

HEIGHTS PHILADELPHIA

The Promise of 1776: A City that Works for All

Dear Friends,

Every year, millions of people from across the globe descend upon our city to stand in front of a giant, silent bronze bell with a crack in it. They tour a stately but small building where flawed men drew up something that outlived them. They come to see symbols of freedom that are famous, specifically *because* they are fractured — forged by fallible people who together made a promise that was clear, beautiful, and enduring for all time: **Prosperity, Freedom, and Dignity**. In Philadelphia, that commitment to making a promise real, even in the darkest of times, still echoes today.

Now, it is our turn to ring the bell. Will you join us as we support the Class of 2026, who personify the living fulfillment of this promise?

As Philadelphia's 250th anniversary approaches, we must summon the urgency of 1776 to bridge the systemic gaps blocking our students from economic mobility. We invite you to help us fulfill Philly's founding promise: **if we can conceive of a better life and are willing to work for it together, we can create it.**

Right before America celebrates its semiquincentennial this July, these students will be walking across the ballfield at Citizens Bank Park at Heights' Graduation Celebration on Friday, June 12th. They are pursuing success despite the harsh reality that Philly ranks last among the nation's 50 largest cities for economic mobility. Rather than let current realities dictate their lives, these students are forging a new path.

Now is the time to champion their success.

At Heights Philadelphia, a fracture in the system isn't a signal to give up — it's an invitation to step in. To honor our history, we must bridge these divides by fueling:

• **SOCIAL CAPITAL:** Talent is distributed equally, but opportunity is not. We are doubling down on the networks and industry connections once reserved for the privileged few. In FY25, we facilitated **209 paid internships** through **100+ partner companies** to ensure every graduate has a clear path to economic mobility.

• **MUTUAL AID:** This isn't charity; it's our city's lifeblood. Our strength lies in a coalition: a powerful network of **1,600+ alumni, 250 volunteers, 700+ donors, and 37 partner schools and universities**. When our students succeed, our businesses thrive and our city's economy grows. We are all stakeholders in one another's success.



The crack doesn't mean the bell is broken; it is a testament to its history. Like the bell, **we are not broken. We are resilient, and together, we will find a better way.** The Class of 2026 represents Philadelphia's 'unfinished business' — the living proof that 250 years later, we can finally make the promise of 1776 a reality for everyone.

Will you join our community in making this promise a reality?

Change is possible even with cracks in the system.

There are many ways to be part of this work — whether by donating, volunteering, or simply joining us to celebrate our students' achievements.

Together, we can build a coalition that refuses to look away until the system works for all.

With gratitude and resolve,

Sean E. Vereen, Ed.D.
President and CEO, Heights Philadelphia



bit.ly/Spring Campaign2026



P.S. Please join us for the **Power of the Network: A Heights Stakeholder Town Hall** on April 30th from 4-5:30pm EST to hear more about our vision for the future and how we can work together to support Philly youth.
bit.ly/TownHallRSVP2026

More than a Network:

A 20-year journey of friendship and support between Barbara and Varonnica

Social Capital in Action

As Philadelphia approaches its 250th anniversary, our city is looking back at its founding ideals — liberty, opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness. But for Philly youth, these aren't just historical echoes; they are a birthright that needs to be brought to life today. At Heights Philadelphia, we believe the most vital infrastructure we can build isn't made of brick and mortar — it's made of the unbreakable bonds between our students and their community.

There is no greater evidence of this than the 20-year journey of Barbara and Varonnica. Their story shows how the Heights community honors a student's potential: not through one-off volunteer acts, but through a **real commitment to showing up for each other and sharing the networks and opportunities** that open doors.

A Spirit of Showing Up

Barbara Link didn't join Heights in 2002 just to check a volunteer box; she joined to help level a playing field she knew was uneven. "I grew up in the suburbs with every resource at my fingertips," Barbara recalls. "Every child deserves that."

What she found was a revelation of resilience. When Barbara was matched with 15-year-old Varonnica, the relationship quickly moved beyond simple "career advice"; it became about **radical support**. By showing up consistently — even when it meant facing a fear of heights on a hot air balloon or stomaching the Body Worlds exhibit at the Franklin Institute — Barbara proved that the best way to support someone was by simply being present. This is what we mean by mutual aid: **the simple, powerful act of making sure no one stands alone.**

The Power of Who You Know

At Heights, we talk a lot about "Social Capital," but really, it's just the **Power of the Network**. It's the web of support that ensures no student has to navigate a complex world by themselves.

Barbara didn't just give Varonnica advice; she opened up her world. She shared her professional connections and gave Varonnica tools for self-expression. For twenty years, Barbara has gifted Varonnica a journal every Christmas. "Writing saved my life," Varonnica says. "She gave me that tool." **This is the heart of a strong network: giving a student the keys to unlock their own future.**

From Fractures to a Stronger City

We can't rely on the history of 1776 to fix the challenges of today. Instead, we have to take up the mantle ourselves to build something better and more just.

Varonnica is now 36 years old. She and Barbara are no longer mentor and mentee; they are family. Their two-decade bond has made our city's social fabric stronger, proving that when we invest in young people, we strengthen the future for all of us.

Your Call to Action: Help Us Build a Better Network

The founding ideals of this country are still unfinished business. To fulfill the promise of Philadelphia's next 250 years, we must ensure every student has the **support and the connections** they need to thrive.

Whether you choose to make a gift, volunteer your time, or simply join our network to stay connected, your involvement turns these founding ideals into a lived reality.

The next 250 years of Philadelphia start with our students. Together, we can break the cycle of generational poverty and help our city's future leaders claim their birthright today.



Reasons to Believe in Philly

As Philadelphia prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary, the Class of 2026 is proving that our city's founding ideals aren't just history — they are a promise of opportunity that belongs to every student. When we back that promise with community and connection, it leads to real prosperity.

At Heights, we know that no one reaches success alone. We believe in the **Power of the Network**: a community of mentors, coaches, and industry partners who make sure every student has a clear path to a great career. This year, as nearly 1,000 students prepare to walk across the field at Citizens Bank Park on June 12th, we are seeing that network in action.

Realizing the Promise: Science, Research, & Leadership

For students like **Tajwan Siyam-Rahman** and **Nashia Nahid**, the promise of opportunity was fulfilled in the lab. Both spent two summers conducting high-level chemistry research at Temple University, eventually traveling to Washington, D.C. to present their findings at a national conference. Today, Tajwan is headed to the University of Chicago, and Nashia continues to lead the way in STEM.

The power of this network is also clear in the success of **Tamara Brockington**, a Steppingstone Academy scholar. A dedicated leader who served as Program Chair for the National Society of Black Engineers Jr., Tamara utilized Heights' SAT Prep and advising programs to pave her way to success. This fall, she is headed to Drexel University on a full-tuition Liberty Scholarship to pursue a career in Biomedical Engineering.

Similarly, **Tamsin Gutierrez** and **Abdallah Sumrein**, both seniors at Abraham Lincoln High School, are seeing their hard work meet the right opportunity.

- Tamsin has already been accepted to eight colleges, including receiving a full scholarship to La Salle University. A future psychologist and a Gates Scholarship finalist, Tamsin has spent her summers in the CHOP-Rises program, proving that when a student has the right support, their ambitions have no limits.

- Abdallah is following in the footsteps of his two older siblings at Heights, having already secured a full scholarship to La Salle University, New York University, and the University of Pennsylvania, and acceptances to Purdue University and Drexel University. As a city finalist for the Coca-Cola Foundation Scholars Program and a leader in Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) and Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), Abdallah isn't just succeeding for himself — he's helping his younger sister start her own journey with Heights this year.

Alana Spicer credits her path to the University of Pennsylvania to the **connections and hands-on experience** she gained through Heights' healthcare programming.

These students aren't just talented — they are part of a network that ensures their hard work meets the right opportunity.

Partners in Progress

When our students succeed, our whole city wins. We see this through the **deep commitment of local leaders** like Comcast, PNC Bank, and Hirtle & Co., who do more than just provide jobs — they become active partners in our students' futures.

Andrea Miguel-Mejia is moving from a summer internship at PNC Bank to a full-time role, a direct result of the bridge built through the Heights network.

Sylvia Ortega and **Tahfiq Williams** are both graduating this year with full-time offers at Hirtle & Co., where they previously interned.

Mustafa Sabil has successfully transitioned from his internship at Comcast to a full-time hire, showing how long-term support creates lasting careers.

The Next Generation of Leaders

From **Danny Nguyen**, who is taking his STEM talents to Penn, to graduates like **Dasia Rosado**, **Tayanna Kelly**, and **Saniyah Copeland** — who are already making waves in biotech — the Class of 2026 is living proof that a city that supports its youth is a city that works for everyone.

Help us make the promise of Philadelphia a reality for every student. The next 250 years of our city start with these students, and our collective support ensures they cross the finish line.

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Heights believes economic and educational opportunity for every young person is **THEIR** right and **OUR** responsibility.

Save The Date

We invite you to be the connection that opens the next door by joining us for the Heights Graduation Celebration at Citizens Bank Park on June 12th, 2026.

Come witness the power of our community as we celebrate nearly 1,000 graduates.



bit.ly/Graduation2026RSVP

Stay In The Loop

We want to make sure you don't miss a single milestone. The best way to stay connected to our students and our work is through our digital community. Join our email list and follow us on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook to stay up to date about what we are doing to ensure young people in our city are set up for success. Please take a moment to share or update your email address so you can stay informed on all things Heights.



subscribe.heights.org

Partners in Progress

Will you give today to celebrate our students' success? Your gift is an investment in the community support that makes these milestones possible. Donate now to Heights Philadelphia in honor of the Class of 2026 and help us fuel the next generation of Philly leaders.



bit.ly/SpringCampaign2026

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