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NCCU Chancellor Debra Saunders-White Leads With Creativity, Innovation

Dr. Debra Saunders-White was formally installed as the 11th chancellor of North Carolina Central University today during ceremonies at McDougald-McLendon Gymnasium on campus.

Saunders-White, who was appointed to the post by the University of North Carolina Board of Governors in early 2013, came to NCCU from the U.S. Department of Education after working in higher education administration at Hampton University and the University of North Carolina Wilmington, as well as in corporate marketing for IBM.

"I see NCCU as the gateway to opportunity, a place where our students can catch hold of a vision and have the life of their dreams," the chancellor said in her inaugural speech.

"Times of change and challenge often spawn unimaginable creativity and innovation. We have to stay relevant, foster new relationships and offer more opportunities that allow our students and the university community to be leaders in the academy and the evolving global marketplace."

Presiding over the ceremonies was Thomas W. Ross, president of the University of North Carolina system, which includes NCCU and 16 other campuses.

"NCCU has enormous potential under Dr. Saunders-White," Ross said. "There is no doubt in my mind that she is the right person to lead North Carolina Central University today and in the years ahead."

Dr. Johnson O. Akinleye, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs, was a colleague of Saunders-White at UNC Wilmington before coming to NCCU earlier this year.

"She is scholarly, yet innovative. Respectful of history, while also keeping her eyes on the horizon," Akinleye said in his tribute to the new chancellor. "While we know the bar set by Chancellor Saunders-White for academic excellence is high, she is someone who will work hard right alongside us to ensure that the path to achieving our goals is as smooth as possible."

Hampton University President Dr. William R. Harvey praised Saunders-White for displaying "determination, focus, vision, intellect and untiring energy" when she served as director of vice president for technology and in other posts on the Virginia campus.

"Her aptitude for high-level contribution and future success were readily apparent," Harvey said.

Other speakers included Durham Mayor William B. "Bill" Bell, Durham County Commission Chairman Dr. Michael Page, UNC Board of Governor's Chairman Peter D. Hans, Dr. Dwight P. Perry, chairman of NCCU's Board of Trustees, and the Rev. Raymond J. Donaldson, pastor of Holy Cross Catholic Church in Durham.

Saunders-White grew up in Hampton, Va., and is a first-generation college graduate. Her mother, Irene Saunders, three brothers and her two children, Elizabeth Paige and Cecil III, were on hand for the celebration, as well as several aunts and uncles from as far away as Iowa.

Ralph Saunders, a high school principal in Hampton, said his sister brought home the best report cards in the family and demonstrated what their parents taught: "That we could be and do anything."

"We are extremely proud of you," Saunders added.

In her speech, Saunders-White acknowledged some of the challenges facing higher education, such as funding for new programs and the need to raise student retention and graduation rates.

She also pointed out that NCCU is well positioned to improve the economic outlook for students who have traditionally had fewer opportunities and access to higher education.

"Because of the support of the state, our alumni and friends, NCCU is one of the most affordable and accessible institutions for low income families in the University of North Carolina system, and it is one of the most affordable institutions in its peer group in the United States," she added.

Saunders-White spoke of the important role historically black colleges and universities play in reaching out to underserved students. Although only 9 percent of African-American students attend HBCU's, they are responsible for producing 18 percent of all engineering degrees, 21 percent of business and management degrees and 31 percent of mathematics degrees earned by African-Americans.

Veteran journalist and NABJ co-founder Stone dies

CHAPEL HILL (AP) - Longtime journalist and educator Charles Sumner "Chuck" Stone Jr., one of the founders of the National Association of Black Journalists, has died. He was 89.

Allegra Stone said that her father died April 6 at an assisted living facility in Chapel Hill. He'd been a journalism professor at the University of North Carolina for 14 years starting in 1991.

Many who helped launch the NABJ credited Stone as the driving force behind its founding, said the association's current president Bob Butler.

"Chuck chaired the first meeting and became the first president. He provided the rudder that steered NABJ at a time when being a member was not always easy. Some employers back then told members to choose between their jobs and NABJ," Butler said in a news release.

After serving as a Tuskegee Airman in World War II, Stone was a writer and editor at influential black publications in New York, Washington and Chicago through the early 1960s, using his writing to urge the Kennedy administration to advance the cause of civil rights. Subsequently, he served as an adviser to U.S. Rep. Adam Clayton Powell of New York.

His reputation grew after he was hired as the first black columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News, where he worked as a columnist and editor from 1972 to 1991. He was known for being outspoken on discrimination, police brutality and racism.

Despite the grave subject matter he tackled, he was a joy to be around in the newsroom, said novelist Pete Dexter, who worked alongside Stone as a columnist at the Daily News.

"He was one of those people who makes you feel good just to bump into him when you came into the office because he was so happy where he was and doing what he did," Dexter said.

Dexter said Stone's work resonated with the Daily News' black readership in a time of racial strife in the city.

"I can't tell you how divided racially Philadelphia was when I got there. It was nothing like it is now," Dexter said.

Stone's family said dozens of suspects turned themselves into Stone before the authorities because of his efforts to hold the criminal justice system accountable. He was also credited with helping to negotiate the release of six guards at a Pennsylvania prison who were held hostage by inmates in 1981.

"I damn near had a nervous breakdown," Stone later told The Philadelphia Inquirer. "I spent two days negotiating and they released the hostages after the second day. So then when people got in trouble and there were hostages... they said, 'call Chuck Stone to get us out of this.'"

Stone was born in St. Louis in 1924 and reared in Connecticut. After his time in the military, he graduated from Wesleyan University and earned a master's degree in sociology from the University of Chicago.

Before UNC, Stone also taught journalism at the University of Delaware. Books he wrote include "Black Political Power in America" and the novel "King Strut."



DR. DEBRA SAUNDERS-WHITE



THE LATE SEN. JEANNE LUCAS

Jeanne Lucas Luncheon Set

During the 9th Annual NC Black Summit, The Alliance of NC Black Elected Officials will host The Senator Jeanne H. Lucas Luncheon, with former Congresswoman Eva Clayton offering words of remembrance. Keynoting the luncheon is Dr. Cedric Bright, assistant dean of the UNC School of Medicine, and 112th President of the National Medical Association. He will provide a local perspective on healthcare issues facing our community.

The luncheon honors the late Senator's commitment to issues of education, healthcare, social justice and other causes also embraced by the Alliance. "We thought it fitting that the Alliance would help sustain the memory of Senator Lucas, who was a staunch advocate of issues of social, economic and political justice to which the Alliance is also committed," says Alliance Chairman Richard Hooker. This year the Summit's focus is on access to healthcare, and issue that was near and dear to Senator Lucas' heart. The luncheon is included in the cost of the 2014 NC Black Summit Registration.



CHUCK STONE (PHOTO COURTESY UNC)