

Patrick Mutsune

Managing Director, Robert Baird & Co.
(Member since 2016)

Brett Timmerman

Realtor, Keller Williams Milwaukee North Shore
(Member since 2016)

Patrick Mutsune and Brett Timmerman are a married couple, who along with sharing their lives, have a mutual desire to work for a more inclusive Milwaukee. Their life stories and commitment to giving back suggest why that future may be within grasp.

Patrick is from Nairobi, Kenya, a city of about 4.9 million, while Brett grew up in Kieler, Wisconsin, population 577. Despite those disparate starting points, their lives intersected—they met at a fundraiser in Milwaukee in 2008—and they discovered shared values and experiences. Coincidence is a word both men use to describe how they came together from very different places. Intentionality best describes the dynamic nature of their partnership where they recognize and enable each other's interests and skills while sharing common societal goals.



Growing up, Patrick said his family was relatively privileged. “But we looked after extended family members who were not as fortunate,” said Patrick, whose father worked for the government. His mother developed curriculums for schools. “There were always one or more relatives living with us who were not as fortunate and who my parents would put through school.”

Patrick's father, a humble man who was educated in Iowa, encouraged his son to attend college in the Midwest. He took his father's advice and came to the U.S. to attend Lawrence University in Appleton, drawn by its 15 percent international undergraduate student population, personal educational touch, and impressive alumni network.

Patrick interned with Robert W. Baird & Co. in Appleton and was then hired to work in the company's Milwaukee office. There, he draws on his expertise in finance and technology as a senior investment and systems analyst. While working at Baird, Patrick earned a master's degree in business administration from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

Brett's father, who worked in nearby Dubuque, was on the town planning committee, a member of the Lions Club and gave back to the community in numerous ways. He describes his mother as the kindest person on earth. After growing up in Kieler, a town Brett said is so small that everyone has to take part in the community and take care of each other, he attended the University of Wisconsin–Platteville.



Brett said it was difficult being gay at a small university in a small town. In a 2020 university publication, he reflected on his UW-Platteville experience in a thoughtful article where his words were candid, affirming and inspiring. He said that professors, especially Elizabeth Gates, chair of the psychology department, saw his struggle and provided support, along with the Alliance LGBTQ organization and the Black Student Union.

Brett earned a degree in business administration with an emphasis in sales and marketing. After working in restaurant management, he is now a realtor with Keller Williams. He credits realtor Gail Ganley for introducing him to the profession.

Both men see Milwaukee as place full of potential but in need of change.

As a black man, Patrick said he is acutely aware of Milwaukee's reputation as one of the most racially segregated cities in the country with schools that fail youth, especially black males, and businesses that become frustrated after hiring people of color for management positions only to see them leave for more diverse cities at the first opportunity.

"I want to give back to the community," Patrick said. "There's a big need in this city, particularly for black male role models."

Patrick has been involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters, has helped high school students enter the post-secondary education pipeline and speaks approvingly of the MKE Fellows Program. Acutely aware of businesses' role in reversing aspects of Milwaukee's negative reputation, Patrick is engaging peers to develop solutions to the minority revolving door. He is grateful for the support of his Baird colleagues, who have become like extended family. Many of his coworkers attended his U.S. citizenship ceremony in 2005.

For Brett, the bullying he experienced as a child inspired him to help Milwaukee children avoid the torment that he suffered. To that end, he has committed his time to the Alliance School of Milwaukee, a charter school with a mission of anti-bullying and social justice.

"For years we hosted an annual New Year's Eve fundraiser for Alliance," Brett said. "This is a big deal to me because I was bullied relentlessly in high school for being gay. I truly believe that this school is not only educating our kids, but it also is saving lives."

Brett also serves in a fundraising capacity for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation of Wisconsin's annual Milwaukee Wine Opener to raise money for research.



“I went to grade school with a girl, Laura Robertson, who had CF and sadly passed away in high school,” Brett said. “I also have four kids in my life that are like nieces and nephews to me who have CF. Better treatments are discovered every year and life expectancy has dramatically gone up since I knew Laura,” he said, adding that his fundraising work is rewarding when he sees these advancements.

In his profession, Brett often uses the phrase “designed for entertaining,” but outside of work, those words definitely describe the couple’s four-story condo in Kane Commons on the Milwaukee River. They were as intentional in selecting and designing a home suited for purposeful entertaining as they are about selecting tasks and beneficiaries of their time and talent.

In local newspaper articles, the couple, who were married in Dubuque, Iowa in 2013, exuded pride about their home. Patrick, who started out as an art major in college, showcases his art from Kenya, a collection that *Urban Milwaukee* described as rivaling many local galleries.

In the article, Patrick said, “We always say diversity matters in all things. These (art) pieces are important because traveling home and seeing family is a once-a-year thing for me. Having art from back home is a daily reminder of my roots.”

With its view of the river, five balconies, artwork, custom-designed kitchen, fireplaces and movie theater, the couple’s home offers a purposeful functionality for charitable fundraisers.

The couple first opened their home to philanthropic events by hosting LGBTQ fundraisers and the Challenge Party, which supports LGBTQ causes. They have also hosted a couple of Rotary dinners, welcoming small gatherings of fellow Rotarians. The events featured lively discussions among influential people from different backgrounds who play important roles in Milwaukee.

Brett, who serves on Rotary’s Member Engagement Committee, said he wants Milwaukee to be a city that welcomes people who look like Patrick.

Patrick agrees, adding, “A place to lay roots and thrive, a place that’s well housed, with good jobs, with young talent that’s well educated.”

And hopefully a place where parents from Nairobi and Kieler can see how far their sons have come—from worlds apart to living a life of intentionality together.



Editor’s Note: *Rotary People of Action* is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Jeff Smoller.