

Forward Together: President's February 2022 Message



Celebrate Shockers during Black History Month

Though we celebrate Black achievement year-round, Black History Month gives us space and opportunity to focus on the significant contributions Black individuals have made throughout the history of Shocker Nation. Please take a moment with me while we celebrate some of the accomplishments and triumphs of our Black Shocker family:

- In 1928, **John Wesley Hayes and Lotta Louise Hayes** (right) become the first Black graduates of Wichita University. John earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and went on to receive a master's degree in religion in 1931, and Lotta earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts.



Dr. Rick Muma, president

- 1974 Shocker graduate [M. Lee Pelton's](#) reputation as a leader in higher education has led him to his current position as president and CEO of the Boston Foundation. Pelton, who studied English literature at Wichita State and at Harvard, has held deanships at Colgate and Dartmouth, served as president of Willamette University (1998-2011) and Boston's Emerson College (2011-2021).
- **Karla Burns**, 1981, was a mezzo-soprano and actress known for her portrayal of "Queenie" in *Show Boat*, and she was a Tony-nominated performer and the first Black person to win Britain's most prestigious theater award. She received the Alumni Recognition Award from the WSUAA in 1988 and was inducted into the WSU College of Fine Arts HOF in 2016.
- **Angela Buckner**, the all-time leading rebounder for Shocker Women's basketball, graduated from Wichita State with a communication degree in 2003 and a sport management degree in 2004. During her time at Wichita State, Angela was a four-year letterwinner and three-time Missouri Valley Conference selection (2001, 2003 and 2004), while also earning MVC Freshman of the Year honors as a Shocker. She is the only Shocker in school history to total more than 1,300 points and 1,200 rebounds. Buckner set the school record for rebounds with 1,297 and double-doubles with 67 — also a conference record. She still holds marks in the top 10 for free throws made and attempted, points and blocks. Buckner was inducted into the Wichita Sports Hall of Fame in 2008, the Pizza Hut Shocker Sports Hall of Fame in 2010, and the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame in 2018.
- **Cleo Littleton**, 1974, (right) is well-known local businessman, standout Shocker basketball player and the first Black student to be elected "Jack Armstrong" (the most All-American man on campus) at the University of Wichita. Littleton was inducted in the Shocker Sports Hall of Fame in 1980.
- **LaVerne Baker** earned two bachelor's degrees in 1956, and then became the first African American to earn a doctoral degree from Wichita State in 1981.
- In the summer of 1958, some two dozen students and members of the Wichita branch of the NAACP Youth Council — led by 20-year-old Ron Walters, a freshman at the University of Wichita, along with his cousin, 19-year-old Carol Parks Hahn, who later earned two degrees from Wichita State University in 1976 and 1982 — organized sit-ins at the downtown Dockum Drug Store (below) on the southeast corner of Broadway and Douglas. Like many Kansas stores at the time, Dockum Drugs would not allow Black people to sit at its lunch counter. Walters went on to become an educator, political scholar and strategist, news commentator, author and activist, whose career included serving as Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign manager, professor of government and political science at the University of Maryland, and director of the African American Leadership Institute at UCLA.





- 1960 graduate **Riley Leroy Pitts** was killed in action in Vietnam in 1967, and he was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor — the nation’s first black officer to be so honored. WSU’s Military and Veterans Center dedicated its naming to Mr. Pitts.
- **Linwood Sexton, 1946**, was one of the first Black athletes to compete in the Missouri Valley Conference at a time when segregation barred him from sharing meals, staying the same hotels, and sometimes even traveling to certain away games with his football teammates. Sexton was inducted into the Shocker Sports Hall of Fame in 1980.
- **John Rolfe, 1985**, is the first Black president and CEO of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce. Be sure to listen to the [Forward Together podcast](#) when we talk to John about his time at Wichita State and his goals for the chamber.

- When **Willie “Jeff” Jeffries** (right) is hired at Wichita State before the 1979 season, he makes history as the first Black head football coach at an NCAA Division 1-A university. In 2004, Jeffries told The Shocker alumni magazine, “I didn’t realize all this weight would be on my shoulders. Some other Black coaches said, ‘You’re carrying the light for us. If you do well there will be others.’” **Anthony Jones ‘88**, a tight end who played under Jeffries as No. 88 and later earned a Super Bowl ring with the Washington Redskins, is now head football coach at Division 1-AA Alabama A&M.



- **Erna Prather Harris, 1936**, was one of the few Black women to attend college during the Great Depression and became the University of Wichita’s first African American editor of The

Sunflower student newspaper. She went on to an impressive career in journalism, including starting up her own newspaper, The Kansas Journal.

- **Isaac Brown**, our current men's head basketball coach, is the first African American Division I head basketball coach in Kansas. Listen to the February 2022 [Forward Together podcast](#) when we talk with Coach Brown.
- **Aliphine Tuliemuk**, 2013 graduate in public health, was a cross country runner and distance runner for the Wichita State cross country and track and field programs from 2011 to 2013. She was a 13-time All-American, the most in Wichita State track and field history, and earned 11 All-America honors in track and field. She finished her career with seven all-time top-10 records, including four school records that still stand today. She also finished her career with two cross country school records that still stand. Tuliemuk placed first at the 2020 Olympic Marathon trials in Atlanta and represented the United States at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. In February 2022, Tuliemuk was inducted into the Shocker Sports Hall of Fame.

This is just a small sampling of the remarkable contributions that Black members of the Wichita State community have made to our state, the United States and all of Shocker Nation. For a more complete history of Black history at Wichita State, [read about it in The Shocker alumni magazine](#).

As we work toward an equitable world, Wichita State is committed to achieving the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. To that end, earlier this year, we released the Wichita State University [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion plan](#). The DEI plan is a comprehensive set of goals and strategies to ensure that Shocker Nation has the benefit and input of all voices in our campus community on our journey work toward becoming a premier urban public research university.

Go Shockers!

Sincerely,

Dr. Rick Muma

President of Wichita State University