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NNPA Honors Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., With Lifetime Legacy Award

By Stacy M. Brown (NNPA Newswire Contributor)

Reverend Jesse L. Jackson Sr. received the highest honor presented by the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) at its annual convention in Norfolk, Virginia.

The legendary activist received the NNPA Lifetime Legacy Award for his decades of service as one of the country's foremost civil rights, religious and political figures.

After a video tribute that chronicled Jackson's life and a surprise solo performance of "Hero," by Jackson favorite, Audrey DuBois Harris, the iconic preacher accepted the award from NNPA President and CEO Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., and NNPA Chairman Dorothy R. Leavell.

"I'm not easy to surprise," Jackson told the crowd, which gave him a standing ovation as he headed to the podium to accept the honor.



Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. (center) accepts the 2018 NNPA Lifetime Legacy Award from NNPA President and CEO Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. (left) and NNPA Chairman Dorothy Leavell, during the 2018 NNPA Lifetime Legacy Award Black Tie Gala in Norfolk, Va. (Freddie Allen/AMG/NNPA)

The Presidential Medal of Freedom winner, Jackson has been called the "Conscience of the Nation," and "The Great Unifier," challenging America to be inclusive and to establish just and humane priorities for the benefit of all.

Born in 1941 in Greenville, South Carolina, Jackson began his theological studies at Chicago Theological Seminary, but deferred his studies when he began working full time in the Civil Rights Movement alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"This honor takes on a special meaning for me because my first job was selling the 'Norfolk Journal and Guide' newspaper and then the 'Baltimore AFRO-American' and then the 'Pittsburgh Courier,'" Jackson said of the iconic Black-owned newspapers. "We couldn't see the other side of Jackie Robinson. We couldn't see the other side of Sugar Ray Robinson," he said, noting that the Black Press told the full stories of those sports heroes.

He reminisced about the fateful night in Memphis in 1968 when an assassin's bullet cut down King.

"I was with Dr. King on that chilly night in Memphis and I went to the phone to talk to Mrs. King. I couldn't really talk," he said. "I told her, 'I think Dr. King was shot in the shoulder,' even though I knew he was shot in the neck. I just couldn't say it."

During the General Motors-sponsored ceremony, Leavell and Chavis said Jackson has carried King's legacy well.

"We still need him," Leavell said of Jackson.

Chavis called Jackson a "long-distance runner who's made a difference not only in this country, but all over the world."

Leavell recalled Jackson's historic run for the presidency in 1984 in a campaign that registered more than 1 million new voters and catapulting Democrats in their successful effort to regain control of the Senate.

Four years later, Jackson ran again, this time registering more than 2 million new voters and earning 7 million popular votes.

"It's a wonder that my neighbors didn't call the police the night he gave that iconic speech at the Democratic National Convention [in 1984]," said Leavell, whom Jackson presided over her wedding ceremony more than 40 years ago. "There was so much emotion that night that I felt, they told me that I could be anything that I wanted to be," Leavell said, pointing to Jackson and photographers flocked to take pictures of the civil rights leader while holding his coveted NNPA award.

Dubois Harris said Jackson is a "King of a man," and, although she had been under the weather all week, nothing would stop her from attending Jackson's big night, she said.

"We stand on his shoulders," Dubois Harris said. "He continues to be a pioneer of civil rights and humanity and he's all that's good and right in the world."

Over decades, Jackson has earned the respect and trust of presidents and dignitaries and his Rainbow PUSH organization has aided countless Black and minority families with various struggles.

But his work not only has helped the poor or minorities.

In 1984, Jackson secured the release of captured Navy Lt. Robert Goodman from Syria, and he also helped shepherd the release of 48 Cuban and Cuban-American prisoners in Cuba.

Jackson was the first American to bring home citizens from the United Kingdom, France, and other countries who were held as human shields by Saddam Hussein in Kuwait and Iraq in 1990.

He also negotiated the release of U.S. soldiers held hostage in Kosovo and, in 2000, Jackson helped negotiate the release of four journalists working on a documentary for Britain's Channel 4 network who were held in Liberia.



Dr. Dayami Lopez, assistant professor of pharmaceutical science, left, and her research assistant, Dr. Quantil Melendez.

NCCU Researcher Develops Quick Test for Cardiovascular Disease

North Carolina Central University (NCCU) researchers have developed a simple diagnostic test to detect genetic mutations known to raise patients' risk for high cholesterol and other common diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Dr. Dayami Lopez, assistant professor of pharmaceutical science, has applied for a U.S. patent for the procedure she developed in her lab at NCCU's Biomanufacturing Research Institute and Technology Enterprise (BRITE), where she has been on staff since 2008. Lopez and her research assistant, Dr. Quantil Melendez, investigate PCSK9, a human protein linked to absorption of cholesterol particles by the bloodstream.

PCSK9 mutations are identified as contributing to several common metabolic diseases, but individual diagnosis has been limited by the expense and time required when using existing methods for identifying gene mutations.

"This is the first diagnostic test for active PCSK9 outside of full genetic testing," Lopez said, adding that most insurance won't cover the cost of the full genetic analysis. "Ours is a simple, cheap blood test that most insurances would cover."

A simple PCSK9 test could give medical practitioners a better understanding of the causes of metabolic diseases, as well as more customized treatment options.

"BRITE faculty and student researchers investigating cancer, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases are expanding our understanding of these diseases and developing new tools for diagnoses and treatment," said Dr. Faye Calhoun, interim director of BRITE. "The test created and, eventually, to be taken to market through a spinoff company is a prime example of how NCCU's emphasis on translational research is advancing not just science education, but also human health, and creating economic growth for North Carolina."

PCSK9, which stands for proprotein convertase subtilisin/kexin-9, affects the body's low-density lipoprotein (LDL) receptor. LDL is the type of cholesterol known as "bad cholesterol" that has the potential to build up in the arteries and lead to blockages. PCSK9 mutations have been linked to a variety of health threats such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, hypothyroidism, and others that tend to run in families.

A study by Lopez and Melendez, "Hypercholesterolemia: The role of PCSK9," was published in the Archives of Biochemistry and Biophysics in June 2017.

The blood assay method developed at BRITE is currently undergoing human medical trials, Lopez said. She and Melendez have formed a company, NIFP Technologies LLC, that will oversee the product manufacturing and distribution when the trial phase is complete.

Melendez, a December 2017 graduate of NCCU who earned her doctorate in Integrated Biosciences, will serve as the company's chief executive officer, while Lopez will continue her research and teaching at BRITE.

"We are excited because our product can provide information that is valuable both in diagnosis and treatment," Melendez said.

For example, physicians could use the test to quickly determine whether a patient's high-cholesterol levels stem largely from lifestyle and nutrition issues or from genetic mutations, and help them pinpoint which medications would be most effective bringing LDL levels down, Lopez said.

The PCSK9 test may also be used to determine which patients might be vulnerable to muscle damage or suffer other side effects of statins, the most common treatment for high cholesterol, or identify those who may have a statin resistance.

North Carolina Central University prepares students to succeed in the global marketplace. Consistently ranked as a top Historically Black College or University, NCCU offers flagship programs in the sciences, education, law, business, nursing and the arts. Founded in 1910, NCCU remains committed to diversity in and access to higher education. Our alumni excel in a wide variety of academic and professional fields. Visit www.nccu.edu.