

ACI Raises Nearly \$85,000 at its 70th Anniversary Celebration

Funds raised go to for scholarships and programs to benefit Illinois college students

April 29, 2022

ACI raised nearly \$85,000 in estimated net revenue at its [70th Anniversary Celebration](#)



April 22, a strong fundraising result for ACI since it initiated its April fundraiser in 2016. The funds included an estimated \$20,900 in pledges for second-mile gifts made at the event. About 130 people attended the event at the University Club of Chicago, with live music provided by the North Park University Jazz Ambassadors.

The organization also established a new high for event sponsors with 11, plus an additional sponsor for the ACI Presidents Forum, held earlier in the day.

This year, ACI celebrated its 70th year of service to Illinois college and universities, and their students. The purpose of the event was to recognize ACI's [26 member colleges and universities](#), recall the organization's roots and history, and to raise scholarship and program funds.

[ACI Board of Trustees](#) member Rob Johnson, president of [Rob Johnson Communications](#), was master of ceremonies. Twelve of 22 founding members are still with ACI today, he noted, adding that ACI has raised \$70 million dollars in its history. The 12 schools are Augustana College, Aurora University, Blackburn College, Eureka College, George Williams College (now part of Aurora University), Illinois College, Illinois Wesleyan University, Millikin University, McKendree University, North Park University, Quincy University and Shimer College, now part of North Central College.



The North Park University Jazz Ambassadors provided live music.

"In 1952, it was time when privately funded education was at a crossroads," said Lyn Bulman, ACI Board of Trustees chair. "Small private school were struggling to keep pace with the large state universities because they were receiving public funding as well as private donations." To help ensure private college funding, community and business leaders joined private college presidents to establish ACI, she said.

Today, ACI focuses much of its work on helping first-generation and low-to-moderate income students earn college degrees. "These students need financial support and often,

they need guidance to graduate and get their first job," Bulman said. ACI offers [scholarships and emergency aid](#) to some 350 students each year, she said. In addition, ACI offers [college-to-career programs](#). ACI research shows member colleges are worth \$3.75 billion to the state's economy, and more than 24,000 alumni are employed by largest Illinois companies. "It seems clear that investing in these students makes a really valuable contribution to our state," Bulman added.

Speakers make the case for liberal arts and sciences education

Tracie Morris, featured speaker, U.S. chief human resources officer and chief inclusion officer, [BMO Harris Financial Group](#), earned degrees from two ACI-affiliated institutions, [Benedictine University](#) and [North Central College](#). She said BMO Harris' mission is to "Boldly grow the good in our community and in life." Through its Empower Program, it has given \$5 billion to the City of Chicago and throughout the United States, for women entrepreneurs and for people of color in business.



Tracie Morris, BMO Financial Group, was featured speaker at ACI's 70th Anniversary Celebration.

Carlos Robles, a recent finance graduate from [Saint Xavier University](#), an ACI member, was a recipient of the ACI General Scholarship. He and his family came to the United States from Ecuador when he was very young. He will join NFA, a financial company, in a few weeks, he said. His ACI scholarship helped him pay off his college debt and graduate earlier, he said. "This scholarship provided so much help in getting where I am. Thank you so much to the donors. I am eternally grateful for the scholarship. I want to thank ACI for allowing me to this opportunity to share my story and allow me to better my life in general."



Carlos Robles, left, Saint Xavier University, and Mia Pitts-Hope, right, Wheaton College, were student speakers who earned ACI scholarships during their college years.

Mia Pitts-Hope who graduates this spring with a communication degree from [Wheaton College](#), an ACI member, told the audience her grandmother inspired and supported her for much of her life. After her passing and other challenges, Pitts-Hope was awarded a McGraw Emergency Financial Aid Fund grant from ACI. She plans to use her degree "to improve the world around me through film, visual storytelling, journalism and design. I plan to

cultivate works of arts and carry on my grandmother's legacy." She added she was "grateful for the McGraw Foundation and its generous contribution and thankful for ACI. What seems to us as bitter trials are blessings in disguise."

Honors for retiring executive director

President S. Georgia Nugent of [Illinois Wesleyan University](#), who also serves as ACI president, helped honor Mick Weltman, ACI's executive director, who will retire this summer. "We know tonight is about our member institutions. It's certainly about our students, but we also want to recognize Mick," she said. At an earlier meeting, board members praised Weltman's leadership of ACI, she said. "I thought that the sense of what Mick has brought to the organization was particularly well captured by one speaker who said he has an incredible combination of kindness and effectiveness." Nugent presented an engraved memento to Weltman on behalf of friends of ACI.

"It's a real honor to be recognized. I will miss the work," Weltman said in response, crediting the work of ACI staff, board members and others for ACI's success.