

# Opening a World of **Possibilities**



GIVING BACK





INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED

**D**eena Pierott is the Founder and Executive Director of the award-winning [iUrban Teen Tech Program](#) for “non-traditional” STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students, ages 13 to 18. The program exposes students to career opportunities while encouraging them to graduate from high school and pursue additional education and training. In August 2013, she was invited to the White House in Washington, D.C. to receive the Champions of Innovation Tech Inclusion Award.

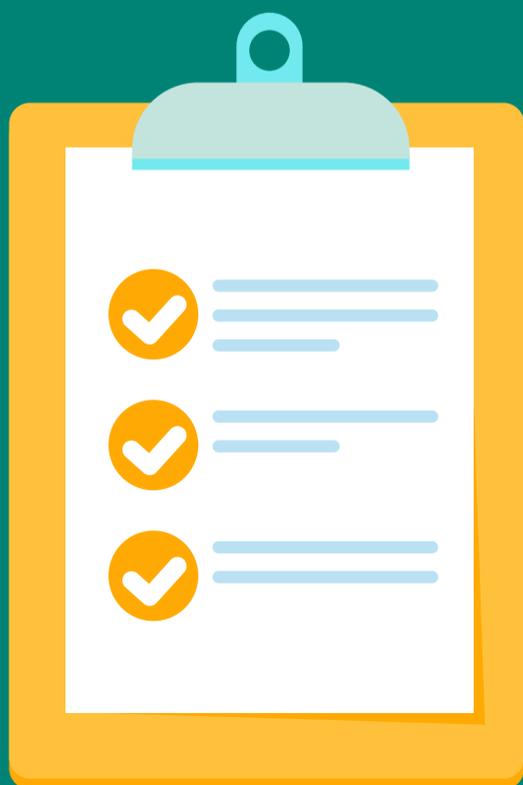
The program consists of an all-day summit featuring hands-on workshops, tours of industry leading businesses and courses in leadership development. While operating for less than three years, the iUrban Tech Teen program has already encouraged more than 800 youth in the Pacific Northwest to pursue STEM education and, potentially, professional careers.

The program introduces them to a world rich with possibilities. Young people who struggle with school dare to dream. After one day, they can picture themselves as engineers, teachers, and software designers. It changes their entire experience of school and learning because they can see new possibilities for their futures.

Deena was moved to create the program while serving in a governor-appointed role on the Commission on African Affairs in Washington State. They were tasked with finding ways to reverse the alarming increase in the high school dropout rate.

**“Technology is so cool and innovative... but information is key. Often, the marginalized communities these young people come from don’t have access to education and career information.**

We can create a program that would provide that. I wanted it on a university campus because a lot of these youth have never been on a campus before. I wanted them to be able to feel that and breathe that in and see them selves there one day, recalls Deena.”



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The first annual summit was in October of 2010 at Washington State University. Other partners include the University of Portland and Lake Washington Institute of Technology. iUrban just finalized an agreement with City University of Seattle and their summit will be held in the spring. Now, iUrban is poised to extend its reach throughout the western United States and beyond, encouraging youth to pursue further education while also helping to fill a shortage of STEM professionals in the United States.

After each Tech Summit, iUrban takes students on Tech Tours to companies like Nike, Daimler, U.S. Fish and Wild Life, so they can take a deeper dive and see how these organizations and their employees use technology. This gives them a hands-on look at that career opportunity. These three-to-four-

hour tours are held throughout the year.

iUrban also includes a program called iUrban Code Camp where students learn to do coding. The newest addition to the program is iUrban Speech, which is a junior Toastmasters program.

Being chosen for the [Champions of Change](#) award by the White House was a profound experience for Deena. “When I went back there and stood in front of the White House, I just looked at it and realized this is really happening. I had to kind of soak it all in.”

That day, she went to a closed door meeting between White House staffers and some of the other Champions of Change. They shared about their programs, both their accomplishments and challenges. “It was inspiring to be in a group of peers who are doing things for youth,” adds Deena.

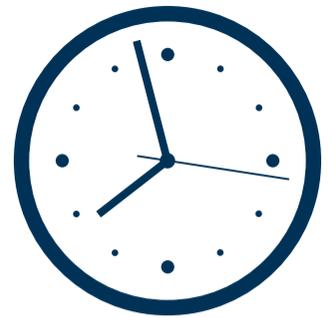
The Champions of Change Award quickly triggered other honors. The program was immediately written up in Black Enterprise Magazine. It was nominated for a Rockefeller Innovation Award. They didn't win, but Deena appreciated the high honor of being nominated with so many programs from around the globe.

Then came the Ebony Magazine Power 100 List of most influential African Americans in the U.S. Deena was listed as an Emerging Leader. "To be on this list with the likes of Oprah Winfrey, Magic Johnson, Serena Williams and some of the others, I feel truly blessed. It was so cool. There I was with all these celebrities and they were so down-to-earth and gracious. I felt like Cinderella. I loved it, she exclaims."

Even so, Deena believes the greatest blessing of all this attention is that it was the parents of the students in the iUrban Teen Tech Program nominated her for the Champions of Change Award.

"The Teen Tech Program is a big part of that inclusion and equity mosaic. It's my greatest professional achievement," she proudly declares.

# Where It All Began



**D**eena Pierott became an entrepreneur 10 years ago, after having had an extensive career in both the public and private sectors. She says it was the school of hard knocks that prepared her to go into the field of diversity recruitment and equity.

She trained for a career in healthcare. Almost immediately, she realized she didn't like it. She was getting sick all the time and couldn't stand the sight of blood. It simply didn't work for her. Looking back, she realizes that it actually did work, because she was helping people.

She left healthcare and started doing office work, progressing from administrative assistant to executive assistant to administrative manager positions. She earned a living but was never fulfilled by her work.

Fulfillment came with volunteering in the community. She became a community advocate with a very deep network. Deena Pierott was the person people would come to for information. She was the

connector in the community. And she enjoyed doing that more than anything else.

"When I was at the City of Portland, I noticed the disparity around diversity. That's when I really started taking that deeper dive into diversity, equity and inclusion and started creating things at the City like the Human Relations Commission which is now their Office of Equity. I created a series of affinity groups at the City: the African American Employee Network, the Latino Network, and the Single Moms Network," she says.

She sold City officials on the idea that employees need to have a voice. Those programs are still going strong. She also encouraged diverse interview panels for candidate interviews and diverse evaluators for contract submittals. That was more than ten years ago. Deena was always creating something that would foster equity. So it was a natural transition for her to go into diversity consulting and recruiting. She's still the conduit for making these kinds of programs and initiatives happen.

“I didn’t realize until later in life that all that changing up and creating things was actually an expression of my entrepreneurial spirit. I was always the “change agent.” Now I have several businesses running at the same time. Even though they’re multiple brands, the foundation is equity, diversity and inclusion. Best of all - they interconnect and become part of a beautiful mosaic that is my passion.”





I really wish that when I was younger, that I would have sought a mentor, or someone would have seen something in me and mentored me to have my own business. I've always been in places where I had all these analytical type of jobs but I was drawn to the creative side. I kept trying to create something out of nothing at these places," she says recalling the many uphill battles. "And I didn't realize I was being entrepreneurial until I took that leap of faith and jumped out there and did it," she asserts.

Ten years ago, she started her first business, [Mosaic Blueprint](#), a boutique firm specializing in recruiting and on-boarding, multicultural communications, outplacement services and career counseling.

Her second enterprise is [Mosaic Metier](#), an on-line job board that provides companies with the opportunity to share their

job announcements with a vast network of top diversity candidates.

Another program she launched just this year is called the Portland Metro Employment Diversity Network. She also runs the Urban Entrepreneurs Network. "We used to have monthly meetings and we'd have quarterly business networking events. It was too much."

Now she will be holding annual Urban Summits in partnership with Mercy Corps NW. The first one will be in early February in downtown Portland.

Some people think Deena is doing too much. She counters by explaining that the core of everything she does is diversity, equity and inclusion. Both Mosaic Blueprint Diversity Recruiting & Consulting and iUrban Teen Tech, are creating a pipeline of diverse talent in technology. The Urban Entrepreneurs Network works to open doors for minority businesses. And the Portland Metro Diversity Employment Network is helping HR Managers and Corporate Recruiters understand diversity recruiting and on-boarding. Mosaic Metier and the Portland Metro Diversity Employment Network are under the Mosaic Blueprint umbrella. The iUrban Teen Tech program is under the Urban Entrepreneurs umbrella. They're not completely separate and they flow together as a beautiful mosaic.

There is no typical day for Deena because it can change in an instant. "You can go from zero to 50 in no time flat. You can be down one minute because a deal didn't work out or someone who said they would call didn't, and the next minute someone else calls with a brand new opportunity. Sometimes it's jagged, sometimes it's a roller coaster ride," she adds.

On a usual day when everything's going well she wakes up and spends at least an hour in what she calls her own meditation. She began this morning routine because she needed to have some down time to meditate and reflect, "Without that, you lose your creativity," she adds.

She uses this time to reflect on what her day was like the day before, what she could have done differently or what was OK. She'll look at what else she can do. Then she makes her coffee and reads the newspaper before strolling over to her home office and turning the computer on.

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“Once I turn the computer on, I am pretty much stuck for the whole day with answering emails or on a conference call or setting up meetings or following up with other people. There is so much involved with putting on an event and usually I will have more than one event going on at the same time. Planning, following up with someone, marketing. That’s usually what I do on a typical day if I don’t have meetings,” she shares.

**O**n the days that are consumed with meetings, she sees new clients, her board for iUrban, and parents. In between meetings Deena is setting up Portland Diversity Employment Network meetings, booking speakers, and setting the agenda.

“That’s usually what a day or a week or month looks like for me. I’ve been traveling a lot lately, going to the White House in August, coming back and two weeks later flying to New York for the Women in Tech Conference and two weeks after that flying back to New York for the Ebony Magazine event. This last quarter has been very exciting,” she beams.

Being an older entrepreneur, Deena was 45 when she took the leap and started her first company, she thinks there is a difference than when you start a business in your 20’s or 30’s,

because, “you’re a little bit wiser about the relationships, about building them and how important relationships are and how we value people. And I am using all of the experience from working in different offices and organizations and understanding all the different cultures and processes.

“I could have done this at a younger age,” she adds. “But I don’t think it would have been as rewarding as it is for me now. I’m glad that I was able to have a more stable career path while I was raising my children. This work as an entrepreneur, you are working 24-7. There is no down time. I could not have done this at this pace when my sons were little. I would not have traded that experience of raising them and being with them for this. I would not have traded it. That’s another benefit of doing this now. If you are younger with a family, it really takes a toll. It takes a lot of time away from your family if you allow it to. I’m not saying

it’s impossible, but it can. I don’t have that concern at this age,” she says with a knowing smile.

**E**ven after she became an entrepreneur, Deena’s family continues to be her most important priority. “This is going to sound kind of corny. My greatest personal achievement was to be able to take care of my mother in her later years with her health issues until she passed away and still run the business,” she says with pride tinged by sadness.

Her next personal achievements are her two sons. The oldest, Raymond Pierott, Jr. is 26. Her younger son is 19 year-old Alexander Pierott. Deena’s oldest son and his wife have presented her with her first grand child, “Who is my heart walking outside of my chest. She’s 15 months old. I see so much of myself in her that it’s scary,” Deena gushes.

# What's Next?

**F**or iUrban, what's next is taking it national. She's unsure if that means franchising it out or licensing it to different universities.

For Mosaic she's thinking about focusing only on the job board and letting go of the diversity consulting and executive coaching. She wound down the executive coach piece about two years ago and just had the job board while she was developing the iUrban.

Urban Entrepreneurs works really well as an annual program done in partnership with Mercy Corps NW. That program will likely continue as it is.

The Portland Metro Diversity Employment Network is a project she is also very passionate about because it gives diverse candidates opportunities to get in front of HR Managers. Those meetings are held at different companies and at the end diverse candidates come in and do a pitch. They say who they are, what their skill sets are, what they're looking for and the value they bring to an organization. They are getting call backs, getting interviewed and they are getting hired!

"That program has gotten some interest in Salem, the state capitol. And we are going to start it there. Once I get it started the companies all pitch

in and keep it moving forward so that's not a big time bandit for me," adds Deena.

Her secret to being effective is to watch both time bandits and time vampires. Deena tries to work smarter and not harder. "And that's why I love this program. It fills a need, a void. So many of these companies and corporate recruiters are interested in how they can improve their diversity recruiting outreach. And once they've hired them, they want to know how to retain that diverse talent. They are so interested in that they help to move it forward and grow it. It's not so much time out of my day," explains Deena.

No matter what Deena Pierott is working on or creating, you can count on her to open new worlds of possibility and opportunity for people of color, with disabilities, struggling to rise out of poverty or any other barrier or stereotype.



**Susan Bender Phelps** is a speaker and trainer who runs odyssey mentoring and leadership. her new

book *Aspire higher* tells compelling true stories of career and business mentoring success.

