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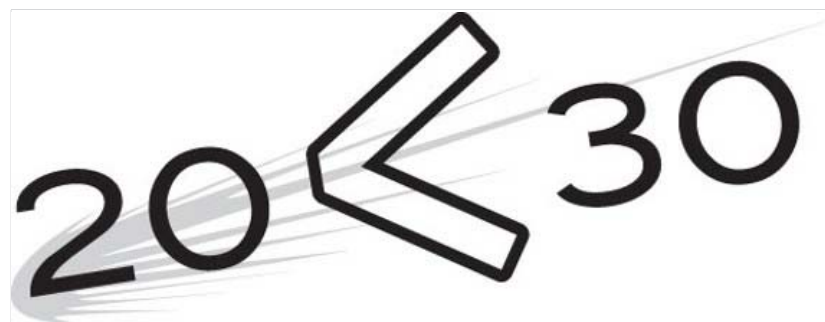
NEWS COVER FEATURE

January 20, 2011

20 < 30

The Flyer's annual look at young movers and shakers who will forge Memphis' future.

by [RICHARD ALLEY](#)



The under-30s — born in the glare and glitter of the 1980s, the decade of big hair and big shoulders, that musically metallic wasteland between the death of disco and the birth of grunge. Their newly opened eyes witnessed the fall of communism, the safe return of some spacecraft and the loss of another, and violence against a president, a pope, and a Beatle.

MTV was born, as was Nintendo, the AIDS pandemic, and Marty McFly. And the Yugo was introduced to America. The ill-advised reformulation of Coca-Cola took place square in the middle of their first decade.

Natalie Portman is 29 years old, LeBron James is 27, *Thriller* turns 29 this year, Madonna's career is 28, *Love in the Time of Cholera* is 26, and the *Memphis Flyer* is 21.

The following Memphians are all in their 20s, all embarking on adventures in business, nonprofit groups, the arts, ecology, society — life. They are positive, community-minded, smart, ambitious. They are seldom singular, choosing instead to come together as collaborators, as collectives of artists and professionals to make Memphis a better place, to make themselves better people.

Born in the shadow of the Me Decade, these young men and women espouse anything but selfishness. They're coming of age in a time when "hope" and "change" are common buzzwords. Their first choice for media may be social, and they are as likely to be aware of someone in Chicago's favorite television show as they are of the person sitting next to them in a café. They are embracing the possibility that they'll feel the flutter of a butterfly's wings half a world away and that the ensuing wind may carry promise and responsibilities.

Our under-30s are intensely creative and highly engaged. And they soon will be a force to contend with. Keep your eyes on them, Memphis. It shouldn't be difficult to do.

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1 Mary Phillips, 23

Mary Phillips not only doesn't mind getting her hands dirty, she craves it.

"It's honest labor. I'm an energetic, scattered kind of person, and it's when I'm working in the dirt and able to get messy and exert myself physically that I feel like I'm doing what I should be doing," she says.

Urban Farms is a three-acre vegetable farm in the Binghamton neighborhood. Off of Walnut Grove and Tillman, near the western entrance to the new Greenline, you can find farm manager Phillips tending the crops, harvesting them, and taking her produce to market. The job came her way as honestly as the work itself. The then-volunteer farmer "begged and pleaded" when the position came open.

Phillips is excited about the opening of Urban Farms' own farmer's market on March 26th in the heart of their community, at the intersection of Sam Cooper and Tillman.



"It's really satisfying to plant a tiny seed, watch it grow, and then watch somebody else eat it," she says.

Phillips' favorite produce grown on the farm? Sunflower sprouts.

2 Shalishah "Petey" Franklin, 29

Petey Franklin was born in 1982, and, by her own account, that makes her vintage. She is the owner of [Strange Fruit Vintage](#), "an online vintage boutique specializing in '80s and '90s fresh clothes."

"I'm an artist ... a painter, and with the vintage clothes, I'm going through thousands of clothes and picking the best of them, so it's kind of the same concept as the curator for a gallery."

Franklin moved to Memphis from Los Angeles in 1996 with her mother, who was after affordable living and a better way of life for Petey and her six sisters — "the American dream," Franklin says.

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Having attended Overton High School and the University of Memphis, where she studied advertising, she considers herself an arts advocate and uses her education for pro bono marketing work for the Collage Dance Collective.

By day, Franklin is the marketing manager for the Memphis-Shelby County Crime Commission, an organization with a five-year plan to reduce crime in the community. "And it's working," she says. "Crime is down."

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3 Joel Halpern, 28

Joel Halpern has found inspiration in the artwork of Alberto Giacometti, Wassily Kandinsky, and Egon Schiele. Closer to home, the native Memphian cites White Station High School art teacher Charles Berlin and business mentor Bryan Eagle, of the St. Blues Guitar Workshop, for showing him the way.

The creative services director for WPTY-24 and its affiliate stations, CW30 and FOX16 in Jackson, Tennessee, attended the Memphis College of Art but became dispirited with the curriculum. What the school did teach him, however, was how to sell his ideas, a marketing practice honed later by working with Eagle.

"Art is really just a platform to grow my ability to form ideas and convince people that they're worth either listening to or looking at," he says.

Halpern and his wife, Emily Harris, moved to New York so he could give the agency world a shot, but in 2008 they moved back to Memphis when the economy soured. It's a move he's never regretted, Memphis being home and "easy,"

he says. His plan is to stay with the affiliate stations "until we are number-one in the market."

4 Brad Phelan, 25

He's a Southern boy, he says. It isn't the Hollywood Hills and glitz that call to him but the slick cobblestones and hometown grittiness of Memphis. Plus, it looks so good through a camera.

Brad Phelan is a filmmaker and web developer for Live From Memphis, an organization created to highlight the area's art, music, and culture. And Phelan knows the area, having attended Bartlett High School, where he first became enamored with the film process, and then the University of Memphis as a film major, "the best major ever."

His first big project after getting hired in 2008 was working on *Flipside Memphis*, a documentary companion piece to MTV's *\$5 Cover*.

"I couldn't have asked for a better job at my age and in my profession," he says. "We film a lot of concerts, and we're active in the community and the art scene."

When he's not behind the camera or developing websites, Phelan is kicking butt with his hobbies aikido and taekwondo, a natural fit considering this filmmaker's favorite movie: Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*.

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5 Shayla Purifoy, 29

Shayla Purifoy became interested in law through her urban-studies classes and mock trial experience at Rhodes College. As her undergraduate studies wound down, she took the LSAT, she said, "just in case."

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"Just in case" turned into law school and, while a student at the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis, she decided she wanted to help victims of domestic violence. Though she admits she could be making a lot more money with a big-name firm, it's her work with Memphis Area Legal Services that scratches the itch to help.

"I've always wanted to do something that helped people, and I've seen what domestic violence can do," she says.

The drive to help and make her community a better place also has led her to volunteer as an attorney coach for Central High School's mock trial team and volunteer with the Memphis and Shelby County Domestic Violence Council.

Purifoy's work is intense and puts her on the front lines of domestic violence and fear every day. To decompress, she spends time with her husband and twin sister, bicycles, gardens, and bakes.

6 Zachary Whitten, 28

Give Zachary Whitten one title and one word, and he'll give you one story about Memphis — every day this year. This is the premise behind his latest endeavor, [Memphis Fast Fiction](#).

There are other endeavors. There is [The Great and Secret Thing](#), his collaborative website for all things artistic. "If people have the balls to stand up and say, 'I've done this and I want to show it off,' then we thought that we should give them the place to do that." He'll be showing off even more of his work in a graphic novel he's working on with Lauren Rae Holtermann (also on the "20<30" list). And this is all after hours from his job as an interactive designer for the local agency Combustion.

The native Memphian attended White Station High School, where he found an interest in theater before going to the Savannah College of Art and then farther away to Arizona to design video games.

He returned to Memphis in 2006, making a deal with himself: "You will live here until you feel like you're in a rut."

"I've been back four years ... and I haven't felt that way at all," Whitten says. "No other place feels like Memphis."



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7 Amanda Mauck, 29

Amanda Mauck had never traveled outside of the United States until she visited Haiti a year ago, following that country's devastating earthquake. The website editor for Le Bonheur Children's Medical Center was tapped as the communications specialist to dispatch stories and photos for the hospital to give the press.

She was chosen, she says, because of her willingness and ability to "go with the flow" and react to whatever situation she and the medical team were put into. Armed with cameras, computers, and satellite phone, she set out on the adventure of a lifetime.

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"It was the most humbling and exciting and happy and sad experience I've ever had in my life, and I would do it again in a heartbeat," she says.

Away from Le Bonheur, Mauck is active in the arts, including working with Indie Memphis and the local film scene, and sitting on the planning committee for ArtsMemphis' Bravo program.

It is her work with Le Bonheur, however, that leaves her fulfilled:

"Le Bonheur is the best organization I could work for, and I feel a lot of pride to be able to tell our story every day."

8 Skewby, 22

Last spring, rapper Skewby became the first Memphis artist to be lauded in the "Unsigned Hype" column of *The Source*, the go-to magazine for everything hip-hop. He is also the only interview on this list that required going through a manager.

Even at such a young age, when most people aren't sure what they want to do for a living, Skewby is realizing his dreams faster than most. He's in the studio now and gearing up for a tour that will take him from Memphis to Atlanta, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Florida, Texas, and Cancun, Mexico, to promote his last album, *More or Less*.

Wanting to be a basketball star at the age of 12, when his parents divorced and he moved to Cordova, Skewby (real name, Cameron Smith) gravitated to music until he made friends in his new environment.



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"I always loved music coming up," he says. "When I spent some time doing it, that's when I knew I wanted to do it the rest of my life. People really listened to what rappers had to say, and I wanted people to listen to what I had to say."

Rest assured, Skewby, we're listening. And so are lots of other people.

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9 Kat Gordon, 29



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As a young girl, did Kat Gordon ever see herself as a baker? "Kind of, but it wasn't like a real possibility. To me it was like, 'Oh, one day I'll be a princess.'" And now, Gordon is a queen, the Queen of Cupcakes.

As the owner of Muddy's Bake Shop, Gordon spends her days making fanciful cupcakes, cookies, and pies. And, in case the dream isn't fulfilled with sugar and frosting, she dresses up in brightly colored wigs from time to time to make herself and others smile.

The St. Mary's Episcopal School and University of Memphis grad grew up on the confections of her grandmother, Jayne Bond (nickname: Muddy), who baked for those in need. Gordon took to baking as a hobby. "I was good at it," she says. Soon, friends and family were requesting treats, and it blossomed into a side business.



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When the side business became more than that, she took the plunge and opened Muddy's in 2008. The treat for her, from the beginning, has been the people she's met and been able to work with.

"It's been wonderful," she says. "That whole aspect of it was unexpected, but it's become my favorite part."

10 Matt Farr, 27

This native Memphian has traveled the world as a teacher, from Costa Rica to China to the Philippines to Singapore. But Matt Farr's most exciting trek may have been the seven miles from Binghamton to East Memphis he began taking last year.

Unless you've been living under a rock at the bottom of the Wolf River, you've heard of the Shelby Farms Greenline. As the manager of education and outreach for the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy since last March, Farr's first task was to handle community outreach and produce the grand-opening events.

The Greenline is an enhancement, he says, that Memphis needs if it is to grow physically healthy and closer as a community. He sees his work with the conservancy as a way to invest himself in the city and to make an impact.

"Having been overseas," he says, "and having seen how communities work or don't work elsewhere, and then to be able to come back to Memphis and implement some of that knowledge into a festival or into the opening of a public amenity, it was a pretty special moment."

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11 Hailey Giles, 29



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Hailey Giles has worked on both sides of the camera. As an actress, she has appeared on stage, television, and the big screen (including the locally produced *One Came Home*) and, on the production side, almost too many positions to list.

She has the utmost respect for the process of filmmaking. "I'm so in awe of everybody around me, because they're always working so hard — 18-hour days — and I show up, they put makeup on me, I go say some lines, and maybe cry if I have to. But I think the hardest part about acting for film is staying skinny."

Giles, a graduate of White Station High School, attended Emerson College and the Berklee School of Music in Boston. The acting bug, however, had bitten her earlier.

"I was 5 when I started acting. Of course, I fought it for many years, because I'm a practical Virgo," she says. "I just thought that I should be doing something other than acting, because it was about the most impractical job I could have chosen. But every time I try to step away, it pulls me back. It's the only thing in this world that makes me truly happy."

12 Clark Butcher, 26

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As he's riding his bike up to five hours a day, Clark Butcher eagerly anticipates the opening of his shop, Victory Bicycle Studio, in Cooper-Young. Again.

After opening day last September, the shop burned 26 days later. "I think we set a world record for losing a business,

but we are poised to reopen February first," he says.

In addition to the shop, which "specializes in products and service for weekend warriors, enthusiasts, and racers," he also owns Propel Endurance Training, personal and custom training for cyclists, runners, and triathletes of all abilities and all ages.

"There are so many group rides — a social gathering with a marked course," he says of cycling's renewed popularity. "It went from being a sport you do on your own to something social."

Regardless of why, these are heady days for Memphis cyclists, with the opening of the Shelby Farms Greenline and, finally, real discussion of community-wide bike lanes and dedicated routes. And, soon enough, Victory Bicycle Studio will rise from the ashes.



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13 Lauren Rae Holtermann, 22

Let Lauren Rae Holtermann paint a picture for you worth a thousand words about what she's involved in. The Memphis College of Art senior is majoring in illustration while working as an intern in graphic design at Combustion.

She's also working on a graphic novel with Zachary Whitten (also a "20<30" honoree). She is senior editor for MCA's newsletter "Black & White." You may have come across her bartending outside the Old Daisy on Beale. And she co-founded the Rozelle Artists Guild, a group of "really broke art students," four years ago when they got together and collaborated on huge paintings. The collective has ranged from seven to 50 artists.

"I think Memphis' art community is awesome, because the people who are here and who give a shit ... they're at every show," she said. "Everybody supports everybody. There's very little competition. Most people are all about supporting anything creative that's going on, no matter who's doing it, which is awesome."

14 Audra Bares, 27

Originally from Oregon, Audra Bares moved to Memphis just before starting Cordova High School. She considers this her hometown and sees great things on its horizon.



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"Even in the time that I've been here, there's a lot more dialogue and more conversation and more people involved in helping. It's schools and it's nonprofits and it's government now — all these different groups that have signed on in a larger capacity to move forward socially, economically, and culturally."

Working in marketing at Medtronic, Bares certainly does more than just sit back and watch as her city moves forward. The Vanderbilt grad is the youngest board chair at MPACT Memphis, sits on the board for the Memphis Youth Symphony, and is a participant in Leadership Memphis.

"I've grown up with a spirit of service, a spirit of giving. My parents are very giving people," she says. "I feel that in the early stages of my career, before children and family responsibilities, that it's my time to give back and be involved in the community."

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15 Josh Belenchia, 28

Buon cibo. It means "good food" in Italian. And this spring it could mean good business for Josh Belenchia. He is the former head chef of Interim who left to open his own restaurant, Buon Cibo, in Hernando.

"It's going to be a gourmet pizza, sandwich, soup, and salad place," the Cleveland, Mississippi, native says. "Everything made from scratch every day."

Food has been a lifelong love, and he grew up with the cooking of his mother and of chef Wally Joe at KC's Restaurant in Cleveland. With training at the Culinary Institute of America, Interim was his first gig as a head chef and where he learned how to run a kitchen.

He's excited about his new restaurant and looks forward to the juggling act of ownership and to mixing up his experience with a dash of high energy, a pinch of luck, and a sprinkling of confidence.

"I want to do it all. That's the type of person I am, and that's the type of chef I am," Belenchia says. "I want to make people feel comfortable, and I want to make sure that I'm getting the feedback I need to make people happy."



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Buon cibo, indeed.

16 Lindsey Turner, 29

Lindsey Turner is an open book, and it's not just the newsprint on her fingers. The Hardin County native has been blogging since before blogging was cool, since before blogging was even a thing. The popular blog [Theology & Geometry](#) started in 2003.

"People have these ridiculous things happen, and there's no reason to be ashamed. If it can be amusing or make people think or whatever, I see no reason to shut up," she says, adding with a laugh: "Until I'm told to."

One thing she's not ashamed of is her work as assistant art director in editorial at *The Commercial Appeal*. The position has allowed her to design some of the newspaper's top stories, such as the True Crime series, which won the Society for News Design award of excellence.

Arranging the elements of a news story and helping the reader to comprehend what the information means is work she finds satisfying: "It combines my need to edit things and pick the right words with the more creative aspect of how I like arranging things and making typography look good. It marries the two very well."

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**17 Elokin CaPece, 27**

You know that scene in the movies where a speaker stands in front of a classroom and demonstrates condom usage on a banana? That's what Elokin CaPece does for a living, and she says it's a dream job: "I can't believe I get paid to do the things I do."

What she's done since 2007, as director of education for Planned Parenthood of Greater Memphis, is go into the community to discuss safe sex and sexual health education with teens and adults and conduct training for professionals in HIV testing and counseling.

She and Planned Parenthood have partnered with the Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center to offer HIV screening. CaPece also co-runs the Queer as Youth and Many Men, Many Voices programs, and with Cuidate, a joint program with the YWCA, teaches Latino teens about HIV and pregnancy prevention.

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In her travels around a city where STDs and teen pregnancies are rampant, CaPece has found some things surprising and heartening. "We have become more queer-friendly as a city," she says. "We think we're more conservative than we are."

18 Tal Frankfurt, 28

First of all, cloud technology. "The term 'cloud' is used as a metaphor for the Internet. Instead of buying and maintaining expensive servers and software to manage your constituent conversations and information, organizations can use Web-based applications and receive a higher return on their social investment." That's how it reads on Tal Frankfurt's website.

Frankfurt is the founder and CEO of Cloud For Good, which specializes in providing cloud technology to the nonprofit sector. He moved here from Israel in 2009 with his wife, Paige, who is from Memphis. He has managed in that short time to combine his knowledge of technology and the needs of nonprofits to realize his dream.

"The mission of Cloud For Good is to help nonprofits achieve their mission. By helping them to do their work in a more effective way, I'm helping the community," he says. It's a community he's come to love.

"Memphis is a big opportunity. There are great people here," Frankfurt says. "The thing I like the most in Memphis is the warmth. People are accepting and embracing and trying to help."

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19 Leila Hamdan, 27

Leila Hamdan has worked for the National Ornamental Metal Museum for the past five years. Before that, she was a volunteer. As the current collections manager and registrar for the museum, her daily grind takes place in one of the most scenic locations in the city, on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. But it was more than the view that first appealed to her.

"It was the metal smithing community, the community of people," she says. "It was a very creative environment and very family-oriented. They had a lot of fun, which we still do. It was a place where they were sharing ideas and teaching one another techniques and processes. More than anything, it was the network of people."



Though she is not as active in the studio as she was as a Memphis College of Art student, it would be wrong to think that Hamdan is no longer creative. "I express my creativity in other ways, from curating, collecting, iron-casting, and writing to gardening and traveling," she says. "For me, creativity and expression is about exchanging ideas and putting ideas into action, not creating a body of paintings."

20 Sarah Petschonek, 28

Do you think you're busy? Sarah Petschonek will humble you as she works toward her Ph.D. in industrial organizational psychology at the University of Memphis and, while she's there, finishes up her M.B.A. Oh, and she works at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in patient-safety research, is a member of MPACT Memphis, serves as a volunteer intern with Le Bonheur's community outreach center, and teaches a class at Literacy Mid-South to help adults improve their thinking skills.

Industrial organizational psychology is the study of why people act the way they do in the workplace and how to improve that environment. "I've always wondered how you could inspire people to make changes for the better, and I liked the idea that you could do that in people's places of work," she says. "We spend so much time at work every week that if you're



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miserable there it spills over into the rest of your life."

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Petschonek loves the work she does and hopes to stay in town once school is finished to devote her abundant energy to making Memphis a better place.