



NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

# BEHOLD

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 1 • SPECIAL EDITION



Devon Henry '00  
CEO & President  
Team Henry Enterprises, LLC

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Devon Henry '00  
CEO & President  
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Let the Heavens Resound...



SPARTAN REGION  
MARCHING BAND  
NORFOLK STATE  
UNIVERSITY

SPARTAN "L"  
MARCHING  
NORFOLK  
UNIVERSITY

SPARTAN  
MARCHING  
NORFOLK  
UNIVERSITY

SPARTAN  
MARCHING  
NORFOLK  
UNIVERSITY

Spartan Legion  
1975-2025

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

# BEHOLD

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 1 • 2026

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.

## From the Desk of the President of Norfolk State University

As I reflect on my seventh year as President of Norfolk State University, I am filled with gratitude and excitement for what we’ve accomplished—and what lies ahead. There is something special about Norfolk State. I felt it from my very first contact. And seven years later, I can tell you that it has been a privilege and an honor to be the seventh President of Norfolk State University.



I truly believe there was something fateful about my appointment to this special place. As I often share, just before I was called by the search committee to come down and be offered a job, my husband said to me, “This is our appointment,” and five minutes later, the call came in. We had a mission to accomplish, as each President before me had a mission to accomplish. That, for me and for him, is the cornerstone of the work that we try to do here at Norfolk State.

I am grateful for the faculty, staff and alumni who have embraced my vision for the institution. Our mission is alive. Our impact is growing. For 90 years, Norfolk State has stood as a beacon of access, opportunity and success. From those 85 brave students who began their journey in 1935 to the thousands of Spartans who walk our campus today, we have never lost sight of our purpose: to educate, to empower and to elevate.

We work to achieve access by creating pathways where none existed, opportunity by lifting as we climb and success by preparing our students not only to survive, but to thrive in a world that needs their brilliance. Our charge is clear: to ensure that every Spartan leaves this campus not only with a degree but also with a sense of purpose, confidence and belonging.

During this milestone year, we have in fact achieved several milestones. Two of our biggest accomplishments have been believing that we could raise \$90 million and exceeding it, and second, due to the hard work of our faculty and researchers, we earned the Research College and University designation — a national recognition of our commitment to excellence in scholarship and innovation.

Then there was the icing on the cake as billionaire philanthropist MacKenzie Scott gifted us with \$50 million, after awarding us \$40 million in 2020. We received total gifts from Ms. Scott of \$90 million as we celebrate our 90th year. BRAVO!

Norfolk State is a rising force shaping the future—through every student we serve, every door we open, and every barrier we break. Ninety years ago, our Founders took a bold step in uncertain times. Let their strength and vision be a springboard to what’s next. The path ahead is rich with possibility, and it starts with us—here and now.

As always, BEHOLD...

Sincerely,

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

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

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# RIDE 4 MY HBCUS

*A Journey Fueled by Love and Legacy*

By REGINA LIGHTFOOT



**R**oderick Bell '96 was on a mission. Through fatigue, aching muscles and blurry eyesight, he rode. Day after day, for 24 days and mile after mile for 9,529 miles, he rode.

The mission: to ride his Norfolk State-themed motorcycle to each of the country's approximately 106 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and challenge 1,006 alumni at each school to give \$106 to their alma mater—to invest in the future of the very places that gave them everything.

On Aug. 31, 2025, when Bell climbed onto his green and gold motorcycle and began his journey, he carried the hopes of generations. Starting in North Carolina, he rode to South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana,

Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, Washington, D.C., Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

His quest— Ride4MyHBCUs—went beyond just raising funds for each of the schools. It was also about changing minds.

"This is about action," Bell said at the time. "It's about inspiring alumni and supporters to give back and invest in the future of HBCUs." He added, "We show up for homecomings, classics, step shows and the battle of the bands. We spend money on parties, travel and tailgates. Now, I'm asking you to show up for your school in a different way."

"Let's give back to the institutions that gave us everything."

CONTINUED ON PG. 4



**Above:** Rod Bell is president and owner of RBELL Construction Group, LLC.

The way Bell sees it, there is a difference between an HBCU graduate and an HBCU alumnus. “An HBCU graduate is someone who earns a degree and returns only for homecomings and festivals without reinvesting in the institution,” he said. “An HBCU alumnus, however, actively reinvests in their university—financially, through alumni associations, by engaging in the community, and by promoting their HBCU wherever they go.”

## Why it Matters

According to a UNCF report, “When we compare HBCUs to the national average and highly selective schools, HBCUs are far more accessible to students and far more successful at moving students from the bottom 40% of the income distribution to the top 60% of the income distribution, signaling social mobility.”

“But HBCUs face significant and persistent funding challenges, impacting the ability to fulfill their missions and serve their students effectively,” Bell said.

Bell’s deep affection and loyalty to HBCUs stem from his own story. While he came to Norfolk State on a track scholarship, what he found went deeper



Photos courtesy of Rod Bell

than having his college tuition paid. He found a place where he could truly thrive. “Norfolk State took a chance on a kid from the Eastern Shore of Virginia and gave me the opportunity to still run track and do it at the University.”

Bell sealed his career path when, as a teenager, he built a clubhouse in his yard from leftover tin that had been used to wrap around the bottom of the mobile home where he lived, impressing his mother. When he arrived at Norfolk State, Bell chose architectural drafting as his major, but his advisor steered him toward majoring in construction engineering. “When I was about to graduate, there were two alumni...Derrick L. Gay and Stephon Artis, if it weren’t for these two guys, I wouldn’t be where I am today.” Bell goes on to describe how Artis and Gay, who worked for Centex at the time, were assigned to visit Old Dominion University to recruit. However, since they graduated from Norfolk State, they went there instead and recruited Bell.

Gay, now CEO of Dominion Builders & Contracting LLC, said Bell impressed them. “He was responsive, his interview was professional, and he was personable and charismatic. We knew with his energy that he could come in and help right away, as he did.”

From there, Bell has worked on landmark projects, including Norfolk International Airport, Dulles International Airport, the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center, and the national World War II Memorial. He later moved to North Carolina and, after working for a few other companies, opened his own.



“It’s about inspiring alumni and supporters to give back and invest in the future of HBCUs... We show up for homecomings, classics, step shows and the battle of the bands. We spend money on parties, travel and tailgates. Now, I’m asking you to show up for your school in a different way.”

—Roderick Bell '96

## The Bike that Tells a Story

The head-turning motorcycle he rode on his odyssey is more than a machine; it’s a homage to Norfolk State. A green and gold Harley Davidson named Sparta, the bike is outfitted with photos of NSU’s second President, Harrison B. Wilson Jr.; the “White House” that once stood on campus; Quiara Jackson, the first Spartan Legion female drum major; Football head coach Michael Vick; Scott Hall; the Sweat Box, among other icons that are of meaning to him. His research indicates that his bike is the first HBCU motorcycle in the U.S. Bell’s riding playlist across those nearly 10,000 miles spanned from old-school hip hop and R&B, to DMX, new school hip hop and of course the Clipse, and in some of his appearances on campus with his bike, Bell has blared the Spartan Legion’s rendition of “The Neck” from his radio.

Reflecting on his trip, Bell now understands much more about both the financial situations of our nation’s HBCUs and the challenges that many of their alumni face. He learned that a small percentage of graduates give back to their schools. Reasons vary.

“Over time, I’ve learned that many graduates who earn degrees in fields that do not pay as much often struggle to give back financially. In many cases, they are working second jobs just to cover their basic expenses. Similarly, those who graduate from medical school are frequently unable to give back immediately due to the overwhelming debt they carry upon graduation. Some accept lower-paying positions to gain experience, others attempt to start their own practices, and many are simultaneously building families. For these graduates, it can take 10 to 15 years before they are financially positioned to give back to their university.”

He added that while alumni may not give back, those who do recognize how their contributions help students facing the same challenges that they once did. Bell also believes that faculty interaction with students also plays a part in whether graduates contribute to the university.

## The Legacy

Roderick Bell’s 24-day odyssey was more than a ride—it was a call to action. His journey was about the students who dream big, the alumni who carry the torch, and the institutions that continue to change lives against all odds. His call to action is clear and urgent: Show up for your school in a different way—because the future of HBCUs depends on it. **B**



Above: Speaking with faculty about the importance of giving and how it can help HBCUs.



“By far the coolest part of the ride is when the President of Wiley University asked me to come to his house and he pulled out his motorcycle and rode a little with me on campus. He said I motivated him to get back on his motorcycle.”

# A Lifetime of Service to NSU

By STEVEN E. OPFER



“  
The best thing about working  
at NSU is seeing the campus  
environment as a whole family.  
— Linda Stubbs '76

Norfolk State University has been more than a workplace for Linda J. Stubbs '76 — it has been a home. As NSU's longest-serving employee, Stubbs has devoted her career to supporting students, faculty, and the mission of the University that shaped her life and the lives of several members of her family.

"I did not think that I would spend almost 50 years as an employee at NSU," she says. "It has been a wonderful experience coming to a job that I absolutely love."

Her NSU story began long before she set foot on campus as a student. One of 11 children, Stubbs followed the example of her oldest sister, Verdell Stubbs Whittington '61, who became the first in the family to attend and graduate from Norfolk State.

Stubbs recalls how her sister started at NSU. "She told Dr. Lyman Beecher Brooks, the president at the time, that she wanted to go to

NSU but came from a family of 11. Dr. Brooks listened and helped Verdell cover her financial obligations in order to attend."

That simple act of generosity set off a chain reaction. Inspired by her sister's experience, three other siblings, along with Stubbs herself, followed in Whittington's footsteps — and the NSU tradition continued into the next generation, with a niece and two nephews also earning degrees from the University.

"When we all get together and share our wonderful experiences, it's clear that NSU was our first choice for higher learning," Stubbs said.

Stubbs earned her degree in Office Administration in 1976, and her fondest memories as a student revolve around the people who made NSU special.

"My best memories include meeting faculty, staff and students from all over the United States," she said. "I met some of my closest friends as soon as I arrived on campus, and we are still friends today."

She remembers professors who went "over and beyond" to ensure that students mastered their coursework, and staff members who offered compassion, encouragement and sometimes just a listening ear.

"They were there when students needed love and support when things were going a little rough," she said. "I enjoyed the food, the extracurricular activities and admired the beautiful campus."

After graduation, Stubbs didn't have to look far for her first job. She began working as a clerk-typist in the Psychology Department in 1976.

"As I approached graduation, I went to the Human Resources Office at NSU and joked with the staff that they gave me a degree, so now they should give me a job," she said. "And that they did."

Five years later, she joined The Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work, where she would spend the next four decades and is currently in the office of Associate Dean Dr. Kirsten Ericksen.

"The Psychology Department was my first campus family," she said, "but the School of Social Work became my second."

Stubbs began as the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program Secretary in 1981, hired by the School's founding dean, Dr. Ethelyn R. Strong. Over the years, she has provided administrative support for every program in the school — undergraduate, master's, and doctoral — as well as the dean's office and credits many colleagues for shaping her professional journey.

"I must give a shout-out to the late great Professor Carrie Waites. She was like a second mother to me," she said. "She taught me about the profession of social work and how important it is in today's world."

Reflecting on what has kept her at NSU all these years, Stubbs points to a deep sense of community and purpose.

"The best thing about working at NSU is seeing the campus environment as a whole family," she said. "I learned so much about how the offices and departments worked together like one big cheering squad for the success of the students."

She also takes pride in seeing former students return to give back.

"I enjoy seeing Social Work alumni coming back to teach. It's rewarding to know that I had a small part in their journey."

When asked about retirement, Stubbs offers a familiar answer: "That's a popular question for me. For now, I'll say — when it's time." **B**

# Redefining Business Excellence

By JALEESA MANLEY

“

At NSU, students do not just earn a degree; they gain experiences.

– Dr. Bebonchu Atems



In summer 2025, Dr. Bebonchu Atems was appointed as the new Dean of the School of Business at Norfolk State University.

Before coming to Norfolk State, Dr. Atems served as the Dean of the David D. Reh School of Business at Clarkson University in Latham, New York. He brings knowledge in macroeconomics, econometrics and energy economics. He received his B.A. in Economics from the University of Maryland and both M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Economics from Kansas State University.

In his work as an economist, he has been widely published in leading academic journals and has frequently presented at national and international conferences. He is also a highly regarded educator, having earned multiple awards for teaching excellence at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

In his role at NSU, which he calls both a privilege and a responsibility, Atems hopes to make the School of Business a recognized leader in preparing students for careers of impact in business, technology and society. He continues this sentiment by saying, “We will build a school that delivers excellent teaching, produces impactful research, and develops graduates who are both career-ready and community-minded. I want us to be known as a hub of innovation, entrepreneurship and societal impact in Hampton Roads and beyond.”

The School of Business offers undergraduate programs in

Accountancy, Business and Tourism & Hospitality Management, with a host of concentrations in business intelligence and data analytics, management information systems, marketing and more. They also provide professional development opportunities, internships and experiential learning experiences that connect classroom learning with real-world applications. All the programs are also AACSB-accredited, which places them among the top 6% of business schools worldwide.

“Business is one of the most versatile and impactful career paths. A degree in business opens doors across industries, from finance to technology, healthcare to entrepreneurship,” Atems expresses. However, what sets Norfolk State apart is the environment thoughtfully crafted by attending a Historically Black College and University. “At NSU, students do not just earn a degree; they gain experiences, mentorship and a network that will set them apart. Choosing business at NSU means joining a community that invests deeply in your success while preparing you to compete on a global stage.”

Under Dr. Atems' leadership, the School of Business will strive for excellence and stewardship. “This is a particularly exciting moment for the School of Business. We are building new partnerships, launching innovative programs and working to expand opportunities for students locally and globally,” he states. “My commitment is to ensure that every student who passes through our doors leaves empowered, equipped and proud to be a Spartan.” **B**

# NORFOLK STATE'S LEGACY:

## *A Community-Built Beacon of Hope*

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



**A**s Norfolk State University (NSU) commemorated its founding in September 1935, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, endowed professor of Virginia Black History and Culture, offered a powerful reflection on the institution's legacy and its enduring role in the community. A respected historian and former dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Dr. Newby-Alexander has spent decades researching African American history in Virginia and the Hampton Roads region.

NSU's beginnings were humble but deeply significant. It was established during the Great Depression as the Norfolk Unit of Virginia Union University, enrolling just 85 students. The founding of the school was a direct response to the closure of Norfolk Mission College and the lack of higher education opportunities for Black youth in the area. Samuel Fischer Scott served as the first director, and Dr. Lyman Beecher Brooks later became the institution's first president. Over the years, the school underwent several

Understanding NSU’s history is essential to appreciating its mission and future. “We must really understand the purpose of the University... Norfolk State and the community are one in the same.”

—Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander

name changes and affiliations before officially becoming Norfolk State University in 1979.

Dr. Newby-Alexander emphasized that NSU was not simply created by educators—it was built by the community. “Norfolk State was founded by the community and has maintained a close and deeply rooted connection to it,” she said. The founders included a diverse group of educators, ministers, social workers, and business leaders who recognized the urgent need for accessible higher education for African Americans in Norfolk.

She also shared insights from her own academic journey, particularly her time at the University of Virginia. “While at UVA, I studied under Chuck Purdue, an anthropologist who pioneered the scholarly examination of the WPA (Work Progress Administration) interviews... interviews with formerly enslaved people to learn about their experiences. I had the opportunity to really learn about those interviews, to study them from a scholarly perspective, and to pull out the cultural aspects of what you can really discover through interviews versus documents you might find,” Newby-Alexander said. “It really enhanced the way I thought about, understood and interpreted our past.”

In its early years, NSU held classes in local churches and the Hunton YMCA before acquiring land and constructing Tidewater Hall (renamed GWC Brown Memorial Hall). The surrounding neighborhoods, largely middle-class and African American, played a vital role in supporting the fledgling institution. This grassroots support helped NSU grow into a respected university that remained closely tied to the needs and aspirations of its community.

## Community Roots Grow

“The foundations of Norfolk State came out of the community,” Newby-Alexander reiterated. “It came from people who wanted to make a difference within their community, for society in general, and since that time, Norfolk State has continued to do just that. It has attracted people who want to make a difference in the community.”

When Norfolk’s Library refused to accept any history or documents about African Americans, Norfolk State became the place where the community’s history was stored and protected.



During the Civil Rights Movement, NSU’s impact extended beyond education. Faculty members contributed research to support attorneys like Henry Marsh and Oliver Hill in their legal battles against segregation. Students also took part in protests and demonstrations, actively engaging in the fight for justice and equality.

Dr. Newby-Alexander believes that understanding NSU’s history is essential to appreciating its mission and future. “We must really understand the purpose of the University... Norfolk State and the community are one in the same,” she said. She highlighted the contributions of early leaders such as Scott and Brooks, who helped shape the university’s identity and laid the foundation for its continued growth.

She also spoke to the university’s resilience and its role as a symbol of hope. “Norfolk State will continue to be an institution that is embedded in the community and will not only continue to survive but thrive,” she said. “Norfolk State University has and will always be an integral part of the community and a beacon of hope against bigotry and institutionalized racism.”

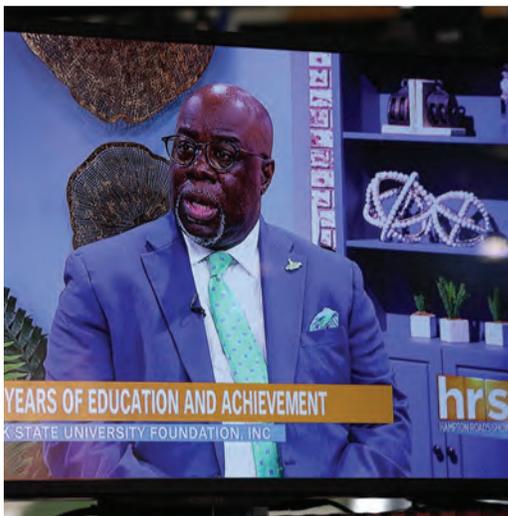
As NSU continues to evolve, Dr. Newby-Alexander’s reflections serve as a reminder of the university’s powerful origins and its ongoing commitment to education, equity, and empowerment. Her words underscore the importance of preserving and honoring the legacy of institutions like NSU, which were built not just with bricks and mortar, but with vision, courage, and community spirit. **B**

# Happy 90th Anniversary



Norfolk State University celebrated its 90th Anniversary on September 18, 2025. Celebrating the most significant milestone in the University's history deserved nothing less than to be spectacular.

The weeklong landmark occasion was filled with legends, including Martin Luther King III and Patti LaBelle, and a record-shattering fundraising campaign that well exceeded its \$90-million goal. (Now standing at more than \$144 million.)



# Thank You!

*For your unwavering support to the  
Now Is Our Time  
Comprehensive Campaign.*

*With your generosity, our university was able to raise  
over **\$147 million** for the students and programs  
at Norfolk State University.*

*Thank you for investing in the present and future of NSU.  
This campaign was just the beginning...*

**BEHOLD!**



[www.nsu.edu](http://www.nsu.edu)

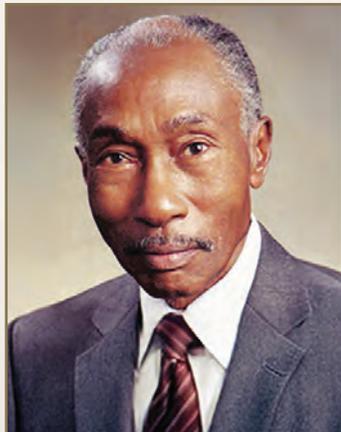
**NOW IS OUR TIME**

THE CAMPAIGN FOR  
NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY





# 90 People Who Had an Impact.



**Samuel F. Scott**  
First Director of the Norfolk Unit  
of Virginia Union University

*For ninety years, Norfolk State University has been propelled by remarkable individuals whose passion, leadership, and commitment elevated its mission. As we honor 90 of these outstanding contributors, we celebrate their dynamic impact on NSU's growth, spirit and enduring legacy. Please scan the QR code to read more about each individual. ►*



**Note:** While we highlight 90 individuals for their contributions to Norfolk State University, we recognize that countless others have also left a meaningful mark. We extend our sincere gratitude to all who have supported, strengthened and advanced NSU throughout its history.



**Lyman B. Brooks**  
President



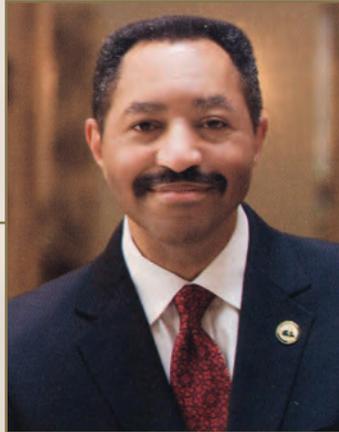
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President



**Javaune Adams-Gaston**  
President

# 90 People Who Had an Impact.



Howard Adams



Paul I. Adams



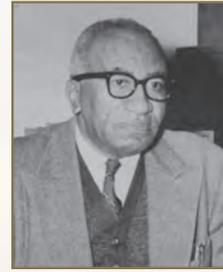
Lamont Bagby



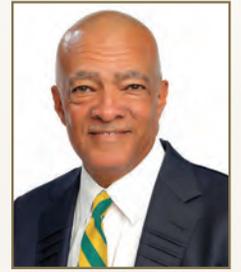
Carthene Bazemore



Tommy Bogger



GWC Brown



Kim Brown



LaVonda Brown



Curtis Bunn



Don Carey



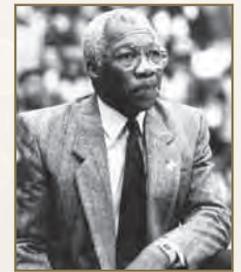
Glenn Carrington



Leon Carter



Maia Chaka



Charles Christian



Brehanna Daniels



Sandra J. DeLoatch



Derek Dingle



Winston Douglas



Ronald Dozoretz



Julian Earls



St. Paul Epps



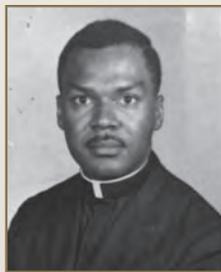
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Emery Fears



Valente Frazier



Milton Gay



Kenneth Giles



Lisa Godley



Korie Grayson



Mona Gunn



Geoffrey Guns



James Harris



Dolline Hatchett



Cliff Hayes



Carl Haywood



Devon Henry



Michelle Hill



April Holmes



Jedidah Isler



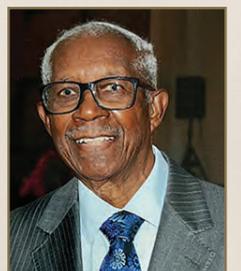
Quiara Jackson



Raymond Jackson



Louis Jaffe



Grady James

# 90 People Who Had an Impact.



Ashley Jones



Chloe Jones



Keith Jones



Robert Jones



Tamara Jones



Candi Mundon King



Alan P. Krasnoff



Marvin Lake



Page Laws



Earl Lee



Melvin O. Marriner



Jonathan A. Mason Sr.



William T. Mason Jr.



Lorie McCowan



L. Louise Lucas



Marty Miller



Yvonne B. Miller



Nathan McCall



"Mr. Spartan"



Wilbur Myrick



Cassandra Newby-Alexander



Mikhail Noginov



Kyle O' Quinn



Shelvee Osborne



LaWarren Patterson



Clifford Porter



Robert Randall



Tim Reid



Michael D. Rochelle



James Savage



Robert Scott



James Staton



Chester & Fran Steward



Melvin & Patricia Stith



Ethelyn R. Strong



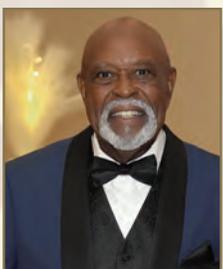
Larry Vickers



Anthony Walters



William Ward



Nat Warren



Aurelia T. Williams



Melody Webb



# LEARNING, EARNING AND GIVING BACK

## *A legacy in motion*

BY ANTHONY TILLMAN '11

Some lives are shaped by opportunity; others are shaped by moments. Devon Henry's journey belongs to the latter, unfolding from a first-generation college student stepping onto Norfolk State University's campus into a leader whose choices continue to echo far beyond it. At 90 years strong, NSU continues to shape leaders, and Devon Henry's story shows what that legacy looks like in motion.

Henry describes his early years as a time that required him to grow up quickly. Raised in neighborhoods shaped by hip-hop, sports, and pressure, he learned responsibility early. His mother, whom he calls his "shero," had him when she was 16 years old, raised three sons, mostly as a single mother, and Henry often stepped into a caretaker role while still a child himself.

Watching her sacrifices, grit, and belief in herself left a lasting imprint. "Where you start is not where you have to end," he says, a lesson that continues to drive him today.

He arrived on Norfolk State's campus in the late 1990s as the first in his family to attend college, a young man from Newport News certain of himself and unaware of how deeply the community would shape him.

"I never lacked confidence, but purpose is different," he says. "Norfolk State helped me find my direction in life. It is where I learned to be a servant leader. It is where I met my wife. And it is where people genuinely cared about me and my well-being."

### Where Identity Took Shape

Norfolk State became the environment where confidence evolved into calling.

"When I think about Norfolk State, I think about resilience," he says. "I think about Norfolk State giving folks a chance when no one else would. It was a vehicle of hope in a community that you did not understand the impact until you got there."

CONTINUED ON PG. 18





For Henry, the campus became the place where identity was not assigned but discovered.

“Norfolk State means to me a place where you get to discover yourself,” he says. “A place where you’re not judged, but you’re given the tools to be great, as long as you want to use them.”

He smiles when he thinks back to who he was then.

“I was a young whippersnapper from Newport News who thought he was on top of the world but didn’t know nothing about nothing,” he says. “I was the first person in my family to go to college, not really knowing what to expect, but knowing I needed to make the most out of the opportunity.”

Those early years were fueled by curiosity and connection.

“I was always a sociable guy. I was always at every party, sometimes to my detriment, but I was a wide-open kid willing to embrace everything Norfolk State had to offer.”

In the Spring of 1998, Henry joined the Delta Zeta Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. His leadership path within the organization would later include service as the 26th Eastern Regional Director and initiation into the Distinguished Service Chapter, the fraternity’s highest honor.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in biology in 2000 and working at General Electric, Henry reached the point where preparation met conviction. In 2006, he launched Team Henry Enterprises, LLC, after saving every dollar he could and walking into the Small Business Administration with a business plan and a belief in himself.

“I’d always wanted to start my own business, but I needed to figure out how to do it,” he says. “So I saved up every dollar that I had and went to the SBA and said, ‘Here’s the business plan, here’s what I need, and here’s what I have. I’m gonna let it all ride.’”

That mindset became the foundation of his career.

“I’m an all-in type person. I don’t dip my toe in. I’m jumping in head first. I don’t approach things like there’s a plan B. With Team Henry, this has to win. This has to succeed. Failure is not an option.”

Team Henry grew to be one of the largest black owned general contracting firms in Virginia, building schools, offices, hospitals, and memorials that pay homage to our ancestors. In 2015, Henry founded TH Logistics, a logistics company managing supply chains for Fortune 500 clients with more than a million square feet of warehouse space nationwide.

Growth brought opportunity. Opportunity brought responsibility.

## Opportunity Brought Responsibility

Henry’s work placed him at the center of moments that reshaped communities, including the removal of more than two dozen Confederate monuments across the country.

“I didn’t take it on thinking I was going to make history,” he says. “I took it on because it was the right thing to do, it was the right time to do it, and nobody else was going to step up to do it.”

The work demanded more than courage.

“I was wearing a bulletproof vest. I had 24-hour security. People were literally threatening my life. I was on site removing twenty-four-thousand-pound objects with my head on a swivel.”

Each removal carried the same weight.

“The twenty-third removal felt just as heavy as the first.”



Above: Devon Henry directs one of the many monuments removed by Team Henry Enterprises, LLC.



Above: Devon Henry’s college days as a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.



Above: President Adams-Gaston and Devon Henry, serving as rector for Norfolk State University Board of Visitors.

Through every chapter of his career, Norfolk State remained home. In, 2016, that connection came full circle when Henry became rector, affectionately known as “Big Rector,” of the Board of Visitors.

“Reflecting on my time serving on the Board of Visitors, I consider it one of the greatest honors of my life,” he says. “I had to balance being an engaged alumnus with serving the Commonwealth. Those perspectives can differ. Once you sit in that seat, particularly as Rector, every decision must be guided by what best supports student success and serves Virginia.”

What stays with him most are the people. “I’ll always treasure the relationships I built with incredible, selfless leaders,” he says. Hiring Norfolk State University’s 7th president, Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston, stands among his proudest moments.

Commencements became part of the work. “Not one,” he says when asked if he ever missed a ceremony. “Watching students walk across that stage, seeing the joy on their face, the shoes they were wearing, that was pure magic. Those moments remind you why this work matters.”

## What Grounds Him

When asked what truly brings him joy, Henry points to the moments that anchor his life.

“It’s really rooted around family,” he said, describing the laughter of his children and the sound of everyone gathered around the dinner table. “That sound... brings me joy.” Even while traveling, he finds peace in quiet reflections. Looking out airplane windows reminds him that “God is in the details.”

His memories reach back to childhood, including the smell of his mother coming home from McDonald’s after long shifts. “That smell when I was a kid... knowing that my mom was home... that’s a moment in my life that I don’t forget, and it keeps me grounded.” He smiled remembering dancing to Michael Jackson for dollar bills and singing gospel hymns in church.

Asked to look far beyond the present, Henry reflects on what it means to lead during a time defined by tension, uncertainty, and social fracture. His answer does not center achievement or status. It centers intention.

“I just hope when my name is mentioned, they say I used my gifts for good,” he says. “If that was to lift up someone, to support someone, to build something honoring our ancestors, and just to have been courageous... I hope that they look at the gifts and say he used those gifts for good.”

On July 14, 2025 Norfolk State University renamed its iconic campus landmark the Devon M. Henry Communications Tower. Standing before alumni, family, and friends, Henry reflected on the institution that shaped him.

“I never lost sight of the love and all the joy that Norfolk State has brought me,” he said. “This place that has produced incredible entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, social workers, teachers, school superintendents, and so many other change makers, I want to invest in that institution.”

His investment included the creation of an endowment to support students pursuing STEM degrees.

When Henry talks about the tower, he returns to the themes that have guided his life: hope, inspiration, and responsibility to the next generation.

“Hope is a big thing for me; hope and inspiration. When I think about the tower, my prayer is that it inspires others to do more for others.”

For Henry, the tower was never part of a personal checklist.

“I never woke up one day and said, ‘I’m gonna have a tower named after me.’ In a million years, I never would have thought this was gonna happen,” he says. “I can’t keep questioning the blessings. There’s a reason why God is enlarging my territory, and I just hope I continue to do good with the gifts that I’ve been blessed with.”

More acclaim arrived on December 6, 2025, at Norfolk State University’s 115th Commencement, when the university awarded Devon Henry an honorary doctoral degree in recognition of excellence, service, and integrity.

“I literally dropped to my knees. It was very emotional. I had no idea I was even being considered.”

For Henry, the moment represented something deeper than recognition. “It’s the culmination of my love story with Norfolk State,” he says. “The years of board service, the years of being generous with the resources God has blessed me with, being the best ambassador I can be for a place that means the world to me and my family.”

He then pauses.

“God is amazing,” he says. “And He is in the details.” **B**

“I never lost sight of the love and all the joy that Norfolk State has brought me.”

—Devon Henry



Above: Devon Henry with his wife Angela, and children Devon Jr. and Taylor.



# ALUMNI PHILANTHROPY: *A Glimpse at Alumni Supporters Through the Decades*

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

**T**he founders of Norfolk State University, a group of concerned citizens, religious organizations, doctors, lawyers, educators and others who recognized the need for an institution of higher learning in the region, pooled their financial resources, expertise, knowledge and gumption to make a dream reality. Those founding fathers and mothers poured blood, sweat and tears into the birth of Norfolk State . . . and they scraped and combined monies from their personal funds to forge that dream.

“People had money during the Great Depression. They just didn’t have a lot of money,” observed Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, endowed professor of Virginia Black History at Norfolk State University. “Here in Norfolk, we weren’t impacted like other places and that was because of the Navy. The Navy

helped keep a lot of people from losing their jobs. In 1933, we started to really feel the impact of the depression in the area and that’s why the Work Progress Administration (WPA) was so important.”

Newby-Alexander continued to discuss the contributions of the university’s founders and added, “During the depression you had a lot of physicians working hard making sure they saw their patients. They didn’t have much money, and the patients didn’t have much. But among the founders were individuals that had money. Churches didn’t collapse because people still gave. With the churches, physicians, social workers, and other professionals involved, they created finance and scholarship committees. They had many different committees that provided seed money for students who had the potential to go to school. Tuition was

\$100. Just imagine if you could go to school right here in your community. You could stay home, work and go to school. That was a big advantage.”

Clifford Porter Jr., vice president for University Advancement and chief university fundraiser, admits that fundraising is vastly different in modern times. “Fundraising during the Great Depression was certainly as difficult a challenge as any fundraiser will ever experience. Making the case to support an institution, a founding institution at that, when people were challenged to meet their own basic individual needs is a tough proposition. Those who committed to give to NSU during that time surely had a vision for a better future,” Porter admitted. “That type of investment in the future shows that the founders knew a special bridge to a brighter future was just around the corner. Boy, did they get that one right!”

Norfolk State University’s philanthropic research indicates that Spartan pride has a major impact on giving. Porter affirmed, “Pride and an opportunity to make an impact have been the chief drivers of financial support at NSU. Alumni are proud of what they see transpiring at the university and they want to be a part of the phenomenal growth that the institution is experiencing,” Porter notes that major shifts in giving also occurred after two capital campaigns at NSU. The recent **Now Is Our Time: The Campaign for Norfolk State University** has realized a number of new donors and unprecedented amounts of giving. “The first campaign for Norfolk State was held over 30 years ago and it too was marked by increases in the number of donors and amounts given to support the institution. Ernie Hodge was the first alumnus to commit to a \$1 million donation during the first campaign.”

Norfolk State alumni believe in the University and in the high quality education provided. Alumnus Joseph Wiggins, who today is a retired 51+ year career veteran educator and school administrator, has contributed more than \$100,000 and earned his place in the Lyman Beecher Brooks Society. “I am deeply indebted to my alma mater. I cannot forget the invaluable role that NSU has played in my life. For that reason, I have a sincere desire to give back to the institution that enabled me to become a successful school leader and a success in each of my endeavors.”\*

Alumnus Markus Gillis reflects on his first time giving to NSU. He says he thought about that first donation of \$2,500 in December 2019. “I



Joseph Wiggins

wanted to help a student in need, but then I quickly realized that I wanted to do more.” He remembers a time when he and fellow students did not have the financial support to pay for tuition or books. That thought led him down the path of establishing a business and technology endowed scholarship fund. After working with staff in University Advancement, “our endowed scholarship was established July 10, 2020. The fund will be utilized exclusively to provide financial assistance to full-time, degree-seeking students enrolled in the computer science or business programs at Norfolk State University,” Gillis proudly stated. “My goal is to help students realize their dreams.”\*

Colonel James Whitehead qualified to join the



Marcus Gillis

Lyman Beecher Brooks Society for lifetime giving back in 2020. “I’ll continue to give.” He created the Colonel (Ret.) James W. Whitehead Jr. Ideal Spartan Finance Scholarship which supports scholarships in the School of Business and athletics. “I also continue to help fund scholarships in the ROTC department through my membership in the NSUAA Military Alumni Chapter. I would say to potential donors, especially my former teammates and my Omega Psi Phi Fraternity brothers, to give what you can and sustain it each succeeding year. Every donation is supportive of the common good . . . and that common good is supporting our students.”\*

Earlie and Charolette Horsey, alumni and retirees from Norfolk State University, shared a common goal and theme of alumni giving. “We set up our scholarship fund to help students that may be having a difficult time financially. We intentionally established the fund to help ‘C’ students . . . average students. ‘A’ and ‘B’ students already have a lot of financial aid assistance. We wanted to give back just to help,” said Charolette Horsey.

“Why do I give to Norfolk State?,” repeated alumnus LaVoris Pace when asked about his continued support of the university. “Alumni giving is the lifeblood of the university. My giving expresses my gratitude for the whole HBCU experience. The nurturing, mentoring and believing in its students,” said Pace, who worked on one of the committees for the Now Is Our Time campaign. Colonel James Whitehead just wanted to be a part of this fundraising effort. Norfolk State University has always seen the future in its students.”

“Giving to NSU is a sure thing,” Porter acknowledges. “Those who invest in Norfolk State will always see a positive return. Contributions to our students will ensure that they have a real chance at success. When you see a student cross the stage at commencement and then return later as a professional, you know that the investment paid off. Alumni giving plays a significant role in our bottom-line fundraising goals. Philanthropists, foundations and corporations always want to know what level of support alumni provide to NSU. It’s not so much about the amount given, but the number and percentage of alumni contributors.”

Alumni highlighted in this article represent several decades of NSU graduates. Although the

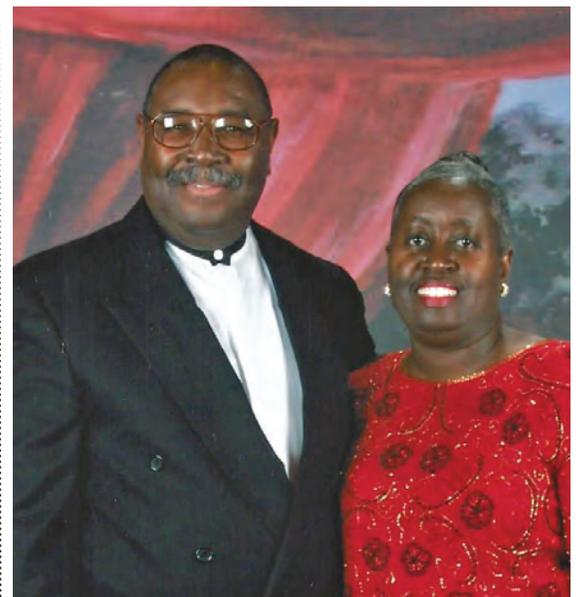


Colonel James Whitehead

business of philanthropy has indeed changed over the decades, one thing has not changed

. . . Norfolk State University alumni still believe in the Green & Gold, and exuberantly and unselfishly give back to support the next generations of students. “That’s the key, alumni giving back to support at least one student. That will keep our pipeline full of talented individuals who will add to the Norfolk State success story,” Porter concluded. **B**

*\* Quotes are from Norfolk State University alumni interviewed for previous issues of the university’s Report on Philanthropy.*



Earlie and Charolette Horsey



# NEW BUILDING TO SHAPE FUTURE

*of Immersive Science Education and Collaboration*

“It is another example of how Norfolk State University is building for the future of our students, our university and our community.”

—Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston

Norfolk State University, in partnership with Work Program Architects (WPA), SmithGroup, and S.B. Ballard Construction broke ground on its \$118 million New Science Building on April 18, 2025. The ceremony marked the beginning of construction on a cutting-edge facility that will shape the future of immersive science education and collaboration on NSU’s campus.

The new 131,376-square-foot building will replace the Roy A. Woods Science Building and house state-of-the-art teaching and research labs, classrooms, a planetarium, a greenhouse, makerspace, and student-centered collaboration spaces. The facility will feature a flexible, forward-looking design that reflects NSU’s vision for the future.

“The New Science Building will be a space where our students can discover, innovate and be inspired,” said Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston, President of Norfolk State University. “It is another example of how Norfolk State University is building for the future of our students, our university and our community.”

The building was designed to foster immersive science, student-centered support, and meaningful collaboration with the community. While embracing leading-edge design and visionary architecture, the project remains grounded in fiscal responsibility. It is targeting LEED Gold certification and is scheduled for completion in Fall 2027.

“This project puts scientific research and education on display in an environment that is inclusive, interactive and energizing,” said Mel Price, CEO of WPA and principal-in-charge of the project. “We’re honored to be part of such a visionary and student-focused effort.”

The facility’s siting and landscape design will also play a key role in its mission. Designed to frame both a public-facing gateway and a student-focused entry point, the building connects to the surrounding campus and activates the Ohio Creek watershed with a restored outdoor learning environment.

“The New Science Building is designed to foster discovery and collaboration at every level — between faculty and students, across departments and with the broader community,” said Lori Cappuccio, Vice President and lead in the higher education studio at SmithGroup. “Its flexible, future-ready spaces will support both academic excellence and real-world problem-solving.”

The university’s biology, chemistry, and physics departments will be housed in the new building, as well as the Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences (DNIMAS). From the outset of the project, NSU sought to bring together multiple scientific disciplines under one roof to cultivate the next generation of scientists.

“This project’s success is a reflection of the strong partnership between NSU, WPA, SmithGroup, SB Ballard Construction Company, and the many engineers and consultants who have shaped it through the challenges of the pandemic, from concept to reality,” says Erin Agdinaoy, associate principal at WPA and project manager on the New Science Building.

The April 18 groundbreaking marked the beginning of a transformational new chapter in the university’s academic journey.

“We are excited about the New Science Building,” says Dr. Michael Keeve, Dean of College of Science, Engineering & Technology. “This building will showcase science with its transformative architecture, thereby inspiring students to believe and achieve their goals. It will encourage and empower collaborations between faculty, students, and the community to build a brighter future.” **B**



“This project puts scientific research and education on display in an environment that is inclusive, interactive and energizing.”

—Mel Price, CEO of WPA and principal-in-charge of the project.



# ALUMNUS SETS GOAL

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



## of Leveling Playing Field in Entertainment Industry

If you were to look up the word passion in the dictionary, a picture of Norfolk State University alumnus Jamal Y. Speakes would pop up. The Philadelphia native was determined to complete his education at Norfolk State and worked between academic years to pay for the next year's tuition. "After my sophomore year, I started paying for school myself. You know, finish one semester, get the money, then go back for the next semester. So I was pretty much in and out," Speakes admitted. "But I knew if I went back to Philly, I would never come back to Norfolk State to finish up my degree." The now-famed instructor of filmmaking received his degree from NSU in 1998.

Speakes majored in English and minored in Theatre. "Dr. Annie Perkins was the one always in my ear telling me if you major in English, you can always do something because it tells people that you have a high function for literacy in reading and writing," he remembered. Over the years, Speakes developed a passion not only for the written word but also for teaching others the art of filmmaking. "I began my career as a theater teacher at Dorsey High School in Los Angeles and taught theater for 15 years. In 2017, I wrote a hip-hop urban West Side Story called Phi'LA The Musical. And when I wrote the script and saw my words on the stage with my student actors, I decided I'm going to continue writing these film plays." Capturing the action on stage on film ignited something in Speakes. He has taught filmmaking for the last 11 years.

Speakes teaches film at the Valley Oaks Center for Enriched Studies (VOCES) in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. It's the second-largest school system in the country, enrolling more than 600,000 students, including adult learning and vocational centers. "I teach my students all the below-the-line jobs from idea creation to postproduction. They learn everything. How to create the idea, write the script, shoot the film, camera use, how to edit the film and then we screen the films here at school." Additionally, students get hands-on experience in sound engineering and set production. His latest venture, Clear Vision Studios, is a multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art, comprehensive film studio on the VOCES campus. He explains the studio's concept, "We just finished building and modifying three classrooms into an ADR

post-production facility where students can now record voiceovers and do musical scoring for their films.” One of the rooms is a 58-seat screening theater, and the third room is a 40-seat editing lab. “Funding was provided via a federal government program as a part of the Career Technical Education or CTE. It's like the trade skills classes back when we were in high school.”

Speakes is already witnessing the transformative effects of the program on his students.

“I have a former student who won an Emmy for the George Floyd episode of Sesame Street. I've got a couple of students who have graduated from UCLA film school. Another former student is working at Netflix,” he proudly shared. Speakes' overarching goal: that Clear Vision Studios will provide culturally diverse students with real-world experience and practical skills to work in the filmmaking industry. “It's a workforce development training center to provide equitable access for students of different social, economic and/or disadvantaged backgrounds,” Speakes observed. “We've already seen the impact of the project. The goal is to economically change the makeup of the San Fernando Valley and bring the industry back to Los Angeles, home where it should be. Here at VOCES, we have an actual pipeline of dedicated and talented young adults ready for the workplace in the film industry. Hollywood is slowly making its way back to LA, and we want to be ready instead of getting ready,” Speakes asserted. “Our goal is to be the space where students of all backgrounds can come in, not be turned away because of the color of their skin or their academic or knowledge level. You know, embrace them, accept them and build them up.”

**“These young people are so very important.” B**

**“It's a workforce development training center to provide equitable access for students of different social, economic and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.”**

**– Jamal Speakes**



**Top:** Mr. Speakes' Advanced Film students shooting an episode of the VOCES Cooking Show with the Culinary Arts Dept.



Jamal Speakes and Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Alberto Carvalho at the Clear Vision Studios Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.





# LEON H. CARTER: FROM BROWN HALL TO NABJ HALL OF FAME

By A'LAUREN GILCHRIST & ALAUNA MARABLE

As a young journalist, Leon H. Carter always knew he would be a boss in the sports journalism field, and his career has proven just that. A pioneer in his industry, Carter, who previously earned the prestigious Red Smith Award in 2022, was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists Hall of Fame on August

8, 2025, becoming the first Norfolk State University alumnus to receive the honor.

"It's been a tremendous reception to that honor," Carter said. "I knew I had an impact on people, on journalists, on Sports Institute alums. I really didn't know the magnitude of that impact until I got this honor, because there were 50 people who were in Cleveland to see me accept the award, and that was the largest contingent for all the other honorees."

The moment marked a full-circle achievement for Carter, who grew up on a farm where he rarely saw people who looked like him in positions of influence. "I did not see a Red Smith Award winner. I did not see an NABJ Hall of Famer. I didn't see a sports editor at the *New York Daily News*. I didn't see an *ESPN* vice president," he said. "You don't see those things when you grow up. All those things happened to me, so I am honored, thrilled, humbled and blessed that those things have occurred."

When Carter visited Norfolk State University as a high school student, he knew he had found his place. "When I went to Norfolk State on a visit and walked into the student newspaper, I saw African Americans putting out a student newspaper. I saw African Americans editing, writing headlines," he said. "And I said, 'Okay, this is where I want to be.' You become what you see others do, and so I'm hoping that this inspires others to continue to work hard and to continue to achieve great things."

Carter joined *The Spartan Echo* Newspaper on his second day as a student and remained there until graduation. "*The Spartan Echo* was the beginning of my career, and I fell in love with it almost instantly," he said. "When I graduated in 1981, I knew I was going to be a boss someday or a supervisor someday. The beginning of it was at *The Spartan Echo*."

"Norfolk State prepared me for the real world," he added. "I knew I

was going to be a boss someday, or supervisor someday, and all those things fell into place later in life. But the beginning of it was at *The Spartan Echo*."

Throughout his journey, Carter carried valuable lessons he first learned on campus. "I learned at an early age, in order to be successful, you have to prioritize," he said. "You have to discipline yourself, use your time wisely, and pick and choose when it's time to work, when it's time to write stories, when it's time to study, and when it's time to have fun."

Carter also believes that failures are essential to growth. "Sometimes you learn more from a defeat than from a victory," he said. "A lot of people pat you on the back, and that's good, but a lot of times you learn more from a defeat because you study it and you learn about yourself."

For Carter, the foundation of any success begins with confidence, and with this, he encourages students to believe in their capabilities. "The one thing that is so important in our industry and pretty much in any industry is that you have to believe in yourself," he said. "Just because you got rejected doesn't mean you aren't qualified; it just means they picked somebody else. You have to believe in yourself and keep looking forward, even in defeat."

Now, as a respected figure in sports media, Carter remains passionate about the future of journalism, especially for students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. "I think the numbers of (African Americans) have improved, but they're still not good enough," he said. "We have to continue to talk to journalism students at HBCUs and tell professors to strengthen our journalism programs. We must adapt to the ever-changing digital world, because those skills are needed and journalism programs at HBCUs are needed now more than ever before."

Carter points to *ESPN's* social media strategy as a model for connecting with students today. "One of the things *ESPN* did was put a shorter version of SportsCenter on Snapchat, and you have two million young people looking at it," he explained. "You have to study how young people are consuming news, then adapt in a way where you don't forget your older audience."

After decades of leadership, innovation and constant impact, Carter hopes his story continues to motivate others, especially current Spartans. "You can go from growing up on a farm to being in the NABJ Hall of Fame. But the one thing you have to do is work hard, and when I say work hard, I mean not giving 100%, but 110%, because others are giving 100%. That is your competition." Leon H. Carter's legacy lives on through the hundreds of students he has mentored, the programs he's created, and the doors he's opened for others in sports journalism, proving that the path from Brown Hall can indeed lead all the way to the Hall of Fame. **B**

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# 2025-26 NORFOLK STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

## JANUARY

- Jan. 3 - @ North Carolina Central \*
- Jan. 10 - @ Delaware State \*
- Jan. 12 - vs. Maryland Eastern Shore \*
- Jan. 17 - @ South Carolina State \*
- Jan. 19 - vs. Elizabeth City State
- Jan. 24 - vs. Coppin State \*
- Jan. 26 - vs. Morgan State \*
- Jan. 31 - @ Howard \*

## FEBRUARY/MARCH

- Feb. 7 - vs. North Carolina Central \*
- Feb. 14 - vs. Delaware State \*
- Feb. 16 - @ Maryland Eastern Shore \*
- Feb. 21 - vs. South Carolina State \*
- Feb. 28 - @ Coppin State \*
- Mar. 2 - @ Morgan State \*
- Mar. 5 - vs. Howard \*

- HOME  
 - AWAY

\* = MEAC GAME

MEAC



2025-26 NORFOLK STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

# SCHEDULE

## JANUARY

- JAN. 3 - @ NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL\*
- JAN. 8 - vs. MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE\*
- JAN. 10 - @ DELAWARE STATE\*
- JAN. 17 - @ SOUTH CAROLINA STATE\*
- JAN. 22 - vs. MORGAN STATE\*
- JAN. 24 - vs. COPPIN STATE\*
- JAN. 31 - @ HOWARD\*

## FEBRUARY/ MARCH

- FEB. 7 - vs. NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL\*
- FEB. 12 - @ MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE\*
- FEB. 14 - vs. DELAWARE STATE\*
- FEB. 21 - vs. SOUTH CAROLINA STATE\*
- FEB. 26 - @ MORGAN STATE\*
- FEB. 28 - @ COPPIN STATE\*
- MAR. 5 - vs. HOWARD\*

= HOME = AWAY \* = MEAC GAME



#GOING4IT

# PIONEERING JUSTICE: HAMPTON'S FIRST BLACK COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY

By JALEESA MANLEY



**A**nton A. Bell '92 made history by becoming the first African American elected to the position of Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Hampton in Virginia in 2012.

He received his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1992 from Norfolk State and his Law Degree from North Carolina Central School of Law. Since beginning his tenure, Bell has implemented numerous initiatives, such as creating a task force litigation team that has vigorously targeted gun violence, gangs, and drugs to keep the streets of Hampton safe from violent criminals.

Bell says making history with his appointment was humbling. "All that I have accomplished is the direct result of the sacrifices of unnamed heroes who have shed their blood so that I may have opportunities they could never fathom to attain," he states.

The Norfolk native has devoted his legal career to public safety across Hampton Roads area. Before his election, Bell served the City of Hampton as a prosecutor of violent crimes, homicides, and child molestation cases, as well as the Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia as a member of the Peninsula Drug Task Force.

Through his work, he wishes to inspire his community to have hope. This lesson was told to him by his mother, Bettie Lucille Bell, who is also a Norfolk State graduate. "My mom was a teen mom with two children. She was encouraged to get off welfare and to return to school. With two young children, she acquired her Bachelor of Social Work from NSU and returned to secure her master's degree in urban affairs."

Attending Norfolk State impacted his career in many ways, laying out the foundation in legal studies and preparing him

for law school. "I had awesome professors like Dr. Elsie Barnes, who served as mentors and surrogate parents," he reflects. "As a student who had lazy study habits, they stretched me. My professors were tough. They never allowed me to settle or lose focus." He continues this sentiment by reflecting on his Constitutional Law class, where he learned how to analyze case studies and apply the law to fact patterns, which supported him during his first year of law school.

As Norfolk State celebrates its 90th anniversary, Bell seeks greater visibility for the university nationally and internationally. "I absolutely would not be in this space I currently occupy without the foundation I received from my alma mater. As such, I hope potential students have the same opportunity to discover the limitless possibilities available at Norfolk State."

"I love Norfolk State University. Above all, I am very proud of my alma mater and how it has evolved over the years. Behold...The Green and Gold!" **B**

"All that I have accomplished is the direct result of the sacrifices of unnamed heroes who have shed their blood so that I may have opportunities they could never fathom to attain."

— Anton Bell

By STEVEN E. OPFER

# ENGINEERING A DREAM

**C**lass of 2000 alumnus B.J. Butler's path from mechanical engineering to the world of acting and voice-over wasn't a straight line, but it was always guided by curiosity, persistence, and a deep sense of pride in where he came from.

"I arrived at NSU in the fall of 1995 after graduating from Brooklyn Technical High School," Butler says. "I remember going to Homecoming in 1988 with my aunt, Linda Archie '73, and absolutely falling in love with the festivity of it all. Once I got a scholarship, NSU it was."

He graduated with a bachelor's degree in mechanical design, a discipline that, in hindsight, still influences how he works.

"The same focus that helped me understand machines now helps me engineer emotion," he explains. "Sound, tone, pacing — it's all structure and rhythm."

At Norfolk State, Butler found not only his academic footing but also the community that helped shape his outlook. He joined the Epsilon Pi Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., which he credits with teaching him lessons in leadership and responsibility.

"My years on campus as a member of Alpha were key in helping me grow up and prepare for manhood in the real world," he recalls. "The day we probated on campus will never be forgotten."

His memories of NSU are filled with music and energy: the sound of the Spartan Legion at football games, the excitement of the dorm step shows and the Homecoming concerts.

After graduation, Butler followed a more traditional career path in engineering, but the pull of performance never left him.

"I never gave up on my passion to be an actor or entertainer; it's in

my blood," he says. "A friend in the business suggested voice work as an option, and it just made sense. I built a small recording space in my home and started learning everything I could."

He taught himself the technical side of voice acting, built his first demo from scratch, and slowly began booking jobs. Over time, that hobby evolved into a profession. Today, Butler's credits include *I'm Home* (2022), *Thespian* (2018), HBO's *The Wire* (2007), *Slavery and the Making of America* (2005), and other projects in film and television.

Represented by Buchwald Talent Agency, Butler has become a trusted voice for powerhouse brands including Nike, ESPN's Monday Night Football, CBS Sports, Target, Nissan, LinkedIn and a host of others. His signature sound — urban cool with an authentic, grounded tone — blends versatility and soul, allowing him to move effortlessly between commercial, narration, promo and character work.

"Creativity is structure and freedom combined," he says. "That's something I learned at Norfolk State — how to turn potential into precision."

He still carries the lessons of his alma mater into every project.

"That Spartan Pride still burns hot inside of me," he says. "I might not have been the 'most or best' in every category, but I never questioned my value. Having the courage and discipline of a Spartan has helped me in all my successes — and I want to make NSU proud."

Butler's story is one of reinvention — a reminder that the skills learned in one field can power success in another. From engineering labs to recording booths, he's built a career that bridges logic and creativity, proof that there's more than one way to engineer a dream. **B**

# NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY HOMECOMING 2025!

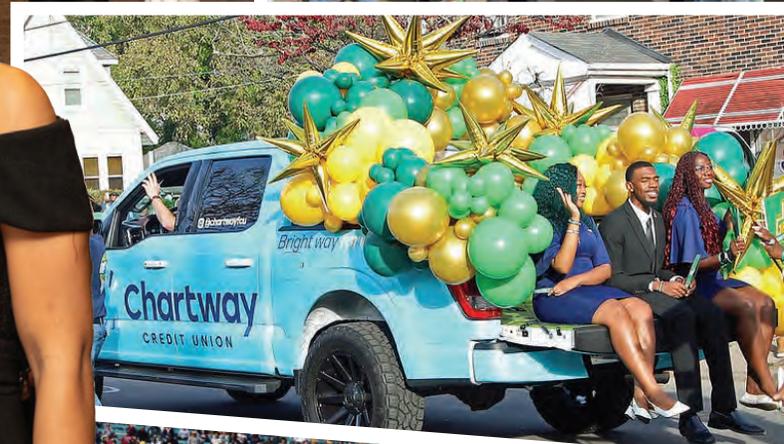
Alumni activities at the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College (VSC) began on November 28, 1949, when the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College Alumni Association was formally organized. At that time, one game during football season was designated as Homecoming. This family reunion has become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





## HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- A groundbreaking \$1 million gift from BOYD Gaming and a \$500,000 contribution from the Hampton Roads Community Foundation.
- Norfolk native and NBA Referee, Tony Brothers served as the grand marshal of the annual parade.
- The University welcomed one of its largest Homecoming crowds ever, with attendance surpassing 47,273 people.





# NSUAA HONORS

*Recognizing the Achievements of our Members*



On Thursday, October 23, the NSU Alumni Association, Inc., publicly recognized and honored members, and chapters of the alumni association who have supported its mission and goals.

◀ **Edwina Forrest '95** received the NSUAA's Alumnus of the Year Award. The Chapter Service Award was awarded to a diverse group of alumni who made significant contributions of time and service to their chapter or local community.



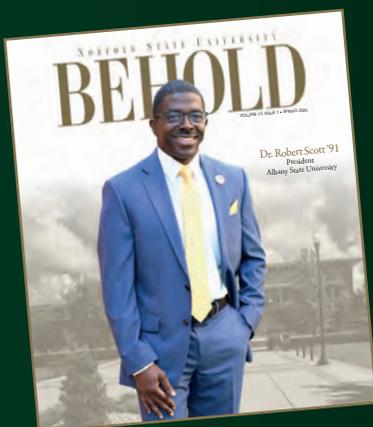
The final recognition of the evening was the crowning ▶ **Tracy D. Boone '88 & '12** as Ms. Alumni 2025-26.



The NSUA also honored one regional group with its Chapter of the Year Award. The recipient has consistently supported the mission and goals of the alumni association and donated their time and treasure to Norfolk State University.  
**The Chesapeake Alumni Chapter** was this year's recipient.

**The Chapter Service Award was awarded to a diverse group of alumni who made significant contributions of time and service to their chapter or local community.**

Congratulations to Tammie Addison-Thompson from Prince George's County MD Chapter; Melissia Artis from the Charlotte Alumni Chapter; Vanessa Copeland from the Virginia Beach Alumni Chapter; Yolanda Boyd Daughtry from the Portsmouth Alumni Chapter; Timothy Hargrove from the Alumni Band Chapter; Yvette Hawkins from the Norfolk Alumni Chapter; Stephanie Hicks from the Washington, DC Alumni Chapter; Lorraine Horsley from the Baltimore Metro Alumni Chapter; Dewan Lee from the MAC Foundation, Inc.; Walter Lindsay from the DNIMAS Alumni Chapter; Mark Morris from the GRNOVA Alumni Chapter; James & Bernadette Salter from the Raleigh Durham Alumni Chapter; Gregory Skeeter from the Atlanta Metro Chapter; Alisia Smith-Rucker from the Alumni Cheerleaders Chapter; Adrienne Turner from the Suffolk Alumni Chapter; Shawn Whitley from the Greater Philadelphia Alumni Chapter; Cheryl Williams from the Chesapeake Alumni Chapter; Damon Williams from the Pure Gold Alumni Chapter; and Davon Yonkers from the Richmond Alumni Chapter.



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Martin Luther King III provided words of peace and wisdom at the University's annual Founders Day Breakfast as Norfolk State celebrated its 90th Anniversary.