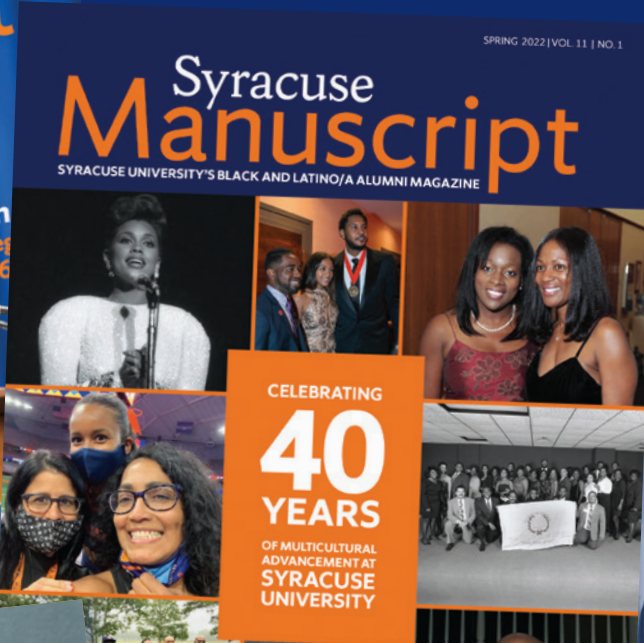
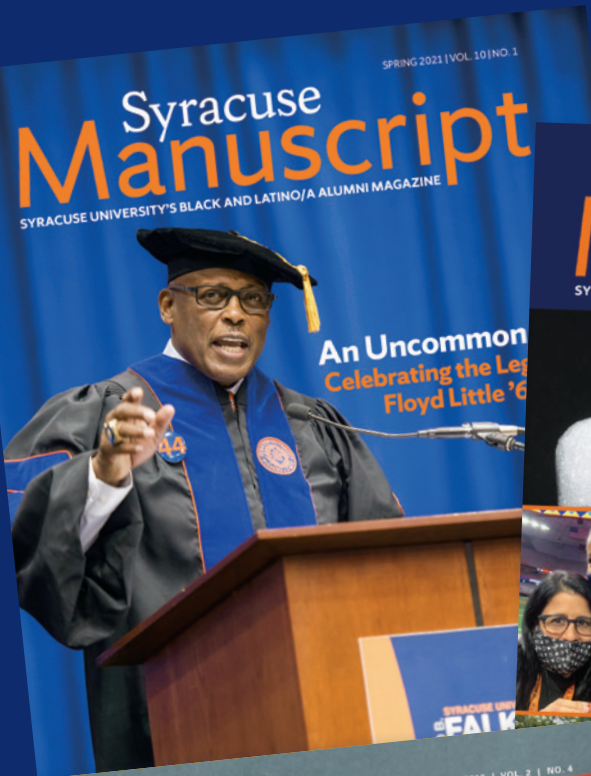
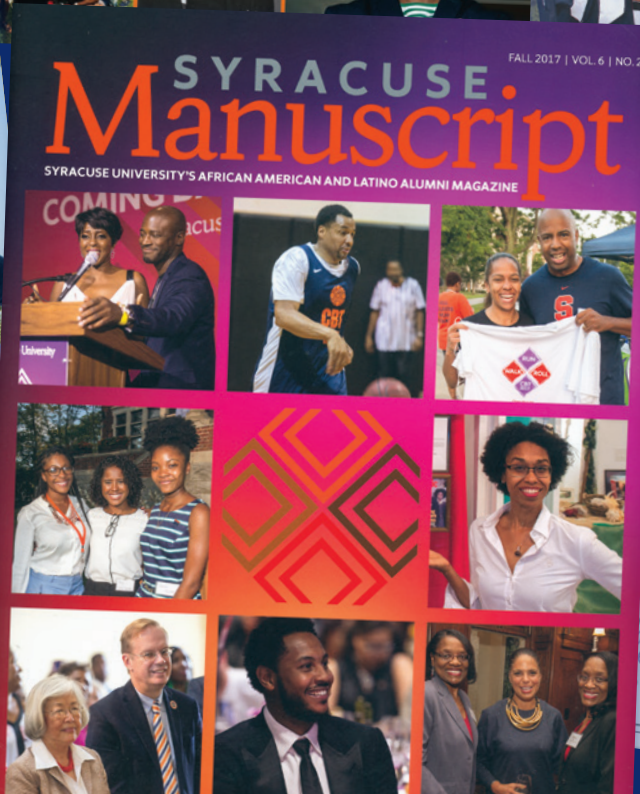


Syracuse Manuscript



A Legacy in Print
Celebrating 40 years of
the Syracuse Manuscript





Syracuse University

Carmelo Anthony delivered a heartfelt message as the 2025 Commencement speaker. "Take that Orange spirit into the world. Be bold. Be kind. Be relentless. Live with a purpose. Give back. Honor your roots. Chase your dreams," he told graduates.

Syracuse Manuscript

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On the Cover: Celebrating four decades of the Syracuse
Manuscript as we transition to a new digital storytelling
platform

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ALEXANDRA VASSEL

Rachel Vassel '91, G'21

EMBRACING CHANGE

Hello, Orange Family,

For many years, *Syracuse Manuscript* has told the stories that are most important to our multicultural alumni community. Articles covering everything from the Coming Back Together reunions, regional events and activities, student and alumni success stories, and Orange heroes such as Floyd Little '67, the Syracuse 8, Vanessa Williams '85 and Kevin Richardson H '20 have filled our pages.

Manuscript, which was launched in 1985 under the leadership of Robert Hill, has been a legacy publication that has helped us to understand how far we've come as a community and how far we have yet to go. Often, I find during home visits with alumni that *Manuscript* is a valued keepsake on a desk, coffee table or bookshelf. This is because it represents the beauty of our deeply connected community at Syracuse University. It's our history and our voice.

This digital copy will be the last issue of *Manuscript* in its current form due to rising printing and production costs. However, this fall, we will launch a new storytelling website that will continue to share the stories that you enjoy, in a more dynamic and timely format. Please ensure that we have your current email address by visiting cusecommunity.syr.edu and clicking "Update My Info" on the top right of the home page. You will receive an email notification when the new platform is ready to view.

As you know, *Manuscript* has changed a great deal over the years (as our cover art illustrates), and this latest change represents the power of digital media to expand our capabilities and support our mission. I hope you will embrace this new and creative approach to communicating all the things that we've always celebrated.

This issue also represents Angela Morales-Patterson's final issue as editor in chief. I cannot fully express the passion that Angela has brought to this publication or her dedication to the communities that *Manuscript* represents. We owe her our gratitude as she retires after 26 years of service at the University (see page 10). Angela was diligent about delivering each copy of *Manuscript* to the University Archives, and we will continue that tradition by cataloging our future digital stories as well.

Additionally, we are grateful that our longtime *Manuscript* writer, Renée Levy (whom many of you may know was hired by Hill, our founding vice president of Program Development), will continue to write for us.

Thank you for your contributions to this important, award-winning magazine and your ongoing contributions to our alma mater.

With Orange Love,
Rachel Vassel

Forever Orange Campaign Exceeds \$1.5 Billion Goal

The unprecedented engagement of Black and Latino alumni contributed to this historic fundraising success.

At the Barner-McDuffie House, three students are studying in the Brown Favors Quiet Lounge. Another group of students is hanging out relaxing in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Iota Upsilon Chapter Social Lounge, while another is using the John Gregory Clemons '76, G'14 Kitchen to bake a batch of cookies.

In the year it's been open, the house on Euclid Avenue has become constant a hub of community, particularly for students interested in Black history and culture.

The Barner-McDuffie House, and the spaces within it, are named for the alumni whose financial support made it possible. That includes a \$1 million naming gift from Sharon Barner '79 and her husband, Haywood McDuffie, as well as \$600,000 raised from individual alumni, and members of Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha sororities to name its rooms.

The Barner-McDuffie House is significant as the first University building on North Campus that was solely funded through the philanthropy of Black alumni.

That fundraising effort is but one tangible outcome of Syracuse University's historic Forever Orange Campaign, which closed Dec. 31, 2024, after raising an unprecedented \$1.59 billion to advance

academic excellence, transform University facilities and spaces and expand access to higher education for talented students.

"I am grateful to everyone who helped us reach and exceed the ambitious goals of the Forever Orange Campaign," says Chancellor Kent Syverud. "The extraordinary generosity of so many is already having a profound impact—transforming our campus, driving academic excellence and providing life-changing opportunities for our students. The Forever Orange Campaign was a catalyst to convert big ideas into exciting realities. But none of it would have been possible without the passion, support and commitment of our Orange community."

Launched in 2019, Forever Orange sought to raise \$1.5 billion in philanthropic support from 125,000 donors and meaningfully engage 20% of alumni. Over its five-year run, all three goals were exceeded. At campaign close, the Forever Orange Campaign had raised a total of \$1,590,234,203 from 125,699 individual donors, meaningfully engaging 20.5% of alumni.

Among Black and Latino alumni, that number is 29.8%. The campaign proved a catalyst for philanthropy among Black and Latino alumni, who supported Syracuse University at

unprecedented levels. Over the last 10 years, Black and Latino giving has increased tenfold, with a high of \$6.3 million in gifts in 2023 up from \$612,000 in 2014.

That participation level is due in large part to efforts of the Syracuse University Office of Multicultural Advancement and Affinity Fundraising (SUMA), which plans and executes regional events and the on-campus triennial Coming Back Together (CBT) reunion, which grew significantly during the campaign period. CBT 2024 sold out last fall with 1,557 registrants and many others who returned to campus that weekend, growing from approximately 400 alumni prior.

Alumni participation translated to alumni giving. At the launch of the Forever Orange campaign, SUMA set out to double the \$5 million Our Time Has Come (OTHC) endowment to \$10 million. When that goal was accomplished in 2022, the target was raised to \$15 million, and by the end of the campaign in December 2024, the OTHC endowment had reached \$16 million.



Alumni members of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. present a ceremonial check for \$75,000 at Coming Back Together in September 2024.



OUR TIME HAS COME SCHOLARS welcomed students and parents during Family Weekend 2023 at SUMA and Alumni Engagement offices at 200 Walnut Place. Left to right: Myla Thomas '24, G'25, Sofia Rivera '26, Jamison Brown '25, Afua Danso Dankwa '24, Sofia Rodriguez '24, G'25, Denisse Cruz '24 and Lizmarie Montemayor '24, 'G25. Scholarships increased significantly as a result of money raised during the Forever Orange campaign.

“Our segment significantly contributed to the success of the Forever Orange campaign,” says Rachel Vassel '91, G'21, associate vice president of multicultural advancement and affinity fundraising. “As a result of their generosity, we’ve increased from awarding 62 OTHC scholarships in 2019 at the campaign launch to 143 scholarships in the 2024-25 academic year.”

The ability to support current first-generation and other students with unmet financial need is the driving force behind the OTHC Program and a major impetus for alumni giving.

Just as football alumni might support athletic facilities or journalism alumni give to the S.I.Newhouse School of Public Communications, supporting OTHC is a way for many first-generation and other alumni to give back for the financial aid and scholarships that they received as undergraduate students.

“Alumni give to support the things they care about, whether it’s their academic program, athletics or supporting scholarships for students with an unmet financial need,” says Vassel.

The important thing is engaging alumni with the University. “All of us have multifaceted interests,” says Vassel. “OTHC may be the first area of interest for our alumni, but once they are in the pipeline, they often go on to support other areas of the University they care about as well.”

Vassel credits the inclusive nature of SUMA fundraising for the unprecedented numbers of Black and Latino alumni participating in the Forever Orange campaign.

“We also support collective giving, which allows alumni to participate at whatever level they can to support their alumni group’s fundraising initiatives,” she says.

SUMA has tapped into the long history of communities of color working together to achieve goals. “We’ve always pooled our resources to do more with less,” she says.

Leading the way is the Kappa Lambda chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., which raised a historic \$1.2 million to create an endowed scholarship. “The Deltas have set the standard for all of our alumni groups,” says Vassel.

Particularly notable is that 40% of contributors to the Delta Sigma Theta endowment were first-time University donors.

“Either those alumnae weren’t previously asked to give or weren’t presented with a giving opportunity that sparked interest,” says Vassel. “Or perhaps those first-time donors were compelled to give collectively because they could contribute at any level to help their group achieve its goal. Whether a donor gave \$50 or \$5,000 to the Delta fund, all members of the collective can celebrate the incredible \$1.2 million raised by the organization.”

When SUMA was created as the Office of Program Development back in 1982, the goal was to re-engage a segment of alumni that had become disconnected from Syracuse University.

Over its 43 years, SUMA became a model for other colleges and universities seeking to engage alumni of color, building relationships that were critical to the success of the Forever Orange Campaign.

Because at the heart of it, fundraising is all about relationships. “When we talk about a campaign’s success, we often focus on the goals and metrics. But campaigns are really built on relationships, trust and a shared belief in one’s mission,” says Tracy Barlok, senior vice president and chief advancement officer. “The Forever Orange Campaign didn’t begin with a dollar goal; it began with people who loved Syracuse University deeply enough to imagine its future and then make it real.”

SUMA’s stellar record of alumni engagement and pipeline building during the campaign period has been recognized within higher education with six awards from the Council for Support of Higher Education since 2021 that recognize alumni engagement, targeted fundraising, targeted constituency engagement, volunteer involvement of the SUMA Advisory Council and the

Syracuse Manuscript magazine. SUMA also received the 2024 Alumni Association Inclusive Excellence Award from *Insight into Diversity* magazine.

The CBT reunion has been a driving force of alumni engagement efforts, evidenced by the increase in participation. In 2014, CBT attracted 400 registrants. The 1,557 registrants in 2024 included 500 first-time attendees.

Many of those were younger alumni. “It’s important that we engage and develop the next generation of philanthropists of color by offering compelling reasons and methods of giving,” says Vassel. “Alumni support will be critical to fund initiatives important to our community. Without it, students will not have as rich an experience on campus.”

DONOR PROFILE: OLIVER FERNANDEZ

GIVING WITH GRATITUDE

As a recent college graduate, Oliver Fernandez ’08 renovated his first property in Washington, D.C. A neighbor was so impressed by the work that he offered Fernandez owner-financing so he could purchase and restore the two buildings he owned. Launching his own construction company, Fernandez recalls plenty of trepidation. “I remember feeling so unsure about my path when I first started out. All my friends had these great jobs with salaries, and here I was struggling to get my business off the ground,” he says.

His initial goal was to get to \$10 million in annual business, a benchmark he reached in under three years. To date, McKenzie Construction boasts 100 completed projects with more than \$200 million construction value. Last fall, Fernandez and McKenzie Construction were honored at the 2024 ’CUSE50 Alumni Entrepreneur Awards as one of the 50 fastest growing alumni businesses of the year. His company offices are located in the building that housed Syracuse University’s Washington, D.C., headquarters for 22 years, which Fernandez and his wife, Leah ’08, purchased from the University in 2020.

Fernandez is grateful for the education he gained from Syracuse University that has contributed to his success. He made the Syracuse University football team as a walk-on, playing linebacker, while earning a degree in civil engineering in the College of Engineering and Computer Science with financial support from the Our Time Has Come Scholarship (OTHC) Program.

Last year, Fernandez made a gift of \$250,000 to the Forever Orange Campaign, earmarking \$150,000 for OTHC, \$50,000 to the College of Engineering and Computer Science and \$50,000 to the Samuel P. Clemence Scholarship Fund.

“Juggling my engineering course load with football was initially a struggle,” he says. “The support of the OTHC program and of Professor Clemence really made a difference. He was one of my



Oliver Fernandez

first professors and kept encouraging me to keep my head up. I ended up getting all A’s and Bs that first semester, which really boosted my confidence that I could get through school successfully and continue football. Because I was that kid myself, I know how important scholarships can be for students who need them.”

In addition to his financial support of the University, Fernandez shares his time and expertise with current students. In the last year, he returned to campus to give the 2024 Convocation address for the College of Engineering and Computer Science, to share his business success with Coach Fran Brown and the football team for their preseason speaker series, to network with budding student entrepreneurs during the ’CUSE50 Summit, and most recently, to speak at an OTHC leadership development program.

“I’m always invigorated by talking with students about their experiences and aspirations,” he says. “I consider it a compliment that they are interested in learning from me and my experiences.”

In addition to giving back, Fernandez says his campaign gift serves as inspiration to propel him forward. “As I’m growing my business, one of the things that I’ve found is that the more things that I have a purpose for, the more motivation I have to dream and keep going after bigger things,” he says. “I’m always increasing the things that I care for, and Syracuse University is especially important for helping lay the foundation that I currently build off.”

“When we talk about a campaign’s success, we often focus on the goals and metrics. But campaigns are really built on relationships, trust and a shared belief in one’s mission. The Forever Orange Campaign didn’t begin with a dollar goal; it began with people who loved Syracuse University deeply enough to imagine its future and then make it real.”

—TRACY BARLOK, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
ADVANCEMENT OFFICER



Sharon Barner at the Barner-McDuffie House Dedication during CBT

DONOR PROFILE: MARCO CAMPOS

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES IN STEM

Marco Campos P’25 believes in the power of education to build a better life. That’s what prompted him and his sister, Deanna Campos-Miller, to create the Campos Foundation to provide opportunities that support underrepresented students through STEM education initiatives.

As part of the Forever Orange Campaign, the Campos Foundation made a gift of \$2.15 million to the College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS).



Marco Campos

In February, the Campos Student Center opened on the second floor of the Center of Science and Technology. The new community space for ECS students is intended as a home away from home where any student can receive academic support, connect to campus resources and find a sense of community and belonging.

“Our overarching mission is to promote a sense of

belonging for the breadth of undergraduates who comprise our college,” says Abby Fite G’18, director of inclusive excellence at ECS.

The Campos Foundation gift also supports scholarship for students in Syracuse’s Summer College, which offers immersive programs for high school students to gain practical skills and enhance their professional portfolios.

Campos says he wants to “level the playing field” for first-generation students and offer more opportunities for students

of all backgrounds. “This program offers students the opportunity to have exposure to networking and a college environment,” he says. “We want to help move the needle for students in the world of STEM.”

He’s motivated by his own life experiences. Campos and his sister were raised by a single mother with limited resources. “As a young teenager, I didn’t have role models. I sensed there was something bigger, but there wasn’t a clear path,” he says.

Although talented in math, he received little encouragement until becoming part of a summer bridge program in his senior year of high school. That opened the door to study engineering at the University of Colorado.

During college, Campos interned at Texaco, where he was hired after graduation. At 30, he launched his own company, Campos EPC, which offers engineering, procurement and construction counsel for utility, energy and midstream organizations. The company also offers STEM education initiatives through a community outreach program; the Campos Foundation supports summer bridge programs, scholarships and SmartLabs at primary and secondary schools.

Campos is the father of Cortez Campos ’25, who studied cinematography and film/video production in the College of Visual and Performing Arts. It was visiting his son on the Syracuse University campus that inspired Campos to make an impact at Syracuse as he had with a similar initiative the foundation funded at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

“We all have a sphere of influence, and it’s incumbent on each of us to affect our sphere of influence in the most positive ways we can,” says Campos. “Putting good out there in the universe brings back good, even more than we put out.”

DONOR PROFILE: ARTHUR AND CHANDLER JONES

MAKING AN IMPACT ON AND OFF THE GRIDIRON

Between 2005 and 2011, brothers Arthur '09 and Chandler Jones '15 dominated the line of scrimmage for Syracuse football. Nearly 20 years later, the Jones brothers added to their impact on the Orange football program with a seven-figure commitment to support construction of a new Football Performance Center at the John A. Lally Athletics Complex.

The gift was announced in October 2022 as part of the Forever Orange Campaign. "My father being a pastor, he instilled in my brothers and me that it's always better to give than to receive," says Arthur. "Syracuse University has been a blessing to my family and me throughout the years. The impact that SU has made on me is priceless, and you can't put a dollar amount on that. I am a proud alumnus of the greatest school in the world."

The Football Performance Center, which opened in March, includes coaches' offices, a cafeteria and nutrition space, locker room and position meeting rooms. The Jones Brothers Football Suite serves as a focal point for the facility's second level and leads into both the coaches' wing and the administrative wing.

The Jones brothers grew up in Endicott, New York, each starring for the defense during their time at Syracuse.

A defensive lineman from 2005 to 2009, Arthur was a two-time All-Big East First Team selection and was selected in the fifth round of the 2010 NFL draft by the Baltimore Ravens. He

played for the Ravens from 2010 to 2013, including the team that won Super Bowl XLVII in 2013. He then played with the Indianapolis Colts from 2014 to 2016 and the Washington Redskins in 2017.

Chandler, a defensive end for the Orange from 2008 to 2011 and All-Big East First Team selection, was a first-round pick by the New England Patriots in the 2012 NFL Draft. During his four years with the Patriots, New England won Super Bowl XLIX in 2014. From 2016 through 2021, he played for the Arizona Cardinals before signing with the Las Vegas Raiders in 2022 for his final season. Chandler has recorded the most sacks and forced fumbles of anyone in the league from 2012 to 2022. His 71.5 sacks during his first five-plus seasons with the Cardinals (2016-21) ranks third in the NFL during that span and first all-time in franchise history. A four-time Pro-Bowl selection (2015, 2017, 2019, 2021), Chandler was named to the NFL 2010's All-Decade Team.

"Syracuse football is a great piece of my history that I will always cherish," says Chandler. "It is an honor for me to give back and be part of shaping the future of Syracuse football. Together, we can continue to build a legacy of excellence on the football field and in the classroom. Being able to lift up others to assist in accomplishing their dreams is something I look forward to telling my children one day."



Chandler and Arthur Jones





The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Miron Victory Court was held Nov. 8, 2024.

Campaign Highlights

Forever Orange fundraising eclipsed that of Syracuse University's last three campaigns combined. Here are some of the other outcomes:

- The University's endowment more than doubled to \$2.1 billion.
- University-wide, the amount of financial support available to students dramatically increased due to the creation of more than 800 new scholarships.
- Bolstered by the Faculty Excellence Program, 117 faculty positions and fellowships were created, advancing Syracuse's status as a top-tier international research university.
- The Lender Center for Social Justice and the Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship in Washington, D.C., were established.
- The National Veterans Resource Center was created at the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Building—the first, best and only facility on a college campus dedicated to the well-being of veterans, service members and their families.
- Manley Field House was transformed into the John A. Lally Athletics Complex.
- The Hildegard and J. Myer Schine Student Center was revitalized into a vibrant new center for student life with centralized student services, contemporary food offerings and collaborative gathering spaces and study areas.
- The JMA Wireless Dome underwent a major renovation, including the Miron Victory Court, a space for gathering ahead of athletic events.
- Student health, wellness and recreation services were consolidated into the new Barnes Center at The Arch.



Through Syracuse University's Dick Clark Los Angeles Program, students have opportunities to explore the industries that interest them, expand academically and get a taste of life on the West Coast. The 22,000-square-foot center—made possible through an extraordinary gift from the Kari and Dick Clark Foundation in memory of the legendary entertainer and 1951 graduate—includes state-of-the-art space for offices and classrooms, a studio and a student lounge.



NEW CENTER IN OUR NATION'S CAPITAL A panel discussion featuring Syracuse University Trustee and sportscaster Mike Tirico '88, Women's Basketball Head Coach Felisha Legette-Jack '89, ACC Commissioner Jim Phillips and Margaret Talev, Kramer Director of Syracuse's Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship, marked the opening of the University's Washington, D.C., location in September 2024.

Champion 'CUSE

With the Forever Orange Campaign a success, Syracuse University has identified the next pressing need: raising money to address sweeping changes across Division I athletics. The advent of name, image and likeness (NIL) and the increasing prevalence of student-athletes capitalizing on the transfer portal requires universities to develop financial resources to attract and retain top talent.

In February, Syracuse announced the launch of Champion 'CUSE: The Campaign for Syracuse Athletics, a three-year \$50 million fundraising campaign aimed at leveling up its success across all 20 of its NCAA Division I programs.

"In this new era of college athletics, it is abundantly clear that winning programs will be the ones that galvanize the support of their campuses, fan bases and communities," says John Wildhack '80, director of athletics. "We are fortunate that the Syracuse University community, our Central New York community and Orange fans around the world have demonstrated their passionate commitment to our exceptional student-athletes and coaches. Their spirit, passion and support are critical for us to compete and win at the highest level."

To learn more or to make your contribution today, please visit cuse.com/championcuse.

From the Heart

Retiring after 26 years, Angela Morales-Patterson leaves a legacy of advocacy and mentorship

In 2009, incoming Syracuse University student Ana Gabriela Urizar '13 attended a New York City new student send-off event, where she met Angela Morales-Patterson G'24, then manager of alumni programs in Office of Program Development (which evolved over the years into what is now Multicultural Advancement and Affinity Fundraising, or SUMA).

Morales-Patterson asked if she had her work-study assignment lined up and offered her a job. Urizar went on to work for SUMA throughout her four years at Syracuse and became an Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholar, an association that made a huge impact on her college experience.

"It wasn't just money; it was a support system—a 'mom' on campus in Angela, events, speakers. You really felt like someone was watching out for you," says Urizar.

Knowing that Urizar, who immigrated from Guatemala, was interested in immigration law, Morales-Patterson connected her with Sylvia Montan L'94, who would become an important mentor. Urizar went on to earn her law degree and is now an immigration attorney in New York City, working at the same firm as Montan.

"I'm so proud of the work she's doing and what she stands for," says Morales-Patterson.

Urizar is but one example of the hundreds of students Morales-Patterson impacted in her 26 years at Syracuse University. When she retired from SUMA in July, she left a legacy as a champion, advocate and surrogate mother figure who believed in the potential of students who might not always have believed in themselves.

"It's always been about the students for me," Morales-Patterson says. "I could relate to their experiences and put myself in their shoes. All of the things that we do for students are things I wish people had done for me: be there for them, support them, because a lot of them don't come from parents with a college background and it took a lot for them to get here."

Herself a first-generation college graduate from a Panamanian immigrant family—the only one among eight siblings to earn a degree—Morales-Patterson brought personal understanding to her work with students facing similar challenges.

"The work became more than a job, but a passion," she says.

Morales-Patterson joined what was the Office of Program Development in 1998 as coordinator of alumni programs. "At the time, both Evelyn Walker [senior director] and I were older and felt like we were losing touch with younger alumni," says Larry Martin, former vice president for program development. "We thought Angela could help us strengthen our outreach with younger alumni and with our Latino alumni. She had the talent and drive to be successful with those efforts."

But her impact extended far beyond those initial parameters.

"Angela made many contacts across the campus and strengthened our connection to other offices that supported students of color. She would reach out to them and try to utilize their talents and skills as we moved forward with our own programs," Martin says.



“Angela made many contacts across the campus and strengthened our connection to other offices that supported students of color. She would reach out to them and try to utilize their talents and skills as we moved forward with our own programs.”

—LARRY MARTIN, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

As a result, Morales-Patterson served on numerous University committees, including the Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month Committee, Black History Month Committee and the Council on Diversity and Inclusion.

Over time, Morales-Patterson assumed responsibility for the OTHC Scholarship Program. Under her stewardship, the program evolved from simple financial assistance to a comprehensive support system. She instituted graduation stoles at Commencement to celebrate OTHC graduates, moved ceremonies from faculty lounges to the Chancellor’s Residence and added mentorship components based on student feedback.

The longest-serving SUMA employee, Morales-Patterson became the heartbeat of the office’s student-centered mission. Many of the students she mentored affectionately called her “Mama Morales”—a title that perfectly captured her nurturing yet firm approach to guiding them through their academic journeys.

“When I think of Angela’s commitment to students, I see her as a true mother figure,” says Marissa L. Willingham, assistant director of Belonging and Student Success. “She carries a strong presence but has a soft heart, always wanting the best for students and pushing them to succeed. Angela made sure students were putting their best foot forward and taking advantage of all campus resources available to help them be successful. If a student wasn’t doing what they needed to do, she would have an honest and direct conversation with them, and students truly appreciated that. I loved her approach because it was firm, direct and deeply caring.”

Similar to Urizar, Anthony Herbert ’15 first met Morales-Patterson at a New York City student send-off event in 2011. Her passion for student engagement made an immediate impression.

“She was adamant that we get involved on campus once we



Evelyn D. Walker, Morales-Patterson, Larry Martin and Carol Melendez



Morales-Patterson presents an award to Kevin Richardson H '20, along with Rachel Vassel, Miko Horn '95, and OTHC Scholars.

arrived, especially with SUMA,” he recalls. “She inspired me to apply for the OTHC program, and her advising and constant care opened many doors. Even during the summers, she was actively engaged in keeping us involved and making sure all the students she connected with were doing well.”

Herbert says that connection didn’t end with graduation. “Any time I would attend an alumni or prospective student event, I’d look to see if Mama Morales would be there,” he says. “Without fail, she would be, looking upon the current and previous generation proudly while hoping to bring the next generation within the circle.”

Central to Morales-Patterson’s approach was a simple philosophy: treat current students like future alumni.

“You treat the students like alumni. You lay out the red carpet for them, because they’ll remember that when they graduate,” she says. “If you treat them right now, they will remember that and be more likely to support the University in the future.”

This viewpoint shaped everything from her daily interactions with students to her advocacy for program enhancements. She

understood that genuine support during college years would translate into lifelong institutional loyalty.

It also helped contribute to the extraordinary growth in SUMA's signature Coming Back Together reunions, which evolved from an intimate gathering in the Women's Building gym to packed events at the Oncenter and Marriott Syracuse Downtown, eventually requiring the JMA Wireless Dome to accommodate demand.

In 2019, Morales-Patterson was named director of operations and partnerships for SUMA. Passing the OTHC torch to Maria J. Lopez '05, G'12, she turned her focus to assisting associate vice president Rachel Vassel '91, G'21 with expanding income streams through major gifts, corporate and foundation gifts and endowments, as well as managing operational budgets and external communications, including the department website, *Shades of Orange* e-newsletter and *Syracuse Manuscript* magazine.

Two years later, the University recognized Morales-Patterson with the Chancellor's Citation for Excellence for Outstanding Contributions to the Student Experience and University Initiatives.

"The impact that Angela has made on the success of numbers of students during her tenure and her determination to ensure that SU is a place that is welcoming to all cannot be celebrated enough," says Vassel.

"As the longest standing staffer within SUMA, she was the person that kept things moving along and kept our community top of mind through multiple leadership transitions. Throughout her tenure, Angela has been a tireless advocate for multicultural alumni engagement and student success. Her leadership has shaped the success of impactful programs such as Coming Back



Morales-Patterson with her husband Eric G'12 and her son Isiah '25 at the CBT 2024 Sneaker Ball

Together, our new student send-offs, and the Our Time Has Come Scholarship and Leadership Programs. As editor of the award-winning *Syracuse Manuscript* magazine, Angela has shared the stories and successes of students and alumni as well as relevant news and information about the University's commitment to being an inclusive campus culture. She will be missed."

"Angela has been a driving force at Syracuse University, dedicating her time and talents to uplifting students, alumni and colleagues," adds Lopez. "Her unwavering commitment to student success was especially evident in her leadership with the Our Time Has Come Scholarship, ensuring that alumni remained connected and actively involved in mentoring and supporting current students. Angela's passion, compassion and deep care for others have left an indelible mark that will continue to inspire and impact our community."

Morales-Patterson says she feels fortunate to have served her Syracuse University career working within the same office to fulfill a mission she deeply cared about along side a team equally committed to that work. She knows her son, Isiah Patterson '25, an OTHC Leader who will graduate in December, will be in good hands.

"There are so many of our students who have gone on to do so many amazing things," she says. "I feel blessed to have been part of their journey and proud of any small role I played in their success. It came from the heart."



Morales-Patterson with Arianna Kuhn '25 at the 2025 OTHC Ceremony

MICHAEL BARBOSA

Protecting People's Rights

Throughout his 25-plus years as an attorney, Michael Barbosa '96 has worked in the public interest to protect the rights of underserved populations, in many cases those without shelter, education or employment opportunities.

"Growing up very low-income and without a lot of opportunities, I always gravitated toward organizations that help people from vulnerable populations," he says. "Providing a voice to people seeking assistance, including many from my own family, was something that propelled me to go right to law school."

For the last nine years, Barbosa has served as assistant attorney general in charge of the Brooklyn/Queens region, for the Office of the New York State Attorney General. He supervises a team of lawyers, advocates and other staff on behalf of Attorney General Letitia James to protect the rights of New Yorkers in matters of civil

rights, economic justice, social justice and consumer fraud.

"There's always more work to be done," he says. "I wake up in the morning trying to figure out solutions to the various problems, and if I'm not upset about a particular issue happening to folks when I go to sleep, then I probably need to do something else."

Growing up in East Harlem and the South Bronx, Barbosa had no images of successful Black or Latino men. "The message we heard was, by 25 you'll either be in prison or dead," he says.

But he found one image of a successful young lawyer watching Blair Underwood on

LA Law. In high school, Barbosa joined the mock trial team, where he was mentored by the first attorney he'd ever met.

The first in his family to attend college, he applied to Syracuse University sight unseen and was accepted and participated in the Student Supportive Services program. Barbosa came to campus immediately after his high school graduation to participate in Summer Institute. "That opened my world in terms of meeting and taking classes with first-generation students from other places," he says. "I learned that I could not only succeed, but enjoy the learning process."

Barbosa majored in political science and joined Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., serving as vice president and president and as

president of the National Panhellenic Council. He secured internships in Syracuse, working at a law firm and the district attorney's office. While spending a semester abroad in Zimbabwe, he interned at the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association.

After graduation, he landed at American University Washington College of Law, which he attended along with several Syracuse University friends, including the late Midwin Charles '95. "Midwin was also a first-generation student, and we leaned on each other through law school and as chair and vice chair of the Black Law Students Association and also served together on the law school's Dean's Diversity Council," he says.

Barbosa began his career at the Legal Aid Society in New York City and later worked at the Seton Hall Law School's Center for Social Justice and as general counsel/managing partner of BounceU, in addition to the Attorney General's Office, where he earlier spent two years as an assistant attorney general in its Civil Rights Bureau.

He credits his Syracuse University education for his trajectory and remains connected as a member and co-chair of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council. He enjoys mentoring Syracuse University students (his daughter, Sasha, is a second-year student this year) and has helped launch endowments for two Our Time Has Come Scholarships: the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. Endowed Scholarship and the Midwin Charles Endowed Scholarship.

In 2005, Barbosa's youngest brother was shot and killed at age 23. Barbosa ran the New York Marathon in his memory to raise awareness about gun violence. Sadly, a second younger brother was also shot and killed in 2015 at age 36. The experience honoring his brothers' memories stuck, and he's run a marathon nearly every year since. This year will be his 20th marathon and 12th New York City Marathon.

"Running marathons is a metaphor for my life and is great discipline in terms of completing a task, moving forward and not giving up," he says.

That's a lesson that carries over into his work. "There are always challenges to different types of protections and threats to people's legal rights," he says.

"Thurgood Marshall once said, 'You do what you think is right and let the law catch up.'"

Barbosa has tried to follow the same model: "Justice is on our side. Sometimes the laws change, but it's important to not get discouraged and figure out the best solutions to help people."



Michael Barbosa

JASMINE BELLAMY

Culture Transformer

Jasmine Bellamy '92 is redefining leadership by bringing love into the workplace. As the architect of The Loving Leader framework, she empowers managers to transform company culture from the inside out.

"I'm a guide for leaders who have decided they don't want to lead like the status quo anymore," she says. "As a consultant, I help them look at the dynamics in their workplace through the lens of love to help them see the possibility for new ways of being in their culture."

Bellamy—founder of The Loving Leader, Love 101 Ministries and host of The Call to Love Experience podcast—stepped into her role as a love scholar-practitioner and business culture transformer through her own transformational journey after crisis. That journey merged with her 30-year career driving merchandising strategies for well-known retailers—including Lord & Taylor, Bloomingdale's, Loft, Gap and Reebok—ultimately shaping her belief that love is the most powerful force for cultural change in the workplace.

Her love for retail was sparked as an intern at Macy's through Inroads while a Syracuse University undergraduate. "It was kind of like discovering Oz," she says. "I got to see what goes on behind the scenes and why a particular product was chosen to show up at my store."

A member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. who served as SU's undergraduate chapter president, Bellamy changed her major to marketing management and launched a career that would distinguish her as a top merchandiser, earning an MBA from Fordham University in the process.

In 2019, she joined Reebok as vice president of merchandising, planning and allocation, leading the U.S. direct-to-consumer business. Then came the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, which tapped into something deeper in Bellamy.

"The convergence of those factors allowed me to show up as a loving leader," she says. "As a manager of people, that looked much less like leaning into hierarchy and much more like being open and present to people amplifying their gifts and listening deeply to what mattered to them."

Bellamy was later tapped to lead change management under United Against Racism, a companywide effort to address racial inequity. She created Courageous Conversations, a space for employees to engage in honest, transformative dialogue about race, bias and systemic change. "I originally intended for there to be six sessions, but we ended up having 23," she says.

She calls that work a "joyful disruption."

"It was about helping people find the capacity to be present with each other, to be open to hear what others had to say, and to



Jasmine Bellamy

be changed by other people's stories," she says.

Her efforts garnered notice. Bellamy was named among *Sports Illustrated's* 100 most influential Black women in sports and was invited to speak and give workshops on love as a culture transformation strategy. When Reebok was sold, it provided the impetus to launch a new chapter.

Bellamy's current endeavors integrate faith, scholarship and strategy to reimagine the marketplace as a space for redemptive love and transformation. In addition to coaching and leading a learning community, she continues her own evolution as a doctoral student in global leadership at Fuller Seminary, where she is part of a cohort exploring the redemptive imagination of the marketplace.

"Part of what I'm doing is examining the fact that capitalism's culture has historically been rooted in lovelessness," says Bellamy, who was honored last year with the Whitman Dean's Citation for Exceptional Service.

"We can see the fruit of that in the workplace—in people struggling with burnout, mental health crises and the impact of managerial decisions on well-being. But what if those norms were replaced with love? Then what would the fruit be?"

Bellamy, who serves on the board of Hendricks Chapel, has shared her message on campus at the Lender Center Symposium in 2023 and in a Matters that Matter conversation with the Rev. Brian Konkol, dean of Hendricks Chapel, in 2024.

"Transforming business was what I did for my whole career, but showing up as a loving leader turned me into a culture transformer. And in the process, I was transformed too," she says. "Now, I invite leaders to embark on their own journey—one where love becomes the foundation of leadership, business and human flourishing."

CHRISTINE JOHNS-HARRIS

Inclusive Educator

As an education consultant who travels the country providing professional development and instructional and leadership coaching for teachers and administrators, Christine Johns-Harris '94 likes to include an exercise on identity.

"Who we are shapes the way we engage with people in the spaces we're in," she says.

She asks participants to list their top five identifiers, what they might list on a social media profile. "People will say things like, 'Mom, Steelers fan, teacher.' But every single person who comes from a marginalized community lists that among their top three."

In education settings, she says, identifiers are often determined by those other than the individual. "We put identifiers on students in our classrooms every day—this is a student with a disability; this student is an English language learner—and we make decisions based on those identifiers without giving those students the opportunity to say [for themselves] who they are," she says. "We're often so focused on efforts that we think are inclusive that we're not asking students directly what they need to feel like a part of their school community and culture."

Johns-Harris draws from her own experience growing up in Queens and attending the Dalton School on Manhattan's Upper East Side as one of few Black students. "Since I was 12, I've thought about who gets to belong to a space, particularly when you're not a majority member of that community."

As a high school student, Johns-Harris knew exactly the profession she wanted to pursue: inclusive education, the practice of supporting all students—including those with special needs—in the same schools and classrooms, aiming to create a learning environment that's free of barriers and discrimination. She came to Syracuse University because it had the only undergraduate program in inclusive education in New York state.

At Syracuse, she found a cohort of students from similar cultural backgrounds and enjoyed the ability to "take up space unapologetically," just like any other student. "My friends were other first-generation students and students from immigrant families who enabled me to feel comfortable and part of the community," says Johns-Harris, who was a member of the Caribbean Students Association, Student African American Society and contributed to *The Black Voice*.



Christine Johns-Harris

She was a dual major in inclusive elementary and special education, and African American studies and earned a master's in curriculum and instruction from Teachers College at Columbia University.

Johns-Harris began her career in preschool and early childhood special education, serving communities and schools in the Bronx, New York. After relocating to Atlanta, she worked as a middle school special education teacher and special education coordinator before transitioning into consulting roles in curriculum design and instructional coaching for special education.

In 2018, she established Johns-Harris Consulting, which provides professional development facilitation, and instructional coaching and leadership coaching for teachers and administration. She has worked with organizations including Kaplan K12 Learning Services, Achieve 3000, Catapult Learning and 3P Learning. For the last six years, she has worked with the Children's Services Council of Broward County (Florida) providing training classes for teachers in project-based learning.

In addition to being an educator, Johns-Harris is an expert baker who ran a specialty cake business, not a crumb!, for 20 years. Twice, she competed on the Food Network *Cake Hunters* show, and her cakes also made appearances on *Love and Hip Hop*. "The business grew pretty big, but I got tired because I was doing too much at the same time," she says.

Retired from professional baking, she is a cheerleader for her husband's new venture, Greenwood Whiskey, a Black-owned brand named for the Greenwood District, otherwise known as Black Wall Street, of Tulsa, Oklahoma. "I've learned way more about whiskey than I ever thought I would," she says.

Both businesses play into Johns-Harris's love for new experiences around food, which often involve travel.

"There's not a place that I've been, whether for work or pleasure, that I haven't come back changed," she says. "That feeds back into identity. A lot of who we think we are is in relation to who we're around. When you go places and don't speak the language, you learn very quickly how adaptable you really are."

VAUGHN IRONS

Building Community

In the mid-2000s, a group of neighbors in an unincorporated suburb of DeKalb County, east of Atlanta, banded together to create a new city. When the bill passed the Georgia Legislature in 2017, Stonecrest, Georgia, became the first majority-Black city in the county to form through Metro Atlanta's cityhood movement.

One of those neighbors was real estate developer Vaughn Irons '93. In his 30 years working to revitalize blighted neighborhoods, Irons came to understand that the value of residential communities is directly tied to nearby commercial assets and the availability of amenities. Seeking to protect the home values of Stonecrest, he turned his attention to the major commercial enterprise at its center, the Mall at Stonecrest, which was in decline.

"I knew that if the mall slid, all of our property values would slide," he says. "I took my expertise and experience and invested it here in order to be a part of the solution to turning that around."

In 2018, Irons, CEO of APD Solutions, a national community and economic development firm, created a commercial subsidiary, Stonecrest Resorts, to focus on development of ancillary amenities to the mall. He's transformed the former Sears building into Privi Stonecrest, a destination hub for dining, entertainment and cultural experiences.

In the third year of a 10-year development plan, Privi includes a food hall, interactive aquarium and petting zoo, art gallery, spa, infrared sauna and MMA fitness facilities and meeting and special events space. The next phase will include 13 chef-driven restaurants and seven bars. Fulfilling the larger plan includes a 110-room Wyndham Tryp hotel, pickleball franchise and two museums—one focused on hip-hop and the other celebrating Black Greek organizations.

Irons says he draws from his Syracuse University policy studies education in his work nearly every day in working with local governments and investors. "We were expected to take what we were learning in the classroom and apply it directly, to do well by doing good in the community," he says. "That philosophy is very much embedded in what I'm doing here at Stonecrest and what I've done in many communities throughout the United States."

Long before Irons thought about college, Syracuse University was important in his household. His mother worked for the



Vaughn Irons

University for 34 years, retiring in 2017. As an undergraduate, Irons immersed himself in campus life, joining Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., serving as features editor for the *Black Voice*, president of the Student African-American Society and was a member of Chancellor Kenneth Shaw's student advisory committee.

As a policy studies major, Irons served an internship with the Fulton County, Georgia, government, which hired him after graduation. That led to positions at the Consumer Credit Counseling Service, working in the housing and community economic development space, and later, 12 years as a senior executive at Freddie Mac.

When the housing market imploded with the 2008 financial crisis, Irons created his own firm, APD Solutions, to help communities deal with development challenges. Initially bidding on federal and local

government contracts, the company has completed projects in 13 states, now primarily focused on commercial projects in Georgia and Florida. The Privi project tops the list.

In addition to his development role, Irons and his wife, Cassandra, own an Original Hot Dog factory franchise. As part of his mission to do well by doing good, Irons built into the point-of-sale system the capability to allow patrons to round up their sale for charity. Proceeds benefit Syracuse University's Our Time Has Come Program as well as scholarships sponsored by 100 Black Men and Top Ladies of Distinction.

Irons, a member of the Multicultural Advancement Advisory Council, is happy to pay back for his Syracuse University education, which he believes prepared him for the world and his career.

"We have to invest in creating pathways so that there can be more individuals like us in the future tackling these challenges in the world," he says. "I firmly believe that service is the tax we pay for success."

LISA ROBINSON

Behind the Music

Every time a song is used in the background of a movie, television commercial or streamed on platforms such as Spotify and YouTube, the songwriter and music publisher are owed royalties. Lisa Robinson '94 built a career tracking royalty income for major music companies, including EMI Music Publishing, the Harry Fox Agency, BMG and Songtrust.

The business of music publishing was unfamiliar to Robinson until she became a part of it. The Queens, New York, native came to Syracuse University to study broadcast journalism. "My dream was to be on TV in front of the camera," she says.

Robinson worked hard at her studies, at the same time building lifelong friendships. She joined Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. and served as president of the Black Communications Society.

When she graduated, Robinson landed a year-long traineeship at WNYW, the Fox affiliate in New York City, working on the production of *A Current Affair*, anchored by Maury Povich. "It was a true hands-on experience, but it also taught me what I didn't want in a career because I was working 15-hour days. I knew I wanted a life outside of work and a family at some point."

As the year came to a close, Robinson was asked to fill in for an employee going on maternity leave who worked in the rights and clearances department. "I didn't know what that was, but quickly learned that every time the show used a piece of music or a video clip, they had to get permission," she says. "That's how I began to learn the business of music publishing."

Robinson was hooked. She got a job at EMI Music Publishing, now Sony, tracking royalties for songwriters such as Lil Wayne, Bruno Mars, Quincy Jones and many others. "CDs and digital downloads were popular in the beginning of my career and later, streaming," she says. "I needed to make sure the record company or digital service provider (DSP) was paying inline with sales as well as paying the correct songwriter and share. It's like a real-time audit—determining the royalty amount due to ensure songwriters are properly compensated and, if not, proactively pursuing the money."

With nearly 30 years in the music industry, Robinson built a track record recovering millions in royalties. In 2022, she was named the vice president of community and workplace engagement at Downtown Music Holdings, a newly created role that allowed her to develop programs to foster inclusion and belonging and to increase volunteerism and philanthropy at the company.

As a result of successful implementation of those initiatives, Robinson was named to Billboard's Women in Music Executives List 2023. Facing a layoff a year later, she embraced the opportunity to launch her own venture, Adagio Music Consulting.

Her services include income tracking for songwriters and publishers and fundraising for nonprofit organizations in the music

industry. "It's allowed me to combine my professional expertise with my love for philanthropy," she says.

Robinson serves on the board of Scholarship Plus, which provides college scholarships to New York City high school students, and Mamas in Music, an organization that supports mothers in the industry. She's also founder of Lisa's Living Room, created as a safe space for women of color to share their personal and professional experiences to empower one another.

Robinson says she's always been intentional about growing her network and having multiple involvements, something she's learned the value of as she's pivoted her career. "When faced with a change such as a layoff, embrace it, because you can leverage what you've done to what you're going to do next," she says.

That's a message she passes on to current students. Mindful of her example as one of few Black female executives in the business of music, Robinson came back to campus last year to speak, both to students in the Setnor School of Music and the Our Time Has Come Program.

"We have such a strong Orange network; it's important for students to know the importance of maintaining relationships," she says. "I also tell them to find a purpose and passion that brings them joy, and that might lead to something different than they originally intended to do."



Robinson visited campus in February to present a Leadership Development seminar to OTHC Scholars and Leaders.

JADA MARIE KNIGHT

Making Opportunities Count

In her four years at Syracuse University, Jada Marie Knight '25 built an impressive resume filled with leadership roles, global experiences and a passion for media and live events.

Born and raised in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Knight came to Syracuse University as the recipient of a Posse Scholarship, excited to study radio, television and film at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

But starting college during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic made it challenging to find community. "I really struggled," she says.

Over time, Knight immersed herself in campus life, joining organizations like the National Association of Black Journalists, the Caribbean Student Association and the Calabash Dance Troupe. She also became a Newhouse Ambassador, a peer leader for the First-Year Seminar and a resident advisor.

Being an RA was a particularly formative experience. "I've only ever had first-year students, and I love it," she says. "You're basically their first impression of college, and I could relate to a lot of what they were going through—leaving home for the first time, celebrating birthdays away from family, seeing snowfall for the first time."

But most influential was her involvement with the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Program, which she joined as a first-year student. "Outside of Newhouse and Posse, OTHC is the biggest part of my Syracuse experience," she says. "It gave me access to people, connections to my peers and amazing mentors. Maria [Lopez '05, G '12] and the entire team was always looking out for me, inviting me to events and introducing me to alumni. Half the time people say, 'Jada, you're always on the go,' it's because of them."

Knight's passion for media has taken her across the globe. In the summer after her first year at Syracuse, she landed a social media internship at the Cannes Film Festival, working in the American Pavilion. "It was surreal," she recalls. "Before that, I had only been to Canada. Now, I was on the other side of the world."

Her international experiences continued with a semester abroad in London, taking journalism and film classes and traveling Europe on weekends. "It was amazing to see how bold British media is compared to the U.S.," she says. As part of a class project, she and a friend created a documentary about a Jamaican restaurant they frequented, allowing her to blend her cultural roots with her media skills.

Knight's senior year was a culmination of everything she's worked toward. During summer, she interned at the American Black Film Festival in Miami. Back on campus, she served as student co-chair of the Coming Back Together reunion, where she had the opportunity to interview the cast and crew of the television show *Bel-Air*, an experience that was one of the



Jada Marie Knight

highlights of her college career. "I had to make sure the questions hit, that they were varied and that everyone could engage," she says. "It really tested my journalism skills."

In February, she flew to California to participate in a film studies program at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. "Only 40 students nationwide get selected," she says. "We attended workshops, met producers and walked the red carpet. It was another chance to make connections before I graduate."

Knight would love to combine her interests in social media and live event production by working for a company that puts on major events. She got a taste of that this summer, interning with the AfroFuture music festival in Detroit, where she supported the programming team and created graphics for the event.

Knight says she's grateful for all she's experienced at Syracuse since that uncertain first year.

"I've been able to grow, to travel and to build a foundation for my future," she says. "Syracuse gave me opportunities I never imagined."

RYAN NKONGNYU

An Ambassador for Syracuse

In his journey from Cameroon to Syracuse University, Ryan Nkongnyu '25 developed the drive and people skills that made him a dynamic campus leader. He served as vice president of the Black Student Union, coordinator of the Black Honors Society, chaplain of the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble (BCCE) and was the student co-chair for Syracuse University's 2025 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration. He also served as an orientation leader, an ambassador for the College of Visual and Performing Arts and a mentor for J.U.M.P. Nation, where he supported at-risk high school and middle school students.

"I've been fortunate to help students navigate their own journeys and help build their confidence," he says.

Born in Cameroon, Nkongnyu moved to the U.S. as a boy, his family eventually settling in Delaware. His choice of Syracuse University involved a bit of serendipity. While watching the movie *Big Daddy*, he noticed Adam Sandler wearing a Syracuse crewneck. "It looked cool, so I thought, 'Let me check that out,' and the rest is history," he says.

It turned out to be a great fit. Nkongnyu majored in communication and rhetorical studies, a field that aligns with his passion for media and entertainment. His public speaking skills garnered him the Champion Speaker Award in the White-Denison Presentational Speaking Competition within his major. He was also involved with CitrusTV, where he worked as a lifestyle reporter for *Unpeeled*, covering fashion and entertainment. "One of my biggest goals at Syracuse has been to amplify student voices, particularly students of color," he says.

His academic journey took a global turn when he studied abroad in London and Florence during his junior summer semester. "It was an eye-opening experience," he says.

"I got to shadow a correspondent at BBC Wales and learn about international PR and media networking."

He also connected with family members in London. "It added such a sentimental touch; it felt like divine alignment," he says.

Nkongnyu's college experience was enriched by his involvement in the Our Time Has Come Program, where he started as a Leader in his sophomore year and became a Scholar in his junior year. "It was one of the first places I found community, helping me connect with alumni and gain a sense of belonging," he says. Nkongnyu acknowledges the challenges he faced adjusting to Syracuse, particularly the harsh winters. "Even now, I still haven't gotten used to them," he says.



Ryan Nkongnyu

He also found a spiritual home within the BCCE. He was raised in a Baptist church with his grandmother and sang in the church choir. "Singing has always been a thing for me," he says. "Through BCCE, I found fellowship and a space where I felt grounded."

But Nkongnyu's Syracuse University chapter is not over. This summer, he began a master's program in television, radio and film at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. His dream is to become a television host. "I want to be on the red carpet at the Oscars. I love pop culture, entertainment and on-air reporting," he says. "Eventually, I hope to produce my own television show or movie."

If his undergraduate experiences are any indication, Nkongnyu is known for getting what he wants. "My biggest takeaway is that if you dare to dream and follow your spirit, you can make things happen," he says.

ALIE SAVANE

Aspiring Physician

Alie Savane '25 began his final semester at Syracuse University with a mission trip to Guatemala through Syracuse's Global Medical Brigades Program, setting up clinics in a rural area to provide much needed medical, dental, optometry and pharmacy services to the community.

"Working alongside an incredible team of doctors, dentists and fellow students, we served 409 patients, 152 people receiving glasses, 85 extractions and 44 child fluoride treatments in four days," says Savane, who plans to pursue medicine. "The impact of our work was profound, as many shared that this was their first time being treated by doctors."

Previously, Savane had volunteered at a psychiatric facility in Gambia. "That experience reinforced why I want to be a physician," he says. "I want to make health care more affordable and accessible to underserved communities, both here and in my parents' home countries of Gambia and Sierra Leone."

Raised in the Bronx, New York, Savane came to Syracuse to prepare for that career. Majoring in biology, he made research a cornerstone of his undergraduate experience. Under the guidance of Sarah Hall, associate professor of biology, Savane studied the effects of oleic acid on the model organism *C. elegans*, a microscopic nematode. As a senior, he worked on longevity assays. "I started with a control group and tested how long they live without oleic acid, using different mutants," he says.

As a first-year student, Savane became involved with the Kessler Scholars Program, designed to aid first-generation college students. "I didn't even know I was a first-gen student until I got here," he says. "The program gave me a scholarship, academic support and mentors who really helped me transition into college life."

Savane paid that support forward, mentoring first-year students as a junior and senior. "I've had people pour into me, so it became my turn to do the same for others," he says.

He also joined the Men of Color Initiative. "I met a bunch of people that looked like me, people from the Bronx, people interested in sports and doing smart things," he says.

And he grew his community through the Our Time Has Come Program. "I met great mentors, attended leadership seminars and connected with successful SU alumni," he says. "It also helped financially. Just knowing that people are invested in our success is incredible."

A Remembrance Scholar, Savane served on the Student Health and Wellness Advisory Committee, working with University leadership to improve health services. "We give them the student perspective on policies," he says. "For example, we discussed how assignment deadlines at midnight force students to stay up late and how embedding wellness into academics can help students."

He's also an entrepreneur with a business venture centered around the kola nut, a culturally significant product from his West African heritage. "I grew up seeing people chew kola nuts for energy and medicinal benefits," he says. His idea, which he worked on refining through the University's Blackstone LaunchPad program, earned him recognition in multiple entrepreneurship competitions. "I'm still in the customer discovery phase, but I've won awards like the Impact Prize and placed third in the Orange Central Student Showcase."

Savane plans to take two "growth years" off before medical school and is currently a student in the master of public administration program at Syracuse's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

His ultimate goal is clear: to diversify the medical field and ensure that quality health care reaches those who need it most. "We need more physicians of color," he says. "And I want to be one of them."

Alie Savane



JOSE ARTURO VENEGAS

Undergraduate Researcher

When students go to college, their first concern is often making friends and getting acclimated. For Jose Arturo Venegas '25, that meant diving into engineering research.

Arriving at Syracuse through the Summer Start program, Venegas connected with engineering faculty and joined a research project on composite materials. His work over three years focused on testing the compressive force of a new material through computational modeling and real-world testing. "Ultimately, we were not able to prove our hypothesis and the project ended, but the experience was invaluable," he says.

It wasn't an isolated experience. Venegas, a civil engineering major, secured a National Science Foundation-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program at the University of California, Irvine, during the summer after his first year at Syracuse. That experience fueled his interest in materials research, leading him to another REU program in Switzerland, where he worked on photovoltaic solar cells. "That was an amazing and solidifying experience," he says.

Originally from San Diego, Venegas found his way to Syracuse through a scholarship that allowed him to visit colleges on the East Coast. "I really liked Syracuse," he said. "I kind of wanted to explore outside of California, and I wanted to experience snow."

He had considered joining the Marines out of high school but pursued college at the urging of his mother. Nonetheless, his desire to serve never faded and Venegas joined ROTC in his junior year. After graduation, he began advanced camp at Fort Knox before commissioning as an officer in the Army Reserves. He plans to serve in the engineering branch while balancing military duties with his civilian career. "It will allow me to do the Army part time," he says.

At the end of his sophomore year, Venegas was accepted into the Department of Defense's SMART Scholarship program. As part of this program, he spent the summer before his senior year interning with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Champaign, Illinois, working on a project to help military bases become self-sustainable in emergencies. "They want to be able to provide their own water and energy without any inputs in the case of installation lockdowns. We were working on a system that reused wastewater and turned it into potable water, as well as providing some energy from the methane that was produced," he says.

The program also guaranteed a job after graduation and a funded master's degree. He has returned to Champaign to continue working on the Corps of Engineers project while beginning a master's degree in geotechnical engineering. "If I really enjoy my research, I might pursue a Ph.D.," says Venegas.

Throughout his journey, Venegas received support as a Goldwater Scholar, which funded a semester of study in France;



Jose Arturo Venegas

as an LSAMP Scholar and McNair Scholar, which both support students in STEM; and as an Our Time Has Come Leader and Scholar. "I really appreciate the scholarship support but also made a lot of friends and really enjoyed the leadership development speakers," he says. "They helped open my eyes to be proactive and take control of what I want in my life, rather than just sitting by and letting things happen."

And Venegas has clear long-term aspirations. "Ultimately, my goal is to become a NASA astronaut," he says. "I would really like to conduct geotechnical research past Earth, providing abundant knowledge for future generations."

KIARA RIVAS

Guided by Faith

For Kiara Rivas '25, coming to Syracuse University launched a time of intense personal growth. A first-generation student from Harlem, New York, Rivas was raised in a close-knit family with Dominican roots on her father's side. As the youngest of five siblings, she grew up surrounded by love and support but yearned for independence.



Kiara Rivas

Encouraged by a friend and her college counselor, Rivas applied to Syracuse University. The decision to move Upstate was significant, as none of her siblings had attended college outside of New York City. "It was almost a shock that I was going away," she says. "This was all very foreign to my family. I had to figure out all the logistics."

Rivas entered Syracuse University as a human development and family science major but quickly realized that public health was a better fit for her aspirations. A big component of the major is service learning to gain hands-on experience.

To that end, Rivas completed multiple internships, including work at InterFaith Works and House of Psalms 23, where she assisted with therapy sessions for women coming out of the criminal justice system. "We conducted therapy circles to dig deeper into traumas and people's current issues," she says. "That helped me as well because I was part of the circles."

One of her most impactful experiences was her capstone project last semester at the Upstate Family Birth Center. Rivas shadowed lactation nurses and doctors, observing the challenges

faced by non-English speaking refugee families in the health care system. The experience culminated in a paper on maternal mortality and morbidity rates among women of color in the United States and reinforced her passion for maternal health and nursing. She now plans to apply to nursing school, hoping to work in a public health capacity in her Harlem community until she begins.

Beyond academics, Rivas immersed herself in extracurricular activities that shaped her college experience. She became involved with the Black Reign Step Team during her first semester. Despite having no experience in stepping, she was encouraged by a mentor to try out. As a senior, she proudly served as the team's president, leading practices four times a week and fostering a sense of community among members.

Her involvement in the Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Program was another defining aspect of her college life. Through OTHC, she gained access to mentorship, networking opportunities and a community of successful professionals who inspired her to strive for excellence. "Growing up, I struggled to see people who look like me excel academically," she says. "OTHC exposed me to many Syracuse alumni from similar backgrounds who have faced the same challenges and gone on to do great things. It was very motivating."

Rivas worked at the Hendricks Chapel Hospitality Desk for nearly two years, a role that allowed her to engage with people from diverse backgrounds. "I've always been curious to learn about different people's culture and beliefs, so this has been a good space for that," she says.

It's part of the tremendous self-growth she says she experienced during her time at Syracuse. Moving away from home was a challenging adjustment, and she initially struggled with her identity and sense of belonging. Through introspection and faith, Rivas says she found solace and strength in her relationship with God, which became a cornerstone of her resilience.

"Mental health challenges in college aren't talked about, but it's easy to be depressed and slack off if you don't have faith in something bigger than yourself," she says. "Building a relationship with God has not made me perfect but has allowed such an imperfect person like me to be more confident, be more grounded and, ultimately, have hope in something everlasting."

University Bookstore Now Run by Barnes & Noble College

Syracuse University has partnered with Barnes & Noble College to manage all course materials, retail and e-commerce operations for all locations of the University's campus store. The transition occurred last fall, with Barnes & Noble College assuming full operation Jan. 1.

"We are excited to welcome Barnes & Noble College to Syracuse University and look forward to our partnership," says John Papazoglou, senior vice president and chief operations officer. "Their expertise will be invaluable as the University continues to focus on delivering affordable, accessible course materials to its students and making sure they have what they need to excel in the classroom."

The partnership with BNC is a result of massive shifts in consumer behavior that began prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, says Papazoglou. The trend away from traditional brick-and-mortar stores selling physical books has accelerated in the last five years. Consumers have come to expect a simple and unified omnichannel purchase and service experience, a wide variety of apparel and merchandise, and course materials delivered in the format of their choosing.

Through its strategic partnership with Fanatics and Lids, BNC offers a large assortment of school apparel and gifts in-store and online and via the shop.cuse.com Athletics website, which transitioned to the new platform July 1.

New Residence Halls and Hotel Planned

Making the way for two new residence halls, Syracuse University began the demolition of Marion and Kimmel halls and the Comstock Parking Garage.

The demolition and new construction builds on the recent conversions of both the former Sheraton Syracuse University Hotel & Conference Center and the apartment complex formerly known as the Marshall into residence halls. Orange Hall (formerly the Sheraton) and Milton Hall (formerly the Marshall) opened to students during the 2024-25 academic year and house 660 sophomores in total. The new residence halls will be the first built since Ernie Davis Hall opened 15 years ago.

"Prospective students are looking at the total experience when determining which university to attend, and that includes housing," says Brett Padgett, senior vice president and chief financial officer.

"One of the most common pieces of feedback from our current students was the desire to have more modern living accommodations that offer gathering spaces, multipurpose rooms and other amenities that support their ability to thrive inside and outside of the classroom.

The two new

residence halls will offer all of that and more and serve Syracuse University students for decades to come."

In addition to the new residence halls being built at the former sites of Marion and Kimmel halls and the Comstock Avenue garage, the University will also construct a new residence hall at 544 University Place, along Ostrom Avenue, adjacent to Thornden Park. This new facility will house approximately 570 students.

The University also plans to construct a 200-room, full-service hotel with a restaurant and event space at the corner of University Avenue and Harrison Street, across from the University Avenue garage. Syracuse University has partnered with Graduate by Hilton to develop a new hotel that is expected to open in the fall of 2027.

"Graduate is an ideal partner in helping us bring to life a distinctive and dynamic space that authentically represents the Syracuse University experience," says Padgett. "This collaboration will create a vibrant hub for both our campus and the broader Syracuse community, offering a welcoming destination during key moments like Orange game days, reunions, graduations, campus visits and beyond. We're thrilled to work together to build a space that reflects the unique spirit and character of Syracuse University."



University Celebrates the Legacy of MLK Sarah Willie-LeBreton Encourages MLK

Sarah Willie-LeBreton, president of Smith College, was welcomed back to Syracuse by a stadium filled with nearly 1,200 people for the 40th annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Jan. 26—happy to return to the city she once called home.

“Although I have not lived here for 50 years, Syracuse, the place of my first days, lives in my heart,” she said.

Willie-LeBreton, the keynote speaker for the event held in the JMA Wireless Dome, is the daughter of the late Charles V. Willie G’57, H’92, Syracuse University’s first Black full professor, department chair and vice president. Willie was a classmate of King at Morehouse College and was instrumental in bringing King to the University in 1961 and 1965.

Professor Willie, who left for Harvard University in 1974, returned to Syracuse frequently to speak, and was the worship service speaker at the first Coming Back Together reunion in 1986.

The University’s annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, the largest of its kind on any college campus, honors the message and mission of King and is a direct expression of the University’s commitment to advancing academic excellence at a University welcoming to all. This year’s theme was Living History.

In his welcoming remarks, Chancellor Kent Syverud noted that many freedoms have been won through the work of King’s contemporaries and those who followed him.

“Challenges and injustices persist, but his message urges us to act,” Syverud said. “When he spoke last here in Sims Hall in 1965, he said, ‘The time is always right to do right.’ I think that means now, too.”

During her address, Willie-LeBreton spoke of the transformation of colleges and universities over the past 60 years, and of the good that higher education puts into the public space as the country’s central economic, medical, artistic, intellectual, scientific and public policy engines and most respected export.



“The work of higher education is intertwined with the work in which King was engaged, because in the United States, the work of the university campus has always been in generative tension with the work of democracy,” Willie-LeBreton told the audience. “The subjects explored in the university quite literally drive us forward as a species.”

artin Luther King Jr.: Mutual Respect



Members of the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble performed at the MLK Celebration.

“The work of higher education is intertwined with the work in which King was engaged, because in the United States, the work of the university campus has always been in generative tension with the work of democracy,” Willie-LeBreton said. “The subjects explored in the university quite literally drive us forward as a species.”

In current times, she said campuses have been tested. “Those of us who are educators must redouble our efforts to cultivate spaces that are mutually respectful as much as they are sites of rigorous learning,” she said. “We have to be with people who are different from us, and we have to stay in relationship with them.”

Willie-LeBreton challenged audience members to talk with people they might not choose as friends. “Find a neutral place, your public library branch, a cafe, an empty classroom, a diner,” she

said. “Bring along two of your friends and two folks you suspect have opinions you don’t share, but with whom you have something in common.”

Willie-LeBreton also encouraged the audience to honor education as “our human birthright” and cultivate “dignity by listening carefully to yourself and to others and then honoring what you hear.”

“If we do these things, we will bring fellowship to each other and the world neighborhood of which King spoke,” Willie-LeBreton said. “Take the baton and let’s give this lap our all in the relay race for justice.”

The evening’s program included performances by the Community Choir and the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble, and the presentation of this year’s Unsung Hero Awards.

Unsung Heroes Honored at 2025 MLK Celebration

Syracuse University's Unsung Hero Awards are presented annually to community members, students, faculty and staff who have made a positive impact on the lives of others but are not widely recognized for their contributions. The awards are given at the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration to honor King's vision of creating positive change in a troubled world. The 2025 Unsung Heroes are:

Andrea-Rose Oates '26, a public relations major in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and policy studies major in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, has dedicated her life to community service, leadership and social justice. She is the president and founder of Girlz Rize, a nonprofit focused on fighting for girls' education opportunities. She has also served as president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's Iota Upsilon chapter, co-secretary for the Black Student Union, events chair for the Women in Communications Club, as a member of the Newhouse Student Representative Committee and an account associate for Hill Communications. An Our Time Has Come (OTHC) Scholar, Oates has received both the OTHC Newhouse and Alpha Kappa Alpha Scholarships.



Andrea-Rose Oates with University staff and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. members



Chancellor Syverud with James K. Duah-Agyeman

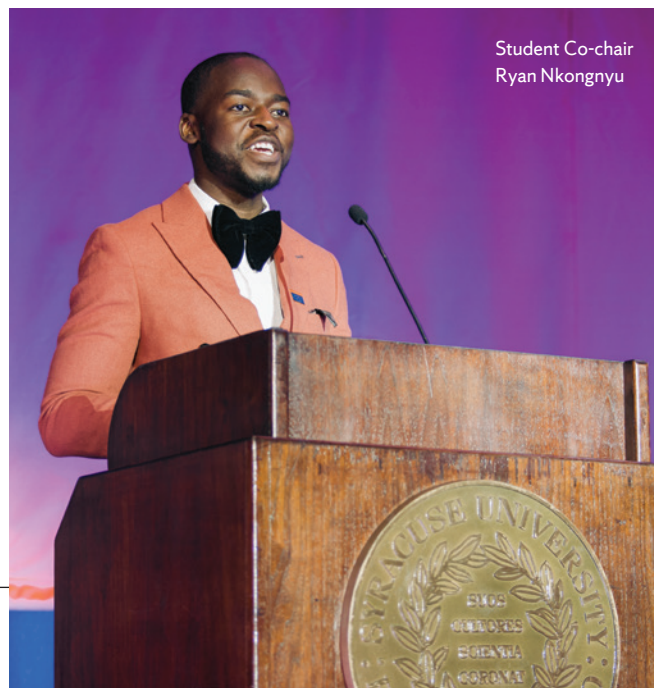
James K. Duah-Agyeman G'99, former director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and special advisor to the Men of Color Initiative, has a 38-year record of achievement at Syracuse University—as a graduate student, teacher, academic counselor, administrator and leader. Most recently, he led Multicultural Affairs in developing programs to advance inclusion on the Syracuse campus by creating best-in-class programs like the WellsLink Leadership Program; Dimensions, a peer mentoring

program; and the Men of Color Initiative. He was instrumental in piloting and introducing the Conversations About Race and Ethnicity intergroup dialogue programs on campus. He also advocated for inclusion through his community work with Interfaith Works of Central New York and the Ghana Society of CNY.

The Student Coalition on Race and Equity (SCORE) was launched in 2020, after the murder of George Floyd. SCORE harnesses the talent and leadership skills of high school students across Onondaga County to combat racism and foster equity. It empowers youth, known as SCORE leaders, to educate adults on topics related to race and equity, sharing insights from their perspectives as young people.

After completing five weeks of training in equity-based topics and being equipped with the skills necessary to facilitate interactive workshops, SCORE leaders take on the role of educators, leading workshop sessions for community stakeholders each August. SCORE has provided workshops on implicit bias and Black history to almost 3,000 community members.

Community member **Laurence Segal** quietly works to make the world a better place. Through his organization, Bottles for a Cure, he has returned millions of bottles and cans for cancer patients and research and pulled millions of pop tabs for the Ronald McDonald House of CNY. He hosts multiple blood drives every month that impact thousands of people, and he strives to make the world a better place.



Student Co-chair
Ryan Nkongny

This summer, Segal cleaned up trash on city streets and passed out hot meals, cold drinks, sanitizers, masks and first aid kits to people experiencing homelessness. He has spent countless hours with cancer patients holding their hands while they go through chemotherapy, radiation and long hospital stays.

Jamie Jackson (posthumous), a longtime employee with Syracuse University's Parking and Transportation Services, connected with people on campus for more than 20 years. He was assigned to the Quad lot outside Hendricks Chapel, where he provided assistance to campus visitors and befriended many members of the campus community. Jackson passed away unexpectedly in September 2024.

Jackson was a graduate of Onondaga Community College and a U.S. Navy and U.S. Army veteran. In his obituary, he was remembered as a "wonderful son, beloved husband, fantastic father, a devoted veteran, terrific brother, great friend, kind uncle, good outdoorsman, strong record keeper and avid sports fan."



Attendees enjoy the 2025 MLK Celebration in the JMA Wireless Dome.

Linda Baguma and Alexandria Johnson Selected for Prestigious Foreign Service Fellowships

Two Syracuse University alumnae were selected for prestigious graduate fellowships that prepare students for careers in the Foreign Service.

Linda Baguma '25, an international relations and political science graduate from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, has been named a 2025 Rangel Fellow.

The Charles B. Rangel Graduate Fellowship aims to attract and prepare outstanding young people for careers in the Foreign Service of the U.S. Department of State through two years of graduate study, domestic and overseas internships, mentoring and professional development activities.

Baguma, an Our Time Has Come Scholar, was born in Africa and raised in the United States and feels a strong connection to both places. She participated in a Public Policy and International Affairs Junior Summer Institute at Carnegie Mellon University during summer 2024 and spent the Fall 2024 semester studying in South Africa.

"Studying abroad allowed me to see how international relations works in a country with a very different history and set of challenges. I learned about South Africa's policies and how they impact local communities. This experience has made me even more excited about pursuing a career in the Foreign Service, particularly focused on improving U.S.-Africa relations," says Baguma, also a 2024-25 Remembrance Scholar.



Linda Baguma



Alexandria Johnson

Alexandria Johnson '24, an international relations graduate from the Maxwell School, was selected as a 2025 Pickering Fellow.

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

Johnson works with the Truman Center for National Policy, a national security think tank in Washington, D.C., where she focuses on subnational diplomacy and democracy building.

As an undergraduate, she interned at the Cleveland Council on World Affairs, interned with the Arab Center for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Education in Strasbourg, France, and was a 2023 Rangel Scholar, participating in a summer program that gave her a comprehensive introduction to professions in U.S. foreign affairs.

"All of these experiences taught me about diplomacy in different ways," she says. "The Pickering Fellowship will help me to attain my goal of public service. I hope to make positive change and to bring more awareness to what Foreign Service Officers do."

Syracuse Expands Presence in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles

In the last year, Syracuse University opened new facilities in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., which serve as centers of activity for students spending a semester away from main campus and as gathering spaces for alumni.

In March 2024, Syracuse celebrated the opening of the Syracuse University Dick Clark Los Angeles Program in North Hollywood, California, which honors the memory of Dick Clark '51 through a gift from the Kari and Dick Clark Foundation. The new facility, which includes classrooms, offices and studios, significantly expands the University's presence and access to the entertainment industry, serving as home to Los Angeles programs for the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

The Syracuse University center in Washington, D.C., opened Sept. 24, 2024. Located at 1333 New Hampshire Ave. off Dupont Circle, the center houses the Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship and serves as a home base for study away programs offered by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Newhouse School and College of Law. The center also supports study away programming across the University's schools and colleges and includes satellite offices for the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families and the Office of Government and Community Affairs. The Greenberg Welcome Center honors Life Trustee Paul Greenberg '65, whose philanthropy supported the 1990 opening of Greenberg House, the University's first outpost in Washington.



During the March 2 dedication of the new building of the Syracuse University Dick Clark Los Angeles Program, former Vice Chancellor, Provost and Chief Academic Officer Gretchen Ritter, left, speaks about the Clark legacy at the University and the importance of such vital programs as the LA program to provide students with an immersive study away experience. She is joined by Anna Proulx, College of Visual and Performing Arts program director, Syracuse University Los Angeles Semester, second from left, and Cindy Clark '86 and RAC Clark, daughter and son of Dick Clark '51, respectively.



Syracuse University Trustee Mike Tirico '88 and Newhouse DC Program Director Beverly Kirk (both in blue) with Syracuse University students at a reception at the opening of the Syracuse University Center in Washington, D.C.



Caption

Fran Brown Honored for First Year Coaching

Syracuse University head football coach Fran Brown earned two national coaching awards for first-year coaches in 2024: the Paul “Bear” Bryant Newcomer Coach of the Year Award and the Steve Spurrier First-Year Coach Award.

Brown led the Orange to its first 10-win campaign since 2018 and its third double-digit win season since 2000. In the process, Syracuse defeated three AP Top-25 teams at the time of their meeting, the most in a single season since 1998.

The Orange saw a program-best 12 players earn All-ACC honors in 2024, despite the league having 17 teams for the first time in conference history. Quarterback Kyle McCord became the first Syracuse player to finish in the top-10 of Heisman Trophy voting since Dwight Freeney in 2001 and set an ACC record for

passing yards and school bests for completions, yards, touchdown passes and total offense.

Tight end Oronde Gadsden II earned AP All-America honors, while being part of a receiving corps that was the only school in the country to have four players with 60+ catches, including Trebor Pena, Jackson Meeks and LeQuint Allen Jr. Meeks went over 1,000 yards on the season, while Allen was one of two players nationally to have over 1,000 rushing yards and 500 receiving yards. He led the nation in receptions by a running back.

Defensively, Maraad Watson was named a Freshman All-American by 247Sports and Fadil Diggs, Justin Barron and Marlowe Wax earned All-ACC honors.

Syracuse iSchool Launches Master’s in Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is the third fastest-growing field in the U.S. Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies is poised to meet that demand with a new master’s degree program in applied human centered artificial intelligence launching in fall 2025.

“We decided to launch this new AI program to meet the growing demand from industry, where many companies, across diverse industries, need professionals capable of leveraging generative AI. Furthermore, our students have shown significant interest in gaining expertise in AI, driven by the industry’s evolving requirements and opportunities,” says Jeffrey Saltz, iSchool associate professor and program director of the school’s master’s in applied human centered artificial intelligence.

The iSchool’s new program will include a strong emphasis on hands-on projects to showcase students’ practical expertise and knowledge in the field of AI. “We were one of the first universities to offer an applied data science program,” Saltz says. “Recognizing the evolving landscape of technology and the increasing importance of AI, the iSchool saw a critical need to expand its offerings to include advanced AI education.”



Gabriel Davila-Campos '25 (right) works with on an AI research project with Jaime Banks (center), associate professor of information studies

Alumni Honored for Exceptional Accomplishment and Engagement



Melanie Littlejohn

Melanie Littlejohn G'97 and Chelsea Ransom-Cooper '15 were among alumni honored at the 2025 Syracuse University Alumni Awards Celebration held April 4. The annual event recognizes and celebrates the exceptional accomplishments of alumni who exemplify what it means to be Forever Orange. Honorees are selected by the Syracuse University Alumni Association's Board of Directors.

Littlejohn, president and CEO of the Central New York Community Foundation, received the George Arents Award, which recognizes individuals who have excelled in their fields and is Syracuse University's highest alumni honor.

Prior to joining the Community Foundation in 2024, Littlejohn had a nearly 30-year career at National Grid as vice president of customer and community engagement. In that role, she led initiatives to drive customer satisfaction, economic development and corporate social responsibility, including projects in environmental justice and workforce development.

Previously, Littlejohn served as executive director of the Urban League of Onondaga County and held a leadership role in international client services with Bankers Trust Co. She earned an MBA from Syracuse University and a bachelor's degree from SUNY Stony Brook. Dedicated to civic engagement, Littlejohn

co-chairs the Micron Community Engagement Committee, supports Onondaga Community College as vice chair of the board and serves on several additional boards, including CenterState CEO and Pathfinder Bank.

Littlejohn is also a devoted mentor and frequent speaker at Syracuse University.

Ransom-Cooper, co-founder and chief financial planning officer at Zenith Wealth Partners, received the Generation Orange Award, which recognizes graduates from the past decade for career success, community engagement and overall commitment to Syracuse University.

A certified financial planner, Ransom-Cooper created the financial planning and investment advisory firm with a mission to create \$1 billion in wealth for women and people of color by providing high-quality and relatable financial advice. She specializes in working with women founders and in the tech industry. She has been recognized by Investment News 40 Under 40, as one of the 9 Black Financial Influencers to Follow by Nerdwallet, and as a Young Advisor to Watch in 2023 by *Financial Advisor Magazine*.

A graduate of the Whitman School of Management, Ransom-Cooper was involved in Alpha Kappa Psi, the WellsLink Leadership Program, National Society of Collegiate Scholars, National Association of Black Accountants and the FullCircle Mentor Program. She chairs the Young Whitman Advisory Council and has been instrumental in launching alumni programming at Whitman.



Chelsea Ransom-Cooper

Phi Iota Alpha to Mark 31 Years at Syracuse with Campus Celebration

In 1931, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity Inc. became the first Latin American student organization in the United States. Founded on the principles of Pan-Americanism, the unification of all Latin American countries, the organization provides brotherhood at 82 colleges across the United States.

In conjunction with the chapter's 31st anniversary, the Distinguished Dons of the Kappa Chapter at Syracuse University will celebrate Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month on campus during fall semester.

"The number 31 is significant because it coincides with the year the fraternity was established nationally," says Derek Polanco '19.

The anniversary celebration will include a banquet that features Latin cuisine, the presentation of alumni awards and a scholarship to a Syracuse University student, followed by a performance by a top musical talent.

"It's an opportunity to celebrate our founders and our history on the Syracuse campus, but also to give back and celebrate Latin culture with the entire University community," says Andres Rivera '15, a former National Organization of Latino Fraternal Organizations president.

The fraternity first collaborated with the Syracuse University Office of Multicultural Affairs, now known as Belonging and Student Success, to host Fiesta Latina in 2014 in conjunction with the chapter's 20th anniversary. "It became something that we

looked forward to planning, bringing in big-name talent, getting dressed up and sharing our culture and cuisine," says Polanco.

While the COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on that involvement, "we plan to continue our collaboration again this year to elevate the celebration in a larger way," says Polanco.

Historically, the group has raised funds to present a scholarship to a high school student within the Syracuse community at Fiesta Latina. To commemorate their anniversary, it plans to accomplish that on a larger scale to support a current Syracuse University student.

Inspired by the alumni camaraderie at the 2024 Coming Back Together reunion, the Kappa Chapter hopes to attract other alumni who have been part of their journey over the last 31 years, as well as current students, to the weekend anniversary celebration.

"Latino students have made many contributions to the Syracuse University campus," says Rivera. "We want to celebrate our fraternity and all it has done for our members, while also celebrating Latino culture in the general Syracuse University community."

For more information about the upcoming anniversary, visit kappaversary.org.



Alumni members of Phi Iota Alpha look forward to celebrating 31 years on the Syracuse University campus this fall.

Chereé Hicks Honored with Jersey Retirement

Track and field standout thrower Chereé Hicks '00 was honored by having her jersey retired by Syracuse University Sept. 20, 2024.

Hicks had a decorated collegiate career as a student-athlete at Syracuse. She is a six-time Big East Champion thrower, six-time All-American and three-time NCAA silver medalist. During the 2000 season, she finished second in shot put at the NCAA Indoor Championships and finished second in both shot put and discus in the NCAA outdoor meet. That same season, Hicks set a Big East Indoor Championship record in shot put and Big East Outdoor Championship records in both shot put and discus. She placed fifth at the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials in 2000 and still holds the indoor and outdoor shot put and discus records at Syracuse University.

"To see my jersey hanging in the rafters of a place that transformed my life is truly humbling," says Hicks. "Syracuse University didn't just shape my athletic career; it molded who I am. Every opportunity, every challenge, every relationship forged on this campus contributed to my journey. I carry the Orange spirit with me daily, and I'm deeply grateful to be forever woven into the fabric of this extraordinary community."

Hicks earned a bachelor's degree in public relations from Syracuse in 2000 and completed a master's degree in liberal studies at the University of Miami in 2011.

After her time at Syracuse University, Hicks coached for many different programs, including stops at Miami, Northern Michigan and James Madison University. She serves as senior manager, grants and operations, for the United States Golf Association.



Chereé Hicks

Milestones

Cydney Johnson '77, G'96 was named deputy Onondaga County executive for physical services. Johnson formerly served as vice president for community engagement and government relations at Syracuse University.

Jennifer Mabry G'91 published her memoir, *Fighting to Be Seen: A Civil Rights Baby Reflects on Life in Post-Integration America*, available online and in-store at Politics & Prose Bookstore, Washington, D.C.

Mendell Grinter G'23 was named CEO of Wesley House Community Services in Louisville, Kentucky. He also serves on the board of directors for the Country Music Association Foundation, where he recently completed a term as chairman.

D.C. Orange and Blue Barbecue Attracts Record Crowd

Alumni make surprise donation to Our Time Has Come

In May 2009, during a visit to Washington, D.C., Eric Watson '91 gathered a few Syracuse University friends at his parents' home for an afternoon of reminiscing over a bushel of Maryland crabs.

Among the guests was Akima Rogers '93, who remembers the conversation that sparked a movement. "We realized that even though nearly 15,000 alumni lived in the D.C. area, we kept socializing with the same small group," he says. "We wanted to create an event that would bring together more alumni, especially those from diverse backgrounds."

That August, Rogers and his wife, Pia Rogers '98, G'01, hosted the first D.C. Orange and Blue Summer Barbecue at their home, welcoming more than 60 guests.

"Having had a packed house and many more folks talking about it, we knew we had to move it to a larger venue," says Rogers.

From that humble beginning, D.C. Orange and Blue has grown into an annual tradition that draws alumni from across the country—and even overseas. Attendees have traveled from Florida, California and even the United Kingdom to be part of it, planning vacation schedules around the event. As it's grown, the barbecue has moved from military bases to its longtime home at Rosaryville State Park in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. This year, it found a new setting at Cedarville Forest Park in Brandywine, Maryland, organized by a dedicated 16-member crew led by Rogers, Amber Dowtin '03 and Stacy "Teaspoon" Carter '95.

For the organizing crew, it's a labor of love. "We are not an organization but a collective of alumni that volunteer to support," says Rogers. "Our goal is simply to have fun and connect."

"It's a lot of work, but something special happened during those four years at Syracuse, and I love reliving them," adds Carter.

That passion pays off. This year's barbecue—the 16th—was the largest yet, with more than 300 attendees. "We leveled up our outreach with a strategic, branded social media presence and consistent e-blasts that kept the community engaged," says Carter. "The addition of SB Thee DJ [Denasia Lawrence '13] brought fresh energy, attracting current students and recent grads." Two of those students had a special connection: Aidan Rogers '29, son of Akima and Pia, and Dwayne Murray II '27, son of Dwayne '97 and Alison Murray '01, all crew members. Their presence strengthened the event's bridge to today's campus life.

The gathering has always had a purpose beyond fun. Traditionally, proceeds are used to purchase \$250 gift cards for incoming Syracuse students who attend the barbecue, and in 2022, the group raised money to support three holes at the OTHC Golf Tournament. This year, the group pooled contributions for a \$2,500 gift to the Our Time Has Come Scholarship Program. "While some of us have given individually before, this was the first time we made a significant monetary donation as a group," Carter notes.

Adding to the excitement, the SyraQues—alumni members of the Krazy Kappa Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc.—hosted a lively Saturday night after-party for the first time.

The organizers are intentional about keeping the tradition fresh and inclusive.

"We want this to connect with younger alumni and incoming students," says Carter. "It's important for them to see that being part of Syracuse isn't just about the four years on campus. It's a lifetime in a community that supports you, celebrates you and stays connected. The barbecue is one of the ways we make that happen."

The next D.C. Orange and Blue Barbecue will be held July 25, 2026, and will be accompanied by a "weekend full of fun," says Rogers.



More than 300 alumni from across the United States attended the D.C. Orange and Blue Barbecue on July 26.

HISTORY LESSON

Driving to Succeed

Andrew Branch helped thousands of Syracusans gain independence and transportation through the ability to drive.

When Andrew Branch '59 died Sept. 19, 2024, he left a legacy of some hundreds of thousands of people who learned to drive through Branch's Driving School, one of the first Black-owned businesses in Syracuse.



Andrew Branch is credited with helping thousands of Syracusans learn to drive through Branch's Driving School.

"It was hard to start a business as a minority," Branch told *The Post Standard* of Syracuse in 2003. "I had no guidance, no role model. . . . The day I got my license [to operate a driving school], I drove down the street with my sign and I got followed by the chief of police."

Branch was born July 28, 1933, in Syracuse. At Nottingham High School, he excelled in the classroom and in track and field and was elected president of his class, a noteworthy achievement for a Black student at the time. After graduating, he married his high school sweetheart and was drafted into the U.S. Army and stationed in Korea.

After completing his service, Branch attended Syracuse University on the G.I. Bill, majoring in microbiology. After graduating with a B.S., he worked as a pharmacological research technician at what's now SUNY Upstate Medical University.

In 1959, Branch's mother bought a new Cadillac. She didn't know how to drive. Branch taught her, and then his sister. That planted a seed. In 1963, while still working at Upstate, he started

Branch's Driving School with a single car, his Ford Falcon.

He overcame many obstacles, including finding an insurance company to cover the business.

Over time, Branch grew Branch's Driving School to have a fleet of seven vehicles and a staff of 22 working out of a dozen locations across the city. Many of the students were older drivers, often widows and immigrants. Branch hired a diverse staff that could communicate with people from different countries and taught himself a smattering of basic words so he could communicate in Spanish, French, Italian and Arabic. Branch's Driving School also had the contract to teach driver's education at Syracuse high schools for several years. The business continues to operate, run by Branch's son, Deraux.

A track and field star in high school, Branch briefly ran at Syracuse until family commitments got in the way. In 1989, at age 56, he competed in the Empire State Senior Games and won gold medals in the 100-meter and 4x100-meter relay.

In addition to running a successful business, Branch served on the board of directors of Housing Visions and Centro and was elected president of the Central City Businessman's Association.

He was an active member of Hopps Memorial CME Church and served as church treasurer for many years, as well as the Board of Stewards and Ministry to Men. In retirement, he moved to South Carolina.

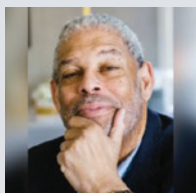
In December 2024, the City of Syracuse renamed a section of North Franklin Street in Branch's honor. For one year, the 200 block will be known as Andrew W. Branch Way.

Branch is survived by his wife of 69 years, Fanny; sons Chuck, Todd and Deraux; daughter Della; his sisters, Louise Walker, Ethelmae Dunham, Mamie Rhodafox and Eva Dixon; nine grandchildren; 18 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

IN MEMORIAM



Thomas S. Smith Jr. #75



Thomas S. Smith Jr. '70 of Eatontown, New Jersey, died June 21.

Born and raised in Asbury Park, New Jersey, Smith graduated from Asbury Park High School in 1966, where he was a standout three-sport athlete, lettering in football, basketball and track. His athletic excellence earned him a

scholarship to Syracuse University, where he lettered in both football and track and became a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. Through his fraternity, he helped establish a tutoring program that provided literacy support to local inner-city youth. Smith graduated in 1970 with a degree in geography.

"Tom was a true example of what a scholar athlete should be," says Dana Harrell '71, G'73. "He was disciplined, studious, and seldom, if ever, cut classes. We were teammates on the football and track teams, and in the intramural basketball league, his Omega Psi Phi team, the Ques, were perennial champs."

He continued his education at Rutgers Law School, earning his J.D. in 1973. That same year, he was admitted to the bars of New Jersey and the U.S. District Court and later to the bars of the U.S. Supreme Court and the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals. During law school, he co-founded a student-run legal aid program to serve the residents of Newark and began his association with the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, focusing on juvenile court matters.

Smith's professional career spanned more than 35 years, including 24 years with the Office of the Public Defender. He served in managerial positions, including assistant public defender and first assistant public defender. In May 1985, Smith became the acting public defender. He served in the role again in 1990, briefly holding the dual role of acting public defender and acting public advocate.

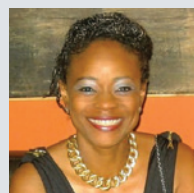
On Jan. 27, 1997, Smith was sworn in as a Superior Court judge. He was assigned to Burlington County and became the presiding judge of the Criminal Division. Smith retired from the bench in June 2009, having served for 12 years.

Beyond the courtroom, Smith was an active and engaged community leader. He was a member of the 1989 Leadership New Jersey Class, served on the editorial board of the New Jersey Law Journal, and held board positions at Jersey Shore Medical Center and the Boys and Girls Club. He received honors and recognitions throughout his career, including his induction into the Asbury Park High School Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame.

Smith had an active retirement. He traveled with his wife, Dianne, to cruise ports across North America, South America and Europe. He enjoyed golfing, swimming, reading, attending sporting events, spoiling his grandson and competing (and winning multiple

times) in his family's fantasy football league. He also stayed active in judicial affairs as a member of the New Jersey Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Extrajudicial Activities and as an adjunct instructor for a 4th Amendment course at Rutgers University.

Thomas is preceded in death by his wife of 52 years, Dianne Gibson Smith. He is survived by daughters Kori Smith, Keir Smith Martin, and Kaprece Smith; grandson Jordan Leftridge; godchildren Karl Crudup II, Brooke Gillespie and Travis Seawright; and a host of extended family and friends.



Ann Marie Smith '86 of Alpharetta, Georgia, died Jan. 7, leaving behind a legacy of kindness, achievement and adventure.

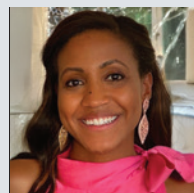
Born in Kingston, Jamaica, and raised in Queens, New York, Smith excelled in academics and athletics at Brooklyn Technical High School, where she was recognized as a high school all-American track star in indoor and outdoor cross country and served as senior class secretary.

Smith came to Syracuse University to study electrical engineering. After earning her degree, she began her career at Raytheon Missile Systems as a systems engineer. In 1990, she joined Xerox, where she developed strong friendships and held numerous leadership roles, including vice president and general manager of global document outsourcing.

Smith earned accolades for her work, including trips through Xerox's President's Club. While at Xerox, she completed an executive development program at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. At the age of 53, she retired from Xerox as vice president of business intelligence and sales management process to settle in Raleigh, North Carolina, to be closer to family.

Smith's adventurous spirit led her to explore the world, and she enjoyed cruising, often traveling with her mother and close friends. Her vibrant personality, contagious smile and kind heart made her beloved by all who knew her. Her commitment to excellence extended beyond her career, as she was an active member of the National Society of Black Engineers and a proud Mary Kay representative.

Smith is survived by her mother, Dorothy; brother, Michael Nicholas; niece, Tatiana Nicholas; a beloved aunt, Harlette Smith Hinds; a host of extended family; and dear friends, who were her chosen family.



Amanda Lillian Quick '14, G'16 of New York City, died Jan. 18 of metastatic breast cancer.

Born on June 5, 1992, in Kansas City, Missouri, Quick showed boundless energy and zest for life from day one. She embraced a range of passions, including singing in the youth choir, serving as an acolyte, acting and excelling in sports. Her adventurous spirit was fueled by living in

IN MEMORIAM

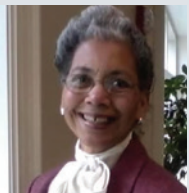
various places throughout her formative years, including Kansas City, Boston and Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. She graduated from Wyoming Seminary Preparatory School, where she played on the 2008 Pennsylvania state champion varsity field hockey team.

Quick's passion for journalism led her to the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast and digital journalism, with minors in marketing and Chinese studies, graduating with honors. One of her college highlights was interning for three summers with NBC Sports, including the 2012 Olympics in London. While at Syracuse, Quick launched her company, The Next Zuck, a media outlet dedicated to showcasing college founders and entrepreneurship nationwide. She continued her academic journey as an SU Fellow, earning a master's in information management.

Quick spent six years at KPMG, holding various risk management/technology assurance roles. She then spent two years at American Express in the U.S. Consumer Banking Group.

Deeply committed to making the world a better place, Quick served on the board of directors for The Pink Agenda, contributing to education and event committees to raise awareness about breast cancer among young professionals and to raise funds for research. She also served as an advocate and supporter of the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF) and spoke about her diagnosis publicly, joining BCRF partners Ann Taylor and Loft in their Sisterhood of Strength campaign and sharing her experiences on *Good Morning America*. She was a member of Syracuse University's Generation Orange Leadership Council and the Newhouse Emerging Leaders Board. In 2024, she was honored with a Generation Orange Alumni Award.

Quick is survived by her parents, Avalyn and Paul Quick; her sister, Lexi; her grandmothers, Bernice Law and Pauline Pendleton; and a host of aunts, uncles, cousins and friends.



Francis McMillan Parks of Syracuse died Jan. 12. She was the former longtime director of Students Offering Service and African American programs in Hendricks Chapel.

Parks grew up in Odessa, Texas, and earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After graduation, she enrolled in Clark Atlanta University and completed a master's degree. She married Donald R. Parks, whom she met while an undergraduate, and for many years they moved around the globe as a military family.

The Parks family settled in Syracuse in 1981 so Donald could work on a doctoral degree. Francis also became engaged in the life of the University, working as an instructor and advisor. She began her tenure in the University's English Language Institute and then served as an academic advisor at University College. In 1992, she became director of Students Offering Service (SOS) and of African American programs at Hendricks Chapel. In that role, she served as a teacher, counselor, leader, activist, volunteer and storyteller.

She created and championed numerous programs through SOS—from a blanket drive in the winter to a summer chess camp for kids from inner-city Syracuse and participation in Habitat for Humanity, International Young Scholars, the CROP Walk for Hunger, green-ups and clean-ups, Libba's Place Coffeehouse, the annual Sojourner Storytelling Conference and holiday basket drives. She also played a key role in establishing the annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration at the University.

Parks kept social conscience at the forefront of activities at Hendricks Chapel. She was known as a passionate cheerleader for students and colleagues alike, providing encouragement and nurturing when they needed it.

After retiring from the University in 2007, she became a Francis Perkins Scholar at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. She joined that community as a student, living in a residence hall and continuing her research.

"Francis Parks embodied the spirit and soul of Hendricks Chapel, and I am personally grateful for her kindness, wisdom and strength," says the Rev. Brian Konkol, vice president and dean of Hendricks Chapel. "We give thanks for all that she did, and we give thanks for all that she was, as her peaceful and powerful presence will forever be felt throughout our Syracuse University campus community and beyond."

Parks is survived by her daughters, Stephanie Ellen Parks and Suzan-Lori Parks; her son, Donald Parks Jr.; her grandson, Durham Xavier; and a large community of family and friends.



Brisa C. Sanchez '25 at the
2025 Our Time Has Come
Ceremony



Office of Multicultural Advancement

200 Walnut Place
Syracuse, NY 13244-5160



@RANDIBARDPHOTO

Syracuse University alumni gathered on Martha's Vineyard Aug. 18 to enjoy food, fellowship and networking, joining alumni from Duke and Stanford Universities for an ACC meetup.