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Education

New Canisius University director to grow East Side relationships



Image: Brianna Blank

Shana Richardson, director of the New Buffalo Institute at Canisius University.

BRIANNA BLANK



By **Katie Anderson** – Reporter, Buffalo Business First
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Canisius University has recruited one of its own as director of the New Buffalo Institute to build stronger relationships on Buffalo's East Side.

Shana Richardson was born and raised on the East Side, received her undergraduate degree at Canisius, was an adjunct English professor there and for six years served as coordinator of Academic Support Services for the Higher Education Opportunity Program.

The school launched the New Buffalo Institute in 2020, but the pandemic slowed some of the initiatives. Now, with Richardson's involvement, the school hopes to create "more meaningful and more authentic relationship and collaborations," she said.

"So, it's not Canisius coming in and saying, 'how can we fix things,' because that really is a problematic approach," Richardson said. "Instead, it's about identifying what is already happening in the East Side that is impactful and powerful, and how can we be a part of that and engage in that way."

Richardson grew up near the campus' Koessler Athletic Center and participated as a child with the school's National Youth Sports Program. That and her receipt of a full four-year scholarship through the Urban Leadership and Learning Community program led her to is chose Canisius for her undergrad. She now lives in the Hamlin Park neighborhood.

"I felt like Canisius was my home already," she said. "I've lived in this community my entire life, and I can see things very clearly as a resident and a part of the Canisius community."

Richardson said she wants to build up trust between the college and the community.

"Canisius is a predominately white institution in a predominately Black neighborhood. You have to recognize that," Richardson said. "I think there's a perception that Canisius is in the East Side and not of the East Side. We need to do a better job of getting community residents to see Canisius as a place where they can send their children."

One vision Richardson has for the New Buffalo Institute is community-based and service learning projects that will give Canisius students the opportunity to connect coursework to community outreach and engagement. She said students already help with tutoring and other events like Saturday academies at the Buffalo Public Schools, and she hopes to build on that.

“I think there are a lot of stereotypes about the East Side of Buffalo, and I really want to work with the students to help demystify some of those misconceptions about the city,” she said. “I would never take away from some of the legitimate challenges, but I think it’s important to recognize the historical reasons and system issues that have caused those issues.”

To build more authentic relationships, Richardson wants Canisius to build on the beauty already taking shape on the East Side, like community gardens, block clubs, farmers’ markets and new businesses.

The New Buffalo Institute is primarily grant funded, but the college is committed to keeping, Richardson said.

Prior to this role, which she started last month, Richardson was the director of student support services for the University at Buffalo’s Educational Opportunity Center. She also was director of the Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program at Medaille University.