

Columbus & Dayton

AFRICAN AMERICAN

News Journal

FREE

December 2017

IMPACT
Community Act



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ROBERT "BO" CHILTON: "PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF"



By Ray Miller

Tell us a bit about how you grew up in Springfield. I hear that you come from a household that believes in supporting others. Can you tell us a bit about that?

I grew up in Springfield, Ohio during the 70's and 80's along with my two brothers, Kyle, who was a year younger than me and Aaron, who was 5 years younger. I also grew up with an Aunt, Jeanne, who was 9 years older than me and was my father's youngest sister. She came to live with us when I was a young boy so she is more like my cool big sister. We grew up in a close knit community where everyone knew one another and embodied the spirit of the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." My mother, Barbara L. Chilton, was an elementary school teacher who loved her students. My father, Butch Chilton, worked at Navistar Inc. building semi-trucks but made the time to coach our little league baseball and basketball teams. My mother could always see the best in people, even my little knucklehead friends who often got into trouble. They loved her because she could look past their circumstances and see them, she saw their potential and inspired them to see it in themselves. My father was that neighborhood dad, particularly for many of my friends who did not have a strong father figure in their household. Dad was an old school disciplinarian and all of my friends had a healthy dose of fear in his presence but he balanced it by joking around with us and teaching us about behaving like young men.

We were the typical black middle class household during most of my childhood except for those times when my father was laid off from work and we struggled financially. Those were some tough times. But, good times or bad times, our house was the neighborhood spot where all of the kids hung out. We lived right behind my neighborhood elementary school. My parents were always very generous with their time and our food. I remember being upset that my mother was giving away all of our best snacks but she would tell me, "the Lord loves a cheerful giver." I didn't really get that at the time but I did see how happy my friends were to be "adopted" into our family. Many of my friends would say they wish they had a mom and dad like mine. Looking back, my appreciation grows as I think about how fortunate I was despite all of the tough times. This was the foundation upon which the scripture, "to those whom



Bo Chilton (Center) with Board Members

much is given, much is required," became the guiding principle of my life and my service.

An associate at The Ohio State University shared that you had a very successful and direct way of engaging and helping students while you were there.

It is all about meeting people where they are and then challenging and supporting them in developmentally appropriate ways. I have two Master's degrees in teaching. I have taught students at three different levels in middle school, high school and college. Even in my current role of IMPACT's CEO, I consider myself an educator in a classroom without walls. There is no better feeling, as an educator, than when the light bulb comes on and something that once seemed incomprehensible to a student suddenly becomes clear. That is the moment when

a person gets it and then wonders what else he or she can accomplish. They begin to understand that they can learn anything by working hard, studying and being persistent. Personally, I connect with people who struggle by sharing my successes but also my failures. Michael Jordan said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Persistence pays off in the end. Sometimes you have to grind it out and keep struggling through to achieve the desired outcome. I respect the grind...that is the hard work, the effort, the hustle to see something through to the end. That mentality, resonates with people and I can often find common ground to engage and connect with people.

You are a Past President of the Alumni chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha in Columbus. What programs did your organization provide?

We had a lot of great programs including, "A voteless people are a hopeless people," which educated our community on the importance of not only voting but being well informed about how we choose as our elected officials. We were the original developers of the Whitney Young condos located on Martin Luther King Blvd. Both of these distinguished gentlemen are brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. But I was most proud of our youth mentorship programs. Alpha Esquires is a mentorship program for high school boys. Additionally, we had a national partnership with Big Brothers and Big Sisters in which 50 Alphas mentored 50 young people who were elementary and middle school-aged children. Sixteen years later, I am still connected with my little brother Kyshawn who is now a



grown man with kids but is still open to the love and advice of a big brother.

You know and influence a lot of people in Columbus. How did your experience with the Columbus City Council assist with that?

Working as a legislative aide for then City Councilmember Charleta B. Tavares was the best and most significant experience shaping my career. Charleta taught me what it means to be a champion of the people. I gained true insight into how this city really works and how to get things done. There are multiple forms of power and various ways in which power is exercised. I believe the greatest power; however, is the power of the people. There is strength in numbers but we need to be well informed and build common ground to realize the will of the people. I learned about the power of partnership, when we as a people are open to dialogue and commit to creating a shared vision then we can actualize the American dream.

What programs are provided by IMPACT Community Action Agency? Under what circumstances would someone in Columbus contact IMPACT?

IMPACT Community Action's mission is to reduce poverty by providing hope-inspiring help and real opportunities for self-sufficiency. We serve over 20,000 families annually who are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. All of our programs are free to income eligible customers. Our programs mirror the parable, "if you give a person fish, he or she will eat for a day but if you teach a person to fish, he or she will eat for a life time." We give the people fish by stabilizing families in need of our Emergency Assistance Department which provides one-time assistance with rent, utilities, furniture, appliances, etc. and we teach people to fish via our Empowerment Services Department. Empowerment Services programming includes Workforce Development, Financial Capability, Re-entry, Comprehensive Case Management for Opportunity Youth ages 16 to 24. We also have a Weatherization program that will keep your house warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. Finally, we have two new initiatives, one to create career pathways into the construction trades and the second, to create more affordable housing. We have a partnership with the Minority Independent Contractors Association (MICA) to provide an 8-week multi-trade construction training program that prepares participants for immediate employment for a variety of construction jobs, maintenance jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. The second pathway is via the Building Futures program. IMPACT has partnered with the Council on Building Trades to provide a pre-apprenticeship program that will prepare economically



Photos from key programs at IMPACT Community Action Agency. (Top) Graduation program. (MiddleLeft) Participants working on their class projects. (Middle Right) Woman shows her new car. (Bottom) Woman shares her story during a re-entry job program.

disadvantaged people with the training and support to qualify for entrance into the local unions' apprenticeship programs.

We are purchasing homes in need of moderate rehabilitation and utilizing some of our construction trades program participants for on the job training opportunities. We are creating opportunity to learn about skilled trades, earn money while you learn and create more affordable housing.

We serve low income people who are below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level for our Empowerment Services programs and up

to 200% for our Emergency Assistance and Weatherization programs. To learn more information you can contact us a (614) 252-2799 or at www.impactca.org.

As I read the newspapers and see the media, I see your influence in the community. What organizations, communities and groups do you belong to and work with?

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IMPACT's Poverty Summit draws people from the government/business sector and the faith community.



IMPACT Staff answers questions about energy assistance programs.



Bo Chilton with board members and award recipients at the annual Ripple of Hope Awards.

I believe in the power of partnership. I try to connect with as many diverse groups and build relationships with people of varying perspectives. I have had the pleasure of serving on a number of boards, commissions, advisory groups, etc. Five that I will highlight include serving as:

- President of the Ohio Urban Resources System, an association made up of Urban Community Action Agencies representing the metropolitan areas of Ohio;
- Board member of the African American Leadership Academy;
- Board member of the Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio
- Presidential Search Committee for the New CEO of Central Ohio Transit Association (COTA)
- Past Co-Chair of the successful Columbus City Schools Levy that passed in November of 2016.

What motivates you to do the community work that you do?

I know that I have been blessed in my life and I feel called to be a blessing to others. I believe I am walking in my purpose and doing what I was meant to do.

Who are some of your role models?

Of course Charleta as I previously shared. But my first mentor was a college administrator by the name of Dr. Lillie P. Howard from Wright State University. From her, I truly learned that a mentor not only supports you in tangible ways but also challenges you to be your best and that process can be uncomfortable at times. I would count my current Board Chairman, Cecil Jones, among those who embodies the role of support and challenge for me. Donna James, Ray Miller, John Bickley and Larry Price are people whom I currently work with in some capacity. All are mentors with very different leadership styles that I have learned from and borrowed from to create my own leadership identity.

There are numerous others such as Larry James, Yvette McGee Brown, Mike Coleman, Nick Akins, Norman Shub and Pastor Charles Booth that I admire and found creative ways at different periods of my life to soak up their knowledge.

What are some of the larger social problems that you see, in Columbus?

Poverty remains one of the most intractable issues in our community. I believe in the Columbus way, an ideal circulating in our community that highlights a spirit of collaboration among public, nonprofit, and

private partnerships. As IMPACT celebrates our 10th anniversary in 2018, we reflected back on a, "Decade of IMPACT." We want to engage people in all sectors so that we may address issues of poverty in a more comprehensive and impactful way.

It is baffling how a country as blessed and as wealthy as ours condones the oppression of poor people. We must confront this oppression by creating economic opportunity, holding our leaders accountable and doing our part to build relationships and partnerships. I believe in the power of the people and the power of partnerships. I do believe our leaders want to create opportunity for all and see every member thrive but practically speaking we have a lot of work to do.

Are there any of these problems that IMPACT can assist with? How?

We will continue to provide emergency assistance to stabilize families in crisis. We will continue to empower individuals and families toward self-sufficiency but in order for people in our community to thrive, we must come together and assert our collective will. Frederick Douglass said it best when he said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress..." We want to further engage with community in a series of conversations about issues and solutions. We conducted a community wide needs assessment that we want to share with a variety of community groups as we seek to create a shared vision for our community's economic growth and development.

What things do you do that many people do not know about you?

Following in my father's footsteps, I coached my son and daughter's basketball teams. Being a Hip Hop-ologist, I like to keep up with artist such as Kendrick Lamar, Rhapsody and Jay-Z who have something profound to say.

What other things would you like to share?

My wife of 20 years, Audrey and I have 2 wonderful children, 14 year-old Brandon Emmanuel Chilton and 10 year-old Sydney Aaliyah Chilton. Both are very good students and get their natural intelligence from their mother who was a straight A student throughout her entire academic career. I can make no such claims but their grit, determination and persistence that comes from me.

I hope the community will join us on August 30th, 2018 when we will host the Ripple of Hope Awards Dinner. Please visit our website at www.impactca.org to learn about your opportunity to get involved.