

# 2021 Honorees

## Rob Ahlers '08

*President and CEO, MSR Transport Services, Inc.*

Major Robert Ahlers joined the Ohio Army National Guard in 2001 at age 17. He was an enlisted member of the 1484th Transportation Company of Akron, Ohio and was deployed to Iraq in 2004. Rob earned the Bronze Star Medal for his actions during a firefight in April of 2004. He was a member of The University of Akron's ROTC battalion when he began attending UA in 2002. When he returned from Iraq in 2005, he rejoined the ROTC unit at The University of Akron and continued pursuing his degree. Rob graduated in 2008 with a BS in Management and minors in Human Resources, Military Science, and Supply Chain Operations.

Rob commissioned in 2008. In April 2012, the battalion commander placed Rob in command of the 1483rd Transportation Company in Perrysburg, Ohio. Rob flipped the unit from being last out of 13 in the brigade to being number 1 out of 13 when he relinquished command in August of 2014.

During his command in 2012, he was asked to lead and command another unit tasked to go to relief efforts for Hurricane Sandy, and he was the senior officer from the State of Ohio on the ground in New York City. Rob commanded a group of Army and Air Force personnel for 3 weeks while providing relief support to the New York National Guard and NYPD.

In October 2014, after completing command of the 1483rd, Rob left the Ohio Army National Guard after 13.5 years of service. He joined the US Army Reserves to begin drilling closer to home. Rob has been in the US Army Reserves for over 5 years and is a member of the Headquarters, Department of the Army Staff. Rob was selected for promotion to Major in August of 2018.

In 2014, Rob had the idea of starting a veteran-owned trucking company with the goal of working with veterans and service personnel who are close to getting out of the military. He earned a Graduate Certificate in Transportation Management from the American Military University in 2012 and wanted to put it to use. Rob knew the trucking industry is short on qualified drivers, and as a transportation officer in the Ohio Army National Guard, Rob knew soldiers in transportation units had the skills that were easily transferable to the civilian industry. He began working with FedEx Custom Critical and Panther Premium Logistics, and he helped them navigate military paperwork and skills transferability to increase veteran drivers in their fleets.

MSR Transport Services, Inc. has been recognized in industry trade publications as a start-up business that is doing right by veterans and entering the

business for the right reasons. There have been 7 articles written and published on the business with Rob as the president/CEO. All three owners still hold regular, full-time employment, and Rob and Sean (Akron Alumni) are both still serving in the Army as well. The three business owners, under Rob's direction as president and CEO, have self-funded the business and have no outside investors. Currently, MSR Transport Services has 25 tractor-trailers and 38% of their drivers are veterans as well.



Rob took a federal appointment in 2009 as an intern with the Army Chief of Transportation in Ft. Eustis, VA. In 2010, he graduated top of his intern class and was the number one choice for the US Army Logistics Innovation Agency located in Ft. Belvoir, VA. Rob was the project lead for the US Army Smart Container program, an innovative polymer based ocean shipping container. Rob was then moved to the Audit Readiness Team and worked field level efforts to ensure that the Department of the Army was auditable and compliant with federal mandates. One of the projects with the most visibility was a special project for the vice chief of staff for the Army on Property Accountability in 2012, a deep-dive task force with a small team focused on a large problem.

In 2015, Rob accepted a new federal position with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). He leveraged his Master of Arts in Homeland Security to make the move from Department of Defense to DHS. Rob oversees training and training aid development that the entire transportation security officer (the TSA airport security officers) workforce uses at the 440 plus federalized airports. Through cost-savings initiatives, Rob is responsible for saving the federal government and taxpayers more than \$36 million over a period of 3.5 years.

Rob married his wife, Victoria, in 2015, and they bought a house residing on one of George Washington's original five farms. They have three kids: Abigail Grace, Theodore Robert and Eleanor Rose. Rob enjoys traveling with his family, reading, being outside, and spending time with his kids. Rob is also a graduate of the Naval War College, College of Distance Education Command and Staff school and earned the Institute for Supply Management's Certified Purchasing Manager credentials and The International Society of Logistics Demonstrated Master Logistician credential.

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## **Darrell C. Claytor '79, '82** *Certified Financial Planner*

Darrell is a registered representative with Securities America, Inc. in the Twinsburg, Ohio branch office. He entered the financial services industry in 1982 and serves over nine hundred families. His practice specialty is retirement income planning, and he also operates an income tax preparation service.

Darrell graduated from The University of Akron in 1978 with a BS in Finance. After a short stint with IBM, he returned to the university and was a member of the first Master of Taxation graduating class in 1982. Dean Dunlap and Associate Dean Mast served as his mentors. In 1985, he obtained his CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ designation from the College for Financial Planner.

While at UA, Darrell was elected president of Black United Students as a freshman write-in candidate and later was elected president again while he attended graduate school. In 1978, he became a charter member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.'s Iota Beta Chapter, and he later served as the alumni chapter president of the Akron and Cleveland chapters.

After becoming a CFP®, Darrell became very active in the Northeast Ohio Financial Planning Association and participated in numerous programs to promote financial wellness. In 2012, he became just the 4th member of the chapter to be awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to the financial planning profession. Darrell has been quoted in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence*.

From 1994 until 2012, he served as the treasurer of the Reynolds/Claytor Family Reunion Inc. and was president from 2012 until 2018. The family reunion hosts a bi-annual reunion that attracts over 250 family members and has donated over \$40,000 in scholarships to high school seniors.

He and his wife, Theresa, reside in Twinsburg, Ohio and have four adult children.



## **Kimberly Haws Falasco '99** *Director and Branch Manager, Baird Private Wealth Management*

Kim is the director, branch manager, and financial advisor with Baird's Private Wealth Management office in Akron, Ohio. For more than 30 years, she has been working with her clients to help them reach their financial goals with personally tailored solutions. By developing a financial plan and implementing a risk managed asset allocation, Kim helps her clients achieve their unique financial goals. This is an ongoing process as clients' needs change over time from accumulation to distribution.

Kim attended The University of Akron where she earned her Bachelor's in Personal Finance. She began her career in 1986 at Dean Witter Reynolds while attending school and held a number of positions with the firm. Since then, she has dedicated herself to financial planning. She joined Baird in 2009 and continues her work to educate and counsel women and families about the importance of investing.

Kim holds the FINRA Series 7, 8, 31, 63, and 65 licenses as well as her insurance licenses in the states of Ohio, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Florida, California, and New York. In 2018 and 2019, she was recognized by *Forbes* and *Shook* as a Best in State Advisor.

While today's investment culture is often geared toward male investors, Kim recognizes that wives

and daughters need to be included too. She believes both spouses should have a working knowledge of their finances. Women who are suddenly widowed or divorced can become overwhelmed by their accounts and investments and feel uncertain about the financial stability of their future. Seeing the need for compassionate financial consulting, Kim focuses on helping couples and suddenly single women understand their finances and reach their goals.

Kim is actively involved in her community. She is a past president of Women's Network of Northeast Ohio, Boys and Girls Clubs of the Western Reserve and Baird Women Advisors. Currently, she is president of the CASA Board for Summit County and vice president of the Keep Akron Beautiful Board. She sits on the board and the grants advisory committee for The Akron Community Foundation. She truly loves Akron and believes in paying it back and forward!

Kim resides in Sharon Center with her husband, Dennis, and their dogs. She enjoys active sports, reading and real estate.



## **Gerard M. Neugebauer '87, '91** *Mayor, City of Green*

Gerard Neugebauer lives a life of service – to his family, his faith, and his community. A native of Akron, he is the sixth of nine children of a German immigrant mother whose family life taught him the importance of collaboration, compromise and compassion from a young age. At age 14, he began volunteering at Camp Happiness Day for the developmentally disabled at Camp Christopher in Bath Township, launching a life of service to others. At age 15, he worked a full-time summer job at Schermesser Funeral Home, earning just enough money to pay his St. Vincent-St. Mary High School tuition of \$975 that year, a feat he repeated every year of high school. He also worked as a paperboy for the Akron Beacon Journal, using the extra money to help support his family.

In addition to working hard at his studies and jobs, he was a founding member of the St. Vincent-St. Mary boys soccer team his junior year and became team captain his senior year. During his senior year, he also helped form the first St. Vincent-St. Mary girls soccer team. Following high school, he pursued his education at The University of Akron, earning a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering in 1987, and in 1991, an MBA in Finance. As a college freshman, Gerard returned to St. Vincent-St. Mary to coach the freshman boys soccer team and helped coach the varsity team to the state finals. As an undergrad at The University of Akron, he also served two years as the University's mascot, Zippy. This allowed him to spend more time with his high school sweetheart and future wife, Maria Hercules, a '82 graduate of St. Vincent-St. Mary, and a UA cheerleader. They both were voted to Homecoming Court in 1983.

In 1987, Gerard began his professional career as a civil engineer and moved to Green. Through the years he served in a variety of roles including engineering project manager, IT director, chief engineer, and division leader with Akron firms AECOM, Kenmore Construction Company and Environmental Design Group. He also became very involved in his community. He served as soccer coach for many years through the Green Soccer Association, but he also served more deeply in shaping his community by serving on the city's Design Review Board (2000-2001) and the Planning and Zoning Commission (2002 through 2010).

In 2012, he began his political career when he was elected as an at-large city councilman. He was subsequently elected to become the seventh mayor of the City of Green and assumed office on January 1, 2016. He is currently serving in his second 4-year term as mayor.



As mayor, Gerard continues to shape his community by improving infrastructure, expanding parks and creating a stronger sense of belonging by developing a true sense of community for Green. He launched a volunteer program to encourage residents to serve their community. He tackled tough issues such as the opioid epidemic that plagued local communities around the state by creating the Green Drug Task Force to educate the community and offer hope to families impacted by addiction. He assigned student municipal representatives to all the city's boards, commissions, and task forces to inspire the next generation of community leaders.

Gerard became a professional engineer in the State of Ohio in 1992, and he served as a board member and three-time president of the Akron District Society of Professional Engineers. In 1995, he was named the Young Engineer of the Year by the Ohio Society of Professional Engineers for his efforts to promote the engineering profession and his leadership in the community. He continues to serve on the Akron Area Engineers Week Committee and co-chairs the Akron Areas Math Counts Competition for local junior high school students. He is also a member of the Leadership Akron Class 34 and serves on the Cleveland Clinic Akron General Community Advisory Committee.

In addition to his leadership roles within his community, he also shared his faith as a PSR teacher and PSR coordinator for several years at the parish of St. Francis DeSales and Queen of Heaven in Green. He is a member of the Queen of Heaven Men's Group and Knights of Columbus Council 3410. He can often be found in the third pew on the right at the 8:30 daily Mass at Queen of Heaven Church, if anyone would like to join him. A devote Catholic, his faith certainly reaches beyond the pew in service and kindness to others.

A 33-year resident of the city he loves, Green, Ohio, he lives with his wife Maria. They have three grown children: Patrick, Stephen, and Rachel (all married), and 18-month old granddaughter, Aria.

# 2021 Honorees

## **C. Allen Nichols '90**

*Executive Director, Akron Bar Association and Foundation*

C. Allen Nichols possesses a BS Industrial Management from The University of Akron, a Master of Library Science degree from Kent State University, and an MBA from Mississippi State University. Allen worked for Ohio public libraries for over 32 years and left library life in 2013 after sixteen years as director of the Wadsworth Public Library and its Foundation to become Executive Director of the Akron Bar Association and Foundation. In Spring 2019, he was additionally named Executive Director of Ohio Notary Services LLC, a jointly owned venture of the Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Ohio State, and Toledo bar associations. He serves as an adjunct faculty member at the Kent State University School of Information, where he has focused on teaching courses in management and leadership. Allen is a referee for the United States Soccer Federation and the Ohio High School Athletic Association. He has presented training workshops and programs throughout the United States, including the American Bar Association's Bar Leadership Institute, and published three books. One book is part of the "Libraries Unlimited Professional Guides for Young Adult Librarians" series which he co-edits with his wife, Mary Anne.

Allen has focused on service throughout both his personal and professional life. He has served the bar association and library professions through participation in various statewide and national organizations, including terms as president of the Ohio Library Association, Ohio Metropolitan Bar Association Consortium, and Conference of Metropolitan Bar Associations. Locally, he is a past chairman of the board of directors for Goodwill Industries of Akron, is chairman of the Fairlawn

Board of Building and Zoning Appeals and serves on the board of directors for the Downtown Akron Partnership. He is an alumnus of Leadership Medina County, past president of the Wadsworth Lions Club, and a member of the Northern Ohio Golf Charities Foundation board and volunteer for the Bridgestone SENIOR PLAYERS Championship. The Wadsworth Chamber of Commerce honored him as the Outstanding Business Leader of the Year in 2002 and awarded him its Community Vision Award in 2004 and again in 2009. The Kent State School of Library and Information Science named him Alumnus of the Year in 2005. In addition, Allen is a former member of The University of Akron's College of Business Administration Alumni Advisory Board.

A graduate of Akron's Kenmore High School, Allen is a life-long resident of northeastern Ohio who currently resides in Fairlawn. His wife is a senior lecturer at the School of Information at Kent State University. Both are active members of St. Hilary Catholic Church and School. He has served on the parish council and is a former athletic director and a past president of the school board. He was a Parent Ambassador at Archbishop Hoban High School and chaired the 2015 and 2019 After-Prom Committees. One of his two sons is a freshman at Hillsdale College, and the other is a recent graduate of the University of Notre Dame now pursuing a PhD at Stanford University.



## **Stephen Thompson '75** *Retired, President, Swensons Food*

Born and raised in Akron, Ohio, Stephen Thompson attended St. Vincent's through his high school graduation where he then enrolled at The University of Akron to study Business Administration. During his time as a UA student, Steve worked as a curb server at Swensons. Upon graduating with his BS from The University of Akron, Steve took his first job with Metropolitan Life Insurance. After one year of working in insurance, Steve returned to Swensons, this time purchasing the Wallhaven location. Several years later of growth, Steve acquired the Cuyahoga Falls Avenue location.

In 1982, Steve started a separate meat company to ensure the quality of the meat and the unique processing of the product. In time, Steve developed those two locations to seven successful stores. Full-time attendance at a four-year college and keeping a 2.25 grade point average was a prerequisite of all individuals hired as Swensons servers with tuition scholarships available for exceptional employees.

Swensons has had numerous accolades including the *Akron Beacon Journal's* "Best Burger" since the inception of the newspaper's contest. Swensons was honored with a "Best Burger" title on Chef Michael Simon's television show "Food Feuds" and was named "The Best Cheeseburger in America" by *Forbes Magazine*.

Steve has held several positions with state and national restaurant associations including president of the Akron Restaurant Association. Swensons has

served as a leading contributor to Akron Children's Hospital, Akron youth sports, First Tee, The LeBron James Family Foundation, Akron parks, various parochial schools, numerous civic organizations and The University of Akron.

Several years ago, Steve sold 80% of Swensons and his meat company with the stipulation that the quality of the product would be maintained. Steve is currently enjoying retirement in southwest Florida with his fiancée, Stacy, as well as with his four children and extended family and friends.

