

THE 28TH ANNUAL UNITY LUNCHEON



Thursday, February 8, 2024

Student Union Ballroom
Middle Tennessee State University
11 a.m.–1 p.m.

LUNCHEON SPONSORED BY

**Intercultural and
Diversity Affairs Center**

AND

Black History Month Committee



Featuring Keynote Speaker
Dr. Cary E. Holman

Director of Schools,
Franklin County School District

“An Appreciation of Our Unsung Heroes”

2024 HONOREES

Edd Hill, Stanley Murphy,
and Collier Woods

Johnie Payton

Sharonese Henderson

Patricia Waire Harlan

Where There Is Unity, There Is Strength

Thanks to

all honorees, attendees,
program participants, hosts and hostesses,
and the Black History Month Committee.

Special thanks to MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee
and our keynote speaker, Cary E. Holman.

Thank you to Tony Strode, Jada Powell, and all of our other members
who assisted with the coordination of the Unity Luncheon.

We also would like to thank our musical performer, Ceron Mays,
and the President's Commission on the Status of Women.

Special thanks to the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership,
Intercultural and Diversity Affairs, Creative and Visual Services,
Student Union Facilities, and Aramark.



**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY.

I AM *true*
BLUE

PROGRAM

Master of Ceremonies Mr. Ron Malone
Assistant Vice President, Events and Transportation, Middle Tennessee State University

Greetings Dr. Sidney A. McPhee
President, Middle Tennessee State University

True Blue Pledge Mr. Michai Mosby
President, MTSU Student Government Association

— Lunch —

Musical Performance Mr. Ceron Mays
Singer-Songwriter

Introduction of Keynote Speaker Dr. Gloria Bonner
MTSU Professor Emeritus, Womack Department of Educational Leadership

Keynote Speaker Dr. Cary Holman
Director of Schools, Franklin County School District

Presentation of Honorees Mr. Tony Strode

Closing Remarks Mrs. Danielle Rochelle
Director, MTSU Intercultural and Diversity Affairs

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Cary Holman, Ed.D., serves as the director of schools for the Franklin County School District. Previously he served as a middle school principal in two different schools in the Rutherford County School System for 17 years. Entering his 28th year in education, Holman has served as a classroom teacher (first, fifth, and sixth grades), assistant principal, elementary principal, middle school at-risk coordinator, middle school principal, and adjunct faculty member at Draughtons Junior College and Middle Tennessee State University.

Holman received his educational training at Motlow State Community College (A.S. in Elementary Education, '93), University of Tennessee–Chattanooga (B.S. in Elementary Education, '95), Tennessee State University (M.Ed. in Administration Supervision, '00), Middle Tennessee State University (Ed.S. in Administration Supervision, '05), and American College of Education (Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, '20).

He has been a presenter at the National Youth At-Risk Conference (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021) and the Nuts and Bolts: Ready to Lead Conference (2018, 2019, 2021, 2022), and he served as a TEAM evaluation trainer for the Tennessee Department of Education.

Holman also is an ordained and licensed minister and serves as associate pastor at Believers Faith Fellowship. He and his wife, Rolanda, have two sons, Colin and Yuri, and have been blessed to raise their nephew, Corban Reynolds, after the passing of his mother (Rolanda's sister). Holman often reminds himself that the key to a successful marriage and a productive family is balance. During his free time, he enjoys spending time with family, cooking, and relaxing.

2024 HONOREES



KOOL CLUB SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDERS EDD HILL, STANLEY MURPHY, AND COLLIER WOODS

EDUCATION

The Kool Club was established in 1974 by a group of students whose vision was to exercise philanthropy through Knowledge, Opportunity, Optimism, and Leadership (Kool). This club was established by Freeman Dukes, Edd Hill, Stanley Murphy, Ben Scruggs, Andrew Simmons, Joe Tucker, and Collier Woods. In 1981, in honor of Kool Club member Kenneth Toney, aka Mr. Freeze, a scholarship was established to provide additional financial assistance to an African American student during their freshman year of college.

This scholarship was established in Toney's honor to commemorate his sacrifice after he left MTSU to pursue a career in the U.S. Marine Corps. Shortly after enlisting, Toney was in an accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down.

Since the establishment of this scholarship, the living founding members, Stanley Murphy, Edd Hill, and Collier Woods, as well as other members of Kool Club leadership have continued to host fundraisers and show their support for the MTSU community as alumni. Annually this group will reunite to raise money for this scholarship by hosting various events that promote their founding principle of "love of mankind" in their ongoing effort to help and support current MTSU students. Each winner of the Ken Toney Kool Club scholarship is recognized as an honorary Kool Club member.

2024 HONOREES



JOHNIE PAYTON

CONTRIBUTION TO BLACK ARTS

Johnie Payton taught K–5 music for nearly 40 years in the Lebanon Special School District, shaping the minds and hearts of thousands of children, but her accomplishments in arts and education went well beyond the classroom.

She was founding director of the Evermean Evergreen Cloggers and served on the National CLOG Committee, which facilitates the National CLOG Convention each year. Payton also served on the Tennessee State/Wilson County Fair Board, where she had the responsibility of hiring the fair’s special performing groups and artists.

As an educator, Payton was named Wilson County Teacher of the Year in 2003 and was a past president for the Lebanon Education Association. She also served one term on the Wilson County Board of Education, representing Zone 6. In 2011, she received the Friend of Education Award given by the Lebanon Wilson County Chamber of Commerce. Payton also was a former board member for the United Way of Wilson County.

She received her Bachelor of Science in Music Education from Middle Tennessee State University in 1971. She was a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and attended Immanuel Baptist Church in Lebanon.

After retiring from teaching, Payton worked for the Wilson County Civic League in Lebanon, Cracker Barrel in Lebanon, and Cedars Prep in Lebanon. She died in December 2022 at age 72.

2024 HONOREES



SHARONESE HENDERSON

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Sharonese Henderson is a powerful advocate for girls and women in STEM—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. She is a member of the Women in STEM (WISTEM) Council at Middle Tennessee State University and participates annually in the MTSU Tennessee Girls in STEM day of hands-on workshops and activities for middle and high school girls. Her passion is to change the lens through which girls and women are viewed in the STEM fields.

Henderson’s commitment to education and mentorship is evident through her role as a mentor of high school seniors in the spring 2024 tnAchieves program. In summer 2023, she contributed significantly to the Brite (Building Relevance and Identity to Transform Experiences) initiative as an educator. The local Brite program is a collaboration between the WISTEM Center at MTSU, led by Chemistry Professor Judith Iriarte-Gross, and the South Sudanese Girls Empowerment Front, led by MTSU alum Nyaruot Kier Deng.

Henderson also has participated in the DigiGirlz conference sponsored by Microsoft as a mentor and exhibitor of Dot Diva, an initiative to promote computing as an attractive field for college-bound girls, and with the Robotics and Botball Camp at the Gallatin Shalom Zone as a volunteer. In addition, she was the co-recipient of the 2017 Technology Shining Star Award sponsored by the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women.

Henderson is the president of the Adams Memorial Scholarship for upper-level students with emergency financial needs. This scholarship is in memory of her parents, who were educators in the Chicago school system for over 30 years. She learned from them the value of community and the transformative power of education.

She also is the owner of Data2Analytics, which offers consulting services in project management, data analytics, and marketing. She retired from United Parcel Service (UPS), where she worked for over 20 years in Information Technology Support and Customer Solutions. She also served as the UPS University Alliance Program instructor for the Georgia Tech Capstone Project and the University of Kansas Capstone Project. Her career also included positions with IBM as an account systems engineer and course developer.

Henderson received a B.S. in Marketing from the School of Business and Industry at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. She is an avid e-book reader and enjoys traveling with her husband, Harrold, and daughter, Sharita.

2024 HONOREES



DR. PATRICIA WAIRE HARLAN

ADVOCATE OF CIVILITY

Patricia Waire Harlan, an esteemed MTSU alumna from 1982, recently culminated a remarkable 41-year career in education at Columbia State Community College. Renowned for her contributions to higher education, she earned her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, specializing in leadership and policy analysis, from East Tennessee State University in 2022.

Harlan's unique educational path began in the early 1970s, homeschooled by her mother and grandmother. This formative experience, rare and underrecognized at the time, especially in the Black community, set the foundation for her lifelong commitment to learning. Excelling academically, she graduated with honors from Columbia Central High School and continued her success at Columbia State Community College, graduating cum laude in 1980. Her academic prowess led her to MTSU, where she earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in 1982, with honors in Sigma Iota Epsilon and Delta Mu Delta.

In 1990, as a post-graduate student at Trevecca Nazarene University, Harlan developed a business plan emphasizing the importance of homeschooling in Tennessee. This project was a precursor to her later research efforts.

Throughout her tenure at Columbia State, Harlan made significant contributions, notably establishing and managing the first comprehensive testing center for three decades. Her dedication to her profession earned her numerous awards, including the Outstanding Professional Staff Award and the Professional Staff Spotlight Award, and recognition as a Leadership Maury County scholar and a Tennessee Board of Regents Maxine Smith Fellow.

Harlan's advocacy extends beyond academia. She has held leadership roles in various organizations, including the Columbia Chapter of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs and the Maury County Foster Care Review Board. Her mentorship in the tnAchieves program, combined with her recognition for mental health advocacy and grant writing for academic programs, showcases her diverse contributions to community development.

Proudly married for 40 years to Nathaniel Harlan, she is a supportive board member of daughter Ashley Na'Trice Harlan's business, The Concierge CEO. The educational journey of her son, Nathaniel Harlan II, inspired her dissertation topic. As a devoted grandmother to Eliza and Sir Harlan, her family remains her pride and joy.

Harlan's career is a testament to her dedication to education, leadership, and community service, making her a true advocate for civility and a role model for generations to come.

TENNESSEE JOURNALISM HALL OF FAME

The Tennessee Journalism Hall of Fame is an independent partner with MTSU, recognizing individuals who have distinguished themselves through news or business management, leadership in the industry, or in the ordinary practice of journalism. Inductees can include reporters, writers, editors, publishers, news directors, and other managers, as well as those who have excelled in advertising or public relations, or in journalism, advertising, and PR education. Inductees may be native Tennesseans or non-natives who spent a substantial part of their careers in Tennessee.

2024 HONOREES



IDA B. WELLS

For outstanding service to journalism in Tennessee, Ida B. Wells is posthumously inducted into the 2023 class of the Tennessee Journalism Hall of Fame.

Born in 1862, slightly more than a year after the start of the Civil War, Wells was one of America's first investigative journalists, an educator, a suffragette, an early leader of the civil rights movement, and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

In articles and pamphlets such as *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* and *The Red Record*, Wells documented the horrors, and prevalence, of lynchings throughout the United States.

Wells co-owned and wrote for the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* newspaper, where she detailed incidents of racial segregation and inequality.

Her investigative journalism was carried nationally and subjected her to continual threats; at one point, a white mob destroyed her newspaper office and presses. Wells continually faced public disapproval, including from other leaders in the civil rights and suffrage movements.

She attended both Fisk University and LeMoyne-Owen College, a historically Black college in Memphis.

Wells travelled twice to Britain, where she spoke before highly receptive audiences. On her second trip she was asked by the editor of the *Daily Inter Ocean* to write about her trip, and she thus became the first African American woman to be a paid reporter for a mainstream white newspaper.

Wells, who died in 1931, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2020 "for her outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans."

2024 HONOREES



ROBERT CHURCHWELL

For outstanding service to journalism in Tennessee, Robert Churchwell is posthumously inducted into the 2023 class of the Tennessee Journalism Hall of Fame.

In 1950, Churchwell became the first African American journalist on the *Nashville Banner*, a prominent Southern daily newspaper.

Following service in an engineering battalion in World War II, Churchwell entered Fisk University, and by attending summer school at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, now Tennessee State University, he completed his studies at Fisk in less than four years and earned his B.A. degree in English in 1949.

In 1950, he was hired by the *Banner*, but because the paper followed the South's practice of segregation, he was prohibited from working in the newsroom. Churchwell wrote his news stories at home and carried them to the *Banner's* office every day.

Following the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, decision in 1954, while still reporting on the Black community, Churchwell was assigned to covering education throughout the city, including the Nashville Board of Education and white institutions of higher education. A year later, he was given a desk in the paper's newsroom.

One of the biggest stories to emerge during Churchwell's time at the *Banner* was the protest against segregated lunch counters launched by student activists. Because these demonstrations were antithetical to the *Banner's* management, its reporters were not allowed to cover the students' protests. However, as a part of his ongoing coverage of the African American community, Churchwell attended mass meetings held throughout the community almost every night, even though his stories never appeared in print.

In 1965, Churchwell became the first African American member of the Middle Tennessee Chapter of Sigma Delta Chi, now known as the Society of Professional Journalists, and later served as chapter vice president.

He was a founding member of the National Association of Black Journalists and was inducted into the organization's hall of fame in 1994.

Churchwell retired from the *Banner* in 1981 and became the interim director of the TSU Bureau of Public Relations. He died in 2009.

2024 HONOREES



BILL HALL

For outstanding service to journalism in Tennessee, Bill Hall is posthumously inducted into the 2023 class of the Tennessee Journalism Hall of Fame.

Hall, often described as the “last of the real weathermen,” joined the staff of WSMV-TV as a weather reporter and morning news anchor in 1974. He worked as a weekend news anchor in 1976, then in 1977 took over the leadership of the station’s weather team.

Hall quickly became known as more than just a “weather guy,” and his style and disposition made him one of middle Tennessee’s best-known local television personalities.

Unlike many weather presenters, he actually discussed the weather with his audience as he also talked about gardening, cooking, hunting, and fishing. During his Channel 4 career, he also hosted *Land and Lakes*, an outdoors show focusing on local hunting and fishing adventures.

Throughout his 31 years at Channel 4 he was often seen as a calming television presence during storms, floods, tornados, and blizzards. Audiences seemed to feel that no matter how bad the weather seemed, he would pull them through.

In the early 1980s, Hall was partnered with “Snowbird” for weather-related school closing reports, but he always kept his large public following updated with serious weather events.

Hall retired in 2005; he died in 2011.

PAST HONOREES

1998

Will Drew Sr.
Rev. Richard Gordon
Rebecca McIntyre Smith
A.C. Wharton
Annie Rucker Zachary

1999

Ellen Louise Clark Bryant
Dorothy McKnight
William Gray McKnight
Henry Sims
Tabitha Williams
Bertha Winsett

2000

Billy Easley
James Issac Mitchell
Dora Rucker
Will M. Vaughn
Nathan Watts

2001

Priscilla Brown
Annie Huddleston
Mary E. J. Mills
Tillman Payne
Nancy B. Vaughn

2002

Grant Daniels
Lillie B. Overton
John Willie Smith
Hattie Sue Tipton
Martha F. Cason Watkins
Tony Webb Jr.

2003

Mattie Butler
Dorothy Crismon
John Chuck Mullins Jr.
Josephine Roper
Christine Cason Wade

2004

Florence Wilson Smith
Pearl Steward
Margaret Phillips Taylor
Ida Phillips Thomas
Gracie L. Turner

2005

Lillian Howse
Delphia McKnight
Beadie Keith
Jesse Lee James
Bessie Pillow Black

2006

Pearl Mae Wade Martin
Amanda Evelyn Gordon
Martha Rankins Smith
Mary Lou Anderson
Etta Collier
Bobby Barlett

2007

Barbara Murray
Alexander
Marilyn Massengale
Lillie W. McCrary
Kathryn McCroskey
Susie Mae Simmons

2008

Cornell Bingham
Verna M. Bonner
Mary Glass
Charlie O. King

2009

Annie Cox
James E. McAdams Sr.
Rev. James Thomas
Carl Wade
William Washington
Katie F. Wilson

2010

Mary McKnight Wade
Nora L. Clark Waters
Eugene Ray

2011

Roy Dukes
Ernestine Johnson
Wordna McKnight
Carolyn Peebles
Rev. Goldy Wade

2012

Olivia Murray Woods
Thenartis Ellis
Mary C. Scales

2013

Rev. Freddie B.
Carpenter Jr.
Franklin Hollie
Rev. Tolbert Randolph
Rev. Richard W. Sibert

PAST HONOREES

2014

James L. "Link"
Butler Sr.
Pearlie Mae Martin
Dr. Phyllis Hickerson-
Washington

2015

Clifford Allison
Dr. Barbara Canada
Percy Ford
Madelyn Scales Harris
Karl Thomas

2016

Ray Fite
Jo Anne Gaunt
Joseph "Joe" Herbert
Marva Hudspeth
Rev. Robert D.
James Sr.
Rev. H. Bruce
Maxwell
Russell D.
Merriweather
Albert Nelson
Florine Rattliff

2017

Dr. Bichaka Fayissa
Navita Gunter
Dr. Jacqueline
Jackson
Evelyn James
Carl Marable
Ernest Newsom
Albert Richardson Jr.

Revonda J. Rucker
James Douglas
Watkins
Martha Womack
Vernal Young

2018

Raymond Bonner
John Harris
Anthony Warren
McAdoo Sr.
Barbara Tuckson
Mary R. Patterson
Watkins

2019

Martha Bigsby
Rickey Field
Carolyn Sneed Lester
Frank Michello
Chantho Sourinho

2020

Phyllis D. Adams
Ray Bonner
Marcus S. Lucas Sr.
Ed Miller
Robbie A. Bailey
Snapp
Leonora "Ms. Boe"
Washington

2021

George Gibson
Kim Sokoya
Sue Alexander
Violet Cox-Wingo
Christa Martin

2022

Thomas Keith
Elma McKnight
Robert Orr Jr.
Melbra Simmons
Carl E. Watkins

2023

Vanessa Alderson
Marva Lucas
Michael McDonald
Joe and Sybil Rich
Stacy Windrow

TRUE BLUE PLEDGE

I am True Blue.

As a member of this diverse community,

I am a valuable contributor
to its progress and success.

I am engaged in the life
of this community.

I am a recipient and a giver.

I am a listener and a speaker.

I am honest in word and deed.

I am committed to reason, not violence.

I am a learner now and forever.

I am a Blue Raider.

True Blue!

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY.

I AM *true*
BLUE

0124-2731 / Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate against students, employees, or applicants for admission or employment on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, genetic information, or any other legally protected class with respect to all employment, programs, and activities sponsored by MTSU. The Interim Assistant to the President for Institutional Equity and Compliance has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies and can be reached at Cope Administration Building 116, 1301 East Main Street, Murfreesboro, TN 37132; Christy.Sigler@mtsu.edu; or 615-898-2185. The MTSU policy on non-discrimination can be found at mtsu.edu/iec.