

Meagan Haire Abbey: A Fiery Servant of the People

Education, service and community is the intrinsic make-up of this history-making Richard Bland College alumna.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- For most of her life, Meagan Haire Abbey felt her calling in life was to lead a classroom—not an entire town.

Abbey resides in McKenney [located roughly 30 miles southwest of Richard Bland College (RBC) of William & Mary], a town that spans about one square mile with a population of 480.



Meagan Haire Abbey looks on during her interview with the RBC (Richard Bland College) Creative Services Group.

After teaching for roughly 10 years in Dinwiddie County Public Schools, Abbey decided to establish her own childcare center, Stepping Stone Academy. This inspired her to be a more active participant in Dinwiddie’s local government. She served on the county’s Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

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Meagan Haire Abbey

After several years of service, Abbey was empowered to invoke change in her own backyard. She struck up a conversation with a friend about her frustrations with McKenney’s government. She felt it wasn’t adequately representing its constituents—so she decided to do something about it.

On Sept. 10, 2020, Abbey put in her bid for mayor—roughly a month before election day. The community and her loved ones rallied behind her campaign because she promised to dismantle the old guard and breathe new life into the town.

33 days later, Abbey made history. She became the town’s first woman mayor. She’s since been

re-elected and is hoping to go for her third consecutive term.

“The older generation of women [of McKenney] are extremely supportive of the things that I've accomplished,” she said. “I think it makes them feel proud that a woman has accomplished these things in their lifetime because these were things they wouldn't have considered possible when they were young girls.”

But as for Abbey's three daughters, her feat was essentially an expectation.

“At first, it kind of hurt my feelings that they weren't more impressed with me,” Abbey admitted. “But then I realized that if I reframe that and think about it, that's a good thing, because they think it's normal.”

“And they should because it should be normal. So having my daughters think this is completely normal for a woman to accomplish means a lot to me.”

Among Abbey's top objectives as mayor is to improve daily operation services for residents, as well as the town's technology and web capabilities—such as giving residents the ability to pay their utility bills online. She's also been intentional about empowering her underrepresented constituents.

“I push for all the things that our residents need or deserve that bigger towns or cities have,” she said.

Abbey was born and raised in Dewitt, roughly six miles northeast of McKenney. Her father, Charles Haire Jr., an RBC alumnus and first-generation college student, strongly encouraged her to attend the college.

“I thought it would suit her better to experience college life there instead of a big, four-year college,” Haire Jr. said. “It's a lot more economical.”

“You're paying twice as much at a four-year university for the same classes you can take at Richard Bland College.”

Abbey begrudgingly conceded but she was envious of her friends attending four-year universities.

“I felt like I was being left behind,” she said.

However, Abbey's disposition quickly changed, largely because of her experiences in Spanish professor Dr. Rachel Finney's class.

Abbey's class took a trip to Costa Rica—her first international trip—which birthed her travel

bug.

“We actually didn’t use English while we were there,” she said. “We were so in tune with the culture.”

Dr. Finney vividly recalled a special moment with Meagan during the class trip.

“I remember standing next to Meagan when she called her mom from the hotel's front desk,” Dr. Finney said. “Her mom asked what time it was there, so Meagan turned to the desk clerk and asked in Spanish, ‘Que hora es?’”

“The desk clerk answered in Spanish and Meagan relayed the time to her mom. Meagan told me later that her mom was so excited to overhear her asking for information in Spanish. My heart swelled too. Those little moments with students when you see them empowered by the germination of seeds of knowledge that were planted in the classroom are about as good as it gets for a teacher.”

Abbey graduated with her associate’s degree in arts in 2005 then transferred to Longwood University. She would later receive her bachelor’s from the university and her Pre-K to sixth grade teaching license shortly after.

Stepping Stone Academy, which has been in business for more than a decade, has been very successful and has been a godsend to underserved families in the area. Namely, during the early years of the COVID-19 outbreak, Abbey helped families secure state funding to cover their child's tuition.

RBC wholly believes in preparing its students for a lifetime of endless potential. Since leaving the college, Abbey has impacted the lives of hundreds of people—young and old alike. She’s a beacon of hope and lover of community. She has traversed several unexpected avenues in her life. But with her North Star grounded in hope, community, and service, she landed right where she needed to be. In her wake, she’s always left spaces better than she found them.

“If you want to see something happen, then do it,” Abbey said. “Be the one who makes the change.”

Haire Jr. couldn’t be prouder as a father and respects how resolute Abbey is in everything she does.

“Don’t tell her she can’t do it because she will do it,” he said.

To learn more about Abbey's story, check out this mini-documentary below highlighting her journey from RBC to the McKenney mayoral office.

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