

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

# 1876

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI, FACULTY, AND SUPPORTERS

WINTER ★ 2022

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



COVER STORY

## Decades of Compassion UNLEASHED

100 years later the College of Nursing is still a bastion of hope in the face of a global pandemic

WINTER ★ 2022

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 4-13

## ON THE HILL

B-Global  
New Engineering Building  
Grad TX 2.0 initiative  
KPVU-FM radio station  
Melina Abdullah  
Nikki Giovanni

Page 14-17

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Ivy Leaf Farms  
Healthy Houston PV

Page 18-25

## ALUMNI STORIES

Outspoken Bean  
Cover Story: Nursing  
Eric Fagan

Page 26-27

## PHILANTHROPY

Opal Johnson



Page 28-31

## ATHLETICS

SOCCER: Lady Panthers

Page 32-35

## FACULTY PROFILES

Andrea McDonald  
Katina L. Thomas

Page 36

## IN THE LAB

Bobby J. Smith

Page 37

## TIME CAPSULE

Colin L. Powell

Page 38-39

## CLASS NOTES



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## Message from



THE DIRECTOR  
**Billy Davis**

» Over the past 18 months, we have seen changes to our everyday lives as we adjust to a new way of living with Covid-19. Going from working and learning remotely to being back in the office and classroom has given us a small taste of normalcy. Although we have not ultimately returned to the pre-pandemic lifestyle, I believe there is a light at the end of this tunnel. I look forward to the days that we can connect in person once again.

It has been an exciting year for the university as we have progressively moved to expand our students' offerings and experiences and elevate the university's national image. Our students have shown a high level of resiliency and dedication to Prairie View A&M University as they returned to campus this fall to continue their education. I ask our alumni to continue your support of our students as they represent the outstanding achievements to come from this university.

The Office of Alumni Affairs continues to work towards improving our alumni communication and engagement. It is increasingly important to have our alumni better informed and in-tuned to the academic advancements, alumni accomplishments, and issues affecting our institution.

Last year, we launched the 5 YR Reunion Program, a collaborative effort between the Offices of Alumni Affairs and Development. The 5 YR Alumni Reunion program is designed to reconnect alumni with their classmates and the university while encouraging lifelong financial participation in its advancement. We see this new alumni tradition as one that will impact our students and the university's growth years to come.

During the first year, our focus was finding ambassadors for the classes whose year ended in 1 & 6, and this year we added the classes ending in 2 & 7. Those efforts have led to over 100 alumni ambassadors volunteering to serve as leaders of their classes. We expect great things from this program as it continues to grow and reconnect classmates with the university and each other.

During our 2021 homecoming activities, we had the pleasure of hosting two outstanding classes: 1970 & 1971. We are always excited to host alumni from the Golden Classes. They have made countless contributions in support of Prairie View A&M University and are defining their legacy as one of creating opportunities for others to follow.

It was truly an honor to hear the countless stories of their personal and professional achievements, relationships that have stood the test of time, and their endearing love of Prairie View A&M University. The Golden Classes are shining examples for us to follow. They have shown us that our relationship with PVAMU is for a lifetime, and we should remain involved and supportive of the institution that has given so much to us all.

Like the legacy and commitment of the golden class alumni, the Office for Alumni Affairs seeks to connect every alumnus back to our alma mater.

### Here are a few ways you can stay connected.

- 1** Provide your contact information to the university at [www.pvamu.edu/pvconnected](http://www.pvamu.edu/pvconnected)
- 2** Attend university-sponsored events
- 3** Volunteer your time
- 4** Follow the Office of Alumni Affairs on social media

Your connection with the university is paramount to our students' and the university's growth. Recently, our office distributed two surveys seeking alumni input to the 2022-2025 University Strategic Plan. I hope you were able to provide your valuable input toward the advancement of University priorities. Alumni participation in surveys is only one way to provide your feedback to the university. Your wealth of knowledge and network of resources are needed on committees throughout the university. A new survey will be launched at the top of the year to identify alumni who wish to serve. Such collaborative efforts are essential to the way the university works, and your input is paramount to help us grow and improve.

We've seen a steady increase in alumni engagement and participation. We know more work is to be done as we try to reach as many more alumni as possible. We want to hear your success stories!

Share them with the Office of Alumni Affairs by visiting our website at [www.pvamu.edu/alumni](http://www.pvamu.edu/alumni) or emailing [alumni@pvamu.edu](mailto:alumni@pvamu.edu).

I hope you will remain engaged and take advantage of the many opportunities available to you. Every day is a great day to be a Panther!

With much Panther pride,

**Billy Davis '91**

Director of Alumni Affairs

## B-Global

An exciting pilot program at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) is looking to educate and inspire the university's newest students to become globally aware and interculturally sensitive leaders.



PVAMU student Shirley Kennebrew; 2019 Study Abroad - Shanghai

» Broadening Global Learning Opportunities, Building Academic Leaders (B-GLOBAL) launched this fall. First-time freshmen of any major who submitted an on-campus housing application were eligible to apply. B-GLOBAL is a two-year learning community that integrates curricular and co-curricular programming, which develops and enhances students' global competence skills. These kinds of skills have been proven to promote effective communication, which lead to open and appropriate interactions with people of all races and backgrounds.

"We're trying to provide a holistic approach so we can reach students where they are," said Nathan Mitchell, Ph.D., PVAMU associate professor of political science and co-director of B-GLOBAL. "One of the things that most concerned us about the pandemic and student travel being limited is the difficulty to teach global skills and competencies. We're using the framework of 'glocalism' to bring the globe to them."

Students who are part of B-GLOBAL will have the option of learning new languages, developing e-portfolios, receiving global leader certificates and badges and living in what will start as a cohort in University College. The cohort will eventually become designated housing for B-GLOBAL students. Mitchell said the initial group of participants would be clustered together, if not necessarily in the same building, and that similarly, opportunities to study abroad will come a little later.

Marcus King '11 '21, program director in the Office of International Programs and B-GLOBAL's other co-director said, "Most institutions have something like this but at a

smaller scale. It's pretty comprehensive for sure — lots of different people will have to make a contribution to make sure it's successful."

As part of the integrated programming that will form the basis of the learning community, students will enroll in a series of common courses in the "Global Awareness" and "Language, Philosophy, and Culture" areas of the core curriculum. An eventual global studies minor, or even major, remains a possibility.

"Because it is focused on the core curriculum, a lot of the globally focused courses will feed right into the student's existing course of study," said Mitchell. "We're trying to give students a foundation, and if they decide to study or work abroad, or even here at home, they will have important skills they'll be able to leverage."

Mitchell, a PVAMU professor since 2008, attended Virginia Tech where there were many officially recognized learning communities. He experienced international travel as part of a leadership-based community, but said the greater benefit was the connection with like-minded people, many of whom remain his friends to this day.

"It gives students a deeper connection to the university and to their peers," he said.



## ON THE HILL

# PVAMU Breaks Ground On New State-Of-The-Art Engineering Building



With more than a dozen gleaming shovels festooned with purple and gold bows, at least a dozen university and system administrators, donors and student representatives ceremoniously broke ground on June 8 on a \$70 million classroom and research building for the Roy G. Perry College of Engineering.

Written by: Andrew COHEN

» Designed by Stantec Architecture and to be built by Vaughn Construction, the 106,000 square-foot facility will offer lab spaces designed to support multidisciplinary research, a maker space to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and classroom spaces for direct instruction.

“I’ve launched engineering building projects at every campus that I’ve led,” remarked Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) President Ruth J. Simmons at the groundbreaking ceremony, “but none of those buildings, at Brown or at Smith or even at Princeton, was as pivotal as the one we set out today to erect here at Prairie View. That’s because the intersection of the nation’s needs and these times, and what Prairie View can produce uniquely well, is represented in this project. If Prairie View could manage to excel and have such an impact for so many years with less than state-of-the-art facilities, imagine what it might achieve with facilities of the kind envisioned here.”

Among those voices heard at the ceremony (and a member of the group wielding shovels) was Joseph Dowell, a PVAMU doctoral student in the College of Engineering who earned his undergraduate and master’s degrees at Prairie View.

“For us, this new building is a symbol of continued growth and evolution for our students and for the

College of Engineering,” Dowell said. “This building will provide engineering students with the space and the tools necessary to stay at the forefront of meeting societal challenges, to stay in the position where Prairie View students like to be: on top of our game, and ahead of the game.”

Pamela Obiomon, dean of the Roy G. Perry College of Engineering, briefly touched on PVAMU’s “firmly planted roots” in industrial education in her opening remarks and said that the new building would “build on that legacy of innovation and technology.”

Her thoughts were amplified by Elaine Mendoza, the immediate past chair of the Board of Regents for The Texas A&M University System, who predicted that new, high-tech facilities “will draw even more top talent to Prairie View’s already renowned engineering program. Investing in Prairie View’s future has been the priority of our system leadership, and today’s groundbreaking is evidence of that.

“It’s because we all rally around the vision that Prairie View will compete with the ‘Ivies’ for top academic talent, faculty, and research dollars, and that Prairie View is recognized not only as the top HBCU in Texas but as a top university in Texas, period,” said Mendoza.

Chancellor John Sharp of the TAMU System listed Prairie View’s many building projects undertaken over the past



Dr. Pamela Obiomon '93, Dean of the Roy G. Perry College of Engineering

decade (an investment of more than \$300 million since 2009) and the skyward trajectory of per-student funding during that time.

“So much has happened over the TAMU System,” he said. “But speaking for myself and the regents assembled here today, the most important thing to the system as a whole has been Prairie View A&M University. As state support has dropped, the board of regents has stepped up, and they have helped take Prairie View to the next level.”

Much of the credit belongs to President Simmons, Sharp made clear, saying that her decision to come to Prairie View was “the shot heard round the world” and that the “psychological boost” to the university “cannot be overstated.”



Simmons, though, preferred to keep the focus on the regents as well as on alumnus Roy G. Perry, another of the honored guests at the groundbreaking. “Your presence confirms the magnitude of this undertaking,” she said.

“We are one of the largest producers of African American engineers in the country,” Simmons continued. “That is well known, and it’s a source of pride, and we aspire to produce engineers of all backgrounds. And increasingly, it’s evident we are doing just that.”

“It’s why our students are much sought-after and why our corporate partnerships and funding are expanding rapidly and robustly. I insisted, at some point early in my time at Prairie View, that this building be a near-term priority, and as soon as I said it, we received immediate support from the chancellor, his staff, and the board of regents,” she said.

Simmons gestured to the line of shovels. “Now, let’s get this show on the road!”

## PVAMU’s Grad TX 2.0 initiative gives former students new chance to earn degree



Written by: Jason **REAGAN** and Marchita **SHILO**

» According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center’s Some College, No Degree report, millions of Americans attend college but never finish their degree. At Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU), some 2,000 students are accepted and enrolled to attend each fall. However, more than half of students who begin their higher education journeys on “The Hill” do not receive a degree within six years, or they stop going altogether.

To reverse this trend, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has partnered with PVAMU as part of a new initiative called Grad TX 2.0. The program will recruit, re-engage, and re-enroll former students in the Houston area to help them restart and complete their college careers.

“The overall goal of the Grad TX 2.0 program is designed to increase participation and success of returning adult students who have ‘stopped-out’ of higher education without obtaining a credential of value – that’s a certificate, associate degree, bachelor’s degree, or above,” said Kimberly Sanders, Ed.D., assistant vice president of Strategic Enrollment Initiatives. Sanders chairs PVAMU’s Grad TX 2.0 committee. “For the purposes of this program, stop-outs include, at a minimum, any student who has exited higher education without a credential, and any student who has attended an accredited higher education institution for at least one full-length academic semester. PVAMU partnering with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will work to implement and expand innovative approaches to help returning students maximize their earned college credits and support students to complete a credential.”

### GRAD TX 2.0 PLUS 60X30TX

The Grad TX 2.0 program will assist the THECB and PVAMU in meeting the goals and objectives of the state’s existing 60x30TX plan. 60x30TX was launched in 2015 to have at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 earn a certificate or degree by 2030. As reported by the THECB, college completions in Texas are improving, but not quickly enough. Only 20 percent of Texas 8th grade students in 2006 graduated from college by 2017; that’s how long it should have taken them to graduate from high school and finish college in six years.

“This is far below what the state needs,” Sanders said. “Experts say that in 12 years, 60 percent of Texans will need a certificate or degree for the state to stay competitive in the global economy. Right now, not nearly enough Texas students are completing the levels of education needed to fill the jobs that will be available.”

Research shows that someone with a bachelor’s degree can earn nearly double the lifetime wages of a high school graduate. And as wages go up, so does the state’s revenue through tax increases. Higher education also helps the state meet its changing workforce needs and spurs new businesses. In other words, “when Texas students win, the state wins.”

“Grad TX 2.0 will increase the success and participation of Some College, No Credential (SCNC) students who have stopped out or withdrawn,” Sanders said. “Grad TX 2.0 will help them re-enroll at PVAMU and provide the academic and financial support needed in order for them to complete their degree and gain the skills necessary for career advancement and opportunities, thus, continuing to make Texas the economic driver of the country.”

### GRAD TX 2.0 EQUALS SUPPORT

The THECB has already boosted Grad TX 2.0 with a \$30,000 grant. In collaboration with the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP), whose primary goal is to “champion” Houston’s economic growth, the two entities are a perfect match to support community colleges and universities across the state, including PVAMU, to amplify the local economy.

“They’re creating strategies to bring students back to educational programs and get a degree,” Sanders said. “That, in turn, should also lead to an increase in the state’s graduation rate, which stands at less than 50 percent.”

Students who re-enroll at PVAMU through the Grad TX 2.0 program will receive academic assistance in the form of flexible scheduling, increased online course offerings, academic advisors by major, and other cross-departmental agencies providing individualized support programs to meet their educational needs. Sanders said Grad TX 2.0 may provide students with emergency and scholarship aid to fill the gaps where needed so they can continue their education.

“Many times, students stop attending school because they have a balance at their previous institution, and that institution won’t release the student’s college transcript,” Sanders said. “Without that college transcript, students have to start college all over again, retaking classes that they already completed if they were to attend another college. Other students stop attending because of increased family responsibilities.”

Sanders added the program’s numerical goal is to enroll at least 10 percent of the identified population by the fall semester of 2021.



### EMPOWERING HOUSTON AND BEYOND

While a large part of Grad TX 2.0 revolves around reversing daunting statistics, the most significant portion aligns with PVAMU’s mission to invest in programs and services that address issues and challenges affecting the diverse, ethnic, and socioeconomic populations of Texas.

“PVAMU’s values of access and quality, relevance, and social responsibility within our curriculum, combined with our location between Northwest Houston’s Metro region and rural Central Texas, make us an excellent choice for students to complete a bachelor’s degree,” Sanders said. “We have a committee of staff across disciplines who are serving and working to move this initiative forward.”

Prospects have the opportunity to enroll now for the spring 2021 semester or the upcoming semesters in the summer and fall semesters.

“PVAMU began working on this new initiative this fall,” Sanders said. “We are excited that THECB selected us to be one of the HBCUs in Texas to be included in the partnership. PVAMU is looking forward to connecting with students who would like to complete what they started.”

For more information, please contact  
gradtx@pvamu.edu.

# PVAMU's KPVU-FM radio station undergoes **MAJOR REVAMP**

When Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) launched its signature radio station, KPVU-FM, in 1981, nearly every household in the U.S. had at least one radio. After all, it was the only way to hear music outside of buying vinyl or cassettes.

Written by: Jocelyn **KERR**



» Over the years, KPVU became the primary voice of PVAMU as a National Public Radio (NPR) jazz and heritage station. The station was the “front porch” to the university, and the listenership remained strong even as the music landscape changed.

“There are literally thousands of people that listen to KPVU every day,

who may never step foot on the grounds of Prairie View A&M University. But their knowledge of the university comes by way of listening to KPVU. And, it’s more than just listening to the music; it’s listening to the many public services, community affairs, and community dialogue that we have, with respect to the activities and the enterprises that make

up Prairie View A&M University,” said KPVU General Manager John Hughes.

Hughes joined KPVU in 2016, just as streaming music services were gaining popularity and the station’s audience was becoming more diverse. Listeners of all ages were tuning in, including millennials, gen-Xers, and baby boomers.

“Our goal was to create a playlist that had a mix of music that would appeal to the three generations. So that led up to what, and where, we are now,” Hughes said.

The station recently rebranded to “The Art of Soul” to focus on being a “bridge” between the generations through neo-soul, jazz, world music, and one of the

country's best Latin music programs. This bridge creates a "sweet spot" or a center of gravity around soul music.

"Soul music is what makes us US", Hughes said.

KPVU continues to program heritage music, including R&B, along with timely, community-focused programs. There is also a focus on emerging artists like Ari Lennox, Snoh Aalegra, and Masego, who are programmed alongside neo-soul icons like D'Angelo, Erykah Badu, and Jill Scott. Of course, there are tracks by soul legends that include Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Aretha Franklin.

"The artist collage idea on our website was initially conceptualized by Darriel Andrews, a PVAMU graduate from Chicago who majored in architecture. The collage acknowledges the diverse array of artists you hear on 91.3 KPVU," said KPVU Program Director Marquis Lofton. "The final image was brilliantly reconceptualized and produced by PVAMU Alumnus Byron Lundy, founder of iBrandMedia."

Along with the rebranding, a new website was designed in coordination with PVAMU's information technology department. Listeners can now stream KPVU live from anywhere in the world.

"The entire platform is being redeveloped, including integrating social media and making the station more accessible to listeners across the Houston metro and beyond," said Hughes.

Hughes and Lofton worked together years ago at Clark

Atlanta University's radio station, 91.9 WCLK. The two shared a vision for making PVAMU's KPVU a preeminent destination for music discovery.

*"We are on a mission to program new and classic music from around the globe. This mission includes award-winning content in the form of specialty programs, such as Neo Soul Cafe, The S.O.U.L. of Jazz, and Latin Soul," Lofton said.*

"KPVU will continue our commitment to our communities of service providing news and information from NPR, our daily morning news program, *The Takeaway*, public/contemporary affairs programs, such as *It's Been a Minute with Sam Sanders*, *Latino USA*, and locally produced programs such as *On The Hill* with PVAMU's own Frank D. Jackson. KPVU's local announcers, Jamal Ahmad, DJ Frances Jaye, Rolene Bailey, Masani, and Gyla Gonzalez, are paired with award-winning jazz musicians Marcus Johnson and Bob Baldwin, who are experts in their respective musical areas. We are excited to add a new addition to our lineup featuring PVAMU alumna and the voice of the Mighty Marching Storm, TT On the Mic. And, an added element of surprise and delight is having the Griot from the City of Prairie View host *The Ride*."

PVAMU President Ruth J. Simmons supported KPVU's new mission with a \$10,000 donation

during the station's year-end fundraiser. Provost Emeritus E. Joahanne Thomas-Smith also gave a significant gift.

Perhaps, most importantly, KPVU is expanding its mission to train PVAMU students. As part of the Communication Department in the Marvin D. and June Samuel Brailsford College of Arts and Sciences, the station will broaden advisement of the student radio organization, PV-U KNO Radio.

"We're greatly expanding our student training platform where we've already started with the creation of what fundamentally is a lab," Hughes said.

The new teaching platform will allow students to gain experience in radio programming, operations, marketing, and other learning opportunities aligned with the Department of Languages and Communication. As many as 75 students can participate in training opportunities at present. Hughes said this expansion is just one aspect of their goal to develop more strategic partnerships, both on campus and with industry experts, including Houston Public Media and others.

"We're looking at developing strategic partners who add resources and expertise to the station," Hughes said. These partnerships extend to the PVAMU community, including on-air announcements to celebrate the College of Nursing's 100th anniversary and continuous promotion of the university's colleges, school, and athletics

department. "We have a commitment to position our university's concert choir on Houston's mainstage, alongside some of our country's most celebrated musicians during KPVU's benefit concerts," said Hughes.

Overall, it has taken a lot of work to develop the rebranding and expansion strategies. However, Hughes and Lofton, along with seven announcers, are driving home the station's mission.

"My staff of announcers work tirelessly to bring an exceptional mix of familiar and unfamiliar music, including new and old voices, within our playlist. Our working ethos is that every song on the station's playlist counts; correspondingly, our musical ambition is to 'surprise and delight' our audience," Lofton said.

"Marquis and I made sure that anyone listening to KPVU hears on the hour, every hour, 'This is 91.3 KPVU, a broadcast service of Prairie View A&M University' – thus proclaiming to the world KPVU is Prairie View A&M University," Hughes added.

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## MELINA ABDULLAH brings grandmother's spirit to new role as PVAMU's FIRST ACTIVIST-IN-RESIDENCE



Written by: Marchita **SHILO**

» PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY (PVAMU) ANNOUNCED THAT SCHOLAR AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE LOS ANGELES CHAPTER OF BLACK LIVES MATTER, MELINA ABDULLAH, WILL BE THE UNIVERSITY'S INAUGURAL ACTIVIST-IN-RESIDENCE FOR THE 2021-2022 ACADEMIC YEAR.

The news comes almost a year and a half after PVAMU President Ruth J. Simmons wrote a letter to the university community following George Floyd's unlawful murder at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. Among Simmons' four suggestions to "advance understanding of the impact of discrimination on the health of the country" includes the establishment of a Center for Race and Justice. This idea came to fruition with the launch of the Ruth J. Simmons Center for Race and Justice in March 2020. Another suggestion was creating an Activist-in-Residence position, which would bring individuals to campus who have made a difference in casting light on or solving systemic social problems.

Melanye Price, the Simmons Center's first director, had the distinct pleasure of choosing who would fill the position. She was already sold on Abdullah, but when she learned in conversation that Abdullah's grandmother was a Prairie View A&M graduate, "It seemed like fate," she said. "For me, Prairie View connects me with her

legacy," said Abdullah, who currently serves as a professor of Pan-African Studies and immediate past Department Chair at California State University, Los Angeles.

*"My heart soars at the thought of walking the campus that nurtured and affirmed the Black-woman-brilliance of my family's matriarch, who, even in 1932, was empowered to step fully into her intellect, her wit, her humor, and her love for our people."*

Abdullah added, "My grandmother passed in 2003. She spoke of Prairie View often as shaping her. She stepped into who she was as an educator, pledged our beloved sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, developed lifelong friendships, and received an education that would benefit not only herself and her family but an entire community."

Originally from Oakland, California, Abdullah's college career began with a bachelor's from Howard University in African

American Studies. Later, she earned her master's and doctorate from the University of Southern California in Political Science.

A leading expert on race, gender, class, and social movements, Abdullah is among the original organizers who convened to form Black Lives Matter. She has contributed to numerous popular media outlets providing content and commentary for platforms including The Root, Los Angeles Times, MSNBC, Al-Jazeera, CNN, and Revolt. She is the creator, host, and producer of *Move the Crowd* and co-host and co-producer of *Beautiful Struggle*, which both air on 90.7 FM KPFK radio.

Recognized by LA Weekly as one of the 10 most influential Los Angeles leaders, Abdullah has garnered many accolades and awards during her career: 2016 Racial Justice Award presented by the YWCA; the 2016 Fannie Lou Hamer Award for outstanding community service presented by the Coalition of Mental Health Professionals; 2016 Fannie Lou Hamer Award presented by the National Conference of Black Political Scientists; 2016 Sacred Sistahs Award; 2016 California Teachers Association Human Rights Award; 2016 BCCLA Ella Baker Award; 2015 Freedom Now Award; and the 2015 Communitas Award.

Abdullah has also had a robust career in film

that includes dramatic roles and appearances on TV shows and in documentaries, including *Good Trouble*, *Waking the Sleeping Giant: The Making of a Political Revolution*, *When Justice Isn't Just*, *13th*, and *(In)Visible Portraits*.

Abdullah is a leader in the fight for ethnic studies in the K-12 and university systems and was a part of the historic victories that made ethnic studies a requirement in the Los Angeles Unified School District (2014) and California State University System (2020). She serves as a Los Angeles chapter lead for Black Lives Matter, a policy team lead for the California chapters, and co-director of Black Lives Matter-Grassroots, the global formation for on-the-ground organizing.

And this is the part of her impressive list of credentials that matters most as she prepares herself to help "build on PVAMU students' long history of political engagement," as the position is charged to do.

Price said that in her conception of an activist-in-residence, "The person who would take on this role would help our students better understand what it means to have a life of service and commitment to the community. I have watched Dr. Abdullah work as an activist in Black Lives Matter LA, but she has a long tradition of activism, including work as a labor organizer on her campus."

Since PVAMU's founding as the Alta Vista Agriculture

& Mechanical College of Texas for Colored Youth, many students have continuously chosen to fight against voter suppression in Waller County, where the university sits. "The county's predominantly white power structure has thrown up hurdles to keep students from voting or to limit their ability to wield meaningful political influence at the ballot box," an article written earlier this year by the Texas Tribune said.

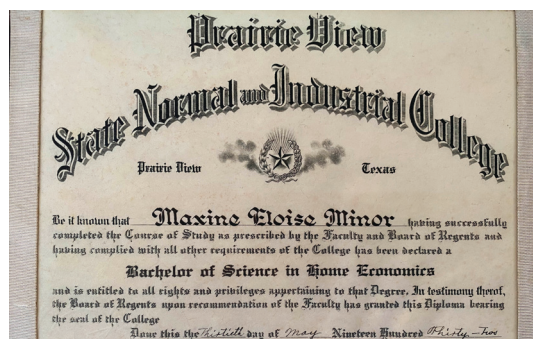
Abdullah's family legacy, Price added, mirrors PVAMU's. "I have immense pride in our legacy as an institution whose students are always actively asserting their rights and resisting efforts to silence them through voter suppression," Price said.

"As my grandmother's spirit dances, so, too, does Sandra Bland's spirit whisper to me," Abdullah said in response. "As a Black Lives Matter organizer who will become the first activist-in-residence at Sandra Bland's alma mater, I hope to inspire a generation of students to continue to struggle for justice in her name, to allow Sandy to 'speak' through their justice work. I look



Mellina Abdullah grandmother  
Maxine Eloise Minor

forward to grounding students in a tradition that ties intellectual work to justice struggle. I hope to tie them to the long history of the Black freedom struggle; to expose them to justice warriors who walked before them; to deepen their sense of 'linked fate'; to give them tools that enable them to do meaningful work in the world; to inspire them to bring their gifts and talents to the charge of Black liberation, and to deepen their understanding of and commitment to this movement moment."



# PVAMU launches **TONI MORRISON** Writing Program with public reading, lecture by **NIKKI GIOVANNI**

 Written by: Marchita **SHILO**

*“We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.”*

These are powerful words spoken by the late Toni Morrison, a prolific essayist, novelist, book editor, college professor, and the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is only fitting that Morrison’s legacy will lay the foundation for a new program at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) that will inspire students to uncover their talents and hone their skills as they learn to understand and craft the creative works across various literary genres.

“Prairie View A&M University aims to educate its students to become change leaders in an increasingly more diverse, globally interconnected world,” said Emma Joahanne Thomas-Smith, Ed.D., PVAMU provost

emerita. Thomas-Smith is overseeing the new *Toni Morrison Writing Program* at PVAMU, which officially launched on September 27.

“Toni Morrison, for whom the Writing Program is named, was the exemplar of an intellectual whose sensibilities were superbly cultivated by her childhood experiences; professional experiences in teaching and editing; and her ability to interpret attitudes, behaviors, and life circumstances of not only African American people but people across the spectrum of race, ethnicity and social class. Reading critically, thinking deeply, dreaming imaginatively, reflecting incisively and then writing compellingly is the very essence of what it means to give power to voice.”

## Training by a ‘Living Legend’

Organizationally housed in PVAMU’s Marvin D. and June Samuel Brailsford College of Arts and Sciences, the program features an annual writer-in-residence. The writer-in-residence is a “top-tier literary artist with a very substantial body of known work, prominent



Nikki Giovanni, Distinguished Professor of writing at Virginia Tech

standing in the literary community and beyond, and a genuine interest in inspiring and guiding other writers, especially students and faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs),” the program website states. The writer-in-residence will offer public readings, master classes, lectures, class visitations, and critiques of students’ works.

In August, PVAMU announced one of the most celebrated African-American poets, Nikki Giovanni, would be its inaugural writer-in-residence through 2022. The appointment of Giovanni, a University Distinguished Professor at

Virginia Tech University, officially begins with this week’s virtual series. She will host a public reading and lecture on September 27 and a master class on September 29.

“The opportunity for students to develop their voices as writers, thinkers, and leaders is immeasurably enhanced by having the tutelage of such a noted, gifted, caring and literary notable, such as Nikki Giovanni,” Thomas-Smith said.

As one of Oprah Winfrey’s 25 “Living Legends,” Giovanni’s diverse body of work includes poetry anthologies, poetry recordings, nonfiction

essays, and children's literature.

*Her early work gained attention as part of the Black Arts Movement; she was called the "Poet of the Black Revolution" because of her forceful and passionate writing about civil rights.*

Her varied activism has included providing support for other African American women writers. In addition, Giovanni has received seven NAACP Image Awards and is the recipient of the Rosa Parks Women of Courage Award and the Langston Hughes Medal for Outstanding Poetry. "In short, Nikki Giovanni is a national treasure," Thomas-Smith said.

## Teaching New Generations

The Toni Morrison Writing Program will also deliver summer writing workshops, informal book discussions with prominent authors, a scholarship program, contests, and, eventually, a full curriculum, supporting a degree program in creative writing and other linguistic expressions.

In keeping with the PVAMU's land-grant mission, the university will include an outreach component where area high schools and elementary schools will become Toni Morrison Writing Program

partners. PVAMU has established 17 Texas schools in its first cohort of K-12 Partners. They include Houston's Aldine, Booker T. Washington, Eisenhower, George Washington Carver, Jack Yates, Mirabeau B. Lamar, Nimitz, North Forest, Westbury Senior, and Wheatley high schools. Other local schools include Cypress Springs, Hempstead, Waller, Klein Forest, and Royal high schools, along with H.T. Jones Elementary in Prairie View and David W. Carter High School of Dallas.

"Faculty and staff of both the University and area high schools will share in the activities of the program and benefit from the Writer-in-Residence and other artists representing the full range of literary genres," Thomas-Smith said.

## Threads That Bind: A Program and a Center

A most prominent partner to the Toni Morrison Writing Program is the *Ruth J. Simmons Center for Race and Justice*. According to Thomas-Smith, not only is the Toni Morrison Writing Program about exploring and developing the craft of writing, but it is also about using the tool of writing to address the manifestation of social injustice through all areas of life.

"Laws, policies, rules, regulations, procedures, behaviors, and attitudes that have a disparate impact on the quality of life and pursuit of liberty and happiness of an

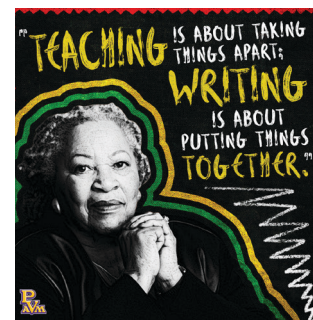
individual or group issue a clarion call for redress," Thomas-Smith said. "Marginalized populations worldwide, and in America, particularly suffer from unequal opportunities to develop their talent and pursue their dreams despite pronouncements to the contrary. The writing program will offer fertile content for writers and thinkers as it examines social justice issues, especially those pertinent to the experiences of African Americans."

Furthermore, the writing program will eventually host a forum featuring well-respected thinkers, writers, and performers, who will address race and social justice from their areas of expertise. "Nikki Giovanni will take the lead in drawing the thread of social justice long denied but in candidacy for repair," Thomas-Smith said.

## A Humble Beginning

The Toni Morrison Writing Program at PVAMU was made possible via a substantial gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott in early 2021. Scott was a student of Morrison's during her time at Princeton and attributes much of her development as an author to Morrison's mentorship.

In a recent article by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, President Ruth J. Simmons said Scott didn't want any buildings or centers named after her. So PVAMU decided to establish the writing program after Scott's former teacher.



"That's as far as we could go in demonstrating our gratitude for her generosity," Simmons said during the interview.

"Clearly, Scott learned more from Morrison than the craft of writing," Thomas-Smith said. "Her extravagant generosity for which she sought nothing in return is evidence that she learned from Morrison to put people, humanity first. Using her resources to elevate opportunities for the next generation, especially those at HBCUs, speaks volumes. Her humility is palpable. We appreciate her and are pleased to have this Toni Morrison Writing Program honor the name of her esteemed mentor and teacher."

Visit [www.pvamu.edu/morrisonwritingprogram](http://www.pvamu.edu/morrisonwritingprogram) to learn more about the Toni Morrison Writing Program.

# Farming As A Passport To NEIGHBORHOOD WELLNESS

In August 2020, Ivy Walls, '16, and her small urban farm—Ivy Leaf Farms—went from being a little-known garden in Houston's Sunnyside community to being put on a global platform.

Written by: Michael DOUGLAS

» Beyoncé's Foundation BeyGOOD announced on Beyonce.com that Ivy Leaf Farms had been chosen among the first-round recipients of the BeyGOOD Black-Owned Small Business Impact Fund. The \$10,000 grant that accompanied it also came as a surprise to Walls.

"There was a girl on Twitter who was like, 'If you live in these cities, and you have a Black-owned business, I am helping you write grants,'" recalled the former Miss Prairie View A&M University. "And she wrote the grant—I didn't even know I had applied to it!

"The first message on my phone: 'Bzzzz! Do you know you are on Beyoncé.com? You won the NAACP BeyGOOD Grant!'" Walls said as she recalled how she had to process that she had just been awarded \$10,000. "And then I was on the news that day. And three times that week," she chuckled as she recalled the whimsical week. "It really has been like a whirlwind just being in my



moment – when passion and purpose honestly collide."

But the journey to launching her farm proved to be a path laden with realizations, reevaluations, and revelations.

## From Epidemiologist to Farmer

Walls' career as an epidemiologist had been rewarding during the four

years since she graduated from PVAMU. And 2020 would be the year she would buy her own home and expand her love for gardening into farming.

"I moved back home after graduation, was working," she recalled. "The timeline is confusing because it all happened so quickly. But I was growing [plants] in my parents' backyard because I wanted to leave them flowers before I left. And

then I eventually began to grow more food. Like kale, okra, and different things.

"I moved to Sunnyside in February, right before the pandemic hit, and I was working in a hospital," Walls said. "So I was ramping up. We were developing all the protocols and procedures for COVID, we were preparing to shut things down. I remember teaching technicians how

to put on their PPE in preparation of what may come.”

And as the coronavirus crisis worsened, Walls began to see it ravaging her community and neighbors.

“It was really stressful ... I started looking at the numbers, and—disproportionately—my neighborhood Sunnyside had way more COVID patients than anywhere else,” she recalled. This medical trauma didn’t sit well with her.

To cope with job stress, this scientist felt drawn to unearth a new purpose.

“Something just told me to go outside and dig,” Walls said with conviction. “We have family land in Sunnyside—five acres—but we just never grew vegetables. I already had a little garden bed, it was just me tossing soil and throwing seeds in there. I already had a love for it. When the pandemic hit, it was like a stress-reliever thing.”

The earthly therapy evolved into a mission to serve after Walls began to survey and assess her new neighborhood.

“I realized we had no grocery store. So I started ramping up my vegetable production, and by April of 2020, I had food to pass out,” she said with a slight grin on her face. She worked on planting vegetables in a free community garden she established at Bruce Elementary School, located just east of downtown Houston.

“I was just giving the harvest to my neighbors,” she continued. “We have one Fiesta Mart, and the produce was not appealing to the community. I just

had to do something about it. I had to ask myself: If not me, then who else would do it? So, I just took that [Prairie View] produces-productive-people attitude and spirit ... and I made something happen.”

### From Passion to Purpose

Nearly five months into the global pandemic, Walls decided it was time to be a productive farmer. However, she was disappointed to learn that leaving her full-time job to pursue her passion for farming would reveal the lack of empathy and support employees can experience from a company that they had been dedicated to for years.


“I went full time [in farming] in August 2020. I resigned on Monday, they walked me out on Wednesday,” she stated as she remembered the dismay she experienced.

“I woke up on August 17th [2020]—that was my first day of not having a job—and I was like, ‘Wow! I really just did this? I just bought a house. I just left this job,’” she recalled about the revelations she experienced.

Little did she know, however, that leaving epidemiology, buying her first home, and starting her farm to feed her community—and that random tweet—would culminate at the right time and with the right person.

The life-changing announcement from the BeyGOOD foundation would also post on August 17, 2020.

“Everything that I had done to this point, whether it was public speaking or



**I WILL FOREVER BE GRATEFUL FOR MY FRIENDS THAT COME OUT TO SUPPORT ME, MY CLASSMATES AND ALUMNI FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. EVERYBODY HAS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF PUSHING THIS FORWARD; IT IS LITERALLY ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR EVERYONE ELSE IN THIS COMMUNITY**

serving as Miss Prairie View A&M University, had been for a reason,” she recalled. “Having the know-how, taking the initiative, and being a part of the community... everything has been available. And Prairie View has been good... good, good. It was my foundation.

“I will forever be grateful for my friends that come out to support me, my classmates and alumni from all over the world. Everybody has been supportive of pushing this forward; it is literally enhancing the quality of life for everyone else in this community,” she said, beaming with pride.

### PVAMU Prepared

Some may question how an epidemiologist—who studies patterns, causes and effects of health and disease conditions—can switch careers so suddenly and go into farming. For Walls, the transition proved seamless due to her

undergraduate studies on The Hill.

“I took botany classes with Dr. [Yolander Renea (Taylor)] Youngblood. I did botany research on grasses, like the study of how burning fields actually does benefit the soil,” she laughed, realizing she was unknowingly being prepared for her future fate as a farmer.

However, Walls believes her biology degree and instinct are two key ingredients in her recipe for successful farming.

“Biology is the study of life, it gives me the basic principles. But honestly, this is a lot of intuition,” she ponders as she stands between two raised garden beds on the school playground as a class of first-graders run laps in the distance behind her. “When you start working with the soil, it’s like how you spice foods [while cooking]. When the ancestors tell me to stop, I’ll stop. The more time



you spend, the more you cook, the more you meld with the garden. You kind of just know.”

Another thing Walls also knows: She was destined to be an alumna of Prairie View A&M University. The university, its professors and programs are interwoven throughout her life.

“One thing that is really funny is that all of the horses at our farm growing up, we used to take to Dr. [Alfred N.] Poindexter at Prairie View,” Walls said with a smile. “I remember going there as a little girl. My first horse, which we still have now, is the last

horse that was seen by Dr. Poindexter. And we still have him. Dr. Poindexter and my dad were very close.”

Walls is also thankful for the friendships she developed and cultivated while at PVAMU because they are key to her success today.

“I work hand-in-hand with Prairie View producers in Agriculture,” she shared. “We buy our meat from a Prairie View beef/cattle farmer. Anyone that I have encountered so far has either been connected with PVAMU or knows Prairie View.”

That connection also includes current students.

“I work very closely with some Prairie View undergraduate students and they are extremely helpful,” Walls said with pride. “Dr. [Richard] Griffin, a professor and scientist in the College of Agriculture, actually came out and tested my soil. It has just been a beautiful experience. I can reach out and get information and guidance when needed.”

### Biggest Surprise the Pandemic Has Gifted

Leaving Memorial Herman and reconnecting with the earth have provided Walls with a fresh perspective on life and nature.

“I think I forgot how much [being] outside really means to humans,” Walls said with deep reflection. “When we have our pop-ups, people just come and sit and embrace the sun. Embracing nature.

Embracing other people. I think that has been the biggest surprise: how much community actually means. It doesn’t have to come from words. It’s just showing up – and being receptive to others’ energy.”

Walls’s toiling in the soil today and sharing her bounty with her Sunnyside community harkens back to her social time on The Hill.

“It may sound silly, but I don’t think I had really thought about, or felt, this sense of community since being at Hump Day. On Hump Day, you go out, you see everybody,” she says with joy. “You see the Greeks doing their dances. It’s like a water hole. And you don’t realize that you don’t experience that after you leave college. And now I’m able to create that ‘community’ feeling again—a safe space for Black people—for anyone—to be seen, to be loved, to be heard, and to be enjoyed.”

## LIFE-AFFIRMING WORK

THE YEAR 2020 PROVED TO BE A YEAR OF A NEW VISION FOR WALLS AND THE MATERIALIZATION OF A CHILDHOOD DREAM.

Walking away from a career as an epidemiologist and unearthing a passion for farming amid a global pandemic have proven to be the perfect catalyst for the creation of Ivy Leaf Farms. This Houston-born alumna can serve her community and revel in the embrace of Black culture.

“The success of my business was a product of the pandemic. Everybody wanted to support Black Business. Everybody wanted to support Black women. Everybody wants to eat local again,” she said. “Local farming had become a dying concept. The Farmer’s Market was a – was slowly losing its appeal before the pandemic, but then it was reimagined. It became the only option where consumers could get something that’s fresh, because the grocery store

shelves were empty and the prices went up.”

For Walls, realizing there was a food desert in her community, and then doing something about it, was not only life-changing, it was also life-affirming. Leaving her career in medicine didn’t mean she wasted her time earning a degree in a field she willingly left, but it was a destiny fulfilled. Walls is currently enrolled in Cornell University’s online e-Certificate program for plant-based medicine.



## COMMUNITY IMPACT

# PVAMU'S NEW INITIATIVE

## aims to improve quality of life for residents in several underserved communities

Written by: Marchita **SHILO**

*The Houston metroplex raises the bar on so many levels, including its rich melting pot of cultures, traditions, and lifestyles. Unfortunately, some of its residents' lifestyles are more harmful than good.*

» To help tackle these issues, a collective of Professors, researchers, practitioners, and students from PVAMU's Colleges of Agriculture and Human Sciences (CAHS), Nursing, Juvenile Justice and Psychology, and Business will utilize a \$750,000 grant awarded by The Texas A&M University System to bring training and programming to targeted communities.

Carolyn Williams, Ph.D., executive director of PVAMU's Cooperative Extension Program (CEP), said, "The mission of Prairie View A&M University's Healthy Houston PV is to assist in improving the health, nutrition, and wellness of selected underserved communities in Houston."



Williams is leading programmatic efforts. Statistical data reveals there are pockets of poverty (POPs) within the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (GHA), which includes Harris and its surrounding counties. POPs are infamous for high rates of chronic health issues, illegal drug use, juvenile crime, and low primary, secondary, and college attendance and completion rates among its residents. Despite prevailing wisdom, most of these problems are fixable.

The colleges will work through Healthy Houston PV to accomplish four primary goals in the GHA:

- Expanding the awareness of nutritional and health services available to families;
- Improving healthy self-care practices through screenings, assessments, and referrals;
- Providing workshops and educational opportunities focused on parenting and family support; and
- Improving access to healthy foods.

Virtual and face-to-face programs include mental health first aid training for families; food demonstrations, promoting the use of fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers markets and food banks; telehealth screenings to help identify intervention strategies for self-care related to diabetes, blood pressure, and other common health conditions; and youth development activities

regarding STEM and pre-college virtual conferences.

Healthy Houston PV will also incorporate modules from its already successful programs in financial planning and literacy, and efforts such as the PVAMU-Haverstock Venture, which currently provides support services to residents in the Haverstock Hills Apartments to help strengthen them and address social-related problems.

"After residents in these communities complete these programs, they will be able to pass down their knowledge to future generations. It will eventually lead to a shift for the better in Houston's culture," said Williams.

The impact of Healthy Houston PV is expected to be immeasurable. It's certainly expected to counteract effects from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has magnified the wealth and wellness gap among residents.

To find out more information about HHI and its programs, visit [www.pvamu.edu/cahs/healthy-houston](http://www.pvamu.edu/cahs/healthy-houston).



# LEVELING UP WITH OUTSPOKEN BEAN

**EMANUELEE “OUTSPOKEN” BEAN ’08 IS NO STRANGER TO SELF-EXPRESSION AND CREATIVE ARTS. AT A VERY YOUNG AGE, THIS NEW JERSEY NATIVE REMEMBERS BEING EXPOSED TO WORLD CULTURES AND ART IN A WAY THAT WOULD SHAPE HIS CAREER PATH.**



Written by: Kimberly MCKNIGHT

» During his freshman year at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU), Bean was inspired by an eclectic poetry slam master to develop a slam poetry team on “The Hill.” By his senior year, he went from not knowing anything about coaching to developing a competitive squad (Prairie View Productive Poets) and perfecting his coaching style. Since graduating, he has performed on national stages, created and produced his festival, and developed Meta-Four Houston, Texas’ largest youth poetry slam organization, to name a few. His ability to fight for his art, coupled with his burning passion for poetry and the willingness to help the younger generation develop their craft in the poetry world, opened many doors and opportunities for him. Now the city of Houston’s Poet Laureate, Bean is on a mission to merge different art forms and mediums with poetry.

# Q&A

## WHAT LED YOU TO GET INTO POETRY?

I was rapping and making beats in high school, which later transitioned to writing poetry. Once I came to PVAMU, I joined the theatre program where I began to develop a stage presence. I had this poem called “And I still love her”, and I would do that poem all the time. During the Charles Gilpin Players fall production New Faces, I decided to use that poem as my introduction and first public performance as a poet. Honestly, girls enjoyed it, so I wrote more.

## HOW DOES IT FEEL BEING HOUSTON'S 5TH POET LAUREATE?

It's such an honor for me because I have wanted to achieve this for a long time. I know the “poet laureate” is new locally but not nationally, so my goal is to maximize the opportunity. I plan to complete my Space City Mixtape project. I'll do this in three steps: facilitate writing workshops with music producer Russell Guess; aggregate stories, poems, raps from Houstonians; record that content; and release it on all music platforms.

## WHY IS IT VITAL FOR YOU TO WORK WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATION?

They keep my mind young, and I like seeing their creative process and comfortability with expression development. One of my mantras is: I'm not trying to build an army of poets, but I do want to build an army of thoughtful leaders. I want to build empathy within young people; I want them to see issues and be able to eloquently speak about them, stand in their opinions but also consider the thoughts and ideas of others.

## IF YOU COULD TELL YOUR YOUNGER SELF ONE THING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Ease is earned. If you want ease, you must work for it.

## WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

In the next five years, I see myself as an author, doing more public speaking events, getting married, and getting some of the ease I want to earn.

## WHAT IMPACT DO YOU WANT TO HAVE ON POETS IN HOUSTON AND POETS ACROSS THE GLOBE?

Those creative pursuits are worth the pursuits.





Decades of Compassion

# UNLEASHED

100 years later the College of Nursing is still a bastion of hope in the face of a global pandemic



Written by: Meredith MOHR

» Nadia Harris stands behind a table in the parking lot of a Welcome Center at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) dressed in crisp purple and white scrubs and in PPE that consists of a face mask, face shield, and shoe covers — a familiar sight these days.

With a deep breath, she surveys the carefully labeled COVID-19 vaccines before her and mentally prepares for the day. Though she hasn't started her career yet, today she's volunteering at a vaccine clinic held on PVAMU's main campus.

Being ready for anything is a critical part of nursing, she says. The past year's pandemic has jumpstarted her experience and given her valuable—and historic—opportunities to put what she's learned in the classroom into practice.

As a student in PVAMU's College of Nursing, she dreams of one day being a nurse on the Intensive Care Unit in a hospital and ultimately becoming a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist. As she says, it exposes her to “anything and everything.”

“The vaccine clinic really heightened my confidence in giving intramuscular injections and also providing patient education to those receiving the vaccine,” Nadia notes. Through classes at the simulation lab or clinical rotations at the hospital, students in PVAMU's College of Nursing are learning skills like this; however, it's often in the context of just training.

It's different when there is a real need, such as during a pandemic. Nadia remembers that she felt a full range of emotions during her volunteer shifts: joy at having the skills to help others receive this vaccine, purpose, hope — but also exhaustion.

This is where Nadia highlights what she considers one of the most important and valuable aspects of PVAMU's program.

She's ready to roll up her sleeves and



Nadia Harris, Senior, College of Nursing

get to work where she's needed.

“One statement I remember from a community member who was receiving the vaccine was, ‘Thank you all for doing this. Continue to work hard and make a difference,’” Nadia recalls. “Those words of encouragement helped me then, and they will continue to help me strive to make a difference for the rest of my life as a nurse.”

“At the end of the day, my body was physically tired,” she continues. “I was exhausted. However, I was fulfilled and so thankful for the learning experience. It was a great opportunity to be surrounded by people that have the same desire as I do to help others. I felt like I made new friends, and also gained confidence and hope to carry back with me.”

This motivated spirit to help others is a catalyst to the university's culture of preparing students—in every department or area of study—to take what they've learned and make a real difference in the world.

This year, the College of Nursing is celebrating 100 years since the first cohort graduated from the program, marking many decades of “making a difference in defining and actualizing a positive experience for many fine individuals who

choose nursing as their career,” Dr. Betty Adams, Dean of the College of Nursing, said.

In light of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the work PVAMU is doing to prepare and equip nurses has never been more important. They are sending out new generations of nurses who are confident and courageous in the work they do.

But PVAMU's College of Nursing also has a legacy of nurses of generations past who have worked tirelessly over their careers. These nurses lean on their training and support from the university while strengthening PVAMU's presence in the medical field.

Located in the Texas Medical Center, the College of Nursing has a long history of preparing nurses for careers where they can contribute to quality and excellence in nursing and health care delivery throughout Texas, the nation and the world.

PVAMU remains competitive in the quality and variety of programs they offer by including technological advances, offering students smart classrooms and transforming laboratories and study and research rooms. Mutual partnerships provide excellent learning opportunities in the classroom and beyond.

The College also continues to celebrate its growth and enhancement through the expansion of programs and

”  
IT TAKES GRIT,  
DETERMINATION,  
PURPOSE, AND  
ACCOMMODATION TO  
BE A HEALTHCARE  
WORKER

24-hour access to online libraries and other electronic programs and operations.

### LOOKING BACK AT HOW PVAMU'S NURSING ALUMS HAVE SHAPED HISTORY

From PVAMU alumna Denise Smith's perspective, she is "once a nurse, always a nurse."

After graduating from Prairie View in 1974, her training launched her into a three-decade career in public health with the City of Houston where she worked on the oncology floor at St. Joseph Hospital in Houston, Texas. Back then, her career guided her through a different sort of health crisis: the HIV/AIDs outbreak in the 1980s.

As a retired healthcare worker who lived through several historic medical events over the years, Denise reflected on the memories and lessons she learned over her career. Those experiences gave her a perspective on the mental strength, quality training, and confidence in the skills she would need to handle whatever nursing brought her way.

"COVID-19 and HIV/AIDs are very different, but at the same time, they are both infectious diseases," Denise remembers. "I worked in the clinic where I was the manager and head nurse and supervised the whole clinic — all the nurses and doctors.

"The thing that struck me the most about AIDs that is similar to COVID," she recalls, "is that you consider everyone positive until you know they aren't. When clients came in, you had to draw blood and figure out what they came in for. PPE and protocols were incredibly important because you didn't know. Gloves were very important during the HIV/AIDs crisis, and masks are really important now.

"When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, I knew my past experience with HIV/AIDs would help me, and more importantly, other nursing students. It reminded me of a lot of experiences," she says. PVAMU alumna Bridget Brumfield '04, Chief Clinical Officer at AccessHealth, leaned on the knowledge that she was called to be



Denise Smith '74

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**I SEE THE YOUNGER NURSING STUDENTS COMING INTO OUR CLINICS DURING THEIR CLINICAL ROTATIONS AND I KNOW THAT THEY ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT WE AS NURSES ARE DOING. I SEE MYSELF AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF PVAMU AND I MUST SET A GOOD EXAMPLE.**

a nurse to get her through the past year. Bridget oversees operations and leads a team of nurses at five clinical locations. Over the last year, she has also been heavily involved in the COVID-19 testing and vaccine efforts in Waller and Fort Bend County.

Bridget agreed with Denise that her rigorous training at PVAMU helped her see her chosen career in a new light. It went from a career option to a calling because the program truly taught her the definition of

perseverance and determination.

"As I look back on my educational experience, I can say that I have been inspired to give my all," Bridget says. "I see the younger nursing students coming into our clinics during their clinical rotations and I know that they are paying attention to what we as nurses are doing. I see myself as a representative of PVAMU and I must set a good example."

Current students like Nadia look to seasoned nurses like Denise and Bridget with many questions as they encounter new situations and learn new skills, especially as the pandemic began.

"During my first year of nursing school, I had to lean on God so much, and ask for his protection as we eventually were placed in hospital agencies for more experience," Nadia says. "Being a nursing student in the uncertain times of the pandemic forced me to realize that we have to adjust to any situation, which is one of the attributes of being a nurse.

"Nurses face so many uncertain and unplanned situations," she says. "However, nurses learn how to adapt and use critical thinking skills to encounter any situation that may come forth. Though this pandemic was a challenge to my mental health and academics, it helped me learn how to operate as a nurse, which overall prepared me to have a career in the medical field."

Although she has more experience, Bridget agrees with Nadia that nothing replaced her need to lean on her faith during the uncertain times of the pandemic, or at any other time during her career. Bridget, a veteran nurse of more than 16 years, also worked through the Ebola outbreak in 2014.

"So much happened at such a fast pace during the last year that I did not have a moment to stop and look back," Bridget says. "I jumped right into the testing efforts not knowing if I was going to contract the virus or not. I knew I signed up to give a part of myself to help others, but I did not want to take anything home to my family and friends or get the virus myself.

“There were days that I would literally cry on my way to work,” she continues. “Not because I was worried about myself, but because I was worried about my team. I knew that I had a team that was working on the front lines. They were encountering someone with COVID daily and I often thought: ‘What if something happens to one of them?’ I just stayed prayerful and stepped out of faith to do what I was chosen to do.”

### WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A HEALTHCARE WORKER GOES DEEPER THAN PVAMU CLASSROOMS

PVAMU has established a culture of building up students throughout the university’s academia, Denise points out. Professors are there to encourage, equip, and empower students before sending them out on their own.

Sometimes, that comes with difficult classes or challenging experiences. Denise notes that her experiences—she came from her native country of Guyana to the United States to attend PVAMU—introduced her to professors who made a lasting impact with the wisdom and lessons they imparted.

“As a nurse, you never get used to death, but you work through it anyways. You go into a mode of care and comfort,” Denise says. “It’s the same with COVID-19. You remember who they are as a person — someone with a family and a personality and a whole life to them.”

“From my toughest professors, I learned empathy, and how to show kindness while doing my job with excellence,” she continues. “Someone’s life is in your hands, and you have to sustain life, but you also can’t decide who gets to live or die. You resolve that you’re going to do the best job you can. In an event like COVID or HIV/AIDs, a nurse may be the last person someone sees or talks to or holds their hand. You have to be courageous to do that. I learned that from many of my professors; I remember that Dr. Blake and Dr. Goodman were instrumental for me.”

Bridget mentions that problem solving, multitasking and good



Bridget Brumfield '04

communication are essential skills for nurses. In her role at Access Health, she is involved in strategic planning, quality performance improvement initiatives, cost control, implementation of policies and procedures, identifying best practices bases, workflow analysis, expansion, retention, and networking outside of the organization.

At the heart of all that, however, are things that aren’t necessarily learned in a classroom, Nadia notes. Instead, she is learning those things from her professors, mentors, and fellow students in settings like the vaccine clinics, labs and clinical rotations. The real core of the work is hands-on.

“It takes grit, determination, purpose, and accommodation to be a healthcare worker,” Nadia says. “Not everything in the healthcare field is great. I think you have to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, develop new or additional positive personal attributes, and learn how to problem solve in situations to the best of your ability.”

Although she is retired now, Denise still holds a nursing license and believes fervently in her call to train—and encourage—other nursing students like Nadia at PVAMU. She’s been involved in some of the vaccine clinics on campus as well, overseeing students as a licensed and experienced nurse.



Denise’s approach is no-nonsense and tough love. “I like to tell students that failure isn’t an option,” she says.

But that’s because she knows that the training they receive at PVAMU—just as she did—will make them more than capable of handling full-time nursing work.

“I love working with the students; it’s a great opportunity to teach and refresh them with what they have already learned,” Denise says. “I tell them: ‘This is what happened to me ... learn from my experiences.’ I go over the highlights and important points with them and remind them: ‘Make sure you have this down.’”

“They have four years of their life here at PV, and after that, it’s time to concentrate on their career,” she continues. “Nursing is a calling, and it’s not easy. After you graduate, you have other’s lives in your hands. PV is the place to learn—but they leave and they are ready.”



# ERIC FAGAN follows trail blazed by Legendary Texas State Senator and Sheriff WALTER MOSES BURTON

There's a new sheriff in Fort Bend County, and he is a proud alumnus of Prairie View A&M University.

Written by: Sammy G. ALLEN

**S**heriff Fagan is the second Black man to hold the position in the racially diverse Fort Bend County. The first was Walter Moses Burton more than 150 years ago. Ironically, both men have unique ties to Prairie View.

“We have a great connection – two connections really. Him being the first African American sheriff in Fort Bend County in 1869 was a great accomplishment,” Fagan said of Burton, who was also the first Black sheriff in the United States. “This man had been a slave. His slave owner, Thomas Burton, taught his slaves to read and write and then allowed them to work for their freedom. So, Walter Moses Burton earned money to buy several large plots of land from Thomas for \$1,900. Burton was one of the richest men in Fort Bend County at the time.”

Walter’s passion for service led him to run for Texas Senate in 1873.



He campaigned and won, serving for seven years. While a senator, he focused his attention on the education of Blacks. He was among the many notable senators who pushed through the bill to establish the Prairie View Normal School.

Much like Walter Moses Burton, for Eric Fagan, the road to his current position has passed

through Prairie View. Fagan has a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice and a master’s in Juvenile Forensic Psychology from PVAMU. He credits his alma mater for his successful 38-year career in public safety.

“The Criminal Justice program at Prairie View is the best in my opinion. I don’t care if it’s an Ivy League institution, the

program at PV rivals them all,” said Fagan, who graduated first in his class in 1983.

Sheriff Eric Fagan—whose campaign platform included initiatives to bring attention to domestic violence, human trafficking, mental health awareness and ending police brutality and misconduct—defeated his challenger in the Nov. 3,

2020 election with nearly 53 percent of the vote.

“The word reform: I understand it—and know why we are saying it—but I really don’t like it,” he said. “I think more training is needed. As law enforcement, we have to own up to the fact that we make mistakes. We are human like anyone else. We get a bad rap sometimes because we don’t have the training to recognize and respond accordingly to calls such as persons with mental illness. The good news is that law enforcement all over the country is reaching out for training so they can see it.”

During his time at PVAMU, Fagan had the opportunity to intern with the State of Texas. Upon graduating, he and fellow classmate Silas Montgomery were the first two African Americans to work for the state investigating welfare fraud and child abuse. His career naturally progressed into public safety when he took a position with the Houston Police Department (HPD).

“I worked for the state and went over to HPD,” Fagan recalls. “During that time, I was working in the southeast part of town on patrol. I made a lot of arrests for trespassing and shoplifting. It was at that point I found a lot of the people I was arresting suffered from mental illness.

“I didn’t understand that,” he continues. “I would arrest them one week and they would be back the same week doing the same thing. It seems like they didn’t understand why I was arresting them.”

Fagan’s attention to the repeat offenders’ actions—



Pictured with Sheriff Fagan is Fort Bend County District Attorney Brian Middleton. (The first African American District Attorney in Fort Bend County)



## PRAIRIE VIEW GAVE ME A GREAT EDUCATION, AND NOW I’M USING THAT EDUCATION TO HELP OTHER OFFICERS LEARN HOW TO DE-ESCALATE SITUATIONS AND RECOGNIZE MENTAL ILLNESS.

and his desire to help—led him back to PVAMU for a master’s degree, which he completed in 2003.

“I wanted to know what the problem was, so I went back to school for Juvenile Forensic Psychology to understand mental illness. I wanted to be better equipped to work on the streets and deal with people with mental illness,” Fagan explained.

“In my master’s program I did an internship with Harris County where I worked with a licensed psychiatrist,” he recalls. “I did psychological evaluations on incarcerated juveniles

before they went to court. Prairie View gave me a great education, and now I’m using that education to help other officers learn how to de-escalate situations and recognize mental illness.”

Fagan said law enforcement officers’ inability to recognize mental illness in the communities they serve and protect can often lead to deadly situations.

“The officer may think the person is attacking them, when actually that person is having a mental crisis,” he explained.

Mass shootings and alleged incidents of

police brutality and excessive force began to take center stage in the media. Last year, prior to his election, the drug task force overseen by the Fort Bend County Sheriff’s Office was accused of overwhelmingly stopping and searching Latinx drivers. Sheriff Fagan indicated he will work toward ending racial profiling, continue racial bias training and utilize a citizen review board.

“Law enforcement officers must have policies in place that say everyone in the public—who we serve—must be treated fairly, with respect and without bias,” Fagan said in a Houston Chronicle editorial titled “Racial profiling of Latinos must stop in Fort Bend.”



Born in Harrisburg, La., Fagan’s family moved to Houston when he was a year old. He was raised in the Third Ward and South Park communities, graduating from Ross Shaw Sterling High School. He and his wife Jacqueline have been married for 36 years and have two children: a daughter who is a physician practicing in Houston and a son who was killed in a car accident in 2013.

# The Gift that keeps on GIVING

When 15-year-old Opal Johnson set out to further her education at Prairie View A&M College in the early 1950s, it was the beginning of her lifelong commitment to giving back to her alma mater, students, community, and family.



Opal Johnson Smith '54

Opal's love and devotion for Prairie View seemed to be instilled in her even before she enrolled as a student – her parents and four older siblings had attended college there. Years later, Opal would encourage others to attend college at Prairie View, often connecting them with scholarship opportunities to alleviate the financial burden.

"My mother loved everything about Prairie View," said her middle son Stanley Smith. "She promoted Prairie View every chance she could get. She focused on the good in people – what they were good at and the areas where they excelled.

She was also known for her philanthropic spirit, often raising money for scholarships, the Dallas Black Dance Theatre, her church and various youth activities. Her name became synonymous with giving and supporting causes.

## MISS PRAIRIE VIEW

Charming, witty, intelligent and beautiful, Ms. Opal made a lasting impression on nearly everyone she met. It was therefore almost inevitable that while she was a student, she would be encouraged by another student to enter the Miss Prairie View contest a few months prior to graduating.

"It was something she never thought about and had to be prod into doing," says Kevin Smith, her eldest son. "She wasn't sure she was going to win, but the person who recommended her said, 'You need to run for Miss Prairie View. You are well respected here, Opal. You need to do this,'" he recalls his mother saying. "She decided to run and she won."

"Ms. Opal's connection to the pageant is legendary," said Lorie Proctor, '04 and former Miss Prairie View.

Proctor vividly remembers the annual trips to the State Fair Classic match-up between Prairie View and Grambling State University. On those weekends, she would host the current Miss Prairie View in her home – they would either stay, or she would host a tea or some other type of event.

"It was an opportunity (for the reigning Miss Prairie View) to meet alumna [and solicit] scholarship funds or additional funding for various things going on here at the institution," Proctor said.

With Opal's guidance, the title of Miss Prairie View evolved into her becoming an ambassador and advocate for the university.

"I think more than anything, her contribution is being connected to those of us who won the title of Miss Prairie

Written by: Sammy **G. ALLEN**

View, bestowing her knowledge and her love for the institution, and really connecting us even more so to how this role benefits the institution,” said Proctor.

## A LEGACY OF SERVICE

In 1954, Opal graduated from Prairie View at age 19 with a degree in Mathematics. “I know initially she thought she might be a music major and then changed her major to math,” Kevin said. “Her dad was a very good mathematician, as well as her mom. Many of the older students looked out for her because she was so young.”

After graduating from Prairie View, Opal went on to earn her master’s degree in Education from the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

“My mother felt included in whatever environment she was in. You can see pictures of her at the University of Wisconsin with all White women, but she is sitting there, right in the middle, eloquent and stately. She always felt like she belonged,” said Kevin.

Opal returned to Texas and began her teaching career at Abraham Lincoln High School in Port Arthur. It was there, through mutual educators, that she met the love of her life, who also happened to have a degree in Chemistry from PVAMU.

“She was living in the home of the principal,” Kevin said. He recalls the story of his parents meeting in a chance encounter that would lead to a lifetime of love. “Dad ran into her and her then-boyfriend somewhere and Dad asked him: ‘You haven’t married this woman yet?’” Kevin said laughing. “My dad was like, ‘OK, alright.’”

“At some point he went over to the house where she was staying, because he was an educator as well, and she came downstairs, and the rest is history.”

On December 22, 1958, Opal married Joe Edward Smith, ’50 from Madisonville, Texas. They became the parents of four children: Kevin, the eldest; Gayle, a psychiatrist; Stanley, an educator; and Cedrick, who went into occupational medicine.

Opal taught in Beaumont, Houston and Waller before joining the Dallas Independent School District where her career spanned 35 years. She served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and eventually as director of the DISD’s Alternative Certification Program.

The devout alumna would also dedicate her “free time” to serving her alma mater through her affiliations with the National Alumni Association, serving as president from 1999 to 2001, the Dallas Alumni Chapter and the Miss PVAMU organization.

In 2003, she was inducted into the National Black College Hall of Fame and awarded Outstanding PV Alumna by The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education. In 2004, she was crowned PVAMU Miss Golden Homecoming by her 50th Anniversary Class, and in 2006, the Opal Johnson Smith Auditorium in the Memorial Student Center was dedicated in her honor.

“She always made time for the Prairie View A&M Foundation to speak at the NAA galas,” said Roy G. Perry, ’78, PVAMF Chair Emeritus. “During one PVAMF fundraiser, when donations were low, Ms. Opal reportedly made a legendary statement: ‘We should give until it hurts and then give more and more!’ Her challenge resulted in the best giving day in PVAMF history. I will always be grateful for Mrs. Opal Johnson Smith.”

## GIVE UNTIL IT HURTS, THEN GIVE MORE

Kimberly Runnels, ’93 recalls meeting Opal in 1998 and being asked to assist with the 5th Annual Athletic Scholarship Gala. “She said: ‘Kim, I need an apprentice for the gala. Would you be willing to work with me?’”

Few people realized how difficult it was for Opal to organize the annual scholarship gala through the Dallas Alumni Association, an event that generated close to \$1 million.

“There were no excuses,” said Runnels, who became president of the PVAMU Alumni Association in 2017. “She was good at creating taglines, and one of them was ‘Prairie View worked for me, so I must work for Prairie View.’”

“During the Dallas Alumni gala,” she continued, “there were five giving days. Opal always had a full-page ad in the souvenir book in honor of her father. She felt that giving back to Prairie View was a debt, and continued service to our alma mater was how we paid.”

Runnels also recalls Opal’s involvement in a six-year fundraising effort for the university: “She worked on the Capital Campaign when George Wright was



**WITH OPAL’S GUIDANCE,  
THE TITLE OF MISS  
PRAIRIE VIEW EVOLVED  
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president of Prairie View and it raised \$30 million plus.

“In addition, the Dallas alumni chapter gives \$5,000 scholarships to students annually. And oftentimes, she would serve as a mentor, keeping in touch with them, and being there for them if they ever needed anything.”


Opal and Joe Smith also gave to support scholarships and the construction of the new football stadium. They were honored by having their names placed on the goal posts.

Last fall, Opal Smith’s health took a turn. At age 86, she was stricken with shingles, which eventually caused brain damage. On December 27, 2020, Opal Smith passed away.

Kevin said: “She is going to live on because so many loved and adored her for what she did and how she influenced people, changed people’s lives, got them into Prairie View, and inspired them. Because of that, she’ll live on. She lives on.”



# WINNING GOALS

 Written by: Kerry LAIRD

## ATHLETICS

## LADY PANTHERS SOCCER TRANSFORMS INTO DYNASTY PROGRAM

IF SOMEONE SAYS, “COLLEGE SPORTS,” WHAT’S THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND? FOOTBALL? BASKETBALL? WELL, IF YOU WIN TWO SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS IN THREE YEARS LIKE THE PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY LADY PANTHERS SOCCER PROGRAM, LED BY HEAD COACH SONIA CURVELO, YOU BECOME THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

The Lady Panthers stalked their prey throughout the 2021 regular season, securing a record of 12-3-3 and winning 11 of the last 12 while outscoring opponents 32-8. Alabama State and Grambling led PVAMU in the SWAC Spring 2021 standings, and the Lady Panthers beat them—not once, but twice—on their way to the title.

“Prairie View has always been a very

good soccer team,” said Curvelo.

“The biggest jump the students made to reach the championship was to change their mindset. I focus a lot on the sports psychology aspect—never giving up when you’re challenged—which I talk about a lot.

“Recruiting and having depth are important, but the mindset is what leads to championships.”



**RECRUITING AND HAVING DEPTH ARE IMPORTANT,  
BUT THE MINDSET IS WHAT LEADS TO CHAMPIONSHIPS.**

**MAINTAINING THE  
MINDSET**

Curvelo said the secret to building a championship soccer program at PVAMU began with changing the players' mental attitude, developing the players she had inherited, and recruiting star-level players to carry the program into the future.

The PVAMU women's soccer program had not won a championship in more than 20 years before Curvelo took over the program in 2018. The team had not finished a season above .500 since 2014.

"When you look at building a championship program, it's about having the right person to lead," said Curvelo, "and that's why Prairie View brought me in: because I've been able to win championships in the past."

Born in Ontario, Canada, Curvelo has led a storied career in soccer as both a player and a coach.

She was a student-athlete at Mississippi Valley State University, a SWAC PVAMU rival – where she led the team to a 2005 conference title and NCAA bid. That same year, Curvelo was named 2005 SWAC tournament MVP.

As a player, Curvelo was a member of the Portugal National Team and later signed a contract with CF Puebla of the Women's Spanish Super League. In Europe, soccer is known as "football," and just as in Texas, "football" is the king of all sports.

For nearly 15 years, Curvelo has transformed her passion for playing into a successful coaching career. She credits her success, in large part, to her study of sports psychology, which she began during her graduate work for her Master of

Science in sport coaching education at Southern Mississippi.

"Confidence wise, it's about putting players in positions where they can improve," said Curvelo. "I've been there before. I was a student-athlete too. I know what it takes to win as a player. Not just winning titles, but also allowing each player to get better every single day, and today is what matters most."



Curvelo said her approach to helping the athletes develop the right mental attitude resulted in at least one student-athlete staying on an extra year because of the “incredible” change in the team.

“Most of the players bought in on the mindset, and now they’re seeing the results,” said Curvelo. “When you put all those pieces together, it makes that job much easier. It wasn’t something that just happened; it is something that takes time.”

Curvelo gives kudos to all of those involved in the program, which includes not only the players but also the staff and the support staff.

“It’s not one person doing this; it’s everyone,” she said.

## STUDENT FIRST, ATHLETE SECOND

Curvelo is quick to remind others that her players may be student-athletes, but they are students first and athletes second.

Curvelo ensures the success of her students beyond the field by emphasizing education as a high priority. She sets the students up for academic success by giving them free access to academic advisors and support, where needed, to guarantee the students reach their educational goals.

As a coach at MVSU and Cleveland State University, Curvelo created an environment that allowed her players to score the highest GPAs out of all the sports programs in the respective universities, scoring top GPAs in the National Soccer Association as well.

Curvelo said the women’s soccer program at PVAMU ranks in the top three of all the sports programs at the university. The team consistently maintains a strong academic presence with a GPA of 3.4 and higher, she said.

“It’s such an important four years in a student-athlete’s life,” said Curvelo. “One of the biggest things, when I am recruiting, is the importance of academics. They’re both equally important. The academic part is the part that will set them up for the rest of their life.

“It’s more important than winning championships. I wouldn’t be where I am now if it wasn’t for my academics.”

Curvelo said that all the players on the team this year, have illustrated a self-sufficient academic prowess, indicating their success in the classroom equals their success on the field.



“ONE OF THE THINGS THAT WE’VE DONE REALLY WELL, WE’VE WELCOMED THE COMMUNITY KIDS TO COME TO THE GAMES AND BE A PART OF THE GAME-DAY EXPERIENCE

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Beyond the field, champions thrive. Success is contagious and leads to inspiration and engagement wherever winners place their focus. For the Lady Panthers, the dedication extends from the corner flag to kids in the community.

Prior to the pandemic precautions being put into place, Curvelo and her team welcomed children from the community onto the field and into the stands at PVAMU. She hopes to continue the practice once pandemic restrictions are lifted.

One of the things that we’ve done really well: we’ve welcomed the community kids to come to the games and be a part of the game-day experience,” said Curvelo. “It’s important to be able to give back to the children in the community, let

them know they have the opportunity to play and go to college too.”

Curvelo said it’s important for her players to work with the kids, introducing them to the game and engaging with the community to build leadership qualities on and off the field.

“Leadership within the team is a very important piece of a championship program,” said

Curvelo, “especially the three captains we had this year.”

The PVAMU soccer team captains include Andrea Nugent (junior), who was named SWAC Defensive Player of the Year. Curvelo said Nugent is the “perfect example of what Prairie View soccer is about.”

“All three captains,” said Curvelo, “work very well together.”

Curvelo, who both coached and played for HBCU soccer programs, said, “Playing at an HBCU is a unique experience. Every school has its own charm. The Prairie View fans are very special. They really support our soccer program. They’re very passionate about the sport. You feel it. I definitely want to thank the fans for coming to our games all season. They are part of the process, part of the experience.”



## FACULTY PROFILES

**ANDREA MCDONALD '07 '09***Instructor, Health & Kinesiology*

*“My favorite part of teaching is walking [into] the classroom and seeing my students smiling, and then passing [their] exams after I instill knowledge in them”*

*- Andrea McDonald*

Written by: Jocelyn KERR

Andrea McDonald, Ph.D., a native Jamaican, never dreamed she would earn a college degree, let alone three. She was born to loving teenage parents who had a limited education. But despite their limitations, they taught her the idea that having a good education would be the most important thing for a successful career. With their encouragement—and her hard work—McDonald joined Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) 20 years ago as a first-generation college student.

At PVAMU, McDonald earned a bachelor's degree in nutrition, food, and dietetics and a master's degree in human sciences with a concentration in nutrition. She also earned a Ph.D. in health education from Texas A&M University.

“Because I have achieved so much from this university, the least I can do is to give back to the younger generation,” she said.

Included in that younger generation is her own daughter, Olivia Johnson-Hopkins. McDonald followed her parents' example and taught her daughter the value of a good education. Olivia recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing and is now working as a registered nurse in the Texas Medical Center.

“She credits the majority of her success as a registered nurse to Prairie View A&M University's College of Nursing,” McDonald said.

Next up for Olivia is pursuing a master's degree, and ultimately opening a clinic in rural Texas as a family nurse practitioner.

Mother and daughter both thrived as undergraduates at PVAMU, in large part to the family atmosphere they felt. It also helped that Olivia was practically raised on the campus.

“She attended classes at PVAMU since she was five years old while I was completing my undergraduate degree,” said McDonald. “She is my only child, and I raised her as a single mother.”

Today, McDonald teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses. Within the undergraduate college, she is a professor of public and community health, and community health planning and assessment. At the graduate level, she teaches epidemiology, environmental nutrition, and community health.

Her employment at PVAMU began in 2006 when she was an undergraduate research assistant and then a research coordinator. After earning a Ph.D., she rejoined PVAMU

as an adjunct instructor in the College of Agriculture and Human Sciences where she taught research in nutrition, food preparation management, and foodservice systems.

For McDonald, returning to PVAMU to teach was an easy decision because of her deep connection with the university. Ever since her first days on campus, she felt welcomed by the friendly environment.

“It felt as if I was at home away from home,” she said.

McDonald has fond memories of her instructors’ open-door policies and commitment to motivating students.

“I can give credit to several professors who have gone home to be with the Lord and some that are still here today,” she said. “Like Dr. Sharon McWhinney, my mentor; Miss Evelyn McGinty, my first advisor; Dr. Richard Griffin, who was my very first instructor on this campus; Dr. Alfred Parks, who always supported the organizations where I led as president; and Miss Barbara Dixon, who died last month—she was my motivator.”

She discovered her passion for teaching at age 18 while volunteering in an elementary school. Watching children become absorbed in the material she presented was an enriching experience, and she wanted to do more. This experience, combined with her lack of quality education as a child, was what led her to want to make a difference in students’ lives. She became an educator because she believes that teaching is the way to change society and improve future generations.

Today, McDonald still feels the same passion for teaching that she felt when she was 18. She enjoys watching students—especially those who believe they cannot succeed in the course—grow in their academic journeys and experience success.

“My favorite part of teaching is walking [into] the classroom and seeing my students smiling, and then passing [their] exams after I instill knowledge in them,” she said.

When students enter McDonald’s classroom, they find not only knowledge, but also compassion, respect, and motivation. Her collaborative teaching style goes beyond just lecturing — she engages each student in discussion, often incorporating videos and games.

“All of my students are different in personality and background, so on my first day in the classroom, I try to know who my students are and identify their learning style.”

She believes in the “flipped-classroom” method in which she provides a scenario and students work in small groups to discover the unknown.

“I believe that sharing experiences and real-life stories are very important,” she said. “For instance, COVID-19

impacts students in different ways, so students telling the stories in my class can increase knowledge.”

Like other professors, McDonald had to find ways to engage and empower students during the pandemic.

“Teaching during this time, for me, is challenging yet fun. I was already putting my teaching materials on a learning platform, so once COVID-19 hit, it was very easy for me to transition to online learning,” she recalls.

Outside of the classroom, McDonald has a long history of research. Her areas of expertise include:

- COVID-19 and the digital divide in school
- Caribbean food culture, health issues, and school nutrition policies
- Community needs assessment and interventions
- Family influences on child health behaviors and outcomes
- Food preparation literacy, with an emphasis on chronic diseases and mental health
- Health disparities among underserved minority adolescent/youth populations
- Qualitative research methods (photo-voice and grounded theory)
- Systematic literature reviews

McDonald is also an internationally known speaker. She has delivered speeches at many conferences and seminars, including her most recent: “COVID-2019 Impacts on the Education System” and “Future Directions for African American and Latinx Youth.” Her work has earned several awards, including the Prairie View 40 Under Forty award and Thinking Progressively for Health award from the Texas Public Health Association.

When she is not teaching or conducting research, you can often find McDonald serving on numerous campus committees. She is part of the University Undergraduate Council, Undergraduate Research Council, and she is the curriculum chair for the Department of Health and Kinesiology. McDonald is also the primary advisor for Eta Sigma Gamma, National Health Honorary Society, and the PVAMU Epsilon Epsilon chapter.

McDonald continually strives to help transform students both academically and professionally, working toward her ultimate goal. “My hope is to produce successful students, so when I exit this earth, my legacy will live on.” PVAMU is fortunate to have such a dedicated professor.



## FACULTY PROFILES

**KATINA L. THOMAS '01**  
*Assistant Professor of Curriculum  
 and Instruction*



*"I always seem to have success with the simulation and practice of skills that my students need to make them more competitive in the job market."*

*- Katina L. Thomas*

Written by: Jocelyn KERR

**K**atina L. Thomas, Ed.D., joined the faculty of Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) in the fall of 2018. It was a full-circle moment for Thomas, who graduated from PVAMU in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies after following in the footsteps of her parents, brother, and extended family — all of whom also graduated from The Hill.

"[PVAMU] has always been a part of my life," she said. "I am a second-generation proud alumna. Returning to PVAMU means that I can continue the tradition of preparing future generations of professionals."

Thomas earned an M.Ed. in administration and supervision and an Ed.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Houston. Today, she teaches in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (CUIN) at PVAMU as an assistant professor of literacy education. She has been widely published in the areas of culturally responsive and relevant literacy approaches, which include textbook chapters and an article that helps first-year teachers transition into the classroom.

She continued: "When I enrolled in college, I ultimately wanted to become a superintendent of schools, and I knew that to be a strong leader, I first needed to understand what was going on in learning environments. As I matriculated through the education program at PVAMU, I realized that teaching is a service, and it was fulfilling to see the enjoyment, the laughter, and the reactions of students as they grasped a concept that you are teaching them. Their reactions were infectious, and I knew that teaching was always going to be a part of my lifelong journey."

Thomas began her career as a classroom teacher in the Alief Independent School District and went on to join the University of Houston as a visiting assistant professor while completing her advanced degrees. After earning her Ed.D., she became a University of Houston – Downtown adjunct professor, then an assistant professor and director of student teaching and field experiences at University of Houston – Victoria.

"I enjoy teaching because it involves more than what is on the syllabus and in the textbook," she said. "It involves using your life experiences to coach and mentor students as they transition into professionals. My favorite part is the healthy relationship building. If I can build positive professional relationships with my

students, then I know that they will be more receptive to the information that I am teaching them.”

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused courses to be moved online. Thomas said she had to get more creative by fostering more student-centered projects to maintain student input and engagement. She already had online teaching experience from previous positions, so the transition was relatively seamless.

“I always seem to have success with the simulation and practice of skills that my students need to make them more competitive in the job market,” she said. “My most successful teaching method to date has been the students’ teaching of lesson plans that they have written themselves. We walk through the components of building a literacy lesson that they would teach in their future classroom. They teach their written lesson to their peers, and I evaluate and give them feedback in the role of an administrator.”

Depending on the content, she also provides a combination of brief lectures, class discussions, and interactive materials and resources students can use to prepare for certifications and employment opportunities.

“I hope to produce a strong generation of 21st-century educators that can not only positively influence their students, but also evolve into leaders and change agents in education, regardless of their role or position,” she said.

Despite the pandemic, Thomas continues to be active in research publication and committee service. She serves as an associate editor for the TALE Yearbook, a professional journal published by the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE). She is also a member of the Undergraduate Council, College of Education Curriculum Committee, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Assessment Committee, and the chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Curriculum Committee.

“Returning to my alma mater has been an enlightening experience for me and an opportunity that is not afforded to everyone,” Thomas said. “My aim is to help cultivate the next generation of PV teachers, and to pour into them the same way that my professors did for me when I was a future teacher on The Hill.”



# BOOK BY PVAMU ALUMNUS analyzes link between food, social injustice, Black freedom

When the topic of social injustice comes up, food is not usually the first thing that comes to mind. However, according to Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) alumnus Bobby J. Smith II, Ph.D. (B.S. '11), food injustice is something that should be discussed and solved in communities nationwide.



Smith's book project, *Food Power Politics: Civil Rights and Black Food Security in the Mississippi Delta*, details the link between food and social injustice that affects rural and urban Black communities. It is a struggle that emerged during the civil rights era.

"There is a lack of access to nutrient-rich foods in Black communities," he said. "On the other hand, in predominately white and affluent communities, there is access to grocery stores, fresh markets, and healthy food apps, like HelloFresh, right at your fingertips. My book project seeks to historicize how food is also a part

of a larger conversation around social injustice and social justice. Food can be used as a tool of resistance."

Smith started his book project in 2016 while taking a graduate class at Cornell University. (Smith received a bachelor's degree in agriculture from PVAMU and a master's and doctorate from Cornell.)

"I took a class called Community Organizing and Development, and we read a book by Charles Payne about the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement called *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*," he said. "It was in that book that I learned about an event called the Greenwood Food Blockade, which was my entry point

into conversations about food and the civil rights movement.

"But the book wasn't about food," he recalls. "The book that helped me think about my own project or how I came into this work was, again, a larger story just about the civil rights movement in general. My project takes a piece of that history and turns it into a project in and of itself."

This year, Smith was honored with fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies Fellowships and National Endowment for the Humanities to complete his book project, which he hopes to do by 2022.

"I hope that my research reshapes how we think about the Black freedom struggle," Smith said. "We



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tell stories about Black freedom as it relates to education, voting rights, police violence, and a number of larger political issues. But we don't talk about how food is actually an instrument by which Black communities can free themselves."



Bobby J. Smith II, Ph.D., currently serves as an assistant professor in the Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He received a Bachelor of Science in agriculture with a concentration in agricultural economics from PVAMU in 2011. During his time at Prairie View, Smith was the 2010-2011 Student Government Association president.

## TIME CAPSULE

# General Colin L. Powell

» On October 15, 1990, Former PVAMU President Julius W. Becton '60 submitted the nomination of General Colin L. Powell for an Honorary Degree. In a letter to then Chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, Becton stated, "General Powell's accomplishment as the first Black to hold the Chairmanship, the most senior and prestigious of positions in the military has brought him international acclaim. He stands as a giant above many, depicting the positive rewards of determination and hard work. General Powell has provided meritorious and outstanding service to Prairie View A&M University, the State of Texas, the United States, and to humanity."

During the 1990 fall Convocation, Powell served as the keynote speaker and was presented with the honorary degree. The PVAMU administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni express our deepest condolences to General Powell's family.



**GENERAL POWELL HAS PROVIDED MERITORIOUS AND OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY, THE STATE OF TEXAS, THE UNITED STATES, AND TO HUMANITY.**



"Prairie View has a vital role to play in preparing Americans, particularly African-Americans, to face the challenges of the new world," said Gen. Colin Powell, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as he addressed the annual fall convocation.

# Class Notes

## Winter 1876 edition

**Valencia Hall '02 '03** named 2020 Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE) Assistant Principal of the Year

**Aaron Griffen '02 '97** was promoted to Vice President of Diversity Equity and Inclusion at DSST Public Schools in Denver, Colorado, after serving as the founding Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion since 2018.

**Nicole George '08 MSN, RN-BC, CMSRN, NE-BC** was named a "2021 Young Professional Voice" by the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) for her outstanding work as assistant director (AD) for the Magnet Recognition Program at the American Nurses Association. The award is given annually to nurse leaders who exhibit significant potential as healthcare leaders, demonstrate exemplary leadership within their organization and the nursing profession, and embody innovation, influence, and inclusion.

**Camryn Davis '20** has secured a United Negro College Fund Achievement Capstone Scholarship (UNCF), a program that aims to invest in the next generation of African American leadership.

**Tej Marrette '16** was named Texas Children's Hospital Acute Nurse of the Year.

**Eddie Robinson '95** is the host of new talk show I See U on the PBS and NPR affiliate Houston Public Media (HPM). According to the HPM website, Robinson will explore cultural identity through the stories of people and places that the effects of long-standing biases have transformed. The show debuted in mid-May.

**Kandyace Mayberry '01** was promoted to Director of Community Relations with the Houston Texans.

**Cecilia Crear, Ed.D., '95, '01** began her new role this summer as Alief I.S.D.'s area superintendent.

**Mohammad Shahab Uddin '17** received the prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship, allowing him to continue his studies in the United Kingdom (UK). The Bangladesh native is pursuing a doctorate in entrepreneurship and circular economy at the University of Essex's Business School.

**Dr. Beverly Copeland '03** has been appointed Vice President for Student Affairs, effective August 2021.

President Ruth J. Simmons announced the appointment of **Kevin H. Hoffman '89** as the Chief of Staff in the Office of the President, effective October 2021. In this role, Mr. Hoffman will assist the president in overseeing various university management and administrative reporting areas. He will also serve as the chief strategist for the University, ensuring that the overall institutional goals are met.

**Eric Jimenez '09** assistant director of bands at Prairie View A&M University

(PVAMU), was named as an honoree of the Yamaha 40 under 40 Music Education Advocacy Program.

The Alvin Independent School District Board of Trustees approved a new elementary school to be named Nichols-Mock Elementary School, after **Ms. Wilma Fountain Mock '70** and Ms. Debra Nichols. **Mock was the first Black teacher in Alvin ISD.**

## CAMPUS BRIEFS

**Dr. Godlove Fonjweng** joined the Hill in February as the **Executive Director for International and Intercultural Programs.**

**Allyssa L. Harris RN, PhD, WHNP-BC**, has been hired as **Dean of Nursing.** Dr. Harris brings 27 years of professional clinical practice and higher education teaching, research, and administrative experience to her new role. She was Department Chair

and Program Director in the William F. Connell School of Nursing at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

**Tiona Broussard**, a student in the Community Development program in the School of Architecture, has been **named to the Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals by the College Station City Council**. Broussard will serve a three-year term.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) approved PVAMU's plans to **offer a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree program**. The program launched this fall and includes 60 semester credit hours, with students completing 42 hours in the first two years and 18 credit hours of dissertation coursework in the third year.

Senior biology major **Alexis Vanzandt** will represent Prairie View A&M University in the February 2022 issue of EBONY magazine as one of 10 finalists in the 2021-22 OLAY x EBONY HBCU STEM Queens online competition.

**Andrea Sankey** joined the President's Office staff in the role of Senior Executive Director of Public Affairs and External Relations. In that role, Ms. Sankey will work closely to elevate further the University's visibility and stature.

Seniors **Raven Hollis** and **Taylon Owens** have been recognized as HBCU scholars by the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, an annual program of the U.S. Department of Education.

Prairie View A&M University kicked off its **2021 virtual Homecoming programming with the PV Experience: "Forever Connected!" on the University YouTube channel**.

The Office for Marketing and Communications featured many exciting segments, from academic program updates to athletics throughout the week. Join in on the fun by watching on [www.youtube.com/pvamu](http://www.youtube.com/pvamu)

The **CW network has greenlighted March**, an eight-episode series that revolves around **The PVAMU Marching Storm**. March debuts Monday, January 24 (8-9 pm ET/PT). It then moves to Sundays starting February 27 (9-10 pm ET/PT).



## IN MEMORIAM

First-year student **Jerrilynn Taplin** passed away January 10. Taplin, who had just turned 60 in December 2020, had a passion for broadcasting. She was on her way to receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from PVAMU after obtaining an Associate of Arts degree in Communication from Houston Community College.

**Jermaine Vesey, Ph.D.**, a clinical assistant professor of management in the College of Business (COB) passed away on February 19 at the age of 44.

**Valencia M. Lewis**, sophomore nursing major, from Garland, TX, passed away on Thursday, April 8.

**Christopher D. Sims** passed away on May 12 due to an

automobile accident. A native of Dallas, Texas, Christopher was a junior Kinesiology major.

**Beverly Roberts**, Interim Director of Clinical Teaching and Field Experiences and Clinical Instructor in the Whitlowe R. Green College of Education, passed away on June 8.

**Dr. Victor G. Stanley** passed away May 27.

**Donyeahviyah K. Lewis**, a junior psychology major, passed away on Monday, July 12. Family and friends describe her as a shining light to all those with which she came into contact.

20-year-old **Carleon McPhail**, a junior psychology major from Houston, passed away on Wednesday, September 8. McPhail was a Dean's List scholar, a member of Panther Advisor Leaders (PALS), M.A.L.E., B.L.A.C.K., and the Campus Activities Board (CAB).

Distinguished alumnus **Samuel Metters '57** passed away October 7, 2021. During his storied career, he embarked upon a career designing affordable housing; advised NASA on safety practices in space travel; served as executive director of the National Capital Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America; and served as President and CEO of Metters Industries, Incorporated.



## SPORTS NOTES

PVAMU **head men's basketball coach Byron Smith** received

the 2021 Hugh Durham award by CollegeInsider.com. The award, which is presented annually, recognizes the top Division I mid-major coach in college basketball.

**The Prairie View A&M Lady Panthers Bowling team** claimed the 2021 Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) Women's Bowling Championship title. This is the team's fourth regular season conference championship in five years for the program.

**Prairie View A&M Department of Intercollegiate Athletics** was awarded the **James Frank Commissioner's Cup Award** from the **Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC)**. This acknowledgment is awarded to the top Athletic program in the league.

**The Prairie View A&M men's golf team** stormed to the top of the leaderboard to claim **the 2021 Southwestern Athletic Conference Men's Golf Championship**.

**The Prairie View A&M Women's Indoor Track and Field** program took home top honors in the Southwestern Athletic Conference Indoor Track and Field Championships, **winning the crown** for the first time since 1989.

SEND US  
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