



Commissioner Spotlight

August 2018

Meet Commissioner Avi Poster

More than 10 years ago, Commissioner Avi Poster and his wife Joie Scott packed up their lives and relocated from Chicago to Nashville.

“I grew up in Chicago,” Avi shares, “[and] moved to Nashville after I retired to provide an expanded opportunity for my wife Joie to pursue her career as a songwriter. I was familiar with Nashville because I did graduate studies at Vanderbilt.”

The following are Avi’s reflections for our **Commissioner Spotlight**.

What are the formative experiences that influenced who you’ve be-

come? I was fortunate to be born into a family committed to social and civil justice. My parents not only taught me to give of myself to others, they modeled doing the same by devoting their life to causes important to them. Whatever I do in life is because of what they taught me. I worked in education for my entire career — initially as a teacher, then mostly as a principal. Working directly with children and families plagued by challenges not only gave me great reward, but helped shape my understanding of the struggles faced by others.

What does an average day look like? [Though retired] I address my community work as if I were still em-

ployed—only my bosses are those who need me. I have many passions, [including] education, poverty, people with developmental disabilities, politics, human relations, and accepting differences among us. These keep me almost as busy as when I was working as a school principal. The one treat I enjoy is avoiding early morning meetings (spent a lifetime attending those!) and instead waking to coffee and newspapers.

What do you enjoy most about your work? If I can play even a tiny part in making life better for others, my life is enriched. While this may seem altruistic, there is a self-indulgent side to the volunteer work I do.

energy expended.

What habits or leadership principles do you admire?

I respect leaders who create an environment in which people sitting at the same tables, doing the same work, feel dignified and of value. This requires establishing a culture of collaboration and cooperation; identifying clear and attainable goals; and creating mechanisms to reach success. The most effective leaders are those successful at this. In the end perhaps

what I respect most are leaders who are willing to take risks; thoughtful and intentional about the work they do; have the courage of their convictions; and not willing to compromise them.

If you could give advice to your 15 year old self, what would it be? Be less concerned about what others think of you. Challenge yourself to think about what is important to you and the world and community you live in. I would also counsel



Comm. Avi Poster

Commissioner Avi Poster’s first name literally means “my Father,” and is Hebrew for Abraham.

Commissioner Poster, a visionary educator, enlightened leader, and impassioned advocate, is one of the **longest-serving commissioners in the history of Metro Human Relations Commission**. In this inaugural **Commissioner Spotlight** Avi Poster shares what motivates him to be a strategic emissary for social justice.

One of Commissioner Poster’s guiding quotes hails from championship boxer, **Muhammed Ali:**

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.

Avi’s Tweetable Tweet

We are only as strong as the work we do together.

The activities I engage in provide me with the company and friendship of like-interested people who are bright and committed to cause and exciting to be with. My volunteer work and my social life are deeply entwined.

What is the most challenging aspect of your work?

Being spread too thin is one. But my biggest challenge in the work I do is actually making that work effective and the results of my work worthy of the time and

myself to always accept differences and to be kind and considerate, regardless of cost. Not sure I followed these words as a 15 year old.

What is the biggest personal risks you've taken? Moving to Nashville. Fortunately Joie and I were able to supplement who we left behind with wonderful new friends in the music and non-profit communities we hang in. And, we are positioned to frequently travel back to Chicago for visits, and host friends and family in Nashville, allowing us to maintain, nurture and sustain past relationships while cultivating new ones.

What is the boldest professional moves you've made? Accepting my first school principalship at a very young age long before I understood the attributes and skills needed to be an effective leader. My first years as a leader were governed by my personal skills. I only became effective when I evolved to be an intentional leader studied in the art of leadership.

What's an accomplishment about which you are very proud? I was the first school principal in Illinois—maybe the country—to lead three different schools to the U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon Awards for Excellence in Education. This provided me opportunities on three different occasions to travel to the White House and personally meet three different sitting presidents. [Though] this

proud work has since been replicated by others, we are a very small fraternity.

What is it about this accomplishment that has made such an impact on you?

It affirmed what I long studied about leadership. It also confirmed for me, given that most of my career was spent working with underserved communities, that schools have to be more than learning factories. They have to be living communities that graduate well rounded children who are not only intellectually advanced, but socially and emotionally equipped to be successful in life for themselves and others.

Have you ever experienced a professional setback or disappointment? Yes. Each year at graduation I would care-

fully and intentionally think of every young person I handed a diploma to. Those that my staff and I failed to advance, as described in the previous question, I considered our failures. On a more global level, when I see how badly people behave, how unwise their decisions are, I cannot help but have remorse that the profession I engaged in and love has failed.

Did you have a mentor who had a deep impact on the path you've chosen to take? My most important mentor was a

colleague I respected, a fellow principal. I learned traveling to conferences with him, sharing solutions to problems. Having a colleague so close that I was willing to learn from and be vulnerable to was motivating and of great security and comfort.

Have you ever had a mentee? If yes, what kind of impact do you believe you're having? I long have enjoyed my students while they were under my charge and long after. I started off in education just a few years older than those I was teaching and administering. Many have remained part of my life and we have moved into deep friendships. I now rely on them as they continue to rely on me. What could be more beautiful than having students wanting to hang and be with their old teacher/principal?

What guiding principle or quote inspires you? Four stand out: *"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth."* **Muhammad Ali**, Boxer Philosopher. *"The most daunting challenge is to reason people out of opinions they were not reasoned into."* **Brandt Crocker**, Muse. *"Do not despair growing older, it is a privilege denied to many."* **Larry Kopald**, Strategist. *"To change the world we must be kind to those who cannot repay us."* **Pope Frances**

How were you introduced to the MHRC? I worked closely with one of our past MHRC Executive Directors and she invited me to sit at the MHRC table, recommending me to then-mayor Karl Dean.



Contemplative Poster

What causes or issues invigorate you?

Increasing opportunities for people living in life's shadows; people in poverty; people with developmental disabilities; and undocumented arrivals—just to name a few.

Do you fulfillingly advocate for these issues through your role as a MHRC Commissioner?

Yes. Being passionate creates a heavy load. I bring all of the issues most important to me as a framework for my work as a Commissioner. I also learn from fellow Commissioners about the work important



Comm. Poster with an appetite!

to them. It is our obligation to make life better for and answer to those whose we bring to our table

What message would you like to share with Davidson County residents?

It is easy to muse about what is wrong around us [but much] harder to be part of the changes and improvements we need to address. My hope is that members of our community will not only have the courage and convictions to identify what

is wrong, but position themselves, in big and small ways, to be part of the solutions, changes, and improvements we so desperately need. We are only as strong as the work we do together.

Comm. Poster with former President Barack Obama at Casa Azafran



Comm. Poster with wife Joie Scott—award-winning and Emmy-nominated songwriter



Comm. Poster receiving Human Rights Award

