

Zone III

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2019

ARIZONA  INFORMANT



Dr. Loretta H. Cheeks, with Nia Richardson and Triniti Cheatham, is on a mission to create a better world with technology. FRONT: Kallayah Henderson makes the President's List at Florida State University.

Rebooting After Wakanda

By Cheryl Jones

On Feb. 16, 2018, the iconic *Black Panther* movie disrupted Hollywood's scenery with bold, brazen depictions of melanin, swag and Black girl magic. While those visuals were undeniably captivating, it was the provocative integration of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, African culture and Black brilliance that dismantled old perspectives, awakened new probabilities and challenged Black people to explore the possibility of ourselves as leaders in a tech-savvy universe.

Now the curtains are closed, the lights are on, and we are left to face the reality that: less than 4 percent of African Americans (AA) are making their way into the world of science and technology; less than 2 percent of AA boys and girls are being accepted into accelerated programs that prepare them to compete in the tech arena; and less than 1 percent of philanthropic funds are being dedicated to closing this gap.

The scenario places us far away from our Wakanda dream.

Yet, technology is one of the fastest growing markets in our nation today, generating billions of dollars in revenue per year. As we scramble to find our footing in a world that is changing every second at the hands of science and technology, AAs are on the brink of one of the

greatest opportunities of the 21st century – if we choose to accept the challenge.

The groundwork has been laid, the vision has been served, the opportunities are here, the possibilities are endless and the only thing standing between us and our Wakanda is our willingness to be the architects of our new world, to insert our voices into old spaces in new ways and disrupt old narratives to birth new opportunities. The only thing between us and our Wakanda is a new mind, one that thrives in the face of adversity, creates in the realm of impossibility, always accepts the challenge and answers the need.

Dr. Loretta Cheeks, industry leader, artificial intelligence expert and science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) advocate, accepted the challenge in 2017 when she created the STEAM and Global Citizenship Mentoring Program – one of the first global mentorship programs dedicated to answering the need for mentoring among AA girls seeking a future in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

After 33 years of sitting at “the table” with no allies, advocates or representation, Dr. Cheeks is clear that the absence of AAs in STEM is not an issue of capability but one of access, exposure, representation and mentorship.

“Our children need to understand and believe that they belong. You can't gain a sense of identity if you don't see yourself,” Dr. Cheeks said.

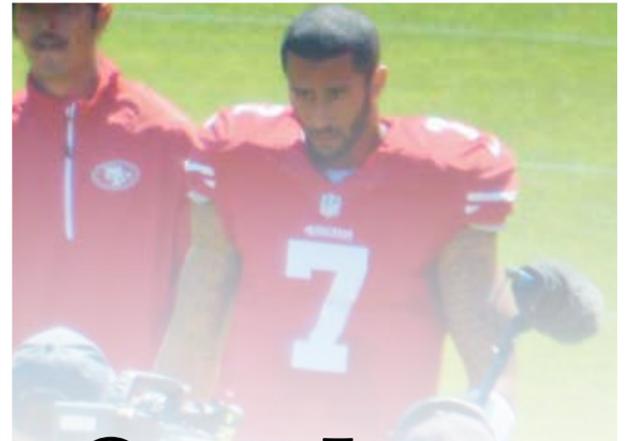
These words were echoed by Kallayah Henderson, information technology and computer science major at Florida State University and mentee to Dr. Cheeks. Henderson was not always interested in computer science but switched her major during the end of her sophomore year as a result of speaking with Dr. Cheeks.

“Seeing how far she's gone with it and how much she was able to do in the field helped me see opportunities that could definitely lie ahead for me... it's a very interesting world,” Henderson said.

Triniti Cheatham, a 17-year-old high school sophomore at Xavier college prep and engineering mentee to Dr. Cheeks, said her interest in engineering was peaked after taking a computer programming class in her freshman year.

“I like how it stimulated my thinking,” Cheatham said. However, it was Dr. Cheeks' guidance and mentoring that helped her turn her dream into a reality. “If it wasn't for my mentor, I wouldn't know what to do or where to go to further my dreams of becoming an engineer,” she said.

Dr. Cheeks is passionate about the *continued on page 13*



Open Letter To Kaepernick

HENDERSON, NEV. – Rev. William Owens, president of the Coalition of African American Pastors (CAAP), is attempting to bridge the divide over the American flag, sports, and politics. Rev. Owens published an open letter July 29, to activist Colin Kaepernick regarding Kaepernick's statements on the flag and U.S. history.

Earlier this month – in the wake of Kaepernick's involvement in Nike's decision to pull its “Betsy Ross flag” shoe – CAAP launched a petition requesting that Nike end its business relationship with Kaepernick and produce the Betsy Ross shoe for the benefit of veterans groups and organizations that help military families.

Last week, CAAP followed-up by announcing a boycott of Nike. At a press conference, Rev. Owens took issue with Kaepernick's attempt to erase American history and pointed out that Nike had aligned itself with the activists radical views.

Now, in an effort to help both Kaepernick and Nike understand the impact of their decision, Owens has penned a letter to Kaepernick, explaining why the former athlete's political stance on the flag sends the wrong message to young people.

“Rather than bringing people together to work for change, it sows division. Instead of inspiring young people, it suggests that America was never great and begs the question of why it's worth improving,” Owens wrote.

Owens goes on to praise Kaepernick's passion, explaining that he has no animosity towards him. Rev. Owens even invites Kaepernick to meet and discuss the issue - an invitation he also extends to Nike CEO Mark Parker.

“Reducing American history to its flaws or looking at it only through the lens of racism is too limited,” Owens wrote to Kaepernick. “It erases the contributions of the men and women who worked and sacrificed to make this country great. There is dignity in our shared history that should not be swept aside.”

Owens went on to urge Kaepernick to pour his energy into helping the African-American community in a less politicized way by supporting projects that would have a practical and measurable effect on the real problems facing Black families.

Owens stated: “I respect Mr. Kaepernick's passion, but he is not helping African Americans by encouraging a culture of grievance and stoking racial division. This is celebrity activism - the kind that benefits a personal 'brand' more than it helps the real people struggling with real problems.”

Owens concluded: “Nike and Mr. Kaepernick need to understand that they are not following the civil rights tradition, which is about erasing barriers and bringing people together. Instead, they are dividing Americans. I hope that Mr. Kaepernick will demonstrate that he's serious about change by reading this letter and pondering its message. In the meantime, I will continue to boycott all Nike products and call on others to ‘Walk Away from Nike’ until it ceases this political posturing and rejoins Team USA.”

Read the open letter and petition at caapusa.org.

New Board Member For African American Museums Assn.

(BPRW) MIAMI, FLA. – Executive director of the Black Archives History & Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc., Timothy A. Barber, was recently selected as a new member of the Board of Directors for the Association of African American Museums (AAAM). AAAM was established to provide professional development and networking opportunities to its membership base and to African American and African Diaspora audiences broadly.

Timothy A. Barber



Barber, who began his career at the Black Archives more than 15 years ago, has been involved with AAAM as a member for over a decade. Climbing the ranks from intern to assistant archivist, archivist and then executive director, Barber has developed a deep connection to Miami's African American history, its preservation, and the preservation of the stories and histories of Black communities nationwide.

As director of the Black Archives, Barber successfully administered a \$10 million GOB capital grant fund to expand and re-open the Historic Lyric Theater, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. He has also leveraged federal grants from the Institute of Museums and Library Services along with local county grants to create sustainability for the organization's operations and programming.

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FOR YOUTH & FAMILIES

Aug 9-11: Game On Expo, 2-5pm. Featuring guests, games to play, tournaments, live music, cosplay contest, live audition, vendors and exclusives. Phoenix Convention Center, 33 S 3rd St, Phoenix 85004. Tickets and information at gameonexpo.com.

Aug 10: Girls Empowered Motivated and Strong Self-Esteem Group. By Integrated Mental Health Associates. Eight-week group for ages 8-18. 480-261-5015; visit integratedmha.com.

Aug 25: My HBCU A Paint and Sip Scholarship Fundraiser, 2-5pm. Hosted by Jackson State University The Greater Phoenix and Tucson Alumni Chapter and Your Art Party. 7146 N 57th Dr Ste B, Glendale 85301.

Thru Aug 31: The Very Hungry Caterpillar's 50th Birthday Exhibition. Free with admission to Butterfly Wonderland. 9500 E Via de Ventura, Scottsdale. butterflywonderland.com; vhc50.com.

THIS WEEK IN BLACK HISTORY...

JUL 31 1874: Patrick Francis Healy, the first Black man to receive a Ph.D., is inaugurated as president of Georgetown University, the oldest Catholic university in America – becoming the first Black person to head a predominantly White university. **AUG 1 1894:** Renowned educator and former president of Morehouse College, Benjamin E. Mays, is born in Ninety Six, S.C.



Arizona College Delegates Attend NAACP National Convention

Five Arizona college students traveled to Detroit, Mich., to attend the July 20-24, 110th National NAACP Convention as voting delegates. Three students were from Phoenix College and two from Arizona State University.

Two of the students were elected officers of the Youth and College Division for Region 1: Charlene "Taj" White of Phoenix College as assistant secretary; and Armonnee Jackson of Arizona State University to serve on the credentials committee.

Other students attending were: Elizabeth Preayer and Chante Holiday of Phoenix College; and Janae Stevenson of Arizona State University.

Advisors accompanying the student delegates

were: Dr. Camilla Westenberg, Phoenix College professor emeritus; and Professor Princess Lucas-Wilson, Arizona State University.

The conference's theme was "When We Fight, We Win," and the array of dynamic speakers and workshop presenters echoed the message of the theme throughout the conference events. The noteworthy presentations of NAACP national officers were accompanied by presentations of other high profile speakers, such as: Democratic Speaker of the House of Representatives, nine of the leading Democratic candidates for President, and one challenger Republican candidate.

Resolutions on which the students voted per-

tained to the areas of: civil rights; criminal justice; economic development; education; environmental affairs; health; housing; information technology; internal affairs; immigration/international affairs; legislative and political action; and voting rights. One significant resolution voted on was an emergency resolution presented by Rep. Al Green calling for impeachment of the current United States President, which was approved by the delegation.

Also, a number of social events were provided for the Youth & College attendees each day. Overall, the convention was educational and informative regarding current political and social climate issue.

Global Program Reaches Girls For Engineering

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future of AA youth and insists that "we cannot afford to leave this population behind." A new world is emerging and how AAs position themselves will depend on how "woke" and assertive we are regarding the way technology is impacting and shaping our lives. According to Dr. Cheeks we need all "hands on deck," including STEM professionals and organizations and parents alike.

Cheatham's mother, who actively sought out Dr. Cheeks to mentor her daughter on her career path, is "hands on" in guiding the student on her career path.

"Having a parent that is so involved is something that I'm really grateful for. She pushes me and I know that she has my best interest in mind," Cheatham said. "All children are not as fortunate, sometimes parents just don't care."

The plea of Cheatham and Henderson to parents is support their children in what they are passionate about, be encouraging and find mentors who can help them to discover what

they can achieve.

As Dr. Cheeks reflects on her "road less traveled" and the scarce support she's received along the way, she urges other AA professionals and industry leaders to reach back while moving forward, to use their influence and voices to speak out on behalf of our children.

"People need to know why they've been asked to the dinner table," Dr. Cheeks said. "It's not to just sit there and assimilate...as individuals we have to challenge ourselves to come forth and stop being silent in the name of fitting in and making sure that our little positions are not jeopardize... we need to challenge ourselves to speak up, particularly on behalf of our youth."

With less than 1 percent of philanthropic funds being allocated for AA teens in STEAM the journey has been challenging. Despite the challenges, Dr. Cheeks has been breaking down global barriers and exploring new frontiers.

In July 2017 STEAM and Global Citizenship Mentoring Program (SGCMP) hosted



Strong TIES provides science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics tools to deserving youth and communities and empowers them to become innovative, engaged, and thoughtful.

17 Black teenage girls on a trip to Ghana, West Africa to explore fundamental applications of STEAM. In 2018 SGMCP hosted eight weeks immersive mentoring and its second annual educational exploration to New York City and Washington, where 19 Black teenagers developed mobile apps at Google and were exposed to experiences to contextualize STEAM throughout the nation's capital.

"If you have an interest in STEM give yourself a chance," Dr. Cheeks said. "Often time you may be the only one in the room that looks like you. You have to be comfortable with walking a path that may not have been trotted before but go ahead and create the path and blaze the trail.... Get a bulldog

attitude that you will not let go of your dream if that is what you want to do. Don't allow others to deter you from that because there is a place for you, be persistent and know that you do belong. This is a part of our world and you shaping it is very important, so get in there and be a part of that."

With future plans to do peer-to-peer STEAM collaboration with young ladies in Polokwane, South Africa in 2020, and more on the horizon, Dr. Cheeks is a stellar example of what can be achieved when we choose to thrive in the face of adversity, create in the realm of impossibility, accept the challenge and answer the need.

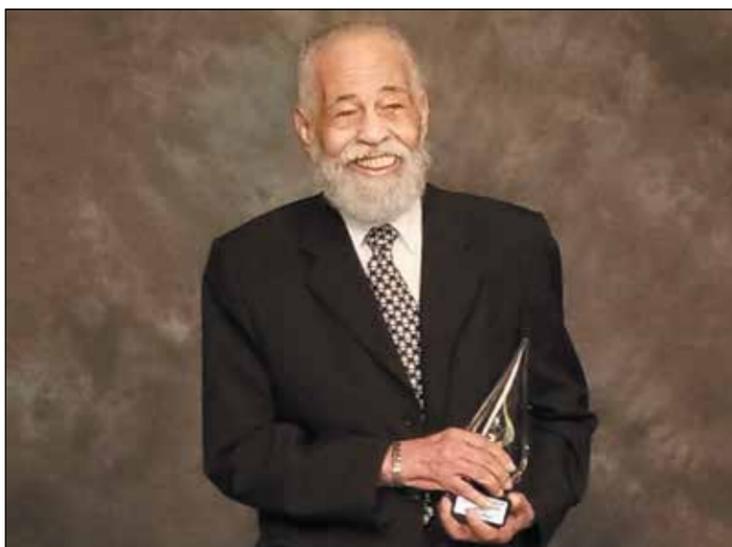
Visit strongtiesaz.org for more information.

Legendary Debate Coach Gets Lifetime Award

The 100-year old legendary African-American debate coach Dr. Thomas Freeman has been awarded the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Speech & Debate Association.

Freeman's 70-plus year resume includes teaching Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during his time at Morehouse, former U.S. Reps. Leland and Jordan, Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis, gospel superstar Yolanda Adams, and Academy Award-winning actor Denzel Washington, who sought out Freeman's expertise to coach the cast of the Golden Globe-nominated film "The Great Debaters."

Freeman was the Texas Southern University debate coach for six de-



National Speech & Debate Association honored Dr. Thomas Freeman's 70-plus year legacy with the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award.

acades before his retirement in 2013. Freeman recently celebrated his 100th birthday on June 27.

"The National Speech & Debate Association is deeply honored to award Dr. Freeman with our 2019 lifetime achievement award," said J. Scott Wunn, Executive Director of the National Speech & Debate Association. "Our members, board members, coaches, and students hold Dr. Freeman with such high esteem - he's like a celebrity within our organization. Freeman is the epitome of who our members hope to become - someone who defies the odds and uses the power of words to propel change. His words of encouragement at our National Tournament in Dallas will always echo

through our hearts."

The National Speech & Debate Association is the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization serving middle school, high school, and collegiate students in the United States. The Association provides competitive speech and debate activities, high-quality resources, comprehensive training, scholarship opportunities, and advanced recognition to more than 150,000 students and coaches every year. For 90 years, the National Speech & Debate Association has empowered nearly two million members to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our society. For more information, visit speechanddebate.org.