GOODBYE SPRING VIRTUAL PROGRAMS & HELLO TO IN-PERSON SUMMER FUN!

BY LILLY COOK, PROGRAM LEAD

When the pandemic started, I was a senior at VCU, assigned to my first internship, and unsure of what lay ahead of me. I found myself joining the Podium team at a time when operations and programs were completely online. Despite the adversities of the pandemic, Podium continued to innovate and brainstorm the best ways to continue its mission, and I have been so proud to be part of the process.

Virtually this spring, we partnered with Next Up RVA to host weekly Prep Your Next Step and Teen Scene workshops with middle schoolers. We continued the Power of the Pen workshops weekly after-school with the Armstrong High School Center for Empowerment (ACE) and helped the Metro Richmond Boys & Girls Club prepare for their Youth of the Year annual scholastic competition. Celebrating the last stretch of our spring programs, on April 29th, Podium Alum Jay Guevara hosted our community open mic night over Zoom. These programs exemplify Podium’s power to conduct our work even in the face of a complete change in our modality of teaching.

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The Podium team is so warm and accommodating even in the most challenging of times. The safety net created by Podium staff is something I know I can trust, so it was natural for me to keep working with them after graduation. I have been welcomed back as our Summer Program Lead, and as we change gears back to in person meetings, I look out to Podium’s bright horizon. It glitters with the potential of each child participating in our programs, exemplified in their work and with everyone at Podium creating a brighter future for Richmond.

This summer, I am excited to work with the Southside Boys & Girls Club to host The Weekly Word, to host four different Teen Scene programs with Next Up RVA at River City and MLK middle schools, and to engage in career and self-advocacy planning with Partnership for the Future. In August, we will facilitate our annual two-day Teen Professional Conference in partnership with the Armstrong High School Center for Empowerment (ACE) and to wrap up the summer, we will host our last fully online community open mic. Check out the program schedule and connect with us at www.podiumrva.org today!

**RIVER ROAD LIVING HONORS THE PEDESTAL FUND**

**BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICKI YEROIAN**

Did you see Pedestal Fund founders Robert and Anne Waldruff featured in last month’s River Road Living Magazine? If you haven’t yet, make sure to grab your copy today! Starting in April, Podium’s newest partner River Road Living Magazine features our youth writers monthly. Whether reflecting on giving back to their communities, the importance of positive mental health, loving our animals and pets, or getting ready for the summer, Podium youth have shared many viewpoints and will continue to voice their stories and experiences! To show even more support for Podium youth, in May, River Road Living featured Robert and Anne Waldruff, the founders of Podium’s Pedestal Fund.

Started in July 2020, the Pedestal Fund is a transformational investment in life-changing programs, college scholarships, and career guidance for under-served teens and recent high school graduates across Richmond. Created with an unwavering belief that every voice deserves a place at the podium, the Pedestal Fund unlocks Podium’s strategic community vision to be local leaders in youth workforce readiness growth and a continued force in closing Richmond’s educational equity gap. With a generous inaugural endowed gift from longtime Podium supporters Robert and Anne Waldruff, Podium establishes the Anne F. Waldruff Excellence in Education Scholarship, the first of many opportunities to help Richmond youth pursue their dream of higher education.

If you or someone you know would like to leave a legacy gift to the Pedestal Fund or contribute to the Anne F. Waldruff Excellence in Education Scholarship, please visit podiumrva.org/donate or reach out to Pedestal Fund Chair Jerry Howard directly at board.chair@podiumrva.org.
WE HAD A BEEAUTIFUL VIRTUAL SPELLING BEE!

BY COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, AERIN MILLS

On June 17th, Podium held our virtual Awesome Adult Spelling Bee! I’m proud to say that it was a wonderful success. Despite the potential pitfalls and usual trappings of an all virtual event, Podium volunteers brought their A-Game, and everything went off without a hitch! A very special thanks to Kerry Swarr and Lindy Bumgarner for playing critical roles as our judge and pronouncer respectively!

We had 8 teams of one or two players competing for the glory of winning the hottest spelling bee in town. Congratulations to both teams from Impact Makers for snatching second place, and a major congratulations to Mr. David Riddle for claiming the top spot all the way from California! (Pictured right.)

You read that right: Podium’s mission resonates across the country.

We also had a total of 20 viewers who all came out to cheer on their team and support Podium’s mission. Shout outs to everyone who showed up for Podium!

Unable to make it to The Bee? Looking for the next best way to communicate Podium’s excellence with your friends and colleagues? You’re in luck!

Share Podium’s Bee Mania Campaign page with your contacts! Our goal is to raise the last $700 needed for our summer programs. Will you help us reach our next milestone?
APRIL HIGHLIGHTS AND AN AUGUST SNEAK PEAK!

BY COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, AERIN MILLS

During April, we ran our second virtual campaign in honor of National Poetry Month, and it was beyond a success! We raised a combined total of $2,210 for youth in Richmond, which is 111% of our overall goal and simply amazing!

We had a total of 10 donations, 30% of which were entirely new donors! The average size of donations was about $125. Our largest donors were Robert Waldruff, Jerry Howard, Kerry Swarr, Sa’adia Douglas, and Christine Hasbrouck. A thousand thank yous to every individual who contributed to this campaign! Without the undying love and support you have for Richmond youth, we would not be where we are today or able to do what we do.

McKinsey & Company recently reported that learning loss as a result of COVID-19 is at an all time high and has set back learning for all students, but especially for lower income students and students of color. Podium is looking to do our part in correcting this disparity by providing weekly mentorship opportunities, accessible workshops for youth in Richmond and surrounding counties, and by printing physical copies for our Journal 11 to give to youth, their families, and the greater community as we return in-person to schools this fall.

Make sure to keep your eyes peeled for what Podium has in store in the coming months! This August, Podium hosts our next campaign, Back to School, to welcome students as they make their way back into the classroom, many for the first time in more than a year. See you then!

Check us out at podiumrva.org!