

NORTH CAROLINA A&T MAGAZINE

FALL-WINTER 2021-2022



THE FAST TRACK



RIGHTING WRONGS | FORTUNATE SON | MORE THAN ART PROJECTS | COMPELLED TO GIVE

North Carolina A&T's international, national and conference track and field champions (L-R): Trevor Stewart, Randolph Ross Jr., Cambria Sturgis, Javonte Harding, Daniel Stokes and Akeem Sirleaf





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THE FAST TRACK

Front (L-R) - Daniel Stokes, Cambria Sturgis, Jonah Ross; middle - Duane Ross (director, track and field programs), Akeem Sirleaf, TeJyrica Robinson, Kamaya Debose-Epps, Symone Darius, Tempest Vance (associate head coach), Amber Monroe (assistant coach); and back - Ron Garner (assistant coach), Randolph Ross Jr., Brandon Hicklin, Javonte Harding, Ernest Barrett (assistant coach)



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Photo: Ivan Sual Cutler, Carolina Peacemaker



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MAKING NEWS

HISTORIC ENROLLMENT PUSHES N.C. A&T CLOSER TO 2023 GOAL

This fall more than 13,300 students enrolled at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University—the largest headcount ever for the 130-year-old university.

Those students are the university's most academically high performing, with an average GPA of 3.7 and average SAT score of nearly 1,079.

The overall enrollment of 13,322 marks North Carolina A&T's eighth consecutive year of growth, as well as the eighth straight year it has been the largest historically black university (HBCU) in the nation. Though the new student body includes growth at nearly every rank and level, a surge in first-year students was the major driver of this year's increase: 2,930 freshmen are enrolled this fall, a 37.17% jump over 2020.

The new enrollment pushes N.C. A&T closer than ever to its fall 2023 goal of 14,000 students.

A&T has grown by 25% under the leadership of Harold L. Martin Sr., Ph.D., who joined A&T as chancellor in June 2009, while the average entering GPA has increased from 3.06 to 3.7.

"We set ambitious and strategic goals for the expansion of our university because we know that as a doctoral, land-grant, research institution, we could and should have greater impact on the education of our

A&T has grown by 25% under the leadership of Harold L. Martin Sr., Ph.D., who joined A&T as chancellor in June 2009, while the average entering GPA has increased from 3.06 to 3.7.

students and upon the communities we serve," said Martin. "It's important to understand that this growth is enhancing quality and academic performance, not undermining it. We are attracting the highest-performing high school graduates in the history of our university, both from North Carolina and beyond.

"In so doing, we're making major contributions to a highly educated, well-prepared and diverse workforce and entrepreneurial sector for our state."

The new enrollment figures come on the heels of new collegiate rankings released by Washington Monthly earlier this week that named A&T the top-ranked HBCU in the country and one of the country's top 135 national universities overall.

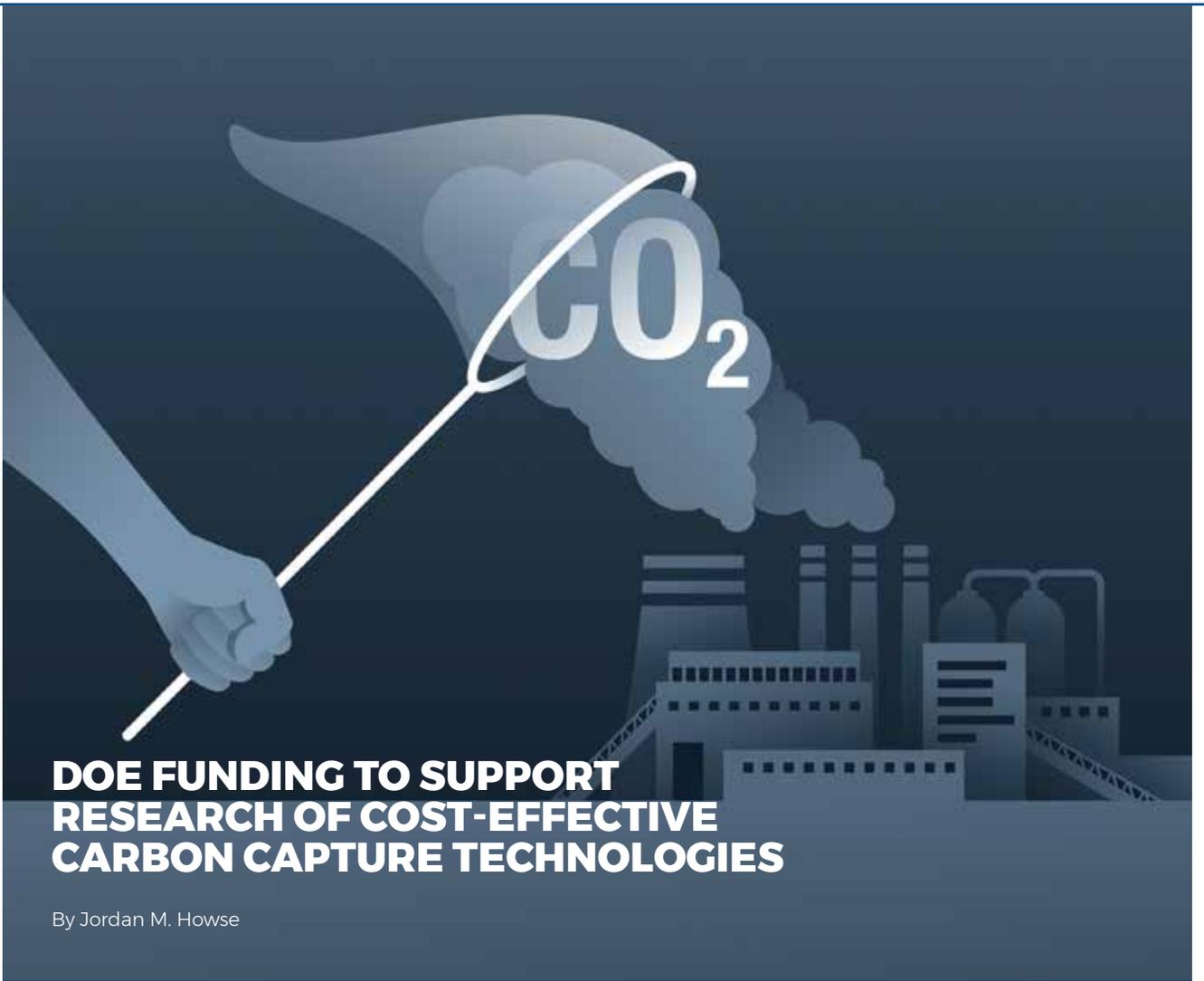
Other highlights of the 2021 fall enrollment report include:

- For the third consecutive year, graduate student enrollment likewise climbed, from 1,623 in 2020 to 1,726 – an increase of 6.35% and A&T's largest graduate

enrollment ever. That growth was driven by a 12.16% increase in new doctoral students. With new online master's and doctoral programs ready to launch this year, further graduate student growth is imminent.

- Nearly 11,600 undergraduates are enrolled at A&T, compared to last year's 11,130 total. A&T is now 846 students over its 2023 goal of 10,750 undergraduates.
- Enrollment of transfer students level continued to climb, as well, with growth of 2% this fall. A&T's student body now includes 780 new transfer students.

"The outstanding academic programs and faculty of our university continue to make it a destination of choice for students, scholars, faculty and researchers around the nation and beyond," said Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Beryl C. McEwen. "It's exciting to see our aspirations for North Carolina A&T come to fruition, and to see that interest in the university shared by so many accomplished individuals."



DOE FUNDING TO SUPPORT RESEARCH OF COST-EFFECTIVE CARBON CAPTURE TECHNOLOGIES

By Jordan M. Howse

The Department of Energy (DOE) has awarded North Carolina A&T nearly \$1.8 million to research novel ways to capture carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the air.

Carbon dioxide concentration in the air continues to increase each year, intensifying the greenhouse effect that is warming the planet. Along with N.C. A&T, Oregon State and the Lawrence Berkeley Lab received a total of \$6.6 million to research ways to capture CO₂ that can then be used to convert into other needed chemicals.

DEBASISH KUILA, PH.D., professor in the Department of Chemistry, College of Science and Technology (CoST), is the principal investigator, partnering with **JIANZHONG LOU, PH.D.**, Department of Chemical Engineering, College of Engineering, and **ALEKSANDRS PROKOFJEVS, PH.D.**, Department of Chemistry, CoST.

“Curbing carbon emissions and carbon sequestration alone will not be enough to combat the climate crisis,” said Kuila. “If we are successful, this will lead to technology that can capture CO₂, which can help bring the concentration of carbon (dioxide) in the air down.”

DOE awarded a total of \$94 million to seven universities and two national labs. Direct Air Capture (DAC) is an expanding field in decarbonization and a key facet of the plan to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

“Finding ways to remove and store carbon directly from the air is an absolute necessity in our fight against the climate crisis,” said Secretary of Energy Jennifer M. Granholm. “This investment in carbon capture technology research through universities and DOE laboratories will position America as a leader in this growing field, create good-paying jobs, and help make our carbon-free future a reality.”

FY 2021 YIELDS \$93.8M IN GIFTS

By Jackie Torok

North Carolina A&T recently completed a historic fiscal year in private giving with an unprecedented \$93.8 million in individual, corporate and foundation gifts.

The amount is believed to be the most raised by a public historically Black college or university in a single year. It also smashes N.C. A&T's previous fundraising record – \$18.1 million in fiscal year 2020.

Although a historic \$45 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott is included in the total, \$48.8 million came from a wide range of other sources, including alumni and corporate donors, as part of the Campaign for North Carolina A&T.

The surge in fundraising grew A&T's endowment to \$157.5 million, up \$83.7 million from the prior year. As recently as FY2012, the university's endowment was \$28 million. The university now has total invested assets of \$157.5 million. The earnings the university generates on endowments support academic programming, student scholarships and financial aid, faculty salaries and more that may not otherwise receive funding.

"The incredible generosity of our supporters has created a new financial reality at North Carolina A&T that holds great immediate and long-term potential for our university," said Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr. "Just as we have successfully stepped up to compete academically and as a research university over the past 12 years, we are now moving into a level of competitiveness in generating private support that has not been witnessed among HBCU campuses.

"These investments are now generating millions annually in earnings that go to support a wide range of student success, academic, research and programmatic needs, and they are making a real difference in the quality and impact of A&T."

The university launched the quiet phase of its Campaign for North Carolina A&T in 2012. It publicly announced the campaign in 2018, with a goal of \$85 million. The university hit that mark the following year and expanded the goal to \$100 million by Dec. 31, 2020.

But over the ensuing two years, the university's philanthropic effort caught fire. By Dec. 31, A&T raised a total of \$181.4 million, more than any other public HBCU has generated in a capital campaign.

Although a historic \$45 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott is included in the total, \$48.8 million came from a wide range of other sources, including alumni and corporate donors, as part of the Campaign for North Carolina A&T.

A significant portion of that total came from A&T alumni, 14,837 of whom gave to the campaign. Three alums made such significant gifts that two colleges were named in their honor: the Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics and the John R. and Kathy R. Hairston College of Health and Human Sciences.

Other gifts are also having immediate impact.

The Equity in Education Initiative (E²I), launched in partnership with Walmart and supported by a \$5 million gift from the multinational retail corporation, is a five-year program aimed at increasing the number of African American college graduates securing careers in fields critical to the nation's workforce needs.

E²I is further supported in part through a \$5.5 million gift from Corning Inc. This donation kicked off a five-year partnership with A&T that will provide scholarships through 2026, with a special focus on enhancing STEM education. Funding will go to students in the College of Education, College of Engineering, College of Science and Technology and the Deese College.

A&T also received a \$2.1 million gift from 3M in support of E²I, building on a legacy of partnership between 3M and A&T that has focused in recent years on support of the 3M Frontline Sales Internship program.

A portion of the Scott gift established and endowed the February One Scholarship Program, whose inaugural class began its studies at A&T this fall. That full-

ride, merit-based program is named for the date the A&T Four launched their historic sit-in at the downtown Greensboro Woolworth in 1960.

A&T's deep history in the civil rights movement and America's ongoing evolution around matters of race and inclusion have both played a role in the university's more recent success in philanthropy.

"The influx in corporate giving is directly related to A&T's popularity and the social injustice reckoning under way in the United States," said Ralisha Mercer, associate vice chancellor for development at A&T. "We hope to sustain this momentum as a foundation for our university's growth and development to fulfill its mission and exceed all expectations for success."

A&T also plans to establish new centers of excellence in health and human sciences, education and the liberal arts in the wake of the campaign's conclusion, and boost investments in new faculty related to the university's research mission.

14,837 *Number of A&T alumni who contributed to the Campaign for North Carolina A&T*

\$157.5M *Amount now in the university's endowment, which supports academic programming, student scholarships and financial aid, faculty salaries and more*

MAKING NEWS



RESEARCH TEAM EMPLOYS DRONES TO INSPECT STATE'S BRIDGES

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is responsible for the safety of 13,500 bridges in the state. According to **ALI KARIMODDINI, PH.D.**, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at North Carolina A&T, each of those bridges, regardless of their condition, is inspected at least once every two years, in accordance with the National Bridge Inspection Standards (NBIS). That adds up to a lot of time, personnel and money to ensure the safety of North Carolinians and visitors.

Karimoddini is investigating a faster, safer and more cost-effective methodology for assessing areas that are difficult to access during bridge inspections, using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). NCDOT recently funded more than \$300,000 for this research, an extension of the recently completed two-year project, Developing a Safe and Cost-effective Flight Control Methodology for a UAV-enabled Bridge Inspection.

"Part of our project is to develop and implement effective workflows for integrating UAVs into bridge inspection processes—but not replace—human inspectors," said Karimoddini. "Our hypothesis is that the new UAV-assisted workflows will significantly reduce the cost and logistics of inspections and increase the safety of inspectors."

Karimoddini and partners are performing field tests and bridge inspection trials twice per month and will use the outcomes of new projects to develop a workflow that NCDOT can use. Tara Cavalline, Ph.D., an expert on infrastructure construction and assessment at UNC Charlotte, will assist Karimoddini during UAV-assisted inspection practices. Additionally, industry collaborators, including Digital Aerolous, Skydio and Parrot, will join the project and provide the team with technical supports. The team publishes the research outcomes, video and other results frequently on its website.

Inspecting NCDOT's 13,500 bridges is tedious and includes manual documentation, recording, measuring and photography. Using airborne data collection with UAVs speeds up the process and allows for faster data collection, facilitates more frequent inspections and better tracking of defects, like cracks.

"Note that the recorded information in the form of written reports or individual photos makes it difficult for employing advanced data-analytic techniques for post-processing and analysis of the detected problem," said Karimoddini.

UAV-assisted data collection along with 3D models and advanced data collection and processing will significantly boost the quality of the inspection data.

Karimoddini is the director of NC-CAV Center of Excellence on Connected and Autonomous Vehicle Technology and the Autonomous Cooperative Control of Emergent Systems of Systems (ACCESS) Lab and the deputy director and research thrust leader of TECHLAV, the DoD Center of Excellence in Autonomy. He also served as the principal investigator for Phase I of the SAE AutoDrive Challenge.

This collaborative effort between Karimoddini and his team, NCDOT and industry partners is an innovation to promote safety and efficiency statewide.

COE RECEIVES \$1.4M FROM ZYNGA TO EXPAND GAMING, CREATE SCHOLARS

By Alexander Saunders

The College of Engineering (COE) has received a four-year, \$1.4 million gift to expand the gaming capabilities of the Department of Computer Science (CS) and to create the Zynga Scholars program.

“Zynga’s investment in the students and resources of the computer science department will further deepen the ways that department applies programming and artificial intelligence to gaming development and projects,” said Robin N. Coger, Ph.D., COE dean. “I anticipate that the successes Zynga and North Carolina A&T create together will serve both organizations well and lead to many years of collaboration between us.”

The partnership between one of the world’s leading gaming companies and COE is designed to address racial disparities in the gaming industry, as well as establish a pipeline between the company and the university. Additionally, Zynga Scholars will receive robust support to strengthen their gaming development competencies throughout their undergraduate education.

“We are honored to work with and recognize the College of Engineering at N.C. A&T through Zynga’s Social Impact Fund as one of our premier university partners in a joint effort to elevate Black representation in the gaming industry,” said Frank Gibeau, CEO of Zynga.

As students immerse in the world of gaming from the development side, the results of the collaboration will be visible through projects, competitions, and outreach activities designed to foster innovation. Zynga will provide mentors and other pathways and opportunities for students to pursue careers as game designers, software developers and computer programmers, among others, in the immensely popular field of computer gaming entertainment, such as game designers, software developers and computer programmers.

Bryant adds that opportunities are created when students are exposed to new possibilities and provided the resources and encouragement to make those possibilities a reality.

“Through our Zynga Scholars program, we are helping to empower future Black leaders to achieve their potential and break new ground within the games industry,” said Gibeau. “Zynga is honored to support these students on their journeys and to create a partnership that will shape the future of gaming.”



Zynga Scholars will receive robust support to strengthen their gaming development competencies throughout their undergraduate education.

“Our CS department at N.C. A&T has been very successful at engaging our undergraduate students in a broad range of research interests including machine learning, cyber security, internet of things, and software engineering,” said Kelvin Bryant, Ph.D., associate professor of computer science. “Gaming is a rich area that combines core competencies from these research areas, so this Zynga opportunity will provide a pragmatic platform for our students to expand their experiences and engage with industry experts.”

Zynga’s Social Impact Fund was established in June 2020 with a \$25 million investment to be used to address equity for underserved and marginalized communities globally in order to shape the future of the gaming industry.

MAKING NEWS

SPONSORED RESEARCH CHARTS SINGLE-YEAR GROWTH OF 30%

By Jamie Crockett

In a year in which universities across America struggled to meet the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing and launching new research, North Carolina A&T faculty brought in a record \$78.2 million in scientific contracts and grants—a 30% increase over fiscal year 2020.

The \$18 million jump over last year represents N.C. A&T's strongest growth year ever in peer-reviewed, competitive funding awards for research programs and represents a total of \$12 million in growth over its best previous single-year increase. The growth occurred across a range of disciplines and initiatives and signal A&T's continued evolution as a doctoral-granting university classified as a "high research activity" institution in the Carnegie Classifications for Institutions of Higher Education. The vast majority of support comes from the most competitive funding arena: federal scientific agencies.

N.C. A&T launched a program six years ago called the Faculty of the Future Initiative that made hiring scholars with significant research backgrounds from leading research universities a priority. In FY2020 and FY2021, those faculty helped drive back-to-back record numbers of A&T research proposals submitted to federal agencies – 451 in FY20 and 494 in FY21.

Though FY2021 research funding overall increased only marginally at those agencies, A&T's share of it rose disproportionately, thanks to the strategic growth of its research faculty and scientific infrastructure.

"As recently as 2011-12, N.C. A&T faculty were landing \$51.3 million annually. To have realized growth of 53% over the ensuing decade is a tremendous reflection on the outstanding faculty, graduate students, undergraduates and research staff who each play a valuable role in the practical and often applied research coming out of our university," said Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr. "This further establishes North Carolina A&T as one of the state's top three public research universities, provides additional learning opportunities for our students and contributes significantly to the university's economic impact."

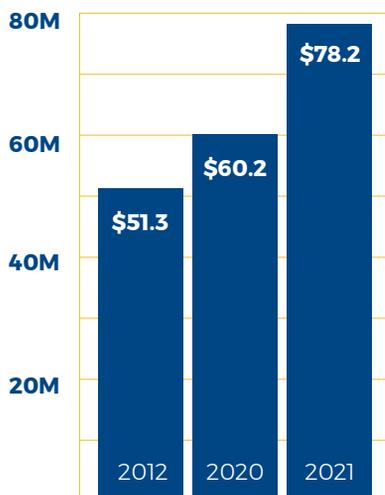
A&T also further advanced its position relative to other leading historically black research universities. Along with Howard and Florida A&M, A&T has led all HBCUs in recent years in federally funded research expenditures. The major funding growth for FY21 is likely to propel the university higher among the top three in expenditures.

THE UNIVERSITY'S LARGEST AWARDS INCLUDED:

- A \$3.97 million NASA grant to **ABDOLLAH HOMAIFAR, PH.D.**, in the College of Engineering's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, in support of ongoing research to develop air taxis. The projected size and impact of this market is expected to reach \$1.5 trillion globally by 2040, according to industry analysts Morgan Stanley Research.
- A \$1.5 million National Science Foundation grant to **REZA ZADEGAN, PH.D.**, for development of a DNA-based digital storage system, in which information bits can be written, stored and read in the form of mutational changes in DNA. This novel new approach to data storage holds the possibility of serving as an alternative to digital data storage as current materials reach their limits of sustainability and scalability. Zadegan is a faculty member in the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering.
- A \$1.1 million USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture award to **MOHAMED AHMEDNA, PH.D.**, dean of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), to support the 1890 Center of Excellence for Student Success and Workforce Development. A top initiative among land-grant HBCUs, the center supports preparation of graduates for key agricultural professions across the country. The CAES will partner with other academic institutions including Tuskegee University and Florida A&M University to develop and test effective programs and serve as resource hubs for best practices.

ADDITIONAL AWARDS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE THIS YEAR INCLUDE:

- **NARAYAN BHATTARAI, PH.D.**, secured a \$550,000 National Science Foundation grant to develop biodegradable materials that will promote wound healing by notably reducing inflammation and scar formation. His research will address a significant challenge in the biomedical engineering field in that many implanted devices stimulate immune reactions that can interfere with tissue healing.
- **The MARC U-STAR Program.** For nearly a decade, A&T has cultivated rising juniors interested in pursuing biomedical research at the Ph.D. level through the competitive National Institutes of Health’s Maximizing Access to Research Careers Undergraduate Student Training in Academic Research (MARC U-STAR) program. More than 70% of these MARC alumni have enrolled in Ph.D. programs at R1 institutions, with a retention rate exceeding 70% over the last five years. **CHECO J. RORIE, PH.D.**, secured a \$443,000 renewal award to continue and expand these efforts and will recruit and train 12 students each year.



A&T IS ALSO ADDING TO, FACILITY TECHNOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES THAT WILL ENABLE ITS RESEARCH PROGRAMS TO GROW FURTHER, INCLUDING:

- **The Harold L. Martin Sr. Engineering Research and Innovation Complex**, a \$90 million state-of-the-art facility funded by a statewide NC Connect bond passed by voters in 2016, is slated to open this academic year. The complex will serve as the site for rigorous teaching and research application for accomplished faculty and competitive students in the college known as the nation’s top producer of African American engineers.
- **Establishment of the Cybersecurity Forensic Hub for Women.** A&T’s Center of Excellence in Cybersecurity Research, Outreach and Education (CREO) will partner with North Carolina Central University, Guilford County Schools and industry leaders to establish a safe place for young women and girls who may be experiencing cyberbullying in the form of malicious stalkerware downloaded to their devices. This malware can be used to track location and movements and access private information. Researchers will train and certify students to detect and remove the software free of charge.
- **Establishment of the Women in Design and Advanced Manufacturing Academy.** According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, women made up approximately 29% of the manufacturing workforce in 2020, a figure that has remained relatively stagnant over the past 50 years. The Center of Excellence in Product Design and Manufacturing (CEPDAM) established the academy to recognize and further enhance support of women faculty and students in the field as they pursue research and funding opportunities, membership in professional societies and other activities.
- **Implementing Energy-Efficient Community Initiatives.** The Center for Research and Technology (CERT) received three grants totaling more than \$500,000 to bolster regional energy-efficient building construction and cost savings in low-income communities hardest hit during the pandemic. With federal CARES ACT funding appropriated to the state’s Department of Health and Human Services and allocated to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, researchers will:

- o Manufacture and analyze an energy-efficient home serving as a research laboratory located on the university farm in order to model sustainable living;
- o Retrofit 15 to 20 low-to-moderate income homes near the A&T campus with various improvements including HVAC systems and insulation. The data will be used to assess and target costs and viability of the projects to inform best practices for future research; and
- o Develop a paid, energy-related summer apprenticeship pilot program in Guilford, Wake and Halifax counties for 31 high school and college students.

“This is truly an extraordinary time to be part at North Carolina A&T,” said Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development Eric Muth, Ph.D. “I’m very proud of the incredible achievements of our faculty and their entrepreneurial, scientific spirit in growing our research enterprise.”

MAKING NEWS

N.C. A&T JOINS DUKE AND OTHERS IN \$20M ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CENTER

By Alexander Saunders

North Carolina A&T is playing a critical role in the creation of Athena, a new artificial intelligence (AI) research center led by Duke University and including Yale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other prominent institutional partners.

Funded by the National Science Foundation and the Department of Homeland Security, Athena is part of a \$220 million investment in 11 AI research institutes engaging campuses in 40 states nationwide.

DANIEL LIMBRICK, PH.D.,

an associate professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, is the principal investigator for N.C. A&T's sub-award from Duke University. Limbrick will contribute expertise in microprocessing and autonomous vehicles by creating small-scale testbeds of autonomous vehicle scenarios. The testbeds offer physical platforms to test and research the capabilities and limitations of edge computing and expand the research beyond computational modeling.

Limbrick will also lead the center's racial and gender diversity and inclusion efforts, where he will collaborate with other researchers to ensure the center meets racial and gender diversity goals by year five of the project.

AI plays an important role in most disciplines within the College of Engineering (COE) at N.C. A&T.

"We understand the dynamism and consequences associated with this AI arena and the positive impact of diverse minds and perspectives being actively engaged in shaping AI and its applications," said Robin N. Coger, Ph.D., COE dean. "Dr. Limbrick's multi-level expertise will be important to further strengthening the research deliverables of the Athena project."

To achieve assured, robust and resilient services for autonomous systems at the edge and to run autonomous driving software with AI to replicate exact scale of real-world scenarios, researchers will focus on two critical, interdependent components of cyber-physical autonomy: situational awareness and learning-enabled control and adaptation.

Athena seeks to solve the future data bottleneck issues with the Internet of Everything (IoE), a concept that aims to bring together "people, process, data and things to make networked connections more relevant and valuable" as described by an industry leader. How, with the expertise of Limbrick and other collaborators, can researchers use artificial intelligence in devices that quickly decide where and how to process data?

"With the emergence of the IoE, we will exponentially increase the amount of data being processed," said Limbrick.

He cites the example of a camera on a car as part of the sensor safety network. He theorizes the addition of edge technology that uses artificial intelligence to interpret the video data before being routed to central computing.

"With AI, we can now develop algorithms to look at the data coming in, resulting in devices deciding automatically and more efficiently where best to distribute information."

Limbrick's expertise is in testing the reliability and security of algorithms and applications. He introduces faults into algorithms (e.g., a disturbance that could cause it to fail) to test resilience and responsiveness to unforeseen issues.

"With this research, we will take some of these emerging applications and identify their computational needs and challenges. In essence, we're testing what would happen if there was a fault."

COE's participation in this nationally critical research is a testament to the important research that faculty like Limbrick regularly conduct, as well as the infrastructure and partnerships A&T has continued to value and cultivate for decades.



Daniel Limbrick, Ph.D., will lead the center's racial and gender diversity and inclusion efforts, to ensure the center meets racial and gender diversity goals by year five of the project.

MAKING NEWS



STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS MADE TOWARD STUDENT SUCCESS, COVID-19 RECOVERY

By Jackie Torok

In recognition of how significantly many students, their families and communities have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, North Carolina A&T is making a major strategic investment into a series of initiatives over the next three years that will significantly lower students' cost of attendance.

In July, the university announced the first two of those student-success initiatives—a program that will make textbooks free to undergraduates for the next two years and a scholarship effort that provides each participating student six hours of free tuition this summer. Some 3,800 students are taking advantage of that scholarship program. Other initiatives are being launched that will potentially have impacts just as large.

Through no fault of their own, many college students have experienced severe impact on their educational progress due to the pandemic.

ROBERT POMPEY, *Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance*

Chief among them is a major investment in emergency aid that will be made available in grants to students in demonstrated need. Those funds, which do not have to be repaid, could be used to cover everything from shortfalls in support for living expenses owing to income lost during the pandemic to resolving financial “holds” on student accounts that have prevented them from registering for classes.

Additional funds have been set aside for merit- and need-based tuition support, respectively called the Aggie Pride Scholarships and Aggie Pride Grants. Many N.C. A&T students represent the first generation in their families to attend college and often come from modest means. While the A&T student body is consistently high achieving—entering students this fall have an average GPA of 3.7—many often need financial aid or work one or more jobs to pay for their education.

The funds fueling these investments largely come from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), part of the Coronavirus Aid, Recovery, and Economic Security or CARES Act, and are aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on colleges and universities.

“These historic investments have been carefully planned for maximum impact in supporting the academic and personal success of our students,” said Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr. “These funds will help enable them to move with confidence through their educational experience at A&T and reduce the financial anxiety that the COVID pandemic has triggered for many college students over the past year.

“We are grateful to our congressional partners for their foresight in providing these funds, which are now being thoughtfully used for exactly the purposes for which they were intended.”

Other areas of HEERF investment include:

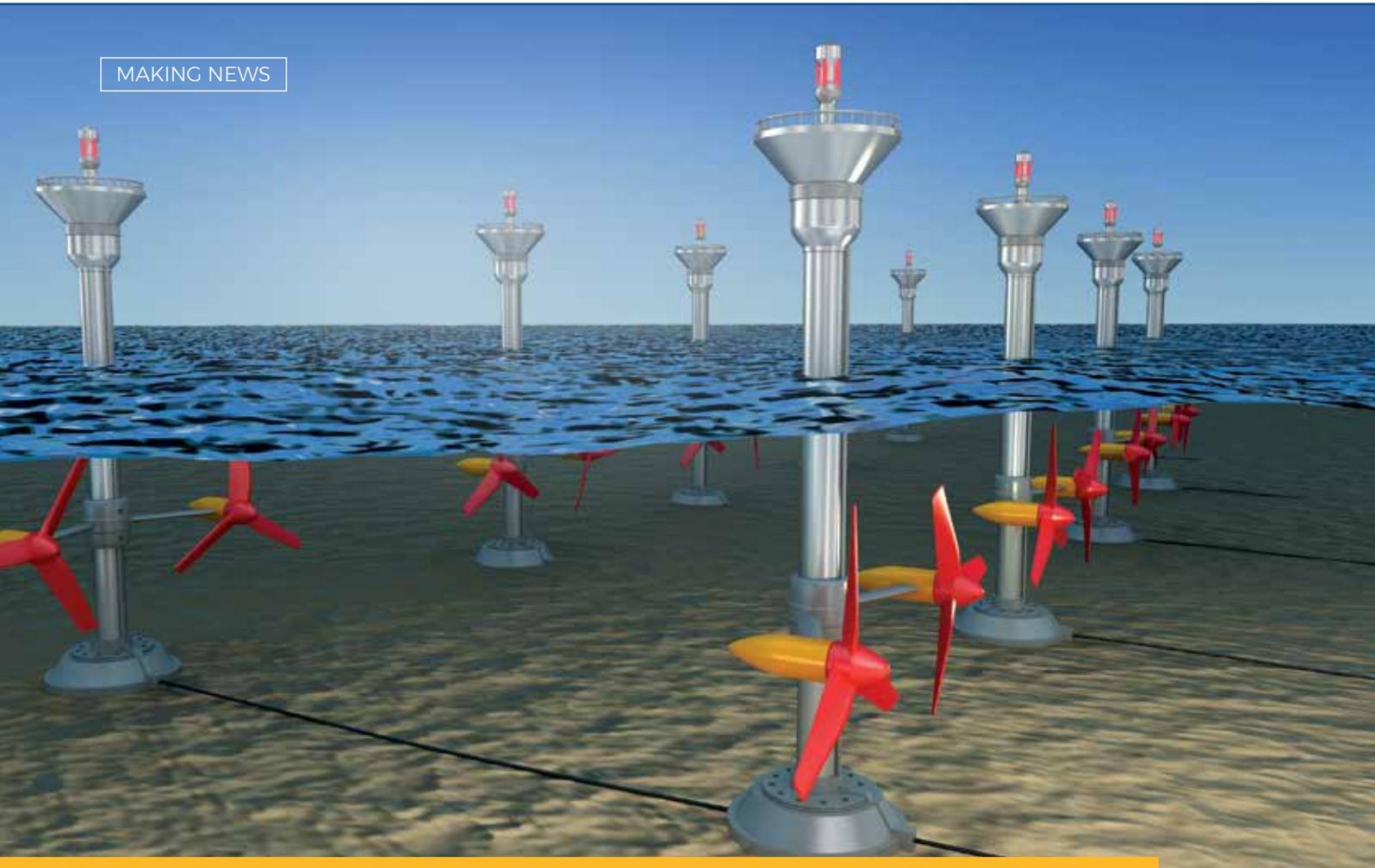
- Graduate student support
- Student work-study, supporting part-time campus employment
- Housing scholarships, a \$250 award for every student in University Housing
- Dining scholarships, a \$250 award for every student selecting a meal plan
- Aggies at the Goal Line, a program that helps former students who left the university without graduating return and complete their degrees

Of note is the housing scholarship investment. As of July 1, the North Carolina Council of State has discontinued its moratorium on renter eviction. Students who lost employment during the pandemic or needed to send monies home to help support family needs may be behind on rent and facing loss of housing. The scholarship monies helped such students enter the fall term with certainty surrounding their living arrangements.

“Through no fault of their own, many college students have experienced severe impact on their educational progress due to the pandemic,” said Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance Robert Pompey. “As a society and as a university, we cannot afford to have the next generation of highly educated, well-prepared graduates slowed or sidelined on their path toward graduation and entering the workforce and further compound the negative results of the pandemic. That would hinder the nation’s economic and social recovery from COVID.

“We are doing our part at North Carolina A&T to invest these critical funds to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

MAKING NEWS



N.C. A&T CHOSEN FOR DOE 2022 MARINE ENERGY COLLEGIATE COMPETITION

North Carolina A&T is one of 17 teams selected by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy to participate in the 2022 Marine Energy Collegiate Competition: Powering the Blue Economy™.

In its third iteration, the competition provides real-world experience and industry connections to help prepare next-generation innovators for future careers in the marine energy sector and the blue economy. Multidisciplinary teams of undergraduate and graduate students will unlock the power of the ocean, rivers, and tides to offer unique solutions that build resilient coastal communities and provide power at sea.

For this year's competition, teams will not only create a market-research supported business plan and develop, design, and test technologies, but they'll also have the opportunity to build and test their device to achieve energy production.

Competing teams include a mix of new and returning universities, along with five international universities: N.C. A&T, partnering with University of North Carolina Wilmington; Oregon State; Purdue University; University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; Virginia Tech, partnering with Stevens Institute of Technology; and others.

RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY HELD AT UNIVERSITY FARM PAVILION

By Jordan Howse

The University Farm officially opened the doors of its new Extension and Research Farm Pavilion, part of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Sept. 21.

The event featured remarks from Chancellor Harold Martin Sr., Ph.D.; CAES Dean Mohamed Ahmedna, Ph.D.; representatives from the U.S. and N.C. Departments of Agriculture; and local government.

“The Pavilion will be an asset for teachers, students and researchers, and will expand the abilities of Extension staff to connect with small-scale farmers, individuals and youth,” said Rosalind Dale, Ed.D., then-associate CAES dean and Extension administrator. “For Cooperative Extension at A&T, it means a state-of-the-art facility for educational programming and events such as Small Farms Week, our annual Grassroots Leadership Conference, and 4-H programs.”

Recorded remarks were given by Jewel Bronaugh, Ph.D., USDA deputy secretary of agriculture. Other speakers were alumnus Archie Hart, director of the Small and Minority Farms Program at the N.C. Department of Agriculture; Greensboro Mayor Nancy Vaughan; and City Councilwoman Sharon Hightower.



N.C. A&T Extension and Research Farm Pavilion

The Farm Pavilion is part of CAES’s Extension and Research’s multiyear plan to expand and improve the facilities and resources at the University Farm, which was created in 1904 to provide food and milk to the N.C. A&T cafeteria. The 492-acre farm is a working, producing farm that raises crops and livestock, and serves as the university’s largest classroom and largest laboratory. CAES students and faculty use it for research and education; staff with Extension at A&T demonstrate new crops and farming practices before introducing them to the state’s farmers.

Future plans for the farm include an amphitheater and a community and urban food complex that will feature a dairy, research labs, classrooms, and a small business incubator.

“The Pavilion will be a tremendous resource for all North Carolinians,” said Ahmedna. “Through it, the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences can increase the Farm’s already-active role in the university and local community and enhance the delivery of Extension and research programs to our many stakeholders across the state.”

MAKING NEWS

AGGIES JOIN SPACE FORCE UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

By Jackie Torok



North Carolina A&T has officially joined the U.S. Space Force University Partnership Program (UPP), a consortium to help meet the responsibilities of the newest branch of the U.S. military, whose personnel (called guardians) monitor the 26,000 objects circling the globe.

Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr. and Vice Chief of Space Operations Gen. David D. Thompson signed the memorandum of understanding (MOU) during a virtual ceremony.

N.C. A&T is the first and only North Carolina university named as part of the inaugural 11-member UPP cohort that also includes Georgia Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Purdue University.

A&T remains the top producer of African American undergraduates in agriculture and engineering and of master's graduates in mathematics and statistics. As a member of the UPP,

A&T will not only create a pipeline for students to pursue aerospace careers upon graduating with STEM-related degrees, but also provide expanded research opportunities for students and faculty—particularly in the College of Engineering, College of Science and Technology, Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering, and multiple centers of excellence.

Additionally, the UPP opens doors to Space Force partnerships with A&T's Air Force ROTC and Army ROTC programs as well as access to A&T and Space Force laboratories for research opportunities between A&T and Space Force partners, technical seminars and guest lectures by A&T faculty and Space Force personnel, participation on advisory and thesis committees, and service as research mentors with the Space Force.

Establishing strategic partnerships with this select set of nationally

renowned universities allows the Space Force to recruit and educate a diverse, high-caliber workforce, offer opportunities to advance research in specific areas of interest, and develop a 21st century, technology-savvy military service. Research is the largest facet of the program, with A&T and the other UPP inaugural cohort members each having its own research component.

Among the criteria the Space Force used to include A&T in the cohort are the quality of STEM degree offerings and space-related research laboratories and initiatives; a robust ROTC program; a diverse student population; and degrees and programming designed to support military, veterans and their families in pursuing higher education.

\$25M NSF CENTER TO ADDRESS PHOSPHORUS SUSTAINABILITY

By Jackie Torok



North Carolina A&T has partnered with institutions across the country to establish the \$25 million Science and Technology Center for Phosphorus Sustainability (STEPS) led by N.C. State University and funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The center is a renewable project that will bring together multiple disciplines in a “convergence research approach” to address and reduce not only society’s dependence on phosphate mining, but also the actual amount of phosphorus that impacts our soil and water resources.

Phosphorus, discovered in 1669, is a chemical element and part of the nitrogen group listed on the periodic table. It is considered an essential element for living organisms, is found in food and even our DNA and is used in fertilizers to improve crops. Several

challenges arise as a result of phosphorus mining dependency and management inefficiencies, including waste and runoff into soil and water, which negatively impact our food system and aquatic life.

STEPS is one of six centers NSF announced this round. A&T, the only historically Black university partner site among them, will primarily contribute expertise from researchers in its nanoengineering department at the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering (JSNN), a collaboration with the University of North Carolina Greensboro. JSNN Dean **SHERINE O. OBARE, PH.D.**, will serve as the principal investigator representing both institutions.

“One of our primary goals is to develop and enhance current nanomaterials that will help us analyze where and in what form

phosphorus appears, to help us mine less, as well as recover and recycle more of this essential element,” said Obare. “We want to leave our world a better place than how we found it for future generations, and we want to be thoughtful about encouraging stakeholder engagement early to make more informed decisions about how these technologies impact our communities and society as a whole.”

JSNN has established a strong research capability in developing sensors that help in the detection of phosphorus and researchers will take that knowledge and expertise a step further by looking at how to use the technology for sustainability purposes.

STEPS will work toward its “25-in-25” vision, facilitating a 25% reduction in both dependence and losses of the element within 25 years. As an additional education component, the center will host workshops for middle and high school students to bring awareness, establish and enhance sustainable habits, encourage students to think creatively and become the next leaders to offer innovative solutions.

The other centers are Appalachian State University, Arizona State University, Marquette University, RTI International, University of Florida and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

NSF established the science and technology center program in 1987 and there are 12 additional active centers that were announced in 2010, 2013 and 2016.

MAKING NEWS

N.C. A&T AND CORNING KICK OFF FIVE-YEAR, \$5.5M PARTNERSHIP WITH INAUGURAL COHORT OF CORNING SCHOLARS, FELLOWS

By Jackie Torok

This summer North Carolina A&T and Corning Inc. kicked off a five-year partnership that was highlighted by the introduction of the 53 new Corning Scholars and Fellows at America's largest historically Black university.

The partnership is the result of a \$5.5 million gift from Corning, announced in January, that is designed chiefly to prepare N.C. A&T students for careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and education and to graduate more teachers from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds.

The relationship between A&T and Corning will have a tremendous local, state and national impact, said Paula Groves Price, Ph.D., dean of the College of Education and president of the American Educational Studies Association.

"This partnership addresses a critical need to diversify the STEM workforce by investing in an entire education ecosystem," said Price. "While many corporations might invest only in scholarships to recruit STEM graduates, Corning's approach is much more comprehensive and impactful for current and future A&T students. They are invested in not only supporting the diversification

of the teaching profession, but also improving access and experiences for students in communities across the state.

"In addition to scholarships for STEM students, Corning is investing in Aggie Educators—future teachers who will inspire our future innovators—and K-12 STEM programming that will reach thousands of children in the state."

During the event, A&T and Corning leaders met and shared lunch with 30 of the Corning Scholars and Fellows, including Olivia Rogers of Pfafftown, North Carolina, who is studying elementary education.

"Corning Scholars is such a blessing to me," said Rogers. "As a Corning Scholar, I represent our future leaders and educators. Without this scholarship I would not have been able to go to college, let alone one with such an excellent education program."

"This is a proud day for Corning as we celebrate these young scholars at North Carolina A&T State University who inspire us with their hard work, intellectual curiosity and enormous potential," said Michael A. Bell, senior vice president and general manager of Corning's Optical Communications

business. "The first class of Corning Scholars and Fellows represent some of the bright young minds that will help fuel Corning with the diverse talent we need to continue our record of life-changing innovation for another 170 years."

Following the luncheon, Corning representatives visited the College of Education, College of Engineering, College of Science and Technology (COST) and the Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics. The day concluded with a hospitality reception open to the campus community, during which talent and recruiting staff were available to talk about careers at Corning.

Corning employs nearly 5,000 in North Carolina, with a 50-year history of advanced manufacturing in the state. Across its Optical Communications and Life Sciences businesses, Corning operates facilities in Hickory, Newton, Concord, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Wilmington, Tarboro and Durham.

The inaugural cohort of Corning Scholars and Fellows, is listed on the right with their hometowns and study program by college:

Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics

DEVIN BOYD, Charlotte, North Carolina, MBA; **QUIORRA BROWN**, Richmond, Virginia, MBA; **STEVEN HENDERSON**, Greensboro, North Carolina, MBA; **JARED VIA**, Greensboro, North Carolina, MBA; **ALIYAH MCCRAY**, Greensboro, North Carolina, MBA; and **JASMINE POLLOCK**, Fredericksburg, Virginia, MBA.

College of Education

TAYLOR BROTHERTON, Burgaw, North Carolina, teaching; **MAREGA HALIMATOU**, Chicago, Illinois, elementary education; **HANNAH HUNTER**, Bluffton, South Carolina, elementary education; **MORAYA LEWIS**, Charlotte, North Carolina, elementary education; **ANTHONY ODOM**, Red Springs, North Carolina, elementary education; **OLIVIA ROGERS**, Pfafftown, North Carolina, elementary education; **PAULA SALMON**, Greensboro, North Carolina, teaching; **MAKYNZIE SPRINKLE**, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, elementary education; **ALLISON STEGALL**, Colonial Beach, Virginia, teaching; **LAILA WATTS**, Easley, South Carolina, elementary education; **T'ASIA WILLIAMSON**, Goldsboro, North Carolina, elementary education; and **KOJO WILSON**, Gibsonville, North Carolina, teaching.

College of Engineering

PIA AGLIAM, Fayetteville, North Carolina, mechanical engineering; **KALEB ARTIS**, Greensboro, North Carolina, mechanical engineering;

NY'ASIA BADGER, Columbia, South Carolina, computer science; **ADAM BEARDEN**, Columbia, South Carolina, chemical engineering; **BRENDAN BRYAN**, Upper Marlboro, Maryland, computer science; **BRIA CAISON**, Wake Forest, North Carolina, bioengineering; **CAMERON CHAMBERS**, Charlotte, North Carolina, computer engineering; **BRANDON DAVIS**, Greensboro, North Carolina, mechanical engineering; **TORRANCE EBERHART**, Greensboro, North Carolina, mechanical engineering; **AHKENATON FURDGE**, Clarksdale, Mississippi, electrical engineering; **ABDUR-RAQIB GANT**, Princeville, North Carolina, mechanical engineering;

bioengineering; **EDWIN ONUGHA**, Raleigh, North Carolina, data science and engineering; **ZEPHANIAH PRINCE**, Selma, North Carolina, mechanical engineering; **RYAN REESE**, Greensboro, North Carolina, electrical engineering; **TANIYA ROBERTSON**, Laurens, South Carolina, mechanical engineering; **AMINA ROBINSON**, Durham, North Carolina, bioengineering; **JEREMY STOWE**, Greensboro, North Carolina, mechanical engineering; **TREVOR SURRATT**, Garysburg, North Carolina, bioengineering; **MIKAYLA THORNTON**, Durham, North Carolina, computer science; **DANIEL TOBIAS**, High Point, North Carolina, data science and engineering;

“The first class of Corning Scholars and Fellows represent some of the bright young minds that will help fuel Corning with the diverse talent we need to continue our record of life-changing innovation for another 170 years.”

MICHAEL A. BELL, *Senior Vice President and General Manager of Corning Optical Communications*

TAYLOR HEADEN, Greensboro, North Carolina, computer science; **NIYA HENDERSON**, La Plata, Maryland, computer science; **KEVIN HILLIARD**, Greensboro, North Carolina, computer science; **PERNELL JOHNSON**, Durham, North Carolina, computer engineering; **SIDNEY JOHNSON**, Charlotte, North Carolina, computer science; **BRANDON MANN**s, Reidsville, North Carolina, computer engineering; **TONY MARTIN**, Greensboro, North Carolina, industrial and systems engineering; **JESSICA MITCHELL**, Thonotosassa, Florida, computer science; **LYNN OGOT**, Fuqua-Varina, North Carolina

NATHAN VAZQUEZ, High Point, North Carolina, civil engineering; and **CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS**, Wagram, North Carolina, industrial and systems engineering.

College of Science and Technology

NIGEL DEVANE, Greensboro, North Carolina, information technology; **LAUREN HAYNES**, Buford, Georgia, chemistry; **TATYANA JACKSON**, Roslindale, Massachusetts, chemistry; and **ALEXANDRA JONES**, Hope Mills, North Carolina, physics.

MAKING NEWS



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION ASSISTS COMMUNITY GARDENS WITH ENHANCEMENT, COVID-19 STIPENDS

Thanks to a new program led by Cooperative Extension at North Carolina A&T and funded by the NC Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation, 22 North Carolina community gardens will receive stipends of up to \$1,000 to enhance their gardens or make COVID-19-related purchases.

The awards are part of a larger effort in partnership with the North Carolina Community Garden Partners (NCCGP) to strengthen the state's network of community gardens, build the leadership capacities of community gardeners, and connect community gardens to local, regional, and statewide food system transformation efforts. Another facet of the program is the Community Garden Leadership

Academy (CGLA), a regionally based program where professionals with Extension at A&T will teach leadership skills and help gardeners obtain county support for their gardens. Gardeners who complete the CGLA will be eligible to apply for stipends in collaboration with other gardens.

“This project is about community empowerment,” said M. Alyssa McKim, community garden coordinator with Extension at N.C. A&T. “These funds will strengthen community gardens, keep gardeners safe, and will put them in a better position to engage with food system initiatives across the state. This is one way to address the problem of food deserts and the inequities they cause.”

Gardens that received stipends were required to participate in COVID-19 Response Training offered by Extension at A&T. The online training walked gardeners

through the process of developing a garden response plan and addressed safe food handling, gardening best practices, and resources available to help gardens operate in a safe and healthy way.

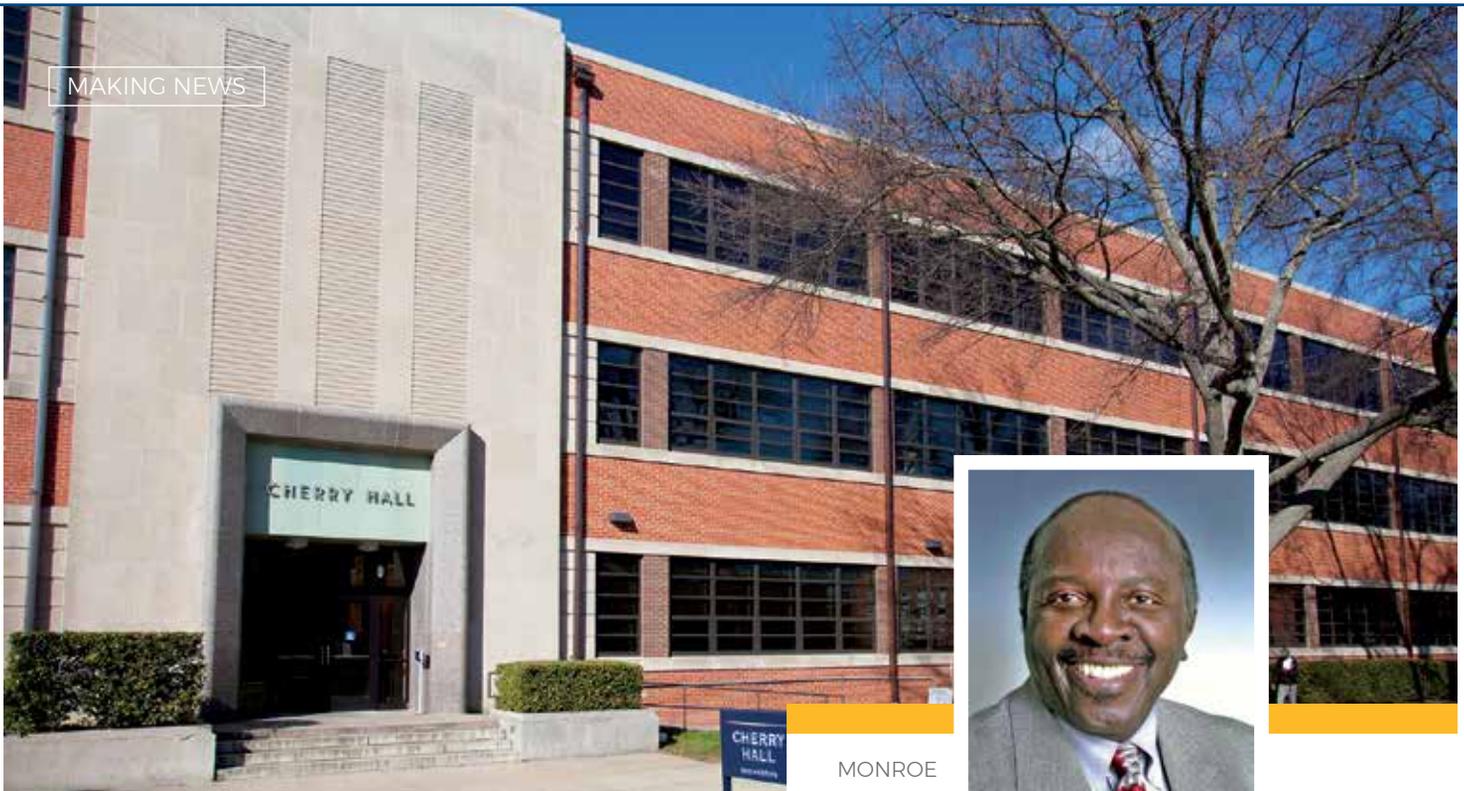
All community gardens in the state are eligible for the stipends, however, the awards prioritize gardens in the 40 most economically distressed counties. Examples of how the stipends can be used include installing handwashing stations, putting up signage that promotes health and garden safety, or purchasing gloves, compost or tools.

The awards are the first of three rounds of stipends that will be distributed for community garden enhancements. The second round of stipends will be open to the public in December and awards will be announced in February 2022.

The 2021 Community Garden COVID Response and Enhancement Stipend recipients are:

- Taft Broom Community Garden, Catawba County
- Waccamaw Siouan Tribe, Columbus County
- Town of Sandyfield Community Garden, Columbus County
- Thomasville Parks and Recreation, Davidson County
- DNA Community Garden, Duplin County
- Urban Community AgriNomics (UCAN), Durham County
- Neighborhood’s Hands, Forsyth County
- Greene County Cooperative Extension, Greene County
- Community Interactive Learning Garden, Guilford County
- New Hope Community Development, Guilford County
- Poplar Grove, Guilford County
- South Side Community Garden, Guilford County
- Meherrin Indian Tribe, Hertford County
- Integrity CDC Community Gardens, Lenoir County
- Martin County Cooperative Extension
- Tabernacle Community Garden, McDowell County
- Bethel Community Garden, Pitt County
- Rooted in Community Farmville Garden, Pitt County
- Hitchcock Green Community Garden, Richmond County
- Boys and Girls Club of Wayne County, Wayne County
- Little Washington Growing Group, Wayne County
- Project Lazarus Wilkes Youth Coalition, Youth in Bloom, Wilkes County

MAKING NEWS



MONROE

TWO CAMPUS BUILDINGS TO BE NAMED FOR NOTABLE ALUMNI

By Tonya D. Dixon '04, '21

The North Carolina A&T Board of Trustees (BOT) voted during its Sept. 24 meeting to name two iconic campus buildings after two revered and accomplished alumni: former BOT chairwoman, Velma Speight, Ph.D. '53, and past College of Engineering dean, Joseph Monroe, Ph.D. '62.

The buildings, which were formerly called Morrison Hall and Cherry Hall, had their names stripped by the BOT in 2020 after discoveries were brought to light that their namesakes were aligned with white supremacy before and during their respective tenures as North Carolina governors. N.C. A&T leaders determined those names did not reflect the university's values, standards and principles.

Now Morrison and Cherry will bear the names of Speight and Monroe, respectively.

"Naming these campus buildings for such distinguished and well-deserving alumni as Drs. Speight and Monroe is our honor and pleasure. The dedication, service and impact they've had on this campus, their respective fields and our nation is beyond significant," said Ken Sigmon, vice chancellor for university advancement and president of The Foundation for North Carolina A&T State University Inc. "As a leading institution of higher education, A&T will make every effort to ensure our campus, including buildings, reflects ideals and individuals of the highest quality and standards."

Known as "Miss Aggie Pride," Speight has demonstrated strong commitment, dedication and cultivation of her alma mater and the field of education for over 45 years.

Beginning her career as a high school teacher, she expanded her reach professionally and civically through numerous promotions, appointments and high-level positions, including specialist in civil rights, state supervisor of guidance and assistant state superintendent for the Maryland State Department of Education.

Speight served as chairwoman of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Department of Education and coordinated its graduate program in guidance and counseling and won the University of Maryland Eastern



SPEIGHT



Shore Teacher of the Year Award. She has also taught at Johns Hopkins University, Loyola College and the University of Maryland, College Park. In 1991, Speight earned a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Ghana and Senegal, West Africa.

In addition to serving as a past chairwoman for the A&T BOT, Speight took the reins as director of Alumni Affairs in 1993, serving until her retirement in 1997. During her retirement, she has continued to serve the university and its alumni chairing executive-level committees and participation and involvement in other areas of significance.

The university celebrated her in 2006 with an honorary Doctor of Humanities at the fall commencement ceremonies where she also served as keynote speaker. The North Carolina A&T University Foundation Inc. later named the main lobby of the Alumni-Foundation Event Center in her honor.

Speight earned a Bachelor of Business Administration from A&T and an MBA and Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Monroe earned bachelor's degrees in mathematics, English and French from A&T before moving on to Texas A&M, where he completed M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in computer science, becoming the first African American to earn a doctoral degree in that discipline in the United States.

After receiving his degrees, Monroe was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force and was appointed an associate professor of computer science at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He held various positions at the Academy including dean of the faculty, chair of the department of electrical engineering, and chair of the Department of Computer Science. Monroe went on to become the first African American appointed a full professor at the Academy.

In 1987, Monroe joined the faculty at Fayetteville State University, serving in various academic and administrative positions. He returned to A&T in 1991 and was named Ronald E. McNair Endowed Professor and chair of the Department of Computer Science. In 2000, Monroe was named dean of engineering, serving until 2009. Under his leadership, the College of Engineering expanded its footprint, increased its funding and hired the most tenured African American engineering professors in the United States.

Monroe was awarded the U.S. Department of Defense Superior Service Medal for Superior Service and Teaching in 1987, and the U.S. Air Force Legion of Merit Service Medal for Outstanding Teaching and Research in 1974, 1978 and 1982.

FACULTY, STAFF & ADMINISTRATORS



BHOWMIK

ARNAB BHOWMIK, PH.D., assistant professor of soil science/soil microbiology, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), and an expert in sustainable agriculture and greenhouse gas emissions, was featured on “Environmental Justice, Equity and Sustainability: Earth Day Imperatives,” a special virtual Earth Day panel presented by North Carolina A&T.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator and N.C. A&T CAES alumnus **MICHAEL S. REGAN '98** provided opening remarks, and alumna **TRACY LLOYD MCCURTY, J.D. '99**, (featured on page 58) executive director of the Washington-based Black Belt Justice Center, moderated.

The panel focused on environmental justice as it connects to communities of color and to historically black colleges and universities. Other panelists included Walter Hill, Ph.D., dean of the Tuskegee University College of Agriculture, Environmental and Nutrition Sciences and a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hall of Fame member; Deidra Hodges, Ph.D., associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, University of Texas-El Paso, and an expert in solar energy and other renewables; Kay Brandon, MSW, chair, Solid Waste Management Commission, Greensboro, and co-founder of Citizens for Economic and Environmental Justice; and **MICHAEL CARTER JR. '00**, CAES alumnus, 11th generation farmer and part of the fifth generation to run his family's century farm, Carter Farms in the Piedmont Region of Virginia.



BISH

ADELLE BISH, PH.D., associate professor of human resource management in the Department of Management, was selected to participate in the 2021 class of the George W. Bush Institute's Stand-To Veteran Leadership Program. The program is a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at those serving the nation's veterans who are motivated to broaden their skills, knowledge and influence across the country.

An active researcher in the field of human resource management, Bish was the only person in the 51-member class chosen from North Carolina after a rigorous application and review process. Her current projects include investigating military veteran career transition challenges and appropriate human resource management responses in the United States and Australia and exploring how best to support academic and career pathways for student veterans attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Bish, who joined N.C. A&T in 2017, earned her B.A. in applied psychology from California State University, Long Beach, her MPsychOrg from the University of Queensland and her Ph.D. in management from Queensland University of Technology.



BRADBY

DONNA BRADBY, MFA, adjunct professor in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, received an Arts Legacy Award in theater as part of Greensboro's Juneteenth celebration. The Arts Legacy Ball, an event modeled after the Kennedy Center Honors, recognized awardees' dedication and their contributions that have paved the way for rising Black artists to thrive in the area.

Bradby was also featured in the Public Record: Greensboro's Creatives video interview series, which highlighted 20 artists, their backgrounds, purpose and passion for their crafts. She comes from a family of artists and has navigated many roles including educator, director, performer and choreographer, marketing director and consultant, and executive director of Touring Theatre of North Carolina, a nonprofit theatre "dedicated to celebrating the ongoing human search for dignity across lines of ethnicity, gender, economic status, religion and age."



COLLERAN

CAES faculty members **HEATHER COLLERAN, PH.D.**, and **ANDREA GENTRY-APPLE, DVM**, are leading two agriculture-related classes this fall for middle and high school enrolled in N.C. Virtual Public Schools.

For the first time in its history, the virtual school platform will offer Food and Nutrition 1 and Animal Science 1. With Virtual Public Schools personnel, the

professors and a leadership team from the CAES have developed online versions of the existing courses, providing middle and high school students access to such subject matter as proper food preparation and dietary guidelines, basic animal anatomy and safety around large animals.

Funding for the courses comes from a USDA capacity building grant obtained by CAES Associate Dean **ANTOINE ALSTON, PH.D.**, to provide the courses within the Career and Technical Education pathway of the N.C. Standard Course of Study.



ELEY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Cooperative Extension, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) have named **MICHELLE ELEY, PH.D.**, the winner of this year's Award for Excellence for 1890 land-grant institutions. USDA-NIFA and Cooperative Extension have sponsored the awards since 1991.

A community and economic development specialist with Cooperative Extension at N.C. A&T, Eley develops, implements and evaluates programs aimed at strengthening rural, underserved communities challenged by poverty, a lack of community services and limited access to information on how to build the capacity of their farms and communities. She has secured more than \$2 million in external funding to support her programs and expand the reach of Extension at N.C. A&T in underserved communities.

Her most recent funded project is Youth Stepping Forward. Funded through the National 4-H Council, the program teaches youth in seven underserved counties skills in decision making and problem solving so they can address the issues facing their communities. She also manages a program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation where she works with grassroots organizations on efforts to increase access to local foods and address inequities in the food system.

Eley is a member of a national team of Extension professionals who participate in the program Coming Together for Racial Understanding, which will receive the 2021 National Extension Diversity Award. The team includes Extension professionals from 22 land-grant universities and other organizations in 17 states, and it prepares and supports state teams so they can lead dialogues on racial issues in their states.

Eley is also part of the North Carolina Extension train-the-trainer team, which has trained 43 Extension staff and six community-based leaders in 23 counties as facilitators who lead local community dialogues on racial issues.

CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

FACULTY, STAFF & ADMINISTRATORS



FAVORS

National award-winning scholar and North Carolina A&T alumnus **JELANI M. FAVORS, PH.D.**, has been named the Henry E. Frye Distinguished Professor.

In this role, Favors will assist in establishing a Center of Excellence within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, teach courses in the Department of History and Political Science and produce scholarly publications and mentor junior faculty and students.

Favors is the author of the national award-winning and highly acclaimed book “Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism.” The book received the 2020 Stone Book Award and the 2020 Lillian Smith Book Award.

In 2021, Florida A&M University adopted “Shelter in a Time of Storm” as its common read book for the incoming class of 2025 and is currently implementing a curriculum to teach and discuss the book with students.

Favors has received major fellowships in support of his research that includes an appointment as a Humanities Writ Large Fellow at Duke University in 2013, and as the inaugural recipient of the Mellon HBCU Fellowship at the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke in 2009. In 2014, he was invited to co-teach the course, “Citizenship and Freedom: The Civil Rights Era,” alongside Pulitzer Prize winning historian Taylor Branch at the University of Baltimore.

The Winston-Salem, North Carolina, native graduated from A&T with a B.A. in history and earned his Ph.D. in history and M.A. in African American studies from The Ohio State University.



HART

ERIN HILL HART, chief of staff, and **FRANCES WARD-JOHNSON, PH.D.**, dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, were selected to participate in the University of North Carolina System’s 2021 Executive Leadership Institute.

Hart serves as principal liaison and senior adviser to Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr. and is a member of the chancellor’s cabinet, the university’s senior executive leadership team.

Ward-Johnson, who earned both her B.A. and M.A. from N.C. A&T, leads more than 160 faculty and staff members who serve more than 1,850 students across six departments.

Leading experts from across the UNC System deliver in-person and online instruction to enhance leadership skills for the cohort—the second in the program’s history. Participants follow a curriculum in three experiential education modules: executive leadership, leading teams and leading the enterprise.

Upon completion, participants receive a certificate and the benefits of a mentoring relationship. They also have the opportunity to pay it forward as mentors for future cohorts, ensuring promising talent continues to develop and advance in careers across the UNC System.



WARD-JOHNSON



HOLLOWAY

MELISSA J. HOLLOWAY, J.D., general counsel, was named vice chancellor and general counsel of the university's newly created Division of Legal Affairs, Risk and Compliance (DLARC).

DLARC supports N.C. A&T's academic mission and strategic plan by working collaboratively with institutional and external partners to ensure understanding of and adherence to the university's legal and regulatory responsibilities. Created in March, DLARC consists of the Office of Legal Affairs, Enterprise Risk Management and Compliance, the Office of Internal Audit, and the Title IX Office.

In addition to providing management oversight and supervision of DLARC, Holloway serves as the legal liaison with the University of North Carolina System, the North Carolina Attorney General and external legal counsel.

Holloway joined A&T in May 2019. She holds a B.A. in business administration from Syracuse University, an M.A. in political science from Binghamton University, and a J.D. with honors from the University of Wisconsin School of Law. She is a recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of College and University Attorneys, of which she has been a member since 2001.

ROY KAUSHIK, PH.D., associate professor in the Department of Computer Science who serves as the principal investigator on the interdisciplinary project, **BALAKRISHNA GOKARAJU, PH.D.**, associate professor, Department of Computational Data Science and Engineering, and **ALBERT ESTERLINE, PH.D.**, associate professor, Department of Computer Science, are addressing issues of national security regarding the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) solutions into critical domains – including autonomous vehicles, robots, defense systems, critical battlefield infrastructure monitoring, complex traffic flow management and more. The research addresses the risk of adversarial attacks in the complex network of data in society's increasing number of modern smart devices, automobiles and financial systems.

With a two-year, \$493,957 grant from the National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity (NCAE-C), sponsored by the Department of Defense's National Security Agency (NSA), the team will research effective ways to modernize AI systems and networks that are vulnerable to unexpected behaviors and adversarial attacks. The grant includes a year-three option for additional support upon successful completion of the year two initial goals.

CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

FACULTY, STAFF & ADMINISTRATORS



COMFORT OKPALA, PH.D., professor of Leadership Studies in the Department of Leadership Studies and Adult Education, was the 2020-21 recipient of the prestigious University of North Carolina System's Board of Governors Award for Excellence in Teaching for North Carolina A&T State University.

OKPALA

Okpala has expertly fostered collaboration, cooperation, interdependence and empowerment in her students. She has thoughtfully supervised numerous student dissertation research and served as the chair for over 50 dissertations and published 16 refereed journal articles as well as other research publications.

While honored to receive the award, she notes her mentorship and instruction of students to be among her greatest accomplishments.

"Being selected as North Carolina A&T State University's recipient of the 2021 Board of Governors Award for

Excellence in Teaching is one of the most humbling and rewarding experiences in my life. It reaffirms my passion and purpose for teaching to impact the learning growth and development of others," said Okpala. "All my students have the capacity to contribute to the learning environment in a unique and special way. I truly believe teaching and learning for all is the soul of education."

Beyond formal time spent with her current students and mentees, Okpala consistently supports them as a life coach well past their graduation.

Okpala says teaching is about transforming the learning environment to accommodate individual learning differences. She is inspired by the 3R model of rigor, relevance, and relationship. Nevertheless, having the ability to evolve is paramount to her success. She says, she consistently evaluates and refines her teaching strategies to improve her students' learning outcomes.

A dedicated and innovative leader, Okpala serves as the co-education director for a \$9 million National Science Foundation STEM Leadership grant, which resulted in a \$100,000 grant for doctoral students in Leadership Studies in 2018 and 2019.



ELIMELDA MOIGE ONGERI, PH.D., professor and interim dean, John R. and Kathy R. Hairston College of Health and Human Sciences, received a \$1.74 million research grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study diabetic kidney disease.

ONGERI

The award is made under the Maximizing Investigator Research Award (MIRA) mechanism, intended for established NIH-supported investigators. The goal of MIRA is to increase the efficiency and efficacy of National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) funding by enabling investigators to take on ambitious scientific projects and approach problems more creatively.

Unlike most NIH grants, the MIRA gives flexibility for investigators to follow important new research directions within the NIGMS mission as opportunities arise, rather than being bound to specific aims proposed in advance of the award. This ultimately reduces the time spent by researchers writing and reviewing grant applications, allowing them to spend more time conducting research and mentoring trainees in a more stable research environment.

Ongeri is also a co-director of the NIH-funded North Carolina Regional Diabetes Research Center (NCDRC), a consortium made up of North Carolina A&T, Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Wake Forest School of Medicine.



ISIKHUEMHEN

The truffle research of **OMOANGHE S. “DR. OMON” ISIKHUEMHEN, PH.D.**, a College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences professor in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Design, was featured in Smithsonian Magazine.

Published this summer, the article—“Has the American-grown truffle finally broken through?”—describes how truffle production could become big business in the United States.

Isikhuemhen has developed a method to propagate truffles, which grow on the roots of trees. Isikhuemhen and his partners, Mycorrhiza Biotech and Burwell Farms, have had tremendous success on a 2-acre plot with an estimated 200 pounds of truffles at Burwell Farms in Burlington, North Carolina.

The other innovators in the partnership are Nancy Rosborough, CEO of Mycorrhiza Biotech, and Richard Franks, chief scientific officer at Burwell Farms. Together, they are growing two varieties of truffles—Tuber borchii and bianchetto, which sell for about \$500 per pound. The article credits the trio with work that could launch an American truffle production boom.

Isikhuemhen developed his own growth media, which is used to inoculate pine seedlings with truffle spores before they are planted in an orchard. He said his “abnormal” secret mix grows truffles about five times faster than other media.

Burwell Farms is doubling down on its original bet. It has now planted five 2-acre orchards and hopes to harvest more than 1,000 pounds of truffles annually in a few years.

Rosborough, meanwhile, is excited about the potential benefits that truffle production could provide for small farmers. The goal, she said in the article, has always been to get this technology into the hands of small farmers.

Rosborough said their work will be considered a success if small farmers begin growing truffles and using the money to save their land.

The research was supported by a grant from USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

PAUL PETTIE, graphic design technology instructor in the College of Science and Technology, was hired as a consulting photographer for Oprah Winfrey’s series “Lift Every Voice,” published with Hearst Connecticut Media.

Named for the song written by brothers James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson, and widely known as the Black national anthem, “Lift Every Voice” connects young Black journalists with Black elders to celebrate and learn from their life experiences and deepen connections with the past to position us all for a better future. Pettie photographed several profiles of prominent Black leaders featured in the Connecticut Post.

Pettie is an architect and photographer, teaches both for the department and has led photography-focused study abroad trips—twice to Japan and once to the Mediterranean for the department.

FACULTY, STAFF & ADMINISTRATORS



SHIPPS

BELINDA SHIPPS, PH.D., associate professor and associate director of the Center of Excellence in Cybersecurity Research, Outreach and Education (CREO) was featured as an expert on PBS NC's Black Issues forum to discuss the Colonial Pipeline cyberattack. Shipps took the opportunity to share lessons learned and encouraged smaller and medium-sized businesses to prioritize security upfront to avoid and mitigate potential threats from hackers.

CREO also launched its Cybersecurity Forensics Hub for Women, creating a partnership with Guilford County Schools, North Carolina Central University and industry leaders to ensure women and young girls can have a safe space if they suspect stalkerware, malicious software that can be used to track movements and access private information, has been illegally downloaded onto their devices. Researchers and students will detect and remove the software at no cost to the user in exchange for anonymous data collection.

A \$320,565 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) will support collaborative research on speech science that could improve the automatic speech recognition systems that are becoming ubiquitous in technology, healthcare and education.

JOSEPH D. STEPHENS, PH.D., a professor in the Department of Psychology, John R. and Kathy R. Hairston College of Health and Human Sciences, is the principal investigator for "Enhancing Speech Science Training through Collaboration: Investigating Perception of a Variable Speech Signal," which has received funding through the NSF Build and Broaden Program that supports research, training opportunities and greater research infrastructure at minority-serving institutions.

North Carolina A&T's project team also includes **CASSANDRA GERMAIN, PH.D.**, assistant professor of psychology, **DEANA MCQUITTY, PH.D.**, associate professor of speech communication, and **JOY KENNEDY, PH.D.**, assistant professor of speech communication.

They will collaborate with a research team at Pennsylvania State University, led by Navin Viswanathan, Ph.D., associate professor in the Communication Sciences and Disorders Department.

During the project's three-year grant period, researchers from A&T and Penn State will help to make speech science and technology more effective and more equitable.

A critical yet unsolved question in speech science is how human listeners achieve robust speech perception despite a highly variable speech signal.

Additionally, the project will significantly strengthen research capacity in speech science at N.C. A&T. It will provide research training for students in speech science, foster collaborations between researchers at A&T and Penn State and enhance opportunities for faculty development.

Stephens's research investigates how the human mind combines information from more than one source. This type of information processing is crucial for cognitive functions like memory, perception, and language. His work has appeared in journals such as "Memory, Frontiers in Human Neuroscience" and "Psychology and Aging," among others. His research is also funded by the National Institutes of Health through a collaboration with Elon University.

MISTY THOMAS, PH.D., assistant professor in the College of Science and Technology, was awarded the Mentor Award in biology by the Council on Undergraduate Research.

Thomas has mentored more than 20 student researchers. Her course-based undergraduate research experiences and mentoring

have yielded peer-reviewed scientific articles coauthored by undergraduates, numerous conference presentations, and students who have gone on to graduate and professional schools. Her mentoring approach involves individual development plans that prioritize the goals, needs and expectations of her diverse mentees.

Thomas earned her undergraduate degree from the Collège Universitaire de St. Boniface in Manitoba, Canada, and her Ph.D. in microbiology at the University of Manitoba. She conducted her postdoctoral work at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences of the National Institutes of Health.

STEPHANIE TEIXEIRA-POIT, PH.D., assistant sociology professor in the Department of Social Work and Sociology, has received the 2021 Hans O. Mauksch Award for Distinguished Contributions to Undergraduate Sociology.

Teixeira-Poit was selected for the competitive award from the American Sociological Association (ASA) Section on Teaching and Learning, which required the completion of an extensive application packet as well as recommendations from students.

Teixeira-Poit and colleagues collaborate on several grant-funded research projects to improve institutional capacity for undergraduate and graduate education at North Carolina A&T. They focus on improving the infrastructure for student participation in data analysis training activities within the sociology program; establishing a research identity development program for students; developing a citizen science program focusing on university and community partnerships; and developing an app to connect students with resources to meet psychosocial needs they are experiencing during COVID-19.

Teixeira-Poit also served as one of the university's Digital Learning Faculty Fellows charged with supporting instructors transitioning to remote learning in the pandemic.

One of her recent projects evaluated quality improvement interventions at federally qualified health centers that seek to improve HPV vaccination series completion to prevent six types of cancer. Other projects focus on evaluating the efficacy of patient education interventions for cancer immunotherapy treatments that aimed to better coordinate care to a cancer clinic and reduce inappropriate emergency department utilization; evaluating a health system's efforts to screen for social determinants of health and coordinate care to community-based organizations that address these needs; and evaluating unintended consequences of a neonatal intensive care unit redesign from open-bay to single family rooms on neonatal health outcomes and quality of care.

In the past three years, Teixeira-Poit has mentored 16 students in research projects in addition to theses and dissertations. These research mentorships resulted in students serving as co-PIs on two funded research grants, winning a first-place poster award in the university's Undergraduate Research Symposium, winning the university's Outstanding Junior Graduate Research Assistant Award, serving as co-authors on publications and presentations, and getting accepted for graduate school, career positions, and internship placements.

Teixeira-Poit, who joined A&T in July 2018, earned her B.A. in sociology and communication from Stonehill College and her M.S. and Ph.D., both in sociology, from North Carolina State University.

STUDENTS

North Carolina A&T recently announced the inaugural cohort of February One Scholars, which is comprised of 15 academically talented first-year undergraduates who continue the legacy of leadership and service that characterized the A&T Four. They boast an average GPA of 4.22.

Eligibility requirements include a minimum weighted 3.75 cumulative GPA and demonstrated exceptional characteristics of leadership and service. Students also must hold a minimum scholastic score of 1270 on the SAT or 27 on the ACT, though the tests were optional for the fall 2021 applicants.

The scholarship is a fully funded four-year award that covers the costs of tuition, related fees, housing, meals and participation in University Honors Program activities and enrichment annually for five freshman each from the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the College of Education and the John R. and Kathy R. Hairston College of Health and Human Sciences. The three colleges partnered to establish the program using a portion of philanthropist MacKenzie Scott's historic \$45 million contribution to the university.

This year's scholars are **ZOE BROOKS ALI** of Chesapeake, Virginia, studying elementary education with a minor in sociology; **LEVI BURKS**, Westerville, Ohio, liberal studies (pre-law concentration), English minor; **KALIA COLEMAN**, Dumfries, Virginia, nursing; **LAILA GARLAND**, East Orange, New Jersey, elementary education; **KAYLEE HARPER**, Raleigh, North Carolina, psychology; **ADAM HENRY**, Atlanta, Georgia, psychology, speech minor; **CAMILLE JONES**, Washington, D.C., criminal justice; **AYANA LEE**, Laurinburg, North Carolina, nursing; **KYLA MORRISON**, Charlotte, North Carolina, elementary education, psychology minor; **AMIRA POINDEXTER**, Charlotte, criminal justice, psychology minor; **LAUREN RAVEN**, Sugar Land, Texas, elementary education, child development and family studies minor; **JAYLA RICHARDSON**, Rocky Mount, North Carolina, criminal justice, psychology minor; **JAYDEN SEAY**, Woodbridge, Virginia, elementary education, African American/African history minor; **DESTINY SELLERS**, Elloree South Carolina, liberal studies (pre-law), criminal justice minor; and **AMEILEON WILLIAMS**, Supply, North Carolina, nursing.

LAUREN ARNAO, JAQUAN BATTLE, OYON MARTIN and **KYRA PIERCE**—four sophomores pursuing degrees in the food, agricultural, natural resources and human sciences—are receiving funding, mentoring and skill-building opportunities thanks to a grant from the Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program, a national, competitive grant program offered through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

The program gives students who are underrepresented in the food, agricultural, natural resources and human sciences a mix of mentoring, formal and informal programs, advisement and professional experiences, as well as partial funding, for all four of their undergraduate years.

In addition to working with their mentor on their coursework and professional development involvement, the students will gain experience in such subjects as entrepreneurship training and understanding supply chains, and such "soft skills" as time management, Robert's Rules of Order and leadership development provided by the program's MSP Advisory Board members.

An experiential learning trip to the University of the West Indies (St. Augustine) in Port of Spain, Trinidad, is also planned for 2023 to expose the scholars to international agriculture.



ZARIAH CAMERON, a graphic design technology (GDT) student and founder of The Advocate, Educate, Innovate (AEI) Design Program, hosted Design Thinking, Inclusive Design and Black Design panel discussions and offered design workshops and portfolio reviews.

Cameron founded the initiative in 2020. It provides resources and virtual events to black design college students across the nation. She is assisted by her team, computer engineering sophomore **TOLANI SMITH** and recent GDT alumni **SIERRA CARELOCK** and **MARCUS REED**.

Cameron created AEI to bridge the gap between academia and industry, while providing design job opportunities for students to advance in their careers. She and her team have partnered with a several companies that align with the efforts of developing an equitable space for black designers including Facebook, Civilla, Disney, UnderArmour and LinkedIn.

Still in its infancy, AEI Design managed to make an impact in the lives of students, with two landing design internships with Facebook and Spotify this summer. AEI Design is planning its first community-style Design Bootcamp this fall. Those interested in participating in this and other events may reach Cameron at zncameron@aggies.ncat.edu or aeidesign20@gmail.com.

CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

STUDENTS

BARTLEY



PASTRIES, PHYSICS AND POLICY—OH MY!

SARAH BARTLEY comes from a STEM family with an HBCU legacy, and eventually set aside her hopes to be a pastry chef to pursue physics. The Savannah, Georgia, native earned a B.Sc. in physics from Agnes Scott College and an M.Sc. in physics from the University of Central Florida. While matriculating through the programs, she spearheaded several diversity in STEM panels and other programming, with a special focus on women of color in STEM.

After attending an all-women's college and predominantly white institution, Bartley wanted to shift her research focus and try her hand at the HBCU experience too. She is now pursuing a Ph.D. at the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering (JSNN), a collaboration between North Carolina A&T and UNC Greensboro.

Bartley is working closely with JSNN assistant professor and synthetic biology expert Kristen Dellinger, Ph.D., and College of Engineering assistant professor Kristen Rhinehardt, Ph.D., on a COVID-19 project that “seeks to create a computational and experimental project for the detection and screening of COVID-19 with aptamers.”

“I’ve received a lot of support on the personal and professional side while at JSNN,” Bartley said. “It’s great to be celebrated for the work too.”

In addition to this research and securing a trainee opportunity with IBIEM, JSNN recognized Bartley with an award for outstanding research contributions during the spring semester graduation celebration. She has also been selected as an A&T Chancellor’s Distinguished Fellow for the 2021-22 academic year.

When she’s not in the lab or passing her qualifying exams, Bartley participates in a number of professional growth opportunities. She was shocked to learn that HBCUs are severely underfunded while participating in the Science Outside of the Lab Nanotechnology and Policy workshop. This opportunity further piqued her interest in pursuing a career in federal policy to address this and other challenges, including sexual assault and harassment in STEM.

Bartley will also launch a podcast that explores discussions around how race shapes science policy.

Juniors **JONEZIE COBB** and **THERESA DAVIS-NATHANIEL** are making history of their own as recruits for the 2021-22 HistoryMakers Student Brand Ambassador Program. The pair joined 22 peers from 17 colleges and universities as official representatives of The HistoryMakers Digital Archives—the nation’s largest African American video oral history collection.

The digital collection can be accessed at any time and hosts more than 11,000 hours of first-person testimonies recorded in 413 cities across the country and internationally. The interviews cover a number of disciplines and feature African American leaders and icons, from renowned poet Nikki Giovanni to Congresswoman Maxine Waters.

Along with immersing themselves in the archives, conducting research and creating content, ambassadors are responsible for increasing awareness and use of the archives on their respective campuses. They will organize a campus-wide Black History Month Digital Archive Contest in 2022.

The HistoryMakers Digital Archives is available at 148 colleges and universities, public libraries and K-12 schools. A&T is one of three North Carolina-based subscribing institutions, along with Duke University and Johnson C. Smith University.

STUDENTS

MYLES GREER, a civil engineering junior, was selected to participate in Virginia Tech's 2021 Nanotechnology Entrepreneurship Challenge-Multicultural and Underserved Nanoscience Initiative (NTEC-MUNI). His project sought to address the global challenge of turning a waste into a sustainable solution, specifically focusing on repurposing coal fly ash (CFA). CFA is a byproduct produced from coal power generation at approximately 750 million tonnes worldwide annually and the most popular disposal method is coal combustion landfills.

Greer's innovation uses nanoscale CFA to improve the cleaning and treatment of wastewater and remove contaminants, which could lower costs for companies. Although he found CFA treatment to be a viable solution, he discovered a separate challenge stemming from this research, as it produces a different waste that will need to be treated.

Greer was able to send samples to Virginia Tech for surface area analysis and scanning electron microscopy testing. He was mentored by Renzun Zhao and Lifeng Zhang, who also advised JSNN Ph.D. student Termitope Soneye for a separate NTEC-MUNI project this year.

The challenge is supported by Virginia Tech's NSF-funded National Center for Earth and Environmental Nanotechnology.

EAST DOCKERY, a multimedia journalism senior, fulfilled a lifelong dream of attending the Olympic Games after landing one of 16 traveling internships for NBCUniversal's Tokyo Summer Olympics program. Though Dockery was a successful competitive swimmer for seven years and initially envisioned competing on the international stage, she was just as thrilled to combine her passion for sports journalism and entertainment reporting in this role instead.

The Olympic Games were postponed in 2020 because of concerns surrounding the global coronavirus pandemic. Although spectators were not allowed at the games, NBCUniversal broadcasted approximately 1,300 hours of programming this summer for the world to see.

Dockery spent several weeks in Tokyo as a runner for the operations team, providing support to various areas and departments including production, digital and engineering functional areas.

As a 2019 Rhoden Fellow for ESPN's The Undeclared, the 2020 Ed Bradley Scholar for The Radio Television and Digital News Foundation and the creator and host of the campus-based YouTube show East & Market, Dockery has already made quite a splash.

Four students in the Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics earned a third-place finish in the inaugural Goldman Sachs "Market Madness: HBCU Possibilities" Program case study competition. **LAIA GARLAND** (management), **ELLINGTON KING** (financing), **QUINCY SANDAIRE** (economics) and **LILLIAN SIMONE TAPP** (economics) secured a \$750,000 grant for N.C. A&T and each received a \$10,000 scholarship for their efforts.

A&T joined Florida A&M University, Hampton University, Howard University, Morehouse College, Morgan State University, Prairie View A&M University and Spelman College as inaugural cohort members of Goldman Sachs' five-year, \$25 million program.

For four months, 125 first- and second-year students from the eight HBCUs received hands-on training and learned fundamental finance skills in a professional setting, complementing their coursework and extracurricular activities. More than 600 students applied to participate in the program.

The program concluded with the "Market Madness" case study competition in which students made virtual presentations to senior leaders at Goldman Sachs and competed for prize donations to their institutions.

Juniors **MALKAM HAWKINS** (captain) and **SAMARA DOBBINS**, along with sophomores **FRANCES KENDRICK** (co-captain) and **MITCHELL WILSON** made up the four-member team that bested Florida A&M in the 32nd annual Honda Campus All-Star Challenge (HCASC) to bring home the national championship title and a \$75,000 institutional grant for the first time.

HCASC is an academic bowl for historically black colleges and universities and is one of Honda's "largest and longest running philanthropic initiatives in the United States." This year's theme was "HBCU Proud, Excellence Defined."

The championship win brings the total institutional grant amount to \$205,000 since the Aggies first competed in 1990 and further highlights the university's commitment to cultivating student academic success. More than 300 students representing 64 HBCUs across the country competed virtually this season.



JONES

AZIARAH JONES received the 2021 University Award for Academic Excellence. A first-generation college student who maintains a 4.0 GPA in the Willie A. Deese College of Business of Economics, Jones plans to graduate in May 2022 with a B.S. in economics.

A member of the University Honors Program, Jones studied abroad in Barcelona, Spain, and Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2019. That same year, she joined 29 other students at a Diversity and Leadership Summit

through Synchrony Bank and 16 other students chosen for the Introduction to Diversity in Doctoral Education & Scholarship research conference at Stanford University. She earned BB&T Emerging Leaders Certification and was inducted into Alpha Lambda Delta.

Jones also was selected as a Management Leadership for Tomorrow (MLT) Career Prep Program Fellow in February 2020. As an MLT recruit, she was featured in a "CBS This Morning" segment this past December.

Since April 2020, Jones has served as president of the Aggie Economics Association, director of student relations for the Honors Student Advisory Board, and intern with Planned Parenthood Generation Action.

The N.C. A&T team comprised of **JAHWONNA JONES, QUINCY SANDAIRE** and **RANDOLPH WASHINGTON JR.** won second place and \$1,500 while competing in the second annual Philip Payton Society Real Estate Case Competition this past spring at Cornell University.

Each team was given a case study to examine and submit a final analysis. The top five presentations were selected for a final round run-off, where teams delivered a +synopsis of their recommendations and answered questions virtually in front of a panel of distinguished industry judges and prominent Cornell alumni.

The competition was established to familiarize students from HBCUs with the real estate industry, where minorities are historically underrepresented. The competition focuses on communication and critical- thinking skills, and workshops provided at the competition enable students to learn more about properties, marketing, sales and leasing.

STUDENTS

TAKING THE SHOT

Prince George's County, Maryland, native **ALEXIS DAVIS** stumbled into playing basketball in the fifth grade. To avoid aftercare, she and her friends signed up for and made the team—despite never playing basketball before. Davis grew to like the sport and eventually found herself competing on AAU teams, but her interest faded in high school since she had no desire to become a professional athlete.

“Once I stopped dribbling the ball in 2014, I knew my way to stick around the sport was to become a journalist,” Davis said. “Being involved in the sports journalism world has always been my top priority, especially basketball.”

Embracing the idea that a WNBA career was out of bounds with what she wanted for her future, Davis initially attended Florida A&M University as a public relations major. She had always enjoyed writing and scored her first school newspaper exclusive by convincing her neighbor MJ, named after Michael Jordan, to sit down for an interview. Davis then transferred to North Carolina A&T her sophomore year to be closer to home and family, and shared with Professor Gail Wiggins her desire to become an NBA reporter when she was registering for classes.

“Every time I’m asked a big question like what my future plans are, it seems



DAVIS

really intense,” Davis said. “Ms. Wiggins told me with those aspirations I needed to be on the multimedia track instead, and essentially changed my major for me. She has an incredible career and I trusted her.”

Davis hasn’t looked back. She has served as a staff writer for the A&T Register, an editorial intern for Her Campus, and a copy editor for Ayantee. In keeping with her desire to build community, Davis has also served as Miss Metro Aggies, creating space for DMV area students to connect, serve and grow professionally.

After two unsuccessful attempts, Davis scored ESPN’s The Undeclared Rhoden Fellowship, joining the fifth class with five peers from other

HBCUs. She is A&T’s third fellow and will cover general and sport-related news for the campus.

“If it had not been for my peers and people like professors David Squires and Wiggins, I would not be where I am today,” Davis said. “Professor Squires’ weekly challenges in his courses pushed me to become better and since he’s a writer for The Undeclared, he introduced me to the program and encouraged me to keep applying.”

To Davis, the famous quote, “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take” rings true. Through self-awareness, perseverance and dedication, and with the right people on her team, she’s prepared to leave feeling undefeated when the buzzer sounds.



MCADOO



RICHARDS

The White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities selected Cheatham-White Scholars and University Honors Program members **MILOSH MCADOO** and **RACHEL RICHARDS** as 2021 HBCU Competitiveness Scholars. They are among 86 students from 54 HBCUs nationwide to receive the initiative's highest honor based on academic achievements, campus leadership, civic engagement and entrepreneurial spirit.

McAdoo, a junior from Hillsborough, North Carolina, is pursuing a B.S. in animal science (animal industry). He completed a summer internship with the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as a Small and Minority Farms intern and is a Land O' Lakes Global Food Challenge emerging leader and intern. He is also one of the four A&T students chosen to participate in the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation-supported North Carolina Policy Innovation Leaders of Tomorrow 2021 (PILOT21) initiative.

Richards, a senior from Cornelius, North Carolina, is pursuing a B.S. in biology. She is a 2021 Goldwater Scholar and is a full-time Learning Assistant Program participant at A&T. Richards has held internships as a student researcher at Tufts University School of Medicine. During the summer of 2020, she participated virtually as an undergraduate student researcher at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and continued her own research at A&T, which she has taken part in since fall 2018 with Liesl Jeffers-Francis, Ph.D.

As 2021 HBCU Scholars, McAdoo and Richards will be invited to monthly virtual events hosted by the initiative and its various partners representing a wide range of disciplines. They will have the opportunity to network with fellow scholars, federal agencies and private partners to showcase individual and collective talent across the HBCU community. They also will be invited to attend 2021 Annual National HBCU Week Conference workshops designed to help them learn and adopt promising practices in areas such as leadership, professional development, HBCU excellence and workforce development.

STUDENTS



WILLIAM J. TEASLEY

a junior industrial and systems engineering major from Greensboro, North Carolina, was selected as a 2021 Marian Drane Graham Scholar through the University of North Carolina System.

A Dowdy Scholar and University Honors Program

TEASLEY

(UHP) Ambassador and “Mr. Honors,” Teasley is one of six students chosen for the honor this year.

Teasley was placed at the NC Pandemic Recovery Office through the Marian Drane Graham Scholars Program. The eight-week immersive and experiential summer program provides students with an opportunity to develop leadership skills and gain a better understanding of key issues facing public higher education.

Scholars worked with UNC System leaders, toured individual campuses and visited with key state policy leaders and elected officials in North Carolina and Washington, D.C., in July. They also worked with UNC System staff to develop and present a capstone project outlining the role of higher education in North Carolina.

An Eagle Scout, Teasley worked during the summer of 2019 with professors in multiple disciplines to research the effects of economic burdens on students in higher education and their universities’ response by investigating the prevalence of on-campus food pantries on college campuses. The following summer, he received an internship with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC to perform data logistical analysis and continues in this role today.

Agricultural and environmental systems graduate student **JANEVA WILLIAMS** was selected as a June 2021 Farm Foundation “cultivator,” a competitive designation given to students by the Farm Foundation, a non-partisan agriculture advocacy group. She was one of six agriculture students nationwide to earn the honor.

Williams’ designation as a “cultivator” allows her to attend the Farm Foundation Round Table, an invitation-only group of thought leaders and policy makers from a broad cross-section of the food and agriculture sector. This year’s theme is “Envisioning the Future of Climate-Smart Agriculture.”

In addition to being able to interact with food and agriculture leaders, Williams will present a poster describing a key aspect of her studies.

This cohort includes cultivators, who have focus areas of critical importance to the future of food and agriculture, including environmental and trade policy, soil and animal health, and robotics.

The group’s Round Tables are held twice a year, focusing on issues of importance to agribusiness, the food system and rural communities. The Cultivator Program is funded by Round Table Fellows and BNSF Railway Company.



THE POWER OF VOICE

Senior business management and entrepreneurship student Victor Solomon (pictured above) is multifaceted. Almost immediately, he is known for his exceptional singing ability and being a finalist on the popular NBC show, “The Voice.” He also has been a campus leader, serving as Mister A&T (2020-21), and he currently holds the title of Mister HBCU. We had the opportunity to speak directly with Victor for a brief question and answer session.

Q: Tell us, what made you attend North Carolina A&T? I've always wanted to attend an HBCU, and A&T was the number one public HBCU, especially for black engineers. I initially wanted to be a civil engineer, but later changed my major.

Q: We want to formally congratulate you on your stellar performance on “The Voice.” Can you share how that process and opportunity evolved? I initially auditioned for “The Voice” but didn't make it. But this year they reached out to me on Instagram and basically encouraged me to audition again. At first, I thought it was a scam, but after I did my research, I realized it was real. I spent my summer doing interviews and the rest is history.

Q: What did you learned from “The Voice” experience? As an artist, I realized I don't have to be in one box. I've sung Gospel most of my life and being on that show showed me how capable I am of stepping outside of my comfort zone and still execute different genres of music. I also learned a lot about the entertainment industry and its operation.

Q: What made you want to be Mister A&T? When I realized what the position does, as far as community service for the entire university and being the official representative, I wanted to do it. My goal whenever I go somewhere or do something is to leave an impact and that was one of the main ways that I felt I could leave my mark on the university.

Q: We know you are passionate about singing. Where else do your passions lie? Outside of singing, I really want to start my own program where I can give in various ways to others. Additionally, I want to establish a platform to experience the music industry and the things that come along with it. But outside of music, I'm still interested in working in the corporate world.

Q: What's up next for you? What are your plans for the future? Right now, I'm working on a concert to be held in the city of Greensboro. I can't wait for that. Later this year, I'm also working on a project for the holidays and I'm excited to release that.

Q: And you already have a single out, correct? Yes! It can be found on all music streaming platforms.

GOLF



TEED UP

Golfer Jayla Rogers has something to prove.

By Brian M. Holloway '97

“There is a Zoom meeting at 3 o’clock.”

Those were the words uttered by North Carolina A&T’s men’s and women’s golf coach **RICHARD WATKINS** to sophomore women’s golfer **JAYLA ROGERS** last February.

In the world of COVID-19, Zoom meetings are common. Rogers was on her way to practice, so a preemptive Zoom meeting was only a little odd. Nevertheless, Rogers reset her schedule to accommodate the meeting.

February is the time of year the best basketball players in the world gather

in an American city for the annual National Basketball Association (NBA) All-Star Game.

As it turned out, the meeting had nothing to do with N.C. A&T’s women’s golf. Instead, it included officials from the NBA and Mountain Dew.

“We have news for you,” said one official, followed by, “We want to award you a \$50,000 scholarship.”

Rogers and Prairie View A&M track and field athlete Zachary Moseley received the scholarships leading up to the NBA All-Star Game in Charlotte.

The scholarships enacted another part of the NBA and Mountain Dew's initiative to support historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs). Unfortunately, the pandemic did not allow the two student-athletes to attend the game at Bojangles' Arena in person, so they received two virtual tickets.

Rogers has several plans for her scholarship. She plans to attend graduate school after her time at A&T. She likes sports medicine and fitness management. She also has an affinity for communications. She sees room in her life for both.

"I think it would be awesome to do it all," said Rogers. "I want to work for the Golf Channel. I love talking about golf. I also want to teach our youth."

Rogers wants to help youth navigate their journey toward college and have an easier time than she did.

Rogers' grandfather introduced her to the sport. One day as he babysat his young granddaughter, he decided to put a driver in her hand. Thus started the love she has for golf.

The First Tee organization then became a big part of Rogers' life. First Tee is an international youth development organization introducing golf and its inherent values to youth and teens. Through afterschool and in-school programs, they help shape the lives of young people from all walks of life by reinforcing values like integrity, respect, and perseverance through the game of golf.

Rogers started out playing golf for First Tee of Brunswick County, which later changed its name to First Tee of the Coastal Carolinas. The program offered Rogers the opportunity to play with golfing legend Davis Love III at Pebble Beach in California. First Tee also provided her the opportunity to caddy for 2012 U.S. Open champion Web Simpson at the Wells Fargo Championship.

Golf Channel televised both events. But as an African American woman playing a primarily white sport, playing golf has not always been an easy task for Rogers.

"Walking down the fairway, you notice the sport is predominately white," said Rogers. "I often got that 'what are you doing here?' look. When I get that look, ... (I must believe I) deserve to be there as much as anyone else. I've worked just as hard to get there. I want to prove I was made for this sport as well."

The perseverance Rogers showed throughout her youth and teenage years eventually led to her capturing the attention of college golf coaches, including Watkins. He reached out to Rogers her sophomore year in high school.

"As soon as it was okay for me to start talking to her, we pursued her," said Watkins. "She has a great family. I liked her personality. I liked her work ethic. She had great high school grades. I also liked her high school golf scores."

Rogers said she chose A&T because of Watkins and because A&T seemed like family to her.

"He has so much energy," said Rogers. "Whenever I'm playing poorly, I call him over and he snaps me back to reality. He tells me I 'was born to do this. This is what you do. You were made for golf.' He gives me a little pep talk and I'm good."

Rogers arrived in AggieLand in 2019. That year she played her first collegiate tournament on Sept. 23, at Phoenix Invitational hosted by Elon University. Her best showing of the season was a fourth-place finish at the Savannah State University Tiger Fall Invitational, where she shot a 13-over 157. Unfortunately, her freshman season ended after a March 12-13 tournament hosted by Bethune-Cookman because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She also had to play a shortened sophomore season. But as the nation breaks free from COVID restrictions, Rogers wants to continue to embrace the game she has always loved fully.

"I want to incorporate the life skills and life lessons that First Tee taught me over the years," said Rogers. "I also want to tell my story about how golf wasn't easy for me growing up as an African American. I didn't let that deter me from my goals. I got a Division I scholarship at A&T. I want to be able to take that and help others obtain their goals."

There is a specific question Watkins asks all of his recruits: Do you love golf? He helps decipher who is serious about the game. Sometimes he gets answers of "um," "well um" or some pontification.

Rogers said yes—immediately.

"Jayla loves playing golf," said Watkins. "She is a golfer. Jayla, at 30, will be playing golf. At 50, she will be playing golf. You've got to love this stuff. You must practice when we practice. You must practice when we don't practice. She is the kind of person who calls me on the days off and asks if we can play."

When Watkins heard about her scholarship, he said he was extremely excited. However, he warns there could be more honors to come from his women's golf team.

"Our women's golf team just has some outstanding members," said Watkins. "Our women's golf team is loaded with outstanding players."



BASEBALL

AGGIE LEGEND AND NEGRO LEAGUE STAR PASSES

By Brian M. Holloway '97

The name “Robinson” has a lot of stardom attached to it in the world of baseball. Jackie is the Hall of Fame player that might come to mind, but there is another Robinson who is much more prominent on North Carolina A&T’s campus.

JAMES “JIM” ROBINSON, a former Aggie baseball player who starred in the Negro League after his A&T days, passed away in October. He was 91 years old.

Robinson was a legend in East Greensboro. He played for the Aggies in the late 1940s and early 1950s, aiding the powerhouse team to three consecutive CIAA

championships from his sophomore to his senior (1950–52) year after coming in second his freshman year in 1949. He was inducted into North Carolina A&T’s Sports Hall of Fame in 1987.

During his senior year, Robinson was being scouted by the manager of the Philadelphia Stars, Oscar Charleston, who after one of A&T’s games, approached Robinson about wanting him to play. Robinson agreed, and then two weeks later, broke his wrist after being hit by a pitch. However, he still joined the Stars after recovering from the injury and played several years in the league.

Robinson was a legend in East Greensboro. He played for the Aggies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He was inducted into North Carolina A&T’s Sports Hall of Fame in 1987.

During his time with the Indianapolis Clowns, the team Robinson played for after the Stars dropped out of the league, the St. Louis Cardinals of Major League Baseball (MLB) signed Robinson to a minor league contract, but Uncle Sam pulled him out the following spring during the Korean War. When he returned to spring training in 1956, he had a great camp, but there just wasn’t enough room on the team, so he went to try out for the Kansas City Monarchs, where he spent the rest of his time in the Negro League as a player (1956–58).

Robinson was still heavily involved in the league after his playing days. MLB would fly him out to their All-Star Game for years and he would set up at the Negro League Museum site and talk to people about the league. He served as an ambassador for the league’s history all of his life.

In March of 2020, Toyota ran an ad campaign to honor 100 years of Negro League baseball and unveiled their all-new 2020 Highlander during an event at the Apollo Theater. Robinson appears in one of the commercials, where he joins his family for a trip to the Negro Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

Baseball remembers Jackie, but they, along with North Carolina A&T, will never forget James.



JM [SIC] ROBINSON (FIFTH FROM RIGHT) IS SEEN WITH THE KANSAS CITY MONARCHS IN AN UNDATED PHOTO. (NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL MUSEUM)

VOLLEYBALL RECEIVES POSTSEASON BIG SOUTH HONORS



BREWER



SAWTELLE



HOWELL



HALL



RICHARDS



In their first season in the Big South Conference, North Carolina A&T volleyball received six postseason conference awards on Nov. 17.

After winning back-to-back Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Player of the Year honors, **EDIE BREWER** proved her volleyball prowess by earning First-Team honors from the Big South.

NAIYA SAWTELLE put the finishing touches on an outstanding freshman regular-season with two honors: securing Big South accolades as a Second-Team All-Conference performer as well as a spot on the All-Freshman Team.

HANNAH HOWELL is also on the All-Freshman Team, and **SHAYLYNN HALL** came away with Honorable Mention recognition. On the academic side, **MACENZIE RICHARDS** did the work in the classroom, earning her place on the All-Academic Team.

"We are very proud of our all-conference selections," A&T coach **HAL CLIFTON** said. "It's nice

that our players were recognized for their effort and hard work. However, this is a true team sport, and these awards are made possible through a team effort."

Going into the Big South tournament, Brewer ranked fifth in the league for assists per set (5.62). She also had per-set averages of 1.91 kills, 2.58 digs, 0.55 blocks and 0.34 service aces. In addition, Brewer recorded four triple-doubles this season, all in Big South competition, giving her 13 for her career.

Brewer also has 41 career double-doubles, with 12 of those coming this season. Considered one of the best players in school history, she ranks fifth all-time in kills and digs, and is third all-time in aces. She also earned her 1,000th career dig this season.

Sawtelle ranks third in the Big South with 3.35 kills per set and second in total kills with 362. She also ranks second in the Big South with 3.84 points per set. Sawtelle recorded 10 double-doubles in her first season as an Aggie.

Howell averaged 1.56 kills and 2.03 digs in 2021, including 1.71 kills and 2.23 digs in conference matches. She recorded her first career double-double in a 3-1 win over USC Upstate with 11 kills and 17 digs on Nov. 12 at Moore Gymnasium.

Hall leads the Big South with 1.20 blocks per set and a .363 hitting percentage. She ranks 10th in the nation with 130 total blocks and 53rd in hitting percentage. She recorded the first kill/block double-double in school history since 2002, with career highs in kills (13) and blocks (11) against Campbell on Oct. 9 at Moore Gymnasium.

Richards finished the season strong with a season high eight kills, 14 digs and four blocks, including one solo on Senior Day against UNC Asheville. She also set a career high with four service aces. Richards is a criminal justice major with a 3.90 grade point average.

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY FINISH FOURTH AND SIXTH, RESPECTIVELY, AT BIG SOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS

North Carolina A&T's cross country program proved every preseason projection incorrect during the Big South Conference Men's and Women's Cross Country Championships Oct. 29, at the Ivey M. Redmon Sports Complex in Kernersville, North Carolina.

The men finished fourth on the shoulders of an all-conference performance from senior **MORRIS KIMBLE**, and the women came in sixth thanks to yet another team-leading day from **FAJR KELLY**.

Kimble finished 13th with a personal best 25:35.3 8k time to garner All-Big South second-team honors for finishing in the top-14. Kelly finished 26th in 19:08.9, narrowly missing a personal record in the 5k.

Charleston Southern won the Big South men's title, followed by High Point University, UNC Asheville, N.C. A&T and Campbell in the top 5. HPU won it all on the women's side. Radford finished second, followed by Charleston Southern, UNCA and Campbell in the top 5.

In addition to all-conference, Big South named Kimble to its All-Academic team. Kimble majors in chemical engineering and has a 3.75 GPA.

Joining Kimble, senior **DEVON WILLIAMS** finished 21st at 26:04.3, senior **REGAN KIMTAI** was 23rd in 26:08.5 and junior **JORDAN RICHARDSON** placed 24th in 26:12.6. Rounding out the finishers for A&T was sophomore **JALEN CHIN** in 52nd with a personal-record 27:37.7.

"We started this journey in August," said A&T head coach **ERNEST BARRETT**. "The guys bought in, and they really put in the work. We were predicted to finish in eighth place and to finish fourth. I think that's outstanding for a program that's coming into a distance-oriented conference. We're going to continue to build this program, and I plan on winning this championship. No question about that."

Kelly could play a part in a future championship run. Like every other race this season, Kelly crossed first for the Aggies.

Kelly was 28th at the 1,634-meter mark but followed her coach's instruction to move up two spots. Five of the six A&T runners behind Kelly all set personal records.

Sophomore **CAROLYN BROWN** ran a personal-best 19:34.5 to finish third. Her previous PR stood at 20:40.8. Junior **LOVE MELTON** lowered her personal best by almost 40 seconds to run a 20:11.9. She finished 44th.



Sophomore **CAMILLE HERRING** set a personal-record two weeks ago at High Point's VertCross Invitational at the same course she ran today with a 20:56.7. However, she shattered that time on Friday by running a 20:25.1 to finish 49th. Fellow sophomore **ANIA CAMPBELL** had a 22:47.5 5k time two weeks ago but finished at 21:46.6.

Senior **ADANNA THOMAS** got in on the action and improved her 5k time by over a minute, turning in a 21:57.7 time. Rounding out finishing for A&T was sophomore **JAYLA JONES**, who ran her first collegiate 5k in 22:18.5.

"On the women's side, we're running pretty much half-milers," said Barrett. "Half-milers are not big on cross country, but they never missed a practice, two-a-days, they work hard day after day, getting on the track. ... I'm so proud of those young ladies. They competed and competed very hard and put their heart on the line."

TRUIST STADIUM TRACK NAMED FOR JOHNSON

By Jackie Torok

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University is naming its track at Truist Stadium for entrepreneur **MARCUS T. JOHNSON** in recognition of his philanthropic contributions that directly benefit students of color and support of minority-owned and -operated nonprofits.

The Aggies acknowledged Johnson and his recent \$350,000 donation to the university during the football team's last home game of the season (Nov. 20).

"We deeply appreciate Marcus Johnson for his generous gift that will benefit not only our track program, but all student athletes," said **EARL HILTON III**, director of intercollegiate athletics. "This will help our facility maintain its status as a top track in the nation while also directly supporting student-athletes through scholarships."

A Beaufort, North Carolina, native, Johnson was reared in Tarboro, North Carolina, where his parents instilled the values of education, hard work and giving back. After graduating high school, he went on to earn his degree in business administration and finance from UNC Greensboro.

Johnson is an accomplished entrepreneur with enterprises spanning multiple industries. He operates Johnson Automotive Group (JAG), one of the largest Black-owned franchise dealer groups in the country with locations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

A proud husband and father, Johnson is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. who prioritizes meaningful community involvement and continues to serve on various boards in the Carolinas.

Additionally, as a champion for minority advancement in leadership and commerce, he is devoted to closing the wealth gap through opportunity and access.

"I believe representation is important. This by no means levels the playing field, but it helps address persisting disparities," said Johnson. "It is an honor to invest in our scholar-athletes as they continue the pursuit of excellence."

The track at A&T—now known as Marcus T. Johnson Track—has produced stellar athletic success in recent years, most recently with **TREVOR STEWART '20** and **RANDOLPH ROSS JR.** becoming the university's first Olympic gold medalists after leading the United States to the medal round of the men's 4x400-meter relay in Tokyo on Aug. 7. Stewart made history as the first Aggie to earn a medal in the Olympics, securing a bronze medal for the United States in the inaugural mixed 4x400-meter relay in Tokyo on Aug. 1.

The Aggies claimed national titles in the men's 4x400-meter relay and 400-meter race and the women's 100-meter and 200-meter races at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships in June. Ross Jr., who won the 400-meter race, joined Stewart, **DANIEL STOKES** and **AKEEM SIRLEAF** to claim the 4x400-meter relay victory. **CAMBREA STURGIS** won the 100-meter and 200-meter races, marking only the 13th time in NCAA history a runner accomplished the feat and becoming the first to do it in five years.



JOHNSON



THE FAST TRACK



Pictured left: N.C. A&T's Randolph Ross Jr., Daniel Stokes, Akeem Sirleaf and Trevor Stewart are 2021 NCAA 4x400 Outdoor National Champions, and women's team member Cambria Sturgis is the women's 100m and 200m national champion. Below: Sprinter Javonte Harding; MEAC Most Outstanding Male Track Athlete

Aggies win top Olympic, national and conference awards

By Todd H. Simmons

The Tokyo Olympics had been underway for a week, with millions watching on TV sets and computer screens around the world, when the July 31 broadcast captured the attention of Aggie Nation.

North Carolina A&T sprinter Trevor Stewart and three Olympic teammates bounded out in the middle of the enormous bold red set used to introduce competitors to the TV audience. He was announced to the world as one of four members of the U.S. mixed gender 4x400 relay team, set now to participate in the finals for the event's Olympic debut. A self-effacing grin crossed his face as he stretched his arms wide, as if to say, "This is me—what you see is what you get."

Minutes later, Stewart exploded out of the blocks for the event's first leg. Despite running in lane four and on a track heavily staggered to make up for the time differences between men and women runners, Stewart blazed, his long, classic strides devouring the space between him and competitors from eight other nations. He passed the baton before any of his first-leg opponents, setting Team USA up for a strong race.

Three laps later, the Americans won the bronze medal, as anchor leg runner Vernon Norwood was edged at the finish line—1/100th of a second—by the Dominican Republic, which took silver. Poland won gold.

But for Stewart, N.C. A&T and Team USA, the race was full of important firsts: a U.S. medal in the first running of the mixed 4x400, the first athlete from an HBCU to medal in Tokyo, and the first Olympic medal earned by an A&T athlete in the university's 130-year history.

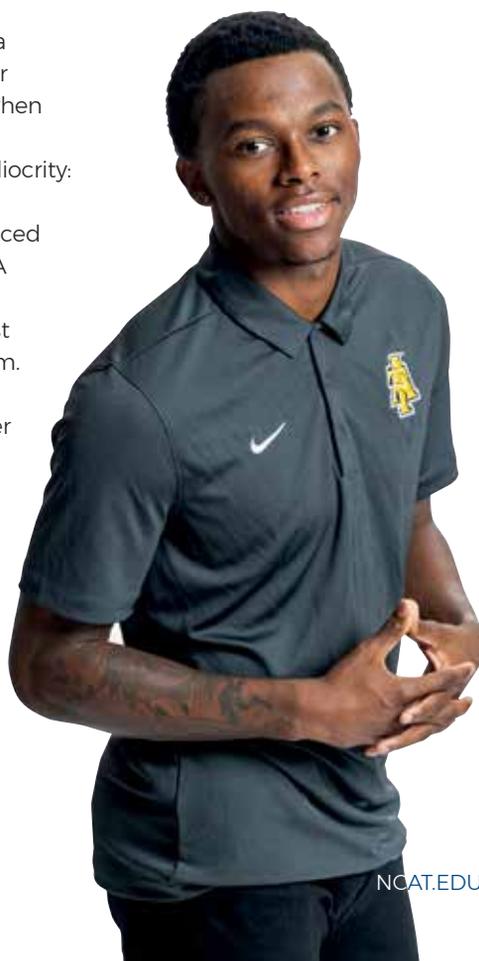
It would not be the last.

The Olympics served as an exclamation point for a sensational run for the A&T men's and women's track teams. Rarely do intercollegiate athletics see a bunch as dominant as these stellar Aggies and their unparalleled coaching led squad, by Duane Ross, himself a former Olympian. Consider their accomplishments since 2012, when Ross took over a track and field program that had slid into mediocrity:

- In 2021, the men's team placed third nationally in the NCAA outdoor track and field championships—the highest finish ever for an HBCU team. The women's team took fourth place, also a best-ever HBCU finish. Both topped universities with major resource advantages and bigger name recognition, such as Florida, Georgia, Southern California, Texas, Alabama and more. On the men's side, A&T finished just behind Oregon on its home track,

a program fueled endlessly by the billions of Nike founder Phil Knight. Both finishes significantly outpaced the influential Track & Field News' predictions.

- Between them, the men's and women's teams have won an astounding 16 indoor and outdoor conference championships since 2017. As they did so, they began qualifying an even larger number of HBCU athletes for participation in the NCAA national indoor and outdoor championships, turning the heads of many in the track





and field world. And that was fine by Coach Ross, who told a local news outlet earlier this year that “at the end of the day, we want to be the best team, period, not just the best HBCU.”

- The individual success has been just as strong. Sprinter Kayla White won A&T’s first national championship in the 200-meter indoor in 2019. Chris Belcher qualified for the World Championships in 2017 on the strength of a long list of conference wins and, for a time, the fastest 100-meter finish in the nation. Both helped create an expectation of excellence in Aggie track, opening the door for other outstanding competitors, such as Stewart.

In this year’s NCAA outdoor championships, the Aggies competed in 15 different events. Having handily won the NCAA indoor

championships, the men’s 4x400, led by sophomore Randolph Ross Jr. (son of Coach Ross) and Stewart, they won by an even larger margin outdoors—a feat Ross Jr. followed with a first-place finish in the men’s 400. Cambrea Sturgis, a sophomore, impressively took the women’s 100- and 200-meter championships.

After the outdoor championships, 11 current and former Aggies competed in the U.S. Olympic trials, including Belcher and White, both now running for Nike. When the dust finally settled, two (Ross and Stewart) would make the U.S. team, while 4x400 teammates Akeem Sirleaf and Daniel Stokes qualified for the Liberia and Mexico teams, respectively.

On Aug. 6, Ross and Stewart joined two other Team USA sprinters in the semifinals of the men’s 4x400. Thanks to a strong opening leg by Stewart and Ross’s exceptional second leg, which put Team USA in first place, the Americans won handily. Seeking fresh competitors for the finals the next day, the U.S. coaches swapped

out three of the four relay team members and earned a gold medal in the Olympics’ final track event, bringing a triumphant finish to what had been a subpar overall Olympic performance by the men’s team.

While many Aggies expressed frustration that Ross—the reigning NCAA 400-meter champ—and Stewart were not tapped for the final race, their semifinal victory earned gold for both men, sending the A&T delegation home with three Olympic medals and setting the national track community abuzz with their success.

For Coach Ross, who traveled with his son to Tokyo, the A&T athletes’ performances were gratifying, but not unexpected.

“I believe in preparation. I believe in speaking success into existence,” Ross said in a video interview from Japan. “The rest of the country wants to overlook our program, but then here we are. ... It IS a big deal. We’re proud of it, and I hope everyone else is. It’s exciting.”

MORE TRIUMPHS

By Jackie Torok

Bringing home two gold medals and a bronze capped off a run so outstanding for the Aggies’ track and field teams that it was hard to keep up with their triumphs.

DUANE ROSS, director of track and field programs, guided the men to their fourth straight Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) title in May, breaking the conference record for points with 288. The men had 13-event conference champions and won every track event contested except the 3000-meter steeplechase.

Ross led the women, who also won 13 events, to their third MEAC title in four years with a record-breaking 290 points.

The MEAC named **JAVONTE HARDING** Most Outstanding Male Track Athlete, **LOREN JAMES** Most Outstanding Female Field Athlete, and **G’JASMYNE BUTLER** Most Outstanding Female Track Athlete at the conference championships.

Ross was crowned co-National Men’s Coach of the Year by the United States Track and Field and Cross-Country Coaches Association (USTFCCCA).



“The rest of the country wants to overlook our program, but then here we are. ... It IS a big deal. We’re proud of it, and I hope everyone else is. It’s exciting.”

— DUANE ROSS

L-R: Jonah Ross, Kamaya Debose-Epps, Symone Darius and TeJyrica Robinson

Earlier in the season, the organization named Ross its Men’s and Women’s Southeast Region Coach of the Year and **RON GARNER**, assistant coach for sprinters and hurdlers, its Men’s Assistant Coach of the Year.

USTFCCCA chose **TREVOR STEWART** as Southeast Region Men’s Athlete of the Year and **CAMBREA STURGIS** as Southeast Region Women’s Athlete of the Year. After the indoor season, the organization selected Ross’ son, **RANDOLPH ROSS JR.**, as Southeast Region Men’s Athlete of the Year.

USTFCCCA also counted 13 Aggies among its All-Academic Athletes for the 2021 NCAA Division I Men’s and Women’s Track and Field seasons: **ABBAS ABBKAR, MADELINE AKOBUNDU, BREANNE BYGRAVE, SYMONE DARIOUS, BRADLEY FLEURINORD, NILAJA FLORENCE, JAMES, AKEEN LINDO, TEJYRICA ROBINSON, ROSS JR., PAULA SALMON, DANIEL STOKES** and **SYDNI TOWNSEND**.

The Aggies sprinted off with national titles in the men’s 4x400-meter relay and 400-meter race and the women’s 100-meter and 200-meter races at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships in June.

Ross Jr., who won the 400-meter race, joined Stewart, Stokes and **AKEEM SIRLEAF** to claim the 4x400-meter relay victory. Ross Jr., Stewart, Stokes and **ELIJAH YOUNG** teamed up for the NCAA Division I Indoor Track and Field Championships in March to win the 4x400-meter relay with a time of 3:03.16.

Sturgis won the 100-meter and 200-meter races at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships, marking only the 13th time in NCAA history a runner accomplished the feat and becoming the first to do it in five years.



RICHARDSON

GOAL ACHIEVED

DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAM REOPENS DOORS FOR LONGTIME STOP-OUTS

By Tonya D. Dixon '04, '21

SANDRA RICHARDSON began her North Carolina A&T journey in 1972. On May 11, 2021, at age 67, she received her degree in interdisciplinary studies through the Aggies at the Goal Line (AGL) program.

The AGL online degree completion program was developed in 2016 out of the University of North Carolina System's Partway Home Initiative. It provides a means for former N.C. A&T students who failed to finish their bachelor's degree program to have an opportunity to return for completion. Participants must have stopped out of school for at least two years, have a minimum 2.0 cumulative grade point average at the time of stop out, and have earned 90 or more credits.

Since its inception, more than 100 students—representing a wide range of ages—have been admitted, enrolled and graduated through AGL. The vast majority have completed the program, receiving liberal studies degrees.

"I always wanted to go back and finish school. You have this weight hanging on your shoulders until you finish. I found myself back at A&T in 1993 [in the Psychology program] and it was a great experience, but again, life got in the way with family responsibilities. I felt I needed to be with my family more than finishing school," said Richardson.

Although she initially remained a student for nearly four years, until 1976, Richardson admits when she first attended A&T it just wasn't the experience she expected and couldn't fully cope.

"I grew up in Canton, Ohio. Basically, I just wasn't prepared for life in the South at that time as far as race and discrimination were concerned," she said.

In 2018, after hearing about the AGL program, Richardson took a chance and tried to enroll again. She couldn't begin until 2019, but once everything fell into place, she knew she had struck gold.

"My experience from then until this point, on a scale of 1 to 10, would be 100. They are inclusive. They want you to finish and get your degree," said Richardson. "My instructors and professors were wonderful. There are no words in the dictionary to explain how I feel about Mrs. Jacobs and Dr. Dicks. It's not just because they've met their goal, but I think it makes them happy when people succeed. They go above and beyond their jobs making sure you have everything you need.

"This has been the best experience with A&T. The AGL program is truly a blessing to those who don't have the time, traditional schedule or otherwise to finish. People have struggles. Everybody's struggle is different. I'm so glad A&T does this program."

Her journey was long, but Richardson believes it all happened for a reason and has no regrets.

"Not only does the Aggies at the Goal Line program facilitate student degree completion—serving as a tremendous opportunity for adult learners to complete a college degree, improving their economic, professional and social profile—but many participants indicate the welcoming program structure reduced their anxiety and concerns about returning after years of separation," said Carliss Jacobs, director of the AGL program.

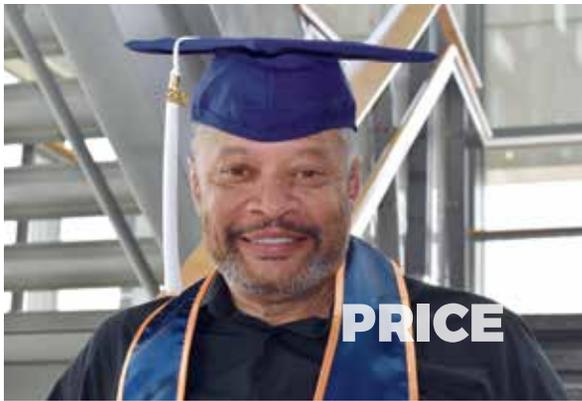
AGL students have exceptional stories of grit, determination and inspiration. Many have shared experiences of losing their way and finding redemption through the program:



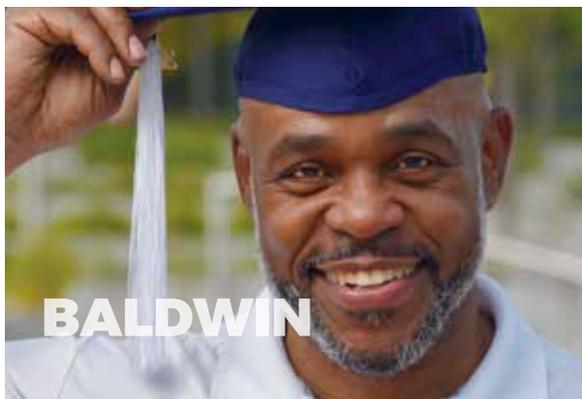
TANIKA KELLY started at A&T with her twin sister in the fall of 1998. She knew from the beginning that it was a mistake. She wasn't ready. Her grades, class attendance and commitment showed it. After many failed attempts at returning, she re-enrolled through the AGL program and completed her degree. She's currently applying to different master's programs. "I'm not going to stop. I'm on an educational roll."



Premature exposure to college freedom, partying and substance abuse prevented **MICHELLE WRIGHT** from gaining her degree in music education from A&T in 1983. She spent many years wishing she made better choices. Fear convinced her she no longer had the ability and aptitude, but after many traumatic events and overcoming doubt, she earned a bachelor's degree from her beloved A&T and credits AGL for her success.



EDWIN PRICE completed his bachelor's degree at A&T 42 years after he originally started, through AGL. Originally, earning a degree was simply a thing to do, but on May 8, 2021, when he crossed the commencement stage, it held a much deeper meaning. Not only did he finish what he started, but he earned his degree at the same time and same university as his daughter.



Once **RODNEY BALDWIN** kicked his pride out of the way, he found his way back to A&T through the AGL program. He was inspired by his son, who had multiple degrees at 21 years old. With only 33 credits left to earn a bachelor's degree, nothing could stand in his way. He refused to let anything or anyone rob him of his second chance opportunity.

[HTTPS://ONLINE.NCAT.EDU/RETURNING-STUDENTS](https://online.ncat.edu/returning-students)



Salil Desai, Ph.D., is a consummate professional with a distinguished career in education and research. But if you ask, he believes “no man is an island,” and at times he feels some of the good fortune he has experienced over the years has been serendipitous.

Desai grew up in Mumbai, India, and attended a high school that incorporated traditional curriculum and instruction with a focus on vocational skills. For years, he learned carpentry and metalworking and spent time in a machine shop.

“At that time, technical-oriented education was an unconventional path for high school students, unlike it is today,” Desai said. “It really gives a totally different perspective to hands-on learning, being able to make and fix things and learning the value of those who build things for us.”

FORTUNATE SON

**UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED
PROFESSOR SALIL DESAI CREDITS
TEAMWORK—AND A FEW
SERENDIPITOUS EXPERIENCES—
FOR HIS SUCCESSES.**

By Jamie Crockett

This training laid a strong foundation and Desai has not stopped building since. The experience ultimately informed his decision to earn a B.S. in mechanical engineering at the University of Mumbai.

"I really enjoyed working with my hands, and I realized adding a theoretical approach would be complementary and deepen my understanding of the phenomenon being studied," Desai said.

During his matriculation, Desai completed a design project related to robotics and automation with India's Atomic Research Center and was able to work with experts to design a robot that could safely handle nuclear fuel rods.

"I was very fortunate to work on a very niche project not many people are able to participate in, and it was very esoteric," Desai said.

Industrial and systems engineering profession was a natural fit into his blueprint and sparked a desire to pursue a career in research.

"Industrial and mechanical engineering are fairly close in terms of manufacturing serving as a common bridge between the fields," Desai said. "I'm fortunate to be connected to both."

Desai went on to earn an M.S. in industrial engineering at the University of Pittsburgh, which incorporated his robotics and automation manufacturing background. He did not initially calculate earning a Ph.D. into his plans but connected with an advisor at the university whose focus was in micro- and nano-engineering.

"These varied experiences broadened my horizon and paved my journey into a cross-disciplinary research themes," Desai said.

hesitant when it came time to apply for full professorship and wanted to continue building his portfolio.

"I will never forget when Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson, my chair at that time, asked me, 'You have a strong record to apply for full professorship. What are you waiting for? Do you want an award from the president?'" Desai said. "Her words came true."

Not only did Desai secure full professorship, but he has also received the esteemed title of Distinguished University Professor and has risen through the ranks as the director of the university's Center of Excellence in Product Design and Advanced Manufacturing.

Desai also received the White House Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, among a host of sponsored research and professional awards, fellowships, editorial positions, patents and notable honors.

"I am humbled to receive such recognition, however, it is truly a testament to teamwork and collaboration, and I would not be where I am today without my mentors, colleagues, students and family," Desai said. "It's interesting because I didn't initially envision myself as a professor, but I received encouragement to give it a try. I eventually got the hang of it, and I enjoy it. Teaching is in our DNA."

The Society of Manufacturing's flagship—Smart Manufacturing Magazine—recently named Desai among its 20 Most Influential Academics around the globe, which also highlights his passion for making an impact on his students.

The 2021-22 school year marks Desai's 18th year at A&T, and he describes the campus community as a warm, supportive environment. He is dedicated to providing the same guidance, assistance and reassurance

"I would not be where I am today without my mentors, colleagues, students and family." — Salil Desai, Ph.D.

After graduation, Desai worked as a research engineer at India's premier research institution, The Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay, another unusual turn of events as many graduates often accept corporate positions in their respective fields. At the time, 3D printing and additive manufacturing was considered a nascent technology, so much so that the Government of India imported equipment from the United States for research projects. Among the interesting contributions Desai made in this role involved printing 3D models of human organs that surgeons could use for practicing surgical procedures that could mean life or death for their patients.

Desai soon realized that a systems engineering approach could give him a holistic perspective of all the technologies he was working on. The

Beyond the cutting-edge design and manufacturing fields, Desai works in the areas of regenerative tissue engineering, cyber-physical systems, multiscale modeling, and artificial intelligence for digital twinning of complex systems to name a few.

Again, serendipity played a part when Desai bypassed a more traditional route of spending several years in post-doctoral research after graduation and instead accepted an assistant professorship in 2004 at North Carolina A&T.

Much like his hands-on education at the beginning of his journey, Desai believe he received post-doc training on the job. He also secured early tenure within four years after the National Science Foundation recognized him with the prestigious CAREER Award. However, he was

to students that he received along the way.

"I often tell my students they are the wind beneath my wings. One person can't achieve everything, and you

have to allow others to assist, some quietly, some in ways you do not expect," Desai said.

Mentorship is an integral focus for Desai. Over the years, he has formally advised or mentored 60 undergraduates, 18 master's students and 26 doctoral candidates. Desai believes that he is fortunate to be the channel for others to accomplish their goals.

"Professors don't have all the answers, we're all seekers of knowledge," Desai said. "I may be passing down information, but I learn so much from our students too and we explore new ideas together. We learn together, struggle together and succeed together."

Reflecting on his journey, Desai acknowledges that serendipity and a solid work ethic go hand in hand.

"Things working out is just as important as how hard we work," Desai said. "And honestly, when you love what you do, it is never work."



DESAI NAMED ASME FELLOW

Salil Desai, Ph.D., was recently named a fellow for the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).

An ASME member since 2005, with a wide-reaching interdisciplinary background, Desai received this distinction in recognition of his outstanding achievements in the engineering field.

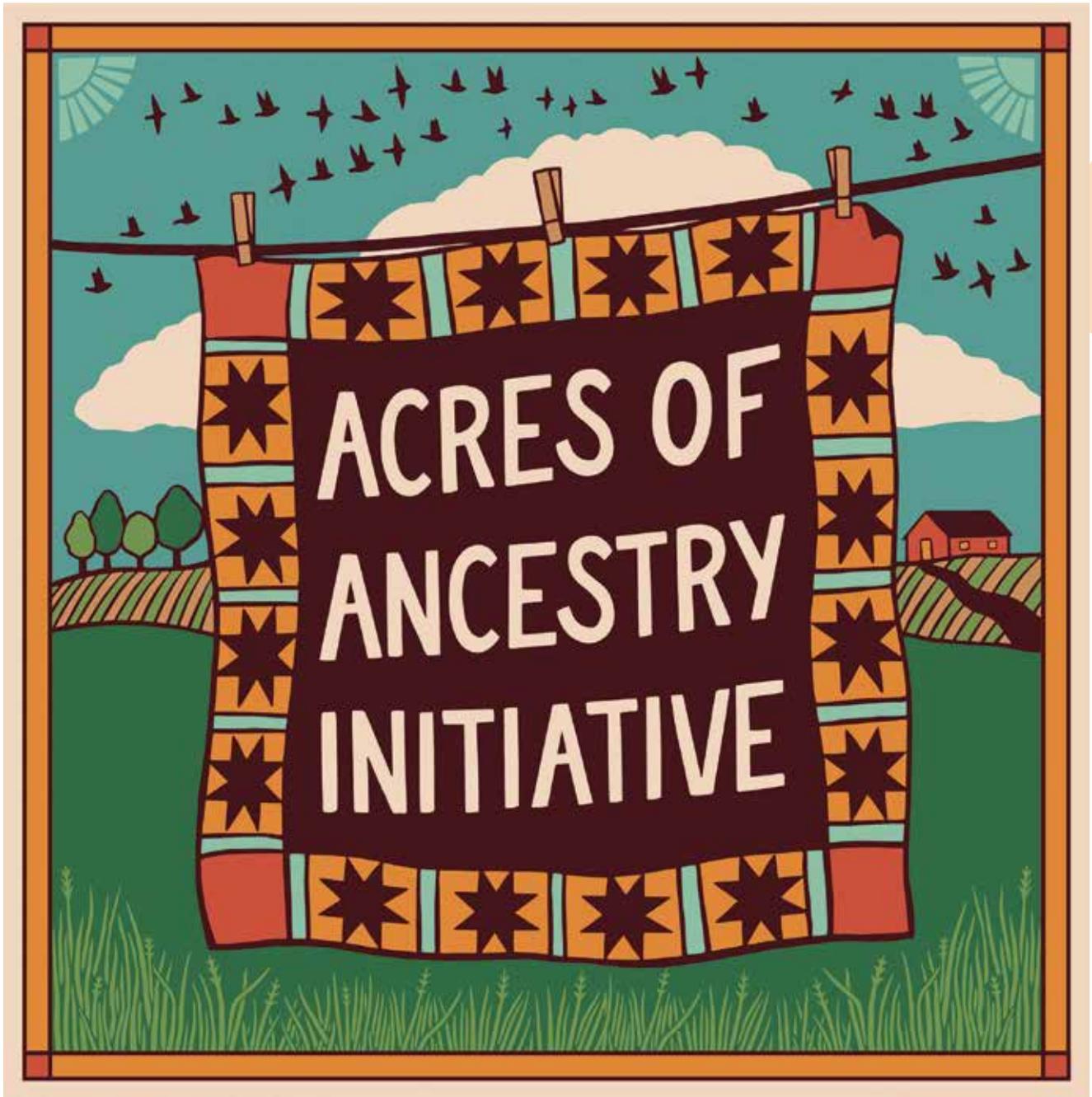
Since its inception in 1880, the international organization has chosen approximately 3,000 fellows from its more than 90,000 members worldwide. Nominees are required to have at least 10 years of active practice and active corporate membership in the society for fellowship consideration.

"ASME is one of the earlier societies I joined as a junior researcher, which provided numerous opportunities for me to attend and present at symposia and conferences, gain visibility for my work, and helped me to grow in the field," said Desai. "This recognition is an outcome of that

growth and comes with a big responsibility in terms of supporting and promoting the next generation of faculty and researchers."

Desai's research contributions are impactful and far-reaching. For example, his innovative development of an ambulatory oxygen device for assistive respiration resulted in an international patent, which has practical applications across the medical industry, recreational sports and space exploration. He recently secured a \$50,000 National Science Foundation I-Corps award to develop microneedle technology through 3D printing that will aid in efficient drug delivery into the body.

Desai is also the recipient of ASME's 2016 Chao & Trigger Outstanding Young Manufacturing Engineer Award, a prestigious honor he shares with peers from leading institutions, including Purdue University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



Acres of Ancestry Initiative by Kelley Wills/Brain Flower Designs

RIGHTING WRONGS

Alumna Tracy Lloyd McCurty seeks justice for Black farmers.

By Jackie Torok

T Tracy Lloyd McCurdy, J.D. '99 has parlayed the B.S. in marketing she earned from North Carolina A&T into a passion for securing justice for Black farmers and preserving their proud heritage and farmlands.

McCurdy's advocacy resulted in the successful passage of the Emergency Relief for Farmers of Color Act, part of the \$1.9 trillion federal COVID-19 relief spending package President Joe Biden approved March 11—just two days after N.C. A&T celebrated its 130th anniversary as a public historically Black land-grant university.

The act, which was introduced by the Rev. Raphael Warnock, a freshman Democratic senator from Georgia, provided \$4 billion for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to forgive direct or guaranteed loans to farmers of color and \$1 billion in aid to farmers of color including technical assistance, legal support, direct payments to farmers for past discrimination, land access and other enterprises for farmers of color. Over the summer, the implementation of the debt cancellation program was halted due to various lawsuits from white farmers alleging reverse discrimination.

McCurdy is working on revisions to the debt cancellation program in the Build Back Better Act moving through Congress. Under the Act, debt cancellation will be provided to “economically distressed” farmers according to specific race neutral criteria. According to the criteria, debt cancellation will be provided to 91% of the 3,100 Black farmers who have existing debt with USDA—less than 8% of all Black farmers will receive debt cancellation.

To address the urgent needs of the remaining 92% of Black farmers, McCurdy fought for the allocation of at least \$750 million in direct payments to farmers who suffered from past and ongoing USDA discrimination. Both debt cancellation and direct payments will be treated as non-taxable income.

The effort to right the wrongs of the past and correct egregious U.S. District Court outcomes from outcomes known as Pigford I and II, which have caused Black farmers to lose about 90% of their land between 1910 and now, has been decades in the making, McCurdy said.

The Pigford settlements arose from a 1997 class action lawsuit that accused the USDA of discriminating against Black farmers through loans and other policies, as well as failing to investigate or respond to discrimination claims. The USDA agreed to compensate them with cash and debt relief cancellation in what became known as Pigford I.

Pigford I was a \$1 billion settlement, but only 4.8% of the debt settlement went to debt cancellation. Attorney malpractice, incompetence and the aggressive posture of the U.S. Department of Justice also contributed to the failures of the lawsuit in providing restorative land justice to Black farmers.

This led to Pigford II, a 2010 settlement in which the federal government agreed to pay \$1.25 billion to claimants left out of Pigford I; however, none of these funds were used to rectify the injustices of the Pigford I settlement. For example, in the Pigford I settlement, Black farmers had to identify a similarly situated white farmer who the USDA had not discriminated against to succeed on their discrimination claims—and without discovery. Consequently, 6,906 farmers—actual farmers with verifiable farm ID numbers—were denied recovery outright.

As the co-founder and executive director of the Black Belt Justice Center based in Washington, D.C., McCurdy took on the farmers' cause and went all in on the effort to seek a more inclusive bill because of the federal government's history of discrimination against all farmers of color.

“This is definitely a full-circle moment,” McCurdy said of the act's passage, as well as documentation of the work that led to it becoming part of the Congressional Record. “One of the farmers said to me, ‘We were in a sinking ship, and no one would help us. And you didn't just throw us a rope; you got in the sinking ship with us.’”

But McCurdy said she is by no means the hero of the saga.

“The story that hasn't been lifted up in the media, for me, is the tenacity and the resilience of our elder Black farmers who have been fighting for debt cancellation and to dismantle institutional discrimination within USDA for the last 30 years,” she said, noting that several had represented themselves in federal court. “I want to be clear: the \$5 billion debt cancellation is not reparations. Not at all. This is a step toward restorative land justice for Black farmers.”



McCURTY

Now is the time to seize the momentum generated by the Emergency Relief for Farmers of Color Act by reestablishing the African American agricultural land base – which was first created entirely through the self-sufficiency of Black farmers – and continuing its legacy, McCurdy said.

This is the heart of Black Belt Justice Center's mission, which facilitates the Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund. Founded by McCurdy in 2012, the center is a legal and advocacy nonprofit dedicated to the preservation and regeneration

of African American farmlands and land-based livelihoods through effective legal representation, advocacy, and community education. The Acres of Ancestry/Black Agrarian Fund works cooperatively with fiber artists, heritage quilters and cultural knowledge keepers to further support food and fiber economies in the rural South.

As part of outreach and education efforts, a new exhibit will open (2022) in Charleston, South Carolina. "Griots of Cotton, Indigo, & Clay" is a fiber arts and earth-based crafts exhibition that pays homage to Black farmers and artists who preserve the wisdom of the earth through lineage, land memory and material culture.

"Griots of Cotton, Indigo, & Clay" features the debut of the Permanent Collection of the Acres of Ancestry Initiative and artworks from the Return of the Bees Quilt Collective. It is curated by Torreeah "Cookie" Washington, a fourth-generation needle worker, fiber artist and independent curator from Goose Creek, South Carolina.

The exhibit will run from Jan. 17 through Feb. 28 at City Gallery at Waterfront Park, with an opening reception scheduled for Jan. 22. For details, and to learn more about the restorative works of the Black Belt Justice and Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund, visit www.acresofancestry.org.

As both the maternal great-great-granddaughter of Lizzie and Gordon Webb, who toiled as sharecroppers and independent farmers in Scotland Neck, North Carolina, and the daughter of childhood friends who grew up in Tarboro, North Carolina, McCurdy was born to champion social justice for African American rural communities.

Her father, Bryant Eugene Lloyd, graduated from A&T in 1969 with a business degree while her mother, Faye Lewis Lloyd, graduated from North Carolina Central University in 1970.

"My parents instilled in me a deep sense of pride in our HBCUs," McCurdy said.

Faye Lloyd was a high school teacher for more than 30 years in Durham, North Carolina, where she taught English, American Literature and Black Humanities. Throughout McCurdy's childhood, her mother took her to various theatre productions at N.C. Central, where she also attended summer enrichment programs.

As a teenager, McCurdy looked forward to tagging along with her best friend and her best friend's sister to Aggie Fest and the Greatest Homecoming on Earth.

"Growing up, my father shared with me stories about his college days at N.C. A&T," McCurdy said. "Dad spoke reverently of the thriving Black-owned businesses in Greensboro. He loved talking about the legendary Boss Webster's and his famous fried bologna sandwiches.

"Dad also talked about the Greensboro Uprising in '69 and how the National Guard occupied campus. Learning about the Greensboro Four solidified my resolve to attend N.C. A&T," she said.

After receiving her undergraduate degree from A&T, McCurdy went on to earn her juris doctor in 2003 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she worked on the Pigford I settlement as a law student in 2001 with the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers' Land Loss Prevention Project.

An Aggie connection with efforts to bring justice to Black farmers had already been created in 1999 during a fairness hearing for Pigford I. That's when Stephon J. Bowens, executive director of the Land Loss Prevention Project, cited the work of Donald McDowell, Ph.D., an A&T economics professor whose research showed that legacy farmers who had been starved off their land because of discrimination would need at least \$250,000 to reenter the agriculture industry.

"I wanted to live a meaningful life in service of Black folk and was determined to find my purpose at N.C. A&T. If David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr. (Jibreel Khazan), and Joe McNeil found theirs, I would, too."

1980s

LYNN PERRY WOOTEN PH.D. '88, president of Simmons University, is the newest member of the North Carolina A&T Board of Trustees. Wooten's appointment was approved during the April meeting of the University of North Carolina (UNC) System Board of Governors. She will serve a four-year term that began July 1.

A graduate of what is now the Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics, Wooten is Simmons University's ninth president and the first African American to hold the position. Previously, she was the David J. Nolan Dean and professor of management and organizations at the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University.

Wooten has held several other key positions at leading institutions across the higher education spectrum, including at the University of Florida Warrington College of Business and the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, where she spent nearly 20 years in faculty and administrative roles.

Specializing in crisis leadership, diversity and inclusion, and positive leadership, Wooten is an innovative leader and prolific author and presenter whose research has informed her work in the classroom and as an administrator.

Wooten's research has ranged from a National Institutes of Health-funded investigation of how leadership can positively alleviate health disparities to leading in a crisis and managing workforce diversity. She is the author of two books: "Positive Organizing in a Global Society: Understanding and Engaging Differences for Capacity Building and Inclusion" and "Leading Under Pressure: From Surviving to Thriving Before, During, and After a Crisis."

Wooten also has had a robust clinical practice, providing leadership development, education and training for a wide variety of companies and institutions, from the Kellogg Foundation to Harvard University's Kennedy School to Google.

In addition to earning her B.S. in accounting from N.C. A&T, graduating as valedictorian, Wooten received her MBA from The Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, Ph.D. in business administration from the Ross School of Business, and certificate in Advanced Educational Leadership from Harvard's Graduate School of Education.



'88 WOOTEN

Photo courtesy Andre Johnson Architects



'97 JOHNSON

1990s

KARIN HENDERSON '94 and **NIKETA GREENE '97** are among the women honored as the Triad Business Journals' 2021 Outstanding Women in Business.

Greene, who holds a B.A. in psychology from N.C. A&T, is vice president of leadership, diversity and inclusion for the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce. She directs the operational and programmatic aspects of three chamber initiatives: Leadership Greensboro, Accelerate Greensboro and Scale to Excel. She leads the Health and Basic Needs Impact Council at the United Way of Greater Greensboro, where she is a board member, and created the annual Summer of Service event for Leadership Greensboro alumni.

Henderson is executive director of strategic management for Cone Health. A Cone employee since 2005, she leads system-wide initiatives and construction projects of more than \$100 million. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Henderson led the teams that transformed the former Women's Hospital into a critical care hospital capable of caring for 2,500 patients and led Cone's COVID-19 command center. She has a B.S. in nursing from A&T.

ANDRE L. JOHNSON '97 and his Raleigh, North Carolina-based firm, Andre Johnson Architects (AJA), won Architectural Record's Design Vanguard 2021 award that recognizes "emerging practices advancing issues of form, construction, sustainability and community engagement."

Established in 2000, the Design Vanguard award is given annually to the top 10 design firms from around the world.

Johnson earned his B.S. in architectural engineering at N.C. A&T and an M.Arch. at Morgan State University. He has more than 23 years of professional experience.

Since 2014, Johnson has grown a diverse team of skilled architects and designers, many of whom have received a solid education from North Carolina-based universities.

AJA designs are "provocative and responsive to their physical and cultural context" and the team has served public and private clients. A design upgrade to the usual NC DOT Division 8 Office by infusing natural light was one of the firm's earlier works.

Johnson designed what will be the university's \$5.7 million community and urban food-processing facility. The nearly 17,000-square-foot complex will offer a state-of-the-art laboratory, classrooms, student research areas and several meeting rooms. A&T also plans to utilize the facility as a small business incubator and an expanded dairy to produce branded products, underscoring the university's leadership in education, research and practical application of sustainable agriculture for students, faculty and farmers alike.

Johnson's firm has been recognized by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) 11 times over the years at the local, state and regional levels for design excellence. The firm received awards from the AIA Triangle chapter this year for its work on the NC DOT Division 8 Office and the university's food-processing facility. He serves on the board of Diversify Architecture, a nonprofit focused on improving representation in the architecture field, and he takes pride in mentoring and supporting the next generation.

2000s



'00 PITTMAN

EBONY J. PITTMAN '00 has been named deputy secretary for business administration at the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) where she directs the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Outreach, and oversees purchasing and facilities management.

As a 16-year veteran of the N.C. Department of Justice, Pittman provided legal support to NCDOT on a wide range of transportation issues related to the use of highway right-of-way, state contracting and procurement, and personnel matters. Most recently, she provided legal support to the N.C. Turnpike Authority.

Pittman earned her B.A. from N.C. A&T and J.D. from North Carolina Central University School of Law.



'02 SAVAGE

COREY J. SAVAGE '02, a leader in higher education and non-profit with over 15 years of experience in creating programs, building awareness and engaging community leaders while fostering support for national and local non-profit organizations and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), has secured over \$3 million in scholarship and permanent

career placement for HBCU students.

Most recently, Savage joined The Walt Disney Company as an HBCU recruiter for Disney Professional Internships. In this role, Savage manages relationships with HBCUs to secure top talent for internships for the organization. He is also responsible for managing the Walt Disney Company UNCF Corporate Scholars Program and providing best practices for HBCU engagement and outreach with various aspects within the organization.

Prior to joining The Walt Disney Company, Savage was the assistant director of development at the Duke School, an independent project-based school in Durham, North Carolina. He previously served in fundraising leadership roles at North Carolina Central University and Hampton University, and as director of college relations and partnerships for the Tom Joyner Foundation.

The Durham resident holds a B.S. degree from N.C. A&T.

2000s



'08 Boone

DONALD T. BOONE '08 of BoxedUp is one of 50 recipients of the second Google for Startups Black Founders Fund that was created in 2020 in response to the financial and societal pressures facing Black founders. Each recipient receives up to \$100,000 in capital

along with Google Cloud credits, Google.org grants and hands-on support to help their startup grow.

Boone—a Seat Pleasant, Maryland, native who received his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering graduate from N.C. A&T—is a self-taught coder, 3x founder and a longtime operator with more than 13 years in both startup and Fortune 100 enterprises. After nearly four years leading teams and building customer solutions at Amazon's Business Marketplace, he and his team are scaling BoxedUp, an on-demand equipment rental platform disrupting the \$335 billion sharing economy.

2010s

KIVA ELLIOTT '11 is among the women honored as the Triad Business Journals' 2021 Outstanding Women in Business.

Elliott, who holds an M.S. in adult education/human resources development, is vice president and chief diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) officer for Cone Health. After joining Cone in 2011, she went on to establish and implement its first DEI strategic plan in 2019 using data from 3,500 employees, 60 focus group sessions and 79 one-on-one interviews. She is an NCCJ board member, a Leadership Greensboro graduate and leading Cone Health's United Way of Greater Greensboro Giving Campaign this year.

2020s

MALIQUE BRUNNER '19, '20 is a finalist for the 2021-22 Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant. Brunner earned her B.S. as a Dowdy Scholar and M.S. as part of the first cohort of Woodland Hall Fellows, both in bioengineering. She was selected for an English teaching assistant grant (ETA) in Bulgaria with the Fulbright/America for Bulgaria Foundation. She is the first known finalist to have earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees from N.C. A&T.

This grant cycle of the Fulbright Program, celebrating its 75th anniversary, carries additional historical significance for A&T, which was invited to participate in the Fulbright Program's celebration of HBCUs and HBCUs' contributions to the various programs under the Fulbright Program grant umbrella. Additionally, **EMMANUEL JOHNSON '13**, A&T's first Fulbright Program grantee, was selected for a group of 2021 Fulbright Program grant Legacy Alumni Ambassadors.

Established by Congress, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program is the largest U.S. cultural exchange program for passionate and accomplished students, artists, teachers and professionals of all backgrounds and from all disciplines to study, teach or pursue important research and professional projects. The program, led by the U.S. government in partnership with more than 140 countries, annually awards grants that cover basic travel and living expenses and provide stipends and other benefits.



JOANNA MARTINEZ '20 is a finalist and **ANDERLYN SMITH '21** is an alternate for the 2021-22 Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant.

Martinez has a B.A. in history from N.C. A&T and was a University Honors Program (UHP) member and a member of the federal TRiO Student Support Services program. A 2020 Public Policy and International Affairs Junior Summer Institute Fellow, she was chosen for an English teaching assistant grant in Mexico. She is the first known ETA finalist to have earned an undergraduate degree in the humanities from A&T.

Smith earned her B.A. in professional theatre as a Dowdy Scholar in the UHP. She was named an alternate for a study/research grant, specifically creative/performing arts, in South Africa in the field of theater arts – acting. As such, she is eligible to be named a finalist any time before the grant period begins if more resources become available.

IN MEMORIAM

ALUMNI (2020)

WILLIE J. DANCY '57, Feb. 7

ALUMNI (2021)

WALTER N. BROWN '70, July 15

ALDON L. CARSON '53, May 20

BRENDA R. CHEATHAM-MCDANIELS '80, May 26

HARVEY B. CORBETT '66, Jan. 14

LINWOOD O. COX '85, Feb. 6

MICHAEL V. DANIELS '69, Aug. 9

SUSAN D. EUBANK '09, April 7

WILLIAM E. FORD '55, Jan. 10

DOROTHY V. FREEMAN '75, July 21

JANET D. GARRETT '65, May 24

WILLIAM H. GATHERS '54, Feb. 11

WOODROW W. HARDING JR. '69, May 22

CECILIA A. HOLMES '97, March 26

ESTHER M. HUNTLEY '44, Jan. 11

CHRISTINE H. JACKSON, March 30

ETHEL J. JOHNSON '52, May 20

VIVIAN J. MCCULLOUGH '62, March 24

MARY F. MCKINNEY '52, Jan. 30

DOUGLAS MCMILLAN '62, May 4

JOHN H. MCPHAUL JR. '86, Feb. 28

MOHAMMED MILANI '76, Feb. 20

HERMAN R. MITCHELL '51, June 22

LOLITA C. PAGE, Aug. 30

MALACHI PARSON JR. '72, May 13

ARLIE PONDS '78, Feb. 18

COREY A. REDDER '99, March 27

ROBERT A. SCOTT '61, April 12

OTHA L. SHERRILL JR. '54, June 1

WILLIE R. SKINNER '65, July 2

KEVIN B. SLOCUMB '07, May 11

DELORION DASHAWN SMITH, Oct. 29

LINWOOD J. SMITH '53, Jan. 29

WILBUR L. SMITH '63, Jan. 23

CURTIS SPENCER, Feb. 23

VEDA J. SPELLMAN STROUD '39, Nov. 7

JAMES C. SUMMERS '92, March 28

DAMON R. THOMAS '72, March 1

VERL R. THOMPSON '90, July 11

CHARLES F. TURNER '57, Date

MAGGIE-JEAN L. TURNER '61, April 27

CHAUNCEY W. WALKER JR. '68, Aug. 14

WILLIE J. WALLS '50, Feb. 16

LUTHER A. WATLINGTON '64, Feb. 8

ALEXANDER WATSON '53, Feb. 6

ALEJANDRO P. WHITE '03, Feb. 2

RODNEY M. WILLIAMS '80, March 17

STUDENTS, EMPLOYEES & OTHERS (2021)

CHAWKI ABDEL-WADUD DEIDI, undergraduate (marketing), Nov. 8

SUSAN DAWN EUBANK, graduate (counseling), April 7

JULIUS HARP, Ph.D., professor (chemistry), Aug. 17

LEUEL M. MEKONNEN, undergraduate (computer science), Oct. 11

TIM METCALF, assistant athletics director (compliance), Oct. 22

FATIMAH ALIYYAH NAILAH SHABAZZ '21, graduate student, Nov. 28

DELORION DASHAWN SMITH, undergraduate, Oct. 29

KWASHAWN JALEEK TYSON, undergraduate, Oct. 29

KAMARI A. WILLIAMS, undergraduate (kinesiology), May 16



L-R: LeShari Clemmons, Hairston Middle School art teacher; Paulo Dembo, Hairston Middle School student; Shamilia Carpenter, Hairston Middle School student; Darlene McClinton, N.C. A&T professor and Arts Greensboro grant manager; Felix Davilab '20, A&T art alum; and Howard Little, Hairston Middle School student (Photo: Ivan Sual Cutler, Carolina Peacemaker)

MORE THAN ART PROJECTS

Once homeless, alumna impacts communities through art, teaching and service.

By Alana V. Allen '07

The life of Darlene J. McClinton '05 can be summed up with one simple word: endurance. Her career as an “art-preneur” has had its ups and downs, but she continues to prevail and is now recognized as a highly sought-after artist for public art in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The South Bronx, New York, native has made her mark in the community by being instrumental in constructing more than 10 murals that have revived and restored areas of Greensboro.

McClinton studied visual arts and design at North Carolina A&T. After graduation, she moved to Washington, D.C., to attend Howard University to obtain her master’s degree in fine arts, painting and digital art. She graduated in 2007 with a dream to become an international artist and decided to move back to New York.

“I moved to New York City with only \$5,000 in my pocket. I was young and I didn’t know how to manage money,” said McClinton. “I found myself being homeless within three months of living in the city.”

McClinton slept in her car for months while working at a trucking company and could only sometimes afford a hotel room.

“During this time, I was angry with God, and I couldn’t process what I was going through in the midst of the 2008 recession,” said McClinton.

With the ability to save as much as she could, McClinton decided to move to Atlanta without a plan and still without a home.

“During this time, I refused to tell my mom about my situation, and I can honestly say when I was homeless, I ate every day, even if it was for \$3 or less, I never missed a meal,” she said.

“This experience humbled me greatly and one day I decided to call a former D.C. employer, Our Future, and in my mind, I was calling my future. I was offered a position immediately and my supervisor gave me advancement checks that allowed me to secure an apartment.”

McClinton worked for Our Future for three years and took on a position as an art teacher at a Title I middle school.

“I never imagined myself as a teacher, but I knew I had a calling to live a life of service to people,” she said. “When I arrived at Charles Hart Middle School, I received a classroom of students who were labeled as ‘bad kids’ and I decided to use art to calm them down and heal their trauma.”

While at that school, McClinton created an art showcase for the students. More than 100 parents attended.

“The principal at that time was an Aggie (and) told me this was the first time in 20 years that an impact was being made in that community,” she said.

In 2010, McClinton received a call from the late LeAnder Canady, an art professor at N.C. A&T, who informed her about a position in the visual art department.

“I thought it was a dream come true because I had struggled for so long and I was coming back to Aggieworld with a stable position that allowed me to teach art,” she said.

For 11 years, McClinton has taught at A&T and has raised more than \$20,000 to assist students with scholarships. In addition, she has been instrumental in keeping alumni engaged through the Visual Arts Alumni and Friends Association housed in the Dudley Building.

In 2014, McClinton and two of her friends partnered to establish The Artist Bloc LLC, a place for creators to reside to get through their artist “bloc.”

“The Artist Bloc LLC is managed by three African American women who are all local artists,” said McClinton. “As a business, we can hire artists to showcase their work and we have a performance space. We are known as the Creative Mecca of Greensboro.”

McClinton entered the public art space in 2011, when she created her first mural at Bennett College inside of the Intergenerational House.

“I knew this was an opportunity for me to make an imprint on the community and I knew without a doubt, entering into the world of murals would afford me opportunities that would pay me for my creative gift,” she said.

Following that project, McClinton constructed a mural for the International Civil Rights Center and Museum, titled “The Celebration of Progress.” In 2014, she made the front page of the (Greensboro) News & Record newspaper when she restored a 127-foot-long pedestrian tunnel in the Aycock Historic District.

“This was a desolate place where various crimes took place and many people didn’t know it existed,” said McClinton. “I wanted to breathe life into the project by transforming the darkness into light and color.”

In the early summer of 2020, during the peak of the Black Lives Matter movement, McClinton, seven A&T students and faculty went down to repair the damage associated with protests in Downtown Greensboro. The group was instrumental in creating the butterfly mural at the Elsewhere Museum and other murals.

“When moments like this transpire, you have to think quickly as an artist and use your gift to construct a masterpiece. Also, you have to be willing to lead others and have the ability to provide direction on your vision,” she said.

In the summer of 2021, McClinton and 10 A&T alumni partnered to take on the monumental task of painting historical figures on the hallways of Hairston Middle School in Greensboro, titled “The Creative Minds Murals.” The murals pay homage to figures such as former President Barack Obama, Vice President Kamala Harris, A&T alumnus and astronaut Ronald McNair, anti-apartheid activist and former South Africa President Nelson Mandela, mathematician Katherine Johnson, and many more. The project took seven weeks to accomplish.

“The principal of Hairston Middle School had a vision to ignite passion back into the students when they return from summer break by showing a representation of Black leaders,” she said.

McClinton still serves as an art professor at A&T and works as a grant manager for Arts Greensboro, a role that allows her to provide funding to local and regional artists.

HOMECOMING HIGHLIGHTS

2021



A



B





C

- A** GAME (Oct. 30): Gridiron action
- B** ALUMNI CONCERT (Oct. 29): Grammy Award winning singer Stephanie Mills
- C** FALL CONVOCATION (Oct. 28): Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr. (center) with six of the 11 alumni achievement award recipients (L-R) Roderick M. "Rod" McLean '92 (College of Engineering), keynote speaker; Angela R. Butler-Rice, M.D. '93 (Julia S. Brooks Achievement Award); Patrice Withers-Stephens '05 (Velma R. Speight Young Alumna Award); Diane Frost Hill, MBA '77 (Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics); Ulysses J. Cozart Jr. '77 (Howard C. Barnhill Distinguished Service Award); Kelvin M. Edwards, Ed.D. '89/'93 (College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences)



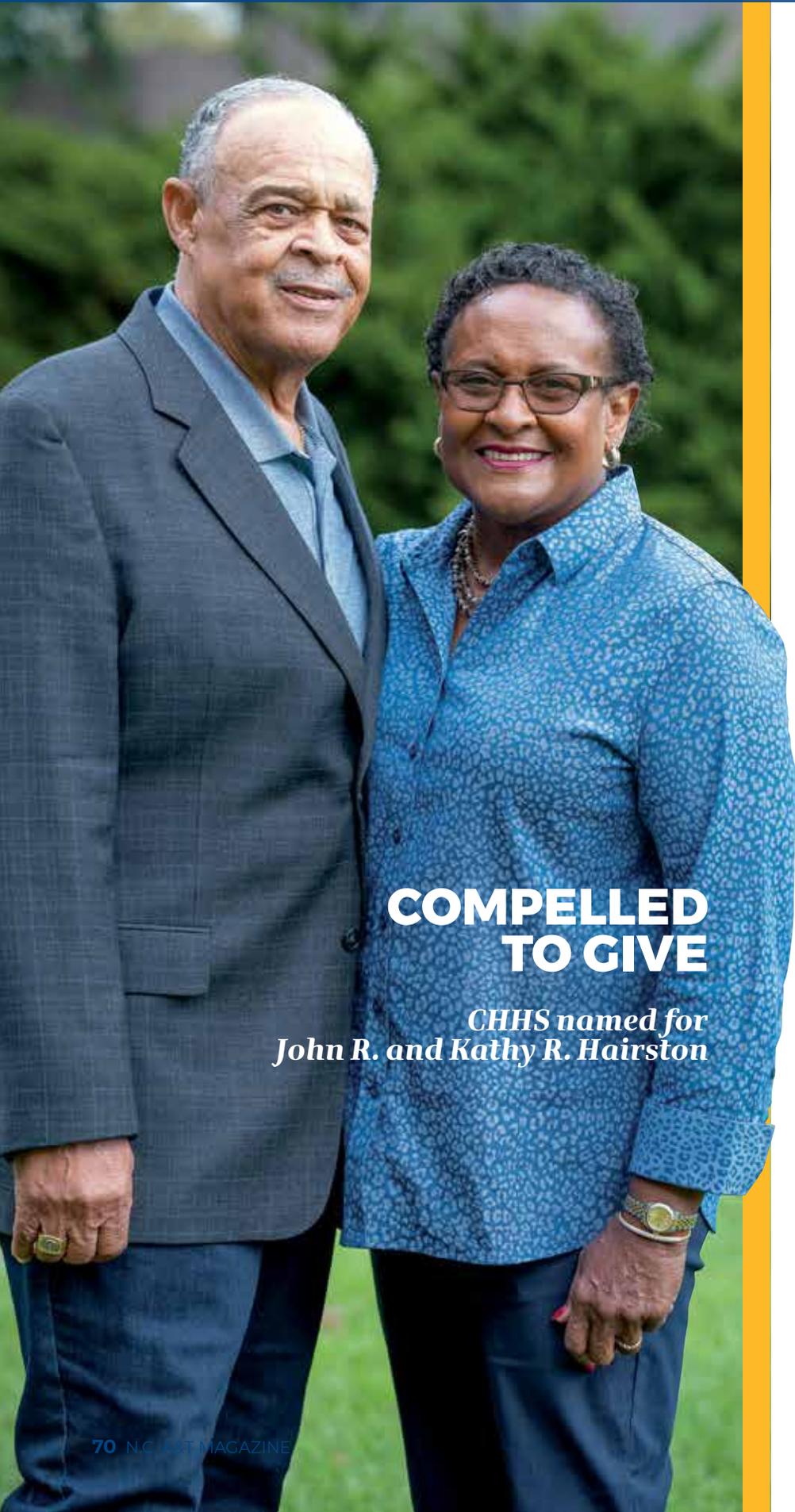
D

- D** CORONATION (Oct. 24): Mister and Miss A&T, Joshua Suiter and Zaria C. Woodford, respectively



E

- E** ALUMNI CONCERT (Oct. 29): R&B and funk band Con Funk Shun



COMPELLED TO GIVE

*CHHS named for
John R. and Kathy R. Hairston*

By Jackie Torok

Fifty years ago, two young students met and fell in love at North Carolina A&T: one a football player from Charlotte, North Carolina, who was studying to become a teacher and the other a local girl pursuing a bachelor's degree in social service.

The couple married a year after both graduated, with a family and career together in business following soon thereafter. That joint career was successful and prosperous enough that it allowed them to give back to their alma mater in many ways—so many that the university has named the College of Health and Human Sciences (CHHS) after **JOHN R.** and **KATHY R. HAIRSTON**, both from the class of 1975.

The Hairston College is the second A&T college in two years to be named, with the Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics being the first.

“John and Kathy Hairston are distinguished alumni who embody Aggie Pride,” Lenora R. Campbell, Ph.D., who was dean of the CHHS at the time of the naming. “Over the years, they have made generous contributions to the university and the College of Health and Human Sciences, and we are extraordinarily pleased to have our college bear their name.”

Naming the college for the Hairstons elevates its reputation of excellence, allowing it to continue attracting first-rate talent in both faculty and students. It also raises the CHHS profile within the realms of academia and research.

The Hairstons most recently bestowed a multi-million, multi-year cash pledge in unrestricted endowed funds to the college to address a variety of needs, including scholarships, department chairs, fellowships and distinct program offerings at the nation's No. 1 public historically Black university.

"We are compelled to contribute to A&T and to our community because so many people provided us with the opportunities to succeed," said Kathy Hairston. "We want to do our part to make sure others receive opportunities for success."

John Hairston added, "It is said that to whom much is given, much is required. Giving back is the right thing to do."

After graduation, John first became a teacher and coach and then began a small construction company to supplement the family income. As they started a family—they have two sons, John Jr. and Jeffrey, and a daughter, Jennifer—the couple became interested in owning a McDonald's franchise, so John enrolled in its owner training program.

Within two years of completing the training, John and Kathy purchased their first McDonald's restaurant in downtown Atlanta. The Hairstons reinvented the formerly struggling location, ultimately receiving an award for most improved restaurant in the region. After three years, they returned to Charlotte to purchase and build more McDonald's locations—11 restaurants over a 40-year span.

Throughout their careers, the Hairstons supported numerous civic and athletic organizations to

continually invest in the people of the communities they served.

The Hairstons and their company, John R. Hairston Enterprises Inc., earned numerous major awards from the McDonald's Corp.: the Golden Arch, given to the top 1% of McDonald's owners and operators based on sales, performance and community involvement; the Ronald Award, predicated on sales, performance and community involvement; and the Street Fighter Award, for ingenuity, creativity and aggressiveness in building market share. The couple received the latter award three times.

John and Kathy retired in September 2020.

The longtime supporters of A&T gave many times of their time and treasure. They established the John R. and Kathy R. Hairston Distinguished Professorship of Sociology and Social Work in April 2017 and the John R. & Kathy R. Hairston Endowed Scholarship that supports sociology and social work students. Additionally, Kathy received the 2013 Alumni Achievement Award for her outstanding levels of achievement and excellence in sustained scholarship, career achievement and service to the university.

"We owe a lot to A&T and the Charlotte community. We want our legacy to be that we did what we could to make a positive difference in the world," said John, a graduate of West Charlotte High School. Added Kathy, who graduated from James B. Dudley High, "The advice I offer our fellow Aggies is this: Never forget where you came from, and always reach back to help others."

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FALL-WINTER 2021-2022

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N.C. A&T EARNS PRESTIGIOUS APLU INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY DESIGNATION

North Carolina A&T has been awarded the prestigious Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) designation by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and its Commission on Economic and Community Engagement. N.C. A&T is the first HBCU and the first of the 1890 member institutions to receive the designation, which recognizes institutional commitment to regional economic development.

Earning the IEP designation allows A&T to better know, tell and maximize its contributions to economic engagement through talent and workforce development; innovation, entrepreneurship and tech-based economic development. The benefits also extend to placing students in roles that allow them to integrate public service, Cooperative Extension, outreach and community engagement with efforts to expand the economy and equitable prosperity both locally and across the globe. More than 70 institutions have been named IEP designees since the program was launched in 2012.



This is A&T's second major recognition for engagement. In 2015, the university earned the Carnegie Foundation's community engagement classification. Like the APLU IEP designation, it is an optional credential for which campuses must apply and undergo a rigorous evaluation.