visa on an HBCU Innovation Incubator. HBCUs are historically Black colleges and universities, and the goal of the project was to develop a payment solution tailored to HBCU students, alumni and members of the communities surrounding HBCUs. The HBCU working group included Inclusiv members such as Richmond Heritage FCU, Virginia State University FCU, Council Hill FCU, Southern Teachers and Parents FCU, Omega Psi Phi FCU, and Hope Credit Union.

New Majority Growth Initiative

Inclusiv Receives \$4M to Launch New Majority Growth Initiative

In 2023 Inclusiv launched the New Majority Growth Initiative which includes a six-month-long virtual course called the MDI Learning Center, MDI peer and alumni network for participating staff and board members, \$1.6 million in subgrants for MDIs, technical assistance and support from Inclusiv staff and experienced credit union consultants. The creation of the initiative has been made possible by Citi Foundation, JPMorgan Chase, and NerdWallet.

Initial MDI Learning Center credit union participants include:

Cohort 1

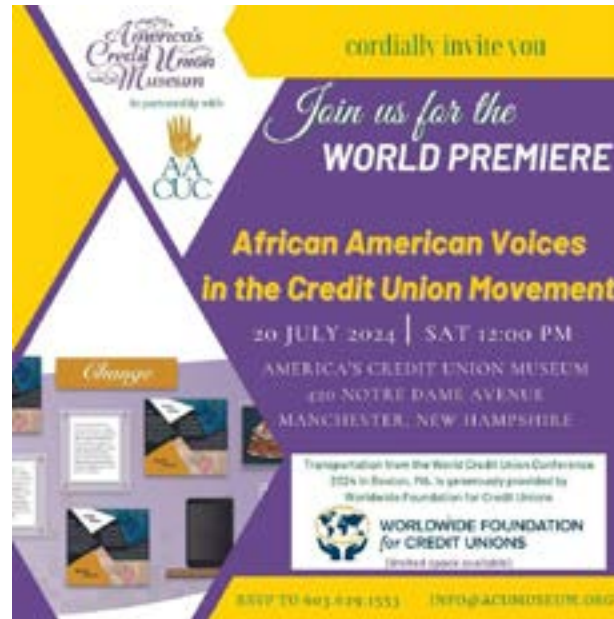
- Border Federal Credit Union
- Chicago Municipal Employees Credit Union
- Church of the Master Federal Credit Union
- Community First Fund Federal Credit Union
- Fidelis Federal Credit Union
- Government Printing Office Federal Credit Union
- Iberville Federal Credit Union
- Sixth Avenue Baptist Federal Credit Union
- Toledo Urban Federal Credit Union
- Urban Beginnings Choice Federal Credit Union
- Urban Upbound Federal Credit Union
- Virginia State University Federal Credit Union

Cohort 2

- Chicago Post Office Employees Credit Union
- Citizens Choice Federal Credit Union
- Councill Federal Credit Union
- Frederiksted Federal Credit Union
- Greater Cleveland Community Credit Union
- Heart O' Texas Federal Credit Union
- Mount Vernon NY Postal Employees Federal Credit Union
- Mount Zion (Indianapolis) Federal Credit Union
- New Covenant Dominion Credit Union
- One Detroit Credit Union
- S.H.P.E. Federal Credit Union
- Unity of Eatonville Federal Credit Union
- Vitelco Employees Federal Credit Union



2024 Upcoming Events



Located in Manchester, New Hampshire on the site where America's first credit union opened its doors in 1908, America's Credit Union Museum is an exciting and dynamic organization that is no mere repository of documents and artifacts. In addition to celebrating the remarkable efforts of the people who built the credit union movement over the past 100 years, it plays a leading role in documenting today's achievements while helping to prepare credit unions for upcoming challenges.

In July, America's Credit Union Museum will premiere the first ever *African American Voices in the Credit Union Movement* exhibit.

To R.S.V.P. to this event, call 603-629-1553 or please visit <https://www.acumuseum.org/aacuc.html>.

2024 Inclusiv Annual Conference

This year's conference will be held in New York City, May 7-9. Visit <https://inclusiv.org/conference50/> for more information.



2024 AACUC Annual Conference

This year's conference will be held in Las Vegas. More details will be published soon. <https://www.aacuc.org/annual-conference/>





African-American Credit Union Coalition

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Founded in 1999, the African-American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC) was created to increase the strength of the global credit union community. We are a 501c3 non-profit organization of professionals and volunteers in the credit union industry. Over the years, AACUC has grown and is ever changing to meet the needs of the dynamic credit union community which it serves. AACUC has adopted the 8th Cooperative Principle and encourages all credit union and affiliated organizations to adopt it as well. AACUC has also created the Commitment to Change: Credit Unions Unite Against Racism Initiative and it has gained great momentum within the credit union industry.



Inclusiv

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Founded in 1974, Inclusiv empowers its member credit unions to advance financial inclusion for everyone through advocacy, education, technology, and investment initiatives designed to create wealth-building opportunities in communities excluded from the financial mainstream.

Inclusiv was instrumental in establishing the [Community Development Financial Institutions \(CDFI\) Fund](#) in 1994, is a certified CDFI intermediary, and a permanent member of the national [CDFI Coalition](#).