

HUBZONE CONTRACTORS NATIONAL COUNCIL

MANUFACTURING  
& TECHNOLOGY  
EDITION



# TRAIL BLAZER

JUNE 2022

DIGITAL MAGAZINE

VOL. 5



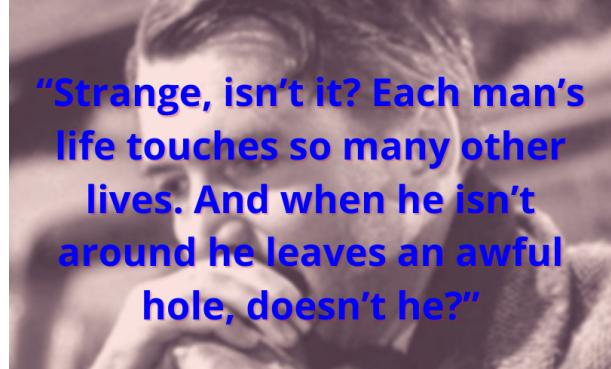
# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## JUNE 2022

I'm excited to welcome you to the Manufacturing and Technology Edition of the "Trailblazer Magazine". It seems fitting that we use a quote from James Stewart's movie "It is a Wonderful Life" for this publication with the National Conference less than two months away. It will be wonderful to see you all in Chantilly! Another reason why we are sharing this quote is because Dr. Victor McCrary our special featured guest is a major fan of the movie. Find out why when you read his article on **page 12**.

For me, it is a reminder that the trailblazers we feature in this magazine are much like George Bailey. They are **brilliant-go-getters who are passionate** about the historically underrepresented communities throughout our nation. They see good people struggling to raise their families in communities that have housing, food, education, health challenges and are moved to action.

These trailblazers have made it their mission to provide a pathway to a middle-class lifestyle for their HUBZone neighbors at their personal peril much like the character James Stewart played "George Bailey". Each of us has the opportunity to use our talents to make this nation even better, to include others on our journey. I have the opportunity and privilege to take you with me as you read these pages. My real question is, will you come, and when you come will you be willing to add your talents, and creating your own story? I hope your answer is YES!



HUBZone Trailblazers are an integral component of our country's story. We will tell their story, and how their commitment is leveling the playing field in their respective communities. I feel blessed to have been given the opportunity to shine a major light on the heroes that are in the trenches some flying, some running, but all committed to revitalizing HUBZone Communities.

We want everyone to get involved with future edition topics like the HBCUs Partnering with HUBZones, Hispanic Heritage, and much more. **If you want to be a sponsor or just share a story, we want to hear from you.**

Lily Milliner

Vice Chair, HUBZone Council, Inc.

& CEO, Build IT Up, LLC

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## FEATURE

### Dr. Victor McCravy

Vice President for  
Research, University of  
the District of Columbia,  
and Vice-Chair, National  
Science Board

“We take the stones the builders rejected to build the STEM workforce. Whether it is blue- or white-collar careers. They have the next idea; I’m encouraging folks not to give up.”

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## ASSOCIATION: MANUFACTURING

**20|** Dr. Timothy Akers  
Assistant Vice President for Research  
Innovation and Advocacy,  
Morgan State University,  
Member, National Quantum  
Initiative Advisory Committee

This trailblazer has gone from surviving to thriving, having almost drowned three times before he was even 16 years old. The last time was in the “Big Flood of 77” in Southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky.



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## ASSOCIATION: TECHNOLOGY

**08|** Dr. Willie Sanders  
Executive Director, Pass IT On  
Clinical Assistant Professor,  
Department of  
Computer & Information Sciences  
Towson University

**08|** Lamont Norwood  
Board Member, Pass IT On  
CEO of Strategic Government Solutions

This trailblazer used his initial failures to blaze a trail for others to follow. Pass IT On is located in a HUBZone community in the heart of Baltimore City. It has one big vision: providing technology education to all. Dr. Sanders truly believes that race, class, or socioeconomic status – or whether people view you as a celebrity or a bum – should not impact your technology literacy, let alone a career in IT.

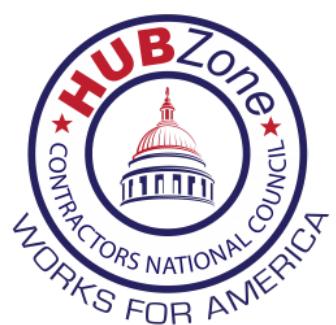


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## CAPACITY BUILDING

**10|** Amy Arnett  
Director of Sales and  
Business Development  
BNL Consulting

Amy Arnett is part of a team of trailblazers. What makes this company unique is that it hires people located in HUBZone communities and provides them the necessary hard and soft skills to systematically move up the corporate ladder. BNL's investment in HUBZone community members has enabled the company to develop a workforce that is able to provide custom analytic platforms, highly interactive user experiences, and seamless enterprise integration solutions to the federal government.



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## MANUFACTURING AND CONTAINERS

**26|** Don Morin  
President, Garrett Containers

Garrett Container Systems was one of the first businesses to push for the legislation that created SBA's HUBZone Program. Trailblazers throughout the nation worked with Senator Bond to create a program that, to this day, creates high-paying jobs in HUBZones.



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## FORTUNE 500

**24|** Charles Robinson  
Public Sector Leader IBM Quantum  
Team; Mid-Atlantic Quantum Alliance  
Diversity & Inclusion Team Co-Lead

At 4 years old, he witnessed his mom operating lithography machines – the ones that created the computer chips – and he was hooked. That experience propelled him into the STEM field.

More than 50 years later, Mr. Robinson gave testimony to the House's Subcommittee for Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, & Innovation.



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## PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

- 22| Dr. Celia Merzbacher  
Executive Director of the Quantum Economic Development Consortium (QED-C), Managed by SRI International**

This trailblazer's career started in material science research for the Department of the Navy. There, Dr. Merzbacher researched nanoscience and the ability to control materials at the scale of atoms. As the science matured, so did the applications – from lasers to networks for securely transmitting quantum information. Today, the possibilities seem endless.

## TRANSPORTATION & LOGISTICS

- 28| Mark Massicotte  
President,  
L'Anse Manufacturing, Inc.  
28| Gilles Fouquart  
Business Development Director,  
L'Anse Manufacturing, Inc.**

This trailblazing team has known each other for more than 30 years. They may tell you differently, but having spent some time with them, I believe the secret to their success is humor and deep respect for their team. LMI is a defense aerospace manufacturing company with a strong belief that rural communities have valuable untapped resources.

## YOUNG DISRUPTOR

- 32| Angela Nguyen  
Marketing Manager,  
HUBZone Contractors National Council & Board Member, HUBZone Council, Inc.**

This young trailblazer is a master of IT improvisation. Ms. Nguyen is known for coming up with ways to enhance the Council's media footprint. Whether she is designing Airtables to match HUBZone Companies with job seekers or creating frameworks for digital publications (like the 21 Days of HUBZones), Ms. Nguyen is quickly making her mark on the HUBZone Program with social media campaigns that educate the nation on its economic impact.

## TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

- 30| Nicholas Koopalethes  
CEO,  
Global Broadband Solutions (GBS)**

Trailblazing has taken Mr. Koopalethes from Antarctica to the Kwajalein Atoll in the South Pacific, inventing several critical patents along the way. Since 1998, his company has been providing expertise to the federal government for the development, installation, maintenance, and administration of undersea cable systems.

## THROWBACK

- Partner, KBS Group  
34| Senator Kit Bond**

"Get with the gang! This is a program that will reward you for hiring people who need to be hired. To do a job the federal government needs. What could be more simple than that!"

## PASSING THE PUCK

- 34| Revitalize American Manufacturing**

Executive Order 14005, *Ensuring the Future is Made in America by All of America's Workers*, launching a whole-of-government initiative to strengthen the use of federal procurement to support American manufacturing.



# ASSOCIATION TECHNOLOGY



**Dr. Willie Sanders,**  
Founder & Executive  
Director, Pass IT On, and  
Clinical Assistant  
Professor,  
Department of Computer &  
Information Sciences  
Towson University



**Lamont Norwood,**  
Board Member, Pass IT On  
CEO of Strategic  
Government Solutions

This trailblazer used his initial failures to blaze a trail for others to follow. Pass IT On is located in a HUBZone community in the heart of Baltimore City. It has one big vision: providing technology education to all. Dr. Sanders truly believes that race, class, or socioeconomic status – or whether people view you as a celebrity or a bum – should not impact your technology literacy, let alone a career in IT.

Dr. Sanders is the middle child of five, and was expected to be the next IT Whiz Kid. His hardworking single-parent mother was counting on it. She had struggled, working three jobs to make sure that her children could succeed. With her son's 3.6 GPA and acceptance to college, that vision was about to become a reality. But that reality changed when Dr. Sanders' journey was almost derailed because of the disparities in technology education in his public high school. He showed up eager to learn but ill-prepared for what he would be facing. Dr. Sanders quickly fell behind, unable to keep up with the rest of the students or connect with his professors. Each semester became more difficult and Dr. Sanders started to believe he couldn't do it – so he dropped out of college.

Thank goodness, his mom did not give up. She started working to build back his

confidence. When he attended Towson University in 1998, they only offered a Computer Science degree anchored in programming. His mother suggested that there might be other technology areas in which he might excel. Eventually, she connected him with a program that introduced him to a different type of computer technology. It was called computer networking. Dr. Sanders had always been a hands-on learner: breaking stuff and putting it back together was his passion. When they introduced him to computer networks and hardware, something clicked. A key was turned, changing the whole trajectory of his life. He had suddenly found his niche. He recalls telling his mother, "this is somewhere I could fit into, information technology." Dr. Sanders has been studying those pathways ever since, from independent studies and certifications all the way to his Doctorate of Science (D.Sc.).



Lamont Norwood (on the left), Willie Sanders (middle-left) and volunteers at Lansdowne Middle School

## Exposure Is Critical

Dr. Sanders' first certification landed him a job at the IRS as an IT federal contractor. As he met more and more black and brown people in the field, he discovered that his journey wasn't unique. Other people had gone through the same struggles. Did they have a mom like his? This is when the vision for Pass IT On came into focus. What if he could educate and mentor people to break that crazy cycle so they too could enjoy a 6-figure income? How could Dr. Sanders help them stay on the trail without the detours?

He decided to create an organization that would expose people in different ways to information technology. He is now a professor in the Computer & Information Sciences Department at Towson University in Towson, Maryland – the very school he had dropped out of because of his IT exposure. Along the way, he asked his Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity brother Lamont Norwood to join his Board of Directors. That act exposed him to the HUBZone Council and the work we are doing around the country.

Mr. Norwood's story was a little different. He finished at Towson University but ended up frustrated and took the only job he could get, which was reading gas and electric meters in the City of Baltimore. This trailblazer's journey changed with a chance meeting with his uncle in the middle of the day. The discussion led to him sharing his job quest, and his uncle immediately connected him to a federal employer. That exposure resulted in Mr. Norwood working for the Defense Department as a Contracting Specialist.

## Bartering Makes a Difference

Dr. Sanders has figured out a workaround to the funding challenges of Pass IT On. He developed an arrangement with another association, the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET). In exchange for facility space and equipment, Pass IT On became MCVET's IT Service provider. Dr. Sanders and his team provide the necessary services to keep MCVET operational 24/7. Instead of trying to tackle the IT literacy problem alone, Pass IT On partners with other organizations who are serving similar populations (homeless, disadvantaged youth, underemployed, career changers), bartering to leverage their talents.

## Feeding a Non-Profit

A federal retired National Program Manager for Direct Procurement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Mr. Norwood has one major regret from those days: that he could never get his agency to reach the 3% HUBZone goal, no matter how

hard he pushed. He is still passionate about the HUBZone Program and found a great ally in Dr. Sanders. COVID hit the funding for Pass IT On hard. Their donors dried up, but not the IT training demand. The Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act provides state-administered training contracts, which measure success by job placements. These trailblazers noticed that very few employers are willing to hire their at-risk graduates. Therefore, Pass IT On will be launching Pay IT Forward as a for-profit HUBZone Business in order to hire these individuals. This HUBZone company will create the IT employment opportunities these untapped resources deserve.



## Importance of Shadowing

Pass IT On has three main programs: Youth Technical Training, Workforce Development, and Empowerment Fellowship. These programs are bringing IT literacy to the DMV area, from integrating music mix and mastering software in Public Schools to infusing technology into the Parks and Recreation Departments. Dr. Sanders, a classically trained opera singer, has made sure that it is more than STEM: it is STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math). Pass IT On provides hands-on training that allows students to shadow the mentors, teachers, and coaches.

Vinod Akunuri, a recent graduate of the 32-week intensive Empowerment Fellowship Program, is now a trainer in Pass IT On's Community Literacy Program. Mr. Akunuri considers Pass IT On a life-changing experience; he is part of a bigger family. It is clear that this young disrupter is about to influence the next generation of savants, having just graduated from Towson University with a major in Information Technology and a minor in Applied Adults Disabilities Studies. He has become part of the next generation of Pass IT On advocates.

To find out more about how you can support Pass IT On click here [\[Donate | passitonmd\]](#).