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LIFESTYLE

One hot summer in West Tennessee changed Pathstone Foundation director's life

Pam Sherman Special to the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

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Last summer after we moved to downtown Rochester, I kept walking past buildings in our neighborhood with the PathStone Corporation logo. I'd never heard of the organization and I wondered what it did.

After doing a little research, I was amazed by the scope of the work and the huge footprint of this private, nonprofit that serves communities and individuals in seven states and Puerto Rico to promote economic and social justice through advocacy and programming.

Shame on me for not knowing more about those who are doing the hard work of changing the world every day right here in our own community. So many of us who consider ourselves allies in our hearts and minds, are really just bystanders, walking by the changemakers not stopping to notice all the hard, daily, incremental work that they do to help repair the world.

Now more than ever, it's up to us to take notice and take the time to learn the stories of those who are true allies.

To learn more, I met with Stuart Mitchell, who until March was the CEO of PathStone Corporation.



Stuart J. Mitchell, front right, is now the executive director of the PathStone Foundation. He is pictured here in a march to integrate a segregated school in 1965 *Ernest Withers, Courtesy Of Stuart J. Mitchell*

About Stuart Mitchell

Mitchell grew up as part of a farming family in Middlesex, Yates County, and attended Cornell University in Ithaca with the expectation that he would return to work in the family business. But in 1965, the summer between his junior and senior year was a seminal time that changed his life path.

His roommate asked him to spend the summer in West Tennessee to work on two very important social justice initiatives: voting rights and school integration.

After that trip, Mitchell decided not to take the expected post-graduation path. Instead, he chose to dedicate his life to the causes he had worked on that summer.

He went on to study at the Colgate Divinity School and for the next 50 years, worked to build PathStone Corporation. He now serves as the executive director of the newly formed [PathStone Foundation](#) whose mission is to raise funds for new initiatives and other programs of the organization.



Stuart J. Mitchell *Gerry Iuppa*

Traveling with students from Ithaca to Tennessee that summer he witnessed first-hand economic disparity and racial injustice. He chose to help not just by observing, but by doing. He says it was a “spiritual calling” that led him to go in the first place and he kept following that calling for the rest of his life.

I asked Stuart what advice he has for the next generation of activists, he says, “Do something. Be engaged even in a small piece. Look for an opportunity to volunteer or work to get first-hand experience to truly understand poverty.”

In his new role, Mitchell is working to raise funds to advance an anti-racism curriculum in Rochester schools to ensure that the next generation will not only understand more about race in our country, but can make change by rewriting their own community story.

As I think about Mitchell’s journey to become a true social justice ally, I think about all the young people who have been galvanized by the state of our world today to become allies and activists, and I wonder where this seminal summer will lead them? What organizations will they create? What change will they make happen to make this world a better place?

This summer, in the midst of a pandemic, we do not need to travel far from home to know that change must happen right here. Look up the block and down the street. Take the time to get to know the changemakers in our community — those who are dedicating their lives both in deed and spirit to change the world every day.

Fifty years from now, I hope we will be celebrating them and all that they've changed.

Pam Sherman writes The Suburban Outlaw column. Contact her at pam@shermanEDGE.com.



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