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Economic Development

Champions for Diversity & Inclusion 2026: Executive director builds sister city ties in Africa while placing over 1,300 into jobs locally



Vamadu Sheriff of Family and Workforce Centers of America-Career Institute of St. Louis poses for a portrait at the Clark Family Branch of the St. Louis County Library.
DILIP VISHWANAT | SLBJ

By Niara Savage – Contributing writer
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Story Highlights

- Vamadu Sheriff leads Family and Workforce Centers of America-Career Institute in St. Louis.
- FWCA served over 25,670 individuals and placed 1,300 into employment in 2025.
- Sheriff established workforce development partnerships in Liberia and Senegal during his tenure.

INDIVIDUAL CHAMPION

Vamadu Sheriff, executive director of Family and Workforce Centers of America-Career Institute in St. Louis (FWCA), continues to dedicate his decades-long career to creating equitable pathways to economic opportunity for individuals and families who have historically faced barriers to education, employment, and career advancement.

Born and raised in Liberia, Sheriff understands firsthand the challenges underrepresented populations and economically disadvantaged individuals face when seeking opportunity. Under Sheriff's leadership, FWCA has expanded workforce development, technical training, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and supportive services.

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In 2025 alone, more than 25,670 individuals engaged with programs and services with FWCA, more than 1,300 individuals were placed into employment, and FWCA had an estimated economic impact exceeding \$16.5 million in the St. Louis region.

Beyond FWCA, Sheriff serves on the Board of Directors of the African Chamber of Commerce St. Louis, the Kigali – St. Louis Sister City Exploratory Committee, and the African Diaspora Credit Union, where he works to strengthen business, cultural, and economic partnerships.

What recent accomplishments are you most proud of? During my tenure, FWCA has expanded leadership opportunities for internationally connected professionals, increasing representation on our Board of Directors and establishing workforce partnerships in Liberia and Senegal. These efforts reflect my belief that organizations are strongest when their leadership reflects the diversity of the communities they serve. Receiving the 2025 Vitendo for Africa Balozi Ambassador Award was especially meaningful because it recognized my commitment to building a more welcoming and inclusive St. Louis.

In 2025, I led a delegation of American leaders to Liberia to build new partnerships in business, education, and workforce development. I have also worked alongside the World Trade Center St. Louis on the Kigali – St. Louis Sister City initiative, which will become St. Louis' second sister city in Africa in more than 30 years.

What has inspired you in your activism and efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion? Growing up in Liberia and later building a life in the United States taught me what it means to overcome barriers while also experiencing the power of opportunity. Those experiences shaped my belief that inclusion is more than being welcomed into a room; it is being given the opportunity to contribute, grow and succeed. Throughout my career, I have seen that talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not. Too often, people face barriers because of where they were born, the language they speak, or the networks they lack. That reality inspired me to dedicate my career to expanding access to education, workforce development, and economic opportunity.

One quote that has always resonated with me is from Verna Myers: "Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance." I would add that equity means ensuring everyone has the opportunity to step onto the dance floor with confidence. My goal has always been to create pathways where people are not only welcomed but empowered to reach their full potential.

What are some facets of diversity that are overlooked or under-appreciated? One of the most overlooked aspects of diversity is lived experience. While we often focus on visible differences, qualities such as cultural perspective, resilience, multilingualism, socioeconomic background and unique life experiences shape how people solve problems, lead teams and contribute to their communities. As an immigrant, I have seen how overcoming challenges develops adaptability, perseverance, creativity and determination. These qualities are invaluable to employers and organizations but are not always recognized.

What do you do in your spare time? Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my children and staying actively involved in the St. Louis community. You'll often find us attending community events, nonprofit galas, and cultural celebrations, including the FWCA Triumph Gala, African Chamber of Commerce events, Vitendo for Africa and African Diaspora Council programs. I intentionally bring my children to these events because they help them build meaningful connections to the St. Louis community they call home while celebrating the African heritage that is part of their identity.

More about Vamadu Sheriff

- **Title:** Executive director, Family and Workforce Centers of America-Career Institute of St. Louis
- **Age:** 55
- **Education:** MBA, Washington University in St. Louis, John M. Olin School of Business; B. S. Chemistry, minor in Mathematics, Missouri Baptist University
- **Family:** I am married with 6 children: 4 girls and 2 boys