

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

BELHOLD

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1 • SPRING 2024

Jawn Murray
Executive Producer



Contents

2 From the Desk
of the President

3 **UniversityNews**
The Future of Fashion
is Crystal Clear

6 **Faculty & StaffNews**

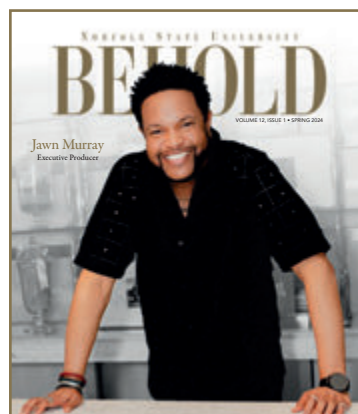
12 **UniversityNews**
A Family Legacy

16 **BEHOLD FEATURE**
Jawn Murray Takes Flight to
Resilience & Success in Entertainment

20 **UniversityHighlights**
Graduate Student Participates in
Unique Music Scholarship Program

26 **AthleticNews**
MEAC Eyes Expanding
Golf Programs

28 **AlumniNews**



Jawn Murray
TV host, Executive producer of the
Sherri show
Photo courtesy of Reynolds Hernandez



A photograph of a graduate in a green and gold gown sitting in a wheelchair on a stage. The graduate is using a black joystick controller to navigate. In the background, there are rows of white chairs with green cushions, and other graduates in green and gold gowns are visible. The scene is set outdoors on a green lawn.

TRIUMPH OVER TRAGEDY!

Nada Edwards '24 walked across the stage to receive her Bachelor's degree at Norfolk State's Spring Commencement Ceremony following an accident in 2017 that left her in a coma for several months and without the use of her arms and legs.

When she walked across the stage, the entire stadium came to its feet, cheering her on. Edwards's next goal--walking under her own power when she receives her Master's degree.

From the Desk of the President
Norfolk State University

In this 2024 Spring issue of *Behold* Magazine, we celebrate the transformative power of opportunities, growth and achievement as embodied by our remarkable students and alumni. Their stories are a testament to the boundless potential and success that lies within each and every one of them.

At Norfolk State University, we believe that every student has the capacity to excel. Our dedicated faculty and staff are passionate about creating opportunities that spark growth, foster exploration and help our students find their internal power to reach new heights. From life-changing internships to invaluable connections in their field of study, these opportunities have instilled in our students the confidence to pursue their dreams and make a meaningful impact.

Meet Jawn Murray, the trailblazing executive producer of the *Sherri* show, who has harnessed the power of opportunity to propel his career to new heights. With an NAACP Image Award, and a Telly Award to his credit, Jawn's proactive approach to identifying opportunities that align with his vision has been a key to his success. He has also utilized opportunities to enlighten and support NSU students about his journey (page 16).

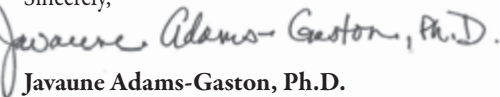
The art of identifying opportunities requires a keen eye for innovation. When Fine Arts Associate Professor Christy Frederick was presented with the chance to partner with Swarovski, the world-renowned crystal manufacturer, she seized the opportunity with passion (page 3). This groundbreaking partnership is an integral part of elevating Norfolk State University's reputation. Through this partnership, Norfolk State became the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) to partner with Swarovski. A project of this magnitude was an excellent experience and has also equipped our students with the skills and knowledge to pioneer sustainable fashion practices.

For some, the pursuit of achievement begins at home. Zelna Haywood Parson Sr. and Vivian T. Parson, who only had a 6th- and 8th-grade education, dared to dream big for their 11 children. Today, their family legacy is a testament to the power of perseverance and the impact of education, with their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren achieving academic success and making a difference in their communities (page 12).

Sometimes, it takes a guiding force to uncover the opportunities that lie hidden. Our talented faculty and staff have a unique ability to see the potential in our students, even when they may not see it themselves. Just ask Lamar Neal, former Spartan football player turned NASCAR tire carrier (page 24), Joseph Abiakam, a May 2024 graduate with a master's degree in piano performance (page 20), and Braxton Harris, a mass communications major (page 30), who credit our faculty and staff with opening doors to new possibilities.

As I reflect on the stories of our students and graduates, I am reminded of the profound impact that mentors and role models have on shaping their journeys. The wisdom and guidance shared by faculty, staff, alumni, family and supporters have been instrumental in empowering our students to chart their paths with confidence and purpose. By sharing experiences they have illuminated the way for our students, helping them to navigate the complexities of their chosen fields and unlock their full potential.

As I bring this column to a close, I am compelled to pay tribute to the Honorable James W. Dyke Jr., a trailblazing icon who has dedicated his life to breaking down barriers and expanding opportunities for African Americans. His remarkable legacy, marked by numerous milestones, including his tenure as Virginia's first Black Secretary of Education, has inspired generations. We are deeply humbled that this visionary leader, recently recognized with a lifetime achievement award by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, serves on our Board of Visitors. His presence is a testament to our institution's commitment to fostering a culture of excellence and inclusivity.

As always, BEHOLD...
Sincerely,

Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.
President, Norfolk State University



NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY
BEHOLD

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1 • 2024 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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The Future of FASHION IS CRYSTAL CLEAR

By JALEESA MANLEY

AS CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTALISM BECOME MORE A PART OF THE SOCIETAL CONVERSATION, THE PUSH FOR CHANGE IS EVER-PRESENT, WHICH MEANS SUSTAINABILITY IN ALL INDUSTRIES IS ESSENTIAL, INCLUDING FASHION.

CONTINUED ON PG. 4



Photo courtesy of Destini Bell



Photo courtesy of Destini Bell

“This was such a wonderful opportunity, and more companies at the level of Swarovski need to offer such partnerships to HBCU fashion students.”

— Christy Frederick

That is why Norfolk State University’s Fine Arts Associate Professor Christy Frederick wants to equip her students with the knowledge and opportunities to design a better future without as much waste. “Sustainability is so important to fashion as in other industries to help save the planet,” says Frederick, “The amount of waste and pollution that is put into the environment from the fashion industry is excessive. The fast fashion industry alone is responsible for at least 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions.” So, when she was approached with the opportunity for a partnership between Norfolk State and Swarovski, the world-renowned crystal manufacturer, it was a crystal-clear decision. This grew from a phone call between Frederick and Felita Harris, the Executive Director of RAISEfashion, a nonprofit that provides pro bono consulting to BIPOC-owned fashion brands and individuals. The program, Swarovski Academic Partnership, which included 14 NSU students, began after discussing the

possibility of fashion design students using Swarovski Crystals in their Spring 2024 senior show designs.

With sustainable fashion practices and education at the forefront, the program is designed to bridge the gap between academia and industry while nurturing the next generation of fashion designers through creativity, innovation, and sustainability. In a press statement, Swarovski stated, “Through this partnership with NSU, Swarovski aims to recognize and foster emerging talent and support them with their career aspirations. Together, we will shape the future of fashion for generations to come.”

This collaboration included a workshop where Swarovski visited NSU’s campus in January to give the students a presentation on their heritage brand and review students’ design sketches. The students also had the chance to visit the Swarovski New York flagship store in March. Along with mentorship and opportunities for further engagement, Swarovski gave sponsorship in the form of upcycled Swarovski Crystals with a total value of \$3,500 that was equally distributed to each student to complete their designs. Upcycled crystals have been created by re-purposing discounted products, to avoid creating waste.

By using upcycled crystals, the students gave this solid material a new life and purpose. “To me, sustainable fashion embraces fashion principles by focusing on quality over quantity, as well as investing in timeless and durable pieces that can be worn for a long time, rather than following fast fashion trends that quickly become outdated,” states Destini Bell, rising junior Fine Arts major. “Also, emphasizing versatility and creativity in styling outfits, rather than constantly buying new items, which is why this collaboration with Swarovski is a wonderful opportunity to showcase just that.”

As the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) to partner with Swarovski, a project of this magnitude was an excellent experience for Norfolk State and its students. For Da’Ron Prioleau, to participate in this program with a company with the caliber of Swarovski was unforgettable. “It feels awesome, to be a minority at an HBCU, and to get the recognition of Swarovski is a blessing. Almost any crystal you see in Hollywood, or the fashion world will be Swarovski Crystals. I believe more opportunities will come once we show what we can do with the correct resources.”

Students presented their crystal designs to Swarovski and displayed them in a fashion show during the 2024 Senior Show in April. “This was such a wonderful opportunity, and more companies at the level of Swarovski need to offer such partnerships to HBCU fashion students,” exclaims Frederick. “Our students continually rise to the occasion when given the opportunity. These types of partnerships help students create their own paths to having a seat at the table. I hope more companies will follow Swarovski Crystals’ lead.” **B**



Swarovski visited NSU’s campus to give the students a presentation on its heritage brand and review students’ design sketches.



Left and Above: The students presented their designs to Swarovski in April.





Photo by Anthony Tillman

HEALTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CULTURAL AWARENESS

THROUGH MANY HEALTH INITIATIVES, DR. SHELIA WARD HAS SUPPORTED NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF, AND ITS SURROUNDING COMMUNITY.

Dr. Shelia Ward's educational background in exercise physiology, epidemiology/public health, and dance, has served as her foundation to promote 'Health Empowerment through Cultural Awareness,' the guiding principle from which she conducts scholarly activities related to chronic disease prevention and management, injury prevention and rehabilitation, and African Diaspora dance for health and wellness.

Dr. Ward, who has been with NSU since 1995, is a professor in the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Exercise Science, the Chair of Education and Clinical Experience for the Kinesiotherapy Program, and the project director for the NSU Health and Wellness Initiative for Women where she oversees the Student Health Ambassadors.

She is a Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine, a Virginia Commission for the Arts Teaching Dance Artist, Co-director of Eleone Dance Theatre of Philadelphia, a consultant for the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts, and Certified Instructor for Kariamu Welsh's Umfundalai African Dance Technique and the Katherine Dunham Technique and Philosophy where she serves as the Pedagogy Chair for the Institute for Dunham Technique Certification.

In her practices, Dr. Ward promotes the use of African Diaspora Dance and Drumming as a strategy for health, wellness, and rehabilitation practices across the lifespan where participants engage in an African diaspora movement experience with live drumming to enhance mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Throughout her career at NSU, she received grants to externally fund her many initiatives.

In 2017, she was awarded a grant from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for High Impact HIV Prevention. In 2022, the VDH and CDC gave her a grant for the NSU project, ECHO, that reduces campus sexual and domestic violence. With this grant, the Virginia HBCU Collective on Campus Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence brought together faculty members from Virginia's four HBCUs leveraged resources and expertise to address this issue. They created the Virginia HBCU Collective Campus and Sexual Violence Programming and Policy Evaluation and Assessment Chart, which is a 56-item tool created and used to collect data from campus staff and administrators whose primary jobs related to campus well-being and safety.

Dr. Ward's most recent grant is VAX Facts by Us 4 Us: Community Driven and Developed Messaging to Address Vaccine Hesitancy in Black Communities. With this endeavor, she launched the 2023 NSU Health and Wellbeing Survey, where data was collected from 900 NSU undergraduate students related to sexual health and sexual assault prevention, substance abuse, and overall health and wellness. This campus-specific data will be used to inform programming and policies. Along with this grant, the Vaccinate Virginia media campaign is currently running, which includes bus, and mall and billboard advertisements. This campaign prioritizes three subpopulations within the African American community, college students, congregants, and the LGBTQ+ communities.

Outside of her grant work, Dr. Ward is a Student Health Ambassador Health Promotion and Research Trainee. As Student Health Ambassadors, student trainees from any major will be trained to provide health education and promotion activities to support wellness, healthy life choices, and behavior changes to students, faculty/staff, and the community. The health education promotion activities and/or projects on campus are based on chronic disease prevention and management, including the use of Cultural Arts, HIV/AIDS and STIs Education and Prevention and its intersectionality, and preventing sexual violence.

FACULTY
STAFF
HIGHLIGHTS

In February, Norfolk State University announced its partnership with The University of Illinois Foundation (UIF), Delaware State University (DSU) and The Planned Giving Initiative (PGI) for the Planned Giving CASE Fellowship Program. The new partnership is aimed at fostering careers within planned giving. This collaboration will help build knowledge and capacity around core best practices for planned giving programs.

This summer, NSU will welcome its first Planned Giving Fellow who will engage with experienced individuals in advancement and gift planning from the three institutions, PGI, Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), and more. This unique opportunity bridges the strengths and needs of UIF, DSU and NSU, reaping the systemic benefits that an inclusive and comprehensive planned giving program can offer organizations while creating a better understanding of the unique challenges planned giving programs face today.



Sanjeev Kumar, Ph.D., attended the 2024 Energy and Climate-Technology Innovation Policy Boot Camp hosted by George Mason University this summer. Professionals from Harvard, Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, and many other esteemed institutes also attended. The camp’s main purpose is to strengthen researchers’ understanding of how energy and climate-tech policy is made, so their

research has a greater impact on real-world clean energy and climate innovation outcomes.



Virginia Clean Cities (VCC) awarded **Richard E. Martin**, Director of Energy & Sustainability in Facilities Management, the Clean Transportation Educator Award for 2024. Martin was recognized for leading Norfolk State in exploring new technologies. He spearheaded an EV (electric vehicle) event with EVNoire that showcased a variety of electric vehicles from cars and trucks to boats. VCC also noted that Martin has set ambitious goals for the campus which included EV charging stations, solar power, educational events, and reducing fleet emissions. He received the award on April 4 during VCC’s annual Rally in Richmond event.



Monique D. Robinson was announced as the new Director of Procurement Services. Robinson has accumulated over 30 years of complex procurement experience including with the Virginia Department of Education. In that role, she provided technical consulting services, training, guidance and recommendations for improving procurement-related operations, which had a major impact on the

Commonwealth’s operational efficiencies, cost-effectiveness, customer costs, and public goodwill. She received a bachelor’s degree from Ashford University. Robinson’s daughter, Diedra, is a 2012 graduate of NSU.




Dr. Keisha Taylor accepted the position of Executive Director for Health Services within the Division of Student Affairs. Dr. Taylor brings a wealth of expertise and experience in enhancing patient experience, promoting quality patient care, fostering community relationships, advancing health equity, and driving evidence-based outcomes. Her tenure as the Vice President and Chief experience officer at Centra Health System, where she spearheaded the development

and implementation of a comprehensive three-year patient experience strategic plan, demonstrates her dedication to excellence in healthcare administration. Dr. Taylor earned her Doctor of Education from Grand Canyon University, a Master of Healthcare Administration from Seton Hall University, and a Bachelor of Science from Kansas State University.

BOOK BANS AND CHALLENGES

Continue Frightening Surge

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (MA '04)



The American Library Association (ALA) has been tracking book bans and/or challenges for more than 20 years. In 2023, the number of book titles targeted for censorship, ban or challenge rose 65% compared to 2022. According to the ALA's most recent report (March 14, 2024), 4,240 unique book titles in schools and libraries were challenged – the highest level ever documented. This number surpassed the 2022 high when 2,571 titles were targeted for censorship. The report also documents 1,247 demands to censor library books, materials and resources in 2023.

SEVERAL ATTENTION-GRABBING TRENDS EMERGED FROM THE DATA:

- In 2023, pressure groups zeroed in on public and school libraries, where the number of attempts to censure materials increased by 92 percent.
- Individuals and groups demanding censorship of multiple titles, often dozens or hundreds at a time, attributed to the surge.
- Titles representing the voices and experiences of LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning, intersex, asexual & more) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & people of color) made up 47 percent of books targeted for censorship.
- Attempts to censor more than 100 titles occurred in 17 states (Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin).

teachers that look like them and their communities. We all are really impacted.” Interestingly enough, Nicholson noted that book bans and challenges have not yet affected colleges and universities. “The university is a place where students can learn and be able to challenge the status quo. Every generation challenges the norm. And the fact that folks have forgotten this blows my mind.”

In February, the Virginia Beach School Board in Virginia passed an amendment that created a content committee whose purpose is to develop procedures

Dr. Cynthia S. Nicholson, associate dean for the School of Education at Norfolk State University, has also observed these trends over the years. Her area of research is literacy. Although she doesn’t subscribe to the book ban/challenge phenomenon as something the public should fear, Nicholson believes the current rise in book challenges, especially those targeted to the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color, is a historical continuation to marginalize specific groups—an attempt to erase the history of our country and those peoples who should be disregarded. “No doubt by trying to keep certain books out of the hands of children, parent and conservative groups continue to take away targeted subjects. You can’t erase the history of this country. As a people, we can respond,” said Dr. Nicholson. “Part of the reason for the increase in book challenges is propaganda, Nicholson surmises. “Propaganda has been the issue when you have elected officials in areas they aren’t qualified to be. I would never tell my surgeon what he or she should do because they are the surgeon.”

Susan Burton is a 39-year veteran librarian in the city of Portsmouth, Virginia. Burton, who also held the position of director of libraries for 13 years, said she is alarmed by the rise in book challenges and bans of specific titles. “I, as well as many other public and school librarians, have advanced degrees in our respective fields. We select materials based on trusted sources, some of which have been around for over 100 years.” Burton was adamant about the role parents have played in the issue. “Parents have always had the right to inquire into these selections and always had the right to request a different title for their child to read.” Burton and Nicholson agree that social media may have fueled book bans and/or challenges. “Social media spreads misinformation quickly and alarms parents who, in many cases, have not read the books being challenged or have only seen small excerpts,” explained Burton. Professor Nicholson concurred, “Reading is fundamental. We should not be in the business of telling students what to think. Our job is to teach them to think critically.”

Nicholson further explains, “Basically it is a continuation of things that happened in the past.” Referring to parent and conservative groups orchestrating book bans she added, “If I can divide and conquer groups of people over issues that really matter to me, I can take people’s eyes off the real issue, and the real issue is that racism continues to repeat, marginalization continues to repeat, and people are continuing to be treated in ways that are nonhuman and that’s our truth.” Nicholson clarifies that the impact of book challenges is the same for both the student and society in general. “Research has shown that students do better when they have books, resources and even

to be used by schools to ensure elementary school libraries do not contain sexually explicit content. Regarding secondary school libraries, the content committee shall develop procedures for identifying incoming library materials that contain sexually explicit content and for listing such library materials that meets the definition in a prominent location on the school division website. The policy uses the definition for sexually explicit content as described in the Virginia State Code (2.2-2827). Dr. Nicholson said that “sexually explicit content” is one of those buzzwords or phrases that can incite parents. “One has to examine how the term is being used. School boards are run by constituents or stakeholders and if those stakeholders don’t say anything differently, then school boards are going to make those decisions. Constituents have to say something so that school boards can make better decisions or decisions for the betterment of the entire society, and not just the society in a certain zip code. As we continue to examine school districts and continue to look at texts, you have to think about who’s really uncomfortable.” As mentioned earlier, the American Library Association report cited 17 states, including Virginia, where more than 100 book titles have been challenged.

So what is the solution and what can citizens do to ensure students and the reading public have the resources they want? “If we’re going to have libraries with diverse thoughts and ideas, we cannot ban books or resources. The community could come together with schools and perhaps read books together. Sometimes it just takes knowledge and understanding,” stated Dr. Nicholson. “I wonder how many parents have actually read Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* or Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird*? These books have been around for decades, and now groups want them banned. Banning books doesn’t change the history of enslavement. Until we come together to have real discussions about texts and not people, change won’t happen.”

Burton added, “At this point in time, I feel we have gone back to the 1950s when some books were not allowed to be sold in the United States. But people smuggled them in, and eventually, the books were recognized for their literary value.” Nicholson believes that education has always been the key to better understanding. “As an educator, I’m training a generation of teachers. As a teacher, I tell them that you’re always going to be an advocate for something. That’s just part of the job. Teachers should be celebrating the cultural differences of their students and encouraging them to embrace all of our differences.” **B**

NIL HAS ADVANTAGES FOR HBCUs, ATHLETES



There has been a lot of discussion about the pros and cons of policies that allow college athletes to capitalize on their name, image and likeness (NIL).

While some large institutions have been hesitant to accept these new policies, they may actually be advantageous for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and HBCU student-athletes.

“Historically, student-athletes have been prohibited from earning compensation for the use of their name, image, or likeness, as it was considered a violation of NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) amateurism rules,” said Dr. Paula Jackson, NSU Associate Athletics Director for External Affairs/NIL. “However, recent changes in legislation and NCAA policies have allowed athletes to capitalize on their NIL rights.”

The most controversial part of NIL, says Dr. Jackson, revolves around concerns regarding the balance between fair compensation for all student-athletes and maintaining the traditional amateurism model of college athletics. “Additionally, questions arise about how NIL opportunities may widen the divide between Power 5 institutions and all other programs as well as inequalities among male and female sports.”

Yet, she says that NIL presents several advantages for student-athletes at HBCUs. “The most obvious is the financial impact,” Dr. Jackson said. “Historically, Black athletes have faced systemic barriers to monetizing their talents and likeness, making NIL legislation a significant step towards economic justice and empowerment within the collegiate sports landscape. NIL allows Black athletes to take ownership of their personal brands and capitalize on their talents in ways that were previously restricted,” said Dr. Jackson. “This can be especially beneficial for students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who may need additional financial support and it can also assist in preparing them for life after sports.”

Keshawn Lynch is one Spartan who has taken advantage of NIL.

“I played football at Norfolk State University, joining the team in January 2023 after transferring from ODU,” said Lynch. “My awareness of NIL began when I arrived at school and learned from Rayquan Smith, known as the ‘King of NIL.’”

When Smith shared his experience with Lynch, it sparked his interest, and he began researching and consulting athletes and NIL coaches like Leah Clapper, Sam Green, and Kristi Dosh.

“Initially, I became involved in NIL by creating promotional videos, starting with campaigns for movies and shoe promotions with Rayquan Smith. As I gained confidence, I ventured into more

“NIL allows Black athletes to take ownership of their personal brands and capitalize on their talents in ways that were previously restricted,”

— Dr. Jackson.

opportunities, eventually speaking at conventions and securing 23 deals and counting.”

For Smith, it has been a growth experience. “My NIL experience taught me resilience,” he said, “rejection doesn’t mean failure. Each ‘no’ can lead to a ‘yes’ elsewhere. It’s about trial and error, finding the right fit between athlete and brand. NIL transformed my life, shaping both my character and opportunities. I’ve had the privilege of speaking at the NCAA convention in Arizona and will attend more conventions this year in Las Vegas, North Carolina, and USC.”

Just as NIL opportunities can raise the profile of individual athletes, they can also raise the profile of HBCUs.

“In some cases, NIL may help to level the playing field between HBCU and non-HBCU institutions. By providing student-athletes with the opportunity to monetize their NIL, HBCUs can potentially attract top talent who may have otherwise chosen larger, more financially lucrative programs,” Dr. Jackson said. “Brands seeking to authentically connect with Black consumers may see value in partnering with HBCU student-athletes who embody the spirit and values of their institutions. This authenticity can lead to more meaningful and impactful partnerships that resonate with consumers.

An Exchange to Navigate the NIL Landscape

To help student-athletes and showcase the value of Norfolk State, the Spartans NIL Exchange has been launched.

“The Spartan NIL Exchange provides a transparent and equitable marketplace where student-athletes can showcase their talents, interests, and personal brands to interested brands and businesses. This not only benefits individual student-athletes but also fosters economic growth



and opportunity within the broader Norfolk State University community,” Dr. Jackson explained.

“This initiative is another resource that demonstrates our commitment to supporting our student-athletes in navigating the evolving landscape of collegiate athletics and maximizing their earning potential. By centralizing NIL opportunities through the NIL Exchange, NSU simplifies the process for student-athletes to explore and pursue endorsement deals and partnerships,” she said.

The Spartans NIL Exchange has partnered with INFLCR, which is the top brand-building and NIL business management app utilized by over 270 elite collegiate and professional sports organizations. The Spartans NIL Exchange houses profiles for each student-athlete, which they set up to showcase their “brand,” which can include not only their sport but also outside interests as well. These profiles create a database for businesses, collectives, or individuals to reach student-athletes who meet the criteria of their search. It also centralizes NIL opportunities, simplifying the process for student-

athletes to explore and pursue endorsement deals and partnerships.

As an athlete who individually pursued NIL, Lynch said, “My advice to fellow athletes is to network with local brands, maintain a professional social media presence, and make it easy for brands to contact you. You don’t need to be the star player; marketability and connections are key.”

“I went from a walk-on to a full ride and built my name both on and off the field. Take care of yourself academically and personally, as you never know who’s observing you or attending your games because that could be your next partnership so make sure to carry yourself the right way.”

Looking at NIL from a broad perspective, Dr. Jackson said, “NIL presents educational opportunities for HBCU student-athletes to learn about entrepreneurship, marketing, and personal branding with a ‘hands-on’ approach that they can see and experience in real-time with outcomes purely based on their efforts. These skills can be valuable beyond their athletic careers and contribute to their overall personal and professional development.”

As for institutions she said, “By embracing NIL legislation, HBCUs can empower their student-athletes and position themselves as leaders in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within collegiate athletics.” **B**



A FAMILY LEGACY

By JALEESA MANLEY

When parents envision the life they want for their children, it sometimes includes achievements they were never given the opportunity to achieve. For Zelna Haywood Parson Sr. and Vivian T. Parson, who only had a 6th and 8th grade education, they aspired for their 11 children to have something they didn't have—opportunity. For the Parsons, the key to opportunities such as a career, independence and financial security was a college education. Their goal was to convince the eldest child to attend college and hope the others would follow, which indeed happened. Eight of their 11 children are graduates of Norfolk State University spanning from 1966 to 1988.

The Parson family grew up in Surry County, Virginia, a rural town known for its agriculture. Zelna was a retired Navy Veteran who worked for the National Park Service in Jamestown, Virginia, who also farmed, and Vivian was a homemaker

until the last child went into kindergarten, when she became a bus driver for the local public schools. Growing up on a farm, the children learned firsthand the importance of hard work with the emphasis on having an education. "On the farm, we took care of the livestock, gardening, cleaning, and cooking. My parents stressed education a lot. This was indeed a topic that was spoken about daily," says Sharon Parson Lofton B.S. '83, M.A. '91.

The eldest child, Carolyn Parson Jones '66, became a Spartan in 1962 when the school was known as Norfolk State College. Her parents chose this institution since it wasn't too far from home and with dormitories not being on the campus at the time, she could stay with relatives that lived nearby. This was the same path for the next siblings, Wayman Parson '70, Allen T. Parson Sr. '74, Eunice Parson Gay '77, Sharon Parson Lofton B.S. '83, M.A. '91, Esther Parson Pierce B.A. '81, MSW '91, Elvis Parson '86, and Tunisia Parson-Jones '88.

To further the tradition, eight grandchildren, including two sets of siblings went on to choose the green and gold to continue the family legacy—Allen Parson Jr. '94, Angela Parson-Hameed M.D. '99, Sherita Parson Thompson '00, Brian Gay B.S. '04, M.S. '12, Kimberly Parson-Dixon '13, Tiffany Pierce '13, Britney Pierce '15, and Rodney Pierce '23. The tradition has gone on to reach great-grandchildren Edward Lee Patten III '19 and Deshawn Thompson, who is currently attending the university. NSU has also been the meeting place for two marriages within the family.

Spanning over three generations, the family has seen the transformation Norfolk State has taken while in attendance. From tuition that was \$265 per semester in the 1970s, to no dormitories on campus, to the demolition and rebuilding of prominent buildings, they experienced it all. "Seeing the old Lyman Beecher Brooks Library be torn down and see the new library be built in its place was a huge change," says Britney Pierce '15, "The library is a cornerstone to the campus and the original library was a safe haven for groups meeting in the 24-hour room. It was difficult seeing the old one go but a wonderful sight having the updated library accommodations."

Even though all the family members did not attend NSU, the family's education legacy was still fulfilled through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). "We have been blessed over the years to be in a family of scholars. Not all have attended NSU; however, the vision was accomplished as others chose to pursue higher education at HBCUs such as Hampton University and Virginia State University," states Tunisia Parson-Jones '88. "Future generations may decide not to attend Norfolk State, but the importance of education will always be used as a platform to excel and to make a difference."

Graduating from Norfolk State not only gave the Parson family a foundation for their careers but also gave them a stronger bond with one another. "Three generations have attended NSU since 1962, and I am convinced there will be a fourth generation due to the many offerings, caring professors, and the success we have all obtained," reflects Wayman Parson '70. "In our family, Norfolk State University has produced a lawyer, doctor, computer scientist, lab technician, engineer, artist, agriculture specialist and many educators."

Zelna and Vivian's vision for their children has truly come to fruition through the generations that followed. The Parson family legacy is truly something to Behold. **B**



Carolyn Parson Jones '66



Eunice Parson Gay '77



Sharon Parson Lofton
B.S. '83, M.A. '91



Esther Parson Pierce B.A. '81, MSW '91



Tunisia Parson-Jones '88



Elvis Parson '86



Angela Parson-Hameed '99



Sherita Parson Thompson '00



Brian Gay B.S. '04, M.S. '12



Tiffany Pierce '13



Britney Pierce '15



Initiative Seeks to Ease Challenges

FOR STUDENT PARENTS

By KESHA WILLIAMS

As a pregnant or parenting student, attending classes may seem daunting. Besides juggling academics, pregnant and parenting students have needs that may differ from students who don't have children.

Norfolk State University is working to lessen the obstacles to learning, strengthen connections for student parents and help them persist to graduation.

Two years ago, the University entered into a partnership with Generation Hope as a means of better serving student parents and by helping them make their road to success broader and smoother.

Generation Hope, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring all student parents have the opportunities to succeed and experience economic mobility, allows participating colleges and universities to join its FamilyU.

This comprehensive, customized, evidence-based, two-year capacity-building experience is designed to build and refine institutional competencies to improve the academic achievement of student parents.

According to Dr. Andrea Neal, associate vice provost for Academic Engagement, the NSU team has made significant progress. The first year of the partnership involved assessing where NSU stands, planning for initiatives, and working through Generation Hope's key components, including culture, policy, data, and people. The second year will be dedicated to implementing the initiatives.

"Last year, students self-identified as parents through a survey. We asked about the ages of their children and the services they need," Neal said.

Neal and her colleagues are steadily trying to determine how assistance with daycare centers, payments for daycare, and specified sites on campus can help.

Child friendly areas that are designed or modified to inspire and amuse kids are a few strategies under review.

"We want it to be accessible. Our survey revealed young parents and nontraditional students who are parents. Some of our student parents have elementary school-age kids while others have college-aged sons and daughters."

"We were thinking about those dynamics as we considered how Norfolk State University can better serve its students," Neal said.

Their survey of 109 respondents indicated that 61 are single parents and 76 are the primary caregivers. In addition, many of these student parents had children between the ages of 25 to 34. Consequently, their academic progress has been hampered, interrupted or delayed in some way.

While graduating every NSU student is important, graduating student parents and propelling them to good-paying career positions is critical to the stability of these families. It's also critical to the University's ability to steadily generate a vibrant alumni association.

Shana Simmons, a professional counselor in the NSU Counseling Center, says the student organization that serves student parents — The Village — will play an essential role. Simmons acknowledges they have a challenging road ahead trying to balance parenting tasks, academics, employment and financial responsibilities.

"It was important that students who are parents or expecting to be parents feel a sense of connection and community as NSU students. It is indeed a unique experience that can leave one feeling isolated and limited with exposure to a traditional college experience," Simmons said.

Accommodations for student parents include the dual-purpose lactation room

in the NSU Counseling Center. It provides student parents with a relaxed and therapeutic space to prepare their minds and bodies to be a nurturing provider. “I also want to acknowledge that we have another newly created lactation space outside of the counseling center and are in the process of ordering a mobile lactation pod for our library,” said Dr. Neal.

The Village, the university organization that services student parents, is already living up to its name,” Simmons noted.

“Having a village is vital to healthy and successful parenting outcomes. Having a connection as well as an effective understanding of campus and community resources will increase positive graduation outcomes.

“The Village will also put emphasis on the voices of the student body that may see the need for implementation of policy changes, alternative inclusive measures on campus and additional unique endeavors that include equity on campus,” Simmons said.

Rickkita Riddick ’23, ’24 can attest to the change that the initiative has had. “Before the student parent initiative, I felt like an outcast on campus, said Riddick. “I am a nontraditional returning adult college student and to add being pregnant my whole senior year, I felt isolated.”

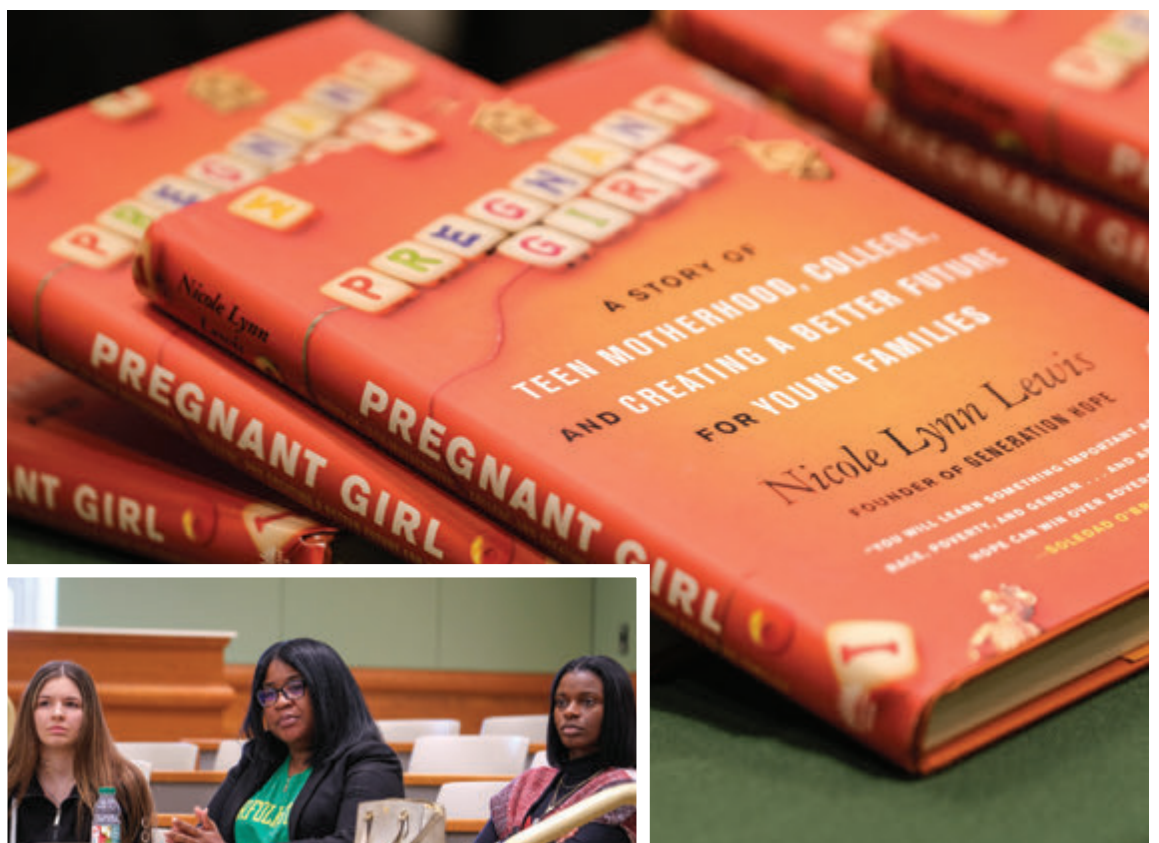
Riddick had a long journey to attaining her bachelor’s degree and graduation.

“I was working on getting my undergrad for seven years,” she said. “I started TCC (Tidewater Community College) in 2013, graduated in 2016 with an associate in business before I came to NSU in 2020 to pursue my BSW. I was 35 years old at that time. “She graduated with the Bachelor of Social Work in May 2023 and went straight in to the advanced standing Master’s program, graduating with her Master of Social Work in May ’24 at 38 years old.

Knowing the difficulties of being a pregnant and parenting student, Riddick became the first president of the Village. “The Village parenting group gave me a sense of community within my time on campus. Participating in the networking hours, leading the group, and attending the study party with my children, made me feel more included on campus,” she said.

“It made me feel that my school cares about my academic success and my mental health. Being able to include my children in a part of my academic life also helped my children see that they can go to college and be successful too.”

Now that she’s graduated, Riddick hopes that the program continues to be successful. “I hope that the same sense of community and support that I received from being a part of the group lives on for all student parents to experience.” **B**



Above: Books by Nicole Lynn Lewis, founder of Generation Hope.

Left: Rickkita Riddick in the middle of two other student parents attending the FamilyU program.



Photo courtesy of Debmara Mercury

Jawn Murray

Takes Flight

to Resilience & Success in Entertainment

By ANTHONY TILLMAN '11

Jawn Murray's career is nothing short of extraordinary. As an executive producer, TV host, commentator, pop culture expert, and media personality, he has crafted an incredible career portfolio. An NAACP Image Award winner and Telly Award recipient, Murray, who attended Norfolk State in the late '90s/early 2000s, is now the executive producer of the nationally syndicated talk show *Sherri*, hosted by Sherri Shepherd.

"While people see the glory of the story, they don't know about the blood, sweat and tears that went in behind the scenes," Murray reflects, thinking back to the hard work he put in to get where he is today.

Murray's story began when he was a pre-teen.

Growing up as a latchkey kid, Murray would race home from school, not for homework, but to immerse himself in the vibrant world of daytime talk shows, unknowingly laying the foundation for his future career. A fan of the sitcom *A Different World*, Murray was captivated by the show's depiction of the diverse lives of students at a historically Black university. The TV show, which aired from 1987 to 1993, portrays the lives of students at Hillman College, a fictional historically Black university, and addresses social and political issues with humor and drama. Murray explained, "I was intrigued by the variety of what Black people are, that we're not a monolith. I wanted that experience."

In addition to the variety of uniquely different people that he was exposed to on the sitcom, this passion for diversity and storytelling was further solidified by a two-week summer program that led him to attend Norfolk State University.

While at NSU, Murray understood that pursuing a degree in Mass Communications should provide him with a robust foundation in the field. There, under the esteemed Professor Dr. Wanda Brockington, Murray dove into the intricate world of video and camera production, mastering essential skills such as scriptwriting, directing, and editing.

Murray remembers Dr. Brockington telling him "You're probably one of the most focused students, and you have such a clear vision of what you want."

The program covered digital media strategies, technical skills of being behind the camera and equipping Murray to excel and succeed in class. However, he had other ambitions. "I wanted to be on the front side of the camera."

He recalls that he wanted to be "the Black Regis (Philbin), walk in the spaces of Arsenio Hall. I was inspired by guys like Montell Williams; I loved the versatility of Tom Bergeron."

Murray was heavily active at NSU, particularly in the Student Government Association, where he met his best friend and fellow *Behold* cover Alumnus, Phil Thornton. They would assist SGA during their larger events, like Homecoming and Spring Fest.

Through their entertainment internships and radio shows, Murray and Thornton were able to create a "pseudo-Hollywood culture" on the campus, solidifying strong relationships with music artists like Coko of the R&B group SWV, Chauncey of R&B group Blackstreet, and even Pharrell Williams, who would arrive on campus occasionally. The presence of these entertainers and more on campus brought a unique excitement and energy to the university.

“While people see the glory of the story, they don’t know about the blood, sweat and tears that went in behind the scenes,” — Murray

Photo courtesy of Debmam Mercury

Around the same time as the rise of the internet boom, while he was freelancing as a writer, doors began to open. Before automatic email distribution programs were a thing, Murray was manually sending out a newsletter, the *Garek News*, by blind copying email listings.

By his senior year, Murray’s newsletter gained popularity, catching the eye of executive Sheila Eldridge, who invited him to his first major awards show: *The Soul Train Awards*. The executive was ready to book his flight, unaware that Murray was still a student at Norfolk State.

Professional opportunities in the business Murray had longed for were calling his name, marking a pivotal moment in his life. “That was the biggest challenge, reconciling.” He had to decide whether to put these career-changing opportunities on hold to complete his degree or to explore the professional avenues that promised to open doors and put him on the path to living his dream in the entertainment industry. As a young 21-year-old, he chose to follow his dream, along with the good money and perks the industry offered.

By the mid 2000s, Jawn Murray was on the air as a young contributor on the *Tom Joyner Morning Show*. In addition, he wrote an entertainment news column for *AOL Black Voices* for several years. During this time, he was working tirelessly, accumulating an average of 100,000 frequent flyer miles a year and describing himself as “living this rock star media life.” However, he soon realized that his backup plan of writing was overshadowing his main goal of working in television. Eventually, Murray came to the realization that he was burned out.

Following a year-long hiatus in 2011, Murray was reenergized, crediting Whitney Houston’s passing for propelling him to a greater level of success in the entertainment industry. When news broke of the singer’s untimely death, he posted a photo on Twitter (now X) reflecting on Houston’s legacy and her impact on the music industry. Moments



Top: Jawn Murray sits in his rightful place on the *Sherri* show

Above: Murray with friends and various student leaders at Norfolk State University

Right: Murray on the NSU campus quad



later, Murray's phone started ringing with requests from cable news outlets like *CNN* and *Headline News*, asking him to come in as a subject-matter expert to speak about her career. Within seven days, Murray made 21 television appearances worldwide. Ultimately, he provided live funeral coverage with *MSNBC* on the day of her homegoing.

"That made me a player in the game," said Murray, "that's when people took me seriously as a pop culture expert."

Through this tragic event, great opportunities emerged, steering Murray back on course toward his destination in the cable news space. Shortly thereafter, he began making regular appearances on *Headline News*, *CNN*, and various *TV One* series.

Murray's professional trajectory shifted once more when he was asked to guest co-host *The View* for his friend Sherri Shepherd's birthday. They had been friends since the early 2000s, having met at the Bobby Jones Retreat in Las Vegas. The overwhelmingly positive response to his guest hosting prompted Murray to acquire professional representation, which led to even more job opportunities. He heavily credits Whitney Houston's passing for opening the door and allowing him to capitalize on the momentum to achieve his career goals.

Throughout his career, Murray has never taken for granted that people recognize the hard work and dedication he put into the business. He expressed frustration with friends and peers who felt entitled to nominations or awards, or who felt overlooked when they didn't receive recognition. "You do the work because these are the careers and lifestyles you dream about, and if you impact somebody, for me, that's always been the real blessing," he shared.

Today, Jawn Murray continues to break new ground in the entertainment world, ever evolving and inspiring countless others to chase their dreams with the same passion. His work on the *Sherri* show continues to touch lives. "I plan on staying on this journey as long as God allows it to be fulfilling," he says.

Jawn revealed that the most rewarding aspect of his work comes from the feedback received from viewers of the *Sherri* show. "Knowing that we've created a space that gives someone the desire to fight another day touches my heart in a major way," he said.

Letters pour in from viewers who are enduring the toughest times of their lives, expressing how the positive energy and ingenuity of the show provides them with comfort during tough times.

Understanding the pressures that come with meeting various networks, Murray recognizes his position to pay it forward for others. He expressed, "It's so rewarding being able to take someone off the bench and put them in the game," referring to the

familiar calls from executives looking to hire hosts or contributors.

"There are so many talented people who just need an opportunity, and I'm in a position now to give them those opportunities." For instance, when a TV pilot he was in consideration for wanted to change the gender of a seat he hoped to occupy, he reached out to the executive in charge and referred a female talent he believed would be a good fit.

Regarding his experience with mentors, Murray has had more positive than negative encounters. However, he advises caution, warning that some mentors may sabotage or undermine opportunities.

"Be intentional about who you call 'mentor,' who you let help lead you, guide you, or inspire you on your journey," he emphasizes. Murray believes that mentorship is very personal and prefers to build those relationships organically. "Anyone that I invest time into, and I don't have a lot to freely give, it's going to be someone already doing the work and they're already on the pathway and has the instinct to achieve on their own."

Murray continues to explore opportunities to do more projects in the food and travel lifestyle space. Additionally, he is interested in pursuing film production and documentaries, telling compelling stories.

Recently, Murray was honored with the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Talk Show as the Executive Producer of the *Sherri* show. Amidst a crowd of industry giants like Method Man and Samuel L. Jackson, Murray shared his journey on stage. He spoke candidly about the challenges he faced as a Black man striving for the perfect job in entertainment, emphasizing how dehumanizing it can feel to be overlooked because the industry's gatekeepers don't see the value in you. Murray expressed his gratitude for Shepherd's unwavering trust in him, saying, "Sherri wanted me to be a part of this; she trusted me to bring her vision to life." He wrapped up his heartfelt speech with a powerful message to the illustrious audience: "Stay the course."

BEHOLD



Photo courtesy of Debmur Mercury



Photo courtesy of Debmur Mercury



Top: Jawn Murray poses with Sherri Shepherd on the *Sherri* show set

Middle: Patti LaBelle with Jawn Murray on set

Bottom: L to R: April Woodard, Jawn Murray and Dr. J in the NSU President's office

Graduate Student Participates IN UNIQUE MUSIC Scholarship Program

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (MA '04)

NSU graduate student Joseph Abiakam went out on a limb and it changed his life. He applied for the Your Future Is Now HBCU scholarship sponsored by Amazon Music and the Recording Academy's Black Music Collective (BMC). "When I found out about the scholarship, I said, why not apply?" The Recording Academy's Black Music Collective and Amazon Music program is in its third year. The collaboration of these music giants provides an opportunity for students at HBCUs and universities to delve into the workings of the music industry, i.e., distribution, programming, business, management, etc. In addition to Abiakam's scholarship award, Norfolk State University also received \$10,000 for equipment in the music department. The partnership is preparing the next generation of music industry power players. Abiakam was among the 2023 participants in the BMC|Amazon Your Future Is Now scholarship series.

When he began his studies at NSU in 2019 the COVID pandemic loomed. A few short months later, students were taking their classes online. It altered the way he was learning but he graduated in 2022 with a Bachelor's degree in music media. "It's really hard to play piano virtually," he said. "I felt I didn't have enough study time with my professors during the pandemic. I chose to come back to NSU to work on a master's in piano performance." Speaking about the BMC|Amazon scholarship Abiakam explained, "When I found out I had been accepted, it was a little strange. I didn't really understand what it meant. Ten thousand dollars meant more funds for my education and what student doesn't need more money. I didn't know much about Amazon Music, the Recording Academy and BMC. A month before the Grammy Awards, I received all these emails about traveling to the Grammys. It felt good to be chosen."

The Grammys were held February 4, 2024.

"With Amazon Music, we got to see another side of music distribution. They partnered with the Recording Academy, presenters of the Grammy Awards, to show us a different part of the industry – the programming. The Amazon Music partnership gave us an opportunity for an in-depth look at the music industry itself. It was amazing," Abiakam explained that the BMC is a section of the Recording Academy committed to celebrating Black artists, ensuring the artists receive credit for their contributions. "I don't believe people understand how diverse Black music really is. The BMC is devoted to just that."

"My favorite part of the week-long event was the chance to attend the BMC Awards which aren't televised but it's such an awesome experience. Any and everybody was there." He quickly rattles off a few names, "Stevie Wonder, Mariah Carey, Flavor Flav, Yolanda Adams, Baby Face, DJ Jazzy Jeff . . . anybody influential to Black music was in that room! When the scholarship recipients were called on stage to be recognized, it was such an experience. They were clapping for us recognizing us as the future of Black music. But being in the room with all those professional musicians it just seemed I was where I belonged." Abiakam's most indelible memory was quite a surprise. He attended a session of Amazon Music's *Bars & Nuggets* podcast. They were interviewing Jon Batiste, five-time Grammy winner, singer, composer, songwriter, and TV personality. "I got a chance to play with Jon Batiste in the music studio after the podcast episode. I was so nervous. I had a small attack of 'imposter syndrome' and asked myself how is it possible that I'm sitting here playing with Jon Batiste. Wow! I belong here – exactly where I'm supposed to be."

He graduated with his master's in May 2024 and has lofty goals after leaving the hallowed halls of NSU. "I'd like to become a professional performer – elise is my stage name. I'm also interested in being a film scorer . . . the person who composes background music for films. Music makes such an impact in movies." His aspiration is to give back to music majors at HBCUs. "There's so much I want to do for HBCUs. Many of these universities have so much musical talent potential. As a piano major and a jazz lover, I didn't have an option to dive deeper into the genre with private lessons for my instrument. I basically learned jazz myself. I absolutely love my piano instructor Dr. Susan Ha." The feeling is mutual.

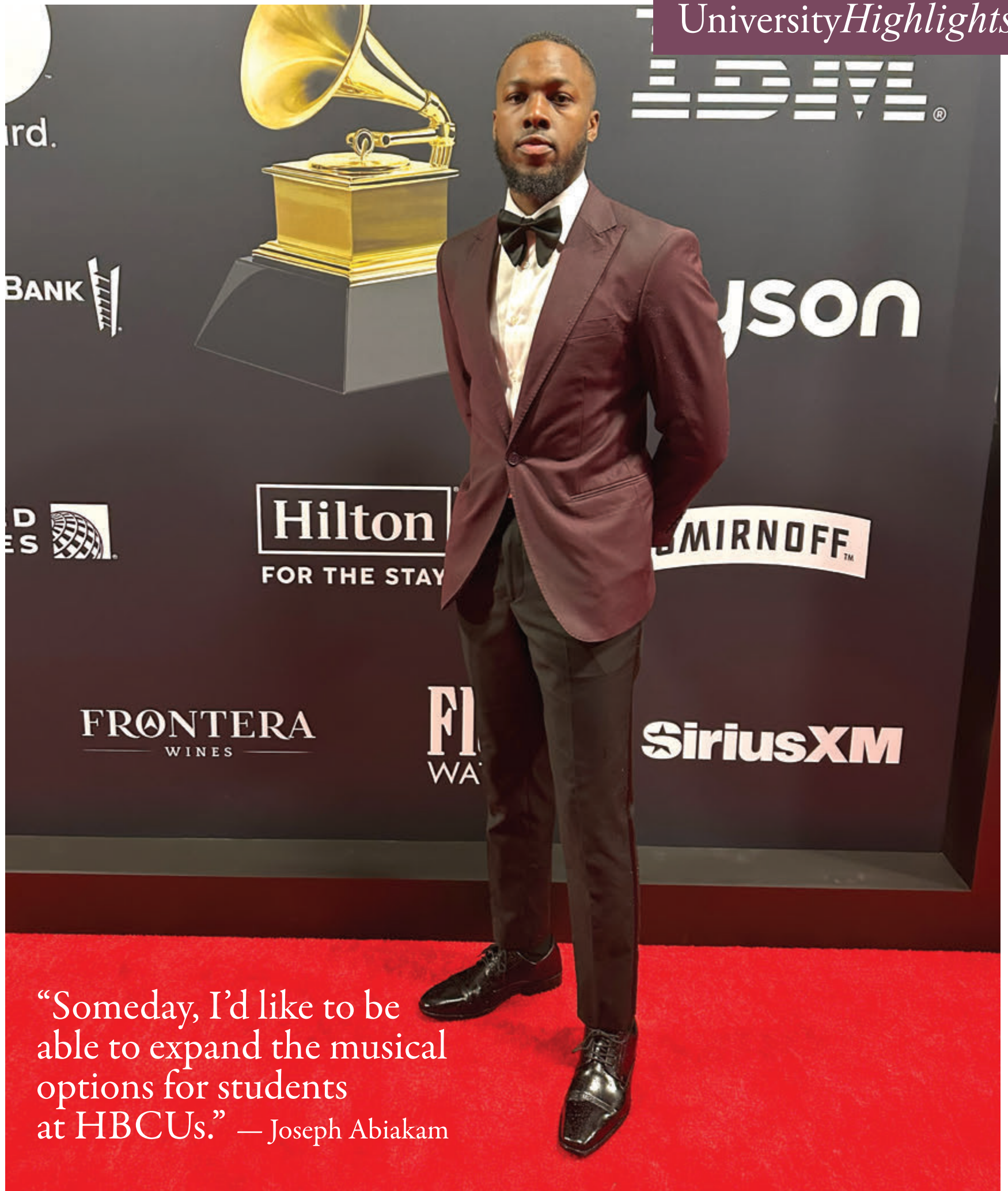
"It has been my pleasure working with Joseph for two degrees at NSU. I commend him for giving his all in everything he does!" Ha said. "His delightful personality, diligent work ethic, competitive nature, and willingness to help others have brought him various musical opportunities including this \$10,000 scholarship and will propel him towards continued success in his career."

"Someday, I'd like to be able to expand the musical options for students at HBCUs."

Abiakam's involvement with the Recording Academy's Black Music Collective and Amazon Music changed his outlook on a career in music. "Sometimes it can seem impossible, but the encounter changed my perspective, and the scholarship connected me to some important people. It has changed and elevated my life. I met people who can really help me achieve my dreams." **B**



Right: Joseph Abiakam at the Grammys Event.
Below: Joseph Abiakam and Jon Batiste, American Singer, songwriter, band leader, composer and television personality.



“Someday, I’d like to be able to expand the musical options for students at HBCUs.” — Joseph Abiakam



JIM DYKE RECEIVES VIRGINIA CHAMBER

Lifetime Achievement Award

Photos are courtesy of VA Chamber of Commerce.



On May 16, 2024, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce named James Dyke the recipient of its Lifetime Achievement Award. Dyke is one of four recipients of the award, highlighting a century of excellence in business leadership as the Chamber commemorates 100 years of fostering economic growth and prosperity in the Commonwealth. Dyke is a member of the Norfolk State University Board of Visitors and Senior Advisor at McGuireWoods Consulting.

“We are delighted to recognize the individual achievements of each honoree who has helped shape Virginia as a best state for business,” said Barry DuVal, President and CEO of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce. “Their visionary leadership and commitment to excellence serve as an inspiration for current and future generations of business leaders.”

Dyke served as Virginia’s first Black secretary of education and the first Black chair in the then 75-year history of the Northern Virginia Chamber (1999-2000).

In his speech, he thanked the Chamber for “giving me the opportunity to help develop bipartisan policy-focused business support for needed improvements in education and workforce preparation programs – changes that will provide every Virginian with the opportunity to succeed and help grow our economy.”

He also noted the historic location of the award ceremony, which took place at the Jefferson Hotel, where 29 Virginia business leaders, including members of the Chamber of Commerce, met with then Gov. Lindsay Almond 66 years ago to urge him to “end the abomination known as massive resistance.”

“As Journalist Benjamin Muse wrote, ‘It may be confidently stated that Virginia business leaders finally brought vigorous and effective pressure, of which the public was not aware, to bring massive resistance to an end.’”

Noting that the award was given two days before the 70th anniversary of the historic Brown v. Board of Education decision declaring segregated schools unconstitutional, Dyke stated that “I proudly stand here as a business advocate and a person of color at the very spot where, because of the business community, Virginia’s history took a decisive turn, a turn that was best for Virginia and that made it possible for me to be a part of your work and the recipient of your honor today.

“Unfortunately, the vestiges of school segregation continue today and hinder our ability to fully prepare our future workforce. The business community once again must step up and address that issue just as you did 66 years ago,” Dyke said. **B**

--Courtesy of McGuire Woods Consulting



Above L to R: Virginia House Speaker Don Scott, Sen. Lamont Bagby, Gov. Doug Wilder, Gov. George Allen, Jim Dyke at the 2024 Virginia Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Awards ceremony.

Left: Dyke with Gov. Glenn Youngkin

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL

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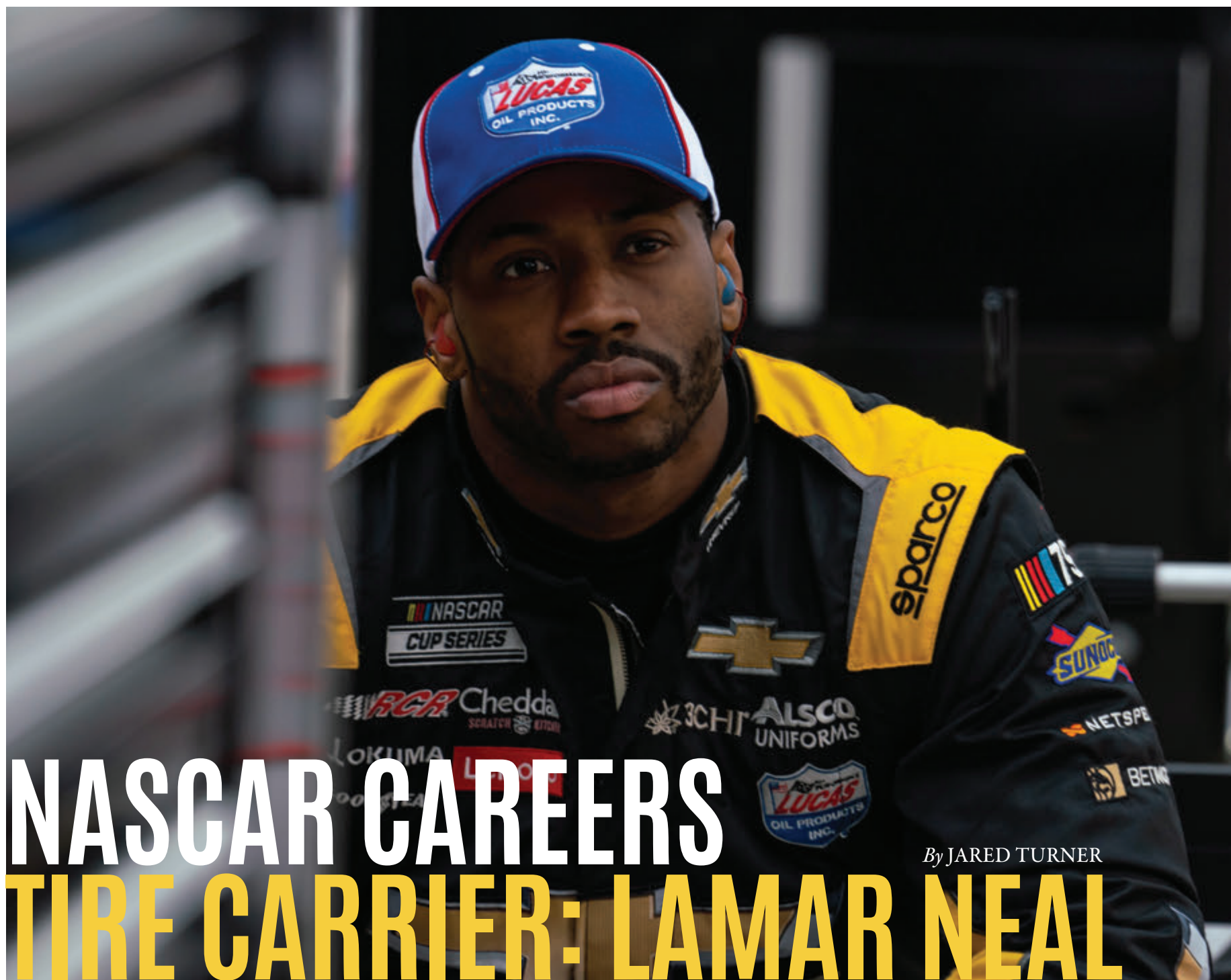
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 28TH | INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

LUCAS OIL STADIUM



VS





NASCAR CAREERS

TIRE CARRIER: LAMAR NEAL

By JARED TURNER

“I’m doing the drills, man, and they’re just like football,” Neal said. “It’s agility, it’s strength, it’s endurance and it’s competitive non-stop. And right then and there, I fell in love.”

When Lamar Neal joined the football team at Virginia’s Norfolk State University in the fall of 2012, his goals were no different than those of most college athletes: win games and set himself up for a possible pro career.

However, Neal’s focus shifted dramatically early during his senior season when it became apparent the NFL wasn’t in the cards. As it turned out, neither was playing out his final year of collegiate football. After leaving the team when he and the head coach had a difference of opinion related to some of his on-the-field responsibilities, Neal considered pursuing a career in the military after graduation. But his plans took a major turn a few months later when the same coach with whom he’d amicably parted ways sent him a text message recommending he attend an upcoming pit crew tryout hosted by the NASCAR Drive for Diversity (D4D) on the campus of Norfolk State.



At first, the former standout linebacker wasn't sure what to think.

"I had never pitted a car," said Neal. "I hadn't even changed a tire; I had changed one tire, and it was prom night. I had never watched a NASCAR race, so I wasn't super-excited about having the opportunity to go and possibly be a pit crew member."

Neal ultimately chose to attend the tryouts – albeit somewhat reluctantly. But what he discovered shortly upon his arrival would ultimately change the course of his career.

"I'm doing the drills, man, and they're just like football," Neal said. "It's agility, it's strength, it's endurance and it's competitive non-stop. And right then and there, I fell in love."

That was in April 2016. The following month, Neal and two other student athletes who participated in the D4D combine at Norfolk State were invited to NASCAR's national Drive for Diversity combine in Concord, North Carolina, where former student-athletes from all over the country would compete for a select few spots in NASCAR's D4D Crew Member Development Program.

One of those spots went to Neal and he enrolled in the program – which provides hands-on training to drivers and pit crew members who hope to land a permanent job with a team in one of NASCAR's national series. While working out of the Rev Racing shop in Concord, Neal received coaching from Phil Horton, who was the director of athletic performance for the D4D and Rev Racing and remains in that role today.

"His determination to succeed, his work ethic, his concentration – all of that was on a high level," Horton said of Neal. "We liked that about him – as well as his loyalty."

To say Neal was a workhorse during his time with Rev Racing would be an understatement. Some nights, he would head over to the shop to hang tires and end



up sleeping over until the following morning when pit crew practice officially started. On other occasions, he would stay back at the shop and continue to refine his craft while most everyone else took a lunch break.

"I think that caught the eye of some of the guys that were there, because they were like, 'Look, man, if you're going to do it, that's what it takes. The biggest thing in this career is consistency and not quitting,'" Neal said.

About four-and-a-half months into the six-month program, Neal received a job offer from Richard Childress Racing – one of NASCAR's elite organizations – and he's served as a tire carrier in NASCAR's big leagues ever since, having started out with an RCR-affiliated Xfinity Series team and worked his way up the ladder to RCR's No. 8 Cup Series team.

As much as Neal still enjoys the game of football and is thankful for his playing days at Norfolk State, he's never regretted the day he traded in tackles for tires.

"When I get up on that wall or I grab my tires and they call the driver to pit road, there is a type of rush that you get that you have to fall in love with it," he said. "You're free as a bird. No matter what you think is going to happen, in that moment, before he gets in that box, you're invincible. And I love that feeling." **B**



MEAC EYES EXPANDING GOLF PROGRAMS

By KESHA WILLIAMS

“The opportunity for the MEAC to host its own championships in women’s and men’s sports would certainly be a great addition to a selection of championships that our students currently excel in.” – Dr. Carray Banks

The past 53 years of intercollegiate competition have given athletes at universities and colleges in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference plenty of time to accumulate an abundance of awards and recognitions on and off the field. The eight historically black institutions that comprise this Division I conference provided a stage to showcase outstanding examples of skills and talent from students and their coaches.

Dr. Carray Banks, the NSU MEAC Faculty Athletics Representative and NSU Engineering Technology associate professor, is not persuaded that the current list of 14 conference-sponsored championships is sufficient. Banks is an advocate for adding or expanding golf teams to all MEAC institutions.

Sure, Banks knows the discussion raises eyebrows for several debatable reasons – golf is not a revenue-generating sport. Golf teams require a considerable monetary investment. Far fewer student-athletes arrive on HBCU campuses capable of competing in golf than in other non-revenue generating sports where acclaimed high school athletic programs have groomed the talent (softball, baseball, track and field, tennis).

Yet, Banks declares expanding opportunities for MEAC student-athletes to develop skills in another viable sport is worth consideration. College golf teams can propel athletes to safely play for pleasure or competition beyond the college setting.

Offering more golf teams can expand the number of people capable of competing in hundreds of charitable golf classics each year. Golf, Banks proposes to folks firmly standing, arms folded on Naysayers Boulevard, can simply make a strong conference more appealing to the next generation of student-athletes weighing their college enrollment options.

“The opportunity for the MEAC to host its own championships in women’s and men’s sports would certainly be a great addition to a selection of championships that our students currently excel in,” Banks said.

“This discussion of offering golf at all eight MEAC universities and colleges started as a result of the strategic plan in 2022. We’re trying to determine how best to acquire funding and to attract the kinds of corporate sponsorships that would be necessary to complete this expansion,” Banks said.

Among fans of collegiate golf teams, it’s no secret that some of the nation’s universities and colleges are investing millions of dollars in their golf programs to better train and challenge their athletes. Not to be forgotten is the potential to lure generous donors with and without nationwide name recognition to support MEAC college golf teams.

“I see an uprising in the sport, and I want to grab that and go further. I want corporate America to be a partner with us. We want to show how well an investment in MEAC teams will favorably impact the future of the next generation of golfers swinging clubs on this country’s golf courses.”

“We want the programs to be self-sustained but we are looking at companies to be partners with us. I believe it can happen because we are offering our partners access to eight schools, across DC and the Mid-Atlantic states,” Banks said.

Over the last two years, several long-range planning steps have been taken in anticipation of this conference-wide expansion. The proposed expansion has been endorsed by the MEAC Commissioner, Sonji O. Stills.

“It is extremely important that we provide championship access for our HBCU student-athletes and bringing back men’s golf as well as adding women’s golf to our conference is essential to our strategic plan,” Stills said.

Lastly, Banks noted that a golf expansion will give alumni from all eight MEAC institutions another athletic team to take pride in. **B**

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY SPARTANS

2024FOOTBALLSCHEDULE

<div>MEAC SWAC CHALLENGE</div> <div><div>8.24</div><div>FLORIDA A&M</div></div> <div><div>8.31</div><div>EAST CAROLINA</div></div> <div><div><div>9.7</div><div>VIRGINIA STATE</div></div><div><div>BATTLE OF THE BAY</div><div><div>9.14</div><div>HAMPTON</div></div><div><div><div>9.21</div><div>VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE</div></div><div><div>CIRCLE CITY CLASSIC</div><div><div>9.28</div><div>NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL</div></div><div><div><div>10.5</div><div>SACRED HEART</div></div></div></div></div></div></div>					
<div><div>10.12</div><div>TOWSON</div></div>	<div>BYE</div> <div>10.19</div>	<div><div>MEAC HOME</div><div><div>10.26</div><div>HOWARD</div></div><div>MEAC HOME</div></div>	<div><div>11.2</div><div>MORGAN STATE</div></div>	<div>BYE</div> <div>11.9</div>	<div><div><div>11.16</div><div>DELAWARE STATE</div></div><div><div><div>11.23</div><div>SOUTH CAROLINA STATE</div></div></div></div>

■ HOME



■ AWAY



Norfolk State Celebrates THE 112TH COMMENCEMENT



Degrees were conferred to more than 500 students on Saturday, May 4, during Norfolk State University's 112th Commencement. The ceremony, held at William "Dick" Price Stadium on the NSU campus, also saw the commissioning of four second lieutenants in the U.S. Army and three ensigns into the U.S. Navy.

The Honorable Don Scott (D-88th District), who became the first Black House speaker in the Virginia Legislature's 400-year history, delivered the keynote address. During the ceremony, Norfolk State University bestowed the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree upon Speaker Scott.

NSU also recognized the classes of 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973 and 1974 for the Golden Anniversary Reunion. Due to COVID restrictions and other limitations, NSU was unable to properly celebrate the classes during their actual year. **B**







A DAY IN THE PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF NSU ALUMNI!



The Office of Alumni Relations & Annual Giving, in partnership with the Office of Career Services, collaborated to create a pilot career readiness program titled A Day in the Professional Life of NSU Alumni!

This initiative had three objectives in mind: to create occasions that introduced students to unique career paths that will assist them with shaping their career interests, expose students to various externship/job shadowing opportunities, and provide alumni with impactful ways to share invaluable insight regarding career objectives and goals.

"National data showed that shadowing programs empower students to make informed career choices. This bridges the gap between media influences, theory and real experience," said Saranette Williams, director of NSU's Office of Career Services.

The Office of Alumni Relations & Annual Giving worked diligently to coordinate with alumni based on the needs of the students, while the Office of Career Services worked with various Deans, Academic Programs, and Academic Advisors to invite students to participate in the pilot.

Above: NSU students visiting CBS News Bureau in Washington, D.C.

Left: Alumni panel as participants Shawn Z. Tarrant, Sr., '89; Danielle Smith Jones '00; Za'Chary Jackson affectionately known Prince and LaVoris Pace '87.

This program was launched with a panel presentation featuring alumni from the Hampton Roads area. Students visited the CBS News Bureau in Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.; the Pentagon in Arlington, VA; the Channel powered by Live Oak Bank Wilmington, N.C.; and locally.

Williams explained that students who participate in these kinds of programs have stronger networks, are less overwhelmed, have a stronger sense of what they like and don't like in a workplace, are confident because they have been exposed to a variety of settings and have prepared them to apply for positions.

LaVoris Pace, Norfolk Deputy City Manager, believes the experience is invaluable. "It provides an opportunity for students to speak candidly about real work-life experiences," said Pace. "The experience also provides relevant and pertinent information and ideas that propel students towards success and makes them more competitive and knowledgeable as it relates to expectations and outcomes." Danielle Smith-Jones '00, a trainer at Virginia Tech University/Virginia Family Nutrition program, enjoyed providing students with guidance and motivation and, most of all, giving back to Norfolk State. "NSU prepared me for everything I have done and currently do, both professionally and in terms of life skills. I always promised myself to give back and help lift another Spartan, as Spartans lifted and guided me."

For one student, Braxton Harris, a mass communications major, the experience was fruitful. He will be working an internship with CBS this summer. "I loved visiting the CBS station in DC," he said. "We were given an in-depth tour," he continued. "It was exciting to learn about the different parts of the station, how they operate as a station, learning about the different departments and why they're important and getting to hear stories from industry professionals."

Although Harris participated in informational sessions before the tour, he didn't know he had the internship until he received official word while touring the station. During the internship this summer, he will travel to several station locations.

His advice to fellow students is to participate and make connections. "You never know who's going to be able to give you an opportunity or connect you to someone else!" **B**

AlumniNews



Above: NSU Alumni James R. Harris, Jr., '91 and COL Audricia Harris '02 host NSU students and staff at The Pentagon
Below: Larnell B. Exum '85 hosts NSU students and staff at the U.S. Capitol.



Graduating to Greatness

Norfolk State University honored three of its alumni at the 2024 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.



Walter R. Clemons, Ph.D., is a two-time alumnus of Norfolk State University. He earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees in music education. For more than 33 years, Dr. Clemons has had an illustrious career as a public school educator, serving as a classroom teacher at middle and high schools; a principal and an administrator. In 2014, Dr. Clemons was appointed the Superintendent of Gloucester County Public Schools, a position he held for nearly a decade until his retirement last year. Most notably, Dr. Clemons was also named the 2023 Virginia Superintendent of the Year and the Region III Superintendent of the Year by the Virginia Association of School Superintendents.



Gregory O. Grimes is a seasoned information technology professional who specializes in systems engineering. For more than 25 years, Mr. Grimes has dedicated his time, talent and treasures to the Norfolk State University Alumni Association where he served as national president from 2009-2014. Under his leadership, he laid the foundation for the NSUAA's current infrastructure. He streamlined the NSUAA's business practices; established an online membership portal; significantly increased membership and adopted enhanced management models to increase revenue to support more scholarship support to the University. In 1986, Mr. Grimes earned his Bachelor of Science degree in electronics technology from Norfolk State University.



Aurelia T. Williams, Ph.D., currently serves as the Senior Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs at Norfolk State University. Serving Norfolk State University for more than two decades, Dr. Williams has been an advocate and champion for Historically Black Colleges and Universities. An exemplary leader for the HBCU Cybersecurity Workforce Development Consortium, Dr. Williams has secured \$25 million to benefit 13 HBCUs across the nation as well as 50 million dollars in external funding for NSU's Cybersecurity initiative. Due to her dedication, the U.S. Department of Treasury awarded NSU the HBCU Visionary Award. A trailblazer for underrepresented students to persist in the field of cybersecurity, Dr. Williams is a 1994 Norfolk State University graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science.



2024 MEAC Basketball Tournament Distinguished Alumni



Lajuana Collins, M.D. earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Norfolk State University in 1983. She completed her medical education and postgraduate specialty training in Psychiatry from Eastern Virginia Medical School. Dr. Collins held positions in private practice, in-patient Psychiatry, medical directorships, emergency room consultation, education, correctional facilities, Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In 2019, she established the Lajuana Collins Helping Hands Endowed Scholarship Fund to provide financial assistance to Norfolk State students. Dr. Collins is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, Inc., and a life member of the NSU Alumni Association. She is also the owner and CEO of Quadsworld, LLC, an independent contracting firm providing medical and psychiatric services to various organizations. **B**

NOV

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NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

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Our University is strong, and our community of supporters and partners is growing. The future before us calls us to capitalize on our positive trajectory to ensure that the coming decades are as brilliant as they can possibly be. As we rise to meet challenges and seize opportunities, we unite in our commitment to collaboration, teaching, and dedication to our students.

Fall 2024



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Gospel artist Kirk Franklin discussed Black fatherhood at the L. Douglas Wilder Performing Arts Center as part of the Courageous Conversations series.