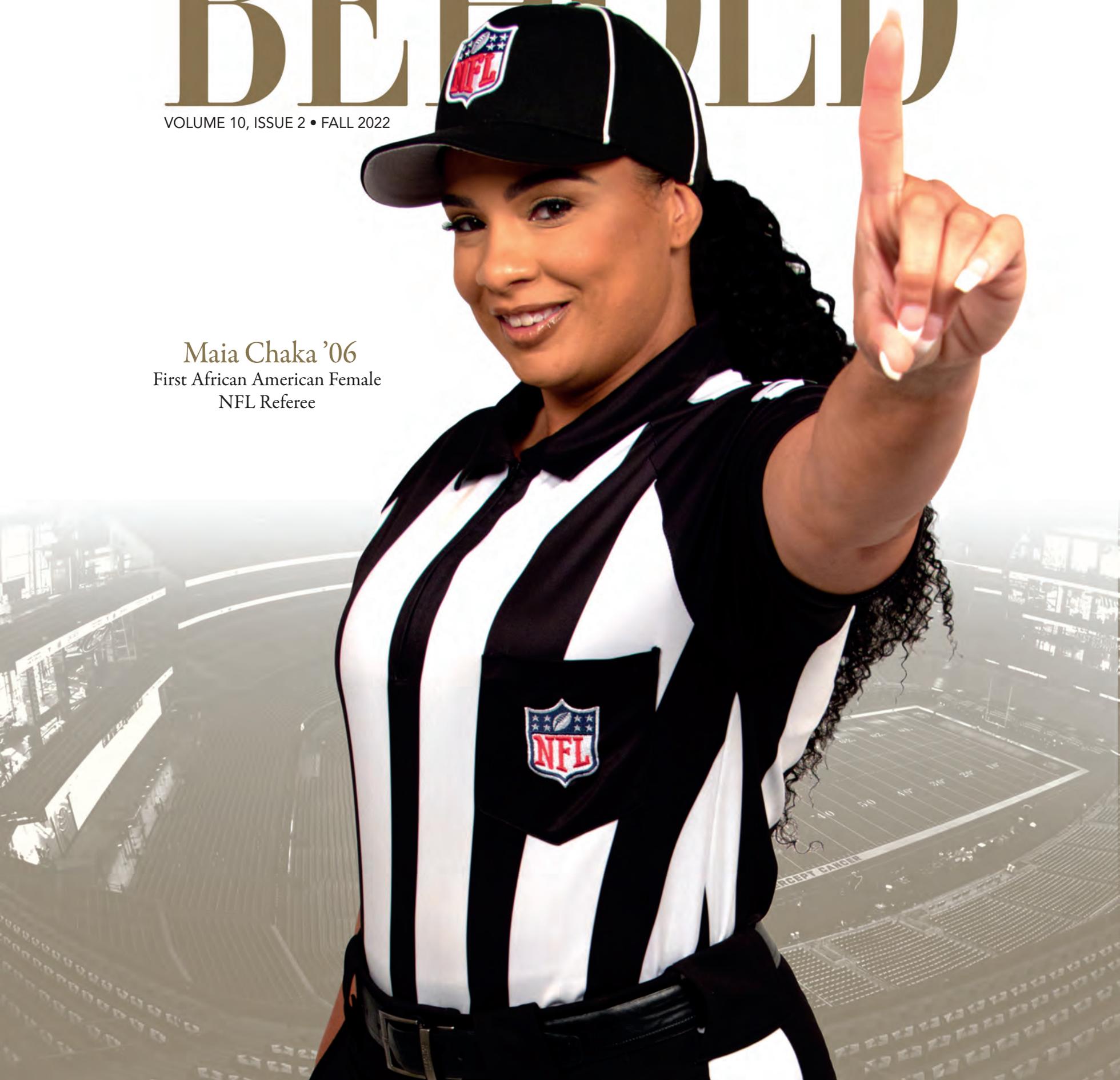


NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

BEHOLD

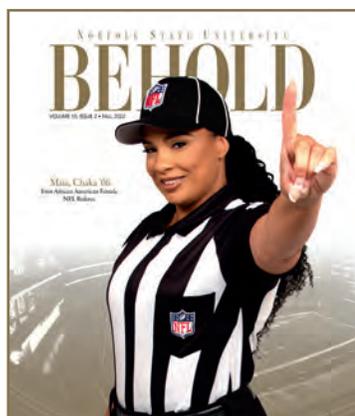
VOLUME 10, ISSUE 2 • FALL 2022

Maia Chaka '06
First African American Female
NFL Referee



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for University Advancement
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Maia Chaka '06
First African American
Female NFL Referee
Photo by Lateef Gibson
Stadium photo by Keith Cephus



Norfolk State University bestowed the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree and the Commencement Presidential Medallion upon singer, songwriter and producer Missy Elliott at the University's 109th Commencement Ceremony. Elliott served as the commencement keynote speaker.



From the Desk of the Vice President for University Advancement

In this last issue of our BEHOLD magazine this year, we are featuring “female firsts.”

We take a close look at the life of Dr. Marie V. McDemmond (pg. 3) and her immensely positive impact on the history of Norfolk State University. She was the University’s third President, having led the University from 1997-2005. She achieved many “firsts” during her lifetime, including becoming the first African American woman to lead a four-year public higher education institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the first woman to lead Norfolk State University. Please read about this pioneer whose imprint on Norfolk State is a central part of our history.



We also offer you another “female first” in our feature story on Maia Chaka (pg. 16), an NSU alumna who became the first African American female to referee in the National Football League. Her path to the NFL is a tribute to our Spartans’ hard work and perseverance, and her story is an inspiring example of what our Spartans achieve when they put in the work. Also, in another “first,” we offer you the entire interview behind the article on our YouTube channel. Please expect more of these multimedia efforts in the future.

Our “female firsts” also extend to our student body as we share another inspiring story about the first female drum major to lead our mighty Spartan Legion Marching Band (pg. 24). And don’t forget: the Spartan Legion performs in the 2023 Tournament of Roses Parade this coming January, another of many “firsts” for NSU.

You’ll also discover the entrepreneurial side of our students and alumni through articles about several innovators that include a new student startup company born out of our Innovation Center (pg. 22), one featuring the progressive research and work of Dr. LaVonda Brown’s patented eye technology (pg. 27) and the story of Marvinna Robinson, who is one of few African American women to own a champagne brand (pg. 26). You may also enjoy the piece on what it means to uncover hidden family roots, a journey of discovery by alumna Sonya Womack-Miranda (pg. 10).

This issue of BEHOLD continues to tell the story of a Norfolk State that is strong, persistent, determined and innovative. We hope you enjoy reading this issue and, as always, continue supporting Norfolk State University and our Spartans with your generous gifts. May you and your family find peace, joy and prosperity in the coming year.

As always, BEHOLD...

Sincerely,

Clifford Porter

Vice President for University Advancement

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY BEHOLD

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 2 • 2022

A MAGAZINE WITH GLOBAL REACH

The word “**Behold**” is often used by those who love Norfolk State. It sums up the excellence of the University and pride felt for it. That is why when it came to naming the magazine featuring the accomplishments and progress taking place at Norfolk State, “**Behold**,” easily came to mind.

Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.
University President

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BEHOLD is published twice a year by the NSU Office of Communications and Marketing.

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MARIE V. McDEMMOND: A TRIBUTE TO A LIFE WELL-LIVED

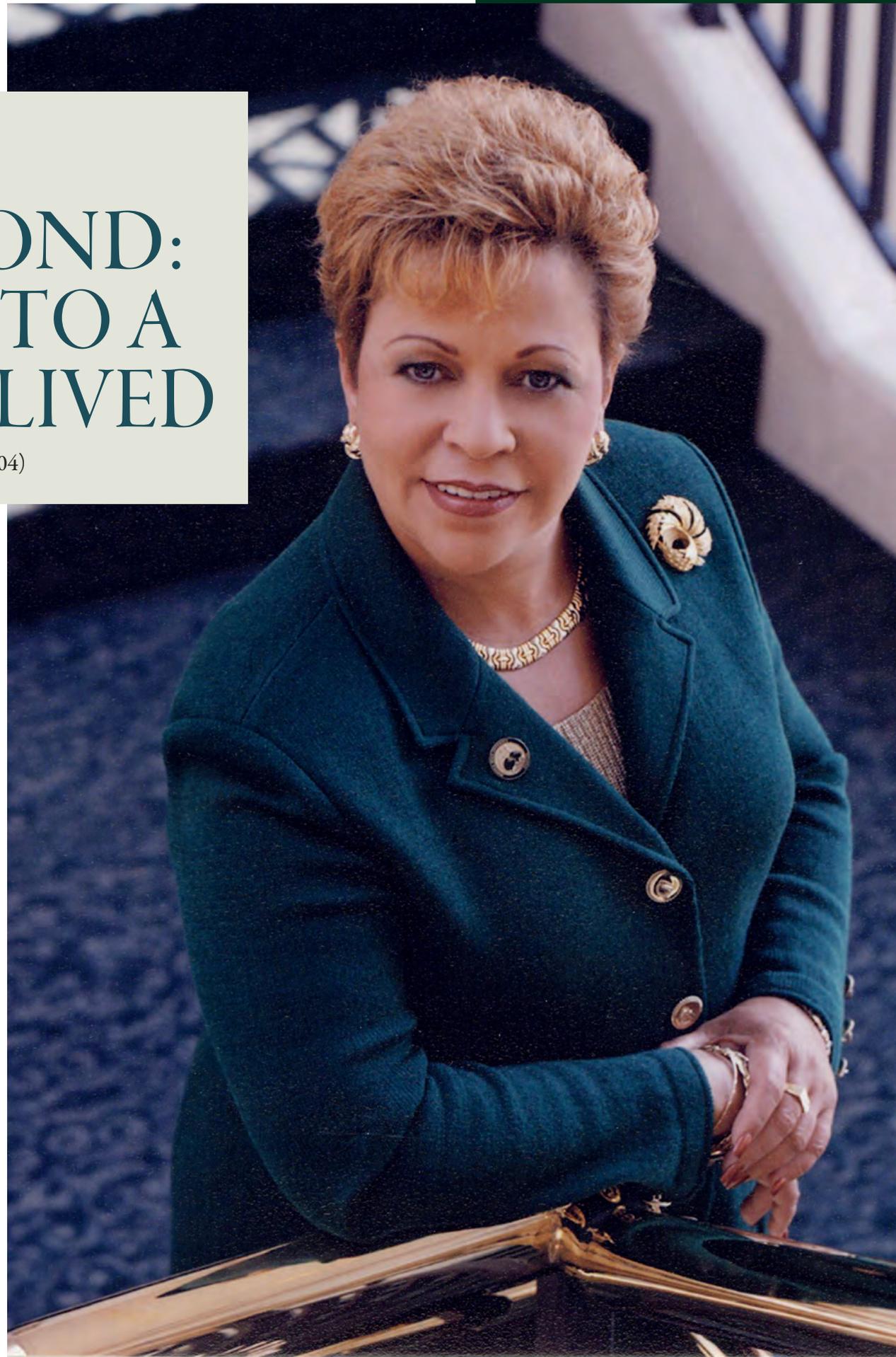
By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

Marie Valentine McDemmond — educator, accomplished leader, visionary, mentor, and “the first” in many aspects of her career — passed away July 27, 2022. She was 76 years old. She leaves a void in her family, the Norfolk State University community, and in the world of educators in the Commonwealth and beyond. McDemmond also left us with a crop of diverse leaders and mentees taking on the mantle of leadership at NSU and elsewhere. She left her mark on the heart of all those she touched or interacted.

Dr. McDemmond served as NSU’s president from 1997 – 2005. She once said, “Leaders must always possess unwavering fortitude – for when they stumble – as all leaders do, they must pick themselves up and be able to achieve even more.” McDemmond lived by her word and embodied them in her mantra . . . achieving with excellence. Always impeccably dressed in her St. John suits, she had an iron will and left a legacy of transformative leadership. McDemmond believed that listening was a fundamental requisite of leadership. She was also quoted as saying, “A leader must be a visionary who constantly asks, why not?”

During a memorial service held on campus August 17, officiant Rev. Joy Carrington from the NSU campus ministry, said about McDemmond, “She was an unforgettable part of the university’s history. And, once a Spartan . . . always a Spartan. She possessed a whole lot of grit, and for those of you who don’t know, grit means diligence, persistence

CONTINUED ON PG. 4





Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston at the McDemmond Celebration of Life Ceremony

CONTINUED FROM PG. 3

with fortitude.” NSU’s current president, Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston, told the audience, “We are standing on the shoulders of greatness. She did incredible things for Norfolk State University that are still in place today: the PASSPORT program with TCC, and she envisioned the reclamation of students who separated from the University through the NSU Reclamation Program. The foundation she laid with her distinguished career has truly positioned and launched NSU to be one of the premier HBCUs today. With her vision and sense of purpose, I only had to pick up the mantle and keep moving.”

Present and former administrators at NSU told BEHOLD that McDemmond believed in proactive transformation and navigated uncharted territories. She visualized partnerships that would groom university leaders of the future from the inside. Dr. Emma Best, who worked in the athletics department during the McDemmond era, remembers how personable the president was. “I met her on the elevator in Wilson Hall,” Best remembered. “I was on my way to Human Resources, and I recognized her. I said how are you, Dr. McDemmond? And she said, ‘fine’ and you are? I told her my name and she knew me. She explained she knew one of my sorority sisters and we started a conversation from there.” Best remembered feeling that even though McDemmond was the leader of the university, she treated her as an equal. Kathy Haverlesky, formerly with University Advancement, wrapped up the sentiment of the group when she said, “She was a smart woman. I loved her.” Haverlesky worked with the university’s foundation and McDemmond was legendary for her knowledge of finances, fundraising, and how to leverage money to elevate Norfolk State. Davida Williams, director of Auxiliary Services at Norfolk State, agreed with Haverlesky’s evaluation of McDemmond’s financial prowess. Williams joined the conversation and choking back tears stated, “As a finance person she understood our language. Not that she based everything solely on finances, but if we came to her and said this is what the impact will be, she understood the impact and we didn’t have to explain it further.” Dr. Best added, “She was a good listener, and she weighed her decisions carefully.” Sandra Williamson-Ashe, assistant professor in the School of Social Work, reminisced about McDemmond saying, “She was a walking charismatic book of knowledge . . . thought well on her feet. She was a consummate teacher. She was a born teacher.”

Marie V. McDemmond was NSU’s first female president and the first African American woman to lead a four-year university in Virginia. Her influence touched not only the NSU community but spread throughout the Commonwealth and around the

McDemmond’s leadership catapulted Norfolk State into the realm of premier HBCUs. Highlights of her accomplishments include:

- Envisioned a campus and community research hub, initially called the Research Innovations to Support Empowerment Center (RISE), today named in her honor as the Marie V. McDemmond Center for Applied Research

- Created a new research and technology division and hired the division’s first vice president

- Developed a comprehensive recruitment and marketing plan for new and transfer students

- Implemented a university-wide budget process

- Realigned the university’s nine schools into five maximizing resources

- Developed Norfolk State’s leadership and vision

- Established the Office of First-Year Experience

- Established the Office of Enrollment Management

- Became the first person in NSU’s history to donate \$1 million

- Began the plans for The Campaign for Norfolk State University: Initiatives for the Future – the university’s first-ever major gifts campaign

“A leader must be a visionary who constantly asks, ‘Why not?’”

—Dr. Marie V. McDemmond

country. Among her community outreach and connections, she was selected for the Dominion Strong Men and Women Series 2004, served as a Senior Fellow of the Institute for Public Policy and Executive Leadership in Higher Education, and was the first college president to be named as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army of Virginia. She was named to the President’s Board of Advisors on HBCUs and headed up a region of the National Association of Colleges and Universities. McDemmond was recognized by the Outstanding Young Women of America, Who’s Who Among Black Americans, and Florida’s National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO).

NSU former executive vice president, Dr. Alvin J. Schexnider, offered a special tribute during McDemmond’s memorial service mentioning the commonalities he shared with his fellow educator. He spoke about her leadership and her devotion to higher education. “It was through this shared commitment that we both found ourselves at Norfolk State University. Every day that we were here, we worked hard to advance the mission of Norfolk State and did everything we could to help it achieve its huge potential. Without a doubt, Dr. McDemmond’s greatest gift to NSU was her vision of what it could become.” Schexnider continued, “The most effective leaders . . . in any endeavor . . . are the women and men who possess a vision, and are capable of articulating that vision, and can draw others to support it. Effective leadership demands clear thinking, intentionality, persistence, and of course hard work. Marie V. McDemmond had a vision for Norfolk State and the Board of Visitors supported her in that vision.”

Dr. Marie V. McDemmond was an absolute educator, trailblazer, glass ceiling breaker, gifted leader, visionary, and counselor. “For me she was an inspiration, a mentor – someone who modeled the way,” said Davida Williams. President Adams-Gaston eloquently summed up the former president’s legacy stating, “She left an indelible footprint at NSU.” **B**



Dr. McDemmond with Congressman Bobby Scott and former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder



Dr. McDemmond with 2nd NSU president, Dr. Harrison B. Wilson



NSU welcomes Dr. McDemmond

Photos courtesy of The Harrison B. Wilson Archives

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARDS

Norfolk State University recognized four distinguished faculty members at the Fall 2022 Opening Conference on Tuesday, Aug. 16. President Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D., presented the Distinguished Faculty Awards before the conference's assembled faculty, staff, and administrators in the L. Douglas Wilder Performing Arts Center. The Distinguished Faculty Awards Program is an internal program designed to recognize and honor faculty who have distinguished themselves in teaching, scholarship and grantsmanship, and University service.



University Professor Award
DR. DOYLE TEMPLE,
Professor and Chair
Department of Physics
College of Science,
Engineering and
Technology

The University Professor award recognizes a faculty member who has

performed in a superior manner in teaching, scholarly activity, and service. This award is one of the highest honors the University can bestow on one of its faculty and is awarded only to an exceptional individual.

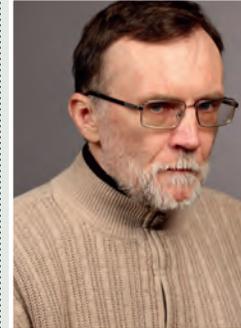
In 2012, Dr. Temple began pursuing the establishment of the Quantum Electronics Group and the Crystal Physics and Quantum Electronics Laboratory. This work resulted in the award of more than \$12 million in Quantum-related research and education grants, including 1) "The Partnership for Education in Advanced Quantum and nanoScience," which is an undergraduate research training program in partnership with the University of Colorado, Berkley, UCLA and Fort Lewis College; 2) the High Magnetic Field/Ultralow Temperature Laboratory, which when completed will be the third-ranking research facility of its kind in the nation; and 3) the "Center for Research and Education in Quantum-Leap Science and Technology," which has the objective of establishing new graduate programs in quantum sciences at Norfolk State.



Distinguished Service Award
DR. MELODY ARMSTRONG,
Instructor of
Allied Health
Department of Nursing
and Allied Health
College of Science,
Engineering and
Technology

The Distinguished Service Award is given to recognize a faculty member who has performed superior service to the University, their profession, or the community at large. The emphasis of this award will rotate in the following order: 1) professional service, 2) University service, 3) public service. This may be evidenced by activities which extend beyond normal expectations, unique contributions, or long-standing leadership and impact on the University and beyond.

Dr. Armstrong was appointed and currently serves as Chair Emeritus in her second term on the Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity (ACHDHE) by the Virginia State Health Commissioner since November 2020. Similarly, she serves on the Virginia Health Equity Working Group, wherein she championed the development of the Scarce Resource Allocation Policy in response to the Covid-19 Health Pandemic, which was adopted and published by the Commonwealth of Virginia in December 2020.



Distinguished Scholarship Award
DR. MIKHAIL NOGINOV,
Professor of Physics
Department of Physics
College of Science,
Engineering and
Technology

The Distinguished Scholarship award is given to a faculty member

in recognition of being an outstanding scholar, as scholarship is defined in his/her discipline. The recipient should have demonstrated a pattern of productive scholarly activity which has been recognized nationally or internationally, as appropriate. Traditional research, creative endeavors, and other scholarly activity are included in this category.

Dr. Noginov has been the principle investigator and co-principle investigator of over 30 grants totaling more than \$30 million. His honors include Norfolk State University Eminent Scholar 2010-2011, Virginia's Outstanding Scientist 2015, Fellow of OSA (the Optical Society of America, now called Optica) and SPIE (the international society for optics and photonics), and General Chair of the CLEO Conference 2015 (Conference on Lasers and Electro-Optics). He has served as the chair and committee member of several conferences of SPIE and OSA and an editorial board member of Scientific Reports. Dr. Noginov also serves on National Science Foundation panels and reviews papers for many professional journals. Since 2003, Dr. Noginov has been the faculty advisor of the OSA student chapter at Norfolk State.

Dr. Noginov says his top research accomplishment was his demonstration of the world's smallest laser, which was published in the magazine Nature.



Distinguished Teaching Award **DR. CHRISTINA PINKSTON,** Associate Professor of English
Department of English and Foreign Languages | College of Liberal Arts

The Distinguished Teaching award is given to a faculty member in recognition of being an outstanding teacher. This may be evidenced by being an inspiration to students, by utilizing stimulating techniques, materials, and methods designed to promote learning; by outstanding attention to the development of curriculum, learning materials, and teaching strategies; by serving in a teaching capacity outside the classroom and University; or by any combination of the above.

Dr. Pinkston specializes in African American studies and British literature (Medieval Period - Twentieth Century). Her research interests include the social-political-cultural voice of African and African Americans, as well as the improvement of academic teaching initiatives both in and out of the classroom with a strong focus on student retention. Dr. Pinkston is the recipient of numerous national as well as international honors and special recognitions for her work as an outstanding educator and published writer.

NSU ENGINEERING PROFESSOR RECEIVES COVETED NATIONAL CAREER AWARD

By GAIL KENT

You have a favorite pair of shoes that are now worn out, and you'd like to buy another pair just like them, but you don't recall where you got them or how much you paid.

You know you own a glue gun, but you can't find it, and you don't want to buy another.

You get an email saying that the kitchen utensils you ordered are on the delivery truck, and you'd like to know how soon it might arrive.

You own a warehouse with thousands of items and need a more effective inventory control system.

All of these are examples of potential applications from a research project that Hongzhi Guo, Ph.D., assistant professor of engineering at Norfolk State, is conducting. He recently received a \$499,337 award from the National Science Foundation's 2022 Faculty Early Career Development Program (CAREER) to pursue the research.

The CAREER award, Norfolk State's first, is NSF's most prestigious award in support of early-career faculty. It recognizes and funds faculty members who have the potential to serve as academic role models in research and education and to lead advances in the mission of their department or organization.

The five-year award will focus on developing a communication system to network objects such as clothing in a closet, envelopes in a mail truck or bottles stored in a container. The technology developed by the research could replace barcodes used today by creating a virtual map to track items. Such a system is superior to barcodes, which can geolocate items as they are scanned but not between contact points.

Guo came to the United States from China 10 years ago. He earned a master's degree from Columbia University and then his doctorate in electrical engineering in 2017 from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo. In 2019, he joined Norfolk State because "I was very impressed when I took a tour of the facility. I believed this was the platform to support me for success."

He is excited about the award and the opportunity it will provide to work with undergraduate and graduate students interested in research. The award is used to cover student stipends and other expenses.

"I think it is good for students and the University from two aspects," says Guo, who has mentored 10 graduate students and 20 undergraduates so far. "First, the research helps the students understand what they are learning. This is especially important for their junior and senior years. Second, the research helps us with student retention. We pay the students a stipend, and they prefer to stay rather than transfer or drop out. They also decide to stay here for their master's degrees."



Guo says he tries to provide research opportunities for any interested student. "I think it is very important." He pairs senior students with sophomores to work on projects that the less experienced students might not understand on their own. A sophomore may not understand circuits, for example, but after working on a circuit project during the summer with a senior, the student then feels confident to enroll in a circuit class as a junior or senior.

"We can build a strong community through these kinds of activities," Guo says.

Guo's supervisor, Patricia Mead, PhD, professor and Engineering Department chair, says she's been happy to support him as a junior faculty member. "The students speak very highly of him. I'm fortunate to have been able to work with Dr. Guo. He's been outstanding."

Mead, who was a CAREER award winner herself in 1997 as a young faculty member at the University of Maryland, says the CAREER award is very competitive throughout the United States. "I was jumping up and down in my office," says Mead, when she got word that Guo had won the award.

"Words cannot explain how much I think of Dr. Guo as a colleague in our department," she says. "He has everything I would like to see in every faculty member." **B**

FACULTY MEMBER ADOPTS SCHOOL



Photos courtesy of Dr. Alston

Dr. Sharon Alston with Lethe students, Ms. Jones, principal of the Eden Basic School and a teacher.



A

family vacation to Jamaica last summer had a surprising, and ultimately rewarding, outcome for Dr. Sharon Alston.

The assistant professor of social work has “adopted” a school and made a commitment to helping improve education for the children in the village of Lethe and the surrounding communities.

A rafting excursion became more than just a lazy day on a river in the Jamaica countryside for Alston. As the raft moved down the river, she observed many of the local residents plying their trades along it. She became curious and intrigued about the culture, history, work opportunities and the families in the area.

What she discovered was quite humbling. “What struck me most was the limited educational achievement for the residents of the Lethe village,” Alston said. “Even the poorest of American children have access to free education.” She visited the Eden basic school, owned and operated by a native woman, who teaches approximately 20 children between 3 and 6 years old. “My American ignorance would have me think that the school was fully equipped with basic resources (computers, whiteboard, lunchrooms etc.)”

The school, located more than 25 miles from a city, has cement floors, two classrooms, an office space, a small kitchen—the size of a closet, a restroom with rusted sinks and slow running water and one room serves as a space for napping but there is only one small bed for the approximately 20 children who attend the school. There is no lunchroom, so the children eat outside under a shed and the playground nook has no working equipment. A swing fixture has one working swing instead of the four it should.

Before leaving Jamaica, Dr. Alston asked about the school’s needs. She returned in September. In between, she raised money from friends to purchase a stove, so that Ms. Jones could cook for the children; tiles for tiling the floor; and school supplies for every student. She also bought and served the children lunch.

Dr. Alston also made visits to several other schools with older children and found mostly the same circumstances. However, the teachers expressed that if they could reach the younger children, the educational outcomes could be better.

Taking on the Lethe school runs parallel with the University’s mission, Dr. Alston believes. “The value of engagement says we (faculty, students and staff) continually enhance the University’s role and influence in affairs of local and global communities by promoting educational attainment, cultural enrichment, and economic development.”

She envisions the adoption of the Lethe school to also help Norfolk State students. “I hope to develop a study

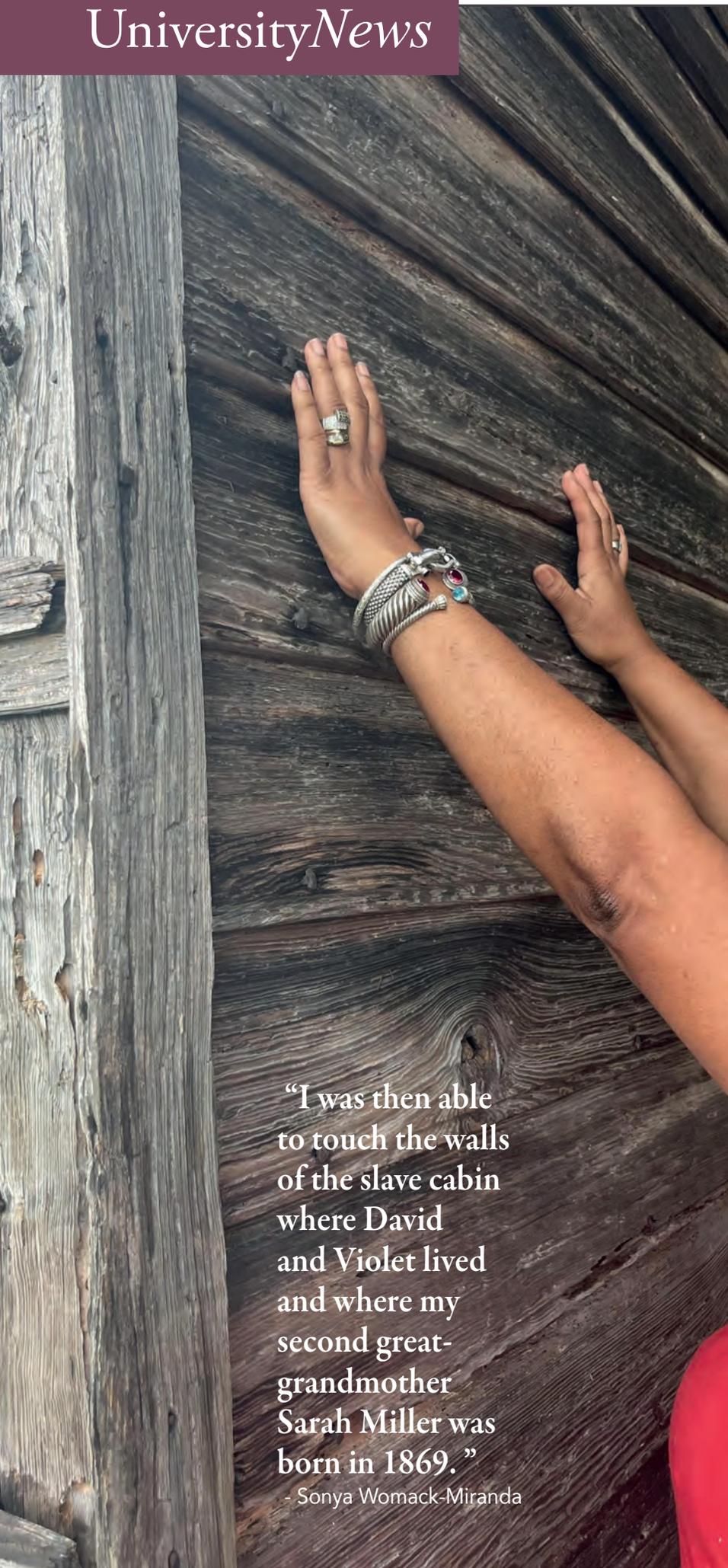
abroad opportunity for students to engage in Project-based learning [PBL] within the Lethe Village. Through PBL, students work with the residents to develop strategies to address poverty, unemployment, and academic failure.”

Since the first time she saw the people and learned the story of Lethe, Alston’s social work instincts kicked in. “The purpose of the social work profession is to eliminate human suffering and improve conditions of society,” said Dr. Alston. “That is, we are to fight for equitable distribution of resources and service for those who are marginalized and oppressed,” she said. “I cannot think of a more deserving population or geographic location than the children of the Lethe Village.” **B**

P.S.: Dr. Isiah Marshall Jr., dean of the Ethelyn R. School of Social Work, Social Work faculty and staff are supporting Dr. Alston’s efforts and have donated school supplies to the Eden Basic School. Alston gives special thanks to Raft Captains, Chris and CJ.

Dr. Alston stands with one of the children who attends the school for older students. The boy wants to be a soldier when he becomes of age.





“I was then able to touch the walls of the slave cabin where David and Violet lived and where my second great-grandmother Sarah Miller was born in 1869.”

- Sonya Womack-Miranda

Discovery of Hidden Family Roots

BRINGS PEACE AND WHOLENESS

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

In 2011, Sonya Womack-Miranda embarked on a years-long journey of discovery — an unearthing of her family roots and its connection to a place called Sharswood.

Located between Danville and Lynchburg, Virginia, Sharswood was a 2,000-acre hub for tobacco plantations in Pittsylvania County in the 1860s. Enslaved people ranging in ages from one to 72 lived there, worked there, and some, were buried there. Today, Sharswood is owned by a descendant of an enslaved Sharswood family and a cousin to Womack-Miranda. The twist of the descendants of the enslaved now owning the former plantation created significant media coverage. But for Womack-Miranda, who helped conduct research on the home, it was more personal than that.

“I wanted to scream right inside that courthouse because I was connecting my family to this particular plantation and to this particular area.” — Womack-Miranda

“For me it was always about my family’s connection to the property,” recalled the Norfolk State alumna. “I did the research, not because of the house, but because of my second great-grandmother who was a person.” At the time, all Womack-Miranda had was a first name. “My quest took me to Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, where I visited the Family History Library. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons have created the largest genealogical library in the world – open to the public. I was looking for one of my ancestors that my mother referred to as Sarah.”

The cross-country trip proved fruitful—Womack-Miranda was able to locate her second great-grandmother, Sarah D. Miller. “In 2018, I visited the courthouse in Pittsylvania County. My goal was to confirm what my grandfather, Charlie Max Miller, told me – that the property we now know as Sharswood, was what he referred to as the Miller plantation. At this point I want to prove that the plantation is linked to us.”

Womack-Miranda explained that she credits Alberta Elizabeth Miller Womack with giving her and her cousin, Dexter Miller, the clue that led them to link David and Violet Miller (the enslaved) to Sharswood. “This is the family historian (Miller Womack) who passed down the clues about the slaves. Without the information she provided in this search, there could not be a link to Sharswood and the Black descendants,” added Womack-Miranda.

As she continued to trace her research journey, Womack-Miranda remembered spending about two hours looking at deeds in the Pittsylvania County Courthouse. “When I saw that Charles E. Miller owned Sharswood last, I knew everything that my grandmother said was true. I wanted to scream right inside that courthouse because I was connecting my family to this particular plantation and to this particular area.” Womack-Miranda recalls the enormity of her discovery. “It’s true! It’s true! It was overwhelming and almost brought me to tears.”

Womack-Miranda’s cousin, Frederick Miller, who also grew up in Pittsylvania County and passed by Sharswood on his way to school, bought the property in May 2020, with the intention of hosting family gatherings. “I didn’t really know Fred,” said Womack-Miranda. “I’d see him at family reunions, but for me, this research has always been about the family . . . my African American descendants – the people buried in the slave cemetery.” So far, there have been at least two major functions in the summer of 2022 celebrated at Sharswood – Juneteenth, which brought out hundreds of celebrants and a family reunion – reuniting more than 200-plus family members.

Womack-Miranda continued to reflect on her family roots research saying, “It was merely a hobby as I mentioned in the 60 Minutes interview. Now, I have people from around the country who have contacted me asking me to look for slaves. I found every single slave linked to the Miller plantation – 19 slaves from my mother and father’s sides of the family.” She discovered that Sarah Miller is her great-great-grandmother and is the great-grandmother to her cousins Fred, his sister Karen Dixon Rexroth and Dexter Miller. Sarah was born on the plantation, but was not a slave; however, Sarah’s mother, Violet was enslaved there. Even after discovering this, Womack-Miranda wanted to know more. “I was so engrossed in the research, I had to take it a step further and get my DNA analyzed. Then I got the chance to go to Africa. I touched the walls of the slave castles where my

ancestors were pushed out to sea in West Africa. I wanted to know where my ancestors exited Africa – the door of no return. I needed to do that.”

The story of Sharswood, its history and people, has made national headlines in recent years including articles in *The Washington Post*, Ghanaweb.com and coverage on MSN.com. But for at least one descendent of the plantation’s legacy, the journey of discovery has had a remarkable impact. “I have had a unique journey that few African Americans can say they have experienced. I have touched the soul of my ancestors in America and Africa,” Womack-Miranda exclaimed. “My journey, in researching my ancestors, has taken me from America to Africa. I journeyed back to America and was able to connect the puzzle pieces to where my ancestors – my third great-grandparents David and Violet Miller landed on the Walnut Grove plantation in Halifax County, Virginia. They were later brought to the plantation we now know as Sharswood.”

The research has come full circle with the purchase of Sharswood by her cousin. “I was then able to touch the walls of the slave cabin where David and Violet lived and where my second great-grandmother Sarah Miller was born in 1869. I have touched the souls of my ancestors on both continents. I feel as an African American that I am no longer disconnected from my heritage, my history, or my roots. I now have a link to my ancestors – the people who were hidden from me. The discovery of my ancestors brings a sense of wholeness and makes me feel as if I am a complete human being knowing who I am.” **B**

Editor’s Note: Sonya Womack-Miranda is publishing a book – a culmination of her research titled “Finding Sarah” with a publication date of November 2022.

Juneteenth celebration at Sharswood



Photo of Sonya Womack-Miranda



*Student
Pathways and
Academic
Formation
Department*

HELPS NEW NSU STUDENTS EXCEL

By GAIL KENT

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earning to become an effective college student is a skill that can be difficult to master.

For the past five years, Norfolk State has supported new students through the Student Pathways and Academic Formation Department as they develop that skill.

The department, originally funded in November 2016 by a \$2-million, five-year grant from the Lilly Endowment in partnership with the United Negro College Fund, uses a three-pronged approach to

strengthen students' academic integration, belonging and skill development. Because of the department's success, it is now funded through the university's academic budget.

NSU freshman seminar courses have been redesigned throughout the years. Students now take three, one-credit courses during their freshman year and first semester of their sophomore year that help them learn study skills and time management and allow them to explore majors and careers best suited to their strengths and interests. Students also gain the opportunity to network with industry leaders and observe professionals in the workplace.

"We help them connect their skills to prepare for their journey," says Robin Marable, Ed.D., department director. "We talk to students about growth

mindset, and how they are not in high school any longer. There's nobody to call them or their parents if they don't show up in class or do their homework. So we get them thinking like college students and taking responsibility for themselves."

The courses, required for graduation, include Spartan Seminar 101, focusing on college readiness; Spartan Seminar 102, emphasizing academic discipline; and Spartan Seminar 201, a research-based course focusing on the ethnography of work that provides students an opportunity to observe work environments related to their career interests.

Students provide feedback used to improve the courses. "Students really like Seminar 201 because it is so meaningful and relevant," Marable says. Last year students rated this course the highest of the three, giving it scores of 4.3 to 4.4 on a five-point scale.

"It's a really reflective course where they're getting to observe behaviors, norms and activities in the workplace and provide feedback on the experience." Such an experience can help students determine early in their college careers if their initial interest in a field is consistent with their goals and aptitudes, she says.

Additional initiatives that support students include Learning Communities, in which students are grouped according to their interests. Learning Community members take courses together and participate in co-curricular activities in which they network with peers, faculty and staff. This ultimately enhances their sense of belonging to the institution.

Student Pathways works closely with Career Services and collaborates with multiple departments in Academic and Student Affairs to ensure that students receive the support they need

for success, Marable says. It also interacts with external organizations that provide scholarships and career readiness opportunities. A partnership with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCFF), offering a five-day Leadership Institute for qualified students, connects them with 300 employers in cities such as New York and Washington, DC.

Students say they have gained valuable insights and opportunities through the courses.

"Spartan Seminar bridges the gap of the unknown for first-year college students," says Jordan Moody ('25), a sophomore from Newport News majoring in secondary history education. "The beauty of Spartan Seminar is that the courses are mainly taught by professors who have a great knowledge of Norfolk State University from its genesis and are knowledgeable of resources all around campus. Most of the time they are either Norfolk State alums or high-ranking professors who have been at Norfolk State for a majority of their professional careers."

Moody credits the seminars with supporting his growth as a leader. He served as president of the Robert C. Nusbaum Honors College Student Association his freshman year and as a presidential intern and chief of staff for the NSU Student Government this year.

Nevin Gammage ('23), a senior psychology major from Ewing, NJ, says the Learning Communities have benefitted him by "providing a space for my peers and me to come together and help each other with complex courses."

He serves as an ambassador for the FACE-IT Learning Community for psychology students, which Moody says led him to a paid internship that prepares students for graduate school.

"FACE-IT gives a sense of community to freshman psychology majors by hosting programs such as 'Surviving the First,' where we provide an open space to discuss our experiences and obstacles that we had to overcome when we were in freshmen's shoes," Gammage says.

"This is only one example of our many programs that focus on students excelling in their major and providing opportunities to further improve their experience as psychology students." **B**

"We help them connect their skills to prepare for their journey."

— Robin Marable, Ed.D., department director



Denise Dowse was a soft-spoken woman and powerful representative and advocate for the performing arts. She was an accomplished and prolific Hollywood actor from the 80's until her passing. The NSU alumna, actor, director, teacher, and mentor died August 13, 2022, after contracting meningitis and slipping into a coma. Her sister, Tracey Dowse made the announcement via a heartfelt post on Instagram writing in part, "It is with a very heavy heart that I inform everyone that my sister, Denise Dowse has gone forward to meet our family in eternal life." The actor was 64 years old.

After Tracey Dowse's Instagram post, the tributes began to pour in from fellow actors, agents, and students studying acting under her tutelage. Dowse's longtime manager, Sandra Siegal said in a statement printed in *The Los Angeles Times* that she was heartbroken by the loss of her brilliantly talented, beautiful, eloquent, and loving friend. "Denise's legacy and memory will live on forever for she has truly touched so many," Siegal wrote.

Dowse graduated from Norfolk State in 1981. Honing her skills under the wing of the legendary Robert Wynn-Jackson, then-director of the NSU Theater program, Dowse received rave reviews for her performance in the lead role of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. She was the daughter of a U.S. Naval officer and born in Honolulu. Although she often had to relocate with her family, acting remained a high priority and constant in her early life shaping her future performing endeavors.

According to IMDb (Internet Movie Database), she has 122 acting credits for television and movie roles. A high-volume performer, Dowse is most remembered for roles in the movie *Ray* (Marlene), and *The Call* (Flora), and for roles in the television shows *Insecure* (Dr. Rhonda Pine), and *Beverly Hills 90210* (Mrs. Yvonne Teasley).

Among her other television series roles include:

- *A Cloud So High* (Det. Trina McWilliams) – 2022
- *Grey's Anatomy* (Lorraine Simms) – 2020
- *New Amsterdam* (Alfreda Watson) – 2019
- *Murder in the First* (Rainelle James) – 2016
- *Castle* (Judge Gloria Wollcott) – 2016
- *Criminal Minds* (Yvonne Burns) – 2011-2012
- *Bones* (Dr. Sherry Bannon) – 2011

In an era when Hollywood is often publicly criticized for its lack of diversity, Denise Dowse, graduate of Norfolk State University, made her mark despite the inequities in her chosen profession, and paved the way for another generation of actors. She will be missed by all those she touched. **B**

Denise Dowse serves as the emcee at NSU's 70th Anniversary Gala



NSU Alumna & Hollywood Actress:
DENISE DOWSE
in Memoriam

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (MA '04)



NSU, UVA Receive \$5M to Fight Sea Level Rise

Norfolk State University professors Drs. Ashley Haines, Sharon Alston, and Renny Fernandez have successfully partnered with the University of Virginia on a \$5 million grant. This interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty from Biology, Social Work, and Engineering at NSU is designed to address rising seawater levels and the associated problems in Hampton Roads. In addition, they have leveraged opportunities for NSU students to gain access to innovative learning opportunities and training that advance their skills for post-graduate education and job readiness.

The grant is part of the larger National Science Foundation's Coastlines and People, or CoPe, program to help coastal communities protect natural, social, and economic resources.

"These awards will support Coastal Research Hubs that bring together experts from multiple disciplines to synthesize coastal research results into actionable solutions," said Alexandra Isern, NSF assistant director for Geosciences. "The Hubs are designed for stakeholder involvement in the research process through community engagement, partnerships with coastal economic sectors, and citizen science activities to foster inclusive diversity and to broaden participation in STEM."

"Focused CoPe: Enhancing Resilience and Equity in Urban Coastal Communities through the Co-Generation of Community Capitals" is the name of the grant received by NSU and UVA. According to the grant, "The overarching goal of this project is to create transferable methods for enhancing resilience and equity in urban coastal communities."



MIGHTY DREAM

Norfolk State University was a proud contributor to Pharrell Williams' "Mighty Dream Forum," a three-day event supporting and celebrating diversity, equity and inclusion in businesses throughout the 757.

NSU Offers 24/7 Virtual Mental Health Services for Students



In order to offer Norfolk State University (NSU) students free and equitable access to mental health support, NSU has partnered with TimelyMD to deliver TimelyCare, a new virtual health and well-being platform for students. The need for 24/7 access to high-quality care has never been more important. According to the American Council on Education, student mental health is the top concern of colleges and

universities because it is the number one reason why students leave college.

"As we continue to build upon the NSU Culture of Care, it is critical for our community to expand the resources available to students in order to maintain mental wellness," said Dr. Leonard E. Brown, NSU vice president for student affairs.

"In addition to services for students," said Dr. Brown, "TimelyCare offers Faculty Support – a service for faculty and staff that is designed to equip them with information to help students who may be struggling. It's available 24/7/365 for free so they can get guidance on how to support a student in need of care." **B**



“ I am honored to be selected as an NFL official, but this moment is bigger than a personal accomplishment. It is an accomplishment for all women, my community, and my culture.”

— Maia Chaka, March 5, 2021

*BEHOLD Magazine caught up with Maia Chaka in May 2022
for a sit-down interview. This cover feature is the result. Enjoy!*

FIRST IN THE NFL

**HARD WORK, PERSEVERANCE LEADS
2006 ALUMNA TO BECOME FIRST FEMALE
AFRICAN AMERICAN REFEREE**

By Steve Opfer

It takes stamina, grit and perseverance to be a National Football League referee, and Maia Chaka, Norfolk State University class of 2006, is no stranger to those attributes. After years of officiating football games at the local, regional and college levels, she became the league's first female African American referee in 2021. While her path to that milestone was complicated and challenging, it started at Norfolk State University. And there's a sense of destiny to her story that started long before she existed.

CONTINUED ON PG. 18



Photos courtesy of JB Agency

“The gym that is Echols Hall is named after my great uncle,” Chaka said. “He officiated 32 years [of] basketball and football in the CIAA. He officiated the Pan African Games for basketball. So, he was a pretty good basketball official back in the ’40s, ’50s, and ’60s, where Black people weren’t even considered human. He was able to cross all kinds of racial barriers and boundaries just being him. And looking through his photo album that inspired me to always want to officiate.”

“And then, when I was here at Norfolk State, and I was working on my Health and PE degree, I needed to find multiple streams of income,” she said. “I didn’t want to become just a PE teacher.” She thought it was important to have those options after graduation, so she pursued work-study through Student Activities where she officiated flag football and intramural basketball.

In fact, she was dared into becoming a referee.

“I used to heckle them, the same way everybody else heckles bad referees,” Chaka said. “So, one of the guys said ‘Well, if you think you can do it, why don’t you come out here and try.’ And that always just stuck in my head.”

She was dared to do better, so she took up officiating intramurals just to prove somebody wrong, but she did it throughout the rest of college.

A year after graduating to become a high school physical education teacher in Virginia Beach, she was again looking for a way to supplement her income. That’s when a co-worker “forced her” to go to an interest meeting to officiate high school football “because there weren’t any women doing football at the time,” according to Chaka. So, she used her experience doing intramurals to move into officiating high school Pop Warner football games.

Once she took on officiating high school football, she worked all the time. Chaka was “constantly working” and never turned down an assignment.

“And that’s key,” she said. “Whenever you’re trying to be successful, when you want to be good at something, you have to put the time in...you have to put that work in, in order to get better.”

And the work paid off. After three years of experience, she became the first woman in Virginia to referee a high school state championship. That helped her move up to Division I college football, a very rare opportunity for high school referees. Most referees move from high school to small college football, but not Chaka. She went straight to Division I in Conference USA.

She credits the big leap to being at a referee training camp where she was the only female and only Black person in the room. She said Gerald Austin, a longtime NFL referee who would become her mentor, gave her the opportunity in Conference USA because of seeing how she handled herself so professionally in that very challenging situation.

She admits, though, that she was not qualified at first. Chaka had to live up to the potential Austin saw in her.

“Because you’re not qualified, doesn’t mean that you don’t have the potential,” Chaka said. “It’s the same as how when you draft a player as a rookie, you know they got the potential to be what they are, but you still have to put the work in to be successful.”

She loved officiating at the high school level because she loved learning something new and loved the growth process.

“But once I started Division I football, then it became tough,” Chaka said. “Because now we’re flying out of town. I had games in El Paso, Texas. I had games in Shreveport, Louisiana.” She’d fly out on a Friday after school, work a Saturday game, then fly home Sunday and go back to work teaching PE on Monday.



Top: Maia Chaka honored on-field at Norfolk State University homecoming, 2021

Middle: Maia Chaka announces the launch of her nonprofit, Make Meaningful Change, on Coast Live with April Woodard and her student

Bottom: Maia Chaka interviewed about her nonprofit, Make Meaningful Change, at the Norfolk State University Innovation Center

While she wasn't aware of it at the time, the grueling workload was preparing her for the National Football League.

Her mentor and Conference USA supervisor, Gerald Austin, had worked many years in the NFL and even had some Super Bowls to his credit. Chaka describes him as a good judge of talent, and he put her with good referees who would go on to the NFL. And, after a few years of Division I, Austin had people from the NFL come out to scout her performance.

"Once you're working in one job, if you want to get promoted, your bosses have to speak up for you and speak well for you," Chaka said. "And that's with every college conference, not just mine...that's how the NFL does it. There's no application."

Chaka says there's a three-tier process and the NFL has around 2,000 referees every year in their scouting pool. Referees move up the tiers through excellence, persistence and discipline, both on the field and off.

"You just have to continue to put in the work and wait your time," Chaka said. "Your work is always going to rise to the top. It's always going to outshine anybody else."

Chaka said NFL training "is just like college." A 200-question pre-test prepares potential referees to take a 200-question entry test. Then there are training camps, pre-season games, fitness tests, and tests on their officiating mechanics: being in the right spot on the field at the correct time.

"We're judged," she said. "As soon as we step on the field, we're judged from that point on until we get on the bus. So, someone's looking at our every move."

And it wasn't easy for Chaka. While most NFL referees are "in training" for two or three years, it took Chaka seven years to make it to the big league, "twice as long," she said.

While her rookie year in 2021 was challenging, she looks forward to staying in the league.

"I was the only rookie [referee] in the league last year, so I got the rookie treatment," she said. "But I'm worried about what my grades say or my supervisor says because I'm trying to stay in the league."

Chaka looks forward to a successful year this year and hopes to make it into the post-season officiating crews. "I'm shooting for that 99.9; I'm shooting for accuracy." And then, after five years of successful officiating, maybe fans will see her in a Super Bowl.

In the meantime, Chaka recently started up a nonprofit foundation — Make Meaningful Change. As a retired Virginia Beach educator, Make Meaningful Change gives her an outlet to continue caring for youth and supporting education. The organization's website is www.makemeaningfulchange.org.

Watch our entire May 11, 2022, interview with Maia Chaka at <https://youtu.be/ZS0yX6RTDSw>. Chloe-Ryan Woolfolk, the editor-in-chief of the Spartan Echo student newspaper, served as our guest host. **B**



Photo by Lateef Gibson



SERVING THE UNDERSERVED: THE NSUIC

is Norfolk's Cornerstone for Minority Entrepreneurs

By YASMEEN FREIGHTMAN

1%. That's how much venture capital is invested into Black businesses every year. It's an unsettling figure that dwindles even further for Black women founders. It also reflects the scale of indifference the national economic sector has towards underserved communities in America. It's that very percentage that beckoned NSU and Norfolk city leaders to launch the Norfolk State University Innovation Center (NSUIC). Now, three years later, the center continues to make incredible strides and impacts that reach far and wide across Hampton Roads.

The NSUIC is a business incubator hub in downtown Norfolk that exists to support the underserved entrepreneurial ecology of Hampton Roads and to cultivate a robust, thriving community of innovators and entrepreneurs. Additionally, the center also works to combat the scarcity of capital investments that go to underserved businesses. It's a fight for equity, empowerment, ownership and community development.

"Most underserved entrepreneurs know that investment funding is out there. It's just that investors often overlook companies founded by minorities, women, and disabled veterans," NSUIC Executive Advisor Dr. Rhonda Alexander remarked. "The lack of mentorship and accessible resources make it difficult for underserved entrepreneurs to get funding and succeed. Thus, our focus is exposing these founders to the language, principles, mindsets, and networks that majority-led startups are immersed in every day.

Since its inception in 2019, the center has instituted several programs for NSU students as well as aspiring, early-stage, and established entrepreneurs throughout Hampton Roads. This specific and targeted programming has not only reinforced and strengthened the business models for hundreds of entrepreneurs, but it has helped these businesses raise sizable amounts of capital, as well.

More than 1,500 people have come to the NSUIC for its services and the center itself has seen huge increases in the number of incubator program participants year-to-year. Thanks to that programming, several of its program graduates have gone on to raise millions of dollars in funding for their businesses. In fact, the innovators in NSUIC's network have secured more than \$1,000,000 in funding that has been poured back into the Hampton Roads economy.

"We've brought mainstream knowledge and fundamentals concerning innovation and entrepreneurship to underserved communities, access to social capital networks and consultants that are available to work one-on-one with our entrepreneurs while building real relationships, as well as access to capital which helps increase the 1% of VC funds that go to Black entrepreneurs and innovators," NSUIC Program Director Akosua Acheamponmaa explained. "With our programs, we're able to teach our participants to connect and help our participants build relationships with investors, so they can get equity funding. This is the impact we've been able to make in the community."

It's the business literacy, networking opportunities, and private consulting the center's programs provide that are and continue to be the biggest draws and takeaways for many of its participants. Take the 3-Day Startup program, designed specifically for NSU students and alumni, which splits participants

into teams that work on real business ideas over the course of an entire weekend. At its conclusion, teams pitch their ideas to a panel of investor judges for cash prizes. Similar to 3DS is the BIG Idea Startup Program, which welcomes aspiring and early-stage entrepreneurs from across Hampton Roads to workshop their startup ideas with the most up-to-date business methodologies and with real-time feedback from seasoned consultants.

Finally, the NSUIC's signature program – the Innovative Entrepreneur Incubator Program – is an intensive, weeks-long course for entrepreneurs who have developed prototype products and services and need help designing long-term financial plans to pitch to investors for funding. It's the center's chief response to the issue Black businesses often encounter when trying to obtain venture capital funds. With one-on-one help from the NSUIC's network of consultants, entrepreneurs learn firsthand how to successfully audit and propose their business ideas to investors.

Part of the NSUIC's involvement in the greater Hampton Roads region includes its collaboration with the Norfolk Innovation Corridor (NIC), a designated zone in the downtown area that promotes the city's innovation assets to attract tech companies involved in resilience products, services, and technologies to Norfolk.

"We really want to become known as the entrepreneurial ecosystem for innovative resilience technologies. So we promote all of the innovation assets, including the NSUIC, to entice these companies to start here in Norfolk and connect them to our vast array of resources. The goal is to expand the quality of life for everybody in areas like sea-level rise, cybersecurity, maritime issues, and healthcare issues," Norfolk Innovation Corridor Executive Director Linda Peck explained. "The whole city will rise up when we all rise up, so it serves us to serve the underserved community. We all benefit from working together and as we continue to focus on economic development for the whole area, we'll just become a more vibrant community."

Future goals for the NSUIC are clear. Center leaders want to increase services and exposure to resources for underserved business owners as well as access to investment opportunities. Strengthening their relationships with strategic partners is also a top priority and they also want to bring more research and internship opportunities to NSU's campus. Achieving these objectives accomplishes the center's vision to create a bustling, entrepreneurial hub in the Norfolk area, while helping new and hungry entrepreneurs take their enterprises to new heights. **B**



Adrian Dews Jr. and
Alana Coleman with
Pharrell Williams and
NSU President
Javaune Adams-Gaston



STARTUP GROWS



By SUSAN SMIGIELSKIACKER

*Out of Innovation
Center Lessons*

Online sports betting is growing in popularity and several Norfolk State University's Innovation Center participants are joining in on the game.

ChxmpionChip LLC is the brainchild of CEO Adrian Dews Jr., a recent NSU graduate, and co-founders and inventors, Chief Operating Officer Alana Coleman and Chief Technology Officer Michael Ogarekpe, a Virginia Commonwealth University student. Also serving with them is Chief Production Officer (CPO) Chris Henderson, a former NSU student, plus current student Chief Financial Officer Keith Bailey. What sets this sports betting platform apart from other sites, is that instead of betting against the house, participants are betting against other people. "We are a peer-to-peer social networking sports betting



Adrian Dews Jr. speaks with Pusha T.

platform. You are not betting against a complex sportsbook. You are betting against a human. This is more social, in addition to being able to place a bet.” Dews said.

For two years, the executive team participated in business building programs and events at NSU’s Innovation Center. That participation gave them the tools to create their business, Dews said. The Innovation Center taught them how to develop and modify their business plan to better market their company. They learned how to create a financial forecast and fee structure, he said. “They walked us through every step,” Coleman added. They credit Jim Franklin, their advisor with the center. “He always has a story,” Coleman said laughing. “Our mentors and advisors from the innovation center and 757 start-up studios helped us formulate our go-to-market strategies, along with other business principles they instilled in us.”

Dews said. The group developed a pilot program and put out a call for 20 people to create a think tank to test it and give feedback, Dews said. The 20 people were also there to determine if they wanted to be a member of the team. Dews said after the first meeting most asked to be a team member. They implemented customer discovery by interviewing their target audience and narrow their customer architecture. The group interviewed potential customers to get their perspective, Dews said. “We said ‘tell us what you want.’ This gave us

a deeper understanding. We wanted to know if we were missing anything. We also wanted to know if it’s priced right,” Bailey said. The results showed the average customer would be between the ages of 21 and 35, a sports fan and enjoy a good bet, Coleman said. “We’re enthusiastic about creating a safer space for people to bet safely with their peers and strangers alike. We want to be the go-to platform for people to be able to bet with friends and not have to worry about actually getting paid if they win,” Henderson said.

The group pitched to over 100 angel investors and raised \$60,000 while also earning an additional \$1,000 at a pitch competition hosted by NSU.

Bailey said in addition to building a social sports betting platform, they are building a network of Black investors. “And we will be creating about 100 jobs, from marketing to technology. We plan to settle here and hire NSU and local graduates in the 757,” Dews added.

The group was one of 250 semi-finalists in the Black Ambition prize awards. It is a set of prizes to fund companies led by Black and Latinx entrepreneurs. There were 3,000 applications this year. The finalists will be awarded a \$1 million prize, Coleman said.

Dews said they plan to develop corporate partnerships with professional sports teams adding they were invited to Truist Park, home of the Atlanta Braves. They were able to gain insight on how ChxmpionChips system would be integrated throughout the stadium and how the Braves fans have been longing for a sports betting solution like ChxmpionChip. Outside of the Braves organization, the ChxmpionChip team has met with the Golden State Warriors, Utah Jazz, Orlando Magic, and Philadelphia Union this year. ChxmpionChip is very conscious of the danger of gambling addiction. They plan to have a link to services for addicts and remind people to make sure they can afford to place a bet, Bailey said. Right now, they plan for a soft opening in late fall. Overall, the group feels comfortable as a team, noting having Ogarekpe as CTO is a blessing.

“It makes our company more valuable and prevents us from being exploited [by technology companies]” Bailey said. “We all have a set of skills that set us up for success. We trust in each other as a team,” Bailey added. **B**

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HERE’S HOW IT WORKS

ChxmpionChip divides users’ bets into three separate tiers. After a user deposits their funds into the in-app wallet, they will simply pick their competitor, choose the sport that they are willing to wager on and then send their bet request.

Tier 1 ranges from \$10-\$20

(\$10 being the least amount that can be wagered)

Tier 1 service fee: 5% per user. Example: one bet placed for \$10 results in 50 cents for the bettor and 50 cents for their competitor. ChxmpionChip makes \$1 in profit from this one transaction.

Tier 2 ranges from \$21-\$99

Tier 2 service fee: \$1 (flat fee per user)

Tier 3 ranges from \$100-\$10,000

(\$10,000 is the maximum bet a user can wager.)

Tier 3 service fee: 1.5% per user.

Every time a user would like to withdraw their in-app wallet funds, there will be no charge for a standard deposit which can take anywhere from two to four business days, roll their funds into an index fund which comes with a two percent fee, and lastly an instant deposit which will be a three percent deposit fee.

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FIRST FEMALE DRUM MAJOR HELPS LEAD THE LEGION

By SUSAN SMIGIELSKI ACKER



This school year, the Norfolk State University Spartan Legion Band is making history in two ways: performing in the Tournament of Roses Parade and being led by the first female co-drum major.

For the 2022-23 academic year, the position of Cap 'N Soul is held by Quiara Jackson. She is co-drum major with Jaylin Jackson (no relation), who is Mr. Spartan.

She said when the announcement was made at the band banquet at the end of last school year, she was in "a state of shock."

"All my friends were cheering, some even crying. It was a special moment. I don't think I've ever seen my parents smile as hard as they did," Jackson said.

The Spartan Legion, which consists of approximately 225 members, has a synchronized and precise marching style that includes high stepping, a rigid strut and military style movements.

Their facial expressions are fierce, evocative of the storied Spartans.

At five feet, four inches, Jackson may be small in stature, but when she climbs atop her five-foot ladder and raises her arms to lead the band performance, she is bigger than life and commands the attention and respect of the entire band.

"I must oversee the band when the staff isn't there, and before they arrive," said Jackson, describing some of her responsibilities as a drum major. "They have to trust us." In addition, along with Mr. Spartan, she works with band section leaders and the drum majors also help the freshman members

get adjusted and work as a team to help with music scores.

A favorite duty is getting the crowd excited. When they march, she and Mr. Spartan high step in unison to the crowd's delight.

The band will take their dynamic performance style to California as they perform in the Tournament of Roses Parade.

Jackson, who has never been to the west coast, is very excited. They will arrive in Pasadena on Dec. 27 and will stay until after the parade on Jan. 2, 2023.

Jackson is proud of the fact that the Spartan Legion was chosen to march in the parade the first time they applied. She noted that most bands apply several times before they are accepted to perform.

In addition to being Cap 'N Soul, Jackson is the chapter president of Tau Beta Sigma, the national honorary band sorority.

She said her roles have grown her confidence and she has gained resources on how to build communication skills.

"I've also learned how to adapt a lot and to adapt to different styles."

She will graduate in May with a degree in sociology. Her plans include attending graduate school to become a mental health therapist for Black youth and opening a music therapy program.

"Mental health is not really talked about in the Black community. I want to open up that conversation," she said.

Norfolk State, said Jackson, has taught her many life lessons and pushed her to consider leadership roles. And now as Cap 'N Soul, she hopes other women will consider taking on the role as well.

All in all, Jackson said, "I couldn't have picked a better place." **B**



"All my friends were cheering, some even crying. It was a special moment. I don't think I've ever seen my parents smile as hard as they did."

— Quiara Jackson

LIVING A CHAMPAGNE LIFE

Cheers to you Ms. Robinson

“I did not want to be dictated to, meaning that they would tell me what to produce.”

— Marvina Robinson

Photo courtesy by Marvina Robinson



It takes a Spartan to launch a major business initiative in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. And that’s exactly what Marvina Robinson ’00 did.

B. Stuyvesant Champagnes made its debut in February 2020, bringing Robinson’s decades-long dream to reality and making her one of few African American women who own a champagne label. The name, B. Stuyvesant, pays homage to the neighborhood where she grew up and where she continues to live.

Robinson’s tenacity is akin to that of her alma mater. As Norfolk State University opened its doors in 1935 during the Great Depression. It was the only higher education institution to do so. However, for Robinson, being among the few African American women in an industry is nothing new. She worked on Wall Street for two decades before leaving the financial world altogether to start her champagne line.

“Working on Wall Street is a monster on its own but being a minority woman added additional blockers.” Even so, she rose to the challenge by earning a statistics degree from an Ivy League institution since that’s where financial firms recruited.

Yet, as she became successful, the idea of owning her own champagne label intensified. Once again, her grit and determination took over. She taught herself everything that she needed to know about the industry before she opened the business. Still, despite her knowledge and industry credentials, Robinson was not taken seriously. Looking back, she said, “My 20 years on Wall Street prepped me for entrepreneurship.” She continued, “I was told numerous times that this brand will go nowhere because I’m not French.”

Undaunted by the challenges and the doubters, she continued her quest. “The negative comments are the fuel that pushed me to success,” Robinson said. She continued visiting France and finally found an amenable vineyard owner who would work with her to create the brand that she desired. “I did not want to be dictated to, meaning that they would tell me what to produce.” Robinson said. “I clearly expressed the variety of sizes I would potentially produce.”

Robinson weathered the pandemic and skepticism to create a product that is truly who she is. For young entrepreneurs, she says this: “Where there is a will there is a way. Sometimes you have to take steps to get to your ultimate vision,” she said. “When things become uncomfortable, figure out a way to make yourself comfortable.” **B**

GRADUATE DEVELOPS PATENTED EYE TECHNOLOGY

In the 12 years since LaVonda Brown, Ph.D. (B.S. '10) graduated from Norfolk State University, she's earned two master's degrees and a Ph.D., founded her own business, started a nonprofit, has developed an eye analysis technology that has been published, patented and licensed for commercial use.

Dr. Brown is the founder and CEO of EyeGage, an intelligent drug screening technology company powered by eyes. Her prior research developed an eye-analysis system that uses eye tracking as a viable biomarker for mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and early-onset Alzheimer's Disease (AD). EyeGage leveraged these eye-analysis techniques and developed a solution to assist individuals battling substance abuse.

As a child, Dr. Brown was naturally gifted in mathematics and learned higher math from her older sister and loved putting things together and taking them apart with her father who was a mechanic. But it wasn't until high school that everything came together.

It's a journey that began when she was a senior at Smithfield High School in Smithfield, Virginia. Her guidance counselor, Lucy Robertson, made a personal trip to Norfolk State to advocate for Brown's acceptance into the Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences (DNIMAS) program. Her support for her student was successful. Brown was accepted into the program, majoring in Electronics Engineering.

"Norfolk State made me," Brown said. After graduating from Norfolk State and going to a PWI (predominately white institution), people are like would you change?, No. I would not change a thing,"



Photo courtesy by Dr. Brown

Dr. Brown getting her eyes scanned by the EyeGage app that she invented.

she quickly replied. "Norfolk State made me. If I would have gone somewhere else or even to a PWI, I probably wouldn't be where I am today or may not even have gone to grad school."

Adding, "It's a family here ... They took care of me when I was here. They made sure our grades were on par," she explained touting the many study sessions and tutoring sessions that are part of the highly successful DNIMAS program. And when she was able to compare what she had at Norfolk State versus a PWI, she could see that the faculty at NSU cared and made themselves available to the students much more often.

THE FIRE INSIDE

Earning the four degrees was self-motivation. "I wanted to be a role model for future generations. I wanted my nieces, nephews, my future kids, to be able to say cousin La Vonda, aunt LaVonda, she did it. ... She got this degree. She joined this sorority. She started this company."

When Dr. Brown found herself as the only Black person and the only woman in her workspace, she decided to do something about it. She began a nonprofit—ProfBrown's STEMulation. "I wanted to prevent this from happening to future generations," she said. "I wanted to expose

underrepresented youth to STEM-related (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields."

Dr. Brown explained that studies show that around third grade, students decide whether or not they like math. "The idea is that I could do these workshops and sessions partnering with third graders, elementary school students, just to let them know that this is what you can do with math if you give it a try."

That was her first taste of being an entrepreneur. Her next venture, EyeGage grew out of her years of working with eye technology while in graduate school at Georgia Tech and a personal experience with someone who had a drinking problem. Dr. Brown developed an app that determines whether a person is sober enough to drive or should use alternate transportation by screening their eyes. Earning her MBA provided her with the knowledge and the confidence to launch the tech company.

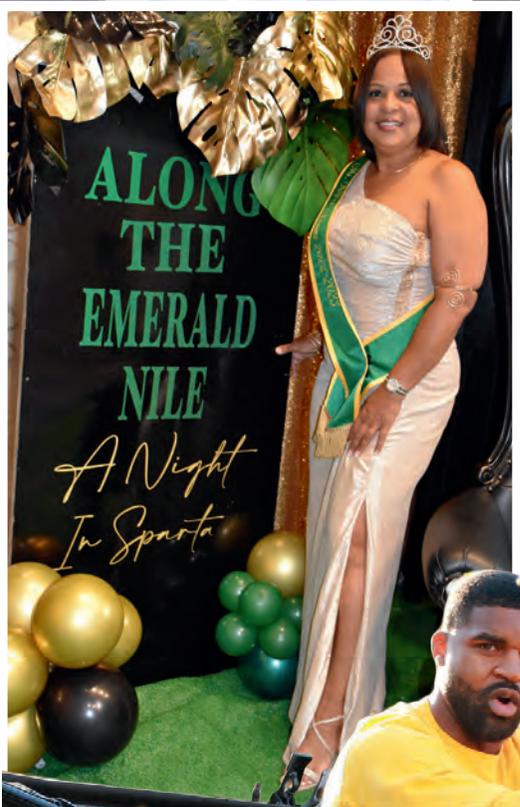
Her advice to students, at Norfolk State or in the third grade, is to expose yourself to a variety of experiences. "Try different things," she said. "Discover what you're really passionate about. Now is the time." **B**

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY RETURN TO SPARTA! HOMECOMING 2022



Alumni activities at the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College (VSC) began on November 28, 1949 when the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College Alumni Association was formally organized. At that time, one game during football season was designated as Homecoming. This family reunion has become a celebration that has fostered a long legacy of fellowship, entertainment and Spartan pride.





NSU ALUMNI MOVERS AND SHAKERS



AVA L. AYERS '18 was appointed the new student services program coordinator for South Carolina State University's Emily England Clyburn Honors College. In her new position, Ayers will be responsible for advising, counseling, providing community service and service-learning opportunities, as well as recruiting students to the Clyburn Honors College.



In September, Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) named **TIFFANY R. HINTON, ED.D. (M.A. '14)**, assistant vice chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion and chief diversity officer. In this position, Hinton will lead ECSU's initiatives around diversity, equity and inclusion by providing vision, leadership, coordination and strategic planning to ensure that the university is a diverse, equitable and inclusive campus.



Colorado State University Pueblo announced that **TREVOR G. GATES, PH.D. (MSW '04)**, Assistant Professor in Social Work in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at CSU Pueblo has received a Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award for the 2022-2023 academic year from the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.



IVOIRE C. LLOYD '04 was recently sworn in as Secretary for the COMTO NY Board of Directors. The Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) is a leading nationwide association of minority and women transportation officials committed to advancing the professional growth and career development of all levels of the workforce in the transportation arena and affiliated professions.

TAMMY BELLE BURROUGHS, PH.D. (B.A. '01), recently finished her Doctorate Degree at Walden University in Public Policy and Administration. Her Dissertation titled, "Assimilation for Hispanics, Generational Standing, Education, and Income: A Correlational Empirical Study" has gained momentum and is currently being used in research at Cornell University, an Ivy League School. Dr. Burroughs has worked for the Federal Government at the Department of Defense for over a decade.



At its 25th Anniversary Gala, the Greater Northern Virginia Chapter of the Norfolk State University Alumni Association (NSUAA) presented **SHELVEE H. OSBORNE '79** (the chapter's first president) with its Lifetime Service Award. Ms. Osborne was recognized for her outstanding contribution of time, talent, and treasure to the chapter. Currently, Ms. Osborne serves as the

treasurer of the NSUAA and is one of its past presidents. She is also the owner and primary benefactor of two scholarships housed in the NSU Foundation, Inc., the Shelvee H. Osborne Endowed Scholarship and the Winnie M. Holley and Clarence S. Osborne Endowed Scholarship.



COREY D. B. WALKER, PH.D., M.DIV., M.T.S. (B.S. '93), has been named interim Dean of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, beginning January 1, 2023. A distinguished scholar of African American social, political, and religious thought, Walker will continue to serve as Wake Forest Professor of the Humanities and director of Wake Forest's African American Studies Program. An ordained American Baptist clergyperson, Dr. Walker preaches and

teaches in congregations and universities across the nation and has published broadly on African American religion and philosophy, African American history and culture, and religion and American public life.



MARTY MILLER '69 was inducted into the inaugural Hall of Fame class of the Virginia Baseball Coaches Association. Miller spent 32 years as the head coach of the Norfolk State baseball program, before becoming the school's athletic director for 15 years. During his tenure, the Spartans went 718-543-3 on the diamond, earning Miller 15 CCAA Coach of the Year accolades.



DOLLINE PRYER HATCHETT '89 received the 2022 Presidential Distinguished Rank Award (PRA), the nation's highest civil service award. Chosen by President Biden, the PRAs recognize the hard work and important contributions of dedicated civil servants in the American federal workforce. Only 1 percent of Senior Executive Service (SES) members across the federal government are eligible to receive the award. **B**



Tell us what you think of our BEHOLD Magazine by taking a quick readership survey at www.nsu.edu/BeholdSurvey

Scan our QR Code to take our survey





Ms. Alumni 2022-23
Renee Grant '03

NSUAA HONORS

Recognizing the Achievements of our Members

On Thursday, October 13, the NSU Alumni Association, Inc., publicly recognized and honored members, and chapters of the alumni association who have supported its mission and goals.

Valerie Perkins '78 received the NSUAA's Alumnus of the Year Award. The Chapter Service Award was awarded to a diverse group of alumni who have proudly represented the association in their community. Janice Bennett '91; Lea Carrington '84; Katrina Flowers '01; Christopher Green '02; Tene' Cherry Hale '07; Thea Jackson '95; Chloe' Jones '73; Cynthia Madkins '75; April Marshall; LaVerne Moore Bagley '84 and Josine Osborne '71 were recipients of this award.

The NSUAA also honored two regional groups with its Chapter of the Year Award. The recipients have consistently supported the mission and goals of the alumni association and donated their time and treasure to Norfolk State University. The Central Virginia Alumni Chapter received the 2022 Chapter of the Year Award for the 35 and under membership category while the Alumni Cheerleaders Chapter received the award for 36+ membership category.

The final recognition of the evening was the crowning Renee Grant '03 as Ms. Alumni 2022-23. **B**




**CHAPTER
OF THE YEAR
AWARD
RECIPIENT**
Membership Size (10-35)




**ALUMNUS
OF THE YEAR
AWARD
RECIPIENT**




**CHAPTER
OF THE YEAR
AWARD
RECIPIENT**
Membership Size (36+)



2022-23 NORFOLK STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

RELENTLESS

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

All times Eastern
Home games in **BOLD GOLD** played at Joseph Echols Hall

(I) Savannah Invitational
(*) MEAC Game
(#) Scope Arena



| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| 11/7 Virginia University Lynchburg 5:30 p.m. | 11/9 Penn State 7 p.m. | 11/13 College of Charleston 5 p.m. | 11/17 Appalachian State 6:30 p.m. | 11/21 Purdue Fort Wayne! 4:30 p.m. | 11/22 UT Martin! 7 p.m. | 11/23 Marshall! 7 p.m. | 11/28 Campbell 5:30 p.m. | 12/1 Hampton 6 p.m. | 12/3 NJIT 2 p.m. | 12/11 Old Dominion 2 p.m. | 12/14 Regent 5:30 p.m. |
| 12/18 Alabama 3 p.m. | 12/21 William & Mary 2 p.m. | 12/23 UNC Wilmington 3 p.m. | 1/3 Chicago State 6 p.m. | 1/7 Maryland Eastern Shore * 2 p.m. | 1/9 Delaware State * 5:30 p.m. | 1/14 Howard * 2 p.m. | 1/21 Coppin State * 2 p.m. | 1/23 Morgan State * 4:30 p.m. | 1/28 South Carolina State * 2 p.m. | 1/30 North Carolina Central * 11 a.m. | |
| 2/11 Maryland Eastern Shore * 2 p.m. | 2/13 Delaware State * 5:30 p.m. | 2/18 Morgan State * 2 p.m. | 2/20 Coppin State * 5:30 p.m. | 2/25 South Carolina State * 2 p.m. | 2/27 North Carolina Central * 5:30 p.m. | 3/2 Howard * 5:30 p.m. | 3/8 - 3/11 MEAC Tournament # TBA | | | | |



2022-23 NORFOLK STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

ELEVATE

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY MEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

All times Eastern
Home games in **BOLD GOLD** played at Joseph Echols Hall

(I) ATL Has Something to Say HBCU Challenge
(S) Boost Mobile HBCU Challenge
(%) Legacy Classic
(*) MEAC game
(#) Scope Arena



| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|----------------------------------|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|
| 11/7 Virginia University Lynchburg 7:30 p.m. | 11/9 Cairn University 7 p.m. | 11/11 Baylor 8 p.m. | 11/14 UCLA 10 p.m. | 11/17 Monmouth 7 p.m. | 11/19 Alabama A&M! 6 p.m. | 11/22 St. Mary's College 7 p.m. | 11/29 Houston 7 p.m. | 12/3 Old Dominion 7 p.m. | 12/10 William & Mary 4 p.m. | 12/14 Bowling Green 7:30 p.m. | 12/17 Hampton S 4 p.m. | 12/18 North Carolina A&T S 2 p.m. |
| 12/21 Nevada 5 p.m. | 1/4 Penn State Wilkes-Barre 7 p.m. | 1/7 Maryland Eastern Shore * 4 p.m. | 1/9 Delaware State * 7:30 p.m. | 1/14 Howard * 4 p.m. | 1/21 Coppin State * 4 p.m. | 1/23 Morgan State * 7:30 p.m. | 1/28 South Carolina State * 4 p.m. | 1/30 North Carolina Central * 7 p.m. | 2/4 Hampton % 5 p.m. | 2/11 Maryland Eastern Shore * 4 p.m. | | |
| 2/13 Delaware State * 7:30 p.m. | 2/18 Morgan State * 4 p.m. | 2/20 Coppin State * 7:30 p.m. | 2/25 South Carolina State * 4 p.m. | 2/27 North Carolina Central * 7:30 p.m. | 3/2 Howard * 9 p.m. | 3/8 - 3/11 MEAC Tournament # TBA | | | | | | |





Dr. Melissa "Missy" Arnette Elliott, singer, songwriter and producer, holds up the customized sneakers by shoe artist Van Monroe presented to her by Norfolk State at the University's 109th Commencement.