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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S BLACK AND LATINO ALUMNI MAGAZINE

Philanthropy in Action

OTHC Program graduates record
number of students





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with Otto

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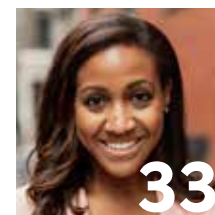
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On the Cover: OTHC 2024 graduates outside Chancellor Kent Suyverud's residence.

CONTENTS



Sharon Barner '79 Leads By Example..... 3

CBT 2024: Make Your Presence Felt..... 7

CBT Student Co-Chairs 10

Alumni Profiles 11

Student Spotlights 17

Campus News 22

Alumni News 30

In Memoriam 37



Rachel Vassel '91, G'21

Hello, Orange Family,

A month after this year's Coming Back Together (CBT) Reunion, I will celebrate my eight-year anniversary in Multicultural Advancement at Syracuse. Eight is my favorite number as it represents victory, prosperity and overcoming. When we consider the many ways in which our Orange community has been victorious, the prosperity we continue to see within our ranks, and the ways that we've overcome challenges in our lives, our country and our world, the number eight speaks to who we are and what we feel in this moment.

This year, we have the opportunity to come together during CBT to celebrate one another, support current students, reminisce about our time on campus, share our plans for the future and build our precious community. In recent years, there have been many reasons to lose hope in humanity, but this very special reunion is a bright spot for all of us. During CBT, humanity is on display, generosity abounds, inspiration is everywhere and Orange love is in the air. CBT is both the triennial gift that we give to the Syracuse campus community and the gift that the University gives back to us as alumni.

We believe that CBT 2024, our 14th reunion, will be the best CBT ever! I sincerely hope that you will do all that you can to return to campus to experience it. There's plenty in store for you, but you also have a role to play. Join us if you want to ensure that what we've built together is passed on. Be here to welcome in new community members, bring back those who've been away for too long or to honor those no longer with us. Come back to have the conversations that will make our beloved alma mater better. Encourage a student who needs to be seen. Make a donation that will create an impact. Let's show up to remember collectively how special this place is and how it has changed our lives.

I often think to myself, "who knew our time on campus would result in relationships that last a lifetime?" Oh, what a privilege it is to be Orange.

CBT registration is now open! We can't wait to see you all on campus this September.

With Orange Love,

Rachel Vassel '91, G'21
Associate Vice President
Office of Multicultural Advancement



Leading By Example

With a \$1 million gift, Sharon Barner hopes to support and inspire students who will someday reach back to help others.

The first time Sharon Barner '79 visited 119 Euclid, she understood why the facility had become a hub for Syracuse University's Black students from the moment it opened its doors.

"I felt like I was home. There was this sense of family, a community of people who are going to help keep you safe, mentally and physically, while helping you grow as a person," says Barner, vice president and chief administrative officer at Cummins Inc. and a Syracuse University trustee. "Students feel included when you have those kinds of spaces, knowing they have a village that supports them."

Barner says she also knew instantly the project was something she wanted to be involved with. Through a \$1 million gift, Barner

has secured the future of the space as a physical celebration of Black culture on campus. In recognition of that transformative gift, the University has renamed the property at 119 Euclid Ave. as the Barner-McDuffie House, in honor of Barner and her husband, Haywood McDuffie.

The Barner-McDuffie House is the first building on North Campus named by a Black family through philanthropic support. In addition to endowing 119 Euclid's future, the gift will enhance scholarship opportunities for first-generation and underrepresented students and strengthen cultural, academic and social student-led activities that promote Black culture.

"Sharon and Haywood are passionate benefactors, ambassadors and supporters of Syracuse University, and



Barner met students at the newly renamed Barner-McDuffie House in April for a lunch reception. A larger celebration to unveil new building signage will be held during Coming Back Together weekend.

especially our students,” says Chancellor Kent Syverud. “This gift allows the University to continue expanding meaningful opportunities for students to build a sense of belonging and community here at Syracuse. I am grateful to Sharon and Haywood for their generosity and vision.”

Barner is happy to be in a position to be able to make such an impact. “Syracuse University provided me the foundation for an incredible career,” she says. “Had it not been for the relationships I made and the education I received I could not have progressed in my career the way I did.”

Barner not only wanted to pay back for her success, but to help other students prepare for their own lives and careers. “I wanted to be able to reach back and make sure that they had the foundation that they needed, both through finding community and scholarship,” she says.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

Barner grew up in Twinsburg, Ohio, a nearly all-white town with a population of less than 20,000. Although Barner was a member of the National Honor Society and elected student government president, her high school guidance counselor told her he didn’t believe she could succeed at a predominantly white college.

“Syracuse University provided me the foundation for an incredible career. Had it not been for the relationships I made and the education I received I could not have progressed in my career the way I did.”

Barner was undeterred. She came to Syracuse University, seeking a more diverse institution that would help her grow and develop as an individual. “I was exposed to lots of different people from lots of different places, which I hadn’t had as part of my upbringing,” she says, “people from different states and countries who were white and brown and Black and Jewish and Muslim and Christian. I had this very broad spectrum of people to learn and grow from.”

She majored in psychology and political science and jumped into campus life. Barner was a cheerleader, wrote for *The Daily Orange*, joined Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and taught English as a second language to Spanish-speaking kids in the City of Syracuse. “I found and took advantage of a lot of the things the school had to offer that I didn’t find in a small town and was enriched as a result of that.”

Barner went on to earn a law degree from the University of Michigan School of Law, forging a career in the field of intellectual property law. She spent three decades as a corporate attorney, eventually heading the Intellectual Property Department of Foley & Lardner in Chicago, where she led a team of more than 200 lawyers. From 2009 to 2011, Barner served as deputy undersecretary of commerce for intellectual property and deputy director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office. She spearheaded 15 foreign missions in two years, meeting with leaders in government and academia about the impact of intellectual property on business innovation.

In 2012, she was recruited to serve as vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary at Cummins, an Indiana-based multinational known as a global leader in power technology. She was named chief administrative officer in 2021, responsible for nine critical global functions, including communications, marketing, government relations, corporate responsibility, product compliance, ethics, facilities, security and legal affairs.

While her success is undeniable, Barner says it wasn’t always an easy road. Because she felt so embraced and supported at Syracuse and Michigan, she was surprised to find not everyone responded to her in the same way when she started working. “Both being a woman and being Black in the legal world had its challenges, like two chains on your legs holding you back all the time,” she says.

But Barner had confidence in herself. “I knew I had a good education. I knew I was smart, and I knew how to get the job done,”

she says. “So, while it was tough being in the corporate world, I didn’t question whether I was going to be successful, only how I was going to be successful. I learned to deal with the challenge of people who thought I was not capable and found people along the way who would support, mentor and sponsor me.”

Even today, as one of the nation’s top executives, Barner says she’s still navigating corporate America as a Black female. “There are always people who think that you shouldn’t be in the room,” she says. “I don’t wear that on my sleeve, but I am conscious of it every day. And I walk into those rooms with confidence, based on my experience, my education and my delivery over the course of my career. And I hope to help other people navigate that same world.”

CREATING A CULTURAL HOME

The residential home at 119 Euclid Ave. was purchased by Syracuse University in 1938 for \$8,958 for use as a women’s residence hall. From the earliest days of Syracuse University, students were housed in cottages (for women) and houses (for men) adjacent to campus. 119 Euclid became Beebe Cottage, named for Minnie Mason Beebe, a graduate of the Class of 1890 and a member of the University faculty from 1900-1937. During her time as a French and history professor, Beebe organized the Kolledj Klan, an interdenominational Sunday school class for college men and women. This organization continued for 25 years and had a peak enrollment of 600 members. Beebe died in 1955.

Black students attending Syracuse in the late ’60s and early ’70s recall hosting communal Sunday dinners at Beebe Cottage. With the advent of high-rise dormitories, the cottage became

University administrative space in the 1970s, used through the years by the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics and the Department of Public Safety.

The transition of 119 Euclid to a space for Black culture came as the result of administrative efforts to make Syracuse University a more welcoming community for all of its students. Black students at Syracuse had been asking for a dedicated social space on campus, most notably during the #NotAgainSU protests in fall 2019 and spring 2020. The university’s inaugural Chief Diversity Officer, Keith Alford, secured the house for this purpose during his tenure.

From the outset, the University looked to create a facility that would celebrate the longstanding history, traditions and contributions of the Black community on campus. The space was extensively renovated with input from Black students, faculty and staff, under leadership from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Syracuse University’s Black alumni played a major role, supporting the project through naming gifts for spaces throughout the building.

Rachel Vassel ’91, G’21, associate vice president in the Office of Multicultural Advancement, led that fundraising effort, hoping that a Black donor would provide the naming gift. She is thrilled that Barner chose to create such a legacy. “When you think of all that Sharon has accomplished as a first-generation graduate of Syracuse University, it’s clear that the Syracuse experience is a game changer. It’s wonderful that she continues to think deeply about the needs of current students through her philanthropy,” says Vassel.

Three years after opening its doors, the space has become a vital part of the campus community, where students go to study, hang



The interior of the Barner-McDuffie House was designed with input from students to reflect Black culture and the contributions of Black students on campus through the years.

out between classes, hold organization meetings, cook food and share meals, and host game nights, speakers and other social events.

The Barner-McDuffie House is not an isolated project, but part of a greater University vision to foster an equitable, diverse and inclusive campus community. In November 2023, the University dedicated 113 Euclid Ave. as the new home of the Native Student Program, a culturally affirming gathering space for Indigenous members of the University community. “113 Euclid sends a message that Indigenous voices and perspectives matter at Syracuse University,” says Bailey Tlachac, program coordinator of the Native Student Program, “that Native students, faculty and staff are valued members of the Syracuse University community.”

Vassel is currently working on naming opportunities to help fund 113 Euclid.

A GIFT TO INSPIRE

The one thing Barner can point to as missing during her Syracuse University years was a gathering spot for Black students. “There wasn’t even a student center when I was there. Most students gathered socially for fraternity and sorority functions,” she says.

While the lack of such a space did not detract from her experience, Barner recognizes the importance of psychological safety and inclusion when you are a minority in a huge pool. “It’s not that students can’t fit into the larger University environment. I had an incredible experience,” she says. But having spaces such as the Barner-McDuffie House “make you feel like someone’s wrapping their arms around you to keep you safe and make you feel included and that you have a village that supports you. And that makes you ready for the rest of the world, which might not be so welcoming at all times.”

It’s all part of an effort to create a foundation that will help Black students succeed at Syracuse, not only by supporting this community space, but through bolstering scholarship support for first-generation and underrepresented students. As a first-generation college student herself, Barner understands the financial stresses families can face trying to pay for higher education. She acknowledges that the cost of attending a private university today is daunting, something she knows firsthand. In addition to being an alumna, Barner is also a Syracuse parent. Her son, Haywood McDuffie III, earned a bachelor’s degree in communication and rhetorical studies in 2017. Her daughter, Devin, will be a graduate student at Syracuse in the fall (Maxwell/Law).

Part of Barner’s gift supports the Our Time Has Come Scholarship Program. “I want these students to know that folks like me who come through Syracuse and who have been able to



The Barner-McDuffie House is a gathering spot for students, both informally and for organization meetings, lectures and programs.

use that educational platform to do well, we give back,” she says. “I want them to know that someone like me is out there rooting for them to be successful at Syracuse and is willing to invest what I was fortunate to be able to earn in my life back into them. And that they will do that for someone else one day.”

For Barner, that mindset is deeply ingrained in her upbringing. Her mother was a social worker. “No matter what we had, we had enough to share with others,” she says.

Barner describes her mother as her most important mentor. “I learned from her the value of hard work, integrity and passion for doing the right thing.”

Barner says she joined Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. largely because it was a community-based service organization. “When I had less to give, I gave less, but I’ve always had my time and talent to give,” she says.

That’s why Barner became a Syracuse University trustee and why she sits on other nonprofit boards. “I have a great sense of, ‘for those to whom much has been given, much is asked in return,’” she says. “And I do that proudly and with care.”

Like the example her mother set for her, Barner hopes to inspire future generations of Syracuse students who benefit from her philanthropy. “My whole goal is to support students who I hope one day will look back and understand the value of their Syracuse education and say, ‘I need to give back.’”

SAMMY CUEVA CALLS ON LATINO ALUMNI TO ATTEND CBT:

“IT’S OUR TIME. MAKE YOUR PRESENCE FELT.”

Since 1983, Syracuse University’s Black and brown alumni have returned to campus for a weekend of networking, fellowship, reconnection and giving back. For generations of Black alumni, the Coming Back Together (CBT) reunion has become a “do-not-miss” event to reconnect with old friends. While many Latino alumni attend and enjoy the reunion, it has not achieved the same level of prominence as it has with Black alumni, and CBT 2024 Co-Chair Zhamyr “Sammy” Cueva ’93 wants to change that.

Cueva, a New York City restaurateur and entrepreneur, says he accepted the co-chair role to continue to educate and entice Latino alumni to participate in CBT. He did not attend his first CBT himself until 2017, when he was awarded the Chancellor’s Citation for Excellence in Entrepreneurship. “The event was special and helped me reconnect with so many friends,” he says. “It gave me a new purpose to give back and help create those same memories for others.”

Cueva wants others to share in that experience, both the joy of reconnection and the great meaningfulness provided to

undergraduates of color by the mass influx of Black and brown alumni on campus. “I am calling out to my fellow Latinos to participate in this historic event,” he says. “Your presence alone will strongly impact the current students who have embarked on a similar journey. We have worked tirelessly to ensure the weekend is filled with meaningful events that will not only entertain you, but also remind you all of our true SU community influence, in the end, leaving an impression that will create lasting memories to come.”

“The event was special and helped me reconnect with so many friends. It gave me a new purpose to give back and help create those same memories for others.”

—SAMMY CUEVA ’93



Sammy Cueva



Each reunion is unique, with the Office of Multicultural Advancement challenged to think creatively and raise the stakes. By all accounts, CBT 2024, to be held Sept. 12-15, is shaping up to be the biggest and best yet. Although planning continues, organizers have locked in not-to-be-missed programming and talent to appeal to a wide audience. “We are working hard to plan a reunion that is exciting for younger alumni and for both our Black and Latino communities,” says Cueva, who is co-chairing the event with Tara Brown Favors ’95, chief human resources officer at Mutual of America.

“... join us in celebrating our rich culture and success as a community, while we reunite with past friends and create new bonds.”

—SAMMY CUEVA '93

Celebrities appearing at CBT 2024 include Roy Wood Jr., Ana Navarro, DJ Camilo, Angie Martinez and Erica Campbell.





Tara Brown Favors

CBT 2024 Sponsorships Available



Looking to support the 2024 Coming Back Together (CBT) Reunion in a bigger way? Help us to elevate the CBT experience by becoming a sponsor. Several CBT 2024 sponsorships are available to promote your brand, company, foundation or family name during the reunion weekend. Options include table sponsorships at the CBT Gala and programming sponsorships of individual events. For more information, contact Rachel Vassel '91, G'21, associate vice president of multicultural advancement, at revassel@syr.edu or Angela Morales-Patterson G'24, director of operations and partnerships, at aamorale@syr.edu.

Alumni should plan to arrive on Thursday to take advantage of Crew Time—dedicated meeting time for individual affinity groups such as sororities, fraternities and other clubs, followed by the CBT Celebrity Classic basketball game, which will bring back athletic stars from multiple eras to battle it out on the court.

Friday, the first full day of the reunion, has a packed schedule. In addition to career-focused networking sessions, there will be a reunion panel of the cast of *A Different World*, the popular television show that ran from 1987-1993, led by Darryl M. Bell '86, who played the role of Ron Johnson Jr.

"In 2021, we welcomed Darryl and Jasmine Guy to campus and Kadeem Hardison participated virtually," says Miko Horn '95, director of special events in the Office of Multicultural Advancement. "This year, we anticipate having all lead cast members on campus and are hoping that CBT will host an official stop on the *A Different World* Reunion Tour."

Chancellor Kent Syverud and his wife, Dr. Ruth Chen, will open the Chancellor's House for an evening reception, which will be followed by a comedy show at Goldstein Auditorium featuring Roy Wood Jr., best known for his regular his stand-up performances on *The Daily Show*. The night will culminate with an after-party featuring Heavy Hitter DJ Camilo, the international club king, along with a game night and spades tournament.

Saturday features a cookout on the Quad, dedication of the Barner-McDuffie House and CBT Live, a first-ever live, on-campus talk show, to be hosted by "The Voice of New York" Angie Martinez and featuring Ana Navarro from *The View* among the guests.

Because of the anticipated number of attendees, the CBT Gala will be held for the first time on the floor of the JMA Wireless Dome. "Given that this is the first reunion in a truly post-pandemic environment, we are expecting record numbers," says Angela Morales-Patterson G'24, director of operations and partnerships in the Office of Multicultural Advancement.

The Gala will showcase alumni philanthropic support of the Our Time Has Come Program, alumni success through presentation of the Chancellor's Citation Awards and will feature special entertainment, to be announced.

CBT 2024 will conclude on Sunday with brunch on the Quad and a worship service at Hendricks Chapel featuring the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble and alumni group TAG-BCCE, as well as Grammy-winning gospel vocalist Erica Campbell.

"I encourage you all to return and join us in celebrating our rich culture and success as a community, while we reunite with past friends and create new bonds," says Cueva. "It's our time. Make your presence felt. Go Orange!"



Meet Student Co-chairs Jada Knight and Sofia Rodriguez

As philanthropic ambassadors for the Our Time Has Come Program, OTHC Scholars Jada Knight '25 and Sofia Rodriguez '24, G'25 have spent the last seven months working with the Office of Multicultural Advancement staff to plan events, create social media content and interact with alumni of color, showcasing the impact of OTHC scholarships.

Now they will take that engagement one step further as student co-chairs of the 2024 Coming Back Together (CBT) Reunion.

"CBT is the biggest Black and brown event on campus," says Rodriguez. "Having so many alumni of color on campus at once is super inspiring and a great resource for students."

"I'm so honored and grateful that we were trusted with this position," adds Knight. "We are honored to serve as a bridge between students and alumni."

There's no question about why the dynamic duo was selected; both have packed as much into their undergraduate experiences as possible, while leaving an impact on their campus community.

Knight, from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, majors in television, radio and film at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. A Newhouse Ambassador, she also serves as event coordinator for both the National Association of Black Journalists and the Kalabash Dance Troupe and is a member of the Forever Orange Student Alumni Council and the Caribbean Student Association Street Team. She supports first-year students as both a resident advisor and peer leader of the First Year Seminar. She's spent parts of two summers interning in France, working on social media for the American Pavilion at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022 and as a production assistant on a documentary for the World War II Foundation in 2023. She spent spring 2024 studying in London but looks forward to being back on campus and CBT.

Rodriguez, from Miami Gardens, Florida, graduated in May with a degree in communication and rhetorical studies in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, serving as the Senior Class Marshal. She served as the president of Many2Come, an organization that supports first-generation students, and has served as a resident advisor and First Year Seminar peer leader. A former intern with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, she hopes for a career as a political communications consultant while representing Latino communities. But first, she will earn a master's degree in magazine, news and digital journalism from the Newhouse School, which she begins this summer.

Together, they organized From: Black Womxn, a panel discussion aimed to uplift BIPOC women within the Syracuse



Jada Knight



Sofia Rodriguez

"CBT is the biggest Black and brown event on campus. Having so many alumni of color on campus at once is super inspiring and a great resource for students."

—SOFIA RODRIGUEZ '24, G'25

University community, held on campus in April 2023.

But their connection runs deeper: Both are first-generation students who came to Syracuse University on full scholarships from the Posse Foundation, an organization that identifies and recruits diverse student leaders from public high schools in select cities and provides mentorship and financial support to attend partner colleges and universities.

Knight and Rodriguez say their goal for CBT is to increase student participation from across campus. "We want to get the word out beyond OTHC and work with student organizations such as the Black Student Union and Caribbean Student Association, because they will benefit from involvement, and we need student volunteers," says Knight.

"Having the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with alumni of color has been super beneficial to me," adds Rodriguez. "Our goal is to share that experience with as many students as possible."

JONATHAN MARTINEZ

Impacting Public Policy, Inside and Out

As a lobbyist in Washington, D.C., Jonathan Martinez '14 draws from his years of experience as a senior congressional staffer on Capitol Hill to help strategize public policy and craft legislation surrounding consumer health care products.

“One major priority is ensuring over-the-counter products remain affordable and accessible for working-class families by encouraging continued eligibility for tax exemptions. Currently, I focus on improving eligibility for toothpaste and multivitamins as tax-free health items, including the ability for people to use their Health Savings Accounts,” he says. “Another area of focus is leveraging federal and state development opportunities to ensure that we retain workforce and tax incentives in the areas where we manufacture to encourage workforce development and continued innovation. My favorite part of the job is being able to promote health and wellness methods backed by science.”

Martinez is head of U.S. federal affairs for Haleon, a global consumer health care company that produces dozens of products, ranging from Polident and Sensodyne to Tums and Advil. He joined the company in 2022, following eight years working in the office of Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez, D-N.Y., the last two as legislative director.

In that role, Martinez helped the congresswoman develop and fulfill the legislative agenda for her largely working-class district, also making sure that staff met deadlines for work on her committee assignments: financial services, natural resources and small business. “Our team collaborated extensively with civil society groups to support recovery and development in Puerto Rico following hurricanes Maria and Irma, and lead efforts on protecting immigrants fleeing political violence and natural disasters under the Temporary Protected Status program,” he says.

Martinez says working on the Hill was a unique and rewarding challenge. “Ultimately, I was satisfied with my legislative accomplishments during my years in public service and wanted to tackle a new challenge with the potential to positively impact people’s lives,” he says. “It had also become increasingly difficult to push good public policy from the inside because of the increasingly partisan nature of politics.”

Martinez grew up in Brooklyn, where Velázquez was his hometown representative in Congress. He came to Syracuse University with plans to become a diplomat in the Foreign Service, earning degrees in political science, international relations and policy studies, and learning French, Italian and Portuguese.

During his last semester, Martinez participated in the Maxwell-in-Washington program, securing an internship with the

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI). “The rest is history,” he says. “I started with Rep. Velázquez as her intern and worked my way up to serving as her legislative director. I’m very thankful to the Maxwell in DC program because I don’t think I would have ever considered my current career in government and politics, and eventually lobbying, if it had not been for that exposure.”

Martinez is now using the foundation learned from that experience to shape health care public policy from the outside by finding common ground on issues that people care about, especially in health care. “I believe that preventive care should be a priority for all Americans, regardless of party or zip code,” he says. “There are plenty of opportunities for us to work together in supporting better everyday health.”

In his role, Martinez also keeps tabs on economic and workforce development opportunities. Sensodyne toothpaste, for example, is manufactured in East Durham, New York, south of Albany. “When our consumers grab that tube of toothpaste at the pharmacy, the impact is shared by both consumers and the local economy in Upstate New York,” he says. “Being close to our customers is core to our values, and Haleon’s domestic footprint across the U.S. and Puerto Rico does just that.”

In addition to his professional role, Martinez serves on the advisory council for the CHCI. “I strongly believe in giving back and devote time to meet with young professionals who are just starting their careers. I review resumes and help them dream big about their legislative priorities and career aspirations.”

Similar to his lobbying work, Martinez says it’s an effort to make the public policy process accessible. “I always think back to the Athenian oath inscribed on the wall of the Maxwell Foyer,” he says. “It’s my way of leaving the spaces I occupy greater and better than how I found them.”



Jonathan Martinez

DOUG MELVILLE

Family History

In 1998, shortly after his Syracuse University graduation, Doug Melville '98 accompanied his parents to the White House to see his great-uncle Gen. Ben Davis Jr., commander of the famed Tuskegee Airmen, receive his fourth star, becoming the first Black general to receive his fourth star in retirement—30 years after he retired. Davis's father, Gen. Benjamin O. Davis Sr., had been America's first Black Army general and helped integrate the military.

Melville says his great-uncle, who had no children of his own and raised Melville's father from age 6, played a huge role in his life. "He bought me my first computer, my first car at 16 and paid for my college education at Syracuse," he says.

So, Melville couldn't have been more excited when, in 2011, he was invited to a premiere screening of George Lucas' *Red Tails*, a movie about the Tuskegee Airmen's contributions in World War II, starring Cuba Gooding Jr. and Terrence Howard in the role depicting his great-uncle.

But Melville's excitement was short-lived. To his dismay, the movie was an amalgamized account and used none of the real names or histories of the actual aviators. He left the movie theater that night with a mission: to research his family's story and make sure they were never invisible again.

A decade in the making, *Invisible Generals: Rediscovering Family Legacy, and a Quest to Honor America's First Black Generals* (Simon & Schuster, 2023) traces Melville's family history across five generations, from post-Civil War America to modern day, reclaiming their narrative in the process.

It's an impressive history. Louis Davis was one of the first Blacks to work for the U.S. government as an employee of the



Retired Gen. Ben Davis Jr. received his fourth star from President Bill Clinton.

Department of the Interior. His son, Benjamin O. Davis Sr., held combat, diplomatic and administrative roles for the U.S. Army over more than 50 years. In 1940, he became the first Black Army general. He served in Europe during the Second World War and was lead adviser to President Harry Truman on the desegregation of the military in 1948.

His son, Ben Jr., became the fourth Black cadet to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy. He eventually commanded the Tuskegee Airmen and became America's second Black general and the first in the U.S. Air Force, in 1954. His career included drawing the median line separating China from Taiwan ("the Davis line"), implementing security standards at commercial airports and leading the creation of a national speed limit, earning him the nickname "Mr. 55."

Ben Jr. raised his nephew Larry Melville—Doug's father—who became one of Connecticut's first Black superior court judges.

Melville came to Syracuse University thinking he would major in communications at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and that he could walk on to the football team as a field goal kicker.

Instead, he became a cheerleader (and for a time, Otto the Orange) and earned his bachelor's degree in marketing from



Ben Davis Jr. commanded the Tuskegee Airmen. He's shown here with his plane, *By Request*.



Melville was a presenter at the second CBT Business Conference, held at Lubin House in March, and will participate in a book signing event at the Coming Back Together Reunion.

the Martin J. Whitman School of Management. In the summer between his junior and senior years, Melville—through the friend of a friend—secured an internship with Quincy Jones in Los Angeles. “I was actually the last intern before he sold his record label back to Warner Brothers,” he says.

He returned to school with a passion to work in the music industry but was told there wouldn’t be a job for a year. As luck

would have it, he found a one-year position driving the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile, an opportunity offered annually to 18 recent college graduates. “After 30 days of Hot Dog High, I spent the rest of the year as part of a team of three driving our Wienermobile around 48 states,” he says.

Melville says the job taught him a lot: how to deal with the press, how to work with vendors and develop corporate relationships and how to fix a car. At the end of that year, Melville’s music industry contacts came through, and he was offered a position as assistant tour manager on Britney Spears’ first world tour. “That changed my whole life,” he says.

For the next decade Melville helped entertainers such as Spears in the development and creation of their passion projects, such as Spears’ perfume Fantasy, eventually moving into marketing for entertainment companies. “I was seen as an expert in diverse markets—women, people of color, urban America,” he says. “Over time, I became known as a diversity officer.”

Having served as the global head of diversity for a major international holding company and top 10 global creative agency, Melville has launched Jodie AI, an online tool that harnesses ChatGPT to serve as a personal DEI assistant. “I took data from hundreds of diversity experts around the country and the world, and I programmed it into an AI software tool,” he explains. “So, if you have a question, you just ask Jodie. Type it in the prompt, and it gives you a very detailed response on how to communicate with different scenarios and different perspectives. The goal is to help people be empowered to not worry about saying the wrong thing and be canceled.”

Melville says his experience working in the DEI space helped him with his own passion project, researching and writing his book. “When I submitted the first draft, the publisher couldn’t even believe half this stuff was real because they had never heard about any of it before. But it’s all fact-checked against historical record,” he says of his extensive research.

Melville is proud to have put his family history in the public eye and thankful to Jeff Glor ’97 (who is married to his Syracuse cheerleading partner Nikki Glab Glor ’99), for helping him share the story on CBS *Good Morning America*.

“My great-uncles, they just wanted to live their version of the American Dream,” says Melville. “So, when the government said, ‘Act as if you’re invisible. Don’t do interviews. Live in silence,’ they didn’t complain about it. But imagine how many other invisible stories are out there.”

LUCIEN METELLUS

A Servant to All

As an undergraduate at Syracuse University, Lucien Metellus '97 had many friends who were members of Greek-letter organizations. At the time, he was focused on other things. He was editor of the *Black Voice*, co-founder of the Haitian Student Association, a member of the Black Artists League and Student Judicial Affairs Committee and was involved in community service through his policy studies major.

But a year out of school, living and working in Queens, New York, Metellus joined the Zeta Zeta Lambda chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., drawn in by the organization's community service mission. In January, Metellus was elected as the 37th general president-elect of the international fraternity, becoming the first Haitian American elected to the top post. When he takes the helm Jan. 1, 2025, he will preside over more than 700 chapters in the United States and abroad.

"It's a great honor to have gained the support of the brotherhood," says Metellus of his successful two-year campaign. His leadership goal is to update Alpha Phi Alpha's four national programs, which focus on voter registration, teen sexuality awareness, college preparation and service to widows of deceased brothers. "Some of these were started in the 1930s and need to be adapted to modern times," he says. "My goal is creating constant improvement and not changing things around just to change them."

In his 25 years of fraternity membership, Metellus has served in numerous leadership positions, including chapter president, vice president, secretary, director of educational activities, associate editor of the *Sphinx* magazine and as a fundraising chair. He has also served as chapter advisor for the Theta Epsilon chapter at St. John's University.

Service at the district level includes tenures as parliamentarian, secretary, director of competitions, New York state director of conferences, New York City area director, New York state president and district director.

Metellus says his rise in leadership was less intentional than "consistent growth."

"I can definitely say my experience at Syracuse University is a key component to that—the leadership skills and the friendships I gained at Syracuse," he says. "I would not be in this position without my Syracuse growth and experience."

Professionally, Metellus has worked in the information technology field for 20 years. Currently employed at Centrilogic as a project manager and senior business analyst, he works on providing solutions for clients and customers. In his career, he has managed projects that provided millions of dollars of savings to businesses through utilization of technology. He has over 10 professional certifications and degrees in leadership, project management, religion and technology and is also a published poet and writer.

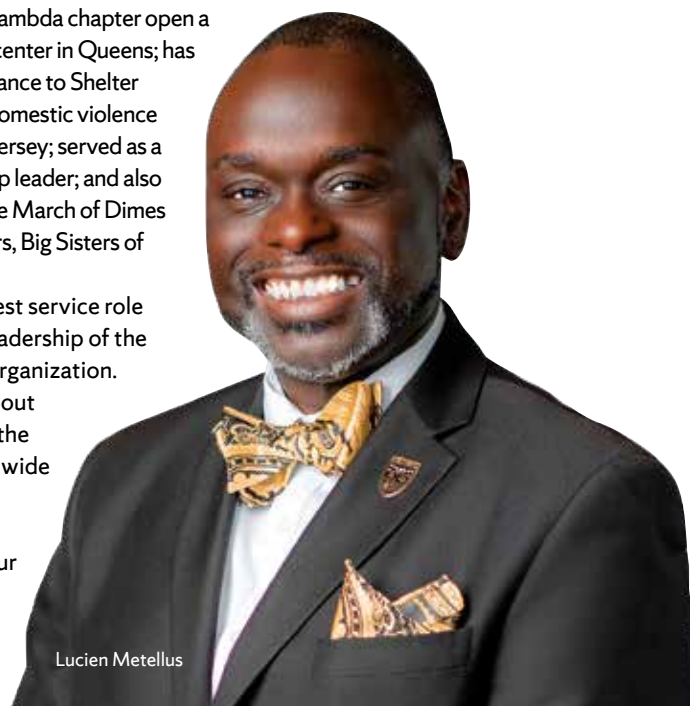
"I can definitely say my experience at Syracuse University is a key component to that—the leadership skills and the friendships I gained at Syracuse. I would not be in this position without my Syracuse growth and experience."

Metellus also serves as chair of diversity, equity and inclusion for the city of Frederick, Maryland, where he and his wife and two children live. Appointed by the mayor, Metellus leads review of city contracts and governmental policies for DEI considerations.

"I draw from my policy studies education," he says. "I always tell people, even though I work in information technology, my policy studies degree helps me in the things that I'm passionate about, like policy movements, governmental organization and volunteer services, as well as in my technology space when writing policies around technology."

In keeping with the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternal motto of "Servants of All," Metellus helped the Zeta Zeta Lambda chapter open a senior citizens center in Queens; has provided assistance to Shelter Our Sisters, a domestic violence shelter in New Jersey; served as a Boy Scout troop leader; and also worked with the March of Dimes and Big Brothers, Big Sisters of America.

But his biggest service role lies ahead in leadership of the international organization. "I'm excited about engaging with the brothers worldwide and, more importantly, helping raise our communities that we serve," he says.



Lucien Metellus

PHAEDRA STEWART

Giving from the Heart

Phaedra Stewart '91 finds it difficult to look at the world without seeing opportunities to connect with people, raise their spirits and empower them to make their lives better.

A self-described serial entrepreneur, Stewart applies this outlook to family, career and philanthropy and says it shapes how she invests her “time, talent and treasure.” Stewart has proudly given all three to Syracuse University since the day she graduated.

“My philosophy is, if you have a dollar, you have 10 cents to share with someone,” she says. “It’s not really about the amount. It’s more about giving from the heart and understanding there’s a natural flow to life: You get out of it what you put in.”

A graduate of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Stewart is a Maxwell Sustainer—having given to the school in each of the past 10 years. She also made a large gift toward the renovation of the Barner-McDuffie House, a cultural center for Black students on campus, funding the Phaedra R. Stewart Meeting Room. “Never in my wildest dreams would I ever have thought I would have my name on a room at a university,” she says.

Stewart, who also earned an MBA from the University of Baltimore, retired after a 25-year career in human resources as vice president of human resources for LifeBridge Health, one of the largest health providers in Maryland. She oversaw HR operations for the largest hospital in the system and led workforce development, employee health and employee and labor relations for the entire system. She is the founder and owner of Seriously Positive, a multifaceted company with a mission to uplift individuals and neighborhoods.

Seriously Positive was born from an encounter during a family shopping trip in 2014. “My cousin was 8 at the time, and my son was 6. We were at the mall, and a young man had on a T-shirt with some words that I thought were not appropriate for anyone to wear in public,” she recalls. “I said to the two of them, ‘What if we were to put some positive messages on T-shirts and sell them so that kids would have some better messages?’”

It was a family effort from the start: Stewart encouraged the kids to get involved in researching and developing the business operations. Her husband built the website. They all helped with



Phaedra Stewart

sales, setting up shop at local events and church bazaars throughout Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

“I was shocked at how many adults were asking for items in their sizes. It grew to the point where we started to sell more adult products than children’s products,” she says.

From that early demand grew a series of business ventures under the Seriously Positive umbrella that reflect Stewart’s wide-ranging talents, interests and entrepreneurial mindset, as well as her faith. Today, the business includes coaching and seminars, a children’s book and real estate development—all aimed at transforming people’s lives by combatting negative images and

nurturing the power of positivity rooted in spirituality.

Stewart began purchasing and renovating vacant buildings with the goal of improving neighborhoods, one city block at a time. “My thought was if I could help Baltimore City to change its physical appearance, maybe that would help people to change behaviors,” she says.

Stewart credits her success to the networks she has developed and her upbringing. “I grew up with a single mom, and she always was involved in various things, helping out church and organizations.” At age 13, Stewart was volunteered by her mother to work at the Baltimore City Department of Social Services. “It really helped to give me a different perspective of life and a certain level of empathy for other people,” she says.

As a Syracuse undergraduate, Stewart volunteered her time singing in the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble and at the Bishop Foery Foundation. Stewart now serves on the University’s D.C. Regional Council and regularly participates in alumni events and activities.

She encourages young people to give back however they are able. “It doesn’t have to be financial,” she says. “You can give of your time; you can give of your talents. And, of course, the treasure. They are all a part of the giving.”

RAHMAN ALI BUGG

Representing His Community

Growing up in Paterson, New Jersey, Rahman Ali Bugg '96 says his youth was intrinsically linked to rap and hip-hop. In essence, they grew up together.

An award-winning producer, director and showrunner, Bugg has never strayed far from those roots. "I'm very proud to be Black. I really love my community. I love my people," he says.

His credits range from music entertainment shows for MTV, VH1 and BET, to reality television programs such as *The Deal* and *Washington Heights*, to short films. Last year, his show *Exposing Parchment*, which he directed and executive produced in conjunction with Roc Nation, premiered at the Tribeca Festival and aired on A&E.

He credits his Syracuse University Black and brown community for helping to nurture and support him throughout his career. "We're very proud of each other, and that is a sustaining energy," he says.

A talented dancer, Bugg attended a performing arts high school and was drawn to the entertainment world. He dreamed of becoming the next Spike Lee, but as one of 12 children, his options were limited.

That changed when he was accepted into Operation Link-Up, a nonprofit based in Paterson that provided mentorship to students from inner-city New Jersey high schools to help them attend college. Ultimately, he was admitted to the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

Although there weren't a lot of Black and brown people at Newhouse, Bugg says it took him no time to find his community at Syracuse. He joined the Student Afro-

American Society; performed with the Creations dance troupe; wrote for *The Happenings*, an entertainment newsletter; and in his second semester, joined the staff of a UUTV show called *The Rhythm*. "It was a Black music video and culture show run by all Black students," he says.

Through the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Bugg participated in a summer internship fair and landed a spot at MTV. As luck would have it, he was placed with the show *Yo! MTV Raps*, working under a young producer from Paterson, Jac Benson II. "We had the same

background, and the people who worked for him were all Black," he recalls. "It was a transformational experience."

Bugg returned to Syracuse armed with new skills and professionalism and took over producing *The Rhythm*. He continued to work with his MTV mentor during summers and breaks through graduation and beyond.

He has maintained his focus on urban music and culture throughout his career, which he's navigated as a freelance talent. For years, he worked for the music networks in what he refers to as "permalance" capacities. In 2009, he formed his own production company, Pop Star Media, to create his own opportunities.

More recently, he partnered into another production company, Red Summer TV, with a younger colleague to focus on his directing and executive producing career while mentoring young talent behind the scenes.

"It's not easy for Black creative professionals," says Bugg. Mindful of the support he received coming up, he is trying to help others develop their skillset. The company takes its name from the Red Summer of 1919, the deadliest summer of lynchings on record in America.

Through Red Summer TV, Bugg's goal is to employ and to create opportunities for "people who look like us and who are from our communities, while producing broadcast-quality work," he says.

One of their biggest projects is creating video content for the Essence Festival, which they have done since 2020. Others include public service announcements produced for ROC Nation and its philanthropic arm, Team ROC, and a docuseries for BET, *Welcome to Rap City*, about the history and culture of rap.

But Bugg's mentorship extends beyond his profession. He has served as a Big Brother and is a volunteer with Kings Against Violence (KAVI) in Brooklyn, where he now lives. "It's an effort to counter gun violence by building relationships with young people in the community," he says. "I try to be a familiar voice and energy, to make them feel accepted and worth being here."

In February, Bugg and Red Summer TV were recognized by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli in Albany at a reception celebrating the contributions of select entertainment luminaries who have demonstrated exceptional commitment and dedication to their communities.

"Through all the projects I've worked on and networks I've cultivated over the years, I'm trying to use those resources to help others like me launch careers and defy stereotypes in this industry," he says.



Rahman Ali Bugg

JADE CARTER

Walking Tall

Jade Carter '24 has never worried about knowing what she wants to do with her life: She has a well-defined career interest and has worked hard to put herself on a path to success.

As a biomedical engineering major in the College of Engineering and Computer Science, Carter has conducted extensive research on gait analysis and rehabilitation engineering—basically, helping people to walk better, from individuals who have suffered a stroke to those with cerebral palsy.

“My goal is to play a role in improving the quality of life for individuals with movement impairments through innovative technology that works to understand and enhance human movement,” she says.

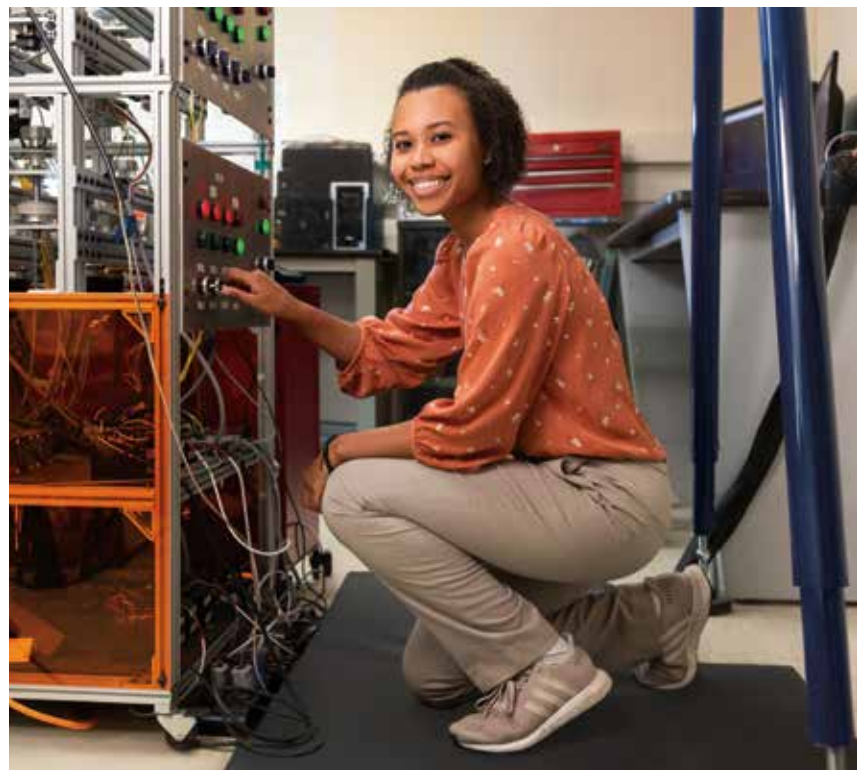
As a member of the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) program, Carter has conducted funded research in Syracuse University’s Bionics, Systems and Control Lab for the last three years. Under the supervision of faculty mentor Victor Duenas, assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, she has worked on the calibration and testing of a powered ankle perturbation device for stroke survivors. “These devices are invaluable to stroke patients because their control systems can read and interact with the external environment and hopefully can improve walking ability, gait speed and balance,” she says.

Carter says working in the lab expanded her career interest beyond simple biomechanics. “I now have a twin passion for rehabilitation engineering and gait training,” she says.

For her senior engineering capstone project, Carter secured \$3,700 in undergraduate research funding to design a simplified gait analysis system. “My focus was on cost reduction, accelerated setup time, minimal training and potential integration into clinical settings for children with neuromuscular conditions,” she says.

One of those is cerebral palsy. In summer 2022, Carter served as an undergraduate research fellow at Columbia University through the Columbia Engineering SURE Program. Working in the Robotics and Rehabilitation Lab with Sunil K. Agrawal, professor of mechanical engineering and rehabilitation and regenerative medicine, Carter developed an augmented reality game for use by children with spastic diplegia, a form of cerebral palsy.

Children with this condition suffer from weak muscle control and are unable to produce enough ankle dorsiflexion during their gait cycle, resulting in foot drop or toe walking. Conventional therapy methods involve having patients contract their ankle while seated. In Carter’s “exergame,” children wear an augmented reality headset, which instructs them to position their feet correctly while walking in pursuit of coins they visualize through the headset. “The



Jade Carter hopes to use technology to improve walking for those with movement impairments. She was selected as a 2024 Distinguished Lee Scholar by the Lee Foundation, which will fund her graduate education.

goal is to increase their engagement and participation during therapy by making rehabilitation fun,” she says.

She spent last summer at a prosthetics and orthotics laboratory, near her hometown of Albany, New York, observing the process of how prosthetics and orthotics are made and customized.

Carter is thankful for the support she’s had as an undergraduate, which in addition to LSAMP, includes participation in the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program and the Our Time Has Come Program. She’s also been actively involved, serving as vice president in both the Biomedical Engineering Society and the National Society of Black Engineers, with which she helped to plan a regional convention in Syracuse last year.

Her next stop is graduate school to study kinesiology or movement science. “I believe a master’s degree in this field with my foundational knowledge in engineering will be very beneficial for my career journey,” Carter says.

Ultimately, she’d like to work at a medical device company that creates tools for rehabilitation or as a gait lab engineer at a hospital. “Having the opportunity to do the kind of research I have as an undergraduate has been extremely rewarding,” she says. “I’ve been able to take what I’ve learned in the classroom and apply it to something practical.”

MIA-MARIE FIELDS

Giving from the Heart

Mia-Marie Fields '24 is fascinated by medical technology and the impact that innovation can have on people's lives. As a sophomore, the biomedical technology major worked in the lab of Zhen Ma, assistant professor of biomedical and chemical engineering, conducting stem cell research on cardiomyocytes, which are muscle cells in the heart.

"I've always wanted to have a profession dealing with the heart, so having the opportunity to be exposed to the scientific element of how the heart works was beautiful," she says. "I'm kind of the good definition of a nerd, someone who is really immersed in anything I'm really passionate about."

Those passions extend beyond the classroom. In January, Fields was honored as a 2024 Unsung Hero at the annual campus Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration for her efforts to make the University a more inclusive and welcoming community. Those endeavors include contributing to the planning of the Barner-McDuffie House, a campus center celebrating Black culture; providing mentorship; and uplifting other underrepresented students. She also volunteers in the community with We Rise Above the Streets, a program that feeds the homeless.

"It was truly the highlight of my Syracuse experience," she says of the honor. "I remember walking onto campus my freshman year and knowing I wanted to make a positive impact on my community. I never looked for any recognition. I just wanted to help people and to make them feel welcome in spaces they were walking into."

Fields was motivated by her own experience of culture shock when she came to Syracuse University from Miami. A strong student who had already earned an associate degree through her dual-enrollment high school, Fields won a full scholarship to Syracuse through the Posse Foundation. Like all 2024 graduates, she arrived on a campus that allowed limited social interaction during her first semester. "We couldn't even leave our dorm for the first two weeks," she says.

Following the advice of older Posse Scholars from Miami, Fields applied for the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholarship Program. She says it was the best thing she could have done. "The OTHC Scholars are leaders on campus, part of all the things I wanted to be involved in," she says.

OTHC expanded her campus community and connected her with alumni of color whose life stories were relatable to hers. "It's a very special experience. You feel like you're not going through college alone, that all the OTHC alumni and donors are rooting you on," says Fields, who is also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha



Mia-Marie Fields was honored as an Unsung Hero for her efforts to make Syracuse University more inclusive and welcoming to all.

Sorority Inc., a Remembrance Scholar and the College Marshal for the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

As president of the campus chapter of the Society of Women Engineers for the last two years, Fields has made it her mission to create a welcoming space for women in STEM. "I want them to feel confident and proud in male-dominated spaces and to secure their own opportunities for success."

She's a role model. Two years ago, she attended a National Society of Black Engineers career fair and secured a summer internship with Edwards Lifesciences in Irvine, California, a leading manufacturer of artificial heart valves. She was invited back last summer, which led to a full-time position after graduation. "For the first two years, I will rotate through different engineering departments, getting to explore different career directions to find the best fit," she says. "I'm very excited to see where I land."

LIZMARIE MONTEMAYOR

Representing Her Culture

As an intern at La Casita Cultural Center, Lizmarie Montemayor '24 has spent the bulk of her final semester at Syracuse University interviewing Hispanic women on Syracuse's West Side about their experiences, a project that will culminate in both a documentary film and a book.

"This project is incredibly important to me, not only because I am engaging with people I share a culture with, but because I feel like citizens in the poor districts of Syracuse get put into this box. It's important to show people as humans just living their lives," she says.

The project is the culmination of four years of Montemayor's involvement with Syracuse University's Engaged Humanities Network (EHN), an entity that supports participatory action research with community partners.

Montemayor was born and raised in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico, and attended a fine arts high school where she focused on music. Her parents, and most everyone she knew, attended college on the island. "I didn't even know what SATs were," she says.

Wanting to attend school on the mainland, Montemayor found a college counselor and researched the process herself. She honed in on Syracuse University planning to major in modern languages, but switched to anthropology in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs after taking an introductory class.

"Anthropology tends to look at society as a whole from a very holistic perspective, and it helps us to deconstruct society," she says. "If we want to make change for the better, I think we have to know why things are the way they are right now and where beliefs and systems come from. By understanding them, we can make change for the better."

Arriving at Syracuse University from Puerto Rico during the pandemic was an isolating experience. Montemayor is grateful to have found the Our Time Has Come Scholarship Program, which gave her a community and assisted her with scholarship support. "My family can't support me financially with college costs, so this really helped take a load off my shoulders," she says. "It's an incredibly valuable program."

She also found the EHN, where she has worked as a research assistant throughout college. Most of her efforts have centered at La Casita, an off-campus program that gives support to Spanish communities, predominantly on Syracuse's Near West Side. Her first involvement was working with the Echoes Program, created in the wake of the pandemic to help children deal with stress and anxiety through storytelling and theater-based mindfulness practices.



After graduating in May, Lizmarie Montemayor will continue her studies as a graduate student in public administration at Syracuse's Maxwell School.

In addition to her current documentary project, which she is completing through a six-credit internship, she is team leader on a resource database project for the EHN that can be used by community organizations. "We're building it from scratch," says Montemayor, who spent a semester in Florence, Italy, as the recipient of a Gilman Scholarship. "It will be an interdisciplinary support for community programs that includes evaluation tools, assessment tools, basically any kind of support tools that programs that are willing to share."

Her work with the EHN helped Montemayor discover her passion for public service and community engagement. She will follow her undergraduate degree with a master's program in public administration at the Maxwell School. "I was awarded a scholarship that will cover 75% of my tuition, which is incredible," she says.

Montemayor will be the first in her family to attend graduate school. "It's a big honor for me to be able to represent my family and my country and my culture," she says.

Her goal is to work in government, specifically in social policy related to Puerto Rico. "Being a territory, a lot of the times we are taxed for that representation and treated as second-class citizens. Part of what I would like to do is change that through policy revision," says Montemayor, an advocate of full independence for Puerto Rico. "I would like to eventually return to Puerto Rico and work in administration to get policy revisions underway and improve the living situation for other Puerto Ricans."

JEAN CASTILLA

Serial Entrepreneur

Jean Castilla '24 had always been interested in military service. But he also wanted to go to college. After doing some research, he realized he could do both. In 2020, he came to Syracuse University to major in entrepreneurship and emerging enterprises at the Martin J. Whitman School of Management. He also joined the Air National Guard, a member of the 174th Attack Wing, located near Syracuse's Hancock International Airport.

As a reservist, Castilla is committed to one week of service per month on base, where he serves as a crew chief. "I've been able to organize my academic schedule so that I only have classes a couple of days a week and can use the rest of the time to study or be on base," he says.

Time management is clearly not an issue for Castilla, who also spends time trading on the foreign markets and owns multiple automated teller machines in greater New York City. For the last two years, he's also worked virtually for the streaming network Paramount+ in cybersecurity, putting to use his minor in information technology to help eliminate security breaches.

He made that connection through the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs Veteran's Career Services, where he also works as a student liaison, hosting networking events, helping student veterans make use of career resources and supporting operations through data management.

Growing up in the East New York section of Brooklyn, Castilla commuted up to an hour each way by bus to attend middle and high school. He was selected for a program called Breakthrough New York, which helped put talented students on a path to college. He gained admittance to the High School for Math, Science and Engineering at City College, where he was a standout on the track team (his records in the 55 meters and 100 meters still stand).

The first-generation college student describes himself as persistent and honest, with firm values and high dreams. He attributes his achievements to God, including maintaining a 3.5 GPA over four years.

For his entrepreneurship capstone project, Castilla invented an affordable vertical gardening system. "The idea was to market the product to companies like HelloFresh, giving customers the option to purchase plants and grow the produce they will cook," he says.

He's applying for a patent, one of two he has in the works. The second is for a rechargeable laptop case that also provides extra RAM, inspired by the cases used by the military. "Those are very strong and durable, but they are also bulky and hard to use," says Castilla, who received the Entrepreneur Student Veteran of the Year Award in 2023.

Outside of his military service and entrepreneurship ventures, Castilla has enjoyed his affiliation with the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholarship Program. "Financially, it has allowed me to work fewer hours," he says. "And the mentorship is fantastic, both from alumni and the staff on campus."

In addition to OTHC, Castilla has been awarded numerous other scholarships during his time at Syracuse University, including a Hendricks Chapel Scholarship, Whitman Internship Scholarship, Veteran Legacy Fund Scholarship, Lois and Martin J. Whitman Scholarship, Office of Veterans and Military Affairs Scholarship and the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Florence Scholarship, which allowed him to spend his final semester studying in Florence, Italy.

"I love visiting other countries, meeting the local people and learning about other cultures," says Castilla, whose parents are originally from Panama. He spent the summer after high school studying marine biology in Majorca, Spain, and summer 2023 participated in EuroTech, a Syracuse Abroad program studying technology in nine European countries.

After graduation, Castilla will continue his Air National Guard commitment—he has two more years—and continue pursuing his own entrepreneurial ventures. "My University and military experiences have prepared me well," he says.

Entrepreneur Jean Castilla has two patents pending for products he's developed.



BRIANNA GILLFILLIAN

Securing Her Networks

Brianna Gillfillian '24 has made it her mission to support other Black students pursuing computer science and engineering. The computer science major is president of the Syracuse University chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), which she has helped grow into a thriving organization during her time on campus.

After serving as membership and mentorship chair, she has held the presidency as a junior and senior. Under her leadership, the NSBE has held weekly study sessions with peer tutoring, developed a mentorship program pairing younger students with older students in their field of study and organized attendance at NSBE national meetings, as well as AfroTech, the largest Black tech conference.

"It's great for students to advance their careers and grow professionally," Gillfillian says. "Every single student who attended the AfroTech conference last year was able to secure either a full-time job or summer internship."

Gillfillian also helped create the Black Excellence Gala, a campuswide event launched in 2022 in conjunction with the Black Honor Society that celebrates Black student achievement on campus.

But NSBE is only one of Gillfillian's many campus involvements. She's a member of the Kappa Lambda chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and the Kalabash Dance Troupe, serves as vice president of alumni relations for Alpha Kappa Psi business fraternity and serves as a career coach and virtual reality consultant in the College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS). She also spent two years as a resident mentor with InclusiveU, living and working with developmentally and intellectually challenged students.

An Our Time Has Come Scholar since her sophomore year, Gillfillian credits the program with helping her acclimate to campus as an international student from Kingston, Jamaica, and with providing valuable networking opportunities. "I've learned a lot about different industries and have been able to connect with people interested in the same things I am," she says.

She's founder of an organization called Scholars on a Mission that provides mentorship and community outreach. One of the biggest projects has been coordinating 10 student organizations to participate in a back-to-school giveaway that provides school supplies to students in the Bronx. "We organized a whole fun day with games and snacks," she says.

The organization has held a similar event for the last two years in Jamaica, securing donations for girls in group homes there.

Coming from a disadvantaged background, Gillfillian says her community service will continue into her adult life, particularly efforts related to children. But she's also focused on optimizing success in her future profession. Part of both the CSTEP and



Through her leadership, Brianna Gillfillian has served as a role model for other Black students interested in computer science and engineering.

LSAMP programs, she was selected in her sophomore year to participate in the University's Young Research Fellows Program for 2022-24. Under the mentorship of ECS Dean Cole Smith, Gillfillian has focused her research in the area of cybersecurity. "While I initially wasn't sure how research could fit in with computer science studies, I gave it a try, and it was one of the best decisions I have made. It gives me a competitive edge, has helped me with time management and has given me more insight into my course of studies outside of the usual curriculum," she says.

Her project looks at network interdiction, which simulates how an actual network operates and ways in which it could be disturbed or attacked. "This has enabled me to understand data transmission a lot better and how I can optimize various network issues in the real world," she says.

Gillfillian hopes to work in the field of cybersecurity, but first plans to earn a master's degree in engineering, hopefully staying at Syracuse University. "I want to go into either product or project management in the technology or engineering field, so the master's degree would give me the skills to transition to either role."

OTHC Graduates Record Number of Students

When the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholarship Fund was established in 1987, the goal was simple: to provide financial support to underrepresented students to help them achieve a Syracuse University education. Over 37 years, OTHC has expanded to include extensive leadership and professional development programming and subsequently added a Leaders program for students interested in that component who don't qualify for scholarship support.

Thanks to the philanthropy of alumni and friends, the program has continued to grow, supporting an increasing number of students each year. In 2024, OTHC celebrated the graduation of a record 67 Scholars and Leaders.

"Due to the generosity of new donors, we have been able to increase the number of scholarships we can provide and the number of students we can support through leadership development and mentoring opportunities," says Maria J. Lopez '05, G'12, assistant director of scholarship programs in the Office of Multicultural Advancement.

Graduating seniors were recognized April 22 at a ceremony and reception at the home of Syracuse University Chancellor Kent Syverud and his wife, Dr. Ruth Chen, attended by members

of Syracuse University leadership. At the ceremony, students were presented with OTHC stoles to wear at Commencement.

As always, the ceremony and reception were highpoints for OTHC students, particularly so for the Class of 2024 who entered Syracuse University during the pandemic. "These students persevered during a uniquely challenging time," says Lopez. "They made the best of a difficult situation, and their success is noteworthy."

As they prepare to begin their professional lives, students (and their families) were treated to valuable advice in a keynote address given by Jacqueline M. Welch '91, executive vice president and chief human resources officer at *The New York Times*. A first-generation college student who earned a degree in English from the College of Arts and Sciences, Welch has had a 30-year career in human resources.

Welch was accompanied by her son James, who will be a first-year student in the College of Visual and Performing Arts next fall. In her remarks, she shared three common traits she has observed among people who live successful, fulfilling lives. The first is curiosity. "If something piques your interest, you've got more information available to you than has ever been available to mankind," she told students. "Exhaust your curiosity by becoming a student of the thing you are curious about. And after you've done that, identify and talk to people who are experts about the thing you are curious about."

The second was asking good follow-up questions and genuinely listening to the answers. "I have never, not one time since leaving college, used calculus in its most strict form. But, the idea of showing your work and exploring alternate routes has served me well time and time again," she said. "When you understand the process of a thing, you stand a better chance of making the process better, and by extension the outcomes better over time."

And finally, she counseled graduates to take good care of themselves, to find routines and rituals that nourish them. "My days vary in their intensity and demands, but there are core things that are present every day. I start the day nourishing my spirit and



Maria J. Lopez with Aqila Collins, vice president of community activations at Truist Bank, and her husband Micha Collins, a student at the Maxwell School



OTHC students celebrating outside the Chancellor's residence

my soul by reading Scripture and saying a prayer. I immediately hydrate my body with a glass of water. I make my bed, which gives me a sense of immediate accomplishment, contributes to a calm space and gets me moving,” she told students. “The key point here is we are human beings, not human doings. Our bodies are divinely made mechanical miracles that require literal care and feeding. Our minds, souls and spirits have to be nourished. We can only be as and do as good as we take care of ourselves.”

Remarks were also made by OTHC Scholars Sofia Rodriguez '24, G'25 and Leondra Tyler '24.

Tyler came to Syracuse University through the Higher Education Opportunity Program as a part-time student after earning her GED. “In the past six years, I went from not having a high school diploma to obtaining an associate degree and bachelor's degrees in psychology and neuroscience,” she shared.

After graduation, Tyler will begin graduate school in pursuit of a doctorate. “From GED to Ph.D., that's what investing in Black and Latinx communities does,” she said. “I have had the privilege to be able to walk down numerous paths that I once didn't know existed. I am the product of opportunity.”

Rodriguez, named one of two Class Marshals for 2024, shared her challenge adjusting to Syracuse University as a first-generation, Afro-Cuban, queer girl from Miami. Nonetheless, she found community in the OTHC program. “Every single one of you is a true inspiration,” she told her peers. “We are lucky to be in a room full of leaders, scholars, activists, scientists, teachers and creatives—a room full of humans who are set to make the world

a better place by sharing who they are. You all continue to make Syracuse University a better place by doing just that.”

For the fourth year, Rodriguez was among students honored for exceptional academic standing. Others recognized for GPAs of 3.9 or above included Raquell Carpenter '23, G'24, Aman Johnson '24, Tashakee Ledgister '24, Myla Thomas '24, Arianna Kuhn '25, Jacquelyn Trotman '25, Samantha Valeiron '25 and Cedrik Jean-Baptiste '26.

“Part of the work I have done has and will always be inspired by the people in this program,” said Rodriguez, who will begin a master's program in magazine, news and digital journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. “OTHC fueled my desire to continue my academic career and stay part of the Orange family.”

She's not alone in her sentiments. “OTHC has provided outstanding opportunities for leadership development and mentorship, enabling me to build meaningful relationships with industry professionals in my desired field and significantly advance my career prospects,” added Johnson, who will pursue an M.F.A. in the Producers Program at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television this fall.

The ceremony closed with the alma mater, performed by OTHC Scholar Gabrielle Pinkney '24, a classically trained opera singer. Pinkney has been invited to sing at the annual senior ceremony each year since she joined OTHC as a sophomore. “This year was extra special as a senior myself,” she says. “It was a full-circle moment.”

Alison Murray Joins Hendricks Chapel as Assistant Dean for Student Assistance



Alison Murray

Hendricks Chapel, the spiritual heart of Syracuse University, supports students in need through the Student Opportunity Fund, Student Veteran Support Fund and Hendricks Chapel Food Pantry. To steward the expanding impact of these and other programs and services throughout the Syracuse University campus community, Alison Murray '01 was appointed as assistant dean for student assistance at Hendricks Chapel.

"Hendricks Chapel is a home for all faiths and a place for all people. Hendricks is also here to help everyone,"

she says. "I want to contribute to that effort."

Through a focus on students who may be struggling with unforeseen expenses, Murray recognizes that some students face more hardship than others, and the Hendricks Chapel Food Pantry in particular is a growing source of care. "For years, the Chapel's food pantry averaged 25 to 40 patrons a week. We're now closer to 150," she says. "The need is great."

Since beginning her new role in January, Murray has worked alongside individual students, faculty, staff and alumni; groups such as the Student Association, the Interfraternity Council, Syracuse University Libraries and the history department in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs; and others to ensure the pantry is stocked with healthy food options, including fresh produce. "We're choosing nourishing items that will truly sustain our students," she says.

As assistant dean, Murray also invests time engaging with students and other members of the campus community to identify and assist those in need. "It could be an unforeseen circumstance

like traveling home for a family emergency or someone who could use a little bit of help with travel or personal expenses to study abroad," she says. "Our student body is very diverse, and their needs reflect that."

Murray comes to her new role after 20 years as a U.S. Army nurse and clinical informaticist. "I think my nursing background has given me a nurturing and caring skillset, as well as a keen eye to critically evaluate what is really going on with students," she says. "My informatics background serves me well, as it applies to innovation in terms of initiating more automation of our processes."

Murray came to Syracuse University from Severna Park, Maryland, on a full ROTC scholarship. While studying nursing, she participated in ROTC and was a cheerleader for football and men's and women's basketball, including the 1999 Orange Bowl.

After earning her nursing degree, Murray entered the Army, serving as a nurse or medical informaticist in posts across the U.S. and abroad. It was while serving in the Republic of Korea that she met her husband, Dwayne Murray '97, who had graduated only a few months before she arrived on campus as a first-year student.

The couple retired when Dwayne completed 25 years of service and Alison had 20. In 2022, Dwayne joined Syracuse University as deputy director of the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs. Alison focused on raising the couple's three sons—Dwayne II '25, Caleb and Malachi—until the right opportunity came along.

"Between the two of us, we cover almost a decade at Syracuse University, so we know a lot of the same people and have a lot of the same colleagues. Syracuse was a big part of our lives, even before working here," she says.

"I'm so grateful to Dean Brian Konkol for this opportunity," says Murray. "I loved cheering for SU Athletics, and now I consider myself the biggest cheerleader for our students. I want them to know that Hendricks Chapel cares and we are here to help."

Gordon Parks Exhibit Coming to Syracuse University Art Museum

"Homeward to the Prairie I Come: Gordon Parks Photographs," an exhibition of more than 75 original photographs, will be on view at the Syracuse University Art Museum from Aug. 22 to Dec. 17, 2024. The exhibit, on loan from the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University, is made possible by a grant from the Art Bridges Foundation.

Parks was a self-taught photographer who became prominent in U.S. documentary photojournalism in the 1940s through 1970s—particularly in issues of civil rights, poverty and African Americans—and in glamour photography. "Homeward to the Prairie I Come" is considered by many curators to be his self-portrait. The collection's title comes

from the first line of a poem written by Parks, a Kansas native, who was also a composer, author and filmmaker.

"This exhibition leverages the power of art to catalyze dialogue about the wide range of issues that Parks engaged with in his photography, from systemic racism to the labor and ethics of the global fashion industry to ideas of celebrity and home," says Melissa Yuen, the museum's interim chief curator.

In addition to exhibition production costs, the grant of more than \$93,000 will support programming within local schools and the Syracuse community, including a screening of one of Parks' films at a public park in Syracuse, with local vendors and artists present to contribute to a festive, community-focused atmosphere.

Talithia Williams Headlines Campus MLK Celebration

Talithia Williams, Ph.D., a big data expert and co-host of the PBS series *NOVA Wonders*, was the keynote speaker for the 39th Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, held Jan. 21 in the JMA Wireless Dome.

Williams personified the theme of this year's celebration, "The Reach of the Dream." With degrees from Spelman College, Howard University and a doctorate from Rice University, Williams is associate professor of mathematics and Mathematics Clinic director at Harvey Mudd College, where she became the first Black woman granted tenure. Her research involves developing statistical models that emphasize the spatial and temporal structure of data and applying them to problems in the environment. She's worked at NASA, the National Security Agency and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and has partnered with the World Health Organization on research regarding cataract surgical rates in African countries.

In her role as co-host of *NOVA Wonders*, Williams demystifies the mathematical process in amusing and insightful ways to excite students, parents, educators and the larger community about STEM education and its possibilities. Her passion for math and learning is contagious as she urges audiences to "show me the data."

At Syracuse University, Williams illustrated how data can be utilized to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in her talk, "Becoming an Agent of Change for Inclusive Education." By showing how educational systems are microcosms of our

increasingly diverse society, Williams addressed how to close achievement gaps, hoping to inspire educators and learners of all ages.

The annual MLK Celebration, attended by nearly 2,000 people, is the largest of its kind on any college campus. In addition to Williams' address, the program included student and community group performances, and the presentation of this year's *Unsung Heroes Awards* (see page 18).

The celebration also included an art gallery exhibit in Club 44 featuring the work of seven local artists: Professor Emeritus David MacDonald, Professor London Ladd '06, Professor Sharif Bey, Professor Rochele Royster, Brandan Meyer, Melquea Smith and Iris Williams.



Talithia Williams

Tanya Williamson Named Assistant Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion

Tanya Williamson was named assistant vice president in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, a new position at Syracuse University. In this role, she is charged with managing departmental operations, budget and planning and project management of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan. She will also supervise staff in the areas of inclusion and belonging, learning and development, and research and assessment.

"Dr. Williamson brings a range of experience and skill to this new role—from her depth of work in DEIA to project management at the University. Her role will be crucial in the implementation of the DEIA Strategic Plan," says Mary Grace Almandrez, vice president for diversity and inclusion. "Through this new role and with her knowledge and background, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion continues to strengthen its mission to make the University a more welcoming place for all."

Williamson joined Syracuse University in 2021 as associate director of diversity, equity and inclusion at the Barnes Center at The Arch and led projects related to DEIA within the integrated

center for health and wellness.

"I'm honored to serve in this inaugural role, as DEIA has consistently been a significant component of my work. I am most excited about the opportunity to continue my collaborations with staff, faculty and students, which will be essential to advancing the DEIA strategic plan," Williamson says.

Williamson holds a doctorate in clinical psychology from SUNY Binghamton and previously worked as a psychologist at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Syracuse.



Tanya Williamson

James Haywood Rolling Jr. Named Interim Chair of African American Studies

James Haywood Rolling Jr. G'91 has been appointed to a two-year term as interim chair of the Department of African American Studies (AAS), effective May 8, 2024. A faculty member at Syracuse University since 2007, Rolling is currently professor of arts education in the School of Education (SOE) and previously held a dual appointment in the College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA). He will continue his commitment to the SOE while serving as interim chair. He is also an affiliated faculty of AAS and the Lender Center for Social Justice.



James Haywood Rolling Jr.

During his teaching at Syracuse University, Rolling has established himself as a steadfast leader, innovator and facilitator. His unwavering commitment to social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and community-engaged scholarship has led to key interdisciplinary collaborations and curriculum enhancements.

“My appointment to this interim leadership role is very much a full-circle moment,” says Rolling, who earned an M.F.A. in studio arts research at Syracuse while studying as a graduate fellow in AAS. “As a first-generation college student, I would not

be a university professor today if not for being selected for that fellowship. I would not have been able to afford grad school.”

As an AAS Fellow, Rolling served as a graduate assistant to Professor Herb Williams, founder of the Community Folk Art Center, where he had the opportunity to design and curate an exhibition. But Rolling stresses that this seminal experience expanded his education beyond the arts. “I arrived on campus as an artist, but by making the MLK Library a second home, I left Syracuse University as an artist *and* a scholar. As I completed my fellowship and my term as editor-in-chief of the *Black Voice Magazine* for 1989 and 1990, I was awarded the AAS department’s Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Award for Outstanding Service. It is my honor to serve the AAS department once again at this critical time.”

Although he’s just begun his new role, Rolling has already established three long-term goals, formulated by listening to the needs and concerns of AAS faculty members: to attract greater numbers of majors and minors to the AAS department through a renewed focus on the curriculum and new collaborative opportunities; to support the scholarship, tenure and promotion

of current AAS faculty members while reinforcing the breadth of full- and part-time instructional lines; and to promote and elevate the value of the AAS department to the University’s campus, alumni and external stakeholders toward the development of increased funding to support future growth and the preservation of essential resources such as the MLK Library and the Community Folk Art Center.

“We have a shared aspiration to be recognized as one of the top AAS departments in the nation,” he says.

Rolling’s track record speaks to his ability to achieve goals. As chair of arts education in VPA, he orchestrated major facilities upgrades; founded the 4A Arts & Creative Literacies Academy, a grant-funded campus community partnership with Dr. Edwin E. Weeks Elementary School in the Syracuse City School District; and expanded the scope of VPA’s curriculum to include visual arts, design, media arts education and STEAM. As co-director of the Lender Center for Social Justice from 2021 to 2023, he helped facilitate a faculty and student fellowship program supporting collaborative research and engagement related to issues of social justice. In recognition of that work, the center was awarded a \$2.8 million MetLife grant to help expand its programming and engagement within the local community.

Rolling’s scholarly interests lie at the intersection of arts-based and narrative research methods, creative leadership and community-engaged scholarship, and will help to expand existing collaborations and advance scholarship and the curriculum within AAS. His established connections with the Lender Center, SOE and VPA will also help the department forge new partnerships between faculty and students in AAS with other researchers across the University. And his expertise and past work in arts-based community engagement will help to enrich programming and initiatives at the Community Folk Art Center, a cultural and artistic hub committed to the promotion and development of artists of the African Diaspora.

“I’m confident that this powerful blend of leadership experience, interdisciplinary scholarship and academic and alumni affiliation make James an exceptionally qualified person to lead our Department of African American Studies.

— Behzad Mortazavi, Dean, Arts and Sciences

“I’m confident that this powerful blend of leadership experience, interdisciplinary scholarship and academic and alumni affiliation make James an exceptionally qualified person to lead our Department of African American Studies,” says A&S Dean Behzad Mortazavi. “I greatly look forward to working with him, department faculty and our associate deans to guide and support a department whose relevance and contributions figure prominently in the lives of our students, alumni and campus.”

Rolling has also held leadership positions outside of Syracuse University. He served as the 37th president of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), a professional membership group for visual art and design, media arts, museum educators and

teaching artists. As president-elect of NAEA, he convened the first standing NAEA Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commission with a network of liaisons in this essential work across most of the United States. He was a founding member of the Black Trustee Alliance for Art Museums, an organization which aims to amplify Black voices within U.S. art museums to make those institutions more equitable. He also serves on the boards of The Cooper Union and the Everson Museum of Art.

In addition to his Syracuse degree, Rolling earned a B.F.A. from The Cooper Union and both a master’s degree and doctorate in arts education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Office of Multicultural Advancement Wins National Recognition for Inclusive Excellence

Syracuse University’s Office of Multicultural Advancement (SUMA) has received the 2024 Alumni Association Inclusive Excellence Award from *Insight Into Diversity* magazine. This award brings national distinction to the team that supports and advocates for underrepresented alumni and students, raising funds for more than 50 scholarships and hosting the iconic Coming Back Together (CBT) reunion events.

According to the magazine, the award honors alumni association programs, culture and initiatives that encourage and support diversity, inclusion and a sense of belonging for all alumni, regardless of racial or ethnic background, sexual or gender identity, religion, socio-economic status, world view and more.

“We know that alumni associations are not always recognized for their dedication to diversity, inclusion and belonging,” says Lenore Pearlstein, owner and publisher of *Insight Into Diversity*. “We are proud to honor these college and university alumni associations as role models for other institutions of higher education.”

“I am grateful to our team in multicultural advancement, which has been building on a 40-plus year commitment to students and alumni with diverse backgrounds,” says Rachel Vassel ’91, G’21, associate vice president of multicultural advancement. “This accolade recognizes their hard work, which is having measurable impact across the University.”



Vassel cites the growth of CBT, now approaching its 14th reunion, expected to draw 1,500 alumni back to campus to engage with students and network with each other. “CBT has truly become part of the fabric of Syracuse University,” Vassel says. “It is a unique example of targeted programming that taps into the special interests of our Black and Latino alumni. From engaging speakers and VIPs to cultural food and entertainment, CBT speaks to a network of alumni who serve as inspiration to today’s students.”

Vassel says the dramatic increase in alumni engagement—along with the eight-fold increase in Black and Latino alumni giving during the Forever Orange campaign—helped Syracuse University stand out among alumni association programs competing for the award. “I often hear from other academic institutions wanting more information about targeted engagement,” says Vassel. “I’m pleased that Syracuse University is now a case study for others who are hoping to more effectively engage various alumni segments.”

The award is not the first time the office has been recognized for its efforts. Over the past seven years, SUMA has been honored by CASE (the Council for Advancement and Support of Education) for the CBT 2017 reunion, diverse volunteer engagement, the *Syracuse Manuscript* magazine and for its virtual CBT reunion in 2021.

Ryan St. Jean Named Pickering Graduate Foreign Affairs Fellow

Ryan St. Jean '24, an international relations major in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and the College of Arts and Sciences, has been named a 2024 Thomas R. Pickering Graduate Foreign Affairs Fellow. He is one of only 45 recipients chosen from hundreds of applicants from around the nation.

Funded by the U.S. Department of State, the Pickering Fellowship provides recipients with two years of financial support, mentoring and professional development to prepare them for a career in the Foreign Service. Fellows also complete a domestic internship at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., and an overseas internship at a U.S. embassy.

A member of the Renée Crown University Honors Program, St. Jean participated in the Maxwell in Washington program during the Fall 2023 semester, when he served as a White House intern in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. During summer 2023, he served as an intern with Freedom House in New York City, an organization that supports and defends democracy around the world.

St. Jean studied abroad in Strasbourg, France, in fall 2022, working with Collectif pour l'accueil des solliciteurs d'asile de Strasbourg to design and implement English language instruction for asylum seekers. He also served as an intern with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and

Cultural Affairs and as a peer mentor with Syracuse University's International Student Success Program.

"Ryan's academic accomplishments, internship experiences and impressive understanding of foreign affairs make him an excellent fit for the Pickering Fellowship and a career in the Foreign Service," says Jolynn Parker, director of the Center for Fellowship and Scholarship Advising.

Among his many honors, St. Jean is a recipient of the Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship and is a Ronald E. McNair Scholar. He is president of the University's chapter of Sigma Iota Rho, a member of the Syracuse University Alumni Association Board of Directors (Class of 2024 representative to the National Board) and a deputy chief justice with the Student Association Supreme Court. St. Jean previously served as a member of the University's Department of Public Safety Student of Color Advisory Committee.



Ryan St. Jean



Felisha Legette-Jack

Felisha Legette-Jack Named ACC Coach of the Year

Syracuse Women's Basketball Head Coach Felisha Legette-Jack '89 was named ACC Coach of the Year, while star guard Dyaisha Fair G'24 was named to the All-ACC First Team and forward Alyssa Latham '27 was named to the ACC All-Freshman Team.

"I am grateful to be named the ACC Coach of the Year by my peers and the media," says Legette-Jack. "I am proud to represent my home and Syracuse University as our head coach. This award is a team award and is a direct reflection of the work our student-athletes, coaches and staff put in, and I am humbled for us to be recognized."

Proceeds from the CBT Celebrity Classic basketball game in September will benefit Legette-Jack's Head Coach's Fund.

Fair earned All-ACC First Team honors for the second straight season. She graduated as the third leading scorer all-time in NCAA Division I women's basketball with 3,403 points and was selected 16th overall by the Las Vegas Aces in the 2024 WNBA Draft.

Latham, the first ESPN HoopGurlz Top-100 recruit of the Legette-Jack era, is one of five players selected to the All-Freshman Team. The Chicago-area native averaged 8.6 points and a team-best 7.0 rebounds per game.

Gwendolyn Pough Named Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

Gwendolyn Pough, Dean's Professor of the Humanities and professor of women's and gender studies, has been named the College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) associate dean of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA). In that role, she will work with college leadership to strengthen the A&S commitment to promoting intellectual openness and maintaining a community that is welcoming to people of all backgrounds and perspectives.

"As home to the liberal arts and sciences at Syracuse University, A&S welcomes and thrives on the richness of diverse perspectives and experiences," says A&S Dean Behzad Mortazavi. "To that end, I look forward to working with Professor Pough in helping to ensure our faculty, staff and students can teach, work and learn in a setting that is equitable and inclusive."

As associate dean of DEIA, Pough will expand on existing structures and policies that actively promote equal opportunities and dismantle systemic barriers. She will collaborate with constituents across the college to enhance diversity and inclusion in hiring practices, admissions, faculty retention and the student experience, among other areas.

"I am excited to serve the college as associate dean and will work to ensure that A&S is a welcoming space for a diversity of people and ideas," says Pough. "DEIA isn't something we can just say we value. It requires ongoing commitment and ongoing work. Diversity isn't a description, or even a prescription; it should be an action. It requires that we are open, flexible and nimble."

Throughout my career I have helped to foster equity, diversity, inclusion, access and belonging in a variety of ways, and I look forward to bringing my vast experience to this new role."

Pough is a renowned scholar of feminist theory, African American rhetoric, women's studies and hip-hop culture. Her book *Check It While I Wreck It* (Northeastern University Press, 2004) explores the relationship between Black women, hip-hop and feminism. A faculty member at Syracuse since 2004, Pough has served the University, the college and her department in various leadership and advisory roles. As the William P. Tolley Distinguished Professor in the Humanities in A&S from 2020 to 2022, she helped to shape conversations about pedagogical practices in the classroom with an emphasis on diversity, inclusion, social justice and activism, work she will carry on as associate dean.



Gwendolyn Pough

Willie Reddic Named Associate Dean at Whitman School

Willie Reddic '12, '13, associate professor in the Joseph I. Lubin School of Accounting, has been named associate dean for business education at the Martin J. Whitman School of Management.

Reddic will provide leadership over the residential and online undergraduate and master's programs, including student attraction, coordination of instructional needs, programmatic innovation and feasibility studies, and oversight of assurance of learning processes and teaching effectiveness. He will work closely with the faculty curriculum and teaching committees, department chairs, students and staff. Reddic is also on the Faculty Oversight Committee for Athletics and is a highly accomplished teacher and administrator. He held a similar position to this current role at DePaul University.

Reddic has more than a decade of experience working in corporate executive training. He has worked with Jones, Lang, Lasalle (JLL); Northern Trust Bank; Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois; McDonalds; Reebok and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families. Before joining the Whitman faculty, he was an associate dean of programs and curriculum at the Driehaus College of Business and the Kellstadt Graduate School of Business at DePaul University.

His academic research interests include the portfolio rebalancing, earnings management, and auditing in regulated environments. Reddic has conducted numerous research studies focused on portfolio rebalancing in the insurance industry, including a project that was awarded grants by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Research Grant and the MetLife Foundation. His academic research has been published in top journals and presented at prestigious academic conferences.

He is an active member of the PhD Project Faculty Alumni Association and the American Accounting Association. He received a B.S. in computer science and an M.I.S. from Chico State University, a master's in finance from the University of Illinois and a master's in economics and a doctorate in accounting from Syracuse University.



Willie Reddic

Hall of Fame member
Dave Bing at the JMA
Wireless Dome during
his Ring of Honor
acknowledgment



Dave Bing Inducted into Ring of Honor

Basketball Hall of Fame member Dave Bing '66, H'06 was inducted into the Syracuse Athletics Ring of Honor in January. The Ring of Honor was established in 2020 to honor the most outstanding student-athletes or coaches from Syracuse University. Bing became the eighth honoree, joining Jim Brown '57, Ernie Davis '61, Floyd Little '67, H'16, Dwayne "Pearl" Washington '86, Jim Boeheim '66, G'73, H'24 (a former teammate), Ben Schwartzwalder and Roy Simmons Jr. '58, whose names are permanently displayed on the perimeter of the JMA Wireless Dome interior between the first and second levels.

Bing played 76 games for the Syracuse men's basketball team from 1964 to 1966, averaging 24.8 points and 10.3 rebounds per game and leading the team in scoring in all three seasons. During that period, Syracuse had a 52-24 record and advanced to the NCAA Tournament's Elite Eight in 1966.

In the 1966 NBA draft, Bing was selected second overall by the Detroit Pistons, where he played point guard, and later for the Washington Bullets and Boston Celtics. He became one of the most celebrated players of his era, a member of the NBA Hall of Fame and was named one of the NBA's 50 greatest players of all time.

After retiring from basketball, Bing joined a two-year training program with a Detroit steel company. He later started his own business processing steel for Michigan's auto manufacturers, growing it from four employees to more than 1,400, with \$300 million in annual sales. In 1984, Bing Steel earned him the National Minority Small Business Person of the Year award.

Bing sold the company in 2007 and, at the urging of city leaders, ran for and was elected mayor of Detroit, serving from 2009-14. He went on to found the Bing Youth Institute, a nonprofit organization that supports programs and activities that are designed to improve the academic, behavioral, and social wellness of young men of color. Bing also supports underrepresented students at Syracuse University. He endowed the first scholarship in Syracuse University's Our Time Has Come program and serves on the Office of Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council.

"Thank you so much for bestowing this honor on me," said Bing at the ceremony. "It's something I will cherish for a lifetime."

Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah Named National Book Award Finalist

M.F.A. graduate Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah G'16 became a finalist for the 2023 National Book Award with his debut novel, *Chain-Gang All-Stars* (Penguin Random House, 2023). Alongside the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award is considered one of the most prestigious honors in American literature.

Chain-Gang All-Stars was also longlisted for the New American Voices Award and the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize and shortlisted for the Waterstones Debut Fiction Prize. It was also a *New York Times* Book Review Editors' Choice and was named a most anticipated book by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Today*, *Goodreads*, *Elle*, *Oprah Daily* and many more.

Chain-Gang All-Stars centers on an entertainment show created by a private prison system in which prisoners fight for their freedom as gladiators. Through the two main characters, the dystopian novel provides an excoriating look at the American prison system's unholy alliance of systemic racism, unchecked capitalism and mass incarceration.

Adjei-Brenyah is also author of the short story collection *Friday Black*, which was a *New York Times* bestseller, won the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, the Dylan Thomas Prize and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Award. He is a National Book Foundation's 5 Under 35 honoree.



Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

Carlisha Bradley and Lia Miller Honored by Maxwell School

In conjunction with its centennial celebration in Washington, D.C., on May 31, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs will honor five alumni who exemplify a commitment to engaged citizenship at the third annual Awards of Excellence.

Among the honorees, Carlisha Williams Bradley G'09 will receive the Charles V. Willie Advocate Award, which recognizes alumni whose contributions advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in their organizations or communities are reflective of Maxwell's commitment to DEIA, social justice and engaged citizenship. Bradley is CEO of Amplify for Women and founder and executive director of Women Empowering Nations, and a former member of the Oklahoma State Board of Education. She is honored for her dedication to education equity and inclusive leadership development.

Lia Miller '99, G'03, a career foreign service officer with the U.S. Department of State, will receive this year's 1924 Award, honoring graduates for their distinguished and sustained professional or civic leadership and achievement in



Carlisha Bradley



Lia Miller

the spirit of the Maxwell School mission. Miller is currently serving as senior advisor for Women, Peace and Security at the U.S. Naval War College.

Alumni Awards Presented During Reunion Weekend

Syracuse University honored its own in April with the presentation of the annual Alumni Awards, which recognize individual alumni who embody what it means to be Forever Orange. Previously held during Orange Central weekend, the Alumni Awards Ceremony was moved to spring for the first time, coinciding with Reunion Weekend for the classes of 1964 and 1974, celebrating their 60-year and 50-year reunions.

AMONG THE HONOREES:

Donovan McNabb '98 received the George R. Arents Award, Syracuse University's highest alumni honor, which recognizes alumni who have excelled in their field.

McNabb played 13 seasons as an NFL quarterback, primarily with the Philadelphia Eagles. He was the second overall pick in the 1999 draft and led the Eagles to eight postseasons, including five NFC East Division championships, five NFC Championship Games and the team's first Super Bowl appearance in 24 years. McNabb was selected to six Pro Bowls, was twice named a finalist for the NFL's Man of the Year Award and finished second in the MVP voting following the 2000 season.



Donovan McNabb

One of the most impactful players in Eagles' franchise history, McNabb was named to the club's 75th Anniversary Team and was immortalized at a halftime ceremony in September 2013, when the team retired his No. 5 jersey. McNabb holds Syracuse University records for career touchdown passes and yards gained. He earned All-Big East honors all four seasons of his collegiate career and was named the league's Offensive Player of the Year three times. McNabb was recognized as the Big East's Offensive Player of the Decade for the 1990s and hosts "The Five Spot" podcast on Fox's newest network, OutKick sports.

The Donovan McNabb Fund, which has pledged support to raise awareness of diabetes, has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the American Diabetes Association, as well as provided scholarships to many students. At Syracuse, the McNabbs support the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholarship Program through the McNabb Family OTHC Leadership Immersion Endowed Fund.

McNabb's wife, Raquel-Ann "Roxi" Nurse McNabb, '98, G'99, a Syracuse University trustee, was a star athlete on Syracuse University's women's basketball team. The couple have four children; daughter Lexi '26 is a current player on the women's basketball team.

Amanda Quick '14, G'16 received the Generation Orange Award, which recognizes graduates within the last 10 years for contributions to their profession, their community and for their overall commitment and loyalty to Syracuse University.

Quick is a senior manager at American Express. She graduated magna cum laude from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications with a degree in broadcast and digital journalism and minors in marketing and Chinese studies. She also received an M.S. in information management from the School of Information Studies in 2016.

Quick served on the Generation Orange Leadership Council for six years and is a member of the Newhouse Emerging Leaders Board. She is also a breast cancer survivor who serves on the board of directors for The Pink Agenda, supporting and educating young women living with breast cancer and raising awareness nationally for the disease. Quick has shared her story with *Good Morning America* and participated in the Ann Taylor LOFT and



Amanda Quick



Leondra Tyler

Breast Cancer Research Foundation campaigns. In her free time, she loves to read, write, travel and cheer for the Kansas City Chiefs.

Leondra Tyler '24 was the inaugural recipient of the Outstanding Future Alumni Award, created to recognize a Syracuse University student who displays exemplary commitment to both the campus and local community through leadership, service and/or involvement outside of the classroom.

Tyler is a post-traditional student attending Syracuse University for neuroscience and psychology through the part-time Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP). She has an associate of arts in liberal arts, cum laude, from Syracuse University. Tyler's academic achievements include making Dean's List nearly every semester of her academic career and being a McNair and Our Time Has Come Scholar.

She serves as an advocate for student aid funding, specifically for HEOP programs, meeting with legislators to discuss the importance of funding for these programs and supporting marginalized and underprivileged communities. At Hendricks Chapel, Tyler has been involved in managing the campus food pantries, combating food insecurity on campus. She spent the spring 2023 semester studying abroad at Yonsei University in South Korea and served as student co-chair of Syracuse University's 2024 MLK Celebration. Tyler is known for her efforts connect with Syracuse University students and create a safe space for them to flourish.

2024 Alumni Award winners with Chancellor Kent Syverud, fourth from left



Raphael T. Richard Gives School of Education Convocation Address

Raphael T. Richard G'12, a member of the School of Education Advisory Board, returned to campus to address graduates at the 2024 Convocation.

Richard is the emerging talent recruiting lead for tech giant Cisco's university partnerships, driving recruitment strategies and engaging programs that connect emerging and university talent with career opportunities at the Fortune 100 company.

While earning a bachelor's degree in urban studies and public policy at Dillard University—a historically Black university in New Orleans—Richard experienced the educational and career benefits created by student leadership. Inspired by his experiences during and after 2005's Hurricane Katrina, Richard launched his professional career as a diversity education specialist at Syracuse University, where he received a master's degree in higher education from the School of Education with support from the Our Time Has Come Scholarship Program.

Continuing his higher education career at the University of Alabama-Birmingham (as coordinator of multicultural and diversity programs) and at Columbia University (as assistant director of the office of multicultural affairs), Richard designed, branded and expanded social justice, intercultural and dialogue initiatives.

Richard then transferred his passion for diversity recruitment into the nonprofit sector, spending four years managing a national

internship program for college students at the T. Howard Foundation, which is dedicated to advancing diversity in the media industry. At the foundation, Richard helped more than 700 students secure internships at more than 40 media, entertainment and tech companies, such as Paramount, NBCUniversal, Snap Inc., *The New York Times* and ABC/ESPN.

In 2021, Richard earned a certificate in diversity and inclusion through the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. He joined Cisco in the same year, first as an emerging talent and campus channel manager.

Committed to furthering his impact through service, in addition to advising the School of Education, Richard is an advisory board member for the National Capital Region of Per Scholas, a senior fellow in the Melton Foundation and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.



Raphael T. Richard

CNN Correspondent Boris Sanchez Gives Maxwell Convocation Address

Boris Sanchez '09, an award-winning journalist and nationally recognized cable news anchor, was the alumni keynote speaker at the 2024 College of Arts and Sciences | Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Undergraduate Convocation.

A dual international relations and broadcast journalism graduate with over a decade of experience, Sanchez has co-anchored *CNN News Central* since April 2023. In that role, he has helped lead CNN's coverage of major events, including former President Trump's legal issues, the OceanGate Titan submarine tragedy, conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine and Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action and LGBTQ rights.

Sanchez says it's a "momentous honor" to have been asked to give remarks to graduates at his alma mater, especially since it's the Maxwell School's 100th anniversary. "Syracuse helped shape everything I have aimed to accomplish throughout my career, and I am deeply humbled and grateful," he says.

Sanchez says his career has provided a platform to speak for people who are underrepresented and to defend democracy.

"And that's not something I take lightly," he adds.

Prior to joining *CNN News Central*, Sanchez co-anchored the CNN program *New Day Weekend*. Before that, he was a CNN White House correspondent and a CNN national correspondent in Miami and New York City, and covered the 2016 protests in Charlotte, North Carolina, over a fatal police shooting, for which CNN won an Edward R. Murrow Award.



Boris Sanchez

Oliver Fernandez Gives ECS Convocation Address

Oliver Fernandez '08 returned to campus to give the Convocation address for the College of Engineering and Computer Science. An Our Time Has Come Scholar, Fernandez played linebacker for the Syracuse University football team and graduated with a civil engineering degree. He founded McKenzie Construction and Site Development, a general construction company that has completed more than \$100 million worth of projects for the federal government.

Fernandez lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Leah '08, and their two children. In 2022, the couple, who are also real estate investors, purchased Greenberg House from Syracuse University. The property had served as the University's Washington, D.C., headquarters since 1988.

As a recent college graduate, 23-year-old Fernandez renovated his first property in Washington, D.C. A neighbor was so impressed with the work, he financed Fernandez to renovate two buildings he owned. "My initial goal was to get to \$10 million in business in

a year, and after two or three years we were there," he says. "I like new challenges, so we are resetting the target for \$100 million a year. Confidence is another great characteristic that Syracuse University developed in me."

He also credits his engineering education. "Engineers think about life in practical ways, and it helps with business and entrepreneurship," he says.

Fernandez earned a master's degree in construction management from Georgia Institute of Technology.



Oliver Fernandez

Suzanne de Passe Tapped for Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award

Longtime music, television and movie producer Suzanne de Passe '68 will receive this year's Ahmet Ertegun Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in a nationally televised ceremony on Oct. 19. The award is given to non-performing industry professionals who have had a major influence on the creative development and growth of rock 'n' roll music and is considered one of the most prestigious honors on the business side of the music industry. De Passe will become the fifth woman to receive the industry award since its inception in 1986 and is only the second solo female recipient.

"With nearly six decades in the entertainment field, trailblazer Suzanne de Passe paved the way for women in the music business as one of the first leading female executives," the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame said in a statement. "From de Passe's extraordinary 20 years with Motown to her successful tenure heading de Passe Entertainment, she has used her passion, persistence and vision to triumph in a male-dominated industry."

A native of Harlem, de Passe began her career as a talent coordinator at the Cheetah Club in New York City. Her friendship with Supremes member Cindy Birdsong led to a job as creative assistant to Motown founder Berry Gordy. The same year she graduated from Syracuse, she helped sign the Jackson 5 to the Motown label, and she is credited with discovering and launching the careers of numerous other Motown hitmakers.

De Passe went on to a decorated career in film and television, becoming president of Motown Productions.

"Every task I ever threw at her, she not only accomplished but exceeded my expectations," said Gordy in a statement to the *Detroit Free Press*. "Suzanne went from being my creative assistant, helping to launch the careers of Michael Jackson, the Jackson 5, Lionel Richie, the Commodores and more, to co-writing a screenplay for *Lady Sings the Blues*, for which she received an Oscar nomination."

In 1992, de Passe founded dePasse Jones Entertainment Group, which created TV shows including *Sister, Sister*, *The Temptations*, *Lonesome Dove* and *The Jacksons: An American Dream* (starring Vanessa Williams '84 as de Passe). She also executive produced President Barack Obama's inaugural ball in 2009.

Among many personal honors, de Passe received a Chancellor's Citation from Syracuse University in 1986 and an Arents Award for Excellence in Entertainment in 2010.



Suzanne de Passe

Milestones

Gizelle Ortiz-Velazquez '84 joined United Way Miami in May 2023 as the director for UpSkill Miami. UpSkill Miami, a fund that invests in workforce development initiatives, forms strategic partnerships with employers and training providers to give individuals from underserved communities in Miami-Dade County access to training, skills expansion and employment. To date, UpSkill has invested \$3.3 million in four key industries: health care, transportation, construction and energy and is projected to benefit more than 750 Miami-Dade County residents.



Andrea Massop Ramos

Andrea Massop Ramos '85 was named to the Falk College Advisory Board at Syracuse University. She is an award-winning clinical nutritionist, private health chef and entrepreneur.

Gisele Marcus '89 was promoted to vice dean-Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the Olin School of Business at Washington University in St. Louis. She also serves as professor of practice of DEI at the school. Marcus was also recognized as one of the Top 10 Women Leaders in DEI to Follow in 2024 by CIO Views, a publication for executive leaders. She is a Syracuse University trustee.



Vincent Cohen Jr., '92, L'95

Vincent Cohen Jr. '92, L'95 has been recognized by Forbes in its inaugural list of the Top 200 Lawyers in the U.S. Cohen is global managing partner of Dechert, shouldering responsibility for setting the firm's strategic priorities and driving its focus on client service, innovation, diversity and inclusion. He is also regional chair of the firm's white collar group and a Syracuse University trustee.



Joachim Rogers

Joachim Rogers '93 has been promoted to vice president and general manager of the Central Market Unit at Coca-Cola Consolidated. In his new role, he will be accountable for sales and delivery operations across all channels of the business in Kentucky, West Virginia and Southern Ohio.



Cha McCoy

The Hon. Tanya Jones Bosier '95 was nominated to serve as an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia by President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L'68, H'09 and awaits Senate confirmation. She has served as a magistrate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia since 2017.

Cha McCoy '07 received the Lifetime Achievement Ivy Award from the Iota Upsilon Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., of which she is a member. McCoy is a sommelier and founder/CEO of Cha Squared Hospitality, a beverage consulting firm focused on event production, marketing and product development. She also owns the Communion, a boutique event space and wine and spirits retailer in Syracuse.

Rafael Balbi '11 has launched the Underwriter App for Android and iPhone, an AI stock research tool to help anyone become a great stock investor.

IN MEMORIAM



Patricia Ann "Patsy" Berry '78, of Baltimore, died Jan. 7, 2024.

A native of Baltimore, Berry earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Syracuse University. She also developed a lifelong friendship with a group of women

she met her first day on campus in 1974, when eight eager and excited young women from different backgrounds met in Shaw Hall. These young women became known as the SU Shaw Sisters of '78. In addition to Berry, they included Cynthia Cody '78, Audrey "Pamela" Davidson '78, Dawn Hill '78 (deceased), Lynelle Johnson '78, Dawne Morgan '78, Charmon Parker '78 and Angela Y. Robinson '78.

Sharing a special bond of 50 years, the Shaw Sisters recall Patsy as a caring, loving friend who was always upbeat, lots of fun and forward thinking, with contagious high energy. She was a food and wine connoisseur and loved to shop and discuss home renovation ideas. She was the kind of sister-friend who always wanted to be sure you and your family were OK. The Shaw Sisters fondly remember her dedication to special organizations on campus like the Alpha Angels. "Honored to call her friend, we will carry Patsy in our hearts forever!" they say.

After graduation, Berry was hired by PepsiCo, becoming a procurement manager and traveling the world. After seven years, she returned to Baltimore and spent the next decade as a women's fashion buyer for Nordstrom. Since 2008, Berry was a fine art consultant for Renaissance Fine Arts and the Merritt Gallery.

In 2022, Berry was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS. "Patsy was a fiercely loyal friend, and during her illness her friends from college came long distances to be with her," says her sister, Helen Cole.

Berry is survived by her brother, Robert, and his wife, Cora; her sister, Helen, and her husband Andy; and other relatives and devoted friends.



John Van Clief III '89, of Leonia, New Jersey, died Oct. 23, 2023.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Leonia, Van Clief attended Leonia High School, where he was an engaged student and member of the basketball team all four years. He

was a fixture on the basketball court in Wood Park and remembered as fun to be around because he was so friendly, constantly connecting people and making things happen. At Syracuse University, Van Clief earned bachelor's degrees in finance and economics and was a founding member of Sigma Nu fraternity. He furthered his academic pursuits with graduate studies in economics at New York University and Fordham Gabelli School of Business.

Van Clief held high-level posts with leading financial and investment firms, including Lehman Brothers, Lanyi Research, Legg Mason and Bear Stearns. He was also the founder and managing partner of Green Knolls Capital LLC/Ravensbridge Capital LTD, at the time of his passing.

Van Clief married Beth Jarrett '91, who he met in Syracuse and would become the love of his life, in Nassau, Bahamas, Aug. 14, 2004. They had two sons, John IV (known as Jack) and Connor. His real joy came from spending time with his family and sharing in his two sons' academic and athletic accomplishments.

Throughout his life, Van Clief's affable nature and ease with people, as well as his bright smile and laugh, were social forces that created a network of lasting friendships. The parties he hosted with his Beth in the Hamptons and at their apartment for Christmas were legendary.

Van Clief is survived by his father, John Jr.; his wife, Beth; and sons John IV (Jack) and Connor.



Juan Cruz '96 of Syracuse, New York, died Jan. 10, 2024.

Born in Puerto Rico, Cruz moved with his family to New York City when he was 5, later returning to the island and then coming back to New York in his teens. At 17, he was

convicted of murder in a gang-related shooting and received a life sentence.

In 1971, at age 30, Cruz enrolled in an inmate art program at Auburn Correctional Facility led by James Harithas of Syracuse's Everson Museum of Art. He studied and worked in various styles and painted portraits of other inmates' loved ones in exchange for packs of cigarettes, painting by candlelight late at night.

Cruz began to be recognized for his talents. Artists and curators began a campaign to have his sentence commuted, and in 1975, New York Gov. Malcolm Wilson ordered his release.

For the next 10 years Cruz devoted himself both to art and to working with Syracuse young people, focusing on making arts accessible to underserved youth. Syracuse University offered him a scholarship to study art, though it would take 20 years to attain his degree.

From 1979 to 1981, he ran a pilot program funded by Youth Community Service where young apprentices helped him to paint murals on buildings on the South and West Sides of the city. He worked as an interpreter and housing aide at the Spanish Action League and coached the football team at Fowler High School.

Cruz had shows at the Everson, Syracuse University, Le Moyne College, Onondaga Community College, the Community Folk Art Gallery and the State Plaza in Albany. In 1988, his painting *Adam and Eve in Paradise* was one of 36 winners in the national art competition, ArtQuest '88,

continued on page 38

IN MEMORIAM

which featured more than 5,000 entrants. In 1996, Cruz earned a bachelor's degree from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts.

He returned to Puerto Rico from 2003-08, but otherwise remained in Syracuse. In 2011, he became the first artist-in-residence of the new Near West Side Initiative. In 2019, the Everson Museum hosted *Juan A. Cruz: A Retrospective*, an exhibit featuring works spanning roughly 50 years, which included drawings, paintings, murals, collages and sculpture.

Cruz is survived by his daughter, Mia; son, Omar; and two granddaughters.



Jenean Chapman '02, of Dallas, Texas, died Sept. 25, 2023, the victim of domestic violence.

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey, Chapman moved to New York City after high school, where she secured an internship at Rush

Communications, founded by hip-hop pioneer Russell Simmons. She heard about Syracuse University from Anne Simmons, whose father was friendly with a Syracuse University dean. Chapman applied and received scholarship support to attend the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

After earning her degree in television, radio and film production, Chapman got a job on a show called *Challenge America* with Erin Brockovich, where she freelanced until the show was cancelled. She then went to work on the documentary production of Paul McCartney's *Driving World Tour*. Through one of her many connections, she interviewed for and was hired as the personal assistant to Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, a position she held for four years, traveling the world with the duchess.

Ambitiously driven, Chapman went on to develop a successful career in marketing and digital strategy, holding positions at Mediaedge, Agent 16, Buddy Media, Attention, Vayner Media, UBM Fashion Group, Clicktale and Hero Media, holding director, vice president and senior vice president positions as a minority woman. Most recently, she served as senior vice president-client partner at Critical Mass.

"Jenean had an unbelievable spirit and ability to connect with people," says her sister Crystal Marshall. "She impacted so many people in her life. She's going to be terribly missed."

Chapman was remembered by Ferguson as "loyal, hardworking, beautiful and fun. My heart breaks for her family and friends."

Outside of work, Chapman volunteered at Meals on Wheels for nearly 10 years and enjoyed biking, travel and live music.

Chapman was predeceased by her father, Horace Chapman. She is survived by her mother, Ann Marshall and stepfather Delroy Marshall; her sisters Charene Chapman, Crystal Marshall and Nicole Marshall; and nieces and nephews.



Josette Burgos Jackson '09, G'17, of Syracuse, New York, died Jan. 21, 2024, after complications from chronic illness.

Affectionately known as Josie, Burgos Jackson was born in Bronx, New York. As a young adult, she

relocated to Syracuse after earning an associate degree in programming and systems from Bronx Community College.

She made a lasting impact on the Syracuse community. She was a longtime employee of Syracuse University, working in the Office of Multicultural Affairs and later becoming a senior administrator for the Community Folk Art Center. She also earned two degrees: a bachelor's in professional studies and a dual master's in business administration and finance management.

Burgos Jackson was an emeritus board member for Initiative Inc. and former board vice president of the Spanish Action League. In 2014, she was inducted into Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc. and held several positions at the local level, including president from 2016-18.

Burgos Jackson had a lifelong love of cooking, instilled by her Puerto Rican maternal grandmother. In 2019, she and her husband, Walwyn Jackson, opened a catering and food truck business, *Elbita's Cocina*, named in honor of her grandmother. The popular truck could be found all over Central New York at various events and food truck festivals.

Burgos Jackson is remembered for her passion for life, women's empowerment, cultural awareness and, of course, her wonderful cooking. At her memorial service, a proclamation was presented by Angela Morales-Patterson G'24 and Maria J. Lopez '05, G'12 from the Syracuse University Office of Multicultural Advancement, honoring Burgos Jackson for her support of the department and University, her love and dedication to her family, her pride for her Puerto Rican heritage and outstanding achievements in the culinary field.

Burgos Jackson is survived by her husband, Walwyn Jackson; her mother and stepfather, Elba and Tony Maldonado; her father, Ryes Burgos; mother-in-law Verna Gordan; her sister, Ines Burgos; her brother, Arnold Maldonado; grandmother Elba Arce; stepchildren Noah and Naomi Jackson; and numerous other relatives.

FACULTY

Alejandro Garcia, of Syracuse, New York, died Nov. 17, 2023.

A professor of social work at Syracuse University since 1978, Garcia was known as an exceptionally generous and engaged colleague, teacher and scholar whose many contributions extended well beyond the University's boundaries. He taught gerontology, social policy and human diversity courses for more than 43 years in the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics, shaping the School of Social Work and generations of students. He held the Jocelyn Falk Endowed Professorship of Social Work at the time of his retirement in 2021, when he became professor emeritus.

Raised in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Brownsville, Texas, Garcia was one of six children of parents who migrated from Mexico. After learning English in grade school, he was recognized as an outstanding student. His musical talent propelled him into the best high school in Brownsville at a time when discrimination and racism limited such opportunities.

Garcia was one of few Hispanics studying at the University of Texas, and after graduation he enlisted in the United States Army. He earned a master of social work degree at California State University Sacramento where, years later, he received the Distinguished Service Award and was designated by its School of Social Work as "The Social Work Educator of the Decades." He was recruited by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to fill a new leadership role as the national student coordinator.

Encouraged by NASW leadership to pursue doctoral studies, Garcia was accepted a few years later at Brandeis University's Florence Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare. That led to one of the first studies of the economic status of elder Chicanos and Chicanas, a dissertation entitled "The Contribution of Social Security to the Adequacy of Income of Elderly Mexican Americans." An elected member of the National Academy of Social

Insurance and Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America, he was also designated by the NASW as a Social Work Pioneer.

Over his career, Garcia served in many leadership roles, including as an emeritus board member of the Syracuse Rescue Mission, chair of AARP's National Policy Council, chair of the National Hispanic Council on Aging, member of the boards of Syracuse's Spanish Action League, the Council of Social Work Education and NASW. He received the Scholar/Teacher of the Year award at Syracuse University and

was recognized as a Hometown Hero by its National Veterans Resource Center. He served as the director of the School of Social Work for two years.

Garcia co-edited three books, including *Elderly Latinos: Issues and Solutions for the 21st Century* (with Marta Sotomayor in 1993), *HIV Affected and Vulnerable Youth Prevention Issues and Approaches* (with Susan Taylor-Brown in 1999), and *La Familia: Traditions and Realities* (with Sotomayor in 1999). He also authored numerous articles and book chapters and served on the editorial boards of several social work journals and the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*.

He is remembered for his deep love of family and friends; his passion for social, racial and economic justice; and his commitment to working to better the communities he touched. He is survived by his brothers Joel, Ruben, Leon and Arturo Garcia; nieces Linda, Ann, Janey, Alice and Alma; nephews Rudolfo and Carlos; three children named for him; many other close relatives; and many dear friends and generations of Social Work students and colleagues.





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