

20 UNDER 40



We set out to find some of the young shining stars in Milledgeville that represent generations who hold the future of the town in their hands. On the following pages you will find our 20 under 40 profiles, selected by you -- our readers. The rules on nominations were that the person had to be from, living in or working in Milledgeville/Baldwin County, be under 40 at the time of the nomination and making a significant impact on the community. Enjoy reading about your 20 under 40 of Milledgeville.



Emmanuel Little

Visionary. Hopeful. Inspiring.

They want to teach. They just don't know it yet. Hundreds of high school students in dress pants and blazers wander the booths at the Edward H. Wilson Convention Center in Macon. It's Career Fest day, where students can meet representatives from colleges, technical institutes, businesses, and the military.

Dr. Emmanuel Little hopes to expose and recruit students to the Call Me MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role models) program at Georgia College. It aims to train students from underrepresented backgrounds to become transformational teachers.

"Have you ever thought about becoming a teacher?" he asks.

Many students respond with blank stares and hesitation.

Some say no.

"Why not?"

They want to pursue something else. They don't have the patience for teaching. Teachers don't make enough money.

"You got to be honest with students," Little says. "Yes, you're right, teachers don't get paid a lot. But the tradeoff is you can also see the type of impact that you have on these students every day. [There are] not many jobs you can say, 'I wake up every single day and have a brand new opportunity to change the world.'"

For Little, teachers impacted not only his retention of math and history but his entire worldview. Unfortunately, he rarely had an instructor who resembled him.

In the United States, less than 2 percent of all educators are black males.

Call Me MiSTER aims to change that. The program selects students from diverse backgrounds, with a focus on African-American males. Students receive scholarships, academic coaching, in-classroom experience, a cohort system of peer networks for support, and mentorship from local leaders in education.

Make eye contact. Comment on their shirt. Eavesdrop on the conversation. Little has developed strategies for catching the attention of high school students at events like these. He wants to build a rapport with students so they trust him and feel comfortable. At Career Fest, he spends as much time answering questions about Georgia College and the application process as he does talking about Call Me MiSTER. Where is the college located? Are campus tours free? What is the minimum GPA required to get in? How much is tuition? Is it an all-male college? What's the baseball program like?

"To me, there's no such thing as a dumb question," he says. "For



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-Emmanuel Little

lot of these kids, it’s maybe their first time conceptualizing what a college looks like, so they ask questions. I’m not going to laugh at you or make fun of you because you don’t know what this major is or you never heard of this school. That’s not what this is about. When I was 16 or 17, I had no clue about any of this stuff.”

As a first-generation college student, neither Little nor his parents knew much about the application process. But he had his pick of schools. A self-described “nerd,” Little earned outstanding test scores and a high GPA. He ranked top 10 in his class.

“Frankly, he could have gone anywhere,” says Dr. Paul Jones, who was then the vice president of Georgia College, now the president of Fort Valley State University. “He was a high-ability student, one of those young men the university could offer something to, and he could offer something to the university.”

How much did Georgia College want Little to attend? Enough that Jones and an admissions counselor showed up at his church in Macon on Youth Sunday to recruit him. A preacher’s son, Little was singing that day in the youth choir. The service started at 11 a.m. and went until about 2:30 in the afternoon.

“They didn’t just stay for a few minutes; they stayed the whole time,” says Little. “That sent the message that they truly want me here.”

Jones recalls that church visit as out of the ordinary.

“I couldn’t say that I’ve gone to everyone’s church,” he says. “It was important because family was

important to him. I looked both his parents in the eye and said he’s in good hands. He wasn’t settling, but really joining a family. By meeting his parents, I better understood him. I better understood his goals and aspirations in his own environment.”

Little has never forgotten that. “You’ve got to show students that you care,” he says. “Too many organizations just care about the numbers. It’s not about getting the most students, it’s about what can we do to help you reach the next level, to help you reach your potential. People saw that in me.”

Georgia College offered Little one of the best academic scholarships the school had at the time. He’s been at Georgia College ever since, earning a B.A. in mass communication in 2007, a masters in public administration in 2010, and working in admissions and the School of Education while pursuing his doctorate in Higher Education Administration at the University of Georgia, which he earned last October.

It all traces back to that church visit 15 years ago.

“It’s amazing how little moments can change everything,” Little says. Little met his wife, Crystal, in college. They’ve been married for 10 years and have a 3-year-old daughter named Cameron.

A typical day of Little pursuing his Ph.D. looked like this: leave Milledgeville at 7 a.m. to arrive in Athens in time to park and get to his 9 o’clock class. When the class ends around lunchtime, get in the car, grab some lunch along the way, and then work at Georgia College until around 5, sometimes later. Spend the evening in the Georgia College library researching and writing papers.

“I don’t know how he did it,” says Jones. “I never said it while he was in midst of it. But holding a full-time job while being married and having a young child at home? A 3-year-old doesn’t care about working on your doctorate. They just want

you. Trying to balance that had to be pretty demanding on him.”

For his dissertation, Little examined the Call Me MiSTER program at Clemson University.

“I’ve tried to combine my work and my coursework as much as I can, from a sanity standpoint, number one,” he says. “But No. 2, I think it makes sense to marry your passions with your scholarship. That’s what I think makes you better researcher and that’s what gives you a lane to make an impact on.”

He continually speaks of the support he received from his wife and his colleagues at Georgia College.

“They see me on campus and I look exhausted and they say, you’re almost done. Just keep going. Your labor is not in vain. We see you working, you’re doing great stuff. Continue doing it because there are people watching you. There are people who want to be like you.”

It made Little realize, “I can’t give up now.”

Personality tests reveal that Little is an introvert.

“In my professional role, when I tell people I’m an introvert, they say ‘no. You can’t be,’” Little says. “Cause I’m always talking. But it’s a switch that I flip. My wife sees how exhausted I get when I come home after events like this. I have to recharge for an hour or two because I’ve been talking so much. I’ve used up my social meter for the next week.”

And Little does talk a lot at Career Fest. He takes the time to get to know each student who stops by his table. What are they passionate about? What motivates them?

At their age, Little thought about drawing. Then he thought about becoming a radio personality. Over the din of voices at Career Fest, Little hopes to break through the noise. Have they thought about teaching?

“Teachers have the power to influence the next generation and change the world, through the worlds of their classrooms,” he says. “Everybody, no matter where you are at now, has come up through a teacher.”