



Tonia Walker (second from left) celebrates with her husband, children and other loved ones.

Walker ready to chart new course as AD

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

Newly-appointed Winston-Salem State Athletic Director Tonia Walker has hit the ground running.

The 43-year-old Hampton University alumna has spent her career preparing for this moment, having served in various positions within the CIAA and as the right-hand woman of several former WSSU ADs.

"For the last 14 years, I have worked hard to push the vision of the three athletic directors for whom I've worked, and I've learned an incredible amount about college athletics from those three athletic directors. I think now is my time to put my stamp on the program," said the mother of two. "...Being that person that is in charge of the program, it comes with a lot of responsibility, but I am up for the challenge."

Walker, who was first recruited to the university in August 2000 as assistant director and head volleyball coach under then-AD Anne Little, succeeds Bill Hayes, a former WSSU football coach who returned to the university in 2010 and shepherded it through its tumultuous transition back to Division II athletics and the CIAA after a brief stint as a member of the Division I MEAC. Walker has led the department in an interim capacity since Hayes announced his retirement earlier this year.

"Tonia has done an outstanding job in every role she has been given within the WSSU athletics program and has a wealth of knowledge of intercollegiate athletics beyond our campus," said Chancellor Donald J. Reaves. "Having Tonia as the athletic director brings strong leadership to the program and provides stability for our players, coaches and staff. Tonia has certainly earned this opportunity, and I am absolutely delighted that she is moving into this position on a permanent basis."

Over the years, Walker has displayed "impeccable character" and a sincere commitment to helping students succeed that Assistant AD Kevin Manns believes will only elevate the program's visibility and reputation.

"She has a genuine love and respect for these student-athletes, to make sure that the student-athlete experience is second to none," he said.

WSSU's sports teams have enjoyed considerable success in recent years, winning championships in several different sports, and Rams fans can fully expect that trend to continue under Walker's leadership, Manns said.

"The expectations are high here, the bar has been set high, and we're not try-



Chancellor Donald Reaves announces Tonia Walker as WSSU's new AD earlier this month.

ing to go back the other way," he said. "She's going to do just fine."

Among Walker's chief objectives are sharpening the focus on academics by raising GPAs and increasing graduation and retention rates among student-athletes.

"Much of what we do will be based on a foundation of relationships; building relationships with faculty and administrators is going to be key," said Walker, who also holds a master's in sports management from Old Dominion University. "We're going to put the onus on student-athletes and holding them accountable ... so that they can benefit from their time here academically."

Establishing new and improved fundraising initiatives and fostering and repairing relationships between the department and former student-athletes and community supporters are also among her top priorities, Walker said.

Walker, who has been married to her college sweetheart Wayne Walker Sr. for nearly 19 years, was a finalist in the athletic director search when Hayes was hired four years ago, but said she withdrew her name from the applicant pool because she wanted to dedicate her time to her daughter Daijah, an incoming WSSU freshman, and son Wayne Jr., a junior at

Reynolds High School.

Being an athletic director can be a demanding job, but Walker said she has bided her time, waiting until the right period — in her personal life as well as her professional career — to take on the role.

"I wanted to first be the best mother that I could be. I would have the rest of my life to be AD," she remarked, noting that her children are older now and more independent. "So now is a really great time for me. My family is ready. We've talked about this; we've prayed about this opportunity, and I feel confident that we will be able to balance it."

Since WSSU made the official announcement on April 30, Walker said she and her family have been inundated with an outpouring of commendation and support from the Winston-Salem community.

"I don't think any of us anticipated the (congratulatory) remarks that came from the community, for my children and my husband as well," she declared. "Everyone is excited, everyone is extending their well wishes, and for that, we're very grateful and appreciative."

While she has enjoyed being in the limelight, Walker said it's time she got back to what is truly important: making Rams Athletics the best it can be.

"It's been great," she said of the accolades, "but I'm ready to get to work. I'm ready to dig my heels in and get back to work."

WSSU Choir headed to South Africa

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The Winston-Salem State University Choir, under the direction of Maestra D'Walla Simmons-Burke, accompanist Dr. Myron Brown and bassist Dr. Ronald Patterson, will depart for South Africa on May 28.

Simmons-Burke and the student performers will present lecture/performance in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Pilanesberg and will collaborate with several South African choirs in performances that showcase cultural differences and similarities.

Simmons-Burke, along with her research partner Dr. David Tang of Charlotte, have worked with the research project "Singin' Black and White" since 2012. Simmons-Burke and Tang, who is also traveling with the WSSU contingent, say the project aims to build better communities while making better choral music through ongoing and intensive musical collaborations and professionally-facilitated work on the subjects of race, identity and singing.

The Winston-Salem State University Choir is one of two lead "Singin' Black and White" choirs, and as such, the group will extend the research across the waters to South Africa. There will be joint performances with the Wits Choir (a culturally mixed choir) of Wits University, the Cape Town Youth Choir (formerly Pro Cantu) and the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy Choir.

The choir is also slated to visit Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, Pilanesberg National Park and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.



Maestra D'Walla Simmons-Burke with Dr. Myron Brown.

The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co. Inc., 617 N. Liberty Street, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The Chronicle, P.O. Box 1636
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636

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