



Michelle Wilson

Executive Director

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As an undergraduate student in International Relations and Business Administration at Kent State University, Michelle Wilson's dream was to work for the United Nations or U.S. Department of State upon graduation. With diploma in hand, fate shined down upon her as she was put in touch with the directors of a small all-volunteer non-profit called "Hosting International Travelers" and began her career working with them. Since then, the organization grew and rebranded into what is now known as Global Ties Akron.

For the past 30 years, Michelle's experience and expertise grew as she worked first as a volunteer, then a board member, program officer, and for nearly the past two decades, as its Executive Director. As she grew the organization, so did her family grow and she and her husband, John, welcomed and raised their two children, Matt and Colleen.

Wilson has had the opportunity to work in citizen diplomacy through the U.S. Department of State, the congressionally sponsored Open World Leadership Program, and other high-level global exchange initiatives that connect Greater Akron to communities worldwide. These initiatives enable Global Ties Akron to design and develop professional development visits and customized learning initiatives for up-and-coming adult leaders worldwide.

Advancing multicultural and diversity education for all ages is a core value of Global Ties Akron. It led to Michelle's brainchild: the inception and launch of "Know Your Community – Know Your World." This initiative brings local and global resources to K-12 students and educators at no or low cost. | www.know-your-world.org

In the pivot to increased virtual programming due to COVID-19 and its challenges, Michelle has been called upon as a national expert to share best practices on creating new opportunities for delivering "virtual exchange" programming while in-person meetings are on pause.

Last year, Michelle was chosen as one of five female artists to exhibit in Stan Hywet Gardens "Winds of Change" installation. The opportunity exposed her artistic talent to the community with three kinetic origami sculptures representing peace, hope, and love. This summer, she and her artwork will return for a refreshed installation of two of those sculptures.

Her love of origami began more than 20 years ago, when a Japanese exchange student taught Michelle's 5-year-old son, Matthew, how to fold. Over the years, Michelle has mastered folding in miniature with fine handcrafted papers making art jewelry and "Calder" inspired kinetic mobiles and has taught origami to hundreds of students of all ages. As Executive Director of Global Ties Akron working with diplomatic leaders, she has presented her origami peace cranes as gifts to ambassadors, educators, religious leaders, entrepreneurs, and world leaders from all corners of the earth, along with prayers for peace on the wings of the cranes!

Wilson's love of arts and fine crafts inspired her to create the social enterprise Global Threads Fair Trade – first as an online ETSY store and recently as a retail gift boutique in downtown Akron's

Northside Marketplace. Michelle is the collection's chief curator and shoppers will find her miniature origami art jewelry, upcycled button art jewelry, miniature origami mobiles available for purchase, along with textiles, jewelry, home accessories, scarves, head coverings, face masks, handbags, and much more created by local and global artisans. All proceeds from Global Threads Fair Trade provides income for the Global Education programs.

In its fourth year, Global Ties Akron's citizen journalism curriculum project and online magazine – also called “Global Threads” – has worked with Creative Serbia to preserve Akron's refugee community's cultural heritage and the multi-ethnic communities in Kikinda, Serbia.

Furthering this partnership, Global Ties Akron hosted a Serbian delegation to Akron in April 2018 and led a delegation visit to Serbia In May 2018.

Global Threads is one of only six global teams to receive this distinctive grant from the U.S. Department of State.

The project's evolution now includes iPromise APS 6th graders as part of a second U.S. Department of State grant. | global-threads.world

In 2017, Michelle traveled to Accra and Kumasi, Ghana, to work with International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) Community Solutions Leadership Fellowship participant Abdulsalam Mohammed on a Peace and Conflict Resolution U.S. Department of State grant project.

Building upon a formal city-to-city memo of understanding between Akron, Ohio, and Accra, Ghana, Michelle is now part of the Akron-Accra Partnership Board developing multi-sector connections between the two communities.

Michelle is an Ohio representative to the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition and a board member of the Himalayan Arts and Culture and Language Academy.

Past leadership initiatives include chairing the 2005 Northeast Ohio Summit on Citizen Diplomacy, bringing more than 250 leaders representing 70 local non-profit organizations, businesses, academic institutions, and government offices to focus on the importance of building community to community international relations. In 2012, Michelle lead event coordination of the inaugural Global Village Festival of Akron.