

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

# BEHOLD

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 1 • SPRING 2023

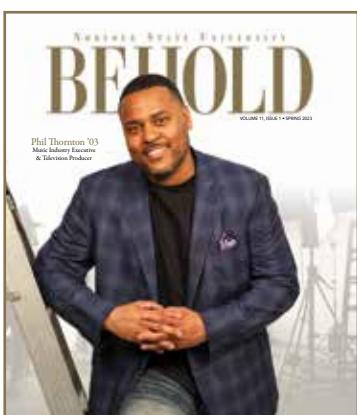
Phil Thornton '03

Music Industry Executive  
& Television Producer



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Phil Thornton '03  
Music Industry Executive  
and Television Producer





Mr. Ryan Butler, Vice President of DEI at The Recording Academy  
Mr. Frankie Yaptinchay, Senior Project Manager/Audience  
Development & Creative Partnerships from Amazon Music  
Ms. Sharon Ingram, Executive Director of Washington D.C. Chapter  
of The Recording Academy, Devon Henry and Dr. J.



# From the Desk of the Vice President for University Advancement

Partnerships often offer opportunities as well as advancement of common goals.

Working with a partner may mean increased involvement with our community as well as finding solutions to challenges that our communities face such as health equity or illuminating solutions that could curb gun violence.

In this first issue of 2023 of our BEHOLD magazine, we feature several partnerships that the University has undertaken. These collaborations have the potential to create a positive impact on outcomes for the community and the entities involved.

In January, Eastern Virginia Medical School and Norfolk State University launched an initiative that targets health equity, promotes research collaboration for faculty and works to increase the number of minorities who become healthcare professionals through the ENRICHe program.

We also take a look at Dr. L.D. Britt Scholarship Program, another partnership between NSU and EVMS that provides a direct pipeline between their undergraduate studies and medical school. Dr. Britt is the Brickhouse Professor of Surgery at EVMS and the first African American in the U.S. to receive an endowed chair in surgery at a major American medical school. Students in the scholarship program get help with the medical school entrance exam as well as hands-on learning about suturing and ultrasound among other medical procedures.

Norfolk State has also begun work on a groundbreaking initiative with the Elizabeth River Project, which is developing an environmental justice incubator. This model is part of a larger project that seeks to engage the most environmentally and economically vulnerable communities in meaningful and equitable conversations that aim to restore urban tributaries. The partnership is also a cross-disciplinary effort for our Spartans. Our art students will create informative artwork as a way to show the community the importance of being environmentally aware.

Our cover story features Spartan Phil Thornton of the Class of 2003. Described as “ingenious, brilliant, ambitious, and fearless,” this music industry executive and television producer can confidently and consistently create projects and content that successfully go against the grain. Thornton serves as senior vice president and general manager of RCA Inspiration, a division of Sony Music Entertainment, where he works with a wide range of inspirational artists, including Kirk Franklin, Travis Greene, Marvin Sapp, Donnie McClurkin, and Koryn Hawthorne. The label, named 2018’s top Gospel label by Billboard, received an NAACP Image Award for the hit show “Greenleaf” soundtrack on the OWN network.

As always, BEHOLD...

Sincerely,



**Clifford Porter**  
Vice President for University Advancement



NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

# BEHOLD

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 1 • 2023

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.

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**Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.**  
University President

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<b>Gail Kent</b>	Contributing Writer

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Contact: Stevalynn Adams | sadams@nsu.edu | www.nsu.edu

Call Us: 757.823.2658



# NSU is NATIONAL NEWS

*By STEVEN OPFER*

**W**hile Norfolk State University has a well-established reputation, NSU made national news more than usual over the past months. Here is a sampling of the news that received national attention.

Norfolk State alumnus Leon Carter, the founder of the Sports Journalism Institute (Pictured above), received the Red Smith Award from the Associated Press Sports Editors, one of the highest awards in sports journalism that honors a long and influential career that helped shape the industry. A significant accomplishment in that career occurred when Carter founded the Sports Journalism Institute on the campus of NSU in 1993. Over the decades, SJI has continually supported young minorities entering the field.

In addition, SJI received the National Sports Media Association's Roone Arledge Award for Innovation. "I always say let's not just talk about diversity. Let's do something about it," Carter said. "From Day One, the goal of SJI was to help improve diversity."

## MIGHTY DREAM

In another nationally recognized diversity, equity, and inclusion effort, internationally famous record producer and recording artist Pharrell Williams returned to Norfolk with A Mighty Dream, an expanded version of his Elephant in the Room business forum from the previous year at NSU. In this multi-day forum, business, opportunity, and money intersected with people of color, set against a backdrop of community engagement and jaw-dropping entertainment. Norfolk State University was featured prominently in the forum, including a meet and greet

on campus between Williams and student leaders. The Spartan Legion Marching Band opened the forum with a drum line demonstration that got the forum off to a rousing start.

According to MightyDreamForum.com, the forum "...will become an annual event where corporate and NGO leaders who are prioritizing DE&I in their organizations will come to share their insights, set goals, make pledges, inform and inspire other leaders to be the best they can be."

CONTINUED ON PG. 4





## THE SPARTAN LEGION

The Spartan Legion Marching Band stole the show again in January when they performed in the 134th Tournament of Roses Parade. The historic appearance put Norfolk State University on a national television stage in front of millions of viewers. An estimated 800,000 attended the parade in person.

Local KTLA television coverage said, "This band is bringing it, bringing it! They're dancing, they're playing, they're entertaining, they're showing off." Watch their coverage at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPAIysOcPTg>.

## LEVEL UP

To round out the fame of the 757 hip-hop stronghold, Missy Elliott's childhood friend and Pharrell Williams' cousin, internationally acclaimed record producer Timbaland came to campus to support the NSU Level Up Career Fair and inspire young Spartans. He discussed growing up in the Hampton Roads area, where he and Elliott collaborated while breaking into the hip-hop music scene. He also spoke on the challenges and demands of the professionalism necessary to rise to national fame and the mindset and perseverance required for that success.



## RAYQUAN SMITH

NSU's national acclaim wasn't limited to the Spartan Legion and connections in the hip-hop world. Spartan track and field star Rayquan Smith, a former running back for Spartan football, quickly took advantage of the NCAA's changes in name, image, and likeness (NIL) rules to become the "King of NIL," sealing more NIL deals than anyone in the nation. At last count, Smith had 58 deals, 18 more than NASCAR's Kurt Busch.

As a result, Smith has spent his senior year appearing on numerous sports shows throughout the country discussing NIL and speaking before national groups as a nationally recognized NIL consultant.



## CHLOE-RYAN WOOLFOLK

NSU was also on the national stage when HBCU student journalists visited the White House in February. Spartan Echo editor-in-chief Chloe-Ryan Woolfolk questioned Vice President Kamala Harris, an HBCU graduate, about equity efforts in addressing climate change. Vice President Harris complimented Woolfolk saying, "that's a wonderful question, Chloe" and gave a long, detailed answer. The entire briefing is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57EbKe-zth8>. White House Senior Advisor Keisha Lance Bottoms, also an HBCU graduate, moderated the event.



## CONRAD HALL DONATION

Conrad Hall, a member of the Norfolk State University Board of Visitors, has contributed a gift of \$1M to support the creation of the Conrad M. Hall Endowed Chair in Constitutional and U.S. History at the University. This position will add to the Departments of History and Interdisciplinary Studies and Political Science program offerings and will allow the University to recruit renowned constitutional scholars as professors to enhance the degree programs.



## JAYLIN DREWRY

In another national event focusing on HBCUs, Jaylin Drewry, the immediate past president of the Norfolk State University Student Government Association, represented NSU at the Truist Diversity in Tech Summit earlier in the school year. The event brought together key stakeholders that can diversify the technology field to create a pipeline of talent from the nation's HBCUs.

"Truist, keeping their promise to ensure the success of HBCU students, awarded me a \$5,000 Scholarship," said Drewry. "Thank you, Truist and Congresswoman Adams, for your dedication and continued support of our institutions."

Drewry is also a current board member on the Student Advisory Board for the national Campus Vote Project. As the only African American on the board, Drewry feels his voice is important to the effort.

"I have the opportunity to work with administrative, faculty, and non-profit partners to advance the Student Voting Network and Campus Vote Project as a whole," Drewry said.

In addition, Drewry participated in the Dr. Dennis E. Thomas MEAC Leadership Symposium representing NSU alongside other student leaders from the conference.

Drewry also exercised an important voice at the state level, having served as Co-Chair of the Student Advisory Committee for The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

"I had the opportunity to speak before the council about the key issues that students in the Commonwealth are facing today," Drewry said. "As individuals, it is important to use our voices and our platforms to speak out on behalf of others." **B**

# Faculty & Staff News

## FACULTY & STAFF RECOGNIZED

### Promotion and Tenure:

**Back Row** (from left to right): Dr. Scott Debb, Dr. Shaun Anderson, Kevin Jackson, Dr. Cynthia Nicholson and Austin Ashe.

### Front Row (from Left to right):

Dr. Jillian Ardley, Dr. Sharon Alston, Marcia Neblett, Dr. DoVeanna Fulton, Dr. Isaac Osunmakinde, Dr. George Hsieh (Retiree) and Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston

### Promotion and Tenure not shown are:

Dr. Bianca Jackson and Jennifer Malia

**Retirees recognized (not pictured)** were Shirley Brooks, Wilhemena Cornic, Dr. Larry Ferguson, Dr. Lydia Figueroa, Dr. George Hsieh, Dr. Ebenezer Kolajo, Annette Montgomery, Dr. Dennis Montgomery, Dr. Kyo Song, Dr. John Spurlin, Shirleigh Wood and Nathaniel Worley.



**Women We Admire** named **Dr. Aurelia Taylor Williams**, Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, Executive Director of the Cybersecurity Complex, and Professor of Computer Science, among The Top 50 Women Leaders of Virginia for 2023. WWA noted Dr. Williams' ability to establish and expand collaborative relationships with national, state and local agencies as well as her role in growing and enhancing cybersecurity at the University in addition to preparing students for careers in the field. Women We Admire provides news and information on women leaders and seeks to inspire others to reach their full potential.



**Marcia Neblett**, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts, was selected to the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award to Malaysia for 2023. It is her third Fulbright award. The Fulbright, awarded by the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, provides U.S. Scholars a chance to lecture and research abroad. Neblett was a Fulbright Scholar in India in 2007 and 2014. She will lecture and research at the Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur, in contemporary drawing and printmaking this summer. Neblett, a recognized expert in her field of drawing and woodblock printmaking, she has a record of national and international exhibitions at museums and galleries.



Norfolk State University head women's basketball coach **Larry Vickers** was selected the HBCU National Coach of the Year by BOXTOROW. Vickers completed his eighth season at Norfolk State, guiding the Spartans to their second consecutive Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) regular season championship and the program's first women's conference tournament championship in more than 20 years. The team earned the conference's automatic qualifier as the No. 16 seed in the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Tournament and fell in the opening round to the University of South Carolina, the No. 1 seed. He was also named MEAC Coach of the Year and the MEAC Tournament's Outstanding Coach of the Year.



**Dr. Viola Vaughan-Eden**, professor and Ph.D. program director at the Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work, received the Outstanding Individual in Academia from the Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy (CRISP) during their Social Work Day on the Hill event. Dr. Vaughan-Eden, who received her Master of Social Work from NSU and doctorate from Virginia Commonwealth University, serves as President Emerita of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) and the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan (NPEIV) as well as Past-President of the National Organization of Forensic Social Work (NOFSW).

# ODU, EVMS, NSU JOINT SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH NAMES FOUNDING DEAN

*The proposed school is a collaborative effort between Old Dominion University, Eastern Virginia Medical School and Norfolk State University to grow the public health workforce and address health disparities.*

**L**i-Wu Chen, Ph.D., will serve as the founding dean of the proposed Joint School of Public Health to be housed at Old Dominion University (ODU), offering collaborative degree programs and experiential learning opportunities for students at ODU, Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS) and Norfolk State University (NSU). Chen, who was selected following a national search, assumed his duties March 10, 2023.

"The founding dean needed to be a respected leader in public health policy and research, but also a coalition builder with a clear vision for leveraging our combined strengths to assist in addressing health disparities across our community and the Commonwealth," said ODU President Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D. "In Dr. Chen, we have found a proven leader who will be fully dedicated to building a solid foundation for this important initiative."

"Li-Wu Chen is a respected and widely published researcher in the field of public health, with extensive experience studying rural health policy," said Austin O. Agho, Ph.D., provost and vice president for academic affairs at ODU. "Under his leadership, the joint School of Public Health will be the premier training ground for the next generation of public health professionals in the commonwealth."

In this new role, Chen will oversee a school designed to educate future public health experts by offering collaborative degree programs, developing research addressing public health challenges, and creating and enhancing partnerships. The school will offer a Master of Public Health and a Ph.D. in Health Services Research.

Chen will help guide the process to earn accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health.

"It is my great honor to be selected as the founding dean of the Joint School of Public Health, a tremendous opportunity to apply my academic leadership and scholarship to significantly improve public health outcomes," Chen said. "I look forward to collaborating with the talented faculty at ODU, EVMS and NSU to create a center for training, research and community engagement that will fulfill the public health workforce needs of the community and secure a healthier future for the region."

"The establishment of the proposed Joint School of Public Health initiative builds on EVMS' long history of collaboration with ODU and NSU and our commitment to health equity in Hampton Roads," said Alfred Abuhamad, M.D., EVMS president, provost and dean of the School of Medicine. "The selection of a founding dean of Dr. Chen's caliber is an important next step in an exciting and necessary effort to expand the local healthcare workforce pipeline and create a healthier future for the communities we proudly serve."

"The proposed Joint School of Public Health initiative positions NSU, ODU and EVMS to go beyond a focus on health care to eliminate health disparities and promote conditions that enable our communities to thrive," said NSU President Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D. "With Dr. Chen's leadership of



this ongoing partnership, we anticipate unprecedented strides in disease prevention, health promotion, public health scholarship and community engagement for the benefit of this region." Chen brings more than 20 years of academic leadership experience in the field of public health. Since 2020, Chen has served as a tenured full professor in the Department of Health Sciences in the School of Health Professions at University of Missouri-Columbia. He is a member of the board of directors for the Missouri Institute for Community Health, an editorial board member of the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice and a former member of the AcademyHealth's Education Council.

As a member of the Health Inclusivity Index Project Steering Committee for The Economist Group's Economist Intelligence Unit, Chen works alongside members from global health organizations, including United Nations and the World Health Organization, and scholars across academia. The steering committee provides strategic guidance for the Economist Impact's Project Team and its partners to develop a comprehensive health inclusivity and equity index for 40 countries.

Before joining the University of Missouri-Columbia, Chen was department chair of Health Services Research and Administration in the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). In Nebraska, he oversaw the UNMC Center for Health Policy Analysis and Rural Health Research, served as deputy director of the HRSA-funded Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis and was founding co-director of the RWJF-funded Nebraska Public Health Practice Based Research Network. Chen was the founding director of the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Ph.D. program in Health Services and Policy Research and led development of a Master of Health Administration program at UNMC.

A widely published scholar, Chen has an established track record of scholarly work in the areas of health services and policy research, rural health research, health economics and public health services and systems research. He has published sixty-four peer-reviewed journal articles, fifteen policy briefs, 20 research finding briefs, 34 reports to public health agencies and three book chapters. Over the past 20 years, he has secured or helped secure grants and contracts totaling more than \$10.4 million as principal investigator, co-principal investigator or co-investigator. **B**



# NSU'S CENTER FOR MATERIALS RESEARCH

*Observes 15th Anniversary of Nano Days*

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (MA '04)

Norfolk State University's Nano Days, a scientific discovery series designed to expose young people to the world of nanotechnology, celebrates a 15-year anniversary in 2023. First established in 2008 by the Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE Net), the project is still exhilarating young audiences around Hampton Roads. NISE Net was funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to create a national community of researchers and informal science educators dedicated to fostering public awareness, engagement and understanding of nanoscale science, engineering and technology. Nano Days continues to fulfill the founding agency's charge.

When Dr. Messaoud Bahoura first heard about the Nano Days project, he jumped at the chance to participate. Throughout his 24-year tenure with Norfolk State University, the professor of engineering and interim director of the Center for Materials Research, has actively researched science-oriented outreach opportunities for the community, especially underserved minority groups in the region. He established a relationship with the Children's Museum of Virginia and applied for the Nano Days kit. Over the years, the Nano Days curriculum has been presented to K-12 students across the region.

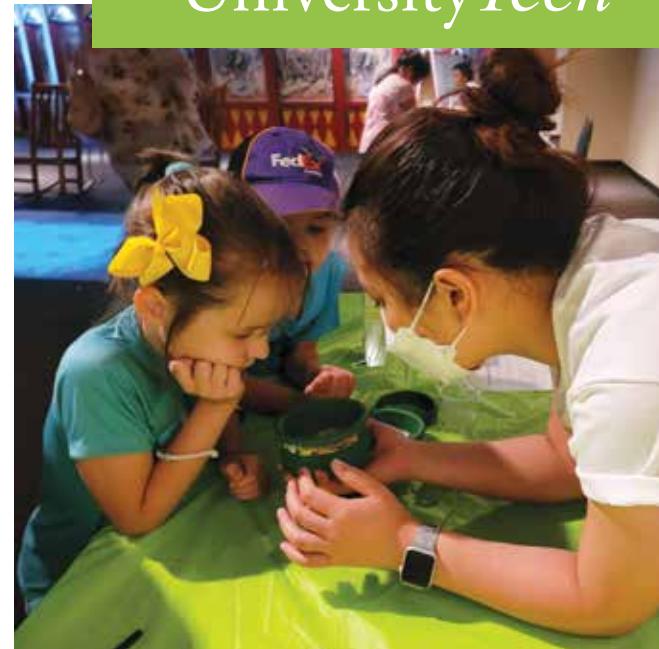
Bahoura explains nanotechnology as the science of manipulating matter at the atomic or molecular level. "Nanotechnology is all about working with materials and structures that are at this incredibly small scale and finding ways to control them and make use of their unique properties. Some examples of nanotechnology in action include things like self-cleaning surfaces, super strong materials, and even tiny medical devices that can target and destroy cancer cells without harming healthy tissue."

Today, Nano Days' appeal remains. "The novelty created a sense of excitement and anticipation," noted Bahoura. "It features hands-on activities that actively engage participants with the topic at hand." By partnering with Portsmouth's Children's Museum of Virginia, the Nano Days project has not only shown laypersons the workings of nanotechnology but has also engaged NSU students connecting them to museum attendees, families, instructors and educators – broadening their classroom experience. "This was more engaging than simply listening to a lecture as it allows all participants to see the concepts in action and develop a deeper understanding of the topic," Bahoura commented.

Christyne Matyseck, Children's Museum Educational Coordinator, said, "Children like to learn from real scientists and because each of the activities is

engaging, they want to try them all. It's fun to watch them discover the science on their own and make connections to those materials, toys, and technology they already use in their lives," she continued. Matyseck, who has been with the Children's Museum since 2004, says nearly 400 to 500 children and families participate in the Nano Days event. Additional families quickly visit and listen to the experiments. "We're probably close to 10,000 participants for all of the events using the activities with nanotechnology content. Events like this reinforce the 'learn through play' idea and allow for great collaboration. NSU staff and students understand the latest in science news and the Children's Museum has the audience ready to play."

"The event aims to inspire and motivate young people to pursue new goals or take action on a particular issue. This has created a sense of excitement and



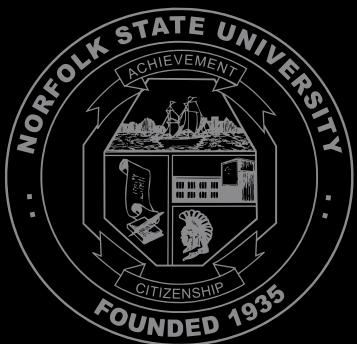
empowerment as participants feel like they are part of a larger movement or cause," said Bahoura. Matyseck agrees saying, "Ideally participants are encouraged to pursue higher education and continue exploring these concepts. Nano Days is the longest running event at the Children's Museum of Virginia, and we are grateful to Norfolk State University and to NISE Net for their support," she added.

The 2023 Nano Days event took place April 1, and featured several experiments including nanotechnology uses in water filtration, discovering why the blue morpho butterfly has blue wings, and playing with a powder substance that could absorb up to 1,000 times its weight in water. [B]

**Left:** NSU student greets kids at the Children's Museum of Virginia

**Top Right:** NSU student showing something interesting to engaged children

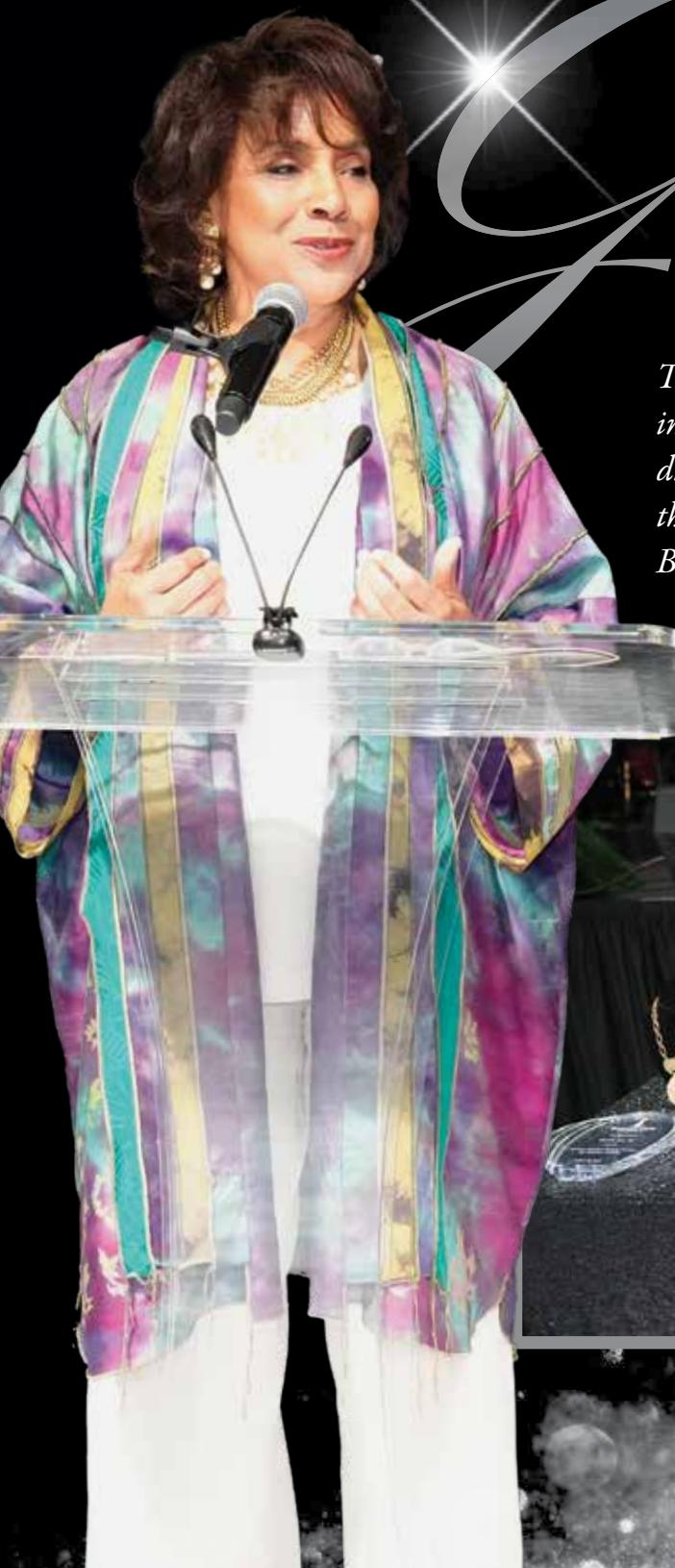
**Above:** Group photo of The Nano Days team



## THE PRESIDENT'S

# Gala

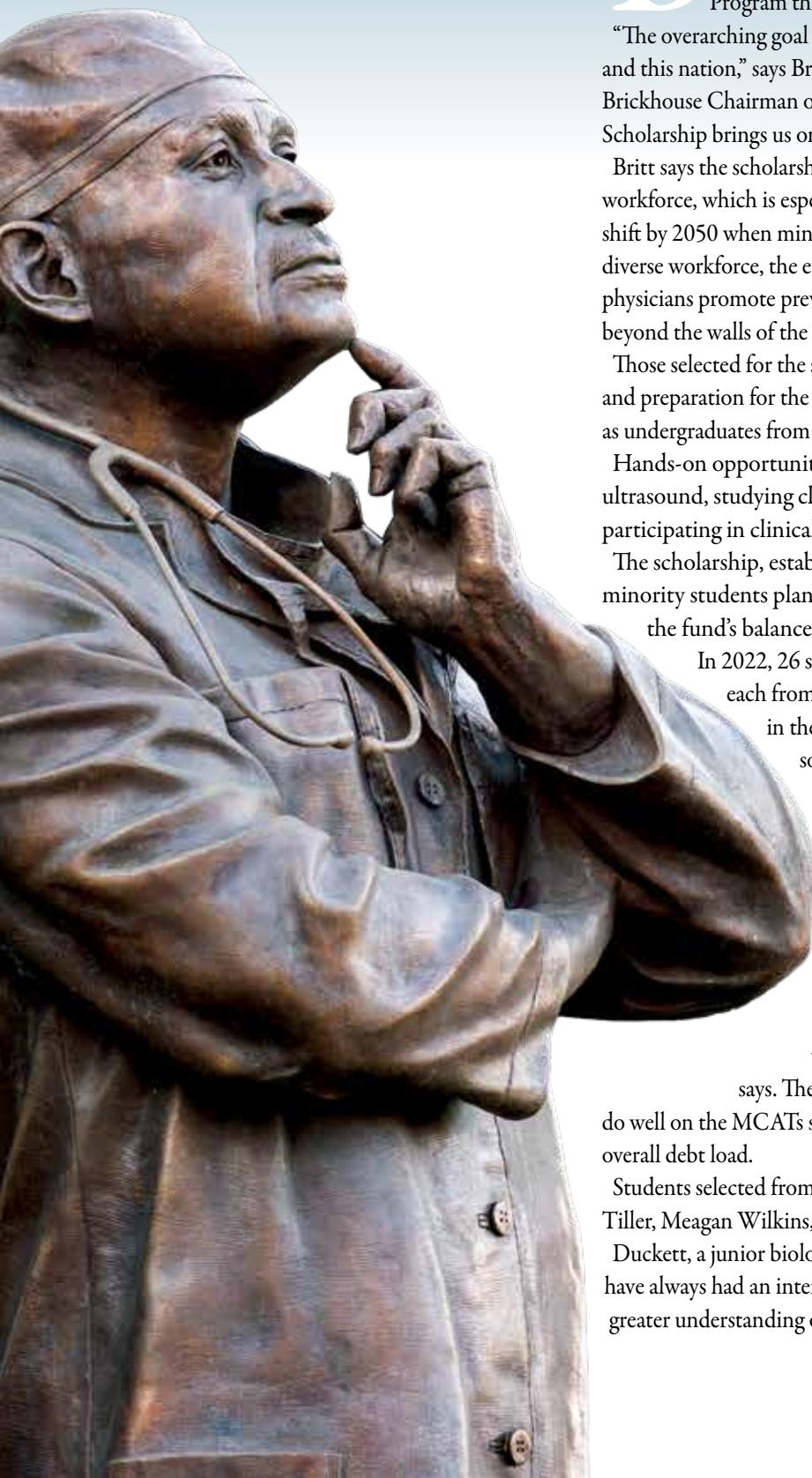
*The President's Gala recognized the generosity of 17 donors by inducting them into the Lyman Beecher Brooks Society. Actress, director and Tony Award-winner Phylicia Rashad served as the Master of Ceremonies. Rashad is also dean of the Chadwick Boseman College of Fine Arts at Howard University.*





# BRITT SCHOLARSHIPS

## *aim to enhance health equity for minorities in Hampton Roads*



**B**lack people are sicker and die earlier than other racial groups. Norfolk State and its partners are working together to fix that. One of those partnerships is the L.D. Britt Premedical Scholars Program through Eastern Virginia Medical School.

"The overarching goal is to provide healthcare, in hopes to better our community and this nation," says Britt, M.D., a Henry Ford Professor and Edward J. Brickhouse Chairman of the Department of Surgery at EVMS. "The L.D. Britt Scholarship brings us one step closer to achieving this goal."

Britt says the scholarship will help provide a bridge to a more diverse healthcare workforce, which is especially important because demographics show a huge shift by 2050 when minorities will become the majority. "When you have a more diverse workforce, the evidence shows that it improves outcomes." Minority physicians promote prevention and advocate for minorities, "extending healthcare beyond the walls of the hospital and the medical school."

Those selected for the scholarship receive yearlong mentoring, hands-on training and preparation for the MCAT admissions test beginning in their freshman year as undergraduates from local colleges and universities, including Norfolk State.

Hands-on opportunities for the scholars include learning about suturing and ultrasound, studying clinical case-based exploration of human anatomy and participating in clinical and research boot camp during the summer.

The scholarship, established in 1995, is awarded annually to deserving minority students planning to pursue a doctor of medicine degree. Based on the fund's balance, the award amount is currently \$10,000 per year.

In 2022, 26 students were selected for the program, including six each from NSU and HU. This year 40 students are participating in the program, 14 juniors (six from NSU, eight from HU), 12 sophomores (six each from NSU and HU) and 14 freshmen (four from NSU, 10 from HU). Of these, eight scholars have applied to the EVMS early admissions BS/MD program (five from NSU and three from HU).

The scholarship program makes it possible for students to go directly to medical school after completing their bachelor's degrees as long as they pass the MCATs, says Aliecia McClain, Ph.D., organic chemistry professor, coordinator of the Britt Scholars program for NSU and director of the Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences (DNIMAS).

"Often students who didn't take the time to study for the MCAT and didn't score well will end up going to a master's program in the medical field before retaking the test," she says. The Britt program helps by exposing the scholars to the medical field and coaching them to do well on the MCATs so that they can eliminate that extra step of getting a master's degree and reducing their overall debt load.

Students selected from NSU this year are Wayne Cochran (BS'24), Zachary Duckett (BS'24), Myles Parks-Tiller, Meagan Wilkins, Alexandria Woods (BS'24) and Felicia Wright.

Duckett, a junior biology pre-professional major interested in orthopedics, wants to become a doctor because "I have always had an interest in sciences and the way the human body functions. African American doctors have a greater understanding of what young Black men might be going through."





"My desire to become a physician started when I was very young," says Cochran, a chemistry pre-med major. "I have always loved science and people, so when I heard about what a doctor does, I thought it was perfect for me." Cochran says his interest in medicine grew when his father suffered a heart attack during his senior year in high school. "I knew that I had to be in a position to help him or others if they were to fall ill."

Woods, a biology/pre-professional major, wants to be an obstetrician/gynecologist or a pediatrician. "Black women's health concerns usually aren't heard or they are ignored, and they have a higher maternal mortality rate," she says. "I would like to be an advocate for black women to voice their concerns and fight to lower their statistics." She says she's interested in pediatrics to advocate for children, especially Black children, "so that they can be inspired by me and see that someone who looks like them can also reach these high positions."

All three students say the Britt Scholarship will help relieve the financial stress of medical school, and Duckett says it will provide him a "direct pipeline into EVMS while ensuring I have all the resources available to prepare for the MCAT to get into medical school." **B**



# PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NSU AND EVMS

*dedicated to ENRICHe  
pathways into healthcare*

By GAIL KENT

Norfolk State and Eastern Virginia Medical School are dedicated to better addressing regional healthcare disparities and attracting more minority students into healthcare fields.

A formal program, called ENRICHe, an acronym for the EVMS-NSU Research and Training Incubator for Collaboration in Health Equity Initiative, was created in January. The program will also provide opportunities for faculty, staff and students at both schools to collaborate on research.

The two institutions committed to providing \$500,000 -- \$250,000 each -- to the venture to be used as seed grants to faculty and students at both schools to support research on health disparities.

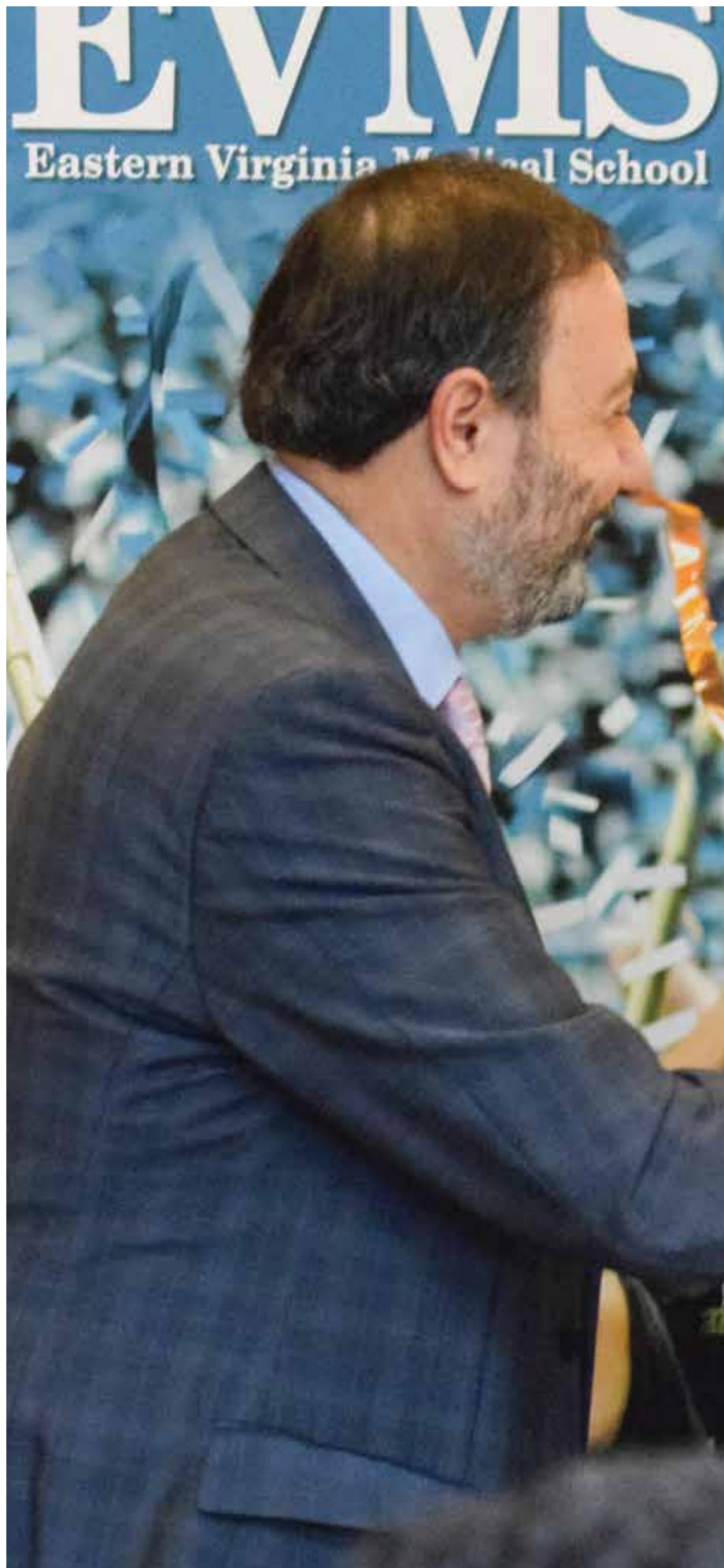
"The program will not only give our students the opportunity to shadow professionals, but also to do research while they are undergraduates," says A liecia McClain, Ph.D., organic chemistry professor, coordinator of the Britt Scholars program for NSU and director of the Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences (DNIMAS). "It will also help with faculty professional development sessions on how to write grant proposals as they relate to public health and equity for people within the community."

The two schools have already held a "speed networking" event featuring a speaker from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). At the event, 10 faculty members from each partnering institution spent five minutes telling each other about research they are already conducting. "Each faculty member who receives a grant will be required to have both an undergraduate and a medical school student working together collectively," McClain says.

An executive committee will review proposals and determine which projects will be initially funded from the seed money, she says. After two years, additional sources of funding will be sought from sources such as NIH, and coordinators will consider expanding the program to other colleges and universities in the area.

Another planned initiative includes creating an annual health disparities workshop to highlight the work of ENRICHe participants.

"This is an important commitment that both EVMS and NSU are making, and we expect support for the initiative to grow," says NSU President Javaune Adams-Gaston, PhD. "This is what equity and social justice look like: identifying a problem, working towards a solution through collaboration, for the equitable distribution of social, economic and healthcare resources to the community." ■





BEHOLD





*Phil Thornton*

# MAKES IT BIG IN

*Entertainment World  
by Being Fearless*

*By Gail Kent*

*Photo courtesy of Wardell Malloy*

# BEHOLD



Photo courtesy of Mike Nims  
He majored in marketing and business, which he says was “pivotal in my success because it prepared me for the real world. NSU sharpened the skills that were already in me.”

At Norfolk State he learned presentation skills, finance, how to write business and marketing plans and how to collaborate with others on group projects. All of those skills have “impacted my bottom line.”

While at NSU, he and another student wrote a business proposal to change the format at WNSB, the NSU radio station, from all-jazz to hip-hop and R&B. After some initial resistance, the proposal was accepted and the pair were hired as work-study students to make the change and promote the station. “I’ve always been up for the challenges and going against the grain,” Thornton says. “I just trust my instincts and my gut. That’s just who I am.”

His experiences at NSU “opened my eyes” and “I concluded that I wanted to be an entrepreneur rather than climb the corporate ladder.” The spark was always there, he says, but NSU gave him the confidence to launch his own business. “My purpose and my passion intersect, so I never had a lot of fear.”

He is remembered fondly by many faculty members, including Wanda Brockington, Ph.D., retired associate professor in the Department of Mass Communications and Journalism. “Phil is one of those rare beings who knew exactly what he wanted to do at a young age, and he literally made it happen. It’s a beautiful thing when destiny and hard work come together.”

She says Thornton has been “extremely accessible and generous with his career advice and mentoring,” as well as “an amazing role model and an inspiration to all who desire careers in the entertainment empire.”

After graduating in 2003, Thornton moved to New York City, obtained investors for seed money and started Bright Star Entertainment, an artist management/consulting firm, where he represented artists including Bad Boy Records’ Grammy award-winning group, 112, and singer Lil’ Mo.

In 2006, Thornton moved to Los Angeles and with partners formed the successful Ten2One Entertainment, a multimedia, television production and artist management conglomerate. His company worked with Sony Pictures Television and Thinkfactory Media to release the made-for-TV film, *Surviving Compton: Dre, Suge & Miche’le*, which premiered in 2016 on Lifetime. It garnered 2.3 million viewers for its debut.

Other accomplishments included managing the careers of Michael B. Jordan, Faith Evans, Kenny Lattimore and Mack Wilds. He launched TV One hits including the R&B Divas franchise and *I Married a Baller*, starring former NFL running back Eddie George and his wife, Taj.

He was executive producer on the hit show, *It’s a Mann’s World*, starring David and Tamela Mann, originally airing on BET, but returning for a third season on TV One. Thornton and his team won an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Reality Series for the show in 2018.

In 2012 Thornton moved to Nashville for new opportunities. “People are surprised that Nashville has become such a diverse place,” he says. “Nashville is Music City and, although people usually think of the country music, it also is growing for Americana, R&B and hip-hop. It’s becoming one big melting pot. I love what it represents.”

There, he became senior vice president and general manager for RCA Inspiration, a division of Sony Music Entertainment. There he worked with a wide range of inspirational artists including Kirk Franklin, Travis Greene, Marvin Sapp, and Koryn

A t 43, entrepreneur, music industry executive and television producer Phil Thornton ’03 has the resume that many people decades older could only dream of.

And he’s far from finished.

The Hampton Roads native’s accomplishments are due, in part, to an early start. At age 5, he started a bookmark business with his cousin, making and selling bookmarks

with cartoon characters for a nickel.

He knew at age 10 that he wanted to be involved with the entertainment business, and by the time he was 12, he was an intern at local radio station WOWI-FM. At 15, Thornton interned with Arista Records, working with Notorious BIG, Whitney Houston and Aretha Franklin. He also interned with Mad Rhythms, a music-based publication, conducting interviews and writing about top R&B and hip-hop artists.

When it came time to go to college, Thornton was committed to attending an HBCU, and he chose Norfolk State because of the communal environment.



# “My purpose and my passion intersect, so I never had a lot of fear.”

Hawthorne. The music label was named 2018’s top Gospel label by Billboard, receiving an NAACP Image Award for the soundtrack for the hit show, Greenleaf on the OWN network.

Gospel is part of Thornton’s wide taste in music, and the same year he became vice president and general manager for Urban Inspirational at eOne Music, where he oversaw a diverse list of gospel and R&B artists including Erica Campbell, Shirley Caesar, Jonathan McReynolds, Tweet and Lalah Hathaway, whose album Lalah Hathaway Live held the top spot on the charts for nine weeks and won three Grammys.

In recent years he produced a Sundance film, “A Boy. A Girl. A Dream: Love on Election Night,” starring Omari Hardwick and Meagan Goode, and the film “Same Difference,” starring Essence Atkins and Terrence J. That film was screened at the 2019 American Black Film Festival and was streamed on BET.

Also in 2019 Thornton was voted into the Stellar Honors Hall of Fame, honoring remarkable achievement in gospel music. In addition, Thornton received the Living Legends Award from the Living Legends Foundation.

Thornton became senior vice president at Capitol Records in 2022. He executive produces and sometimes directs a TV show, “Uncensored,” for TV One. He also produces a new dating show called, “The One” for singles in his age category.

He appeared in a Christmas movie on VH1 and Paramount called “A Hip Hop Family Christmas Wedding” produced by Jamie Foxx and Datari Turner, playing a music executive named Phil. In February he produced a Hallmark mystery called “A Nashville Legacy,” filmed on location amidst the National Museum of African American Music, for which Thornton serves as a board member.

Thornton entered yet another arena with his podcast, We Sound Crazy, featuring three other music aficionados, now in its third season. The podcast focuses on music and pop culture.

With all that’s on Thornton’s plate, he still finds the time and energy to give back. He’s an active member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. and a board member of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Middle Tennessee. A philanthropist, Thornton supports and volunteers for a number of non-profits, including St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and Hope for Harvest, a Charlotte, NC-based organization that provides clothing, school supplies and other necessities for underprivileged children and feeds the homeless.

At Norfolk State, Thornton funded a scholarship, the Jessie & James Lilly Jr. Endowment, for Virginia natives with 2.5 GPA or higher and business or mass communications majors. The scholarship is named for his grandparents, who always encouraged him to go to college.

He worked with partners to bring the HBCU First LOOK Film Festival to campus this spring. He donates his podcast to Hot 91.1 / WNSB and gives back “anywhere I can” to help students. In the future, he hopes to help NSU build out a music curriculum “to help aspiring students who want to work in the business.”

Thornton credits his faith with his remarkable success. “It’s everything to me; literally like the air that we breathe. My faith has gotten me through the ups and the great times, and the valleys and not-so-great times. It is the consistent thing that has gotten me through every amazing chapter in my life.” **B**



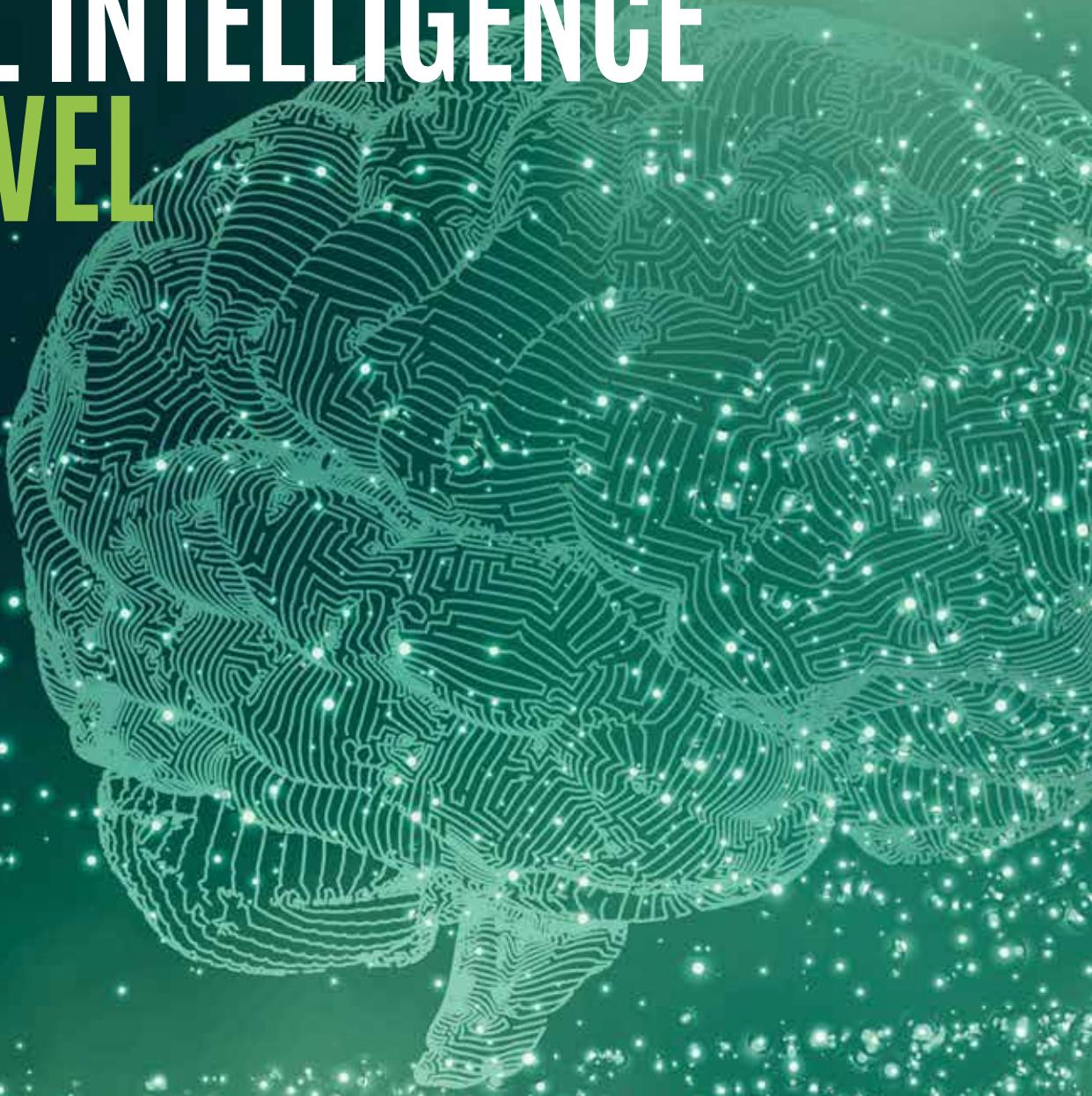
**Top:** On set directing TV One's Uncensored

**Middle:** Plaque presentation with Gospel Singer Marvin Sapp

**Bottom:** On set of TV One's Uncensored with Missy Elliott & Lil Wayne

# CHATGPT BRINGS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO NEW LEVEL

By SUSAN SMIGIELSKI ACKER



**“This puts a spotlight on AI in general and puts it into the forefront of what is possible with it.”**

– Scott Debb



Want to show your love for someone in a poem, but not good with words? Let ChatGPT express your feelings.

Associate Professor Dr. Scott Debb, CyberPsychology Research and Program Coordinator at NSU, said ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence (AI) language program that pulls information from the internet along with books, articles, websites, and other sources, using advanced machine learning algorithms.

Developed by Open AI, it is powered by large data amounts and has computing techniques that create sentences in a human-like way. It taps into a vast amount of vocabulary and information and understands words in context. This helps it mimic speech patterns while dispatching an encyclopedia's worth of knowledge, according to the information provided by Open AI.

"This puts a spotlight on AI in general and puts it into the forefront of what is possible with it," Debb said.

It delivers answers it thinks the user wants. There are multiple ways for it to respond and it can be asked the same question 100 times and can give 100 different answers. It learns as it goes, Debb said.

"It's always gathering information. Just like a library when another book is added to the shelf. More information is being added," he said.

The creators of ChatGPT state its potential is to automate tasks, such as writing summaries, reports and content creation that are normally done by people. The developers state it will allow for other work to be done by people.

"There is a lot going on in the world. This technology has the leverage to pull information from all corners from around the world, that is amazing," he said.

Since its launch in November 2022, ChatGPT has been praised and condemned. Some higher education institutions have even banned its use.

Debb said people who normally perform those tasks should not fear losing their jobs. That fear is common with any technology. Instead of fearing ChatGPT, it is better to understand it to fully utilize it.

"It's no different than any other information tool such as a newspaper or TV. It's not something to shy away from but should be embraced. There are always new tools to be understood and not be intimidated by," he said.

One way to understand ChatGPT is to "play around with it," Debb said.

In the education world, there is concern students will use ChatGPT to do homework and write research papers. Debb said just like with other technology that people have misused, the industry quickly figures out a way to block it. In addition, educators need to keep up with the speed of technology and to create unique assignments and lesson plans that utilize it rather than avoid it.

One downside is the digital divide. Not everyone has equal or reliable access to high-speed internet, he said, noting the digital divide is getting smaller, but not fully closed. In this case, some students may wind up being left behind.

People generally need to know not only about the technology but also have to be aware of its future impact on society. Debb said like social media, people creating these digital technologies need to be careful not to move too fast so that safeguards can be established. Several tech leaders have called for a slow-down for this reason so that the human impact can be fully understood.

"Human behavior always needs to be considered. It needs to make life better for humans. There needs to be a check and balance," Debb noted. **B**

# ALUMNA BECOMES A ONE-WOMAN CHANGEMAKER

## *Employing Protests and Education*

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (MA '04)

**G**lenna Hawkins Moore is a changemaker. She hails from a family of changemakers. She fits into two categories of changemakers: the social driver, dedicated to the progress of a group of people, usually marginalized groups, and the activist: who leads movements against oppression and systemic injustices. A Norfolk State College (now Norfolk State University) alumna, she earned a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1974. Moore continued her education at Virginia Tech obtaining a master's degree in Urban Affairs in 1976.

Inspired by fellow Franklin County resident Henry Turnage's protest of the town's Confederate monument, Moore joined the cause and launched her own demonstration. For nearly three years, the activist and social driver has continued a protest, speaking at almost every Franklin County Board of Supervisors meeting, requesting the removal or relocation of a Confederate monument that stands in front of the County's courthouse.

Named for Benjamin Franklin, the county was formed in 1785 and is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. According to the 2020 Census, the population is about 54,000. The county lists some of its notable citizens as Gen. Jubal Early, a Confederate General, Booker T. Washington and Adam Clayton Powell Sr.

Moore said that her family was the major reason for taking up the monument removal cause. "For the last 15 years, the removal of the Confederate statue has been a frequent discussion at the family kitchen table. My entire family, (husband, sons and their wives) wanted that statue to disappear." She relays the story of how the family got its wish when a truck accidentally hit the monument back in 2007 and destroyed it. "My oldest son, Darnell joked that we were all so busy celebrating the statue's demise, we didn't notice the United Daughters of the Confederacy\* and the county leaders replacing it in 2010 – the 21st century. I was especially driven when I learned about the United Daughters of the Confederacy's history and passion to flourish the southern landscape with Confederate monuments," Moore reminisced.

Moore feels she is the right person at the right time to take on the monument removal issue. "I strongly feel that the Confederate statue on our courthouse lawn is intimidating to African Americans who seek justice inside. I have

a strong passion for moving the statue. I'm retired and available to attend the Board of Supervisors meetings and speak freely about racial issues. Additionally, I was engaged in Black history research and had accumulated information about United Daughters of the Confederacy and U.S. Colored Troops. This was my opportunity to share what I learned."

Her strategy, consistently and relentlessly speaking to the Franklin County Board of Supervisors is to not only advocate for removing the emblem of the Confederacy, but to educate the board and public on the county's Black history. "I have been attending the Franklin County Board of Supervisors meeting since 2020. During the three-minute public comment, I primarily share local Black history, personal racial experiences and researched facts," Moore stated. Her cause has received some community feedback. "I'm getting the kind of support I've experienced all my life from Black leaders in the community, Black families, churches, the Franklin County NAACP, county Democrats and White progressive thinkers . . . 30 percent of whom voted to move the statue."

Moore's quest took on new vigor when research uncovered a little-known Black history fact. "I was excited when we found an article posted by the West Virginia State Archives searching for families of the 177 United States Colored Troops. These families would be awarded unclaimed 45th United States Colored Troops Infantry Medals. Two Franklin-born soldiers were on the list," she exclaimed. Further research uncovered 70 more U.S. Colored Troops born in Franklin. "I traced the list to the Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project. This is a topic I was not taught in the 1960s from the 1957 edition of Virginia: History, Government, Geography text."

When Moore realized that the Board of Supervisors would not remove the statue, she changed tactics. "It's obvious that our leadership is not going to move the statue, no matter how many people stand before them sharing the true history behind the erection of Confederate statues. I feel that to show a more accurate narrative about local Civil War history, we should add a U.S. Colored Troops statue near the confederate one. Personally, I don't want any political or war symbols on our Courthouse lawn. However, it is evident that this Board is not going to move the Confederate statue. So, the most fair and equitable symbol of truth is to erect a statue representing the locally born U.S.

**"I want to leave evidence for my descendants that I worked diligently to expose and secure true Black History."**

**–Glenna Hawkins Moore '74**



Photo courtesy of Glenna Moore

Colored Troops who fought against the Confederates for the freedom of millions of enslaved African Americans.”

Moore said that throughout her crusade she has never doubted the course she's taken and has never been afraid. “I plan to continue presenting monthly three-minute public comments about local Black history, personal racial experiences and facts about the U.S. Colored Troops especially those born in Franklin County, Virginia. There's still a lot of African American Civil War history to be learned and disseminated.”

Ultimately, Moore wants to leave a legacy for Franklin County school children: a more factual narrative about Civil War history and pique their curiosity about the history not taught. “And I want to leave evidence for my descendants that I worked diligently to expose and secure true Black history,” Moore commented.

**\*Editor's Note:** The United Daughters of the Confederacy was founded in Nashville, Tennessee, September 10, 1894. The nonprofit organization's mission is to honor the memory of those who served and those vanquished in the service of the Confederate states. Also, part of its mission is to protect, preserve and mark the places made historic by Confederate valor. The United Daughters of the Confederacy boasts a membership of 19,000. **B**



Glenna Moore waits to speak at the Franklin County Board of Supervisors meeting with family.



# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INCUBATOR SEEKS TO ENGAGE VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Norfolk State University has a three-year program with the Elizabeth River Project to develop an environmental justice incubator as part of a larger project that seeks to engage the most environmentally and economically vulnerable communities in meaningful and equitable conversations seeking to restore urban tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay.

NSU's Environmental Justice Incubator embraces the national movement of restorative and environmental justice, which is a philosophy and theory rooted in the emphasis on community building, repairing harm, and reintegration into the community. Restorative and environmental justice stresses the importance of establishing and maintaining trustworthy and equitable relationships.

Thus, NSU's Environmental Justice Incubator will investigate the entities responsible for the political, environmental, health, economic, and structural inequalities in African American communities. It is believed that examining the historical and sociological legacies through the lens of restorative justice

is essential for understanding and recommending measures that will assist in mitigating harm in meaningful and equitable ways in the most environmentally and economically vulnerable communities.

In Hampton Roads, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Endowed Professor of Virginia Black History and Culture at NSU, said that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Norfolk, like many municipalities throughout the nation, created a public-private partnership to develop suburban communities for whites. These neighborhoods provided amenities such as well-manicured homes, parks, waterfront views, tree canopies, and public transportation. However, cities realized that African Americans wanted to purchase homes in these neighborhoods. In response, municipalities throughout Virginia passed segregation ordinances, such as the 1914 ordinance in Norfolk, designed to enforce strict residential segregation.

In reaction to these limitations, African American realtors and funding agencies sought to develop suburban neighborhoods for African Americans.



Check presentation from left to right: Vernon L. Tillage Jr., Virginia Natural Gas Community Affairs Sr. Coordinator; Stephen Via, NSU Assistant Professor of Biology; Dr. Ashley Haines, NSU Professor of Biology; Clifford Porter, VP for University Advancement; and Emily McCartney, Virginia Natural Gas Community Affairs Manager.

However, their choice of the location of these properties was shaded by racism. Newby-Alexander observed that “Blacks were only allowed to build in low-lying areas or in areas near but not bordering the waterfront.”

There were other restrictions as well. After Norfolk purchased government properties constructed for shipyard and civilian naval employees during World War II, those properties were converted into housing for low-income families. The city also organized the streets for public housing and predominantly Black neighborhoods, limiting access to only one entrance/exit. Moreover, most of these areas, while located near the waterways, were in low-lying flood zones with no waterfront views. These conditions meant that the home values were depressed and entrances and exits from these neighborhoods was difficult because of how the roadways were constructed.

“That makes it unsafe!” she said.

These past practices are even more problematic today as Norfolk’s sea level rise is rapidly increasing. The city, however, continues institutionalized practices that ignore the needs of historically underserved communities. When pictures and data are presented by city officials about endangered communities, for example, the focus is on Norfolk’s west side, where wealthy whites dominate, noted Newby-Alexander.

These issues are not just limited to municipal officials. Recently, the Army Corps of Engineers announced plans to mitigate flooding in Norfolk that included building levees only for Norfolk’s west side and downtown areas, according to Newby-Alexander. The reason given was that the criteria used by the Army Corps that determines what neighborhoods receive flooding mitigation assistance focuses on property values versus social equity. The larger Berkley community has fortunately raised their collective voices regarding this disparity and are in negotiations with officials to receive assistance as their communities are endangered by rising sea water.

“What’s happening to the other parts of the city with the Army Corps plan to not provide levees? NSU is in a flood zone, yet, the Army appears to be using the old redlining program model established by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation in 1933-34,” she said.

Even air quality is worse at NSU than at Old Dominion University about four miles away.

“That is why we are using the Earth Day Celebration as an opportunity to highlight some of these issues and to introduce to the communities in

Hampton Roads how celebrating Earth Day does not have to depend on where you are or who you are,” Newby-Alexander said.

Working with local organizations such as the Elizabeth River project, neighborhood associations, and community organizations, we are hoping that the week long program will raise awareness and encourage community engagement.

“We want to create partnerships with the community by identifying the needs of each community, the history of how and why problems emerged, and work with community leaders to develop remedies. We need to understand how residential inequity can be remediated and repaired and develop a plan as to how Norfolk State University can help. Our first step is establishing a relationship with community leaders and follow through with any promises we make. If we are successful, this will go a long way to establishing trust because many times in the past, communities let their concerns be known, were given promises, but then were ignored or betrayed,” she said.

One way that NSU hopes to create partnerships with communities is by collecting and sharing water quality data from waterways as well as storm water in Norfolk. Dr. Ashley Haines, biology professor and undergraduate students in the Department of Biology at NSU will collect the data; they also hope to teach community members how to collect water quality data themselves. The

**"The hope is to give impacted communities a powerful voice for change."**

-Dr. Ashley Haines

goal is to create “citizen scientists” in Norfolk communities who are engaged, informed and able to advocate for their neighborhood. Some testing around the city has already taken place and more is set to begin this summer.

The project will begin in Norfolk’s Berkley neighborhood. A task force will be established to use data from the program’s research and residents. The information will be used to request the city and the federal government for improvements, Haines said.

The hope is to give impacted communities a powerful voice for change, Haines said.

Professor Solomon Isekeije, Director NSU’s Fine Arts Division, said art students will play a role by creating a mural at the Elizabeth River Project’s Resilience Lab to demonstrate the merits of environmental health. Some of the artwork will include trash that has been collected in the area.

Using data equity information, they will create informative art pieces to disseminate to the community. It will break down the problem visually and increase social engagement.

Isekeije said the goal is to show the community the importance of becoming environmentally aware and develop a multi-generational movement.

“Hampton Roads is a network of rivers which are the life line to the region. We need to keep the life line clean,” he said. [B]

# SPARTAN WOMEN'S HISTORIC SEASON



Photo by Mike Nims

The Spartan Women's Basketball team won the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Tournament in an exhilarating game against the rival Howard Bison. It was a satisfying ending that saw the women avenge last year's tournament loss to Howard. The tournament title win also ended a 21-year MEAC championship drought.

Clutch plays and clutch points saw Norfolk State walk away with the win. With 40.3 seconds left in the game, Howard cut the Spartan lead to 3 points — 49-46. Then with 7 seconds to go and the Spartans leading by just 1 point, Niya Fields sank 3 free throws, giving the Spartans the 56-52 win.

As the MEAC champs, the women received an automatic bid into the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Tournament, landing as the No. 16 seed. They were matched in the opening round against the No. 1 seed, the undefeated University of South Carolina Gamecocks and their Hall of Fame Coach Dawn Staley.

Although they fell to South Carolina 72-40, Coach Staley saluted the team for its play. "Norfolk State is not a 16 seed," Staley said. "They didn't play like a 16 seed, and they were a tremendous team and opponent. We didn't shoot the ball well in the first half, and I credit that to how well Norfolk State played." **B**



Photo by Mike Nims



Photo courtesy of HRT

## Milestones

- The Spartan women clinched the regular season MEAC title for the 2nd consecutive year.
- The Spartans finished the season with 26 wins — a Norfolk State Division I Record.
- The 26 wins ties the mark held during the 1989-1990 season.
- The Spartan women clinched the regular season MEAC title for the 2nd consecutive year.

## Rankings and Accolades

- Norfolk State University women's basketball team wrapped up the season with a final ranking of 24th in the CollegeInsider.com Women's Mid Major Top 25 Coaches Poll.
- The team had several Spartans garner post-season accolades: head women's basketball coach Larry Vickers was selected the HBCU National Coach of the Year by BOXTOROW and the MEAC Coach of the Year, Camille Downs and Deja Francis were named HBCU BOXTOROW All-Americans. Additionally, Downs was named the MEAC Defensive Player of the Year for the second consecutive season. She is one of the best in the country defensively, ranking fifth nationally in steals and steals per game. In addition, Norfolk State University sophomore forward Kierra Wheeler was named the HBCU National Player of the Week by BOXTOROW in Mid-March.
- Norfolk State ranked top-5 in the country in five statistical categories recorded by the NCAA. NSU was first in scoring defense, allowing an average of 50.7 points per game and first in field goal percentage defense, holding teams to 31.5% shooting percentage. The Spartans ranked fifth in steals per game, making 12.1 steals; fifth in three-point percentage defense, holding teams to 25.2% from beyond the arc; and fifth in turnovers forced per game, making teams turn the ball over 21.97 times a game.

— Compiled from NSU Athletics Reports.

# ALUMNI BUS TOUR FINDS SUCCESS IN RECRUITING STUDENTS

By STEVE OPFER

In February 2016, during a College Fair at Freedom High School in Woodbridge, VA, Padreus Pratter '06, an alumnus of the Greater Northern Virginia NSUAA Alumni chapter, had a fortuitous encounter with a high school student named Juan Peters. Impressed by the presentation at the alumni chapter's table, Juan asked if they hosted bus tours of the campus. At the time, the answer was no, but Padreus shared Juan's request with then-chapter president Tony Harrison and the wider chapter, sparking a vision for a new framework.

The following month, the alumni chapter embarked on its first bus tour, the "Spartan Express Exit 12." The tour was completely sold out, thanks partly to collaborative efforts with Geronimo Stupin, an admissions officer at the time who helped identify Northern Virginia Community College seniors who had been accepted to or recently completed programs of interest at Norfolk State University (NSU). The alumni chapter tailored its outreach to target these individuals to improve their enrollment chances. Although they no longer receive a list of targeted students from NSU admissions, the chapter has established recurring relationships with local schools, building anticipation for the annual tour.

"Our tour experience focuses on family and community engagement. We encourage parents to attend because we believe the village works best when the parents are partners in the process," Pratter said. "We communicate with parents about the benefits of our strong alumni community, one that is always a phone call away."

The tour covers the basic aspects of a campus visit but also offers an additional bonus. Students who have identified their intended major in advance are paired with behind-the-scenes experiences in their respective departments. This interactive portion, called the "behind-the-scenes tour," provides a first-



hand look at the academic programs, such as auditions for music students or visits to various departments like communication, psychology, nursing, technology and business.

The alumni chapter has restructured its fundraising efforts to meet the growing demand.

"We charge \$35 per attendee as a means to secure a seat. We also sponsor students of need," Pratter said. "We have found many will sign up if free but may not show unless we attach a cost. The true cost for each participant exceeds \$100."

The chapter maintains communication with students who enroll at NSU throughout their college careers, fostering a network that serves as a pipeline for chapter scholarships.

In 2023, the alumni chapter expanded the tour experience to include the Baltimore Alumni Chapter, with plans to expand further in the coming year. The day typically begins with setup, breakfast and prayer at 5:30 a.m. and concludes around 5:30 p.m. The on-campus portion runs from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. sharp to ensure participants beat the returning traffic.

Since 2016 over 30 students from the bus trip have enrolled at Norfolk State. Graduates have included Cyndi Brown, Senior Class President. Additional leaders included Stephanie Boakye Danquah (Miss Sophomore), Derrick Almond (Spartan General), and other students who worked with the admissions team conducting student tours. They have also been active members of fraternities and sororities on campus.

Looking ahead, the chapter envisions chartering Norfolk State University-owned buses to transport participants to campus, thereby covering the cost of fuel and lodging, if necessary. This strategic move would reduce the financial impact on the alumni chapters and allow them to allocate more funds toward scholarships. ■

# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION BOARD SERVICE HELPS JONES KEEP CONNECTION



Otis Jones '83 comes from a long line of watermen. The Northern Neck native grew up in a family where his great-grandfather, grandfather, father and uncles spent their lives working on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries oystering, crabbing and fishing for menhaden.

Although Jones took his career down a different path, he keeps his connection to the water through his service on the Chesapeake Bay Foundation Board of Trustees. After five years on the board, serving in several capacities, in January 2023, he was elected chair.

He was recruited to join the Board after a foundation executive heard him talk about his heritage at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Jones was presenting to a packed audience at a Career Day recruiting event representing IBM, where he worked at the time. "I had a keen interest in the mission of saving the bay, specifically because you save the bay by saving the tributaries that flow into it," he said of joining the foundation board.

Jones knows the importance of a strong and healthy Chesapeake Bay because the Northern Neck area of Virginia is bordered by the Chesapeake Bay and the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers. And the approach of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving the Chesapeake Bay through effective science-based solutions to pollution, is what beckoned him to help improve the waters that he'd known all his life.

"Otis Jones' lifelong connection to the Bay together with his strong leadership and stellar business sense are an incredible combination. We're lucky to have such a strong advocate at the helm as our new Board Chair," said Chesapeake Bay Foundation President Hilary Harp Falk.

As board chair, Jones has several goals that may seem ambitious, but he's always been that way. At Norfolk State, the journalism major began working for Metro magazine as a sophomore and for K94 radio publishing The RocMonitor magazine during his junior and senior years. "Back in the day, it was unheard of for an African American male to be in college and publishing a 'rag,'" he said. He was able to make those connections because of NSU professor Linda Scanlon who pushed her students to take on internships. "Those connections and the experiences on campus and off campus helped shape me," said Jones, who describes his experience at Norfolk State as "profound."

"My experience at Norfolk State really opened up the aperture for me," he said. Those experiences included the off-campus jobs where he learned business etiquette, as well as his on-campus activities that helped bolster his journalism acumen. "Some of the peers in the journalism program there — you could tell that they were going to be leaders in the profession and just the experience of working with them — Leon Carter, Nathan McCall, Lisa Godley, Curtis Bunn, Derek Dingle, Glen Mason, Felita Bunn, Sheila Spence — I could go on and on."

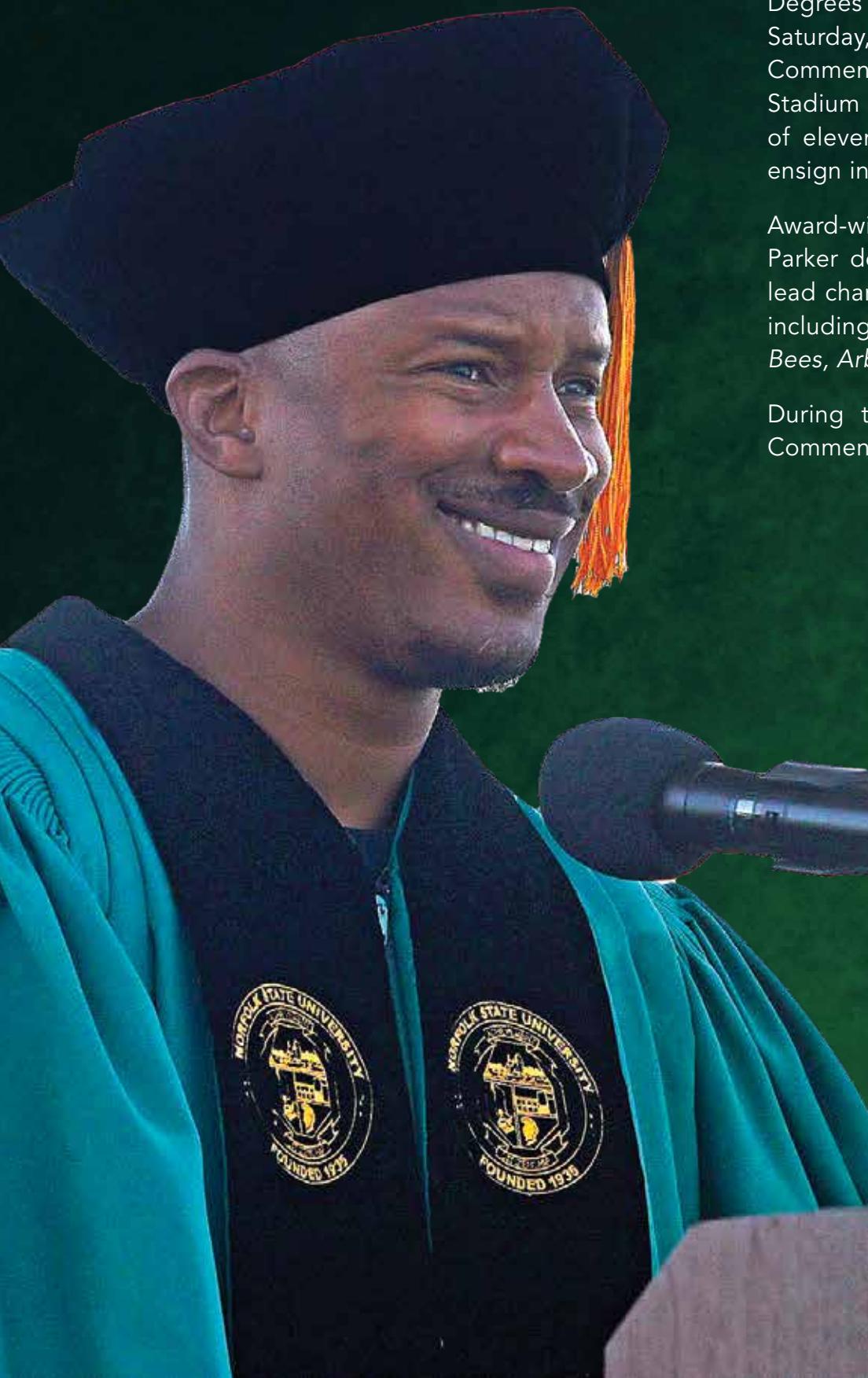
Jones continues to give back to his alma mater not only through financial support but also through his time as a member of the School of Business Advisory Board. Jones has also served as trustee and vice president of the Chesterfield Public Education Foundation Inc. and the Richmond Public Schools Education Foundation. He is the past chair of the Board of Trustees of The Richmond Forum and was appointed by former Governor Ralph S. Northam to a two-year term on the Virginia Council of Environmental Justice, whose mission ensures that vulnerable communities are being protected from pollution, climate change and environmental hazards.

Jones, who is accustomed to talking to students, has this advice for them: to hone their skills in their chosen craft, have positive interactions with those they meet and have a point of view. "Every interaction that you have with the people you meet can be a moment of truth," he said, "you never know how they will influence your life." His relationships and financial services experience developed over a 36-year career at IBM has led to his current Board of Director positions at Northern Neck Insurance Company and Blue Ridge Bankshares, Inc., two Virginia-based firms.

For Jones, those interactions and connections have taken him a long way, but it all started at Norfolk State.

"I owe Norfolk State University a debt of gratitude for my success in business and for giving me a chance to get a degree, and I'm having a pretty good life because of that." ■

# Norfolk State Celebrates the 110th Commencement



Degrees were conferred to more than 600 students on Saturday, May 6, during Norfolk State University's 110th Commencement. The ceremony, held at William "Dick" Price Stadium on the NSU campus, also saw the commissioning of eleven second lieutenants in the U.S. Army and one ensign into the U.S. Navy.

Award-winning actor, writer, director, and producer Nate Parker delivered the keynote address. Parker has played lead characters and held starring roles in at least 19 films, including *Beyond The Lights*, *Red Tails*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, *Arbitrage* and *Pride*.

During the ceremony, Parker received the Presidential Commencement Medallion.





# Graduating to Greatness



**Kathy Pope Belfield**, a 1987 graduate of Norfolk State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in business management. She is a senior Budget Analyst at the Office of Satellite and Products Operations for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Washington, DC. Throughout her career, she has received several recognitions including Civilian of the Year and Employee of the Month.



**Dolline Pryer-Hatchett**, a 1989 graduate of Norfolk State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in mass communications. She is the Principal Deputy Managing Director, Management and Operations, for the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The President of the United States, Joe Biden, recently selected her to receive the Presidential Rank Award, the Nation's Highest Civilian Award.



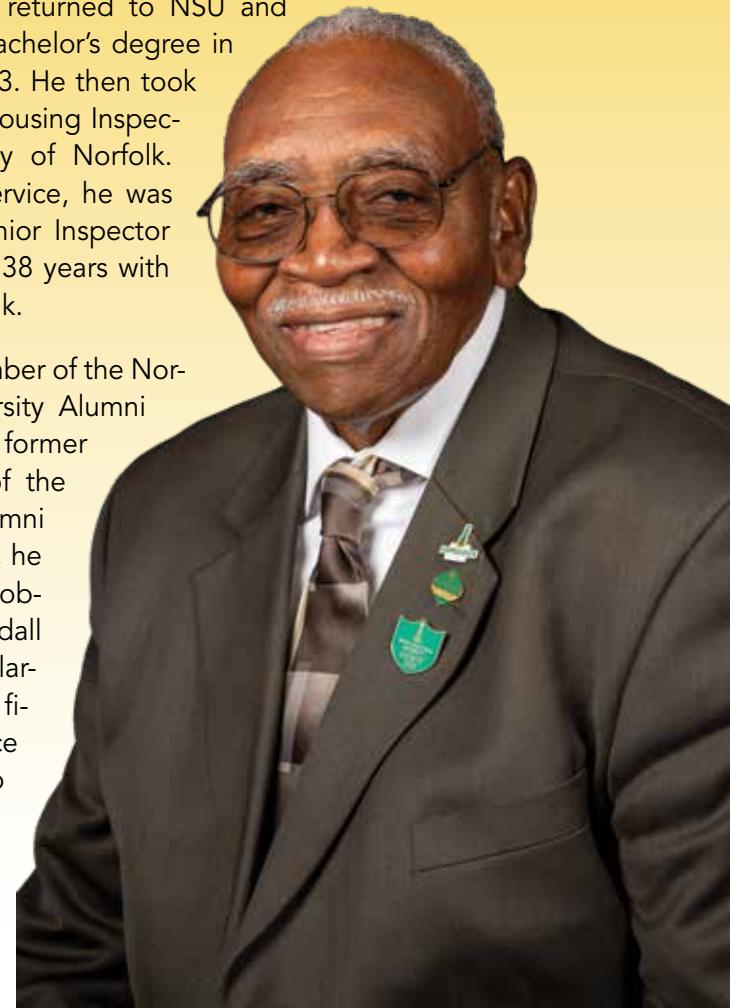
**George A. Jones**, a 1983 graduate of Norfolk State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. Since 1996, he has served as the Chief Executive Officer of Bread for the City (BFC), a social justice organization located in Washington, DC. Mr. Jones is the recipient of numerous honors including the District of Columbia's Cornelius R. "Neil" Alexander Humanitarian Award and Georgetown University's John Thompson, Jr., Legacy of a Dream Award.

Norfolk State University honored three of its alumni at the 2023 Alumni Awards Reception & Dinner. These graduates demonstrated exemplary leadership in their professions and in the community. They personify the mission and goals of the University.

## 2023 MEAC Basketball Tournament Distinguished Alumni

**Robert Randall**, affectionately known as Frog, began Norfolk State University in 1963. In 1966, he was drafted into the United States Army and served a tour of duty in Vietnam. After completing his Army obligation, Frog returned to NSU and completed his bachelor's degree in education in 1973. He then took a position as a Housing Inspector with the City of Norfolk. After years of service, he was promoted to Senior Inspector and retired after 38 years with the City of Norfolk.

Frog is a life member of the Norfolk State University Alumni Association and former past president of the Chesapeake Alumni Chapter. In 2018, he established the Robert "Frog" Randall Endowed Scholarship to provide financial assistance to students who are exercise science/physical education and/or fine arts (photography) majors.



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Office of Communications  
and Marketing  
700 Park Avenue, HBW 340  
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Celebrity chef Carla Hall demonstrates healthy cooking at the health equity program by Riverside Health System held at Norfolk State.