Thanks to SparkMacon for allowing us to use their creative maker space. SparkMacon is a community innovation space specializing in 3D Design, Electronics, Fashion & Textiles, Metalworking, Music, Web Programming, Woodworking and Visual Arts. Visit sparkmacon.com to learn more.
The idea was simple. Identify five people locally who are under 40 involved in the community and are successful professionally. That was in 2001. Since then in each August-September issue of Macon Magazine we’ve highlighted five people we think are moving Macon forward.

They don’t necessarily fit a mold. And that’s a good thing. They do share common traits. Primarily among those are caring about their community and having the wherewithal to invest their time and energy to ensure it is a good place to live.

Anyone can nominate someone for our Five Under 40, and past young leaders vote for those they think best represent the qualities that are necessary to fill one of the five slots.

It is always an interesting exercise for us, and it’s one of the tasks we look forward to each year. Because for us, there is satisfaction in helping highlight peoples’ good works. But more importantly, it’s getting to know more people in our community who share our love for the place where we live.

Congratulations to Chris Floore, Ivey Hall, Michael Kruger, Veronica McClendon and Melinda Robinson-Moffett. This year’s Five Under 40. You’re joining very good company.
MELINDA ROBINSON-MOFFETT, PH.D.

AGE
39

OCCUPATION
DIRECTOR OF CAREER SERVICES
MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

What are your professional and personal goals for the next five years?

Melinda: My personal goals include continuing to travel the world and enjoying life. My husband and I have travelled to Honduras, Belize, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Cozumel and Japan and look forward to travelling much more.

My professional goals include learning and growing in the field of higher education. Georgia has a unique blend of public, private and for-profit technical, two-year and four-year institutions. The opportunity to develop a niche expertise among various populations of adult learners is broad and exciting.

Michael: Personally, I just want to be the best father and husband I can be. I have two young boys (ages 1 and 4) and the next five years are going to be a lot of fun with those two. I just look forward to watching them grow. Professionally, my goal is to continue to develop positive relationships in the business community. It’s hard to be personable in today’s world, but I’ve always been taught that success stems from relationships.

Chris: Personally, the next five years are going to be about my family. I have two young boys – including one who was just born – and my wife and I will be making sure they have a good education and every chance to experience the world.

Professionally, I want to continue building a team of communication professionals who can help continue the growth and improvement of Macon-Bibb County, both as a community and consolidated government.

Ivey: Over the next five years I would like for Macon Area Habitat for Humanity to be a part of Macon’s solution to reduce the number of blighted structures in our community, replacing them with affordable homes and vibrant neighborhoods. Personally, I would like to see my kids develop a heart for our community. Even though Travis and I did not grow up here, Macon is our home, and I want our kids to experience the beauty in our community and be a part of the growth happening.

Veronica: When I got married, I moved into my husband’s home just outside of Macon. We plan to return to Macon within the next year. Additionally, I recently got back into martial arts and hope to earn my black belt within the next few years. Professionally, I’d like to be recognized as an expert in leveraging inherited property to generate wealth in traditionally low-wealth communities. I also aspire to become a published author and teach a class at a local college.

You have shown a commitment to move this community forward in positive, important ways. Tell us about your activities in the community, especially those you’re most excited about.

Melinda: I currently serve as a commissioner on the executive board of the Macon-Bibb Housing Authority. Most recently I served as a commissioner for the Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful Commission specifically focusing on litter-prevention education and outreach into the public schools. Additional efforts include service in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, providing scholarships, mentorships and community activities. Last year I volunteered with the Mentor’s Project of Bibb County, Real Impact, Upward Bound, Urban CEO, Two Hands International and the career, technical, agriculture education committee of Rutland High School.

Michael: I currently serve on the boards of Communities in Schools, United Way and the Chamber of Commerce. It’s really wonderful to be a part of these organizations and see the work they are doing. I’m most excited to see the direction in which our schools are currently heading. We’ve had a rough time in the past decade, but as a product of the Bibb County public school system, I know that a child can get a wonderful education here in Macon.

Chris: While I’ve been involved with some great groups this past decade, I’m most proud right now of being a board member at Montessori of Macon. It’s where my oldest boy goes to school
and where we want to send our youngest. It’s giving me the chance to have a direct impact on my family and its future. I’m also currently on the United Way of Central Georgia’s board, the City-County Communications & Marketing Association board, and the Southern Interscholastic Press Association.

I’m very proud of the work of the members of the Public Affairs team, whether its presenting at the national level on Macon-Bibb’s efforts to improve customer service, to serving and presenting at the state level on government communication, to leading a local arts organization. We’re not just trying to communicate about the consolidated government; I want them involved with and improving their local and professional community.

**Ivey:** Since moving to Macon over a decade ago, I have loved being a part of the non-profit community. Through my work at Goodwill, in Junior League, serving on community boards and now working with Habitat I am excited to see how the non-profit organizations in Macon-Bibb work together to address the needs of so many. Partnerships between non-profit organizations, for-profit companies and city and state entities will only make our community stronger. It is exciting to see new programs emerging that bring all facets of the community together to create solutions.

**Veronica:** Being one of the Mercer students who helped conceive of the College Hill Corridor taught me I had a role in helping this community reach its full potential. I discovered a passion for seeing people thrive economically, which explains my present service on the Macon-Bibb Workforce Development board and NewTown Macon’s small business loan committee.
In addition, my heart for racial reconciliation has encouraged my participation in Mercer's Building the Beloved Community Symposium.

**Right now, what is the best thing going on in Macon?**

**Melinda:** As director of career services for Middle Georgia State University I see first-hand the increase in opportunities for jobs and careers in Macon with an emphasis on workforce development. Several organizations are focusing on supporting the development of technical and soft skills. These free services combined with the growth of existing industries and the recruitment of new industries will take Macon to the next level.

**Michael:** In my mind, the best thing in Macon is and always has been the people that live here. There is a real sense of community in this town. My family recently lost our home in a fire and as terrible as that was, the overwhelming response from the wonderful people in this community (many of whom we had never met) really just reinforced my love for the people of Macon.

**Chris:** Consolidation. No question.

It’s not the solution to all the issues we face, the answer to every question, nor the leap over every hurdle placed in front of us. But it was a huge step forward. It allowed our community to loudly declare the type of government it wanted, and we’ve worked every day to try and exceed that expectation.

I’ve seen a change in attitude and a great deal of that has stemmed from consolidation. We’ve been offered the chance to build a government that meets today’s needs and to structure partnerships and plans around what works and what is best for every part of the county.

**Ivey:** The best things happening in Macon right now are new ideas and leaders who are not afraid to try them. We are seeing Macon residents step out of their comfort zones to try new ideas, and those new ideas are reviving our community.

**Veronica:** I’m really excited about the revival of Macon’s historic neighborhoods. I’m particularly interested in conversations people are having on making Macon a more walkable and bike-able city. It would be so much easier to exercise if we were naturally incorporated in my daily commute.

**What really needs to change to encourage continued progress in our city?**

**Melinda:** The perception that there are two Macons: 1) offering significant opportunities for the entire family (i.e. Theatre Macon, Occkmulgee National Monument, Hay House) and 2) nothing of significance for specific populations (i.e. young adults, African-Americans, singles, etc.). The citizens of Macon need to expand their thoughts and experiences by stepping outside of the box they were raised in. Make a conscious effort to know people who aren’t like you. I think many would be surprised at how much we can progress if we worked, lived and played outside of our own backyards.

**Michael:** My immediate response is our attitudes toward Macon in general need to change for the better. A lot of people here tend to focus on the negative aspects of the city. Of course we have some glaring problems as most cities do, but there are a lot of positives here as well. I am encouraged to see more of an effort in the community to overcome the negative perception and do something to make a tangible difference.

**Chris:** The big change – consolidation – has happened. The next big win our community will need is passing the SPLOST. That funding (most of which comes from outside the county) will give the government the ability to tackle major economic and community development projects, all while taking care of decades of deferred maintenance and neglect on our roads, sewer system, and facilities. Macon, Bibb County and now Macon-Bibb have been very successful using the current SPLOST funds, but we’re nowhere near done addressing the needs that are out there.
IVEY HALL

AGE
35

OCCUPATION
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MACON AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Ivey: In order to keep Macon moving in the right direction we need to stay motivated and be careful not to fall back into old habits. We need to keep thinking local - local restaurants, local shops, local businesses, local organizations all need our support. They are depending on a permanent shift in our mindset so they can be a vital part of our economy.

Veronica: Great strides must be made to include every segment of the population. There's a lot of divisiveness here. Too many pursue their own agendas and are unwilling to partner with others for the greater good. Borrowing the words of Dr. King, the destiny of each Macon resident is tied up with the others. Unless we approach the future in a more unified manner,
VERONICA ALLEN McCLENDON

AGE
31

OCCUPATION
ATTORNEY
GEORGIA HEIRS PROPERTY LAW CENTER

we'll never get where we desire to be.

What are you, personally, committed to accomplishing in Macon and why?

Melinda: I freely give my time and expertise to helping one person at a time identify the skills they have that are marketable (the gift of public speaking, an attention to detail, sales, etc.). From a young age I was blessed to have a lot of personal motivation, a wonderful support system of extended family and mentors and the ability to remain focused. As I grew older I realized there are many people who lacked any of these skills or anyone to cheer them toward success so I easily adapted into motivator, coach,
cheerleader, or advisor as needed. I am personally committed to avoid complaining and volunteer my time to helping others without worries of special recognition. I am committed to parenting four wonderful children with my husband then deposit my time into others hoping that our community will be a shining example to them.

**Michael:** It's hard to look into any specific thing, but as a fifth-generation Maconite, I feel the need to continue the legacy of those who have come before me. I am so fortunate to come from a wonderful family (and company) that has always placed a priority on being involved and making our city a better place to live. I plan on being here for a long time, and I want my children to be proud of where they are from and maybe even choose to live here after they're grown.

**Chris:** I want to create a communication program that sets an expectation for governments moving forward. Transparency in government is so important, but it has to be more than just publishing boring financial reports and big books of jargon. I would like for people to gain a deeper understanding of how their government works, how they can access services, and how they can work with departments to improve their neighborhoods.

**Ivey:** I am committed to sharing the good things that are happening in Macon. Yes, we still have issues and areas to address, but if we continue to focus on the strengths of our community we will be able to work together to find solutions. We have to be our own storytellers and get the word out that Macon is a great place to raise families, grow businesses and make a home.

**Veronica:** I am committed to help inspire a vision for a better Macon that includes all of Macon’s residents. Through listening and building relationships, I aim to be a bridge between people of different perspectives and backgrounds, helping people to see the world through the eyes of someone who may be of a different race or socioeconomic group.