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## Prominent SC Leaders Recognized in Annual Awards Program

**Columbia** – With support from the [WeGOJA Foundation](#), the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission presented achievement awards to nine influencers today for lifetime leadership or significant contributions in 2020 to preserving and promoting African American history in the state.

Under the theme “Preserving Our Places in History: Lest We Forget,” the program featured inspiring remarks by keynote speaker state Senator Mia McLeod, who challenged the virtual audience to become the change they’re expecting for the future. “We have to first understand our history, then we have to challenge ourselves and each other to make history,” she said. “And finally, we have to muster the courage to change history, lest we forget and repeat it.”

To view the entire show, click [here](#).

The program also acknowledged 2020 award winners (list at bottom,) who were not recognized last year because the ceremony was cancelled due to COVID-19.

### The 2021 Award Recipients were:

#### **Leon Love Lifetime Achievement Award -- Joseph McGill**

McGill is founder of The Slave Dwelling Project. Ten years ago, McGill began spending the night in historic slave quarters and has slept overnight at more than 150 such sites across the country. He uses the experience to talk about the importance of preserving these historic structures so that we may have full and honest conversations about our country’s history. He has worked as a field officer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is a former director of history and culture at the Penn Center, and is a former docent to the Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston. McGill is currently a history consultant for Magnolia Plantation & Gardens in Charleston.



#### **Herbert A. DeCosta Trailblazer Award for innovative leadership -- Marilyn Hemingway**

Hemingway is the CEO, President and Founder of the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce. She is a native of Georgetown and is passionate about Social Entrepreneurship, business development and economic vibrancy. She is a founding partner of The Hemingway Group, a public relations, advertising, marketing and political advocacy firm. She is also a registered fundraiser with the state of South Carolina and has completed Energy Justice and Sea Level Rising certifications through the national NAACP.

### **SCAAHC's Project Award -- The Cecil Williams South Carolina Civil Rights Museum**

This museum is *the first* and *only* civil rights museum in the state of South Carolina. The museum's official opening was offset by COVID-19, but still attracted more than 9,000 visitors. It has preserved more than 1,000 photographs, documents and artifacts – including original photography of marches and protests, a travel trunk that once belonged to Justice Thurgood Marshall and more -- that are exclusive, one-of-a-kind historical treasures relating to the South Carolina civil rights movement.



### **Legislator of the Year – State Representative Joseph H. Jefferson, Jr.**

Rep. Jefferson represents Berkeley and Dorchester counties. This award recognizes a legislator who has endorsed the preservation of African American history and culture and/or solicited funding in 2020 through the state legislature for causes, groups or organizations that support the preservation of African American history and culture in South Carolina.

### **Group / Organization Award -- The Village Group**

The Village Group of Georgetown County is comprised of community leaders, parents, elders and concerned citizens with one common interest: to improve the Plantersville community and build a brighter future for our children. During the early months of the pandemic, Georgetown County school children were provided with access to Chromebooks, but many had no access to the internet. The HTC and the Village Group partnered to help provide wi-fi hotspots at the Plantersville Cultural Center and the Plantersville Community Center. The Village Group, a nonprofit serves approximately 88% of Plantersville Elementary School students in an after school program.



### **Group / Organization Award -- Drayton Hall Preservation Trust**

2020 was a watershed year for the Drayton Hall Preservation Trust (DHPT) concerning the interpretation of African American history. DHPT's proudest accomplishment is a new audio tour of the main house. Since the 1970s, tours of Drayton Hall focused primarily on architecture and the building's White residents. The new tour, which was featured on the front page of Charleston's Post and Courier, accentuates Drayton Hall's status as an African American history site dedicated to researching and interpreting that history. It is a social history tour that focuses primarily on the enslaved residents of Drayton Hall. In conjunction, a new self-guided walking tour was created for the grounds of Drayton Hall that provides much more information about enslaved people and their enormous contributions across the site.



### **Student Award -- Keighla Pope**

This Claflin University student produced a noteworthy documentary on the impact of the coronavirus on her local community. The documentary explores the impact of COVID-19 on not only a religious community, but also the African American business community. The documentary titled: *The Lowcountry Battler with Covid-19* can be found on YouTube.

### **Individual Award -- Dr. Beatrice Rice Thompson.**

Well-known in the Anderson community as a member of the Anderson City Council, this octogenarian worked on the Church Street Heritage Plaza with a team of artists on art installations with stories, a series of clay reliefs and a sculpture in homage to a key era in Anderson's history featuring a generation of black entrepreneurs and community leaders. Dr. Thompson shepherded the city of Anderson's \$450,000 upgrade to the park named in her honor. And in 2020, the United Way of Anderson County named Dr. Thompson as the African American Legacy Award Winner.



### **SCAAHC Commissioner of the Year -- Dr. Abel Bartley**

Dr. Bartley is an African American history professor at Clemson University and currently serves as Vice Chair of the Commission. However, he has served in leadership roles for the Commission for at least a decade. Under his leadership, the Commission produced teacher's guides, hosted teacher's webinars and institutes, created the Green Book of South Carolina, published a resource guide for rural entrepreneurship and a book that documents historic African American schools around the state, and managed the oral history project Black Carolinians Speak.



### **The New Jannie Harriot Founders Award**

A new award was presented in the 2021 program – the Jannie Harriot Founders Award – to recognize an individual who has given significant contributions to the growth and sustainability of the SCAAHC. The inaugural award was given to Jannie Harriot, Chairperson of the SCAAHC and former Executive Director of the WeGOJA Foundation. Jannie began her commitment to African American historic preservation when she successfully saved Butler High School in Hartsville. She was part of the group of historians and activists who founded the SC African American Heritage Council in 1993 (now the SCAAHC) and, later, the South Carolina African American Heritage Foundation (now WeGOJA Foundation.) Under her leadership, both organizations became models for preservation programs in other states.

The awards ceremony also featured greetings by Congressman Jim Clyburn and Dr. Eric Emerson, South Carolina's state archivist and Director of the Department of Archives and History. There was also a performance by Christal Brown and the Gullah Geechee Choir. Local comedian Akintunde served as Master of Ceremony.

### **About the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission**

Established through a joint resolution passed by the South Carolina General Assembly on May 14, 1993, the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission (SCAAHC) is devoted to preserving and promoting the rich history and culture of African Americans in the Palmetto State. Since its inception, the Commission has enhanced the efforts of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to document and educate the public about the Black experience in South Carolina through cultural programs, curriculum development, teacher training workshops, the publication of books and online resources, and the preservation of historic spaces.

### **About the WeGOJA Foundation**

The WeGOJA Foundation (formerly the South Carolina African American Heritage Foundation) supports the SCAAHC through fundraising, collaboration and the coordination of projects. More can be found here [www.WeGOJA.org](http://www.WeGOJA.org).

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## 2020 POPIH Award Winners:

### **Receiving the Leon Love Lifetime Achievement Award were Bishop Fred C. James and Dr. Lonnie Randolph.**

Born in Prosperity, Bishop James received his bachelor's degree from Allen University and earned a master's of divinity at the Howard University School of Religion. He has ministered in Winnsboro, Columbia, Sumter, and countless other cities worldwide. In addition to ministering in countless cities around the world, including Winnsboro, Columbia and Sumter, Bishop James was a prominent civil rights organizer during the 1960s. He spearheaded the Sumter Movement, a nonviolent direct action and political organizing campaign that toppled Jim Crow segregation there. Bishop James also worked closely with civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Lewis. He was among the dignitaries present in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda during the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



The now 98-year-old minister continued his religious and political work in later decades. Under his leadership, Allen University reached new heights during the 1980s. He also served on the White House advisory board during the Clinton administration. In 2003, he received the state's highest civilian award, *The Order of the Palmetto*, for his lifelong commitment to improving the lives of citizens in our state.



In July, Bishop James was presented his award in a ceremony that featured remarks by Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott and Columbia Police Chief William Holbrook.

A native of Columbia and graduate of Dreher High School, Dr. Lonnie Randolph eventually earned his doctorate in Optometry in 1977. He maintained a private optometric practice in Columbia for nearly 44



years. Dr. Randolph is renowned for a lengthy and remarkable history of community service and social justice activism. He founded Palmetto Health's free eye clinic, which provides care for students in K-12, to which he volunteers his services as a physician. In the interest of advancing human and civil rights, he served as a member of the state NAACP executive committee before his election as president of the statewide organization, where he served for seven two-year terms. As a leader in the NAACP, Dr. Randolph was a key strategist in the Campaign for Dignity in South Carolina, which led efforts to remove the Confederate battle flag from the South Carolina State House grounds, and assisted in organizing the first King Day at the Dome march. The State NAACP Conference leadership honored him with the President Emeritus Medal in 2017. Dr. Randolph remains an active member of the state executive committee and a trusted advisor to the State Conference.

**Receiving the Herbert A. DeCosta Trailblazer Award for innovative leadership were Bible Way Church Pastor Darrell Jackson, Sr., and Brookland Baptist Rev. Dr. Charles B. Jackson, Sr.**

Pastor Darrell Jackson has a distinguished career of leadership and service in Columbia. He was born and raised in the capital city, attended Dreher High School, Benedict College and Columbia International University. At Benedict he served as Student Government President and received the Most Distinguished Student Award. He received Honorary Doctorate degrees from Benedict and CIU, as well as Richard Stockton College in New Jersey.



Jackson served as Commissioner for Richland County School District One from 1990-1992. In November of 1992, he was elected to the South Carolina Senate, becoming, at the time, the state's youngest African-American Senator ever elected. Jackson continues to serve in the South Carolina Senate today representing District 21.

He also owns a successful marketing and consulting firm and a life insurance company.

In 2006, Bible Way Church of Atlas Road was named one of "America's most influential churches" by Dr. John N. Vaughan, founder of the American Society for Church Growth. Vaughan features the congregation in Volume I of America's Most Influential Churches.



Dr. Charles B. Jackson has been pastor of Brookland Baptist Church for 49 years, helping the congregation grow and become a premier service center for its community. A native of West Columbia, Dr. Jackson attended Lakeview Elementary School before graduating with honors from Brookland Cayce High School. He graduated magna cum laude with a degree in mathematics from Benedict College and graduated with honors from Morehouse School of Religion of the Interdenominational Theological Center, receiving his masters in Divinity. He also received honorary doctorates from multiple institutions.

He led the development of a mega-church sanctuary for Brookland Baptist in 1999. Over the next decade, his team also completed a Community Resource Center, a Health and Wellness Center and Banquet and Conference Center. Today, the church has more than 60 ministries, a full service federal

credit union, the Brookland Foundation, the Brookland Center for Community Economic Change, the Brookland-West Columbia Community Housing Development Corporation and the Brookland Community Pediatric Center, which is a collaborative effort with the Eau Claire Cooperative.

Dr. Jackson has also served on the boards of multiple civic organizations and has delivered sermons across the country. For his philanthropy and influence, Dr. Jackson has been given numerous local and national awards, including the Order of the Palmetto from South Carolina Governor Jim Hodges in 2001.

**Receiving SCAAHC's Justice Award were Isaac Wright for his tireless efforts in overturning wrongful convictions of fellow inmates, and Dr. Bobby J. Donaldson at the University of South Carolina for the exhibit Justice for All in the Center for Civil Rights Research.**

Born 1962 in Moncks Corner, Isaac Wright worked as a music producer for the Cover Girls, a 1980s musical group. In 1991, he was wrongly convicted on drug charges and sentenced to life in prison under New Jersey's drug "kingpin" laws. While incarcerated, he worked as a paralegal and helped to overturn the wrongful convictions of 20 of his fellow inmates, before finally proving his own innocence. After being released from prison, he graduated from Thomas Edison State University in Trenton, N.J., and eventually completed law school at St. Thomas University School of Law in Miami, FL. He graduated in 2007 and passed the bar a year later. After a nine-year investigation into his character, the New Jersey State Bar Association approved his application. A popular television show, *For Life*, is based on his life and the origins of his excellent legal career.

A native of Augusta, Georgia, Professor Donaldson received his undergraduate degree in History and African American Studies from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., and his Ph.D. in American History from Emory University, where he served on the staff of the Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project. A scholar of Southern history and African American life and culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Dr. Donaldson's research and writings explore African American intellectual thought, print culture, education and religion. Additionally, he has served as a consultant for museum exhibitions, archival collections, oral history initiatives, documentary films, and historic preservation projects including the renovation of Booker T. Washington High School and a documentary project on the Ward One community, both located in Columbia.



His most recent project, *Justice for All*, documents South Carolina's fundamental role in the national Civil Rights Movement. On display in 2019, the exhibit used oral history recordings, film clips, photographs, postcards, diaries, and manuscripts to highlight largely overlooked chapters in the history of the movement in the Palmetto State. The materials covered a broad time span, from Reconstruction through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The exhibit was paired with a series of public events featuring celebrated authors, former activists and scholars who offered reflections about the legacies of the Black freedom struggle and its continued relevance in the present day.

A digital version of the exhibit is available here: <https://digital.library.sc.edu/exhibits/civilrights/>

**The Legislator of the Year Award was presented to retired SC Sen. John W. Matthews.**

A native of Bowman, Senator John W. Matthews, Jr., is a graduate of South Carolina State University, Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, the College of Charleston and Lincoln Electrical Institute. After serving 10 years in the S.C. House of Representatives, where he also was chairperson of the Legislative Black Caucus, Matthews was elected to represent Senate District 39, which includes portions of Berkeley, Calhoun, Colleton, Dorchester and Orangeburg counties. In the Senate, he served on five committees including education, ethics and finance.



Senator Matthews' political career was defined by his love for his constituents and a desire to provide young people with educational opportunities. The longest serving legislator in the General Assembly announced in March that he would not seek re-election in 2020 after 46 years of public service. Prior to his departure, the governor presented Senator Matthews with the state's highest civilian honor, *The Order of the Palmetto*, for his tireless devotion to improving the lives of his constituents.

**The Group / Organization Award went to South Carolina Humanities.** Their mission is to enrich the cultural and intellectual lives of all South Carolinians. The organization seeks to share the history and culture of the Palmetto State by awarding grants for high-quality public programs, generating special initiatives, and bringing humanities perspectives to bear on contemporary issues. SC Humanities programs and initiatives are balanced, reflect sensitivity to the diversity of ideas, encourage open dialogue, demonstrate integrity and are ethical in operations.

In 2019, South Carolina Humanities awarded over \$72,000 to 16 different humanities-based projects throughout the state that were designed to interpret or preserve African American history. The projects ranged from exhibits interpreting South Carolina's role in the American Civil Rights Movement to a Gullah Geechee Community Day to African Dance Community Outreach classes. Past examples of SC Humanities commitment to sharing the African American experience in South Carolina include such meaningful and enduring projects as the documentary *Family Across the Sea* (1990), the Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Pavilion (2009), and the *Making a Way Out of No Way: The Legacy of Modjeska Monteith Simkins* exhibit at the historic Modjeska Simkins House museum (2014).



**SCAAHC's Project Award was given to the project "Call My Name" at Clemson University.** Created and directed by Dr. Rhonda Robinson Thomas, Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature at Clemson University, the project is committed to preserving the places of African Americans in the history of Clemson University and its neighboring communities.

In 2013, while conducting a historical survey of African American life in Pickens, Oconee and Anderson counties, Dr. Thomas found the names and records of the convict laborers—nearly 700 men and boys—who built Clemson University's first buildings. She realized that their names must be remembered, and began *Call My Name* to document all aspects of African American history in the Clemson area.

*Call My Name* documents the material and popular cultural history of Clemson University by working with families whose members and ancestors have lived in the area and worked for Clemson University over generations, including descendants of enslaved African Americans who labored on Fort Hill, African American alumni and retired faculty and staff, and African American residents of the Clemson, Seneca and Pendleton communities.

**The Individual Award went to Nadine Anderson.** Anderson is a dedicated senior member of the Jones Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Columbia. She has served in various capacities including Deaconess and Church Secretary. She has also provided leadership and support to the AME Zion denomination at both the District and Conference levels. Her leadership, persistence and personal contributions played a major role in "turning a struggling project into a successful accomplishment for a church that has continuously served the Columbia community for 130 years." She led a committee that researched, wrote and published *Then and Now: A History of Jones Memorial AME Zion Church*, a documentary that highlights the resilience and determination of a church dedicated to its legacy.







**Commissioner of the Year for 2020 – Dawn Dawson-House**

The SCAAHC Commissioner of the Year is Dawn Dawson-House. Dawson-House had been an ex-officio member of the SCAAHC for eight years, filling the seat held by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. She was a project lead for the GreenBookofSC.com and brought other tourism insights to discussions. She currently serves as Executive Director of the WeGOJA Foundation.

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