CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

2017 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

ENROLLMENT
FINANCIAL AID
ACADEMICS

COMPLETION
Dear Friends:

Today, simply having “some college” is not enough to secure a financially stable career path. More jobs than ever are requiring some form of postsecondary degree, whether it be a postsecondary credential or a two- or four-year degree. According to MIT’s Living Wage Calculator, a living wage (the cost of supporting one adult and one child) in 2016 was $21 per hour. Without a degree, an employee cannot reach that living wage, and the earnings gap between those with a degree and those without is growing rapidly. According to data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2015, individuals age 25 and over with a bachelor’s degree earned, on average, $1,137 per week, compared to the $678 per week earned by those with just a high school diploma, which, at $16.95 per hour, is less than the living wage.

Despite the increased need for degrees and credentials, navigating the pathways to them remains challenging for many students. Now more than ever, traditional and non-traditional learners need College Now’s services as they seek to obtain the education required to fill the open jobs in Northeast Ohio.

Although they have different circumstances based on age and life experience, high school students and adult learners receive similar supports from College Now – they need advice on financial aid; help completing college applications; guidance on selecting the best-fit postsecondary program; mentors who can walk them through the challenges they may face on campus; and academic and social supports. College Now’s services continue to expand to ensure that every student who needs support is able to get it, when they need it most.

This year, we have more than 60 advisors and AmeriCorps College Guides in high schools in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Medina and Summit Counties. We have placed 10 new AmeriCorps Career Coaches in five Cleveland Metropolitan School District career academies to ensure freshmen and sophomore students are introduced to postsecondary educational paths that will lead them to the region’s in-demand careers early in high school. We have bolstered our work with adults to ensure that they receive specialized guidance to meet them where they are in their postsecondary journey, and we have assisted graduates with federal student loan debt to save them an estimated $46 million since the inception of our student loan forgiveness work in 2013.

But our work is not done. As economic demands change, and the cost of postsecondary education increases, delivering our services to those in Northeast Ohio has become more important than ever. Crossing the finish line is our goal – for all the students we serve – and we could not help them overcome the obstacles they face in achieving that goal without you, our funders and partners. We are grateful for the support you provide to College Now – thank you for all you do to help students of all ages cross the finish line.

Sincerely,

Alan S. Kopit
Chair, Board of Directors

Lee A. Friedman
Chief Executive Officer

Chair, Board of Directors

Chief Executive Officer

MISSION

College Now’s mission is to increase college attainment in Greater Cleveland through college and career access advising, financial aid counseling and scholarship and retention services.

FINANCIAL STABILITY

COLLEGE NOW AT A GLANCE 2015-2016 ACADEMIC YEAR

27,000

Number of individuals served by College Now

$150 Million

Amount of financial aid the more than 10,000 current college students served by College Now have received

$68 Million

Scholarship dollars awarded to Greater Cleveland students since inception

$70,000

A $500 investment in College Now advising services results in an average of $70,000 in financial aid awarded per student over four years of college

1,500

High school graduates and adult learners who received College Now scholarships

$2,410

Average College Now renewable scholarship award

$11.6 Million

Operating budget for College Now, including 104 employees

94%

First- to second-year average retention rate among traditional scholarship recipients

60%

Average graduation rate for College Now scholarship recipients compared to the 18 - 26% national average for students from low-income backgrounds

1,200

Number of community members volunteering as mentors for College Now scholarship recipients

175

Venues in Northeast Ohio where College Now provides its services

$46 Million

Total estimated amount saved by 617 individuals who received College Now’s student loan restructuring services over the last three years

For the Fiscal Year Ending July 31, 2016
COLLEGE NOW’S ADULT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES EXPAND AS DEMAND FOR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT INCREASES

Northeast Ohio has a critical need for skilled workers. A gap continues to grow between the skills necessary to fill open jobs and the skills that individuals possess, causing the number of unemployed to outpace the number of open jobs in the region. By 2020, 64 percent of Ohio jobs will require a postsecondary credential, but only 38 percent of Cuyahoga County adults (ages 25+) have this level of education, leaving a 26 percent gap. Currently ranking 37th in educational attainment, Ohio has significant ground to make up to ensure that job-seeking adults have the credentials necessary to participate in the state’s workforce. Nearly 440,000 adults (ages 25+) in Cuyahoga County are eligible to start or continue their postsecondary education; 192,290 of these adults have some college, but no degree, and 247,342 have a high school diploma or equivalency. Cuyahoga County adults with a high school diploma or some college, but no degree, are a critical piece of the educational attainment puzzle. To keep up with changes in the workforce, our region’s adults need to continue their education and job training.

To meet this community need, College Now has strategically invested in expanding our adult learner work. Last fiscal year, we grew our adult learner department from a team of 1.5 full-time equivalents to a standalone department of five. These five uniquely trained advisors, plus one full-time AmeriCorps member, work proactively in our Resource Center and out in the community to support adults as they decide what the appropriate and economically feasible next steps in their education may be. For adults, more so than for traditional students, it is a marathon, not a sprint, to college completion.

FINDING ADULT LEARNERS

Setting out to find adult learners is a challenge, which is why our newly-expanded Adult Programs and Services team has changed its approach. Previously, our primary method of serving adults was to work with those who came into the Resource Center and/or received our Adult Learner Scholarship. While effective, we realized that this approach was not enough to make a meaningful dent in the educational attainment gap. Now with more manpower, our Adult Program Specialists reach individuals in the community through partnerships with community organizations, employer connections and resource fairs, enabling adults to receive support where they are as they navigate the postsecondary process.

College Now offers services not only in college access and career advising, but also in financial aid counseling, scholarship services and student loan debt counseling. During the 2015-2016 school year, College Now served over 1,300 individual clients with these services - and we are on track to double that number in 2016-2017.

HELPING ADULTS MANAGE STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Just like traditional students, most adult learners face the difficult task of paying back loans that they borrowed to finance their education. College Now has built our Student Loan Rescue program over the past few years, which provides graduates with individualized counseling to determine which payment plan and/or consolidation options make the most financial sense for their unique situations.

Local employers, like government agencies, school districts and nonprofit organizations, have found our Student Loan Rescue program to be an enormous added benefit that they can offer to their employees. Since College Now began offering the Student Loan Rescue program in 2013, College Now has saved 617 employees from seven different area organizations more than $46 million in anticipated federal student loan repayments.

Now, more than ever, adults need support to pursue and/or complete a postsecondary credential. College Now’s expanded Adult Programs and Services team is equipped to help them cross the finish line to completion.

1 Lumina Foundation. (2013.)
2 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2011-2015 Estimates. (Most recently available as of Jan. 2017.)
3 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2011-2015 Estimates. (Most recently available as of Jan. 2017.)
It started with three simple questions: “Who am I?” “What am I good at?” and “Where is that needed in the world?” These questions were used to shape the early awareness work that is underway with ninth and tenth grade students at John Adams High School in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) as part of College Now’s early awareness initiative. Under the guidance of a dedicated College Now advisor, students work on building self-efficacy, resilience and aspirations for postsecondary education. College Now understands that academic success and college and career readiness is not something that happens overnight — nor is it something that should wait until eleventh and twelfth grade years to develop. The groundwork has to be laid much earlier. Identifying possible programs or areas of interest sooner enables students to shape a high school pathway that can lead to the successful transition into life after high school.

At John Adams, College Now has developed a robust early awareness strategy targeting younger students to ensure that they receive specialized guidance as they transition into their high school years. This period at the beginning of high school can be daunting, and College Now’s proactive advising approach for these younger students guarantees that they have the guidance they need when faced with the big decisions that they must make about their academic futures.

At the ninth and tenth grade level, College Now advisors employ online, interactive college and career planning tools like Naviance Succeed and Ohio Means Jobs to help students assess their skill-sets and identify potential career paths they might pursue after graduation. By targeting students early and creating a college-going culture throughout the entire high school experience, College Now is equipping students to be better prepared to make postsecondary decisions later in their high school careers.

As part of the early awareness initiative, College Now also targets eighth grade students to ensure that they have an early start in developing a college-going mindset. Students at four John Adams High School feeder schools (Miles Park, Nathan Hale, Charles Dickens and Miles Elementary) participate in programs designed to acclimate them to the high school culture and prepare them for high school-level expectations and responsibilities. Eighth graders also have the opportunity to participate in the Rebel Up Summer Bridge Academy, which encourages high school success through targeted summer programming.

Beyond College Now’s specific interventions in the John Adams/Mount Pleasant community, eighth grade students in the CMSD also have the opportunity to participate in our partner MyCom’s True2U program, which provides innovative mentoring and career awareness to eighth graders to help them transition to high school. The program began during the 2015-2016 school year and served 807 youth with 150 mentors in Cleveland during its first year, including College Now’s AmeriCorps College Guides. The goal is to expand to serve 2,500 students in 68 schools by the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

Eighth to tenth grade is a formative and transitional period in a student’s life. When students understand more fully how their high school decisions can impact their educational opportunities after graduation and beyond, they can make more informed decisions about their eventual college and career goals. When students understand more fully how their high school decisions can impact their educational opportunities after graduation and beyond, they can make more informed decisions about their eventual college and career goals.
A adopted in 2012, the Cleveland Plan for Transforming Schools emphasized college and career readiness for students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), with a focus on Career-Technical Education. According to a 2014 Futureworks report, only 12.4 percent of students in the CMSD concentrated in a specific career pathway. With the CMSD class of 2015 high school graduation rate at 69 percent, as reported by the Ohio Department of Education, and the college enrollment rate at 51 percent, as reported by the National Student Clearinghouse, there is a clear gap between the percentage of high school graduates and the percentage of these students who graduate and then embark on an educational pathway to a career (certificates, two-year and four-year degrees). College Now recognized an opportunity to work with ServeOhio and CMSD to implement an AmeriCorps Career Pathway Coaches program at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year to address this gap.

This AmeriCorps program supplements our existing AmeriCorps College Guides program, which has been in place since 2009 and provides College Now with 28 near-peer advisors (College Now also oversees the entire statewide AmeriCorps College Guides program, which includes 70 Members who serve college access organizations across the state). The 10 additional AmeriCorps Career Pathway Coaches supplement the college and career access services provided in the five CMSD Academies – Garrett Morgan, Jane Addams, Martin Luther King Jr., Max Hayes and Washington Park.

In these schools, Career Pathway Coaches are tasked with providing direct support and interventions for all incoming freshmen and sophomore students through individual meetings and group interactions. The Career Pathway Coaches ensure that students stay on track for graduation by monitoring student attendance and academic progress and engagement. They also engage students in a number of college and career access advising activities, exposing students to a variety of careers and the educational pathways to them, and providing mentoring and motivation for students to meet milestones related to college and career readiness. Understanding the benefit of a postsecondary education early in high school helps students complete high school with not only a vision for their future, but also a distinct plan that outlines how they can achieve their postsecondary goals.

The AmeriCorps Career Pathway Coaches program provides an additional layer to the already robust work of our advisors and AmeriCorps College Guides who work in CMSD, providing targeted interventions in five Cleveland high schools to ensure that all students have a plan for college and/or a career after high school.
Being accepted into a postsecondary program, be it an industry credential program or a two- or four-year degree program, is an exciting milestone. However, the excitement is often diminished when students face the daunting task of determining how to pay for that education. This is where College Now advisors step in to help students find the financial aid they need. Postsecondary programs are expensive, and the cost can make it challenging, or even impossible, for some students to complete a program without falling into financial hardship.

Through our financial aid counseling, the low-income students we serve in schools are awarded, on average, $70,000 in financial aid over four years of college. But students cannot receive these funds without first completing the vital - and complicated - task of submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

As the name suggests, the FAFSA is a free form that, if correctly completed and submitted, unlocks the door to federal, state and institutional student financial aid that does not need to be repaid upon graduation. In addition to this “free money,” the FAFSA is used to determine subsidized and unsubsidized loan eligibility and loan amounts that do have to be repaid. Last year, 7,000 FAFSAs were submitted by students across all of College Now’s program sites.

Recently, Cleveland was one of 22 cities nationwide to receive a grant from the Kresge Foundation, administered by the National College Access Network, to increase the FAFSA completion rate for students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) by at least 5 percent among the high school graduating class of 2017. College Now and our partners, the Higher Education Compact, CMSD and the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education (NOCHE), have been tasked with implementing the grant.

College Now advisors receive intensive training every year on changes to the FAFSA so they can help students and families complete the form as efficiently as possible – and the FAFSA underwent some major changes this year. The FAFSA was previously available to students starting January 1st, with a priority deadline of February 15th, and tax information could be used from the prior year. The federal government acknowledged that this wasn’t the most effective way to develop student aid packages, and decided to open the FAFSA earlier, starting on October 1st. Students and their families are now also allowed to use prior-prior year tax returns, to facilitate earlier completion.

Once the FAFSA is completed, and students have received their award letters, College Now advisors help them make the best financial decision for their postsecondary paths. Advisors are specially trained to help students evaluate financial aid packages, which includes analyzing current student financial obligations and anticipating future financial situations.

College Now is committed to ensuring that students are equipped to make the best financial decisions possible, given their individual goals and financial situations, so they can cross the completion finish line without breaking the bank.
Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars Program Boosts Financial Aid Awards and Selectivity of Schools for CMSD’s Highest Achievers

For students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), high academic marks in high school may not be enough to secure a spot in the freshman class of some of the most academically competitive colleges and universities in the country. Although high-achieving, these students do not always have the knowledge or resources to find, visit and apply to those top tier schools, resulting in a trend of under-matching, which is when academically-qualified students attend a college or university that is less selective than their academic abilities.

During the 2011-2012 school year, College Now and the Cleveland Foundation developed the Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars Program, which specifically targets the highest-achieving students in the CMSD to expose them to and match them with highly selective schools with the academic, financial and social resources to help them be successful and earn their degrees.

Selected students must have a 3.2 weighted GPA and at least a 25 composite ACT score to participate, and they benefit from working with a dedicated College Now advisor, Martha Basile. During the 2015-2016 school year, 52 students participated in the program. The average ACT score for Scholars in this most recent cohort was a 26, and their average GPA was 4.17 (weighted).

The individualized advising students receive from Ms. Basile helps ensure that their application choices are being made based on their academic prowess, as well as their personal situations. Ms. Basile coaches students through applications and essay writing, evaluates financial aid awards and advocates on their behalf for more aid, if necessary.

The majority of the low-income students in the Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars Program are first-generation college students who need deeper academic and social supports when they enroll in college. Through the program’s specialized advising, students are matched with schools that can support them not only academically, but can offer stronger financial aid packages and provide more individualized attention to help acclimate students to campus. Often, these are smaller schools that have more resources to provide to students individually than campuses that cater to a much larger student body.

As part of the Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars Program, students have the opportunity to participate in a number of guided college tours as rising seniors throughout their final year in high school. In recent years, Scholars have visited schools in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Ann Arbor and Chicago, and have enrolled in highly selective schools throughout the country, including Barnard College, Bates College, Case Western Reserve University, Carnegie Mellon University, Cleveland State University’s Honors Program, Columbia University, Harvard University, Howard University, New York University, The Ohio State University, Skidmore College and the University of Pennsylvania.

Since inception, over 250 Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars have received nearly $6.5 million in financial aid. Enrollment and persistence numbers have been impressive for the Scholars – 98 percent of students in the class of 2016 enrolled in college for the 2016-2017 school year, and 92 percent of students from the class of 2015 persisted from their freshmen to sophomore year of school. The first cohort of students, the class of 2012, are currently achieving an 80 percent persistence rate. The selectivity of the schools in which these students are enrolling and persisting has also increased – 98 percent of enrolling students from the class of 2016 enrolled at institutions rated “Competitive” or higher by Barron’s, as compared to 80 percent of enrolling students among the class of 2012. Giving high-performing students access to schools with the right academic, financial and social supports to help them succeed puts them on the right track to crossing the finish line to college completion.

Since inception, over 250 Cleveland Foundation College Now Scholars have received nearly $6.5 million in financial aid.

College Now and GEAR UP Bring Renewed Focus to Student Success and Completion in Parma

In 2014, the State of Ohio was awarded a seven-year GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Ohio grant, to be administered by the Ohio Board of Regents, the Ohio Department of Education and College Now. The highly competitive grant, targeting at-risk students in four Ohio school districts, allowed us to forge a partnership with the Parma City School District. Parma, an inner-ring suburb, has demonstrated a high need for the services provided by GEAR UP Ohio – according to the 2015-2016 Ohio School Report Card for the Parma City School District, only 64 percent of the district’s 2013 graduating class entered college within two years of graduation. GEAR UP Ohio is working to improve that rate by providing the community with comprehensive, holistic and research-driven programs to prepare low-income and minority students for higher education.

Over 4,000 students in Parma Senior High, Valley Forge High School and Normandy High School have been served through individual one-on-one advising sessions since GEAR UP Ohio’s work began. During the sessions, students receive college and success advising covering topics such as college exploration, completing college and scholarship applications and financial aid counseling. GEAR UP Ohio advisors also partner with Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) to offer two weeks of intensive programming on Tri-C’s Western Campus for rising twelfth graders that focuses on essay writing, ACT prep and college exploration. Participating students also have the opportunity to visit additional college campuses and apply for an additional GEAR UP-specific scholarship. GEAR UP allows College Now to reach Parma students in all three Parma middle schools, focusing on seventh grade students in order to support the middle school to college and career pipeline. Seventh grade students participate in activities around early career and college awareness, giving them a leg up when they transition into high school. Moreover, as students get closer to high school, College Now hosts eighth and ninth grade orientations to help students with the critical transition to high school.

Knowing that parents are pivotal to the success of students’ pathways to postsecondary studies, GEAR UP Ohio also works to engage families. Parents of students in grades seven through twelve have opportunities each academic year to learn more about the postsecondary education system, college readiness and the college enrollment process. Our advisors also work closely with school district staff to build a career and college readiness culture in the district’s high schools. This culture has already begun to evolve and will continue to do so throughout the tenure of the grant. The goal is to ensure all aspects of the program are sustainable by year seven, leaving a legacy of equitable college access, which in turn leads to increased college enrollment, persistence and graduation.
On Tuesday, October 4, 2016, College Now hosted its fourth Invest in Success event, an annual opportunity during which College Now recognizes and acknowledges the impact of an individual on the organization and the community. This year, College Now honored Margot James Copeland, Chair and CEO, KeyBank Foundation and Executive Vice President and Director of Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at KeyBank, for her commitment to education and her long-standing support of College Now. Along with Ms. Copeland’s individual dedication to educational attainment, College Now also recognized the deep commitment of KeyBank and the KeyBank Foundation to ensuring educational opportunities for youth in Northeast Ohio.

 Held this year at the new Cleveland School of the Arts, Invest in Success featured remarks from College Now CEO Lee Friedman, Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) CEO Eric Gordon, College Now scholarship recipient Leah Hudnall, all of whom celebrated Ms. Copeland’s achievements. Beth Mooney, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of KeyCorp, and Katrina Evans, Executive Vice President and Director of Corporate Center for KeyCorp, also attended, and Ms. Evans provided additional remarks that spoke to Ms. Copeland’s impact on both KeyBank and the community.

Ms. Copeland shared deeply personal, poignant examples from her childhood with the more than 150 Invest in Success attendees to underscore why she holds the mission of educational attainment in such high regard. The efforts of both Ms. Copeland and the KeyBank Foundation as an institution – in education, neighborhood prosperity, workforce development and community service – have been instrumental and transformational, not only for College Now but also for the Greater Cleveland community. Recent examples of this impactful support include the KeyBank Foundation Scholars Program at Cleveland State University (CSU), where a series of initiatives have been designed to increase the on-time completion rates of CMSD graduates attending CSU. Likewise, the KeyBank Foundation has awarded a grant to Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) to enhance and expand the school’s public safety education and training programs, as well as provide scholarship opportunities.

Previous Invest in Success honorees include Patrick S. Mullin, Retired Managing Partner, Deloitte, and former Board Chair of our organization; Jeannie Grassell Brown, Retired Scientist, Standard Oil Company, and former Board member; and Paul Clark, Regional President, PNC Bank.

Thank you, Ms. Copeland, for all that you do for College Now and education in Northeast Ohio!

$1,000,000 and above
AmericanCorps Ohio
The Cleveland Foundation
Ohio Department of Education
$500,000-$999,999
Cuyahoga County
The John Huntington Fund for Higher Education
Ohio Department of Education
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$50,000-$99,999
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Westfield Insurance Foundation
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$10,000-$24,999
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$5,000-$9,999
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Centric Consulting, LLC
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Manouk, Gavir, Gerlack & Manouk Co.,LPA
Marketplace Events
Medic Management Group
Megan L. Mehalko
John G. and Karen R. Nestor
Norholz Plumbing, Inc.
Northeast Ohio Fulfillment Center
Oswald Companies

This list reflects gifts, payments and multi-year pledges from January 1 - December 31, 2016. We have made every effort to ensure the completeness and accuracy of this report. If an error or omission has occurred, please accept our sincere apologies.

$1,000-$2,499
Kate and Robert Finlay Beaucage Graeme and Amy E. Finlay

$250-$499
L. D. K. Alonso

$100-$249
Addison S. Nelson

$50-$99
M. E. Young

Our Line Now Greater Cleveland College Now Greater Cleveland Crossing the Finish Line 2016-2017 Annual Report

Crossing the
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Anita Lois Poole Minority Scholarship Fund
Preformed Line Products Co.
F.M. Pritchard Fund of the Cleveland Foundation
Florence Mackey Pritchard and P.J. Pritchard Scholarship Fund of the Cleveland Foundation
William Roberts Endowed Scholarship Fund
Samuel Rosenthal Foundation Endowed Scholarship Fund
Robert J. Schneider Endowed Scholarship Fund
Fred E. Scholl Charitable Foundation
Augie Schroeder Endowed Scholarship Fund
Ratner Miller Shafair Foundation
Shearer’s Foods, Inc.
Sherwin-Williams Company
Shikha Daan Scholarship Fund
Sisters of Charity Healthcare Foundation Scholarship Fund
Kent H. Smith Charitable Trust
Jo Rene Miller Smith Scholarship Foundation
Sally Stewart Scholarship Fund
Stockler Foundation Endowed Scholarship Fund
Ralph P. Stoddard Memorial Fund of the Cleveland Foundation
Swagelok Advantage Scholarship Fund
Swaminathan and Garg Foundation Scholarship Fund
Swamy Family Scholarship Fund
Teamsters Truck Drivers Union Local 407
University Hospitals Endowed Scholarship Fund
George Garrett Wade Charitable Trust #2
Ella M. Walz Memorial Fund of the Cleveland Foundation
Waxman Family Scholarship Fund
William M. Weiss Endowed Scholarship Fund
Jane D. White Fund No. 2 Scholarship Fund
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Eddie Taylor, Taylor Oswald
Ingrid Tolentino, Hyatt Legal Plans, Inc.
Susan M. Tyler, Medical Mutual of Ohio
Deborah Vesty, Deanesons Community Foundation
Jeffrey Wasserman, Oswald Companies

Please call 216.241.5587 for a community location near you.