Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson
Office of Communications

2021 STATE OF THE STATE SPECIAL GUESTS

During the 2021 State of the State Address, Governor Mike Parson recognized six individuals for their achievements and commitment to the people of Missouri.

Darlene Sowell - President & CEO of Unleashing Potential

Ms. Sowell has been the President and CEO of Unleashing Potential in St. Louis since November 2008. She has more than 30 years of administrative experience in the for-profit and non-profit arenas, most recently serving as the Executive Vice President of Human Resources, Facilities, and Housing programs at UCAN in Chicago. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Notre Dame and a master's degree in management from Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

Denise Carter - Director of Early Childhood Education at Unleashing Potential

Ms. Carter is the Director of Early Childhood Education at Unleashing Potential in St. Louis. A New Orleans native, she has over 25 years of experience in the early childhood field, including managerial roles, oversight of programs, fund development responsibilities, and human resource duties.

Ms. Carter holds a Master of Business Administration from Webster University, a Bachelor of Science from Xavier University of Louisiana, and an Associate of Arts from St. Louis Community College. Ms. Carter has also obtained a Parent Educator Certificate through Missouri Parents as Teachers. She holds a Child Development Associate Certificate from the Center for Professional Recognition and is a certified Professional Development Specialist. In 2020, Ms. Carter received the United 4 Children Childcare Champion Award for her service to and in the field of early childhood education. She is a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, an advisory board member for the T.E.A.C.H. Missouri program, a Troop #2775 Girl Scouts volunteer, and the Windermere Place Association Treasurer. She also holds leadership positions in various other community organizations.

Her passions include advocacy work for families and mentally ill individuals. She and her husband Brian, a math professor, are the proud parents of two children – Brysen (age 15) and Briese (age 11). Their son attends St. Louis Public School – Metro Academic and Classical High School, and their daughter attends St. Frances Cabrini Academy.

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Mallory Fox - Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant Recipient

Ms. Fox is a nursing student at East Central College in Rolla. She has also been employed by Phelps Health Hospital as a scope tech for the past three years. Prior to joining Phelps Health, Ms. Fox attended Butler County Community College where she earned an associate degree. She has worked in health care as a CNA, CMT, EMT, 911 dispatcher, and long-term care community manager.

Ms. Fox's life goal has always been to pursue a career in nursing. She would like to become a traveling nurse and potentially obtain a nurse practitioner license. She credits a school email for introducing her to the Fast Track program and says the financial support will help her family reach their financial goals and her reach her personal career goals. Her advice to other adults is to "just do it." Pay attention and get it done. Ms. Fox lives in Rolla with her husband Bryan, their daughter Piper, and their dogs Harry and Gracie.

Briana Tyler - Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant Recipient

Ms. Tyler is a student at State Fair Community College. She would like to become a traveling nurse so she can combine two of her passions – helping people and seeing the world. With the help of the Fast Track program, Ms. Tyler was able to return to school after 10 years. She hopes to finish the RN program and then bridge to MSN. Ms. Tyler feels that she owes Fast Track everything because it helped her realize her educational goals and work towards a successful future.

Ms. Tyler started college a decade ago in her home state of Louisiana but was never able to finish due to financial restraints. She decided to move to Missouri to take advantage of the significantly lower cost of living and access to a less expensive education. She enrolled at State Fair Community College to pursue a degree in nursing. Despite working hard to save for her education, the money ran out before her tuition was fully paid. Ms. Tyler is thankful that Fast Track has allowed her to finally follow the path she always knew she wanted to take. She is currently employed as an LPN at Royal Oaks Hospital in Windsor while she finishes the RN program.

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Gary Hill - Chief of Police for Lincoln University Police Department

Chief Gary Hill has been with the Lincoln University Police Department since December 2016. He is also the Director of the Lincoln University Law Enforcement Training Academy. Chief Hill started his criminal justice career as a corrections officer at the Jefferson City Correctional Center in 1996 and joined the Cole County Sheriff's Office in 1998. He was promoted through the ranks from Deputy to Sergeant in 2002 and Sergeant to Lieutenant in 2005. He then served as Patrol Division Commander for last 12 years of his tenure until November 2016.

Chief Hill came to Jefferson City from Muskogee, Oklahoma, to attend Lincoln University where he graduated in 2001 with a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice. He then received a master's degree in administration of criminal justice agencies from Columbia College and is currently a Criminal Justice Doctoral candidate at Northcentral University. Chief Hill is also a 2009 graduate of the 239th FBI National Academy Class in Quantico, Virginia.

Chief Hill served on the Cole County Sheriff's Office SWAT Team from 2001 to 2016, including Commander from 2005 until 2016. He also played an intricate role in establishing the Central Missouri Tactical Officers Association, serving as Vice President from 2013 to 2016. Chief Hill was awarded the Law Enforcement Commendation Medal from the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution and was appointed to the Missouri Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission by Governor Parson in 2020.

Chief Hill is a member of the Missouri Police Chiefs Association and the FBI National Academy Associates. He has been involved with numerous organizations in the Jefferson City community:

- Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated (1996-Present)
- Capital City Boys and Girls Club Board Member (2008-Present)
- Jefferson City Crime Stoppers Law Enforcement Liaison (2012-Present),
- Missouri Task Force on Children's Justice (2012-2014)
- Disciples of Christ Youth Outreach Program Board Member (2011-2013)
- Jefferson City Public Schools Character Plus Program Committee Member (2010)
- Blair Oaks High School Assistant Football Coach (2005-2012)
- Optimist Club Officer of the Year (2005)

Chief Hill has been married to his wife Candie Hill for 14 years. They have two daughters, Gabriella Grace (12 years old) and Amani (26 years old), and one son, Steven Anthony (21 years old).

Cindy Sheets - Registered Nurse at Truman Medical Center in Kansas City

Ms. Sheets, RN BSN MHA, is currently the Senior Director of Cardiovascular Services for Truman Medical Centers (TMC) in Kansas City, Missouri. Ms. Sheets has been with TMC for 10 years and a registered nurse for 24 years. Prior to working at TMC, she worked as a charge nurse in a medical telemetry unit providing care to cardiac patients.

Over the past 11 months, Ms. Sheets has worked alongside three other TMC directors forming an amazing team to provide services to TMC patients and the local community. These services include setting up and maintaining two COVID-19 testing sites at TMC's hospitals, providing community testing via the TMC mobile unit for underprivileged populations, and initiating monoclonal therapies for COVID-19 positive patients. Ms. Sheets and her team are also currently involved in COVID-19 vaccination efforts, which includes providing vaccines to Missouri residents as quickly as possible while following the appropriate tiers outlined by the state of Missouri.

Ms. Sheets has never doubted her decision to become a nurse. Early on in her career, she volunteered at a hospital watching the nursing staff use empathy and compassion to care for their patients. COVID-19 has brought those feelings of empathy and compassion back to the forefront for Cindy as she helps TMC patients and her community deal with daily fears and concerns. Cindy takes pride in knowing that she has been able to contribute in some way to Missouri's COVID-19 efforts over the past 11 months.

In addition to being a nurse, Cindy loves spending time with her family – her husband Rodney, who has been so patient and caring during the many long hours spent at work, and her three daughters, Savannah, Megan, and Tori. Cindy's family brings her the joy and love she needs to rest her mind and soul after a long week and help her prepare for the next new challenge.