

VIEWPOINT

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Summer Bridge program participants display their certificates at the end of the Lancaster Promise Neighborhood/USC Lancaster collaboration. From left are USCL college mentor Lyrik Mitchell, student Andrew Caughman, Dr. Angela Moss, student Mikaylah Quattlebaum and Summer Bridge assistant Donika Quattlebaum.

Summer Bridge a good experience

My experience with the Lancaster Promise Neighborhood/University of South Carolina Lancaster Summer Bridge program was more than I expected it to be. There are many words I could use to describe this program, but the two that are most fitting are educational and encouraging.

I say this program was very educational because there were speakers/professors who came in from the USCL campus that spoke about various topics such as clubs/organizations, importance of good writing components, carefully taking on our desired career path, mathematics, plus must-haves as we take on college, life and everything in between.

There were also speakers from outside of campus who spoke on the benefits of community service, the importance of mental health, and dismantling the stigma around therapy and counseling that so many of us struggle with. I found it reassuring to know there were professional counselors with a deep interest in helping me navigate life's challenges.

As someone who has no job experience, I learned that volunteering in my community would be a great way to find my passion in life.

Each of the topics that were talked about were significant to me because



Summer Bridge students participated in a scavenger hunt of landmarks in the Historic Downtown Lancaster during the program. From left are students Destiny Mitchell and Mikaylah Quattlebaum, USCL college mentor Lyrik Alexander-Mitchell, student Andrew Caughman and Summer Bridge assistant Donika Quattlebaum.

I apply them to my life. How do they apply? As an incoming college



Mikaylah Quattlebaum

student, I was able to gain prior knowledge about the importance of having a plan that lays out a path to achieving my goals, the importance of making connections, and how being organized is the key to becoming successful.

Not only did the Summer Bridge experience teach me college tips, but it also taught me real-life tips. Among other things, I was given more information on how to make a cover letter, enhance my resume for submitting to employers, and how to build confidence with speaking in public.

With the help of Dr. Angela Moss, Donika "Nika" Quattlebaum and Lyrik Alexander-Mitchell, I felt heard and understood in the group.

I was never ignored and the lectures that they each gave were informational and always interesting to listen to.

A few that stood out to me were Alexander-Mitchell's lecture about keeping up with your health, which is commonly forgotten in college because you get so focused on academics, being employed and maintaining a social life, and getting involved within the campus.

Another component of the Summer Bridge program was the team building exercises presented by Quattlebaum. These exercises helped us to realize that we had much more that common than what divided us. This is important because having a support system on campus is vital to a healthy mind.

Moss focused on the importance of maintaining our academic skills, which would help us to

have a better college experience.

Once again, I can't express how many rich experiences and connections this program had for me. Our cohort went on scavenger hunts, toured the Native American Studies Center and traveled to Dave & Buster's. These trips were not only fun, but they were deeply educational, while encouraging us to use our social skills such as patience, focus, communication, active listening, cooperation and more.

This was the first year of the Summer Bridge program, but it was also a remarkably successful one. I hope to be a peer mentor with this program next summer and encourage all Lancaster High School graduates to take advantage of next year's Promise Neighborhood/USCL Summer Bridge program.

Mikaylah Quattlebaum is a recent Lancaster High School graduate.

How you can help to strengthen our democracy

Editor's note: This column was first published Aug. 5 in The Statehouse Report. It is reprinted here with the author's permission.

If there's anything that stood out in (last) week's scathing criminal indictments of former President Donald Trump for trying to overturn the 2020 election, it's how serious the threat was to American democracy.

Now that Trump, the leading GOP candidate for president in 2024, will face a reckoning on his attempt to keep power in 2020, you may wonder what can be done to buttress our democracy and make it stronger in the years ahead, so that what happened on Jan. 6, 2021, doesn't happen again.

The answer comes from two words: You and participation.

If we are to reinvigorate American democracy, we must be intentional about strengthening our communities from neighborhoods to towns, counties and states.

Consider your local bookshop. Not only is it a place where you can find entertainment and new ideas, but local booksellers spend an enormous amount of time curating a selection of books to appeal to and inform their communities. Yes, they want to sell books, but they know that if they pick books that reflect their community's spirit and mores, they'll pull people together, launch discussions and help residents to see things in new ways — all of which strengthen community ties and democratic values.

"Independent bookstores foster democracy by providing meaningful backstop to misinformation, disinformation and censorship," said Charleston bookseller Julian Buxton, co-owner of Buxton Books.

Libraries are much the same. Go to one soon and you'll see how the professionals have displays of books to engage your brain by offering interesting, relevant topics about what's going on.

So here's a short list, in no particular order, of how you can proactively promote democracy by getting off the couch and getting more involved in your community:

Read banned books. If somebody doesn't want you to read "To Kill a Mockingbird" or some other classic, it's because there are ideas in there that scare them — and might get you to think. Do you really want somebody else telling you what you can and can't read?

Support local newspapers. They are incubators of community

values and are vital knitters for keeping the fabric of a community strong. But if you don't advertise with them or subscribe to the newspaper, it can't stay in business. Two of South Carolina's 46 counties no longer have weekly newspapers.



Andy Brack

In neighboring Georgia, 16 of 159 counties no longer have newspapers. Imagine what's not happening there as a force that pulls people together?

Volunteer somewhere. Get out of your comfort zone and find a place where you can join with other people and help with something you care about. It will deepen your sense of community, which will make democracy stronger.

Reduce social media. If you rely on Facebook and other outlets' algorithms to push information they think you will like, you'll miss a lot of stuff that could change your mind on issues. Get out of the echo chamber. And guard against foreign-owned media outlets that may be pushing disinformation and misinformation.

Be cautious about hot-button issues. The current rage finds conservatives going nuts over "wokism," which is nothing more than a modern-day way to scare you that somebody is trying to take away your guns, values, job or insert the appropriate outrage. But think more deeply. If they don't want you to be awake, they are really saying they want you to be asleep. Why? So they can do what they want without you paying attention. There's no way that's going to be good for democracy.

Get involved in the political process. Vote. Work or give money to candidates. Write letters to the editor. Contact your local, state or federal representative when you don't agree. Attend public meetings to hold public officials accountable.

Respect the rights of others. Just as you may not want to be told how to think or act, others may feel the same about their beliefs or behaviors. Don't engage in issue-related road rage or the similar grumpy codger syndrome. Listen to other perspectives and have civil engagements.

There are dozens of other ways that you can promote democracy. What would you suggest?

Andy Brack, the editor and publisher of the Charleston City Paper and Statehouse Report, was recently named first-place winner for political columnists in the 2023 national contest by the Association of Alternative Newsmedia. He was also named the best columnist in the state this year by the S.C. Press Association.

COMING EVENTS

American Legion Fair: 5-10 p.m. weekdays and 1-10 p.m. weekends through Aug. 19 at the American Legion Fairground, 823 S. Main St., Lancaster. Fair food, games and carnival rides. Admission is \$7 for ages 10 and up, ages 9 and under get in free. All attendees under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. For details, call 803-283-2394.

Chief Roper's Hoops for Hope: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Aug. 12 at the Gay Street basketball courts, 309 E. Gay St., Lancaster. Hosted by the Lancaster Police Department, there will be a team tournament, 3-point shootout, dunking contest, free throw contest and prizes for winners, along with food trucks and vendors. Free for spectators, \$5 tournament entry fee and \$10 per team fee. For tickets,

visit www.eventbrite.com/e/chief-roper-and-the-lancaster-pds-hoops-for-hope-tickets.

Teen financial literacy workshop: 10 a.m.-noon Aug. 12 at the Lancaster County Community Center, 508 E. Meeting St., Lancaster. Sherrell "The Homegirl" Wright will teach teens about financial literacy, including budgeting and saving, basic banking, credit and its importance and more.

Fish and chicken fry: 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Aug. 12 at the United Citizens Community Center, 678 Hart St., Heath Springs. Fish and chicken plates are \$10, hot dog plates are \$7. Sandwiches, drinks and sides also available. Proceeds will help maintain the building; all donations are tax deductible. For details, call 803-286-8726.

Budgeting and Financial Freedom: 6 p.m. Aug. 12 at First Baptist Church, 210 N. Matson St., Kershaw. Presented by KARE and First Citizens Bank, the free public program will focus on credit, debt and budget planning. Attendees will receive dinner and a gift card to The Exchange by KARE. To register, contact KARE at 803-416-2197 or olivia@kershawkare.org.

OneBlood drive: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Aug. 13 at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, 7095 Waxhaw Highway, Lancaster. To make an appointment, visit www.oneblood.org or call 888-9-DONATE (936-6283).

American Red Cross blood drives: • Aug. 14, 2:30-6:30 p.m., White Springs Baptist Church, 1249 Grace Ave., Lancaster • Sept. 8, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m.,

Buford Recreation Center, 4073 Hurley Walters Road, Lancaster

To make an appointment, visit redcrossblood.org or call 800-733-2767.

KVLT talk on bats: Join Katawba Valley Land Trust to learn about bats with S.C. Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Jennifer Kindel at 7 p.m. Aug. 16 at the Carole Ray Dowling Center, 509 Hubbard Drive, Lancaster. For details, call 803-285-5801 or visit www.kvlt.org.

Finally Friday: Free concert featuring NTac and Gritty Flyright bands 6-10 p.m. Aug. 18 at the corner of South Main and East Gay streets in downtown Lancaster, with food trucks, hot rods and a beer and wine garden. Final performance is Phazar and Electric Dynamite on Sept. 15.