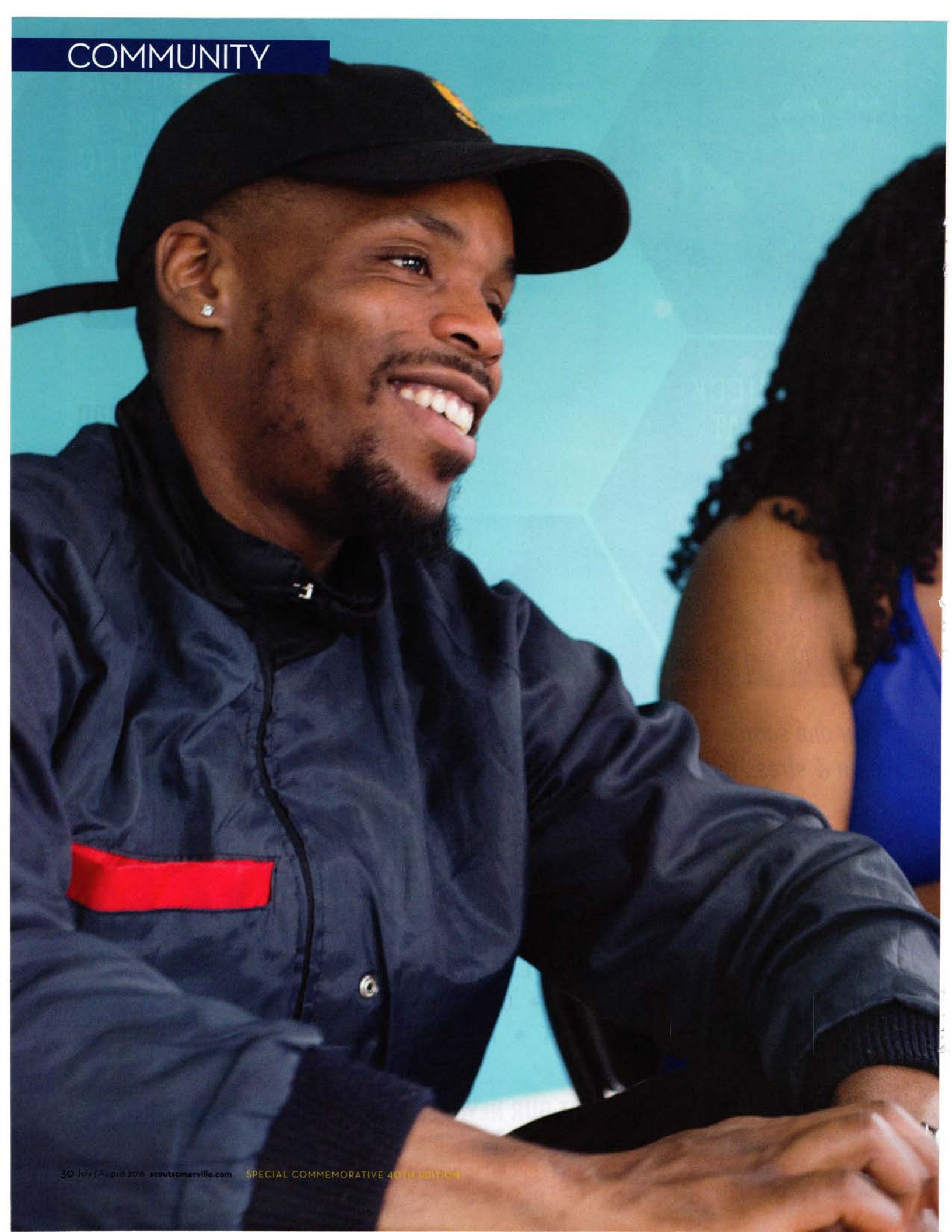


COMMUNITY







# IT TAKES A 'VILLE-AGE



## GETTING TO KNOW 40 LOCAL LEADERS WHO ARE SHAPING SOMERVILLE'S FUTURE

BY EMILY CASSEL, ELIZA ROSENBERRY AND KATHERINE RUGG

### 01 SERGIO AND SASSY ESTANY ASSOCIATE PROGRAM COORDINATORS, SOMERVILLE CENTER FOR TEEN EMPOWERMENT

A few years ago, Somerville's Center for Teen Empowerment (TE) was in trouble, down to just two staffers: Danny McLaughlin and Sassy Estany. "And I was part-time, but I was definitely doing way more than part-time," Sassy laughs. "It was a lot."

Undeterred, Sassy helped work to rebuild the program. She and McLaughlin sent countless emails, made scores of phone calls and got out into the community, connecting with the city, other activists and neighborhood groups to show how important Teen Empowerment's work was.

"TE was the program that gave us the platform and the understanding of how to critically think about our surroundings and the social interactions we had in our everyday lives," says her brother, Sergio, who today works alongside his sister as an associate program coordinator. "We just kind of stuck around. We always knew the door was open."

Sergio and Sassy say that Somerville's young people are wise beyond their years. They speak intelligently and thoughtfully about issues that are of concern to them—racism, drug addiction, gentrification, mental health. "Their way of thinking is beyond me, sometimes," Sassy says. "I'm just like, man, maybe you should be in this position."

For this dynamic sibling duo, the job is often as simple as being there for their teens, many of whom don't have someone they can talk with and relate to on these issues. "We always think it's, in a sense, so simple. Why don't people just do that? Why aren't people just nice and caring?" asks Sassy. "But that's because we've had figures like us," adds Sergio. "It's like a ripple effect ... it makes you appreciate the program that much more."

It's why many Somerville teens return to Teen Empowerment year after year—and why many, like Sergio and Sassy, continue to do important work with the organization as full-time staff members after participating in their youth.

01

PHOTO BY JESS BENJAMIN





02

## 02 BUG FOUNDER, BUG'S BIKES

When we meet Bug, he's looking very stylish in a Superman shirt and cape. But a few minutes later, he turns to his parents, Kelly and Steve. "I should have worn a Bug's Bikes shirt!"

Bug is a strategic salesman and a dedicated professional. He's also only seven years old. He and his parents run a 501(c)(3) charity called Bug's Bikes, which raises money to help differently-abled children and their families purchase adaptive bicycles, like Bug's own. Bug is visually impaired and has medical complexities and high-functioning autism—but nothing stops him from riding his bike, which has three wheels, a seat belt and a seatback. Adaptive bicycles come with a variety of features depending on the child.

Bug's Bikes has raised money to provide bicycles to seven overjoyed recipients in the Greater Boston area, plus three more as part of a collaborative program with Franciscan Children's Hospital. Bug and his parents say there's no feeling like telling a family they'll be receiving a bike—particularly because these bikes are more than just toys. An adaptive bicycle often marks the first opportunity for an entire family to go on rides together, and hospitals and other programs use adaptive bikes for therapy to help kids build strength. But insurance companies consider the bikes a "luxury" expense and don't help with costs, which can run upwards of \$800—a prohibitive expense for many families.

Community support has been integral to their success so far, according to Bug's parents. Businesses including Kelly's Diner, the Winter Hill Community School, Maxwell's Green, East Cambridge Savings Bank and the local police and fire departments have supported their cause. At one lemonade stand, Somerville Fire Department trucks drove by throughout the day to take photos and show support. "Bug was over the moon," Kelly says. With the support of his parents and Bug's own unending enthusiasm, things are going strong. They hope to expand the nonprofit; their goal is to consistently raise enough money to give away multiple bikes a month.

When Bug originally met with the Maxwell's Green property manager, she asked him why he wanted to give these bikes away. Bug responded so perfectly that they have since adopted his response as their tagline: "Bikes like mine, for kids like me."

*Bug's Bikes will hold their annual lemonade stand fundraiser, featuring lawn games, face painting and more, on Saturday, August 20, at Maxwell's Green. The event is rain or shine, and all are welcome. If you're interested in donating to or volunteering with Bug's Bikes, you can reach out at [bugsbikes.org](http://bugsbikes.org).*

## 03 CHRIS MANCINI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROUNDWORK SOMERVILLE

Groundwork Somerville promotes community building and sustainable environmental practices through youth programming, urban agriculture and other green practices and social engagement efforts. And its executive director, Chris Mancini, is dedicated to all parts of the nonprofit's mission.

Since 2011, Mancini has guided the Groundwork Somerville team through a wide range of projects. It isn't always easy—one of the organization's signature programs, which entails creating green space and gardens in unused lots throughout the city, has become increasingly difficult





as there's less and less open space available. But through strategic direction and partnerships, Mancini is helping Groundwork—and the city—to thrive and grow while embracing these changes.

Mancini's involvement with other organizations like Somerville Food Security and Shape Up Somerville shows his community-minded approach to leadership, with a focus on empowering others. He says that collaborative, outcome-driven work is most meaningful to him as a leader. Somerville youth who participate in Groundwork programs are encouraged to envision themselves as leaders, and Mancini says it's one of the most rewarding parts of his job. "To see a shy kid get up in front of an crowd at an agriculture conference and deliver—it's so great," he says.

Today, one of Mancini's goals is to attract more residents to visit Groundwork's South Street Farm, in the same way they might a city park, by hosting events and improving accessibility.

But the best leaders know their limits. "Having a three-year-old at home who I can't convince to clean up after herself is pretty humbling in the leadership department," Mancini laughs. Even this holds a lesson: "Having a partner and a child is very grounding," he adds, "and I encourage my staff to value and prioritize their family and personal lives."



**04** **MEREDITH LEVY**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, SOMERVILLE COMMUNITY CORPORATION

"We have so many great amenities coming into this community. How do we make sure everyone gets to benefit over the long haul?"

Meredith Levy joined the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) 13 years ago as the organization's director of community organizing. Driven by big-picture urban policy challenges and a desire to work with people, she set out to answer community equity

questions through grassroots work and policy changes. Now, as Deputy Director of SCC, she's working behind the scenes to bring economic opportunities to a diverse population.

"There's just a lot happening here in Somerville," she explains. "It's a dense city, and there are a lot of opportunities. It's a great place to do this work and to build relationships with so many different people."

For Levy, affordable housing has been one of the keys to connecting people to their community. In May, when the city passed the inclusionary zoning policy requiring 20 percent of all new residential development in the city to be affordable, she saw it as the culmination of a decade of hard work. "Somerville has one of the most progressive inclusionary zoning policies in the country now, because of this campaign," she says. "To be in a job for 13 years and to see it happen, it's just gratifying beyond words."

Going forward, Levy hopes to be able to build opportunities for low-income residents beyond affordable housing. She wants people to belong to the culture of the community, to feel connected to a network and, ideally, to become leaders. Considering Somerville's thriving creative economy, she asks, "Wouldn't it be amazing if we could connect that growth with a whole part of our population that doesn't always have access to that world?"



**05** **KAREN NAREFSKY**  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, SOMERVILLE COMMUNITY CORPORATION

As Community Organizer for Somerville Community Corporation, Karen Narefsky spends a lot of her time going to neighborhood events, knocking on doors and talking with Somerville residents.

"It's really about bringing people together and activating that sense of passion and the desire to take leadership," she says, adding with a







06

laugh, “You’d be surprised how many people open their doors and go, ‘Oh, someone wants to talk with me about my community? Okay!’”

Narefsky believes that city and institutional structures can make it hard for members of the community to feel like they can be engaged, which means that knowledge and energy often go untapped. Her job is to find the people who may not even realize their own potential, to help them get involved in their community and to be a part of the decision-making process.

She recalls meeting one woman at a First Source Jobs Program workshop aimed at connecting residents looking for jobs with local employers. Narefsky asked the woman, who had lived in Union Square for eight years, if she had ever been involved in any community organizing. The woman admitted that she hadn’t, but that conversation sparked an interest. “This is someone who goes to school, who works, who’s a parent ... but she became really involved in the Union United Coalition, and she’s developed all of these relationships with people in the community,” says Narefsky. “People recognize her and wave to her on the street. People want to know what her opinion is on a particular issue.”

For Narefsky, tapping into these individuals isn’t just for their personal growth—it’s about strengthening the community by connecting people directly to it.



**06 TUCKER LEWIS AND JEN PARK**  
CO-OWNERS, DIESEL CAFE, BLOC 11, FORGE BAKING COMPANY AND FORGE ICE CREAM BAR

Tucker Lewis and Jen Park met more than 20 years ago when they were working at the now-closed Herrell’s Ice Cream in Harvard Square. They shared an entrepreneurial spirit and wanted to start their own scoop shop. However, concerned that the seasonal ice cream biz was too risky for first-time business owners, they opted instead to open a coffee shop with year-round appeal.

Lewis and Park’s Diesel Cafe welcomed its first customers in 1999. Nine years later, they launched Bloc 11 in Union Square, and Forge Baking Company on Somerville Avenue opened its doors in 2014. From coffee to baked goods to lunch fare, all three locations have become bustling hubs of activity, attracting the work-from-home set, families balancing babies and sandwiches, friends sharing coffee cakes and solo residents taking it all in. Their eateries collaborate whenever possible; all breads and pastries are baked at Forge, the shops have similar coffee programs and Lewis and Park host cross-staff trainings for their more than 100 employees—but the locations have their own identities.

“Each store—as a result of being in a different community—kind of reflects that neighborhood,” Park says. At Diesel, which draws from a young, professional customer base, seats with proximity to outlets are stalked (and pounced upon) by customers clutching laptops. Outdoor seating at Bloc 11 accommodates big groups of friends and families gathering for weekend brunch. And though it’s a newer spot, customers already know to squeeze in, elbow-to-elbow, and share tables at Forge during peak hours. In this way, Lewis and Park are quite literally bringing residents closer together. With each new location, they’ve been at the forefront of Somerville’s neighborhood and community building.

No longer newcomers to the restaurant industry, the duo is finally ready to take on their white whale. This summer, right next door to Forge Baking Company, you can visit the brand-new Forge Ice Cream Bar.



**07 SANDRA MCGOLDRICK**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, WINTER HILL BANK

Winter Hill Bank is celebrating its 110th year in 2016—no small feat for an independent, local bank with just five locations that’s competing against monolithic financial institutions. “And we have done so by remaining true to our core belief that at the end of the day, it is people and the relationships that are developed that really make it work,”



says president and CEO Sandra McGoldrick. "And that is what community banking is all about."

McGoldrick's neighborhood-based approach isn't solely reflected in her role at Winter Hill Bank, though she's taken great pride in leading the organization for more than two decades. The Somerville native has also had her hands in countless nonprofits and business organizations throughout the city. She serves as treasurer for the Somerville YMCA and has served on the board of the Somerville Home. She's worked to provide transitional and affordable housing for low-income families. She served as past president of the Kiwanis Club, and in 2007 she initiated the Kiwanis Annual Appeal, which to date has raised more than \$100,000—100 percent of which has gone back to the community in the form of donations to area nonprofits and scholarships for Somerville High School seniors.

For decades, McGoldrick has been using business as the launching pad from which to give back to her city. The former chair of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors has received numerous accolades from the chamber, including a 2010 lifetime achievement award. She currently serves on the chamber's Government Affairs Committee, working with Mayor Curtatone and the Board of Alderman to formulate initiatives that benefit both businesses and residents.

"Today, with the other developments and initiatives that have taken place, when people mention Boston and Cambridge they now say Boston, Cambridge and Somerville," McGoldrick explains. "And that's quite an accomplishment."



**08** **JESSIE BAHNEZL**  
CEO, GREEN CITY GROWERS

In 2008, Jessie Bahnezl left an unfulfilling job in television production in New York City and was living at her parents' house in Wayland, with just the seed of a business plan in her brain. "My parents are both entrepreneurs,"

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**09** **JESSE CLINGAN**  
 COMMUNITY ORGANIZER,  
 SOMERVILLE  
 OVERCOMING ADDICTION  
 AND OUTREACH AND  
 COMMUNICATIONS  
 COORDINATOR,  
 RYAN HARRINGTON  
 FOUNDATION

“It’s like a tale of two cities, where you have cool events like Fluff Fest or the Honk Parade, and meanwhile, you have kids overdosing in the bathrooms of Davis Square. Clearly, there’s a problem that needs to be addressed.”

Jesse Clingan is a community organizer who has worked with Somerville Overcoming Addiction (SOA), an organization with a mission to eliminate drug overdose fatalities, remove the stigma of addiction and connect the community with addiction support and recovery services. A small group of community activists formed SOA in 2014 after then-governor Deval Patrick declared a public health emergency in response to the growing epidemic of opioid addiction and overdose deaths. The group’s first event was a free screening at the Somerville Theater of *The Anonymous People*, a documentary about the more than 23 million Americans living in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. The screening was well-attended, and

she reflects today, “so they were a good support system.”

The idea was this: Start a business in Massachusetts, the likes of which existed on the West Coast but not yet here, that would build and maintain gardens for commercial and residential clients. Bahnezi started small, working with a friend out of her parents’ house, then out of coffee shops throughout Cambridge and, finally, from an office space in Somerville. She hasn’t looked back since.

Her company, Green City Growers, now employs 20 staffers and works with clients in the region ranging from restaurants to private homes, schools and hospitals—even Fenway Park. Now in its second season, the Fenway rooftop farm attracts half a million people each year. (“We’re the Red Sox’s other farm team,” Bahnezi jokes.) That project launched GCG onto a national platform; this year, they signed on to partner with First Lady Michelle Obama’s Partnership for a Healthier America initiative.

But Bahnezi isn’t satisfied yet. She wants to expand and focus more on gardens that are publicly accessible, like Fenway, to help challenge people’s understanding of how food can be grown and their knowledge of what they’re eating.

“Personally, it’s really exciting to see the business grow,” she says. “But what’s great about having a social mission is that while you grow in scale, you can impact more people ... How do we create spaces for people to understand the importance of fresh food, and also to access that fresh food?”

Clingan helped facilitate a training for Narcan—an opiate antidote—at the event.

“We were a conduit,” explains Clingan. “We were your neighbors and we were your friends bringing you the resources that were already out there but that so many people don’t know about.”

SOA continues to hold Narcan trainings at their events, which Clingan believes is necessary in preventing drug overdose fatalities in the community. Just a few days after the screening at the Somerville Theater, he heard that someone in the audience that night had to use the Narcan they received from that training on their daughter. “That was extremely powerful to hear,” he recalls. “We knew we were on the right path then, and we knew we had to continue to bring this lifesaving antidote and this message to people. And we’re still doing it.”

Clingan currently works with the Harrington Foundation—a charitable family foundation in memory of Somerville resident Ryan Harrington, who died of an overdose in 2011. The foundation supports local youth organizations and assists people struggling with addiction.

“So now, within a 4.3 square mile city you have Somerville Overcoming Addiction, the Harrington Foundation and the Alex Foster Foundation,” Clingan explains. “Certainly, there’s a problem in Somerville like every city, but it’s easy to ignore because there’s such a difference in population. We definitely have made the city take notice.”

“We need to stay vigilant,” he adds.





10

**CASSIE PIUMA**  
CHEF AND CO-OWNER, SARMA

Sitting at the Sarma bar, sipping a glass of sauvignon blanc and taking tiny bites of the bluefish falafel (to make it last as long as possible), you can see directly into the bright, open kitchen where chef and co-owner Cassie Piuma spends her time.

Piuma and Ana Sortun worked together for almost a decade at Sortun's iconic Cambridge restaurant Oceana before opening Sarma together in 2013. A mezze-style Middle Eastern restaurant with small dishes like fava bean pate and steak tartare—and plenty of options for vegetarians—Sarma is reliably delicious, innovative and satisfying. "We wanted to be part of a lively neighborhood where people actually live," Piuma says, "and contribute something meaningful to the community." Sarma is tucked behind Somerville High School, in a residential Winter Hill nook. "I think a location speaks to you."

Under Piuma's guidance, Sarma walks an enviable line between casual and fancy. It's both a neighborhood restaurant for residents and a destination for foodies from throughout the region. "I think Sarma is successful because it's approachable, comfortable and fun," Piuma observes. "It appeals to folks from all walks of life and doesn't take itself too seriously."

As a resident, Piuma is a fan of the varied food scene in Somerville. She rattles off a dozen of her favorite spots, including Spoke, 3 Little Figs, Istanbulu and Tasty Momo. But there is one missing piece for Piuma: breakfast and coffee spots distributed throughout each neighborhood—"preferably on my walk to work."

What's next for the local chef? "I'd love to do a fast-casual lunch place someday, or maybe an outpost for our fried chicken and hummus," says Piuma. Luckily for Somerville, Sarma remains her primary focus—for now.



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**JUSTIN HILDEBRANDT**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT FREEDOM  
CONNEXION AND LEAD PASTOR AT  
CONNEXION

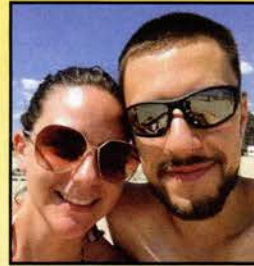
When Methodist pastors are appointed to a new church, that nomination isn't only to their congregation but to that city or town at large—a commitment that Justin Hildebrandt takes seriously. "Maybe I've got 25 people here on a Sunday, but there are 80,000 people in Somerville," Hildebrandt explains. "I say that I spend my time accordingly." His community-focused space on Broadway in East Somerville is a frequent host to organizations that need a place for their board meetings and retreats, and the church holds a monthly meal in partnership with area nonprofits. Every summer, the building houses Freedom Connexion, a six-week program that provides free education to students who are at risk of learning loss during the summer months.

There's no better metaphor for that community-first focus than the communion table where Hildebrandt and his congregation break bread each week. It's a simple card table; Hildebrandt believes that communion shouldn't feel like it's happening in a formal dining room, meant for special occasions and fancy table settings, but instead in the family room, where meaningful conversations between loved ones take place. Groups that borrow the church's space will sometimes use the communion table for their work, and Hildebrandt recalls once looking on as members of Somerville Overcoming Addiction (SOA) made posters memorializing those who had been lost to addiction on its surface.

"This is kind of beautiful," Hildebrandt thought to himself as he watched SOA members cut, draw and paste on the table where his congregation communes on Sundays. "It's the communion of life."



**COME IN AS A CUSTOMER,  
LEAVE AS A FRIEND**



*After moving from Brooklyn, my husband, Cole, and I wanted to buy our first car together and decided to look for a used Prius. We visited multiple dealerships and found the salespeople to be too aggressive or uninterested. Disheartened, we temporarily put our search on hold. Until one day when I saw a Prius*

*in John's Auto Sales lot down the street from our apartment. When we finally stopped by to ask about it a week later, the car had already been sold, but another Prius had just come in. One of the salespeople, Dan, was very helpful and told us to take it out for as long of a test drive as we wanted. It was great that we were able to talk freely about what we wanted to do without a salesperson in the passenger seat. When we got back, Dan introduced us to John, the owner, who answered our questions honestly. Cole and I felt that the price was fair, but more importantly, we appreciated that we never felt pressured into making a decision. We gave them a deposit on the spot. Knowing that John, Dan and the staff are available right in our neighborhood to help with any possible issues in the future is a big relief and we're glad we found them. — Katie & Cole*

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**12** CHRISTINE ANDRADE  
OWNER, HAIR BY CHRISTINE & CO.

During her first year in business on Highland Avenue, Hair by Christine & Co. owner Christine Andrade flew a rainbow flag outside of the salon during pride week—a decision that prompted a friend to ask if she was worried it would turn people away. Andrade realized that they might be right. “So I put a pride flag on every window,” she recalls.

Reaching out to LGBTQ individuals has always been a priority for Andrade, whose salon is a judgement-free, safe space. Hair by Christine & Co. stylists recently held a “Dress for Success” beauty tutorial day for the transgender community at Fenway Health, and Andrade always teaches those who are transitioning how to style their hair and makeup free of charge. When the #IllGoWithYou ally project to promote safety in gendered spaces like bathrooms launched earlier this year, she immediately ordered 500 of the pink, white and blue buttons, which she gives out for free.

Andrade, who always wanted to have her own salon—in elementary school she was snagging her mom’s bleach to put streaks in her hair—is a firm believer in using beauty care for the greater good. Her stylists cut hair for homeless women at St. Francis House, and she recently hosted a cut-a-thon to benefit the Boston Children’s Hospital. A graduate of the cosmetology program at Somerville High School, she welcomes current students into her shop to learn the tricks of the trade. “I like to take people from where I was and build them up,” she says. “I think it’s really important to build people up in this business.”

“To me,” Andrade adds, “hairdressing is helping people.”

**13** DANIELLE MCLEAN  
REPORTER, SOMERVILLE JOURNAL

For Danielle McLean, being a reporter—especially one working in the same city where she resides—is a big responsibility. She believes that free press is crucial to democracy and government functionality.

“You need to have that oversight,” says McLean. “There’s no government that’s perfect, there’s no politician that’s perfect and there’s nobody that can represent the voices of everybody. You need the media there to hold people accountable for decisions that may affect different groups of people.”

Most cities have their own issues, identities and problems, but McLean doesn’t think there are many that have as much complexity and as much at stake as Somerville. The cost of living skyrocketing and forcing low income and working families out of the city, while drawing in developers, is a story about changing demographics that McLean feels an obligation to tell. She wrote a story in February about the high cost of living in Somerville after a study revealed that the yearly income to afford the average monthly rent in the city, without being rent burdened—or paying more than a third of your salary on rent—is more than \$95,000.

“That number has really stood out to me because it just shows how difficult it is to live in Somerville,” she explains. “And so there’s that huge push and pull, and I think it’s a very interesting time, a very complex time and a very important time to be in news media here in the city.”

It can be difficult for just a two-person staff to cover such a busy, ambitious city. McLean makes a great effort to address the important topics in the city, to share the stories of the marginalized members of the community and to give them a voice.



# WHAT LOCAL LOOKS LIKE



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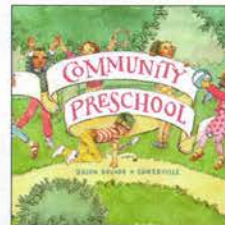
ByeBye  
Banana Bread



Casa B



Charles Cherney



Community  
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"When we're able to tell a good story and we're able to point out an important issue that nobody else has known, it's great," says McLean. "It's an amazing feeling. It's why I do what I do. It makes you feel like you really are contributing to the community."

14

**MICHÈLE BISCOE**  
CO-FOUNDER, SOM|DOG AND OPEN SPACE ADVOCATE

When Michèle Biscoe adopted a dog in 2004, she was excited to explore Somerville with her new canine companion—until, that is, she realized that dogs were expressly forbidden in every public park. "Even the Community Path," Biscoe recalls.

It's hard to imagine now; in 2016, Somerville is a great place to own a dog. But throughout the '80s and '90s, dog owners had a reputation as scofflaws—a reputation that endured in the mid-2000s. Legally, dogs weren't allowed in parks and playgrounds, which meant someone had to convince the city that those laws should change.

Biscoe and other Somerville dog lovers were willing to do the work. With the guidance of the late Alderman Tom Taylor, a dog owner "and everything a community could hope for in an elected representative," Biscoe says, she co-founded Som|Dog and kicked off a grassroots campaign to make the city more dog-friendly. Working with a host of advocates—School Committee Member Steve Roix and his wife,

Julie, Justin Grunau, Lisa McFarren, Frank Cresta, Genevieve Jones, Shannon Pendleton, Ben Worthen, Tir na nOg owner Feargal O'Toole, Alice Napoleon and Bill Ritchotte, the eventual unofficial "mayor" of the Nunziato Field Dog Park—Biscoe started organizing park cleanups. The group wanted to get the word out that dog owners love and need parks—and that they would be willing to take care of them. After 18 months of advocacy, the city's first dog park opened at Nunziato Field.

These advocates weren't only working on behalf of four-legged residents; they often attended meetings about public gardens or skate parks, promoting the importance of open space for all. In a dense city like Somerville, you might think that different groups that wanted open space for their own uses would have a "piece of the pie" mentality—that they'd work against each other to ensure their own needs were met.

"We didn't see it that way," Biscoe says, pointing out that the Zero New Washington Off-Leash Recreation Area is on a piece of land that was initially slated for development. "We saw that we could just, you know, bake more pie."

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**EMILY REICHERT**  
CEO, GREENTOWN LABS

As one of the *Boston Globe's* 2016 Game Changers and with a profile in *Forbes* last year, Emily Reichert something of a Somerville celebrity. After a career in chemistry research and laboratory work—with an ever-increasing focus on green research—Reichert enrolled at MIT's Sloan School of Management. In 2013, she joined up with Greentown Labs, an incubator for green technology startups that offered the right combination of business and environmentally-minded science. She currently serves as Greentown's CEO.

Reichert's first decision was to move the company from South Boston to Somerville. Through a "fortuitous" connection, she was able to work collaboratively with Mayor Curtatone's administration to bring Greentown to the city. "I think [the mayor] could see the potential of this organization, and he wanted it to be part of the landscape in Somerville," she says now. The city assisted in helping Greentown make the move, and the business has been here ever since.

While Reichert doesn't live in Somerville—"I have Somerville envy!"—she says the city was the perfect spot for the green-tech incubator. "Somerville is a place where entrepreneurs are and where entrepreneurs want to be," she says. The city's enthusiasm has been a significant component of her organization's success. In fact, with additional support from the city and the state, Greentown is planning to expand its facilities here, having recently made an agreement with the owner of the Maaco building at 444 Somerville Ave. The expanded space will offer significantly more room for events and will triple the number of entrepreneurs Greentown can house while enabling the company to expand globally and attract clean technology startups from around the world.



Though she's left her hands-on lab research behind, Reichert is as committed to scientific development as ever. "I think I've found something that is more powerful to me than being an individual contributor," she muses. "If I can contribute to making all 50 of these companies more successful than they would have been otherwise, I feel like that's a pretty significant impact."



16

**JOE LYNCH**  
CO-HOST, GREATER SOMERVILLE,  
CO-ANCHOR, SOMERVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS AND  
CO-FOUNDER, MAGOUN SQUARE  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

"I love when the community gets involved in what's happening locally," says Joe Lynch. "Your government starts locally, and I love covering hyperlocal politics."

Regional government has always interested Lynch, who grew up here in the city talking Somerville politics with his family at the dining room table. Today, he puts that interest into practice with two SCATV programs: *Greater Somerville*, which he created in 2009, and *Somerville Neighborhood News*, for which he became a co-anchor last year.

But while you may recognize him from those SCATV productions, it's Lynch's slightly more behind-the-scenes work as a Magoun Square neighborhood leader that really showcases his keen interest in local affairs. As recently as the early 2000s, he recalls the square being a very different place than it is today—rundown buildings, empty storefronts, a few scattered bars. Noting that the city can only do so much, he and his neighbors drafted their own plans to redevelop the neighborhood and make it more attractive to businesses.

"We were ready, with a shovel-ready project, and that's how the Magoun Square revitalization got into the front of the queue for all of that federal money," Lynch explains. It was somewhat serendipitous, he admits—but they made their own luck.

Lynch says he still gets a few emails a week from concerned Magoun neighbors. But today, he credits the area's continued growth to its business owners—people like On the Hill Tavern owner Robert Antonelli and Gregory Coughlin of Olde Magoun's Saloon who have actually invested in the square and are guiding its future. It was Daddy Jones Bar's Dimitra Tsourianis who rallied the region together for the first-ever Magoun Square Food and Dance Festival in May.

"You get four or five people together, and before you know it, you've got a movement," Lynch says. "I'm glad to see it's happening. I think Magoun Square is going nowhere but up."

17 **PAT JEHLLEN**  
MASSACHUSETTS STATE SENATOR, 2ND MIDDLESEX DISTRICT

Senator Pat Jehlenn has served the city of Somerville for four decades.

In her current role as Somerville's State Senator, Jehlenn fights for progressive values on issues ranging from elder affairs to criminal justice reform and public education, including ending high-stakes testing. The Green Line Extension "takes up enormous amounts of time, and energy, and anger, and frustration," but she works to keep Somerville's priorities front-of-mind on that project, advocating for job opportunities and training for Somerville workers on the GLX.

Jehlenn, who also represents Medford and parts of Cambridge, originally became involved in Somerville politics as an educator during the city's reform movement in the 1970s. She decided to run for school committee, a position she held for 16 years, advocating for state funding and parental involvement. Jehlenn then served as state representative from 1991 to 2005, during which time she led efforts on behalf of

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18

**18** EVELYN BATTINELLI  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SOMERVILLE MUSEUM

disabled residents and senior citizens, education reform and the legalization of gay marriage. After voting in favor of marriage equality in both the house and the senate, due to timing of the votes in relation to her senate swearing-in, "I got to officiate at three weddings, including some of my dearest friends who had been together for decades," Jehlen recalls. Her powerful role in Massachusetts politics has rippled through the country—because then-Governor Bill Weld supported her medical marijuana bill, he was later denied an appointment as U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

This year, Jehlen is running for reelection against Cambridge City Councilor Leland Chung. Though she's more focused on serving her constituents than election-year politics, Jehlen did endorse Bernie Sanders in the Massachusetts primary and today reflects that "inequality is the biggest issue this country faces—inequality of money and power—and I think that's where my focus has been."

And lest you forget: Jehlen founded the OPENAIR Circus, which her son currently oversees, and still teaches stiling at every opportunity.



When lifelong Somerville resident Evelyn Battinelli's daughter went off to kindergarten in 1973, Battinelli and another friend were determined to reconnect with the local community. Together, they began attending Somerville Historical Society lectures organized by their former teacher Isabel Cheney. Battinelli has been a member of the Somerville Historical Society ever since. Today, she serves as the Somerville Museum's executive director.

The museum is owned and operated by the historical society. Along with exhibition director Michael O'Connor and many dedicated volunteers and board members, Battinelli has put together three decades of programs, events and exhibits. The Somerville Museum has an expansive collection of archives that are showcased in exhibits by local artists and historians. One of Battinelli's favorite exhibits was *Lifting the Veil* (1997), about the burning of the Ursuline convent. She also fondly recalls a year-long exhibition on the history of Somerville's theaters that featured a memorable opening event with searchlights and Hollywood actress Frances Dee. "Each of these exhibitions touch on so much of our history," Battinelli says.

She remains dedicated to the museum's mission: "To keep alive the history and to bring alive the culture and art seen here in Somerville."

"The museum is our treasure," Battinelli emphasizes. "No other area locally has such a magnificent little building."



**19** STEPHANIE HIRSCH  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER AND ADVOCATE, SOMERVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS (AND MORE!)

Over the past 12 years, Stephanie Hirsch has worked for both the municipal and the school divisions of city government, where she's helped to make data a centerpiece for strategy in Somerville. On the municipal side, her work in the mayor's office, including the launching of SomerStat—Mayor Curtatone's tool for managing departments and initiatives using data—has made a difference in the lives of residents and in government transparency. When it comes to her educational work, she relies on data to ensure students have what they need to succeed, whether that's extra enrichments or family services.

"You do see how it's a whole system that has to work together to make sure children, families and individuals in Somerville have what they need to be happy, healthy, successful and able to contribute to the community," says Hirsch.

In addition to her work in the mayor's office and for the schools,



Hirsch has been an advocate for families in Somerville. She volunteers her time organizing community groups such as Happy Hour, a social network for new moms, and she has coordinated affordable programs and camps for kids.

Hirsch, who has lived and worked in Somerville since 2004, believes we have a unique culture that can be a model of socioeconomic diversity for the country. But the relationship between this culture and the schools' continued successes—which bring resources to the city for program investment—makes this a crucial time in history for the city. “We can’t freeze time right now,” she says. “We know families are being priced out of the city and we will lose that economic diversity.” Her goal is to continue expanding resources while finding ways to stabilize households and preserve the diversity within Somerville.

“How do we continue to be this very special place and hopefully provide an example for how you can preserve a strong middle class and strong working class and integration across socioeconomic backgrounds?” she asks. “That’s the question we work to answer.”



**20** **KEN KELLY**  
 RESTAURATEUR, THE INDEPENDENT,  
 BRASS UNION, FOUNDRY ON ELM,  
 SALOON, RIVER BAR

“I like to say that when I opened the Independent, I did the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time, and did a bad job of doing it,” Ken Kelly joked when we spoke with him for the “Fierce Over 40” feature in our July/August 2015 edition. “It was a very bad move for a long time. It went from bad to worse for a while.”

Kelly passed away in December at age 44 after a long battle with cancer, but his willingness to take that risk with the Independent, and later, with Brass Union (formerly Precinct), Foundry on Elm, Saloon and River Bar, forever changed the dining scene in Somerville—and the fabric of the community as a whole. “Building the Independent really set the whole tone for the neighborhood ... Ken came in and made a dramatic change to the building and made a significant investment when nobody else would,” former Union Square Main Streets Executive Director Mimi Graney told the *Somerville Journal* last year. “He had a sense of faith in the neighborhood before anybody else.” His contributions weren’t limited to Union Square; Foundry on Elm was the first eatery to bring high-end dining to Davis, setting the tone for the neighborhood and paving the way for the restaurants that have opened there in the years since.

The beloved restaurateur also had a sense of faith in a certain hyperlocal magazine; when Scout publisher Holli Banks was struggling to find funding to print the magazine’s first issue in 2009, Kelly generously purchased back cover ad space at the last minute, ensuring that the inaugural edition went to press. Scout would likely not exist today without him.

Kelly volunteered with Union Square Main Streets, the Somerville Little League and Groundwork Somerville. He also served on the board of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, from which he received a lifetime achievement award in 2014, as the chairperson of the Union Square Business Group. He contributed his time and financial resources to scores of nonprofits throughout the region. But when we spoke last year, he was quick to defer the credit for Somerville’s revitalization to people in the community who made his achievements possible—the other members of the Chamber of Commerce and the local Main Streets organizations, especially.

“Now, we’ve gotten to the stage where a business comes [to Somerville], and they do well right out of the gate,” he said, adding that while he had briefly looked for restaurant space in Cambridge and Newton, it was Somerville where he saw long-term potential. “And that’s a great thing to see.”

EVELYN BATTINELLI PHOTO BY JESS BENJAMIN  
 KEN KELLY PHOTO BY TODD DANFORTH



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**21** **ANTWAN STEED**  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, SHORTSTOP

“What we know about young people is that they’re at an age of transition, and we can hear their story,” says Antwan Steed. Steed is the Program Director at Shortstop, a transitional living program for homeless young adults ages 18 to 22. He’s been with the organization for more than 10 years and believes that Shortstop’s success comes from its nurturing environment—one that focuses on goals and aspirations unique to each individual. Most homeless young adults don’t have family members supporting them, so Steed makes sure that Shortstop is a place where they can find positive reinforcement.

“We pride ourselves in welcoming all identities,” says Steed, recalling one young gay male who came to Shortstop after his father kicked him out of his home because of his sexual orientation. “It was a blessing to witness this young person blossom from where he thought he did something wrong and he was abandoned by his family, to him graduating and feeling like he can be a part of his community.”

Steed applies a strength-based approach to the support Shortstop provides, meaning that he recognizes that most homeless young adults have been silenced and wants to empower them to find their voice. “We allow a young person to be who they want to be, or we simply coach them on how to be better at what they do,” he says. After an individual assessment, along with resume and cover letter guidance, Shortstop helps young people discover their interests and recognize their potential so they can follow a career or education path that’s the best fit for them. According to Steed, Shortstop doesn’t only provide a platform so that homeless young people can have options; the program tries to remove *any* limitations.

“I always say, you can go higher and further, but you have to believe and put the hard work into it.”

**22** **KATE CLOUD**  
RESPOND, RESIST AND THE SOMERVILLE COUNCIL FOR CHILDREN

**JACK HAMILTON**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY OF SOMERVILLE

When Jack Hamilton passed away earlier this year, the line to attend his wake in Union Square stretched out the door and around the block—despite a cold, steady rain—for hours. “A number of people came up to me and told me how he had helped them,” recalls his wife, Kate Cloud. “People who I didn’t know, who I had never met.”

During his 25 years as the executive director of the Community Action Agency of Somerville, Hamilton was committed to helping the city’s vulnerable populations: the poor, the young, those with mental health issues. “Jack loved people,” Cloud explains. “And he had the Irish gift of gab.” He spoke several languages—Portuguese, Spanish, some Creole. In 2008, he told the *Boston Globe* that “to have fun in Somerville, you have to speak at least two languages.”

“And he attracted people who were also interested in making change,” Cloud says. “He was able to rally people behind him to work on projects.”

Cloud, too, has lived a life of activism here in Somerville. She worked with the Somerville Council for Children throughout the ‘80s, setting up task forces, conducting needs assessments and working with teachers, educators and parents on issues affecting city youth. “In those days, we had a very vibrant community of activists,” Cloud says. “And there was funding for activists.” In the ‘90s, she came on board as the director of RESPOND, the first domestic violence prevention agency in New England. She also served on the board of Resist and was involved in the anti-war and anti-nuclear movement. In fact, she



literally wrote the book on parenting during times of war: *Watermelons Not War!: A Support Book for Parenting in the Nuclear Age*, which came out in 1994.

But while activism was important to both Cloud and Hamilton, they rarely brought it home with them.

"We didn't really talk about work that much outside of work," Cloud says. "Home was a place to rest and be comfortable. We could be quiet together."

23

## CINDY HICKEY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SOMERVILLE COUNCIL ON AGING

Somerville's annual senior picnic. Trips to Tanglewood, a dude ranch and Florida. Outdoor yoga, home fitness and nutrition advising. Cindy Hickey can speak to all of these varied events and programs, because she's the one running them for the senior community in Somerville.

"It's a very small group," she says of the department she oversees, "but we get a whole lot of stuff done."

Hickey says she's held almost every position at the Council on Aging over the past 22 years. The office has a mission of ensuring that seniors can stay in their homes and engaging them as active members of the community. The Council on Aging works to coordinate intergenerational programming, home visits, friendly calling and some medical escorting, as well as outings and events. According to the 2010 census, Somerville has nearly 7,000 seniors. Hickey works tirelessly to find ways to engage each member of this important community.

It's clear, after speaking with Hickey for even a few minutes, how passionate she is about her work. "You know, it's that smile on their face when you help somebody," she reflects. "It's really completing that circle for them socially, physically, educationally. It's being of service to them."

*This year, Somerville's 37th annual senior picnic will be held on August 3rd. Hickey is also the executive director of Toys for Local Children, a charity that provides toys to families in need around the holidays and to fire victims all year round. More information can be found at [www.toysforlocalchildren.org](http://www.toysforlocalchildren.org).*



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## ANDREA SHAPIRO

FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SECOND CHANCES

For the past 10 years, Second Chances has provided free clothing to homeless and low-income people in Somerville and Cambridge. "They're folks who are doing all kinds of things once they get clothing," explains founder and CEO Andrea Shapiro. "So we provide the full range of clothing that folks might need, from something to wear to church to something to wear on a job interview."

Shapiro first discovered the need for this service through her work as a management consultant with nonprofits in the community. She noticed these organizations were receiving an overwhelming amount of requests from the public to take in clothing and other donations. They accepted the donations, hoping there would be a match, but didn't really have the storage space or the staff to handle the sheer weight. Donations piled up, to the point that one organization had to turn its conference room into a storage room. Shapiro started to think about her own resources and how she could help get these donations to the people who needed them.

"Housing and homelessness and equity in the community have always been things I care a lot about, and I've worked most of my career on those issues," says Shapiro.

She believes that Second Chances is most successful when the

people receiving the donations go on to be donors themselves. She recalls a client from about eight or nine years ago—a mother with a two-year-old son who had just left a domestic violence situation and was living at a local shelter. Second Chances brought them clothes several times during their first year in the shelter, and the mother would send them photos of her son.

About a year ago, Shapiro received an email from that same woman. This time, she was contacting Second Chances because she wanted to donate a stroller. Shapiro followed up and discovered that the woman had finished her bachelor's degree and now has a great job that she loves. She's living in market-rate housing in Somerville. Her son skipped a grade and is a year ahead at his school.

"Her life is stable; she's happy, and, best of all, giving back," beams Shapiro. "Which is a big part of completing the circle—being able to be in the position to give back."



25

## DENISE PROVOST

MASSACHUSETTS STATE REPRESENTATIVE,  
27TH MIDDLESEX DISTRICT

State Representative Denise Provost has lived in Somerville since 1982. And when we observe that she must have witnessed some significant changes in the city over that time, she responds, "Well, I made some changes."

She's absolutely right. During her time as a state representative, a seat she's held for a decade and for which she's seeking re-election in 2016, Provost has worked on energy and environmental policy issues, zoning laws and the Green Line Extension. "That's been a long struggle," she acknowledges. As an alderman from 2000-2005, Provost led the city through the Assembly Square redevelopment process and capital projects with a focus on good governance.

Provost attended law school at Boston University before accepting a position working for the city of Somerville. She says that when she came here in the early '80s, Somerville was known for political corruption and not much else. But under then-Mayor Eugene Brune's leadership, and with the hard work of residents like Provost, Somerville got back on track. Provost met her husband working for the city in what sounds like a meet-cute straight out of *Parks & Recreation*—he worked in the auditor's office, she in the legal office—and they've raised their family here.

Today, Provost continues to fight for the people of Somerville on issues ranging from women's health to clean air to transgender rights. "Somerville always has lots going on," she says.



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## COURTNEY O'KEEFE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
SOMERVILLE LOCAL FIRST

"My life was Somerville's local businesses," says the Somerville born-and-raised Courtney O'Keefe of her childhood. "I can talk about walking up the street and buying my brother's birthday cake at Cara Donna's bakery ... I can tell you about going to Frenchies every Saturday for breakfast, going to Gino's shop on Broadway after church on Sunday. That's what I grew up with."

There is, perhaps, no better person to speak for Somerville's small businesses today, which is why O'Keefe's role as executive director of Somerville Local First makes so much sense. She's a frequent patron of the area's shops, bars and restaurants—not because she has to be, but because she genuinely enjoys connecting with local business owners. Her parents met in the space that's now Daddy Jones Bar—they ran a





business together next door.

"The needs of businesses are evolving here in Somerville," O'Keefe explains. "When Joe Grafton started Somerville Local First eight years ago, it was really about bringing the business community together. It was about showcasing Somerville as a business destination." Today, Somerville is a destination, which means she's addressing new concerns that are specific to business owners in the area. "They want to be here. It's getting more and more expensive to be here," O'Keefe says. She's working with shops and restaurants to foster creative collaborations and points to pop-up markets at eateries like 7ate9 and Slumbrew as one of the ways the business community is rallying together to support one another.

While her Somerville roots run deep, O'Keefe isn't averse to new residents who have been attracted to the city by its thriving food and cultural scene. "You want to live in Somerville?" she asks. "Great, we already have something in common."

Though she does wish—as do we all—that you'd register to vote here.

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**27** ED HALLORAN  
PRESIDENT, SOMERVILLE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

"Our workers are superb. Not a knock on any other city or town, but you won't get what you get in Somerville."

Ed Halloran sees his job as more than just union president for the 220 members of the Somerville Municipal Employees Association (SMEA); he says he has a responsibility to the city. Halloran credits his love for the community and his passion for labor law to growing up in tight-knit Somerville neighborhoods—and to coming from a long line of union workers.

"We were always protective of the name of Somerville," recalls Halloran. "We were street educated, and we learned how to respect the city. I love the old Somerville, but I also love the new one."

By negotiating for higher wages, better hours and improved working conditions, Halloran defends the rights of workers ranging from librarians to Department of Public Works employees to school nurses. But his efforts don't end at the union contracts. "We want what's best for the city, and affordable housing is currently a number-one priority," he explains. "I'm thrilled to see they actually raised the cap on that to 20 percent."

Because Halloran believes that an important part of his job is reaching out to the city, SMEA offers scholarships to high school students and is active in local charities and fundraisers. Halloran makes an effort to meet with community organizations like the Somerville Homeless Coalition and Somerville Overcoming Addiction and to connect with people from all wards. "I don't just sit behind a desk," he laughs.

"I really do enjoy it, Halloran adds. "We're only a small labor association, but I always knew this is where I was meant to be. Our workers are so important to the city, and I didn't want to lose that."

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**28** BRAD RAWSON  
DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,  
CITY OF SOMERVILLE

There isn't much that Brad Rawson isn't doing. In addition to raising his 8-month-old son with his wife in Teele Square, he's the city's director of transportation and infrastructure and the mayor's point person on the Green Line and Community Path Extensions. He's the head of a five-person team that deals with issues like bicycle and pedestrian planning, parks, public space work and forestry issues. And he's quite literally mapped out Somerville's future thanks to his extensive work with SomerVision, the city's comprehensive long-term plan.

"It is grueling work, and we make a lot of sacrifices, says Rawson, "But it's also very rewarding and special to help shape the community that I live in."

Rawson got his start in Burlington, Vermont, but moved to Somerville and began working in city hall in 2007 after realizing he wanted to practice as a city planner in a larger, more diverse environment. For Rawson, the main attraction to the profession comes from a basic curiosity about why things happen where they happen. "Every time I'm walking down the street, or I'm on my bicycle or riding the



bus or driving around, I'm just fascinated by what I see. You notice different things at different times of day."

Rawson believes that everything we love or hate about our community is rooted in public policy. To him, the city is shaped by those decisions.

"As planners, we are ambassadors to the public, and we try to make sure that people understand that they have an opportunity to face the future of their communities," he explains. "Because if we stick our heads in the sand ... if we don't make proactive choices, then the communities will change. And often, they'll change for worse and not for better."



**29** **KELLEY LANE**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SIBLING CONNECTIONS

"Imagine losing your caregivers and then your siblings," says Kelley Lane, who started working with Sibling Connections in 2009. "A lot of times, the kids in our program depend upon each other. Big brothers and sisters parentify; they care for these siblings, they change their diapers—and then they get separated."

In foster care, siblings are often separated due to the lack of available homes. But with Sibling Connections, Lane has been fighting to keep them together.

Brothers and sisters participate in the program for up to six years, during which time they're picked up once a month for sibling days that involve activities like rock climbing and roller skating. Sibling Connections also offers week-long overnight camping trips where kids spend their days reconnecting and sharing new experiences, all of which are photographed and documented in scrapbooks that participants take home with them.

This is a personal cause for Lane, who was herself separated from her siblings in the foster care system. "That's what drives me to do the work," she explains. "Had my siblings and I had the program, I think we would have a better relationship than we do now." Lane lived in seven foster homes throughout her youth, and at just 20 years old, she knew she wanted to begin fostering herself. She and her partner, Jeff, have welcomed more than 40 kids into their Somerville home over last 12 years, and they're in the process of adopting their fifth child. It's selfless work, and it isn't always easy, but people have taken note of Lane's efforts. In December, her work with youth earned her a profile in *Good Housekeeping*.

"A sibling relationship is the longest relationship you're going to have in your life," Lane says. "If you lose your caregivers, you still need that sense of who you are and where you came from. I think that siblings do provide that for one another."



**30** **WENZDAY JANE**  
FOUNDER, METRO PEDAL POWER

Building something with your own hands is a powerful experience. No one knows this better than Metro Pedal Power founder Wenzday Jane. As a child, she was always eager to learn how things worked. This curiosity drew her first to art school, then to a metal fabrication shop in downtown Boston. Eventually, she started building bicycles on the side.

Metro Pedal Power was born in the summer of 2007. Jane wanted to create a business from the ground up and saw an opportunity for a company that provided distribution-by-bike for goods on a local scale. Today, Union Square-based Metro Pedal Power's 10 employees provide home distribution for farm CSA programs, act as a conduit between small farmers and local restaurants and perform recycling pickup for the city of Cambridge.

Jane views the accessibility and affordability of bicycles, not to mention their environmental benefits, as a key component of her business model and her personal worldview. "To me, bikes are about autonomy, freedom, self-reliance," Jane says. "When I started riding a bike as my primary mode of transportation, with every pedal stroke I was awakening the knowledge that





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it was my own power that was going to get me where I needed to go.”

Let's put it this way: "I definitely wouldn't be running a distribution company with trucks," she laughs.



## 31 SKUNK FOUNDER, SCUL

"It feels like the city changes whenever we ride through it. You can ride your regular bike through Somerville, but then if you ride your disco sparkly bike and groove through the streets, it's totally different. It really has a huge impact on the the world when you change yourself."

Skunk is the founder of SCUL, a bicycle gang that has been building and riding experimental bikes since 1996. SCUL used to be an acronym for Subversive Choppers Urban Legion, but they outgrew the acronym as SCUL evolved from hard to hip. "After a while, we didn't really care about sounding tough," Skunk recalls. "Instead of playing rock music, we started playing funk and disco and groove ... We just kind of lightened up a lot."

SCUL has built an imaginative science fiction culture; everything the gang does or builds has a sci-fi twist. Its members are called pilots, bikes are deemed spaceships and they ride on missions through star systems (cities), occasionally crossing galaxies (state borders).

This relationship between bicycles and science fiction started at an early age for Skunk. He was 7 years old when Star Wars came out, which happened to be right around the time that he started riding his bike. He would pretend the wind in his ears was rocket ship thrusters.

"When you first start riding you have that sense of freedom and exploration," says Skunk. "And sci-fi brings out that same sense of adventure, for me."

SCUL's motto is "be a superhero version of yourself," and Skunk believes that many of the gang's pilots live up to this. He's watched people develop as individuals, taking on challenges and having a lot of fun along the way. "It's really for us," he says. "We wind up having a really good time, and it feels really contagious wherever we go."

## 32 THALIA TRINGO REAL ESTATE AGENT AND NONPROFIT ADVOCATE

"If you're making money by helping people buy homes, you have to think about the people who don't even have a home," real estate agent Thalia Tringo says simply. That's why she serves on the board of the Somerville Homeless Coalition—which honored her with a Davis Area Residents and Business Initiative award in 2012—and works with Community Cooks and a number of other local nonprofits. "I live in the community, and I feel like if you're making money in the community, it's kind of your responsibility to put money back into it." Each time one of Tringo's agents makes a real estate transaction, \$250 from the sale goes to local advocacy organizations like the Charles River Conservancy, the Steppingstone Foundation and Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services.

"Real estate, in particular, is working with a lot of people who are lucky. They're able to, and they have the resources to, buy homes," she says. "Especially in the area that we live in, that's a luxury."

While Tringo is a huge believer in philanthropy, the idea behind this donation model goes beyond the financial. She asks her clients to choose the local nonprofit where they'd like the money to go, in the hopes that when they move to the area they'll become engaged with one (or more) of those organizations as a volunteer or donor.

Nonprofit work is as important to Tringo as it is to her agents, three of whom work with Community Cooks themselves. It's a commitment they take very seriously. Tringo recalls how one of her agents, Adaria Brooks, recently came into the office looking exhausted. Her Community Cooks



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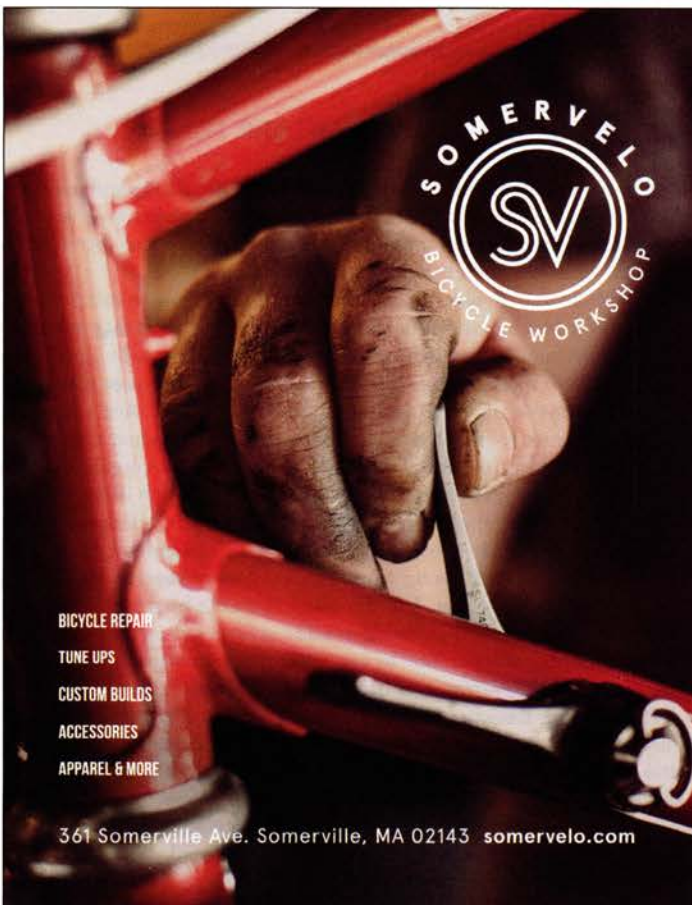
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recipe assignment was fried chicken, and when she didn't think her first two batches were good enough, she stayed up until 3 a.m. to make a third. "I thought, 'I really hired a good person here,'" Tringo says. "I'm so lucky to have a bunch of people who share that philosophy."



**33** BEN ECHEVARRIA  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE WELCOME PROJECT

When it comes to empowering immigrant youth, adults and families in Somerville, Welcome Project executive director Ben Echevarria sees opportunities through community. "By strengthening our immigrant residents, we strengthen the city," he explains.

The Welcome Project is a community-based organization that advocates for immigrant rights and offers programs for immigrant and lower-income families throughout Somerville. "We work with bicultural students to help them realize that knowing a second language is a great asset," says Echevarria. "We teach them how to interpret. And we work with their parents to help them be involved." To Echevarria, these are valuable resources that aren't available in a lot of communities. He's proud of a new program called English for Parents, which is dedicated to helping moms and dads stay engaged in their child's education. The class gives non-English speaking adults tools to navigate the system, such as the ability to ask the right questions at parent-teacher meetings.

Echevarria has been on The Welcome Project's board for the past nine years, having served as board president for most of that time. He recently accepted the position as executive director after the previous executive director, Warren Goldstein-Gelb, suffered a stroke.

Community Benefits Agreements are especially important to Echevarria, and The Welcome Project holds developers accountable to the needs of working class and immigrant communities. "Developers want to come in. Great—we welcome you!" says Echevarria. "But you're coming here because you understand how lucrative the market is. And the reason why it's lucrative is because of all the people who put in the hard work." Whether it's green spaces, improving community policing

or improving schools, Echevarria wants developers to understand that they are signing up for a partnership not only with the city, but also with the diverse voices of the community.



**34** RACHEL STRUTT,  
HEATHER  
BALCHUNAS,  
NINA EICHNER AND  
GREGORY JENKINS  
SOMERVILLE ARTS COUNCIL STAFF

For the staff of the Somerville Arts Council, encouraging and promoting the arts doesn't just mean working with gallery spaces and museums. That's a part of the job, of course, but what really interests this group is the way that art intersects with culture at large.

"It's really exciting to me to bring a lot of different communities together," says special events manager Nina Eichner, who grew up in Somerville and joined the

arts council staff just over a year ago. "Even though there are so many communities living in Somerville, they don't always overlap directly."

Eichner is the first full-time staffer to take on this events-focused role. She, Executive Director Gregory Jenkins, Cultural Director Rachel Strutt, Office Manager Heather Balchunas and a whole host of volunteers are responsible for much-loved annual events like Porchfest and Artbeat, as well as recurring happenings like SomerStreets. And they're looking to expand their live programming, connecting with new people and neighborhoods by helping locals bring offbeat ideas to life. (See: last year's Pity Party and this year's Tiny Tall Ships Festival.) Their reach is broad and getting broader, with new yearly happenings like Haiti in the 'Ville and last year's first-ever Evolution of Hip Hop Festival.

This small but mighty team wants to connect the city at the intersection of arts, athletics, food, music and fun. At last year's SomerStreets festival on Highland Avenue, for example, Eichner recalls watching skateboarders from Maximum Hesh roll their boards through paint to create murals. They're open to new perspectives; they want to try new things. They see the potential in a new, unexpected or unusual idea—and they're willing to build off of their small successes.

"From the international market tours [in Union Square], we did the Nibble blog," Heather Balchunas explains. "From the Nibble blog, we did the cookbook, and from the cookbook we did classes, and from the classes we did pop-ups and from the pop-ups we also did the Culinary Entrepreneurship Program."

"Sometimes, it's just these seeds," she adds. "And they grow into other things."



**35** MIMI GRANEY & MARYCAT CHAIKIN  
RELISH MANAGEMENT

If you visit the Union Square Farmers Market this summer, or if you stopped by the winter market at the Armory in the colder months, you've been a direct beneficiary of the collaborative, community-minded work of Relish Management founders MaryCat Chaikin and Mimi Graney.



After a trial pop-up the previous year, the duo officially founded Relish in 2014. Their business provides project management services for creative and food-based happenings, like farmers markets, shared work spaces and public art projects. Graney and Chaikin's specific focus is on hosting public events in public places with high accessibility for local communities. They want to create events that celebrate neighborhoods and engage people in underused spaces with a focus on art and food—two of our favorite things.

Both Chaikin and Graney are longtime Somerville residents and have deep experience with community events here. Chaikin's background is in restaurants and markets, while Graney founded Union Square Main Streets in 2005. Now, they take on projects throughout the Greater Boston area together, including the Watertown Farmers Market and the state's Gateway Cities initiative. But they're not applying their Somerville model indiscriminately. "We're not trying to change the flavor of the neighborhoods," they say. Instead, "We want to appreciate what's unique there."



36

**LYNN WEISSMAN & ALAN MOORE**  
CO-PRESIDENTS, FRIENDS OF THE  
COMMUNITY PATH

"When we first said, 'Well, what about the Community Path? This should be built along with the Green Line [Extension],' the first response from the state was, 'Nope,'" Alan Moore recalls.

Moore and Lynn Weissman are spearheading the efforts to extend the Community Path along the future GLX by linking the Minuteman Bikeway and Charles River Path networks. "If the Community Path isn't built now, especially that section, it probably won't be built within our lifetime. We could be losing a great opportunity," says Weissman, a self-proclaimed "extreme commuter-cyclist and bicycle-pedestrian advocate" who has been volunteering with the Friends of the Community Path since her partner Joel Bennet first came up with the idea for the group in 2001. "We're not talking about just a little side path. It's primary access to the Green Line, and this is the best, most efficient use of the transportation corridor."

Extending the Community Path would link 11 Boston metro cities and towns, create safe and ADA-compliant routes to schools and work spaces and spark an estimated 3 million trips along its length per year, according to Weissman. But despite these advantages, Weissman and Moore have met significant roadblocks recently from the Green Line Extension Project. In April, the Green Line team proposed a plan that Weissman says will remove the Community Path from the project altogether.

Weissman and Moore don't want to see that happen. They're using Moore's experience as an environmental and civil engineer—along with the hard work of other group members—for the Friends of the Community Path's alternate design, which they've proposed to the GLX.

"There are plenty of ways the Green Line Project could save money and get the path done, as opposed to slicing and dicing the path," says Weissman. "Our plan hasn't gotten to yes on the state yet, but this is a crucial time and we're going to keep pushing."

37

**MARY CASSESSO**  
PRESIDENT, CHA FOUNDATION AND CHIEF COMMUNITY  
OFFICER, CAMBRIDGE HEALTH ALLIANCE

Mary Cassesso has held a range of jobs throughout her impressive career, but they share common threads: healthcare, affordable housing and education, all work done in the public interest.

As a child in Somerville, Cassesso saw her grandmother and mother



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graffiti, potholes, complaints about rats. He and his staff are using “predictive analytics” to determine where the problems are and how to best address them, monitoring 311 outputs to determine how to best address public safety and quality of life in Somerville.

“You have to manage the city in real time, and you have to build the services in real time, so you have to look at the data in real time,” Curtatone explains. “We’ve built up an analytical capacity in the city—which is one of the innovations that Somerville is lauded for worldwide—to understand how we use our resources better and how we reallocate, not just money, but human capital.”

Curtatone, who first introduced the city’s revolutionary 311 program, initially wanted to be a pilot. But he ran for alderman in 1995 because he thought, among other things, that the city had no foresight, no idea of where it wanted to be. Somerville’s mayor since 2004, he’s actualizing his vision for the city by collecting data, which is important—crucial, in fact—to actively building its future.

But while Curtatone is using statistics to answer big-picture questions like, “Are [residents] going to choose to send their kids to public school?” and “Do they have an authentic choice to buy a home?” he’s also concerned with the city’s well-being on a personal level. It’s why Somerville was the first municipality in the nation to measure people’s overall satisfaction and happiness, why Curtatone previously held a series of

as active members of the community who spoke up on issues that were important to them, like rent control and I-93. In Somerville, Cassesso says, there has always been “a community of people that are very active and want to make sure we have good government and good policies.” It’s clear that she’s carried that sense of public engagement with her.

Early in her career, Cassesso worked for the city’s Council on Aging and Health and the Human Services Department. She went on to work for Governor Dukakis in his office for affordable housing. That has remained a critical issue for Cassesso, who now serves on Somerville’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund. “I think we’re at a challenging point,” Cassesso says, as “Somerville is now unaffordable for so many.”

Her current position at Cambridge Health Alliance comes after a long history of working in public health. As a co-op undergraduate student at Northeastern University—she was the first in her family to attend college—Cassesso worked for the East Somerville Health Center on lead paint poisoning. Later in her career, she took a position at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. During that time, she was on the board of the Cambridge Health Alliance, where she herself was—and still is—a patient.

But most powerful of all is Cassesso’s commitment to the public good. “Somerville has been so good to me,” she smiles, “and I hope I’ve been good for Somerville.”

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**38** **JOSEPH CURTATONE**  
MAYOR, 2004-PRESENT

Every day, Mayor Curtatone is working to fight crime, end drug abuse and improve overall livability in the city by looking at the little things—

“backyard chats” to get to know his constituents.

“We should be opening the city up as a test lab for ideas that generate innovation and originality in the neighborhood,” Curtatone explains. “It’s about social progress—what is our role as leaders? Are we managers or leaders? If you need managers, you can hire accountants.”

“We can be the most progressive community in the United States,” he says, “and I believe we are.”

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**39** **EUGENE BRUNE**  
MAYOR EMERITUS

Mayor Emeritus Eugene Brune is bursting at the seams with stories about Somerville politics. “We can talk as long as you want,” he responds when we promise to keep the conversation brief.

Mayor Brune got his start in Somerville politics in 1969. He served on the Board of Health before becoming an alderman in 1972. But he’s best known for his term as the city’s mayor, a position he held from 1980-1989.

Brune’s early years as mayor were fraught. Three months into his first term, a Monsanto chemical spill at the trainyard displaced thousands of people and sent more than 400 residents and responders to the hospital. “It was a scene out of television,” Brune says now, still shaken. Not making things any easier was Proposition 2 1/2, which went into effect early into his tenure and meant that Brune had to cut taxes for three years even as outdated city infrastructure demanded upgrades and maintenance.

But Brune persevered, confident he would reach a point when he could afford to address some of the city’s pressing issues. “I always said this in politics: If you don’t lie to the people, they will stay with you,” Brune says. They did—he was reelected four times.



During his tenure as mayor, Brune cut the ribbon at the Davis Square Red Line T stop, an expansion he'd worked towards as an alderman. He fought for more restaurants, asking that liquor licenses be prioritized for food establishments over barrooms. Brune started Artbeat and worked to attract artists to the city, and he set up the fair housing commission. He replaced the elected assessors, responsible for the financial well-being of the city, with qualified, appointed assessors. His legacy endures today in Somerville's thriving arts and food scene and in the city's ongoing attention to affordable housing and responsible governance.

Mayor Brune eventually left office to serve as the register of deeds for Middlesex County Southern District, an elected position which he held for two decades, and from which he retired just a few years ago.

Today, Brune remains actively involved in city organizations and politics. He's a trustee for the Somerville Museum and serves on a number of other boards, and he's in close contact with local elected officials. Like many residents, he's concerned about the high cost of living and the price tags of major capital projects; he's also worried about Somerville's transformation from a city of family neighborhoods to what could be a destination for transitory tenants. "When it comes time, are those people going to stay and raise their children here?" Brune asks.

But he worries because he cares. "I was born in this city, and I love this city," Brune says. "So, that's my story."



40

**ERICA JONES**  
DIRECTOR, MEMBERSHIP  
& OUTREACH, SCATV

At SCATV, Erica Jones is the Director of Membership and Outreach, a descriptor that, at other nonprofits, could stop at managing donor databases and sending out email newsletters. But Jones doesn't treat her position that way. Instead, she spends a great deal of time fostering what she calls "strategic community partnerships."

"I think, at the heart of everything, it's about building community. Strength in numbers is key," she explains. "Especially in an ever-evolving and growing city, where there's a lot of change going on, I think it's good to have anchored roots and foster those existing partnerships—but also have new blood coming in."

Jones looks at the needs of SCATV and the needs of Somerville as a whole in developing programs like Cinema Somerville, a family-friendly, outdoor film series that comes to spaces like the Somerville Community Growing Center, and Rough Cut Media Screenings, where local filmmakers can showcase early drafts of their work at the Armory and get feedback. She's helped kick off music events like the Duck Village Stage series at Aeronaut, where SCATV shoots high-quality live videos of local bands. But she isn't only a supporter of SCATV's programming—head to just about any community event in Somerville, and you're likely to find her there.

In this way, Jones is a community connector, a one-woman hub who loves bringing together people who are doing similar or parallel work in the neighborhood so that they can collaborate.

"It's nice to get out there," she says. "We are the Somerville community media center. We need to get out of Union Square."

That's why the station collaborates with local businesses and nonprofits, and why, on SCATV's YouTube page, you'll find profiles on community institutions—OnStage Dance Comedy, Hub Comics, the Neighborhood Restaurant and Bakery—that were filmed for free and which those business can then use to promote themselves.

"We can actually make media that reflects our own interests, our own communities, our own values," Jones says simply. "Our goal is to do community service, essentially. We have the resources. That's basically why we exist."

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