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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S BLACK AND LATINO ALUMNI MAGAZINE





Delta Sigma Theta alumnae Fatimah Moody '90 and Sadé Muhammad '12 at the CBT Sneaker Ball gala. See more about DST's historic support of Our Time Has Come on page 10.

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On the Cover: Scenes from Coming Back Together 2024. For more, see page 3.

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Rachel Vassel '91, G'21

Hello, Orange Family,

Thanks so much to those who returned to campus for Coming Back Together (CBT) 2024, the Office of Multicultural Advancement's 14th triennial Black and Latino alumni reunion. It was wonderful to see more than 1,500 of you joyfully feeding into the lives of current students. That's what CBT has always been about: coming back to give back with humility, generosity, positivity and love.

Some of my top moments from our amazing weekend together included:

The buzzer beater at the CBT Celebrity Basketball Game (congratulations to Coach Billy Owens '91!); a masterful Darryl Bell '85 moderating the *A Different World* panel (I mean, Lena Waithe AND Yvette Lee Bowser as surprise guests?); a beautiful evening at the Chancellor's House; uncontrollable laughter at the comedy show with DL Hughley; the inspirational Barner-McDuffie House donor celebration (thank you, Sharon Barner '79, for your legacy gift); the Cookout on the Quad (our young alumni DJs made it a party and the Divine Nine/NALFO photo in front of Carnegie Library was epic); Syracuse parent Angie Martinez interviewing our talented alumni during CBT Live; my predecessor, the great Larry Martin, sharing CBT history at the Sneaker Ball (also, the sneaker cam!); witnessing the joy of our CBT 2024 honorees (talk about full circle!); and the blessing of having A.R. Bernard, Erica Campbell and the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble to close out the weekend in gratitude.

Now, some acknowledgements to individuals and teams whose support, dedication and kindness were integral to our success:

1. CBT co-chairs Tara Favors '95 and Sammy Cueva '93. What wonderful co-chairs we had this year! Their hard work, great ideas and connections truly made a difference in the planning of the event. Please thank them.
2. CBT Student co-chairs Jada Knight '25 and Sofia Rodriguez '24, G'25 represent the best of the Our Time Has Come program. They are smart and driven. Please hire them.
3. The SUMA Advisory Council is the best volunteer group I've had the pleasure of working with. Their advice and support behind the scenes were invaluable to me and the team. Please know that we don't do this work alone.
4. The Office of Multicultural Advancement staff. No group works harder and with more goodwill than these ladies. Please recognize this is a team effort.
5. Our donors. I am so inspired by your generosity and support of the work that we do here at Syracuse University on behalf of current students. Please understand that many of our students would not be at Syracuse without your life-changing gifts.

As we close out CBT 2024, you can still help us reach our fundraising goal with a gift of any size by December 31. Please make your gift at CBT.syr.edu.

The great Maya Angelou once said, "Try to be a rainbow in someone else's cloud." That's what this community represents.

CBT 2027 loading!!

With Orange Love,
Rachel



Alumni and students with Chancellor Kent Syverud at the Friday evening reception held on the lawn at the Chancellor's House

Magic in the Air

A sold-out Coming Back Together reunion was a celebration of Orange love, excellence and paying it forward.

Chancellor Kent Syverud and his wife, Dr. Ruth Chen, stood in front of their home, welcoming alumni and students to the opening reception for Coming Back Together (CBT), Syracuse University's triennial reunion for Black and Latino alumni. The sprawling lawn provided ample space for catching up and meeting new friends on the beautiful September evening.

Brian Tarrant '96 and retired U.S. Army Maj. William Watts '94 had just arrived, Tarrant from Las Vegas and Watts from Georgia. It was the first CBT for both, and they were already loving every minute of it. "As a football player, I wasn't able to entrench myself in the whole University, so I'm meeting a lot of people for the first time," said Tarrant. "It's awesome to rediscover people I missed when I was here and really cool to see all of these Black and Latino people that are doing very influential things."

Watts, who had a long career in the Army, had not been back to campus until last year, when he was honored as a Hometown Hero at a Syracuse football game. "This feels like home," he said. "I don't see missing another one. I can tell you that much."

Next to arrive was Lia Miller '99, G'03, a career foreign service officer serving as the consul general of the U.S. Consulate in Barcelona, Spain. She was able to coordinate a visit to the United States with CBT and hoped to garner honors for having traveled the farthest for the reunion.

Mingling through the crowd were alumni co-chairs Sammy Cueva '93 and Tara Favors '95 and student co-chairs Jada Marie Knight '25 and Sofia Rodriguez '24, G'25, each of whom had worked for months in assisting the Office of Multicultural Advancement with the near Herculean task of designing and



CALIBER PHOTOS

CBT co-chairs Tara Favors (left) and Sammy Cueva (right), with Rachel Vassel and Chancellor Kent Syverud

orchestrating a jam-packed weekend of programming to appeal to all ages.

On the far side of the yard, a group of Delta Sigma Thetas had staked out a table—only a handful of the 90 Kappa Lambda members back on campus for CBT. “There is nothing better than coming back every three years. All this love, friendship, all the memories, I would never miss it,” said Candi Carnage ’90, a leader of the organization’s \$1.2 million gift to the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Delta Sigma Theta Endowed Scholarship Fund and member of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Committee.

For Gisele Marcus ’89, the highlight of being at CBT was seeing the intersection of the many connections she’s made at Syracuse University in various roles through the years. “The friends I made

“CBT is a celebration of the relationships we built over our time on campus, but it’s also a party with a purpose. Our ultimate goal is the support of our current students, who are a reflection of who each of us was when we were here.”

—TARA FAVORS ’95



CHELSEA REEVES

Student co-chairs Jada Marie Knight and Sofia Rodriguez at the Sneaker Ball gala

as a student, the people I met when I served as vice president of an alumni club. I hosted incoming students in my home when I lived in Dallas, and now, I’m on the Board of Trustees,” she said. “Even though all those things happened at very distinct times in my Syracuse student or alumni life, the thread of all of it is here in one place.”

Across the way, fellow University trustee Michael Blackshear ’91 reflected on how CBT has evolved from “reconnecting with former classmates to a way of paying it forward and giving back. We have 1,500 people registered for this event and probably more attending,” he said. “I’m hoping that the majority have made some sort of financial contribution to support those students that are struggling with paying their tuition.”

“CBT is a celebration of the relationships we built over our time



CALIBER PHOTOS

Russell Fearon ’20, G’21, Sean Dorcellus ’24, Jordan Pierre ’24 and David Barbier ’23 at the Chancellor’s Reception

on campus, but it's also a party with a purpose," added Favors. "Our ultimate goal is the support of our current students, who are a reflection of who each of us was when we were here."

The OTHC Scholars were there in full force, mingling in small groups through the crowd, eager to soak up the wisdom and experiences of those who walked this campus before them. "It's so great to talk with alumni about their postgrad experiences and get their advice," said Hailey Roy '25. "It's encouraging how friendly and helpful they are."

"They're so eager to talk to us," added Joshua Gardner '25. "I love to hear their success stories, their triumphs and their hardships, and what got them to where they're at now."

Regardless of age or distance traveled, everyone was joyful: happy to be in Syracuse on this sunny, 80-degree evening, happy to be in each other's company.

That pure joy permeated the Syracuse University campus throughout the weekend, the 14th CBT held since its creation in 1983. While every CBT weekend is special, each has built on its predecessor. CBT 2024 was no exception, with a record-breaking 1,500 alumni returning to campus, including 600 first-time attendees. In particular, the number of Latino and younger alumni attendees substantially increased, a focus area this year to ensure the continued success of the reunion.

"It was important to me to share this experience with my fellow Latino alumni and for them to make their presence felt to current Latino students," said Cueva. "It felt like a long overdue family reunion."

ALBERTOLANERZ



Gina Brown '89 and her husband, Steve, sold their mySULife merchandise at pop-up shops throughout CBT weekend.

For many attendees, the biggest draw was simply "coming back together." From Sylvia Mackey '63 and Sheila Payton '70 to Brandon Reyes '19 and David Barbier Jr. '23, alumni of all ages were drawn back to the community they developed with fellow students of color and now share with alumni across generations, as well as current students.

When Kim Burnett '91 and Lisa Yearwood '91 arrived from Washington, D.C., they didn't leave the Schine Student Center for four hours. "We just kept seeing people we hadn't seen, some since graduation," said Burnett. "We just sat and visited."

It was a scene played out on campus all weekend: shrieks of recognition, hugs and sometimes tears. "When you're a student, you don't realize the importance of being together during those foundational years, but it creates a forever bond," said Yearwood. "Now that we're in our 50s, we cherish it."

But it was more than just fun; important networking took place. "This CBT was really about connecting our more seasoned alumni with young alumni and students," said Maria J. Lopez '05, G'12, assistant director of scholarship programs for multicultural advancement. "The best is watching OTHC students connect with alumni and donors, getting an understanding that so many people are investing in their success."

It's not unusual for students of color at Syracuse to be the first generation in their families to attend college, often struggling to navigate an unfamiliar experience at an institution where many people don't look like them and come from different backgrounds. That's where the OTHC program shines. An outgrowth of CBT, it was launched in 1987 as a scholarship program and has expanded to include formal mentoring and professional development activities. As much as CBT is a reunion for alumni, it's also an opportunity to support students of color en masse, if by nothing else than their sheer presence on campus, said Lopez.

"Everything I have become and learned about myself has been possible because of the support I found in OTHC," said Rodriguez. "The opportunity this weekend to connect with so many students and alumni who are Black and Latino is a dream come true and makes me hopeful for the network I will be joining. It feels like home."

GLORY DAYS

CBT kicked off on Thursday, Sept. 12, with the CBT Celebrity Classic, a charity basketball game featuring former Syracuse athletic legends from sports including basketball, football and track and field. Team captains Billy Owens '91 and Lawrence Moten '95 faced off in a surprisingly athletic competition.

"It was so much fun watching the game with my old classmates and seeing folks on the court that played while we were students," said André Del Valle '97.

For the first time, the game went into overtime with a buzzer-beater shot by Lazarus Sims '96 with 0.07 seconds left on the clock—which referees initially said did not count. Ultimately, Owens' team won in overtime, crowning him as the championship coach once again.

"It was unreal," said West Lamy '04, a sportswriter and broadcaster from Miami who assisted veteran Celebrity Classic announcer Vera Jones '88, G'91 with courtside play-by-play at the event, held in the JMA Wireless Dome. "It was a lot of fun to do. The players were still great. Brandon Triche ['13] played the entire game; he's still got it."

Indeed, until last year, Triche had been playing professionally in Dubai. Others joining in the competition, which benefited the Women's Basketball Head Coaches Fund, included men's basketball alumni John Bol Ajak '23, Tyus Battle '19, DaJuan Coleman '16, Eric Devendorf '09, Scoop Jardine '12, Mookie Jones '15, Elimu Nelson '96, Eugene Waldron '84 and John Wallace '96; women's basketball alumni Whisper Fisher G'20, Shakeya Leary '13, Naje Murray 'G'22, Chineze Nwagbo '05 and Jones; football alumni David Byrd '99, Archie Gilchrist '75 G'76, Will Hunter '02, Maurice Jackson '02, Chris McKenzie '12 and Jason Poles '99; and track and field alumni Dwayne Murray '97, Artie Vaughn '94 and William Watts '94.

"It is an opportunity to see old friends, teammates and colleagues, to reminisce over the good old days, and feel a burst of enjoyment and pride in being a Syracuse Athletics alumnus," said Jones. "Plus, as a former broadcaster and standup comedian, I never want to miss an opportunity to cultivate fresh comedic material."

SU athletes from many eras returned to participate in the CBT Celebrity Classic Basketball Game.

"It is an opportunity to see old friends, teammates and colleagues, to reminisce over the good old days, and feel a burst of enjoyment and pride in being a Syracuse Athletics alumnus. Plus, as a former broadcaster and standup comedian, I never want to miss an opportunity to cultivate fresh comedic material."

— VERA JONES '88, G'91

"This is a beautiful event," added Moten, who now works as a youth development leader for the Syracuse City School District. "It's fun playing for the camaraderie and for the joy of people you may not have seen for 25 years," he said. "And it's great to see everyone come back doing so well outside of athletics."

On Friday morning, alumni packed the K.G. Tan Auditorium in the National Veterans Resource Center for the A Different World Reunion Tour hosted by Darryl M. Bell '85.

A frequent sentiment shared throughout the weekend was the community Black and brown students created for themselves



Caption



CALIBER PHOTOS

Members of Omega Psi Phi show their fraternal spirit with comedian DL Hughley.

while at Syracuse that often made them feel they had their own “HBCU” within a predominately white institution.

“We nurtured each other,” Bell told his fellow alumni. “This was what allowed me to audition for *School Daze* and be authentic. This is what allowed me to do *A Different World* and be authentic, because this is what I grew up in.”

For Bell, it was important to share his Syracuse family with his castmate family. And it was clear they were family. Kadeem Hardison (Dwayne), Cree Summer (Freddie) and Charnele Brown (Kimberly) all endured travel difficulties to get to Syracuse for the event because they knew it was important to Bell.

“It was like I ran the *Amazing Race* to get here. You owe me,” Hardison joked. Jasmine Guy (Whitley), who was tied up filming, sent a recorded video message. Television writer/producers Lena Waithe (*Dear White People*, *The Chi*) and Yvette Lee Bowser (*Living Single*, *Dear White People*, *Unprisoned*) were surprise guests who joined remotely.

In sharing their career journeys and motivations, the common theme was the importance of representation.

That resonated with no one more than Tamekia Flowers-Ball '97, whose event planning company, Epiphany Blue, sponsored the event. As a teenager, Flowers-Ball had

been a huge fan of *A Different World*, which showcased a multicultural cast and introduced television viewers to the world of historically Black colleges and universities during its run from 1987 to 1993. “Growing up, I did not have an example of a college student in my family. But the examples I did have were Whitley, Dwayne, Ron, Kimberly and Freddie,” she said.

Following the program, alumni and students dispersed for lunch receptions at individual schools and colleges, which included panel discussions and/or networking activities. Later, afternoon workshops featured alumni experts on topics important to alumni of color: mental health and wellness; wealth building strategies; politics in action; and Our Time Has Come success stories.

At the latter, moderator Ronald Taylor '15, G'16 prompted alumni and student panelists to share the impact of the OTHC program on their own experiences. Ryan Nkongnyu '25, an immigrant from Cameroon and first-generation student, praised OTHC for providing the fellowship of community he needed to thrive. “I’m benefiting from the fruits of all your labor,” he told alumni present, sharing that he’s vice president of the Black Student Union, chaplain of the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble and a writer for *The Daily Orange*.

Kalilah C. Nelson '12 said it was the support of people she met through the OTHC program that fostered her career growth in the field of child advocacy, obtaining her first internship and mentors through OTHC. Kamille Stewart '14, an attorney, cited the recent Supreme Court case striking down affirmative action in college admissions. “I think Syracuse continuing to have the OTHC program is on the right side of history,” she said.





The Barner-McDuffie house name was officially unveiled during Coming Back Together 2024. Sharon Barner (above) said it was a “celebration of a vision that is deeply personal to me and my family.”

from home. “Sometimes it feels so hard to feel recognized and seen on this campus, but the fact that this program highlights us every day means the world.”

After alumni and Scholars enjoyed sushi, shrimp and conversation at the Chancellor’s Reception, shuttle buses returned them to the Schine Student Center, where they packed the Goldstein Auditorium for a gut-busting comedy show headlined by DL Hughley and, afterward, to the Syracuse Marriott Downtown, for an after-party hosted by CBT co-chair Cueva, where DJ Camilo kept the dance floor packed until 3 a.m.

While some alumni needed their beauty sleep, others were up and out early Saturday for the dedication of the Barner-McDuffie House, where Sharon Barner ’79; her husband, Haywood McDuffie; and other naming donors were recognized for financial contributions that have created an important cultural home for Black students on campus.

“My own personal journey at Syracuse University provided me with a sense of belonging, purpose and the tools to pursue excellence, and for that I am truly grateful,” said Barner. “The dedication of the Barner-McDuffie House represents decades of expressing, demonstrating and living that gratitude.”

Barner and McDuffie were accompanied by their three children, Haywood III ’17, Devin L’27 and Meredith. Other donors present included CBT co-chair Favors, Phaedra Stewart ’91, Dakota and Victor Holman ’82, Gwynne Wilcox ’75, Mariama Boney ’96, G’98, John Clemons ’76, and members of Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta, which both funded rooms in the house.

“I am grateful to the generosity of these donors who solidified



CALBER PHOTOS

CBT Live featured a conversation with cast members and executives of the hit television show *Bel-Air*. From left, Peacock vice president, creative Eric Jones, Simone Joy Jones, executive producer JanNeika James, CBT Live host Angie Martinez, Alycia Pascual-Peña and Olly Sholotan

But it was the raw emotion of CBT student co-chair Knight that struck a chord for many. Knight, who came to Syracuse from South Florida, shared her struggle to fit in at Syracuse and her self-doubt about whether she belonged at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. “OTHC changed my life,” she said, providing opportunities for personal and professional growth, and more importantly, a community that has become her family away

Members of Syracuse’s NPHC and NALFO Greek organizations gathered on the steps of Carnegie Library for an epic group photo.



naming opportunities for the house within seven months,” said Rachel Vassel ’91, G’21, associate vice president of multicultural advancement. “It is a special space.”

The morning also included a variety of arts and culture programs, including an alumni book signing, alumni art show at the Community Folk Art Center, a historical exhibit at Bird Library and the Gordon Parks exhibit at the Shaffer Art Building.

Young alumni and current students filled the Newhouse III auditorium for a panel featuring television writer/producer JaNeika James G’05, executive producer of the hit show *Bel-Air*; Eric Jones ’99, vice president, creative at Peacock; and *Bel-Air* castmates Simone Joy Jones (Lisa), Olly Sholotan (Carlton) and Alysia Pascual-Peña (Amira).

In a discussion moderated by Knight, panelists shared their career journeys, but also engaged in a conversation that touched on representation, inclusion in media, identity validation and breaking stereotypes, and offered career advice to Newhouse students interested in careers in the entertainment industry.

Alumni packed the Quad mid-day, many repping their Greek letters, for a cookout featuring wings, barbecue brisket, empanadas and mac and cheese. Alumni DJs Denasia Lawrence ’13 and Daniel Nuñez ’15 and emcee Andres Rivera ’15 had the beats bumpin’ and the crowd on their feet, reliving their college days and creating a dance party under the big tent.

Kevin Richardson H’20 and his wife, Johansy, were soaking in their first day of CBT, having come directly from the Black Excellence Brunch at the White House the day before. Others were busy reconnecting with familiar faces, and more than one

ALBERTO LAINEZ

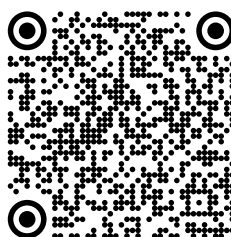


Omega Phi Beta (and biological) sisters Danielle Benavides ’15 and Krystina McDaniel ’11 enjoying the Cookout on the Quad. Below, the DJs turned the tent into a dance party.

CALIBER PHOTOS



CALIBER PHOTOS



More CBT Memories

Visit CBT.syr.edu for a recap video, photos and more.

“This CBT has ignited so much passion and connection and reconnection, but also a real excitement about going forward. And the care for the students; everybody’s here for the students.”

— MARIAMA BONEY ’96, G’98

alumnus was overheard lamenting the toll taken on their aging body by the previous night’s after-party.

Representatives of student organizations chatted with alumni to bring them up to date about organization activities. Mouctar Barry ’27, a member of the African Student Union, was inspired by the sheer number of attendees. “It’s nice to see that the alumni are still connected to the Syracuse community and that their connection is still very present,” he said. “I hope to have that feeling too when I come back.”

The steps of the Carnegie Library provided the perfect setting for photos, culminating in a large group photo of all NPHC and NALFO organization members, who filled the staircase and beyond, with Greek chapters trying to outdo each other with their calls and signs.

Alumni might have stayed on the Quad into the evening were it not for the final program of the afternoon, the first-ever CBT Live. The talk-show format program, held in Goldstein Auditorium, was moderated by New York City radio personality Angie Martinez P’25 and featured three segments. The first showcased successful alumni entrepreneurs—Kimberly Blackwell ’92, Shanti Das ’93, CBT co-chair Cueva and Abdul Karim Abdullah ’10, all of whom were CBT Chancellor’s Citation recipients, with Abdullah receiving the honor later that evening.

The second segment featured James, Jones and the *Bel-Air* cast members, in a similar exchange to what they’d had earlier in the day at the Newhouse School for the wider alumni audience. And the final segment focused on content creators, featuring Rahman Ali Bugg ’96, Connie Orlando ’89 and Talia Parkinson-Jones ’00.

CBT co-chair Favors closed the program with thanks to participants for sharing their stories. “We’re so proud of our Syracuse University community and everything we’ve accomplished together,” she said. “As you leave today, remember that we are all part of this amazing Orange family. Let’s continue to support one another and create positive change in our communities.”

COMING BACK TO PAY IT FORWARD

While there was no football game, alumni still got to experience the newly renovated JMA Wireless Dome, the site of the Shades of Orange Sneaker Ball fundraising gala and awards ceremony.



OTHC Scholars and Leaders at CBT Sneaker Ball gala



More than 90 members of the Kappa Lambda chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. turned out for Coming Back Together 2024. The members presented a check of \$111,193 for the OTHC Scholarship Fund at the gala, adding to their \$1.2 million endowment.



CALBERPHOTOS



CALBERPHOTOS





CBT co-chair Sammy Cueva with Erica Diaz, at the Sneaker Ball gala

While enjoying cocktails and conversation, alumni showed off fancy footwear at the Shoe Cam, taking the opportunity to connect with University administrators and each other.

Garry Nelson '97, attending his first CBT, admitted he was totally overwhelmed by the atmosphere. "To connect with people I haven't seen in decades and the entire program we've experienced this weekend totally exceeded my expectations," he said.

Jonathan Reyes '14, also attending for the first time, said he was caught up in the groundswell of excitement for the reunion and also wanted to support his fraternity brother Cueva, who co-chaired the event. "It was a nonnegotiable to show up this year," he said. "The energy of the weekend, the joy of reconnecting, it's all been amazing."

Similarly, Christopher McKenzie '12 came back for his first CBT because a large majority of his classmates were returning. "I wanted to celebrate with them, and it's been just phenomenal," he said. "The best part has been sharing my college experience with my fiancée."

Kelsey Davis '19 recalled being a student during CBT 2017. "I was walking to class one day and saw all these people of color. It was like seeing your dreams manifested years ahead of time," she said. This year, back for her first CBT as an alum, Davis participated as a panelist on the Mental Health and Wellness panel. "To be part of this now is like no other," she said.

Even the veteran attendees were effusive. Syracuse 8 members John Lobon '72 and Greg Allen '73 praised the programming and the focus on fundraising for OTHC. "There's a real sense of

excitement," said Lobon. "The fact that the event sold out speaks volumes."

Mariama Boney '96, G'98 remarked on the love and "genuineness" in the air. "This CBT has ignited so much passion and connection and reconnection, but also a real excitement about going forward," she said. "And the care for the students; everybody's here for the students."

Once everyone was seated, emcees Ryan Smith '92 and Boris Sanchez '09 led a program that focused on honoring alumni excellence and recognizing philanthropy. During the awards segment, six alumni received Chancellor's Citation Awards—Abdul Karim Abdullah '10, Ada Agrait '94, Tara Favors

ESPN anchor Ryan Smith moderated the program at the CBT Sneaker Ball along with CNN correspondent Boris Sanchez.



ALBERTO LAINEZ

“Communities of color have always given as a collective to the things that matter most. OTHC scholarship support is critical because it means students will be able to literally change their lives after completing their Syracuse degrees. There’s power in that, and it comes from a community of individuals with like minds who plan for the future.”

—RACHEL VASSEL

'95, JaNeika James G'05, Jason Olivo '95 and Savalle Sims '92—and Sadé Muhammad '12 was honored with the Young Alumni Award.

“I am so pleased to celebrate these outstanding alumni,” said Chancellor Kent Syverud. “Each of these awardees, through their careers and their commitment to Syracuse University, inspires the next generation of leaders.”

And last but not least came the check presentations for the OTHC program. “We’ve come to my favorite part of the program,” said Vassel, who was thrilled that more than \$900,000 had been raised to support student scholarships.

The recognition began with Greek organizations that had raised more than \$75,000 since the last CBT in 2021: Delta Sigma Theta, which raised \$111,193; Alpha Kappa Alpha, which raised \$96,829; Kappa Alpha Psi, which raised \$90,869; and Alpha Phi Alpha, which raised \$75,000.



Chancellor Kent Syverud with CBT honorees Tara Favors, Sadé Muhammad, JaNeika James, his wife Dr. Ruth Chen, Jason Olivo, Ada Agrait and Savalle Sims



Rachel Vassel and Tracy Barlok, senior vice president and chief advancement officer, recognize the Kappa Alpha Psi donation, presented by John G. Clemons Jr. '76, G'14 and Michael Pitts '83.

CBT sponsors recognized included Wegmans (“Shop Wegmans,” enthused Evelyn Ingram '90 in a stunning bright orange gown); June Grant '87, Rhonda and Michael Blackshear '91, Lisa and Vincent Cohen '92, L'95 and the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council.

Individual donors giving \$25,000 or above since the last CBT included Ada Agrait '94, Sharon Barner '79 and Haywood McDuffie, Rhonda and Michael Blackshear '91, Mariama Boney '96, G'98, Candice Campbell Jackson, Candi Carnage '90, Lisa and Vincent Cohen '92, L'95, Dale and Tara Favors '95, Charles '90 and Monica Houston '90, Todd and Venida Jenkins '94, Melissa Marcelle '81, Fatimah '90 and Keith Moody '89, Celeste Murphy '91, Phaedra Stewart '91, Rachel '91, G'21 and Don Vassel '91, Eric Watson '91 and Gwynne Wilcox '74.

Throughout the program, attendees were encouraged to scan the QR code on their table to give to the OTHC Scholarship program. “At CBT, we come back to give back,” said Vassel. “Communities of color have always given as a collective to the things that matter

most. OTHC scholarship support is critical because it means students will be able to literally change their lives after completing their Syracuse degrees. There's power in that, and it comes from a community of individuals with like minds who plan for the future."

To date, \$1.68M has been raised, with \$1.1M toward the OTHC fundraising goal of \$1.5M. Alumni can still contribute at CBT.syr.edu until the end of December 2024 to help SUMA support current students.

CBT student co-chairs Knight and Rodriguez offered thanks for the support on behalf of all of the OTHC Scholars. "If I could write a love letter to OTHC, it would go something like this," said Knight. "Thank you to the program that is so unique I can't name another like it. Thank you to my fellow Scholars who have encouraged me to be confident, stand up for what I believe in, and support my people and community in any way I can... Because of this program, I know I'll succeed wherever I end up post-grad, and for that, I'll never stop saying thank you."

But the evening was just getting started, with a final after-party hosted by Arley Pressley'89/Assorted Flavors Entertainment continuing into the early-morning hours back at the Syracuse Marriott Downtown.

UNTIL NEXT TIME

Despite many getting only a few hours of sleep, alumni turned out in full force to worship at Hendricks Chapel Sunday morning. And what a service it was, with nearly 100 members of the combined BCCE/TAG-BCCE groups raising the roof in song; a performance by Grammy-winning gospel artist Erica Campbell that had attendees out of their seats in praise; and a moving message from renowned Pastor A.R. Bernard on family and legacy.

The fellowship continued out on the Quad for the Farewell Brunch. It wasn't only a farewell for alumni but for James K. Duah-Agyeman, Ph.D., who was celebrated for remarkable contributions to Syracuse University over four decades, 21 years as director of multicultural affairs. (See page 32 for more.)

In what was a surprise to "Dr. D.," he was regaled with a spoken-word performance, written and performed by Imani Wallace '16, and presented with a commemorative bowl made by ceramicist David MacDonald, who also crafts the Chancellor's Citation platters.

"I have had the privilege of knowing Dr. D. for 26 years. Our office has collaborated closely with him, and he has devoted his career at Syracuse to supporting students and alumni," said Angela Morales-Patterson G'24, director of sponsorships and partnerships in the Office of Multicultural Advancement. "We could not close this weekend without acknowledging him, and I thank him for his friendship and mentorship."

With goodbyes in the air, people were emotional—and exhausted.



CHELSEA REEVES

Grammy-winning gospel singer Erica Campbell raised the roof of Hendricks Chapel in song during the CBT Worship Service.

Reflecting on the weekend, Cueva said he enjoyed meeting new alumni, seeing the changes to campus, and sharing the experience with his kids, "who ran around campus feeling the love from their new extended SU family." He also gave high marks to the Office of Multicultural Advancement team and its hard work to ensure things ran smoothly. "The amount of work it took with limited staff to get this production completed is impressive and should be applauded," he said.

Rodriguez, a current graduate student, said the weekend will leave a lasting impact on her. "Between the workshops, the special panels, cookout, brunch, meeting [Afro-Latina *Bel-Air* actress] Alycia Pascual-Peña, the Celebrity Basketball Game and the Gala—CBT was life changing," she said.

Billie Braithwaite Jones '90 expressed thanks that CBT continues. "My heart is just so full of gratitude and joy right now that we're here, that we keep reaching out to the younger ones, just letting them know that there is light at the end of the tunnel," she said. "That's how we help each other. That's how we build community."

"Coming to Syracuse was the best decision I ever made," added Diana Crawford Wilson '87. "I've attended every CBT since the mid-1990s, and this one topped this list. I'm not a crier, but I've been crying all weekend."

It Takes a Village

The support of corporations, businesses and individuals was key to the success of CBT 2024.

While the triennial Coming Back Together (CBT) reunion has become a beloved tradition, it has also become extremely expensive to produce, largely because of its tremendous growth.

Due to the almost doubling of attendance this year, sponsorships played a key role in the ability to present a robust schedule of quality events, says Rachel Vassel '19, G'21, associate vice president of multicultural advancement. "We are grateful to our corporate and individual sponsors, who understand the importance of our mission to support underrepresented students in obtaining a college education," she says. "We truly could not have hosted this weekend without them."

At the top of the list is presenting sponsor Cummins, Inc., support garnered through the efforts of Sharon Barner '79, vice president and chief administrative officer. Barner is also a member of the Syracuse University Board of Trustees and naming donor of the Barner-McDuffie House.

"At Cummins, we believe our business success requires us to equip a workforce with the skills of tomorrow and attract, retain and develop diverse talent to lead the world through the energy transition and achieve zero emissions strategies that will protect and safeguard our climate," she says. "Two of our three global engagement priorities are education and equity. As our diversity has increased, our innovation, community impact and business results have as well. Cummins was therefore pleased to celebrate my gift to Syracuse and CBT's commitment to celebrating diversity."

According to Vassel, a combination of cash and in-kind sponsorships reduced reunion expenses. The Central New York Community Foundation and KeyBank underwrote expenses for the CBT Celebrity Classic basketball game, and Wegmans underwrote Gala expenses. Hendricks Chapel (Dean Brian Konkol) covered talent fees for the Sunday worship service. Game uniforms for the CBT Celebrity Classic basketball game uniforms were provided by Dreissig Apparel, and player gift bags were sponsored by mySULife (Gina Brown '89) and Achieve More LLC (Mariama Boney '96, G'98). JetBlue (Icema Gibbs '83) covered talent and VIP flights. The CBT Welcome Lounge on Thursday night was underwritten by Event Prep (Me'Shae Brooks-Rolling G'90). Aux1 Media (Dorinda Angelucci '89) underwrote CBT video production costs. Epiphany Blue (Tamekia Flowers-Ball '97) supported talent fees for the *A Different World* panel. Donations from the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council (Monica Houston '91, Tara Favors '95, Aisha Thomas-Petit '98 and Celeste Murphy '91) covered the CBT 2024 backpacks, and trustees

Michael Blackshear '91 (Friday Night After-Party) and Vincent Cohen Jr. '92, G'95 (Comedy Show) supported CBT evening programs. Other sponsors supported overall expenses.

Corporate donors expressed support for the role CBT plays in creating community for alumni and students of color and for supporting education for students with financial need.

"KeyBank is proud to support this event that invites the whole Syracuse University community to celebrate diversity and achievement, reminisce, rekindle relationships and build connections for the future," says Tamika D. Otis, corporate responsibility and community relations officer. "We applaud SU for their commitment to encouraging alumni to come together, creating opportunities to share knowledge and connecting generations of graduates with current students."

"Wegmans is excited to be a partner with Syracuse University and the Our Time Has Come Program because it enables us to make sure that we are making provisions for students to further their education," adds Evelyn Ingram '90, director of community engagement. "One of our company priorities is to make a difference in every community that we serve, and this enables us to make good on that commitment."

Melanie Littlejohn, president and CEO of the Central New York Community Foundation, explained the organization's support of the Celebrity Classic basketball game this way: "When we think about community and bringing people together, Syracuse University Athletics has a very strong attraction, and at the heart of it are the men and women who left it on the court and the field," she says. "The excitement that Syracuse Athletics has brought to this community is something the Community Foundation wanted to get behind because we recognize that together we are absolutely stronger."

Since philanthropy often comes from the heart, CBT was an opportunity for alumni business owners to support a cause they deeply care about through their business. "MySULife chose to support the celebrity basketball game as sponsors because we are in favor of uplifting any activities that support OTHC," says Gina Brown, who already donates a portion of proceeds from her clothing line to the scholarship program.

"I was excited to be a CBT sponsor for the very first time as an alumna, a former SU staff member, and also as the hotel purveyor for the 1,500 returning alumni. The bond to my beloved alma mater is very strong, because it's also where I met my husband, James," says Brooks-Rolling, EventPrep franchise owner/operator.

"The thematic mission of 'Coming Back to Give Back' truly resonated with me on both a professional and personal level," says

Houston. “As a CPA, I get to experience the emotions of clients as I assist them in navigating life’s financial waters. No emotion is more meaningful than that of gladitude when a client realizes how their commitment to financial success pays the dividend of changing the trajectory of someone’s life through their charity. In supporting CBT, I was not only creating such a moment for myself and my family; I was using the wealth I generated (in helping others to experience the same) to perpetuate the cycle.”

For the second time, Flowers-Ball sponsored the *A Different World* panel through her event planning and production company, Epiphany Blue. Watching the show as a teenager, Flowers-Ball says *A Different World* empowered her to know attending college was an attainable goal and exposed her to Greek life, inspiring her to become a member of Zeta Phi Beta Inc. “To this day, *A Different World* remains my very favorite show. When he’s older, I hope my son has a show that motivates and inspires him in the same way.”

For some, support of CBT is just another way to pay back the institution for providing a professional foundation. “Attending Syracuse University changed my life,” says June Grant ’87. Through her firm, Luxury Image Architect, Grant helps prominent and affluent clients revamp themselves with unique and exclusive luxury wardrobing, with clients ranging from C-suiters to the White House and Congress to entertainment moguls and industry leaders. “I was a foster kid, and not many people at Syracuse knew that because I wanted to succeed on my own and not have my accomplishments judged based on where I came from,” she says. “My professors believed and invested in me so much, leading to my success. So, how could I do anything but pay it forward?”

“Syracuse University laid the foundation for my professional success,” adds Blackshear. “I’m passionate about Syracuse and think CBT is important. If I can support it or the students participating, I’m happy to do so.”

It’s not too early to think about sponsorship for CBT 2027. Promote your brand, company, foundation or family name during the reunion weekend by sponsoring an individual event or providing overall support or services to CBT. 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.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

We thank the following sponsors for making CBT 2024 a success:

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Celeste Murphy ’91
Aisha Thomas-Petit ’98



CHANCELLOR'S CITATION RECIPIENT: ABDUL KARIM ABDULLAH

Bridging Cultures

When Abdul Karim Abdullah '10 conceived the idea of hosting a music festival in Accra, Ghana, back in 2015, he wanted to draw Black Americans to the country through a celebration of African music, food and fashion.

Two years later, he launched Afrocella with a fraternity brother, attracting 4,700 people. In the second year, attendance more than doubled, and in 2019, the festival became the anchor event for Ghana's Year of Return tourism campaign, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the United States. The festival sold out with an attendance of 16,000. In 2021, Abdullah was named a tourism ambassador by the country and the following year, the festival rebranded as the AfroFuture Fest to reflect its expansion beyond music.

The sixth festival, held last December, attracted 41,000 people from across the global Black diaspora, 45% from North America, 13% from Europe and Asia and about 12% from African countries outside of Ghana and South Africa. In addition to music, food and art, the festival added a film showcase, sending a winner on to the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity; a tech meet-up to bring together individuals and companies such as Google, Apple and YouTube to discuss the future of technology on the continent; and a health fair run by volunteer physician attendees, held in Nima.

At the heart of it, the festival was a way for Abdullah, the child of Ghanaian parents, to reconcile his two identities. Growing up between the Bronx and Ghana, he says he always felt like the

African kid to his American friends but the American kid when in Africa. "I knew if I could bridge that gap, I could create something powerful," he says.

Yet he never imagined the massive economic impact his vision would make on his parents' home country. Tourism to Ghana has increased from approximately 150,000 visitors a year in 2019 to nearly one million today, growing the GDP of the country.

Now other countries are trying to tap into what he's done for Ghana. Abdullah and his partners have been contracted by the Basketball Africa League to produce entertainment across the continent. "We were the entertainment partner in four cities: Pretoria, South Africa; Dakar, Senegal; Cairo, Egypt; and Kigali, Rwanda; working with more than 73 artists and 250 dancers and managing surrounding cultural programming," he says.

Abdullah says his first taste of the music industry came as a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. as a Syracuse University undergraduate, when the fraternity booked Big Sean. "I was fascinated by how everything came together and the process of creating and managing an event," he recalls.

After graduating, he drew from that experience to pitch a concert for two major Ghanaian artists, El and Joey B, at the Gramercy Theater in New York City. "From those early experiences, I found the confidence I needed to create, plan and execute my own event," he says.

Amazingly, Abdullah also has a separate career that he is equally dedicated to. He has a master's in public health and has spent 15-years as a clinical research project manager, first at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, then at Syneos Health Clinical Solutions and, since 2022, at Bristol Myers Squibb. He's currently managing a global clinical trial for prostate cancer. "I work with our sites in different countries to ensure the research is being conducted correctly, analyze data so that we can assess whether a drug is worthy of being submitted for FDA approval," he says.

Sharing his story as part of the Founder's Circle panel on entrepreneurship during CBT Live, Abdullah says it was during the train ride back and forth to work that he began conceiving of a passion project focused on African culture.

"Syracuse taught me that if I can dream it, I can achieve it," he says.

And he hasn't stopped dreaming. Through AfroFuture Fest and beyond, his goal is to create sustainable change for Ghana and for Africa at large. Says Abdullah, "It's a beautiful thing to be part of dispelling preconceived notions and exposing people to real African culture."



CHANCELLOR'S CITATION RECIPIENT: ADA AGRAIT

Digital Marketing Visionary

As a high school student in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Ada Agraït '94 worked on the political campaign for the first woman candidate for governor of Puerto Rico. She also successfully ran for class president for three years in a row. "I discovered the power of messaging to successfully communicate who you are and what you stand for," she says.

Today, Agraït does that on a worldwide scale as executive vice president and global head of corporate marketing for SAP, a German-based company that makes widely used business software. Over her 30-year career, she has received multiple industry awards and corporate recognition for marketing strategies resulting in increased market share, reduced acquisition costs and successful rebranding for rapidly evolving technology products.



"It's fun doing creative work to bring our products to life for customers," says Agraït. "At the heart of it is giving customers choice. Technology is always evolving and can solve real problems for customers, both in their personal and professional lives."

Looking to study public relations at a top communications school, Agraït came to the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. "I was excited to go to school far away from home, but it was a big change being so far away from my close Latin family," she says. "I worried about succeeding in such a different environment."

Agraït had a scholarship with a GPA requirement. "My whole first year I just focused on academics," she says. Once she did well, she was able to relax and enjoy campus life, attending football games, working as a tour guide for the Office of Admissions, writing for *The Daily Orange* and pledging Kappa Alpha Theta sorority.

Her first job was as a copywriter in the public relations department of an insurance company. "I moved to New York City three days after graduation," she says. Later, she moved to another firm whose major clients included TDK, DirecTV and Toshiba, her first experience in the technology sector.

At a networking event, Agraït met the chief marketing officer for Ernst and Young, who was looking for fresh talent that could embrace the new trend of digital marketing. Up for the challenge, Agraït joined Ernst and Young and built the company's first website and first paid digital campaigns.

"At the time, digital marketing was really new, and industry standard tools today, such as paid search and digital display ads,

were cutting-edge," says Agraït, who increasingly found herself invited to speak on panels about the shift from traditional marketing channels—TV, print and billboard ads—to digital.

In 2005, Agraït was recruited by Microsoft to lead U.S. consumer and product marketing as director of MSN marketing. She agreed to move to Seattle for two years, where she met her husband and has now lived for 18 years and counting. During her Microsoft tenure, she led the Bing search engine launch, marketing for the Windows Phone, then moved to the commercial division, where she spent 10 years working on efforts related to cloud marketing. Ultimately, she was named vice president of commercial marketing, leading integrated marketing for Microsoft Azure, Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Dynamics 365.

But as she looked ahead, she didn't see a next move at Microsoft. "I had so many incredible chapters at Microsoft, but I was ready to look for new growth opportunities outside of the company," she says. "It was time to get outside my comfort zone and try something new."

In 2022, she made the leap to SAP, where she's helping the company transform its marketing digitally and running global marketing strategy, while managing 1,200 employees in 38 countries. "It's another dream job," she says.

Despite the intensity of her role, Agraït is also a working mom and carves out time to give back to her community and her passion to support underrepresented women in the workplace. She serves as board president of Dress for Success Seattle, an organization that helps unemployed and underemployed women achieve financial independence.

"When my parents divorced, I watched my mom go back to get an education and saw how few opportunities there were for women," she says. "I want to pay it forward and help other women, especially in underrepresented communities, get the tools and support they need to thrive in work and life."

Her motivation for funding the Ada Agraït Our Time Has Come Scholarship at Syracuse University is similar. "My parents used to tell me, 'Material things will come and go, but no one can take away your education,'" she says. "My Syracuse education is such a baseline and foundation for my personal success. I want to offer others the same opportunity."

CHANCELLOR'S CITATION RECIPIENT: TARA FAVORS

Investing In People

Over the last three years, Tara Favors '95 has helped Mutual of America transform and modernize its human resources strategy, instituting a new compensation philosophy, benefits program, talent development approach and diversity, equity, inclusion strategy with a mission to make sure employees feel empowered and fulfilled.

"It's really important that every one of our employees feel like they can come to work and be their authentic self and has the opportunity to learn and grow," says Favors, chief human resources officer. "That's the culture we're working to create."

Favors joined Mutual of America in 2021 and is responsible for all aspects of human resources strategy for the company, which has more than 950 employees nationwide.

As a Black woman in a C-suite role, she understands the impact of her presence. "There are not a lot of people who look like me who are sitting in chairs that I'm sitting in," says Favors. "For me, it's important to be a role model, to make sure that everyone in our organization understands what they can be, and to sometimes help them see what they can't quite see in themselves."

That extends to Syracuse University, where Favors mentors students through the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholarship Program as a member of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council. Those efforts are deeply personal and stem from her own experience as a first-generation college student. "I didn't know any professional women of color growing up," she says. "It's hard to dream bigger if you don't know that those dreams are even available to you."

Favors grew up on Long Island, New York, the daughter of Jamaican immigrants. She applied to four colleges, including Syracuse because of the basketball program. When she received a good financial aid package, she signed up to attend the Spring Minority Weekend to visit.

"I randomly sat next to Nicole Carrington '95 on the bus, who remains my very best friend to this day. It was a beautiful spring weekend. The program was really welcoming, and as a Black student, tailor-made for understanding what campus life was like," she says. "On the way home, I sat next to Nicole

again. We decided to be roommates and that sealed the deal."

While Favors loved her college experience and received a great education—she majored in psychology and minored in human resources—she's also aware of the many opportunities she didn't take advantage of simply because she didn't know to.

"For instance, I never considered a semester abroad because I didn't know that the cost was the same as being at Syracuse for the semester," she says. "I never pursued internships because I didn't understand their importance to job preparation and making you marketable."

After Syracuse, Favors went to graduate school to earn a master's degree in human resources. "My goal was to have a strong internship so that when I finished, I had a job offer and could pay my student loans," she says.

Favors was hired in a two-year program at Merrill Lynch that rotated her across various HR functions and allowed her to work in London for a month. That experience provided the foundation for a career holding HR leadership positions at Morgan Stanley, Revlon, Deutsche Bank, American Express and, now, her current role.

Busy launching her career and young family, Favors wasn't involved with Syracuse University for about 10 years, when she was contacted by a representative of the Martin J. Whitman School of Management and invited to campus to speak to students. Her participation grew over time, exponentially when she was invited to join the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council.

By her own account, she's making up for all the involvement she didn't have as an undergraduate. She spearheaded creation of the OTHC Kevin Richardson Endowed Scholarship, making the lead gift and fundraising classmates to ensure that the scholarship was endowed. She also named the Brown Favors Quiet Lounge at the Barner-McDuffie House. And most recently, she served as co-chair for the 2024 Coming Back Together reunion.

"When I started making gifts to the University, it was \$25 or \$50," says Favors. "My ability to give financially and to give of my time has evolved naturally. For me it's always been about helping other Black and brown students. It's important for them to see what their future can be and to help them get there."



MAUR SOLAGES PHOTOGRAPHY

CHANCELLOR'S CITATION RECIPIENT: JANEIKA JAMES

Representation Matters

In her nearly 20-year career working in the television industry, writer/producer JaNeika James G'05 has worked on some of the biggest television shows representing the Black experience in America, from *Half & Half* to *Empire*.

"When I started out, I didn't want people to think that I can only write for Black characters," says James. "But the reality is, who else is going to tell our stories? What was really empowering about *Empire* was that we told these stories and the whole world tuned in."

James is experiencing similar success with her latest project, *Bel-Air*, a dramatic reimagining of the 1990s sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. James and her writing partner, twin sister JaSheika James, were brought in as co-executive producers in pre-production for the first season.

"*Bel-Air* was a crazy phenomenon because it was greenlit by Peacock for two seasons without even having a pilot script," she says.

But James knew better than to assume instant success. She and her sister were co-executive producers for the *Gossip Girl* reboot on HBO Max, which attracted a lot of initial support and excitement but was canceled after two seasons. "Remakes are tricky. People have such affinity and nostalgia for the originals, and they don't want to see that sullied," she says.

Bel-Air, now in its third season, has lived up to its hype. "It's really fresh," says James. "It has the familiarity of the original, but we're telling stories that resonate with modern times."

In addition to smart, relevant writing, which she and her sister contribute to, James praises the cast and the family atmosphere they have created. "These people genuinely love each other and lift each other off screen as much as on screen," she says.

That bond was evident among cast members Simone Joy Jones, Alysia Pascual-Peña and Olly Sholotan, who were on campus to participate in Coming Back Together (CBT) panel discussions and to support James in receiving a Chancellor's Citation at the CBT Gala. "JaNeika has touched our lives in such a beautiful way, we're excited to honor someone who's had such an impact on us," says Jones, who plays Lisa on the show. "She's a talented executive producer and writer, but also an amazing person, so to be able to come back to her alma mater and to speak to students and alumni has been really fun."

As executive producers, the James sisters help manage the show with showrunner Carla Banks Waddles, but also write and produce on set. "As TV has evolved, it's rare that writers are actually on set to produce their episodes, but that's all I've known and I'm so grateful," she says.

It's the career she dreamed of as a graduate student in television, radio and film at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. "I told my advisor, Richard Dubin, that I could not afford to graduate with student loans without a job. He helped me design a thesis project that landed me my first job with writer/executive producer Yvette Lee Bowser, and I am forever grateful," she says.

At Newhouse, James found a community of friends who were as obsessed with television as she was. Her own love for TV developed as an Air Force brat living in Germany watching VHS tapes of favorite shows sent by relatives in the U.S. As an undergraduate studying telecommunications at the University of Florida, she had two television sets in her dorm room: one for watching live TV and the other for taping shows.

While her Newhouse peers shared her passion, she also discovered they had different viewing perspectives. "That's where I became aware of the role of diversity in the consumption of media," says James, a member of the Office of Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council and supporter of the Our Time Has Come Scholarship Program.

Whether it's on *Bel-Air* or in other projects she's developing with her sister, representation is front and center.

"We're so used to seeing Black and brown people presented in a certain way, but we're not a monolith," she says. "Shout out to *Good Times*, but we don't need to always present people of color living in poverty. What's really important about *Bel-Air* is not just showing kids affluence and success in terms of what's possible, but also presenting the humanity in people regardless of their station in life."



YOUNG ALUMNI AWARD: SADÉ MUHAMMAD

Impacting Equity in Media

As an aspiring journalist, Sadé Muhammad '12 wanted to tell stories that represented the Black community in a more authentic way than what she saw in the media. But as she began working, she learned that decisions about content coverage and placement were often influenced by marketing, advertising and business outcomes. "I thought I could make more impact if I was able to make business decisions about whose voice is heard and whose story gets told," she says.

In January 2023, Muhammad was named chief marketing officer (CMO) of Time, where she leads marketing efforts with a goal to advance equity and impact change in media. Her challenge is to help make editorial ideas that come from Time's journalists and editors commercially interesting to partners.

"It's a lot of stakeholder management," she says. "How can I help them see that telling this story in this way is going to also help them reach their business goals? There are sometimes different priorities and values at the table, and it's my job to connect the dots."

Muhammad is the first CMO named since Time became an independent company in 2018. She was recruited by chief executive officer Jessica Sibley, who she worked for at Forbes when Sibley was chief revenue officer.

As associate director of content partnerships, Muhammad developed branded campaigns on cutting-edge topics such as AI, blockchain and the future of work. But she saw something important was missing. "I didn't see anything about how equity impact integrated into the conversation in any real way," she says. "I thought we needed to start thinking about DEI as a revenue center rather than a cost center."

In 2020, she received the greenlight to launch Forbes representation and inclusion practice, a revenue-generating ad business centered on equity as a path to marketing innovation and cultural change. "I had to get advertisers to understand that diversity matters," she says. Then George Floyd was murdered, and priorities changed overnight.

At Time, Muhammad has an even greater platform. "Time is a legacy brand. People have such a connection to it. The magazine is part of the fabric of the culture," she says. "We want to make sure that continues for the next 100 years, even though the way we consume media is very different."

As a child, Muhammad loved creative writing. "I pursued journalism because I wanted to give a voice to people that I felt didn't have a voice, which included people who look like me," she says.

With Syracuse alumni as parents (Injil Muhammad '86 and Michele S. Muhammad '87 met as undergraduates), she says the University was very present in her life growing up.

A self-proclaimed magazine fanatic, Muhammad majored in magazine journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, where she says she received a top-class education. "We had the best professors in the country to teach us about the fundamentals of media and journalism," Muhammad says. "Feeling like you understand an industry before you even enter it is super powerful because then you can get creative about what you want to see in the industry."

After graduating cum laude, Muhammad worked as a freelance writer, then was hired into the NBC Page Program, leading to a position with Oxygen Media. After three years she made the leap to Forbes as a brand producer for content marketing.

At only 33, Muhammad has developed a reputation as an influential cross-functional leader and creative. Her work has been celebrated in Digiday, Adweek and PRSANY, and she received the 30 Under 30 Award from the International News Media Association for Achievement in Advertising in 2020. At Syracuse, she sits on the Newhouse 44 Advisory Committee, a group dedicated to equity and inclusion for journalism students at the University, and is a member of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council. She's also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.

"My passion is harnessing the power of authentic brands to get audiences to listen and, in turn, unlock their unique power to affect change," says Muhammad. "Time is one of the world's most trusted storytellers, and I am thrilled to bring our partners' stories to life with imaginative ideas to inspire a smarter, better marketplace."



CHANCELLOR'S CITATION RECIPIENT: JASON OLIVO

Planning for Security

As a member of the JP Morgan President's Club, Jason Olivo '95 is in the top echelon of wealth management advisors across the United States. Based in New York City, he provides clients with services ranging from college and retirement planning to portfolio management. He holds series 7, 63, 65 and life/health licenses, allowing him to service virtually of his clients' investment and insurance needs.

A native New Yorker, Olivo came to Syracuse University to study information technology. "The University's expert staff and reputation of excellence gave me the confidence that I would receive a quality education," he says.

As a student at the School of Information Studies, Olivo took courses that focused on managing technology, but says that what he liked the best were the elements of his studies that allowed him to collaborate his ideas with others.

He dived into his studies and into campus life, attending parties, basketball games at the Dome, volunteered at Syracuse Stage and worked in Schine Student Center security. He also joined Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity Inc. as a member of the new chapter's second line, forming friendships that would prove crucial when his father died during his first year on campus.

Doubling down on his career focus, he applied for Inroads, a program that helps ethnically diverse college students prepare for corporate careers and helps employers foster diverse workspaces. He interned at Carrier Corp. in Syracuse as a junior, working as an associate project manager in London and earning college credit. When he graduated, he was hired as a project manager.

Olivo spent two years on infrastructure projects, working to streamline the company's air conditioner manufacturing processes through technology. "I traveled the country, working side by side with factory workers and line managers," he recalls.

Despite being on a promising career path, he could not stop thinking about the world of finance he had heard about in his business classes at Syracuse and from his senior-year roommate who had a subscription to *The Wall Street Journal*—sent to him by his father, a successful Wall Street trader. And while the roommate had little interest in the financial journal, Olivo fell into the habit of reading up on the markets each day.

Convinced that he had given a career in information management his best shot and looking to take a risk, he returned to New York looking for employment on Wall Street.

Olivo was soon hired at DH Blair, a boutique firm known for developing young financial advisors. He later moved to Kaufman Brothers, a technology-based investment banking firm where his technology education allowed him to dialogue with technology executives, resulting in millions of dollars raised for private and

public companies. Within a short time, he became a top advisor. In 2003, Olivo moved to JPMorganChase, where he quickly became a national achiever and now is a senior vice president and private client advisor at JPM Wealth Management.

Twenty years in, he has early relationships that are starting to retire. "That for me is the biggest joy, to see clients be able to retire with peace of mind while also maintaining their lifestyle," he says.

Olivo hasn't limited his success to his clients. He's helped other Syracuse graduates launch careers in the finance industry by serving as a JPMorgan Syracuse University internship mentor and participating in the Our Time Has Come Virtual Immersion with colleagues at JPMorgan.

He pays it forward in numerous ways, including supporting Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Society in honor of a Syracuse University friend who died from stomach cancer and the Alzheimer's Disease Research Foundation in memory of his grandmother. He was also the lead donor of the of the first Latino fraternity endowment fund at Syracuse University through the Our Time Has Come program, the La Unidad Latino Endowment Fund.

"I wanted to give back to Syracuse in a way that was personally meaningful," he says. "We hope someday to be able to fully fund a student's education."

Olivo is himself the father of three boys, ages 12, 13 and 16, and enjoys coaching their AAU basketball teams and traveling the country to tournaments. His sons were on campus with him for the Coming Back Together reunion to see their father honored at the CBT Gala. "It was a great weekend and sharing my Syracuse experience with my family made it all the more special," he says.



CHANCELLOR'S CITATION RECIPIENT: SAVALLE SIMS

Navigating Complex Legal Landscapes

Savalle Sims '92 has built a career as a sophisticated litigator and a diplomatic, level-headed negotiator. As chief legal officer for Warner Bros. Discovery, she's had oversight of the company's global legal teams managing all legal issues across nearly 20 offices worldwide. She played an integral role in guiding the legal strategy for Discovery's 2018 acquisition of Scripps Networks as well as complex negotiations to form the new company Warner Bros. Discovery in 2022.

In her previous role as executive vice president and deputy general counsel, Sims managed Discovery's litigation and trademark legal teams, handling legal efforts around Discovery's intellectual property, including trademark, patent and copyright portfolios.

Among her many industry achievements, Sims was recognized in 2023 as one of Hollywood's Top Dealmakers by *The Hollywood Reporter* and named one of *Variety's* Best In-House Entertainment Attorneys.

But, surprisingly, Sims came to Syracuse University aspiring to be a physician. "I wanted to be an anesthesiologist, but I discovered pretty quickly that I was not particularly strong at math or science," says the Washington, D.C., native.

Instead, she focused on business, majoring in marketing and transportation distribution management, with a minor in Spanish. As she neared graduation, she realized she wanted a career that would allow her to help people solve problems more directly. She attended Notre Dame Law School, then clerked for a judge for two years, where she learned that she enjoyed litigation. She joined a small boutique law firm in Washington, D.C., where she handled divorce cases involving complex business assets.

While there, she represented a woman married to an attorney who had become president of ABC News. "I started thinking about how a corporate attorney at a law firm ends up becoming president of a news network," she says. "It really sparked something in me because I've always loved television."

Sims recalls getting her own little TV for her bedroom when she was 10. "I grew up watching a lot of television. When I was young, my mother used to call me Perry Mason, both because I was a fan of the show and because I liked to argue," she says.

In her next career move, Sims joined a large D.C. law firm, Arent Fox, where she spent 10 years, becoming a partner in the commercial litigation department. She handled a few cases for Discovery and, when the prospect arose to oversee litigation at Discovery, was excited to move from the client side to the in-house role.

"You don't see media companies in the Washington, D.C., area that are headquartered here. I felt like this was a very special way

to marry the law and content, and I was going to try it and see if I liked it," says Sims, who joined the company in 2011. "It's been far more rewarding than I ever expected. It's challenged me in different ways, and I've enjoyed the experience immensely."

Last April, Sims invited Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholars to Warner Bros. Discovery's New York City studio for an immersion visit to expose students to the wide array of career options. "I think that I have a responsibility to build an inclusive workplace at Warner Bros. Discovery, and part of that is the obligation to make sure that I'm exposing bright, young, diverse minds to potential careers in media and giving them a window into what's possible for them here," she said at the time.

Sims' connection to Syracuse University runs deep. She met her husband, former Syracuse football player Turnell Sims '90, a graduate of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, while both were undergraduates; her sister, Marie Davis '03, is an alumna of the School of Social Work.

In addition to OTHC, Sims has supported the Syracuse Black Law Alumni Collective William H. Johnson Endowed Scholarship, InclusiveU and Syracuse Athletics (women's basketball, Lally Complex Fund and the Football Head Coach's Fund). She returned to campus to speak at the Orange Central Multicultural Breakfast in 2023 and to accept an award at the Black Excellence Gala in 2024.

In late September, Sims announced plans to begin a new chapter, currently helping Warner Bros. Discovery transition to new legal leadership. Regardless of what she chooses to do next, she'll undoubtedly continue to be someone others look up to.

"If you can show people that it can be done, then they can have a greater belief in themselves, to challenge themselves to do more and to stretch," she says.



ROBERT SEVERI

LINDA BAGUMA

Student Advocate

Spending the semester in South Africa is a bit surreal for Linda Baguma '25. Her parents fled the Democratic Republic of Congo during the civil war, and Baguma was born in a refugee camp in Tanzania, where she spent the first seven years of her life. "This isn't the Africa I experienced," she says. "South Africa may still have work to do, but it's a democratic country. I'm currently in Durban, which has all these cool tall buildings."

As a child, all Baguma knew of the United States was a calendar featuring the Obama family that her father hung in their tent. When she was 7, her family immigrated to Amarillo, Texas, and later settled in Iowa City, Iowa, where many African refugees work in meat-processing facilities.

The transition was difficult on her parents. Baguma and her brother ended up moving in with family friends. Although a good student who excelled at soccer, she had no plans to attend college until her high school guidance counselor intervened. She applied to Syracuse because she was drawn to the Block S on a brochure in his office. When she received an acceptance letter, she decided to take a leap of faith, not quite knowing how she'd pay for it.

Baguma arrived in Syracuse with \$3,000 she'd saved from a summer job to pay for tuition. She hadn't yet received a financial aid award since she hadn't known she had to accept her acceptance offer. "There was a lot to navigate that I didn't know about," she says.

Becoming an Our Time Has Come Scholar helped. "That made such a difference, not just financially, but the community. I made

friends and gained mentors. I got to see a whole different version of a future for myself than I had before," she says.

As a political science and international relations major, Baguma aspires to a career in foreign service and diplomacy. As a member of the Renée Crown University Honors Program, she's focused her honors thesis on global industry in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She spent the summer participating in the Public Policy and International Affairs Fellowship Program at Carnegie Mellon University and will intern with an NGO during her semester abroad. She is currently applying to fellowships to pursue graduate school in international relations.

A Dean's List student, Baguma is both a McNair Scholar and a Remembrance Scholar. Outside of her studies, she has distinguished herself with student advocacy. She serves as a senator in the Syracuse University Senate, as a member of the Syracuse University Public Safety Community Review Board and as a member in the Student Association for the University and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She has also served as a member of the Forever Orange Student Alumni Council.

"I always want to be a voice for students. I don't shy away from advocating for people, especially student voices; they need to be heard, and they're not being heard," she says. "I want to be that person that is there to represent them and fight for them, and I'm very much a mediator."

Baguma says her greatest accomplishment at Syracuse has been her ability to work with and learn from different kinds of people, including University administrators. "Being involved in these different organizations, sometimes you're talking with people you see as very different from yourself. But I've been able to learn from them, and I believe they also learn from me, so that has been very fascinating and enjoyable," she says.

She's reconciling her preconceived notions back on the continent of Africa as well. "This is definitely not the vivid image I had from growing up," Baguma says. "I'm learning there's much more to Africa than what I came from, and that's in a good way."



Maxwell student Linda Baguma pictured outside the school

GABRIEL DAVILA-CAMPOS

Promoting Social Change through Data

It would be easy to focus on the accomplishments Gabriel Davila-Campos '25 has achieved as an undergraduate at Syracuse University. But for him, what matters most is how his journey has unfolded—the moments of discovery, growth and the desire to use data for positive change.

Coming to Syracuse as a first-generation college student, Davila-Campos faced the challenge of navigating a world that was unfamiliar. “It wasn’t just about filling out forms or handling logistics,” he reflects. “It was about figuring out how I belonged in this new space.”

Raised in a Nicaraguan household, Davila-Campos always carried a deep sense of responsibility to his family: “I knew I had to do something meaningful, not just for myself but for my family.”

Originally, he envisioned a career as an FBI behavioral analyst. But that changed after taking a course on innovation, design and startups in the School of Information Studies during his second semester. “The course opened my eyes to the power of technology and data to drive change,” he says. His professor selected Davila-Campos to represent Syracuse at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. “Meeting innovators from all kinds of fields was inspiring. It made me realize there were so many ways I could make an impact.”

He changed his major to applied data analytics, focusing on information security management with minors in innovation, design, and computer engineering. He plans to pursue a master’s in geographical information science and eventually a Ph.D. Davila-Campos dreams of working at NASA, using data to solve complex space exploration problems.

Alongside his studies, Davila-Campos immersed himself in research that aligned with his values. As a research assistant for iSchool Professor Carsten Østerlund, he became part of Gravity Spy, a project that uses citizen science and machine learning to analyze glitches in satellite data for the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory. “The work was technical but meaningful,” Davila-Campos says. “Knowing our contributions could support detecting gravitational waves was humbling.”

His passion for social justice also found a home in his research. Working with mathematics Professor Nicole Fonger, he helped advance racial justice through a math education project. His project focused on providing underrepresented students with the skills to pursue STEM fields. “I love how data and education can come together to open doors for people who don’t always have the same opportunities,” he says.

Davila-Campos has presented his work at national conferences including the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation

Principal Investigators Meeting, where he discussed broadening participation in STEM through initiatives like the CHIPS and Science Act; and the 2024 National Student Data Corps Data Science Symposium, examining energy consumption trends and how renewable energy investments shape global energy use.

But Davila-Campos’ story at Syracuse is not just about research and academics; it’s also about community. He is an iSchool ambassador and a member of the marketing team. His contributions were recognized with the iSchool’s Scholarship in Action Award, which he credits to the opportunities he’s had to make an impact on campus and beyond.

One of Davila-Campos’ most transformative experiences has been his involvement in the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) program. “I’m an introvert, and I wasn’t sure about joining at first,” he admits. “But OTHC gave me a community and opened up opportunities I wouldn’t have considered.” Through the program, he has participated in initiatives like the Warner Bros. Immersion trip and the Coming Back Together reunion, which helped him grow personally and professionally.

He’s eager to see where his path will take him next. “I feel incredibly lucky to have had these experiences, and I’m excited to continue using data and technology to solve real-world problems,” Davila-Campos says. “At the end of the day, it’s about making a difference, whether through space exploration or helping communities grow.”

MARLYN HESLER



Gabriel Davila-Campos hopes to work at NASA, using data to solve complex space exploration problems.

MARK NZASI

Class Marshal

As a triplet with an older brother already in college, it was important for Mark Nzasi '25 to maximize college financial aid and scholarship offers. When he received a full-tuition Coronat Scholarship to Syracuse University, he knew his future was sealed.



ANGEL RYAN
But he hasn't stopped there. Nzasi's academic achievements have secured him an Invest in Success Scholarship, a Remembrance Scholarship and a Sanofi U.S. Scholarship from pharmaceutical company Sanofi Pasteur. "My brothers and I have a friendly rivalry as triplets that pushes us to strive as high as possible," he says.

Natives of Kenya, Nzasi's family immigrated to the United States when he was a baby so his father could earn a doctorate in chemistry at SUNY Binghamton; they later moved to Scranton, Pennsylvania. Like his father, Nzasi was drawn to the sciences. At Syracuse, he majors in neuroscience and

Mark Nzasi aspires to become a physician and someday return to his home village in Kenya to improve medical care and training.

psychology and plans to pursue medical school, hoping to become the first physician in his family.

"I have family members in Kenya who unfortunately pass away from very preventable and treatable diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis," he says. "Just this year, my grandma had cataract surgery, which is a very simple procedure in the U.S., and the procedure they did in Kenya caused her to go blind in one eye because the system there doesn't train people properly."

He and his brother John, who also aspires to be a physician,

hope to return to their home village in Kenya to improve medical care and training there.

On a visit last December, Nzasi was able to volunteer and shadow surgeons at the local hospital. "It was a great experience watching and learning about how their medical system works and is different from U.S.," he says.

At Syracuse, he has been heavily involved in undergraduate research, working in the behavioral neuroscience lab of Catherine Cornwell, associate professor of psychology. Using mouse models, the research studies the consequences of early life adversity. "She conducts studies using different variables to see how they might reduce or mitigate effects of that early life adversity and get back on the level of the control groups," he says.

Nzasi joined the Our Time Has Come Leaders Program as a junior, an opportunity he learned about through his fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. "Older brothers that had graduated from this chapter were creating a scholarship for undergraduate students. That sense of community and message of paying it forward appealed to me," he says.

Growing up in Scranton, there weren't a lot of people of color. He says both his fraternity and OTHC have provided professional development and a large network of support "from people who look like me in successful spaces," he says. "And being surrounded by other like-minded students has been inspiring."

Nzasi has served as vice president of his fraternity, is recruitment chair for the Black Pre-Medical Society and has served as an orientation leader and as student representative with the Office of Admissions, giving tours and speaking at Orange Preview events. Most recently, Nzasi was selected to represent his class as one of two senior class marshals.

"I would not be here today if not for my family and the incredible Orange community that's supported me and always challenged me to be better each and every day. I'm excited to give back to this community and advocate for my peers," he says.

Nzasi says he's excited to work with administrators to plan Commencement and to advocate for students on policies to improve the student experience.

"I'm only the third Black man to serve as class marshal," he says. "One of my goals is to increase the self-efficacy of men of color on campus. I want to ensure those that come after me do not hesitate to seek leadership."

He encourages other students not to disqualify themselves from opportunities. "Don't be afraid to try," he says.



To support the OTHC Program, please visit
multiculturalalumni.syracuse.edu/support/

SOFIA RIVERA

Designing for Sport

In Colombia, soccer is a national passion that extends beyond sport. “It’s a very important part of our culture,” says Sofia Rivera ’26, a native of the country.

Rivera loves soccer. An athletic girl who played basketball, lacrosse and was a cheerleader, Rivera focused on soccer as a high school student in Norwalk, Connecticut, where she lived from age 13. It’s her interest in sports as an athlete and fan that sparked her interest in stadium and sports facility design. “It was kind of right in front of my face all along, but I didn’t make the professional connection until watching the Olympics and Copa América this summer,” she says.

“I enjoy the aesthetics, the complexity of the designs, and the inspiration they take from surroundings and local culture,” says Rivera. “But I am also drawn to the experience that teams and spectators have, the urban plan and multifunctional use of the facilities. For example, Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid has a museum accessed through the Bernabeu Tour and also holds concerts.”

Rivera has always considered herself a creative, artistic person but initially attended a computer science high school. When she wanted to take an art class, she discovered the curriculum was so structured she was unable to.

She ended up transferring to another school. In an art history elective, she found herself fascinated by building design and the history of architecture. “My drawing teacher encouraged me to follow that interest,” she says.

Researching college architecture programs, Rivera discovered her “dream school,” Syracuse University.

“I never thought I would get in but applied as kind of a lark. I sent my portfolio and all the required essays but really didn’t expect anything back,” she says. “When I was accepted, I immediately discarded all the other options.”

But architecture, a five-year program, is a notoriously demanding major. “Coming into college. I didn’t think I deserved to be here and totally focused on academics during my freshman year,” says Rivera. “I basically spent all my time in Slocum Hall.”

Each semester, the architecture studio course has a different focus. “One semester can be a housing project, the next can be a park, the next can be a museum,” Rivera says. The goal is to learn design at different scales. “We are mostly worried about design choices, layouts that make sense and aesthetics.”

Having done well in her first year, Rivera began branching out. She was accepted into the Honors Program; became head of graphic design for *DeSol* magazine, which gives Latino and Hispanic voices on campus an outlet to express themselves; and became a mentor with Dimensions, a program that helps young

ANGELARIN



Architecture major Sofia Rivera hopes to tap into her love of sport through a career in stadium and sports facility design.

women of color in their transition to college. She serves as a peer advisor in the School of Architecture and is an Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholar.

“That definitely changed my college experience for the better,” she says of OTHC. “Connecting with successful students and alumni of color has really helped me to get where I am today. Being around these successful individuals has helped me believe in myself and given me the confidence to take on some leadership roles.”

Outside of studies and extracurriculars, Rivera enjoys cycling classes at the Barnes Center at The Arch and reading Colombian authors in Spanish. With much of her family still in Colombia, she visits regularly for holidays.

Currently a fourth-year student, Rivera is enjoying the course Advanced Building Systems, where she’s learning to conduct climate analysis to ensure building comfort, about sustainable design practices and efficient design choices. Next year will focus on her capstone project, in which she hopes to encompass her interest in sports facility design.

She’ll take inspiration from the many matches she watches, cheering on her favorite teams, Colombia, and the club team Real Madrid CF. “This is something that has been passed on to me through my family,” she says.

Marsha C. Senior Retires from College of Professional Studies

Marsha C. Senior eagerly looks forward to each Coming Back Together reunion to see the fruits of her 36-year career at Syracuse University. “So many alumni of our opportunity programs come back, and it’s just heartwarming to see what they’ve accomplished,” she says. “I enjoy watching their lives take shape and knowing I had a little piece to do with that.”

This year was no exception. One former student is a district supreme court judge, another an attorney working for the attorney general of New York. Others bring their children, who are now interested in attending Syracuse University.

During her tenure at Syracuse—15 years as an academic advisor in the Office of Supportive Services and 21 years in the College of Professional Studies—Senior has worked with students in the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), which provides academic support and financial assistance to students identified as having academic potential for success but who might not otherwise be able to attend college.

She retired at the end of October, closing a career dedicated to helping students achieve their full potential.

A native of Evanston, Illinois, Senior earned a degree in criminal justice followed by a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling. She began her career as a counselor with the Upward Bound program at Le Moyne College and joined Syracuse University in 1986, where she has stayed except a brief tenure as assistant director of student services at Upstate Medical University from 2001-2003.

Since 2016, she served as the director of HEOP and assistant director of student administrative services at the College of Professional Studies (formerly known as University College), working with nontraditional and part-time students. “Many of them work, they have children, they have obligations that don’t necessarily allow to go to school full time,” Senior says.



Marsha C. Senior

Senior admitted part-time students into an associate degree program and, once completed, moved them to a bachelor’s program. “Through the years, I’ve actually helped many students become able to go full time,” she says.

One of the students who benefitted from Senior’s guidance is Leondra Tyler ’24, who earned her associate and bachelor’s degree from Syracuse University through the College of Professional Studies attending part time and is now applying to graduate school.

“Ms. Senior created a welcoming environment for students like me, to not only feel comfortable but to flourish on this campus,” says Tyler. “My academic journey would not have been the same without her. As a Black woman, I feel privileged to have such an inspiring advisor who supports, encourages and fuels my endeavors. This campus will not be the same without her, but the impact and

love she poured into each of her students will never cease to exist.”

Another former student recruited Senior to become advisor of the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble, a position she held for seven years until retirement. A highlight was traveling with the group when it performed at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta in 2019.

“It has been an absolute joy to serve the students that I’ve served over the years and to work with our team to help mold our students,” she says. “On a personal level, it’s been the most rewarding thing that I’ve done in my lifetime, next to raising my own two children.”

Senior’s retirement plans include a cruise next year and attending the CBT reunion in 2027 to reconnect with former students. Beyond that, she says it’s OK to not know what happens next. “I don’t know what the next chapter will bring, but I pray it will include space for me to continue helping students to reach their full potential,” she says.

Benetta Dousuah and Jude Akpunku Named Tillman Scholars

Syracuse University student veterans Benetta Dousuah G'25 and Jude Akpunku L'26 were named 2024 Tillman Scholars by the Pat Tillman Foundation, selected out of nearly 1,600 applicants.

Tillman Scholars are provided academic scholarships, leadership development opportunities and access to a supportive national network as they embark on career journeys in the fields of health care, public service, business, STEM, law, the humanities and education.

Dousuah served as a unit supply sergeant in the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Hood and Fort Drum. She was later stationed at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, where she attended the Army Basic Leader Course and graduated as the class Honor Graduate, ranked No. 2 in her class of 113. She is earning a master's in social work at Syracuse.

Akpunku is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, where he earned a bachelor of science degree, followed by a master of science from the Naval Postgraduate School in 2021. He is a Congressional Fellow and a student in Syracuse University's online J.D. program.



Benetta Dousuah



Jude Akpunku

The Pat Tillman Foundation was created in April 2004 in memory of Tillman, a starting safety for the National Football League's Arizona Cardinals, who put his football career on hold in 2002 to serve with the U.S. Army's 75th Ranger Regiment in Afghanistan and died in the line of duty.

Miriam Mutambudzi Chosen as 2024-26 Lender Center Faculty Fellow

Miriam Mutambudzi, a public health professor whose research focuses on social determinants of health, has been selected as the 2024-26 Lender Center for Social Justice faculty fellow.

Mutambudzi will explore how Black adults who reside in historically redlined neighborhoods can experience a disadvantaged occupational life course and subsequent health consequences.

Redlining was a discriminatory banking practice of designating certain neighborhoods, especially predominantly Black ones, as being poor credit risks.

Mutambudzi is an assistant professor of public health at the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics and a faculty affiliate of Lender Center for Public Health Promotion, the Center for Aging and Policy Studies, and the Aging Studies Institute, all located within the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

She will be assisted on the project by an interdisciplinary team of student fellows.



Miriam Mutambudzi

The Alejandro Garcia Runaway and Homeless Youth House Opens in Syracuse

The first youth shelter in Central New York dedicated to LGBTQ youth was dedicated in May, a program of the Rescue Mission Alliance of Syracuse. The emergency shelter can host up to nine children between the ages of 12 and 17 who are either at-risk or experiencing homelessness.

Studies indicate that one in 30 adolescents in the United States will experience homelessness each year. For youth identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, homelessness is more prevalent. LGBTQ+ adolescents experience homelessness at more than twice the rate of their non-LGBTQ peers.

The Alejandro Garcia Runaway and Homeless Youth House, while open to any youth in Onondaga County in need of

emergency shelter, will provide a safe, accepting and affirming space for youth that identify as LGBTQ+.

The shelter is named for Alejandro Garcia, a professor of social work at Syracuse University for 43 years and a long-time Rescue Mission board member, who died in November 2023.



Alejandro Garcia



Anthony J. Thomas and Fatim Cisse Named Diversity and Innovation Scholars

Syracuse University Libraries' Blackstone LaunchPad announced that Anthony J. Thomas '24 (School of Information Studies) and Fatim Cisse '25 (David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics) have been named 2024-2025 Todd B. Rubin Diversity and Innovation Scholars.

Thomas' entrepreneurial endeavors include building websites/web design, information security systems and home security systems. He has experience working in retail as a technology associate on both hardware and software.

Cisse's entrepreneurial experience includes owning Womb's Yoga, an organization that provides mindfulness workshops and support groups for women of color. Cisse is passionate about maternal health care and women's wellness. She also previously served as a researcher in Health and Wellness Services through the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The Todd B. Rubin Diversity and Innovation Scholars is funded by a multi-year gift from Todd B. Rubin '04 (School of Architecture) to support employment of entrepreneurial students



Anthony J. Thomas



Fatim Cisse

focused on innovation, diversity and inclusion at the LaunchPad. Rubin received the University's 2014 Generation Orange Award for philanthropy and is a member of the Syracuse University Libraries Advisory Board.

Carrie Mae Weems Receives National Medal of Arts

President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L'68, H'09 honored Syracuse University Artist in Residence Carrie Mae Weems H'17, center, on Oct. 21 with the National Medal of Arts. The medal, the highest award given to artists and arts patrons by the United States government, is bestowed upon individuals or groups who “are deserving of special recognition by reason of their outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support and availability of the arts in the United States.”

Weems’ four decades of work—including groundbreaking and distinctive compositions of photography, text, audio, installation, video and performance art—depicts topics of race, gender, social injustice and economic inequity throughout American history to the present day. As the University’s artist in residence, she engages with Syracuse University faculty and students in a number of ways, including working with students in the design, planning and preparation of exhibitions.

“As the first African American female visual artist to receive the National Medal of Arts in recognition for my contributions is profoundly humbling and a great honor,” says Weems. “I thank my colleagues, along with the many other great women artists of color who came before me, widened the path and took the heat, but unfortunately were not recognized for their tremendous achievements.”



Carrie Mae Weems with the Bidens at the White House

Syracuse Stage Launches 2024-25 Season with Kyle Bass’ *Citizen James, or the Young Man Without a Country*

Syracuse Stage, in partnership with 100 Black Men of Syracuse, launched its 2024-25 season with *Citizen James, or the Young Man Without a Country*, a world-premiere production from resident playwright Kyle Bass.

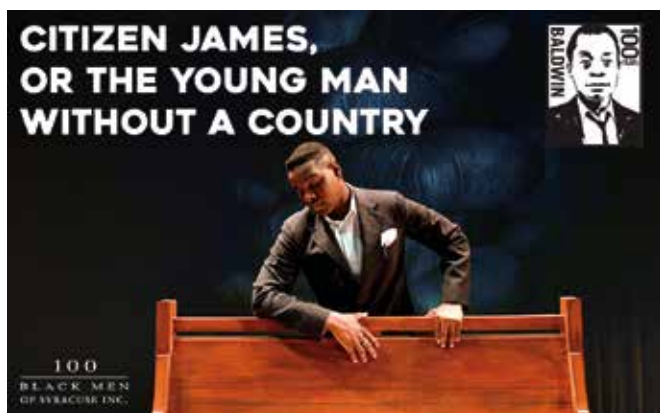
Originally incubated as part of the Stage’s Backstory program and presented as a streaming-only event in the 2020-2021 season, this one-man show about a young James Baldwin follows the Paris-bound aspiring author and activist as he is seeking refuge

from the racist violence of America in the 1940s, on his way to becoming a towering literary figure and a still-relevant voice of the Civil Rights Movement.

“In his novels, essays, stage plays, speeches and interviews, James Baldwin was and remains a singular observer and chronicler not only of the Black American experience but of the American experience—a nation in conflict with itself,” says Bass. “Long one of my literary heroes, in *Citizen James* I was interested in creating a portrait of Baldwin as a young, gifted, Black and unknown artist already possessed of the deep feeling, trenchant intellect, urgent concern and piercing insight that would become the hallmarks of his writing, his social activism and his international persona.”

The two-night-only performances began August 2 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Baldwin’s birth—which coincidentally, is also the birthday of actor James Alton, who portrayed Baldwin in the play.

“Kyle Bass’ text is a brilliant homage to the genius of James Baldwin, his conflicts and struggles as an artist, and how they reflect our own contemporary times,” says director Joann Yarrow, who also serves as Syracuse Stage director of community engagement. “It is uncompromising, inspiring and a celebration of 100 years of creative activism and social change.”



Citizen James, or the Young Man without a Country launched Syracuse Stage’s 2024-25 Season

James K. Duah-Agyeman G'99 Leaves Helm of the Office of Multicultural Affairs

Over his 38-year career at Syracuse University, James K. Duah-Agyeman G'99 has lived by the Chinese saying, “All things come to the person who is modest and kind in high position.”

“That has really guided my approach of mentoring both students and staff,” he says. “Bring them up with you. Let them grow and then let them fly away when they feel they’re ready. That’s what I try to do.”

By all accounts, “Dr. D.,” as he is affectionately known, has helped countless students reach their full potential in his roles as a teacher, academic counselor and administrator at Syracuse University, including 23 years as director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). This academic year, he stepped back from that position to serve as special advisor to the Men of Color Initiative—a program designed to support, empower and explore issues unique to the experience of men of color in higher education—and will officially retire June 30, 2025.

He has created a huge legacy, impacting not only the lives of individual students during his tenure, but helping to shape Syracuse University as a welcoming institution to diverse students.

A native of the Ashanti Tribe in Ghana, West Africa, Duah-Agyeman came to the United States for his own higher education. After earning a bachelor’s degree from SUNY Brockport, he came to Syracuse University in 1982 to earn a doctorate in mathematics education. Serving as a mathematics teaching assistant, he taught each summer in the University’s Summer Institute run by the Office of Supportive Services (OSS). When an assistant director position opened up in OSS in 1986, Duah-Agyeman thought it would be a good opportunity to experience the administrative side of education. “My intention was to finish my degree and see what happens,” he says.

What happened is that Duah-Agyeman discovered a passion for student retention through academic achievement, particularly in helping students achieve success in STEM fields. He was subsequently named director of the Center for Academic Achievement, interim associate vice president and director of the Division of Student Support and Development, and director of the Office of Academic Development and College Preparation Programs. In 2001, he was named director of OMA.

Early in his career, Duah-Agyeman says he realized that it’s difficult for students to be academically successful if they don’t feel a sense of belonging, have mentorship or a support network. “So, leadership skills building, mentoring and support became critical to my administrative skills,” he says.

“They have made me a better person as an administrator, as an academic and as a human being. I have been blessed by what the University has done for me, just to be able to work in the system for so long with so much support and collaboration from colleagues. Thanks to my Orange family.”

—JAMES K. DUAH-AGYEMAN

CALIBERPHOTOS



James K. Duah Agyeman (center) with colleagues and friends, from left: Angela Morales-Patterson G'24; Marissa Willingham; his daughter, Karista N. Vaeth '04, L'08; Don C. Sawyer G'03, G'08, G'13; Anthony Otero '96; Paul M. Buckley G'12; Maria J. Lopez '05 G'12 and David Perez II, associate professor

Over four decades, working under the administration of four Syracuse University Chancellors, he says he has seen increased acceptance and emphasis in the area of diversity and inclusion and is pleased at the commitment of the current administration. In particular, he cites the creation of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the advent of the Intercultural Collective, Barner-McDuffie House, Disability Cultural Center and LGBTQ Resource Center. “We have created many spaces addressing the intersectionality of identities for students to feel a sense of belonging,” he says.

That was always his goal with OMA. “What I did with my staff was create a place where students could come and talk and find a home,” he says, “creating an environment where people take ownership in the space and help to co-create the programs and the environment for themselves.”

Indeed, OMA has helped students create their own support networks through programs such as WellsLink, named a Model of Excellence Program in 2015; Dimensions, a peer mentoring program for incoming female students of color; and most recently, the Men of Color Initiative.

In 2002, the Center for Academic Achievement and Student Development introduced the James K. Duah-Agyeman Award for Outstanding Faculty, given annually in recognition of exceptional mentoring to undergraduate students.

While Duah-Agyeman appreciates the recognition, his greatest satisfaction comes from relationships he has built with students and staff and the role he’s played in launching their lives and careers. “I have former staff members who are now professionals all across the country, and they always mention what they took away from their time at OMA,” he says. “The same with our students.”

Prior to joining OMA in 2012, Huey Hsiao asked former OMA staff what Duah-Agyeman was like as a supervisor.

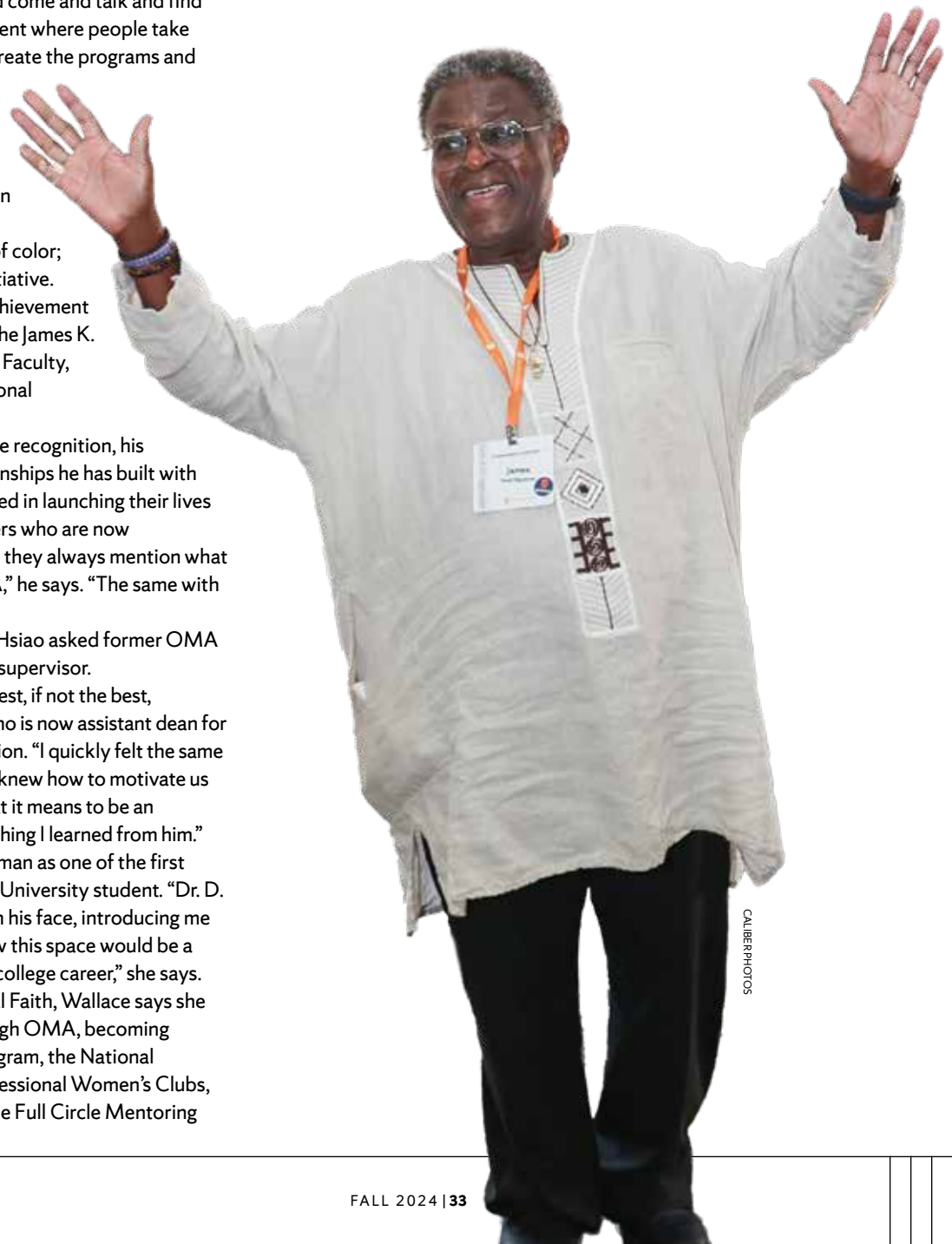
“They all said that he was one of the best, if not the best, supervisor they ever had,” says Hsiao, who is now assistant dean for student success at the School of Education. “I quickly felt the same way. Dr. D. deeply cared about his staff, knew how to motivate us to perform at our best and modeled what it means to be an inclusive leader. I truly appreciate everything I learned from him.”

Imani Wallace ’16 recalls Duah-Agyeman as one of the first people she met as an entering Syracuse University student. “Dr. D. welcomed me into OMA with a smile on his face, introducing me to the programs they had to offer. I knew this space would be a home on campus to me throughout my college career,” she says.

A spoken-word poet known as Lyrical Faith, Wallace says she developed her voice and passions through OMA, becoming involved in the Verbal Blend Poetry Program, the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, and as both a mentee and a mentor in the Full Circle Mentoring

Program. “My leadership on campus inspired me to pursue a master’s in higher education and student affairs. It was mentors I met through OMA that helped me grow into the scholar, professional and person I am today.”

As much as he may have touched their lives, Duah-Agyeman says he received just as much in return. “They have made me a better person as an administrator, as an academic and as a human being,” he says. “I have been blessed by what the University has done for me, just to be able to work in the system for so long with so much support and collaboration from colleagues. Thanks to my Orange family.”



CALIBERPHOTOS

Entertainment Pioneer Suzanne de Passe '68 Inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

On Oct. 19, Suzanne de Passe '68 stood on a Cleveland stage in front of hundreds of music industry luminaries to be honored for her nearly six decades in the entertainment industry by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. De Passe, former president of Motown Productions and co-chairman of de Passe Jones Entertainment, was presented with the Ahmet Ertegun Award, given to non-performing industry professionals who have had a major influence on the creative development and growth of rock 'n' roll. She is only the fifth woman to receive the award.

De Passe was introduced by Motown founder Berry Gordy, who gave de Passe her start. "I can never thank him enough for seeing something in me I didn't see in myself and giving me an opportunity to find it," she said. "And in so doing, I have had the most wonderful career and life."

A native of Harlem, de Passe grew up attending the progressive New Lincoln School from kindergarten through high school. "There were 50 students, 25 girls and 25 boys, and most of us went the whole way through together," she says.

She was among five female classmates who came to Syracuse University. De Passe majored in English literature and lived in Reid Cottage, at the time located near the Newhouse I building, taking her meals at DellPlain Hall. "It was where the athletes ate," she recalls.

De Passe says she had a wonderful college experience. "It was very social, probably too social," she says. "I enjoyed the independence and gained a great sense of myself."

But she did not like the Syracuse winter. "This was before there were cute insulated coats," she says. "I felt like the Michelin man every time I had to go outside."

By the end of the year, de Passe was engaged to a graduating football player who had been drafted by the Washington Redskins. Back in New York City, she told her mother she was not returning to Syracuse. She enrolled at Manhattan Community College, an experience that would also prove short-lived.

Only a few blocks away, a new disco had opened called the Cheetah Club that de Passe began frequenting with a girlfriend. "There were three bands each night, and we would go and dance," she says.

As a regular, she began sharing her opinions about the talent with the club owners, who invited her to sit in on auditions. Before long, they dumped their booking agent and offered de Passe a full-time job as talent coordinator. She was 19.

Her engagement and college career behind her, de Passe relished her new role. She became friends with Cindy Birdsong, a member of Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles, who was soon tapped to join The Supremes.

When Birdsong returned to New York for The Supremes' performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, de Passe made plans to take her out afterward to celebrate, hiring a limousine she couldn't afford for the occasion. "I was sitting in the limo outside the stage door waiting, when Cindy came out and said the words that would change my life forever," recalls de Passe. "Mr. Gordy's car has gone on an errand, and he needs a ride to an appointment. Can we take him?"

Gordy took Birdsong and de Passe to dinner. When she later reached out to him to ask why she was having such trouble booking Motown acts at the Cheetah Club, he offered her a job as a creative assistant.

Shortly after joining the company, she received a call from Motown artist Bobby Taylor, who lived in her Detroit apartment building. "I've got something you need to see," he told her.

De Passe arrived to find five young boys sprawled across his living room. When they started singing a cappella, the hairs on the back of her neck stood up. But when she called Gordy, he told her he wasn't interested in a kid act. "Don't you know how much trouble Stevie Wonder is?" he told her.

"I was new, so I didn't," she says.

But de Passe would not take no for an answer. "Sometimes when you really believe in something, you have to make no your vitamin. It has to be the thing that makes you stronger, not weaker, because your belief is the thing that can change people's minds, hearts and lives," she says.

Those kids were the Jackson 5. Once they were signed to the Motown label, de Passe steered their career, guiding everything from wardrobe to choreography. "I watched the Jackson 5 go from



Suzanne de Passe at the 2024 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction plaque dedication

“Sometimes when you really believe in something, you have to make no your vitamin. It has to be the thing that makes you stronger, not weaker, because your belief is the thing that can change people’s minds, hearts and lives.”

—SUZANNE DE PASSE

anonymity to superstardom over a period of three or four years, and it was magical,” she says.

De Passe went on to sign Lionel Richie and the Commodores, Rick James, Teena Marie and DeBarge to the label, while also working closely with Motown’s established artists. “She has shaped careers, saved careers, advised careers. She made all of us,” said Richie in her induction video.

De Passe’s responsibilities included coordinating the appearances of Motown artists on variety television shows popular during the 1970s, including *Hollywood Palace* and *The Dinah Shore Show*, which allowed her to see how television was produced.

By then, Gordy had launched Motown Productions but wasn’t happy how it was going. “When he told me to get over there and fix it, I jumped at the chance,” says de Passe. “I’ve loved books and stories since I was a child.”

In 1972, *Lady Sings the Blues*, a Billie Holiday biopic starring Diana Ross and co-written by de Passe, was nominated for five Academy Awards including Best Original Screenplay. To date, de Passe is the only woman of color to be nominated in that category.

Named president of Motown Productions in 1982, de Passe was key in taking the company to television. She produced and co-wrote the 1983 Emmy Award-winning 25th-anniversary special *Motown: Yesterday, Today, Forever*, which featured a Supremes reunion and a performance by Michael Jackson, who sang “Billie Jean,” while introducing his iconic moonwalk to the world.

Gordy sold Motown Records in 1988. After a brief foray with Gordy/de Passe Productions, de Passe acquired the development projects she’d been working on and launched de

Passe Entertainment in 1992. She’s now partnered with Madison Jones in de Passe Jones Entertainment.

Among de Passe’s many credits are television shows *Sister, Sister* and *Showtime at the Apollo*; miniseries *The Temptations*, *The Jacksons: An American Dream* and *Lonesome Dove*; and the feature film *The Marvin Gaye Story*. She also produced former President Barack Obama’s Commander-in-Chief Inaugural Ball.

In his induction ceremony remarks, Gordy exalted de Passe as a “true pioneer.

“While running Motown Productions, she stepped into the predominantly men’s world of music, movies and television. Her instincts made her a formidable player, and her success carved out a much-needed path for the many women who have followed her as executives in the entertainment industry,” he said.

An acknowledged role model, de Passe says she’s happy to take any opportunity to share her experiences to help those coming up in the field.

That includes serving as an advisor to Syracuse University’s SULA Semester, in which students take entertainment industry-related courses while interning in Los Angeles. Although her tenure as a student was short-lived, her relationship with Syracuse University has endured. She was awarded a Chancellor’s Citation at the Coming Back Together reunion in 1986, and in 2010, she received the Arents Award, the University’s highest alumni honor.

De Passe made it clear in her induction remarks that she has no plans to retire. She said she takes inspiration from the past and is excited for the future, invoking the title of the Bill Withers’ song “Use Me (Till You Use Me Up).”

“That’s what I intend to do,” she said.

Alumni Association Board Updates

Alonna Berry '11, a director on the Syracuse University Alumni Association (SUAA) Board since 2021, assumed the role of vice president. She will serve in that position for the next year before transitioning to the role of president July 1, 2025.

Berry has served as chair of the board's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. She lives in Milton, Delaware, where she is senior director at Social Contract, a firm that helps organizations achieve their social impact goals and is founder and chairwoman of the Bryan Allen Stevenson School of Excellence, an emerging charter school in Sussex County, Delaware.

Davita N. Carpenter '92 has joined the SUAA as a member of the board of directors. A scholar-athlete on the Syracuse women's basketball team, Carpenter is now vice president of human resources at HCA Healthcare and is founder of the Davita Nicole Consortium, a training, mentoring and people development organization. She lives in Santa Clarita, California.



Alonna Berry



Davita N. Carpenter

Army Col. Pia W. Rogers '98 L'01, G'01 Gives MPA Convocation Address



Pia W. Rogers

Army Col. Pia W. Rogers '98, L'01, G'01, returned to campus last June to give the keynote address at the 2024 Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs master of public administration Convocation. She spoke about her 22-year career as well as her commitment to public service.

"Today my energy is derived from those around me—subordinates, peers and superiors—and how we, collectively, improve our foxhole," she says.

After being commissioned at Syracuse University through the Reserve Officers' Training Corps program and earning her undergraduate degree in journalism from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications in 1998, Rogers completed the J.D./M.P.A. dual-degree program in 2001.

She joined the Army's Judge Advocate General's Corps in 2002 and has been an active-duty soldier for 22 years. During that time, she has been stationed at numerous locations across the globe, including Taegu, South Korea; Kabul, Afghanistan; and Bolslawiac, Poland. In the U.S., she has worked in Maryland, Virginia, Kansas, North Carolina, Colorado and now at the Pentagon, where she serves as the chief of legislation, investigations, and nominations for the Office of the Chief Legislative Liaison, U.S. Army.

Rogers and her husband, Akima Rogers '93, help plan and host the Orange and Blue Barbecue, an annual of Syracuse alumni held each summer in suburban Washington, D.C. (see page 38 for more).



More than 200 alumni attended a reception during CBT that showcased new facilities for the HEOP and SSS programs in Steele Hall. Above, alumni from the classes of 2014 and 2015 at the reception.

Alumni Honored by HEOP/SSS Programs

Syracuse University is home to one of the oldest and largest Higher Education Opportunity (HEOP) programs in New York state, established in 1969, hosting programs for both full-time and part-time students. Along with the Student Support Services (SSS), which came to Syracuse 10 years later, these programs provide academic support services, tuition assistance and supplemental financial assistance to enable students to successfully complete undergraduate studies.

“The students in our programs have the odds stacked against them,” says Craig Tucker, director of HEOP and TRIO SSS programs. “Most of them are first-generation students who come here with no idea what to expect. They’re underrepresented, underprepared, and some of them are inadmissible by regular admission standards. But with our help, they do amazing work. They contribute to the campus in so many ways. And then they go on to careers that reflect who they really are.”

In recognition of those achievements, the programs present annual awards recognize alumni excellence. Recipients of the JoAnn K. May Eternal Flame Alumni of Excellence Award for 2024 include:

TRIO SSS

Anthony Fulton '82, communications entrepreneur and member of the Syracuse University Alumni Association Board of Directors

Taye Diggs '93, actor and author

Michael Barbosa '96, assistant attorney general in charge of the Brooklyn Regional Office of the New York State Attorney General's Office

The Hon. Teneka E. Frost '98, Schenectady city court judge

Plansky Hoang '15, Ph.D. '21, chemical engineer, scientist at Lotte Biologics

HEOP

David Hoalcroft '85, retired from 37-year career in information technology services at Syracuse University

Felisha Legette-Jack '89, Syracuse University women's basketball head coach

Terron Moore '10, executive-level content director and marketing/communications strategist, currently at Reddit

Jessica Santana '11, co-founder, AmericaOnTech

Evin F. Robinson '12, co-founder, AmericaOnTech

Awards were presented both last spring and at a reception for HEOP/SSS alumni held during the Coming Back Together reunion.

“These alumni are doing amazing things and making a difference in the world,” says Tucker. “They are an asset to the Syracuse University community, and their accomplishments should be celebrated.”

CALIBER PHOTOS



Chancellor Kent Syverud with Anthony Fulton

Alumni Summer Gatherings in Washington, D.C.

Almost every summer for the last 15 years, Orange alumni of color from the Northeast and beyond have gathered in suburban Washington, D.C. for the Orange and Blue Barbecue.

The event started in 2009 when Akima Rogers '93 and his wife, Col. Pia Rogers '98, G'01, L'01, hosted 60 D.C.-area alumni at their home. Over time, the event took on a life of its own, with alumni traveling from as far as California, Atlanta and New York City. More than 300 alumni and family members attended the barbecue this year, the 15th anniversary of its start.

The barbecue has long outgrown the Rogerses' ability to host on their own. Now held at the Rosaryville State Park in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, the barbecue is planned and executed by a 19-person committee that calls themselves "The Crew."

"This is a family event and people bring their kids," says Akima Rogers, a member of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Committee. "There's all-you-can-eat food, games, raffles, a live DJ who has dance contests. It runs all afternoon from 12 to 6, and people just hang out and have a good time," he says.

The ticket price for the event covers the cost of food and

entertainment. Any surplus is used to purchase gift cards given to incoming Syracuse University students from the D.C. area.

This year, the Syracuse University Office of Multicultural Advancement partnered with The Crew and hosted a pre-CBT reception in Washington, D.C., the evening before. "We know that many people travel to attend the Orange and Blue Barbecue and thought it would be a great way to make it a whole weekend for alumni," says Miko Horn '95, director of special events in the Office of Multicultural Advancement. "We did the same thing three years ago prior to CBT 2021, and it worked out great."

With 200 attendees, it was the largest of the Pre-CBT receptions held in cities including New York City, Atlanta, Los Angeles, the Bay Area and Martha's Vineyard.

Rogers says planning has already begun for next year's Orange and Blue Barbecue, which will be held July 19, 2025. "I would have never imagined this 15 years ago, but people plan their summer vacations around this event."



Alumni at the pre-CBT reception in Washington, D.C.



At halftime of Syracuse's game against No. 23 Georgia Tech, the Orange honored Hall of Fame defensive lineman Dwight Freeney by retiring his No. 54 jersey.

Dwight Freeney and Cherée Hicks Jerseys Retired

The athletic accomplishments of Dwight Freeney '01 (football) and Cherée Hicks '00 (track and field) were celebrated by Syracuse University with the retirement of their jerseys at ceremonies held in September.

Freeney was honored during the Georgia Tech game Sept. 7. A member of the College and Pro Football Hall of Fame, he finished his career ranked second in program history with 34 sacks and was third in Big East history. He posted more than 50 tackles for loss in his career and was an All-American in 2001 after setting the program's single-season sacks record (17.5), earning Big East Defensive Player of the Year.

He was drafted 11th overall by the Indianapolis Colts, where he totaled the 18th-most sacks in NFL history during his 16-year career. He was enshrined Pro Football Hall of Fame earlier this year.

Hicks was a six-time All-American thrower at Syracuse and won six Big East individual championships. She claimed conference titles in the indoor shot put (twice), outdoor shot put (twice) and discus. She was a three-time NCAA silver medalist in 2000, finishing runner-up in the shot put (both indoor and outdoor) and discus in 2000.

She later went on to the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials in 2000, where she placed fifth. Hicks still holds the Syracuse

indoor and outdoor shot put and discus records.

Hicks was honored during the Stanford game Sept. 20. She is currently head track and field coach at James Madison University.



Cherée Hicks

Milestones



Sharon Owens

Sharon Owens '85 declared her candidacy for mayor of the City of Syracuse for the November 2025 election. She currently serves as deputy mayor of the city.

Lisa Y. Benjamin G'90 joined Lexicon Strategies as a partner in July. Lexicon is a public affairs consulting firm that focuses on strategic communication, public relations and media affairs, government relations, public-private partnerships and public health. She previously served as chief operating officer for the city of Atlanta and CEO of Atlanta Habitat for Humanity.

Lia Miller '99, G'03 became consul general of the U.S. Consulate, in Barcelona, Spain, in August. She has been a foreign service officer for more than 20 years.

Etan Thomas '00 has published a new book, *Police Brutality and White Supremacy, the Fight Against American Traditions* (Akashic Books, 2024).



Grant Palmer with daughter, Mia

Grant Palmer '13, a member of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council, and his wife, Erica Goodyear-Palmer, welcomed daughter Mia Feb. 12, 2024.

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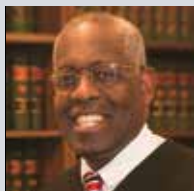
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HISTORY LESSON

Remembering the Hon. Langston C. McKinney, Syracuse's First Black Judge



The Hon. Langston C. McKinney L'71 never dreamed of serving on the bench when he came to law school at Syracuse University but said he was spurred by the social change movements of the late 1960s, as well as the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy and Malcolm X.

A native of Miami, McKinney majored in chemistry at Howard University, where he joined Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. He was recruited by Carrier Corp. to come to Syracuse to work as a chemist, where he was the first Black American scientist in its research and development division. He served in the U.S. Army for two years during the Vietnam War where he tested the effectiveness of chemical agents as a member of the chemical corps. Back at Carrier, he researched new refrigerants in his windowless lab, then would go home and devour news about the events going on in the nation and the world. "Never was there any mention of the importance of having adequate cooling systems in our culture or research into better refrigerants," he said in a 2014 interview.

Using education benefits under the GI Bill, McKinney applied and was accepted to the Syracuse College of Law, becoming one of four Black students in his law school class.

McKinney set out to be an agent for change. After earning his law degree in 1971, he received a fellowship to work as a community lawyer for poor people, then worked for the Legal Aid Society. In 1980, he joined with two colleagues to open Syracuse's first all-Black law firm, Maye, McKinney & Melchor. In addition to the partners' general law practice, the firm developed a niche handling contracts for engineering firms involved in wastewater treatment projects, a combination of McKinney's chemistry expertise and federal regulations requiring the projects employ minority vendors.

In late 1986, when a Syracuse city court judge resigned, McKinney was asked by Mayor Tom Young to fill the opening.

He took the bench in January 1987, becoming Syracuse's first Black judge. Judges appointed to elected positions serve only until the next election, so that September, McKinney ran for his first 10-year term, winning his post by 11 votes. "Whenever anyone says, 'Your vote counts,' I'm a living witness to that," he said. He was subsequently re-elected in 1997 and 2007 and retired from the bench in 2011.

During his 24 years as a city court judge, McKinney earned a reputation for administering justice in a fair and even-handed manner and for protecting civil rights and liberties. He developed the Syracuse Community Treatment Court, which provides drug abusers treatment an alternative to jail; advocated for more inclusive representation on city juries; and spent hours working outside of the courtroom with youth and neighborhood groups, schools, churches and nonprofit boards. "I spent the majority of my professional life trying to ensure there be justice for all," said McKinney in 2014.

In 2015, McKinney received the William C. Ruger Award from the Onondaga County Bar Association, presented in recognition of "singularly outstanding achievement in devotion to the principles of our system of justice." On Oct. 30, The Hon. Langston C. McKinney Courtroom was dedicated in the Criminal Courts Building in Syracuse.

McKinney died May 24, 2024. He is survived by his wife, Linda M. Littlejohn; his children, Brian McKinney, Evan McKinney and Jeffrey Bellamy; his brothers, Edward McKinney, David McKinney and Ronald Sharpe; his sisters, Nancy Kearney, Cheryl McKinney, Laverne Reese, Melanie Reese and Yvette McKinney; his grandchildren, Damien and Novah Bellamy; and a host of nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his first wife, Stephanie Harder McKinney.

IN MEMORIAM



Cheryl Stephen G'83, L'83, of New York City, died May 14, 2024, after a short illness.

Born in Guyana, Stephen attended elementary and middle school on St. Croix and high school in Yonkers, New York. After earning a bachelor's degree from New York University, she came to Syracuse University, where she concurrently earned a J.D. from the College of Law and a master's in library science.

Over her 40-year career, Stephen combined her expertise in positions at the Frick Art Reference Library and as a reference or research librarian at law firms White and Case, Sullivan and Cromwell, and Reed Smith.

Stephen had numerous cultural and popular interests, including art exhibitions, musicals, dance and concerts, with passions for Beyoncé and BTS-Korean pop. For several years, she entered and finished the New York City's walkers' marathon. She also enjoyed traveling to the Caribbean and Europe. She was a loving and dedicated aunt, known for her hearty laugh and sense of humor.

Stephens is survived by her brothers and sisters, Wesley, Joseph, Annita, John and Linda; nieces Pamela and Mellina; nephews Gabriel, Samuel, Luca and Matteo; and many cousins, relatives and friends.



Anthony Herbert Jr. '15
and his wife, Taylor, with
Leslie Sanchez '18 and
Malcolm-Ali Davis '18



Office of Multicultural Advancement

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Nicki Mayo '01, Jade Fulce '08 and Lia Miller '99, G'03 at the CBT Sneaker Ball