

# Meet the 2017 Board of Directors candidate nominees

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One of the many things that differentiate credit unions from banks is the volunteer Board of Directors. Nominated by their peers and elected by the members, the Board provides leadership and guidance that helps Alternatives accomplish our mission.”

**This is a “first look” at the candidates, a separate ballot (paper or online) will be provided to members around May 1.**

Nominations for vacancies may also be made by petition signed by 100 Alternatives members (1% of membership). Each nominee by petition must submit a statement of qualifications and biographical data with the petition. Nomination by petition must be accompanied by a signed certificate from the nominee stating that he/she is agreeable to nomination and will serve if elected to office. The closing date for receiving nominations by petition is May 1, 2017. The election will not be conducted by ballot at the Annual Meeting and there will be no nominations from the floor.

We hope this choice underscores the importance of your participation as a member of our cooperative and inspires you to vote!

There are seven candidates running for five openings on the Board. Ariana Blossom, Kenneth McLaurin, and Leonardo Vargas-Méndez are incumbents running for another term.

To learn more about the candidates, read the candidates’ statements inside.

### ■ Olivia Armstrong, BSW/RM

Olivia opened her first Alternatives account in 1990 and started her first job as Youth Development Program Leader and Assistant Summer Camp Director, at the Greater Ithaca Activity Center. In later years, she was hired as Youth Director and Summer Camp Director at South Side Community Center, Project Administrator at Ithaca High School's program, Project Moving Up, restarting her Alternatives membership account, for the third time since 2012, earlier commuting from her residence in Tioga County. Today she lives in Tompkins County.

Olivia moved to Ithaca (TC) in 2002, with global travel and a lot of hard knocks experience under her belt. She was welcomed back with open arms. She is an Adelphi School of Social Work Graduate (BSW) Certified Herbalist, Reiki Master, Professional Spoken Word/Poetess, Professional Dancer (primarily African), 1997 Ordained Minister, 2001 Co-Founder and now Executive Director at Rainbow Healing Center of America Inc. ([rainbowhealingctr.weebly.com](http://rainbowhealingctr.weebly.com)), community updates, Paralegal, Grassroot Community Activist, and an active Board Member of LAWNY Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc.

Olivia's reason for wanting to be part of the Alternatives Family (for years): she was approached by a previous Alternatives Board Member, who suggested that she look into being an Alternatives Board member. They felt they needed more grassroots voices on the Board from those who are in the trenches of the community. People who can go in and out and not be afraid to walk into any parts of the Ithaca community; not be afraid to speak to those community members whose voices are not often heard. A seed was planted in her during a community struggle time while having a community leadership role.

Despite being an active Alternatives member for years, Olivia was unaware of Alternatives Federal Credit Union's great mission; Community Development and helping low-income people also. She wants to be a mouthpiece for Alternatives to help get the word out to communities that know nothing about the services, and inform them they have assets that can turn into progress.

Olivia knows the Director of Community Programs and Outreach at Alternatives, who is very community active and admired and feels he's doing a great job. However, to reach more people in the Ultimate Re-entry program, Mental Health Association, and other programs more Alternatives member activism is needed. Olivia thanks you for accepting her nomination.

### ■ Ariana Blossom

Ariana is a certified business coach specializing in leadership coaching for women running small businesses. In 2015, in partnership with Rev: Ithaca Startup Works, she launched the Passenger to Pilot program which supports women growing

their small businesses through mentorship, coaching, and workshops. She was the lead organizer for the annual Women Redefining Entrepreneurship conference held in Ithaca, NY.

Ariana's eight years of coaching experience includes a range from the executive MBA students at Cornell University's Samuel J. Curtis' Management School on team dynamics, college staff looking to balance their work and home lives while reducing stress, and company executives needing to improve employee engagement. She has launched a series of year-long workshops teaching business skills in Oxford and Ithaca NY, while individually mentoring entrepreneurs throughout Tompkins County.

These days, Ariana is coaching women in business and leadership, addressing the challenge of retaining female employees in the technology industry, and delivering talks around Upstate NY. She serves on the Alternatives Federal Credit Union board. She is the mother of a sweet toddler who likes to start conversations at 3:00 in the morning. And she aspires to get back to writing on her Huffington Post blog.

### ■ Robert Brown

Robert has lived in Tompkins County, mostly its rural Towns, since the early 1990s and settled in northern Lansing in 2003. Through his work at the Tompkins County Workers' Center, he has had the privilege of being part of a movement that champions a Living Wage for everyone and the right to dignity at work free from unfair or illegal treatment. Most recently before Robert shifted his career to focus on his passion for labor rights and labor organizing, he plied his skills in non-profit administration, financial management, and development with a healthcare organization. There, he helped provide free care and accessible health education to people without health insurance and directly provided financial health services for folks struggling with healthcare debt. Besides administration and finance, Robert's professional life has spanned bicycle mechanics, clinical herbalism, fund-raising, landscaping, research, and waste hauling. Throughout it all, he has always been devoted to civil rights activism.

Robert believes that community institutions must be accountable and responsive to the people they serve, and that empowerment of and service to people most marginalized by society is the most important work one can do. Alternatives' special role as a community development financial institution uniquely positions them to contribute to this work in our community, which is why he has been a member for years and would like to deepen his involvement through service on its board.

### ■ Ashley Cake

Ashley was born and raised in Ithaca and has been a member of Alternatives since 2010. Her first job was as a cashier at the Hancock St. P&C during high school. She went away for undergraduate and graduate study at the University of Toronto, Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, the Catholic

University of Leuven, Belgium, and finally Syracuse University, attaining advanced degrees in European Philosophy, Gender Studies, and Comparative Religion.

Returning to Ithaca in 2006, Ashley worked for Gimme! Coffee, Madeline's Restaurant, The Shop Cafe, Coltivare, Mercato Bar & Kitchen, and Bar Argos. In 2016 she opened The Watershed bar with her three business partners, incorporating as GDAM Industries, Inc. The Watershed is thriving in the new year, creating eight living wage jobs and striving to meet ambitious service, environmental, and social justice goals every day.

Ashley is deeply invested in socially responsible growth in the Ithaca business community and particularly interested in the Alternatives mission to build wealth among low-income folks and families in Ithaca and Tompkins County.

### **Kenneth McLaurin Jr., Secretary**

Kenneth graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta with a Liberal Arts Degree. He spent 12 years internationally leading community-based programs focused on servicing a wide range of needs for individuals, families, and communities. He has been a part of our Ithaca community since 2011 and recently served as the Interim Executive Director of Southside Community Center. Currently, Kenneth is working with Cornell Cooperative Extension as a Financial Management Educator.

### **Michael McNeil**

Banking services, financial knowledge, and personal and business credit are requirements to participate in the economy effectively. Michael hopes to support Alternative's efforts and is honored to be nominated for the Board.

Michael grew up in Ithaca and recently moved back after twenty-five years living elsewhere. He is a business lawyer, primarily in entertainment, intellectual property, technology, and company issues. He represented an impoverished single parent regarding a \$1,500 used car, a Fortune 500 corporation in a \$150 Million dollar construction claim, and every type of business dispute in between. (He even had a fraud case involving Scotland Yard.)

Michael has been the co-founder of three substantial entrepreneurial efforts, two of which were sold at a significant profit and one which lost money. He served on the board and/or management team of several small not-for-profit entities, entrepreneurial companies, and larger businesses; and he is an arbitrator for the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA).

In the past fifteen years, Michael has worked primarily for a large non-US entertainment company (with about 1500 people) and has 'moonlighted' for technology start-ups and entrepreneurs, ranging from one person with an idea, to the sale of a business for millions of dollars.

Alternatives is already a strong and successful contributor

to our community, and Michael hopes to contribute to that. He is especially interested in Alternatives as a facilitator of small business growth in our area by offering his effort and experience in seeing ways to success (and failure). Even the tiniest business can benefit the people in and around it, and in his experience credit is often the missing ingredient.

### **Leonardo Vargas-Méndez**

Leonardo is the Executive Director of the Cornell Public Service Center (CPSC), and a member of Cornell University's Division of Student and Academic Services' senior management team. Leonardo is Co-Principal Investigator for the Cornell Upward Bound Program and Co-Director of the Faculty Fellows-in-Service learning programs. He is Cornell University's liaison to the New York Campus Compact Advisory Board and a member of the founding Board of this statewide higher education membership institution. He is also a Carl L. Becker House Faculty Fellow at Cornell University.

In addition to his Cornell responsibilities, Leonardo has served on the boards of many Tompkins County non-profit agencies and governmental committees, including the Board of Trustees of the Tompkins County Public Library; the Founding Board of the Latino Civic Association of Tompkins County Inc.; the Ithaca Alliance for Community Empowerment; the Advisory Board of the Suicide Prevention and Crisis Service of Tompkins County; the Tompkins County Workers Rights Center; the Board of the Tompkins County Human Services Coalition; the City of Ithaca's Board of Public Works; and the Board of Planning and Development; the Board of the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission; and the Board of Planned Parenthood of Tompkins County. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Tompkins Community Action, and also a member of ATTAC International, Chile's chapter.

Leonardo enjoys being a Board member for Alternatives on many levels, and he and his family have been Alternatives members for many years.

**alternatives.org**

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