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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District Names 20 Alumni to be Inducted into the Prestigious University City High School Hall of Fame in Fall 2023

University City, MO - The School District of University City is delighted to announce 21 individuals have been selected to be inducted into the prestigious University City High School Hall of Fame this fall.

These University City High School graduates have made a tremendous difference locally, nationally and internationally and join dozens of other notable honorees who have helped to shape the world. This year's inductees include a physician who rose to become the first Black full professor at Harvard Medical School, accomplished professional athletes in tennis and basketball, a first graduate of University City High School, and a leader in midwifery striving to diminish health inequities by improving access to maternal care.

The celebration and formal induction of University City High School's finest graduates will take place the Friday evening of Homecoming Weekend, September 29, 2023, at University City High School. Tickets will be available starting in late June at www.ucityschools.org/HOF2023. The new inductees are:

Karl Van Meter, Class of 1917*

Karl Van Meter was the first male graduate of the new University City High School after transferring to the school that year. He went on to receive bachelor's and master's degrees from Washington University in St. Louis. In college, his passion for public service enabled him to secure a fellowship grant in 1923 to enroll in the university's new graduate school of economics, which convened in the Washington home of University President Robert Brookings.

Van Meter then worked as an economic analyst for the New York Telephone Company, which later became AT&T. He also hosted the radio program "Air College," discussing current events and utilities in the city. In 1936, when it became highly unlikely that the next World's Fair would be staged in Europe due to the unrest there, he served as a member of the 1939 New York World's Fair Corporation.



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During World War II, Van Meter served as chairman of the New York City Red Cross War Fund Drive, raising more than \$800 million for relief efforts. Van Meter's dedication to supporting servicemen and servicewomen continued as the executive vice-president of the National USO, overseeing clubs and providing entertainment to more than 100,000 patients in the military and veterans hospitals.

In the 1950s, Van Meter served as a founder and first national executive director for United Cerebral Palsy, organizing local chapters nationwide and raising funds for affordable and accessible care for individuals with cerebral palsy. Upon retirement, he retired and moved to Florida. He died in 1981.

*Posthumous

W.L. Hadley Griffin, Class of 1936*

W.L. Hadley Griffin was a scholar-athlete. A member of the National Honor Society and student council, he served as the editor of the University City High School newspaper. He ran track for three years and helped the team secure a state championship in part to his first-place finish in the 880-yard run. After graduating from Williams College in 1940, Griffin served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and later earned a law degree from Washington University in St. Louis.

Joining Wohl Shoe Company, which later became part of the Brown Shoe Company, Griffin played a pivotal role in its growth. He rose to become the company's president and CEO, leading it in significant expansion and increased sales to become one of the nation's top shoe manufacturers.

Griffin undertook significant philanthropic work in the St. Louis region. He served as chairman of the United Way fundraising campaign in 1972. He was president of Civic Progress and served as board chairman for Washington University. His commitment also extended to the arts where he was actively involved with the St. Louis Symphony, helping elevate it to world-class status. He further served as chair of the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank and chairman of the Smithsonian National Board of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.

Griffin supported initiatives benefiting minority and disadvantaged individuals. In 1969, while President of Brown Shoe, he oversaw the opening of a shoe plant in the Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhood of St. Louis to provide employment for African Americans and other minorities. In 1974, he helped organize and spoke at a fundraiser for Meharry Medical College in Nashville. At the time, this college trained more than half of the African American doctors and dentists in the United States, 65 of them practicing in St. Louis.

Griffin was widely celebrated for his meaningful contributions to St. Louis. In 1973, he was named the St. Louis Globe-Democrat's Man of the Year. In 1980, he received the Urban League Award of Merit. In 1997, the student commons area of Washington University School of Law's new Anheuser-Busch Hall, was named in honor of Griffin.

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Arthur Litz, Class of 1941

After graduation from University City High School, Arthur Litz earned a bachelor's and master's degree in history from Washington University in St. Louis before attending Harvard Law School where he obtained his law degree in 1947.

He returned to St. Louis and practiced law from 1947 to 1975 when he was appointed as a St. Louis County Circuit Court Judge in St. Louis County, a position he held from 1975 to 1993. He served as presiding judge from 1980 to 1982. During his tenure on the bench, he presided over approximately 400 civil jury trials and garnered a reputation as an astute and fair judge.

Litz participated in many legal associations and organizations, including his service as president of the Missouri State Trial Judges Association. He also worked as an arbitrator and mediator for U.S. Arbitration & Mediation and the American Arbitration Association from 1993 to 2014.

From 1972 to 1975, Litz served on the St. Louis County Civil Service Commission, including a year as chair. He was a longtime book reviewer for the St. Louis Bar Journal since 1966 and also served as an adjunct professor at Laclede Law School.

Litz remained committed to preserving history and was the founder of the St. Louis County Historical Society. His dedication to education was evident as he volunteered as a religious school teacher at Temple Emanuel and served as a Harvard alumni interviewer for admissions. This year, he celebrated his 100th birthday.

Maureen Arthur, Class of 1952*

Maureen Arthur was a captivating actor best known for her role as Hedy La Rue in the Broadway hit "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying." Throughout her storied career, she spoke fondly of her time at University City High School, where she was an honor student and part of many student activities. She was also a founder of the high school's very popular Wigwam teen dance night at the University City Community Center which hosted dozens of bands and was a social hotspot for years.

Arthur's bubbly portrayal of the ditzy Hedy La Rue endeared her to audiences. She took on the role during a national tour, which made its way to Broadway in 1961. The production ran for more than 1,400 performances and won seven Tony Awards and a Pulitzer Prize.

In 1967, she starred as La Rue in the film adaptation alongside Robert Morse, Rudy Vallee and Michele Lee. Her memorable entrances in the film were accompanied by a playful "va-va-voom" drumbeat.

The daughter of a family that owned several storied St. Louis theaters, she sang on stage at the Fox Theatre while accompanied by organist Stan Kann on the theater's famous Wurlitzer. Arthur studied drama at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York and made her onscreen acting debut



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in the 1958 film, “Hot Rod Gang,” directed by Lew Landers. She went on to make appearances on popular TV shows such as “Whirlybirds,” “Bourbon Street Beat” and “Richard Diamond, Private Detective.” Arthur’s talents also led to frequent appearances on Steve Allen’s “Tonight Show,” where she showcased her remarkable impersonation skills, including Marilyn Monroe.

In addition to her work in *How to Succeed*, Arthur’s filmography included notable roles in movies like “Thunder Alley” (1967), “The Wicked Dreams of Paula Schultz” (1968), “Killers Three” (1968) and “A Man Called Dagger” (1968). She also made appearances on various television shows over the years, including “Mork & Mindy,” “Perry Mason,” “Get Smart,” “Love, American Style” and “Murder She Wrote,” among others.

Arthur was most proud of her involvement with Variety Club, the Children’s Charity. She traveled the world as a spokesperson and entertainer helping to raise millions of dollars for children. She appeared at hundreds of telethons worldwide.

*Posthumous

Richard Breiner, Class of 1953*

Richard “Dick” Breiner dedicated his life to fighting for civil rights and promoting justice as a lawyer and a judge. After graduating from University City High School, he earned a bachelor’s in history, *Phi Beta Kappa*, and a law degree from the University of Missouri where he was elected to the Law Review.

Breiner served as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army, stationed in California and South Korea and later worked for the U.S. Department of Labor and a small law firm in California.

In 1964, Breiner volunteered his legal expertise and went to Mississippi to gather depositions from African American citizens who had been unjustly denied their right to vote. While in the South, Breiner’s life was threatened while he persevered and took depositions. The testimony collected by Breiner and his colleagues was submitted to Congress, and helped lead to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, empowering minority voters and ensuring their ability to elect candidates of their choice.

Breiner held various public positions in California, including deputy public defender, city attorney and special counsel. In 1977, he was appointed to the Marin County Superior Court, often serving as the presiding judge until 1993 where he oversaw numerous notable and notorious cases. In 1995, he suffered a near-fatal stroke that left him paralyzed on his left side. He underwent extensive rehabilitation to regain his mobility and returned to work as a judge for two years before transitioning to a career as a mediator and arbitrator.

He was recognized with many honors such as the outstanding graduate of the Class of 1961 by the University of Missouri Law School and the inaugural Marin County Bar Lifetime



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Achievement Award. Furthermore, he and his wife, Dottie, were honored with the Legal Legend Award for their advocacy of Legal Aid and their commitment to social justice causes.

*Posthumous

Sheldon Breiner, Class of 1955*

Sheldon "Shelly" Breiner was a member of the a capella choir and the varsity wrestling team and was described in the yearbook as "a leader in all he undertakes and he undertakes all."

Breiner attended Stanford University, where he earned a bachelor's, master's and doctorate in earth sciences. At Stanford, he began working with magnetometers, devices that measure magnetic waves to detect objects invisible to the human eye.

Breiner's contributions to the field of magnetometry were groundbreaking. His notable inventions included magnetometer gradiometers, which are used worldwide in metal detectors. These devices, originally designed to detect minerals and hydrocarbons, proved effective in detecting small magnetic objects, including guns.

Breiner's magnetometers were inserted into ski boots to aid in avalanche recovery, used by the U.S. government to track down sunken submarines, employed in predicting earthquakes by measuring the properties of stressed rocks, and utilized by archaeological expeditions worldwide.

Ruins discovered in southern Italy with this technology are believed to be part of the ancient city of Sybaris, while ruins found in southern Mexico were artifacts from the Olmec civilization, which thrived from 1200 BCE to 400 BCE. Additionally, Breiner is credited with helping to rediscover the axle from the so-called 8th Wonder of the World – the Ferris Wheel used in the 1893 and 1904 World's Fairs, which was buried and lost for decades under what is now the intersection of Skinker and Forsyth Boulevards.

He founded several high-tech companies and authored more than 30 technical papers and a book, which remains a primary resource on the magnetic search for buried objects. Additionally, he co-founded the Peninsula Open Space Trust that protected more than 80,000 acres of land in California for conservation.

Breiner's commitment to new inventions continued late into his life. He held patents for semiconductor technology to mitigate the risks of using mobile phones while driving. He created multiple Stanford geophysics scholarships for future inventors.

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Justina Bricka, Class of 1961

Justina Bricka made her debut at the U.S. Open (then known as the US Championships) at just 16 when she was still a high school student. In a stunning display of skill and determination, she defeated tennis icon Billie Jean King in the first round. In 1961, Bricka was ranked #5 in women's tennis in the United States and remained ranked in the top ten for three consecutive years. Her performance led to her selection to the United States Wightman Cup team in the same year, where she played a crucial role in helping the U.S. team regain the prestigious trophy. She traveled around the world to compete. In 1965, Bricka reached the quarterfinals in singles at Wimbledon.

Her exceptional competitive skills also extended to doubles. In 1962, she partnered with Australian champion Margaret Smith, the winner of 66 Grand Slam titles. The pair went on to win seven tournament titles and secure a runner-up finish at the French Championships as well as numerous quarter- and semi-final finishes.

After retiring from the women's tour, she became the head referee for the Women's Pro Tour, then known as the Avon Tour. Returning to her roots in St. Louis, Bricka became the first female head tennis professional in St. Louis at Triple A in Forest Park. In 1981, she assumed the role of head pro and manager at the prestigious new indoor tennis facility, Frontenac Racquet Club where she later became a co-owner.

Bricka, along with fellow top-ranking U.S. women players Carol Hanks Aucamp and Mary Ann Eisel Beattie, was part of the golden age of tennis in St. Louis during the early 1960s where numerous players went on to compete nationally and internationally.

Stephen Gerber, Class of 1965*

Stephen "Steve" Gerber received a degree in communications at Saint Louis University. After graduating in 1969, he relocated to Los Angeles, where he began to make a mark in the animated film/television and comic book industry. Over his long career, he worked on 51 signature comic, animation, television and film projects.

One of Gerber's most notable achievements was the creation of the beloved Howard the Duck comic book strip character when he worked for Marvel Comics. Howard the Duck was adapted into two major sci-fi action movies. The overwrought duck from outer space had no superpowers, but his adventures always embodied social satire and parodied genre fiction.

Aside from Howard the Duck, Gerber made significant contributions to the world of animation. He received an Emmy for his work on "The Batman/Superman Adventures." He also wrote for television, including an episode for "Star Trek: The Next Generation," which focused on the Romulans. He worked on popular comic titles such as "Iron Man," "The Hulk" and "Man-Thing."



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Gerber was honored with a plaque in the Comic Book Hall of Fame at the Will Finger San Diego Hall of Fame. Howard the Duck continues to make cameo appearances in movies like “Guardians of the Galaxy” and as a playable character in video games.

*Posthumous

Sheri Sherman, Class of 1965

From her formative years leading clubs at University City High School, Sheri Sherman discovered a passion for service that would shape her life. After graduating from Washington University in St. Louis with a degree in interior design in 1969, she embarked on a five-decade journey, tirelessly championing projects and causes that have left an indelible mark on the community.

A decade ago, Sherman became involved with the Midwest Children’s Burn Camp, an organization dedicated to supporting burn survivors. Her tireless efforts as co-chair of an annual fundraiser have not only raised close to \$200,000, but have also offered countless young survivors a chance for recovery and growth.

Sherman created the Unsung Heroes event for The St. Louis Jewish Light which honors community volunteers who often go unnoticed as they unselfishly improve the lives of others. She has co-chaired or advised the event for 13 years.

In the world of arts, Sherman’s leadership has left a distinct imprint on the St. Louis region. As co-chair for the St. Louis Jewish Film Festival and the nationally recognized St. Louis Jewish Book Festival, she has helped curate experiences that draw hundreds of attendees each year, fostering a rich cultural dialogue within the community.

Sheri has held numerous long-term leadership roles and has served on various local boards, including Access Missouri, Burns Recovered, Edison Theatre, Jewish Community Center, The New Jewish Theater, Women at the Kemper, Women of Achievement, Women's Philanthropy, Women’s Society of Washington University, and other organizations that support the arts, education, and social services. She also helped to produce "Hana's Suitcase," a play that became a teaching tool for thousands of students across the country – including University City High School students.

In 2010, she received the national Woman of Worth Award, and, in 2015, she was honored as a Woman of Achievement for Humanitarian Concerns. In 2018, she received the Above and Beyond Award from the St. Louis Press Club for co-chairing a Press Club event at Neiman Marcus providing scholarship money for journalism students. In addition, in 2018, she became an honorary Unsung Hero.



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Richard Weiss, Class of 1969

Richard “Dick” Weiss has dedicated his professional life to journalism, racial understanding and community-building in the greater St. Louis area.

Weiss attended Colgate College and received a bachelor’s degree in Russian studies. He began his newspaper career with a short stint at the Kansas City Star, and then had a 30-year career at The St. Louis Post-Dispatch as a reporter, editor and writing coach where he mentored and inspired dozens of young reporters.

His reporting highlighted many historical events in St. Louis, but he is most proud of his work amplifying the voices of African American youth and residents from marginalized communities in the St. Louis region. After retiring from the Post-Dispatch, he was part of the founding team of The St. Louis Beacon, a pioneering digital news organization later folded into St. Louis Public Radio.

In retirement, he continues to elevate marginalized communities through writing and reporting. At the age of 67, he established Before Ferguson, Beyond Ferguson, a non-profit journalism organization focused on highlighting the voices and experiences of individuals affected by racial segregation and its lasting impact in the region.

When the pandemic struck, Weiss saw further opportunities to highlight health disparities through The 63106 Project, which focused reporting on health inequities and how one of St. Louis’ most distressed neighborhoods coped with a global pandemic. In 2021, Weiss ensured this type of nuanced reporting on race, inequity and differing voices and perspectives by co-founding the River City Journalism Fund, which supports independent journalists and shares their work with legacy media and their audiences.

Weiss continues to be a powerful supporter of The School District of University City through his writing, reporting and his deep inquiries regarding the District’s history, its students and its resolve for racial equity and academic excellence.

Dr. Michael Shannon, Class of 1970*

While at University City High School, Michael Shannon was involved in the Biology Club, performed in the senior play Brigadoon and ran for Student Council President. He aspired to become a doctor with his peers even though medicine was not always a welcoming field for African Americans.

He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in biology from Washington University in St. Louis and went on to obtain his medical degree from Duke University. He completed his pediatric residency at Children’s Hospital Boston where he developed a deep passion for caring for children and addressing the impact of toxins on their health.



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Shannon became the first African American full professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, an extraordinary achievement that broke barriers and paved the way for future generations. He was also the first African American division chief at Children's Hospital Boston, where he served as both chief of emergency medicine and clinical pharmacology.

Throughout his career, he treated children affected by exposure to toxins, such as lead-based paint and other environmental toxins, and medicine overdoses. He published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles in major scientific journals, establishing himself as one of the world's premier pediatric toxicologists. He advocated nationally for the protection of children from environmental hazards, testifying in court and before public agencies to provide safer environments for children.

Shannon found further fulfillment in dancing, particularly his strength and grace. Known as The Dancing Doctor, he performed annually in "Black Nativity" and took on the role of Drosselmeyer in "Urban Nutcracker."

Several prestigious national awards were created in his honor. The Michael Shannon Award, presented by the American Pediatric Association, acknowledges outstanding abstracts in various medical areas. The Michael Shannon Humanitarian Award, established by the American Academy of Pediatrics, recognizes excellence in clinical care and mentoring in the field of pediatric emergency medicine. The Michael Shannon Dance Champion Award celebrates individuals over 60 who have made significant contributions to the Boston dance community.

*Posthumous

Richard Zane Smith, Class of 1973

Richard Zane Smith is a highly accomplished ceramic artist and member of the indigenous Wyandot Nation of Kansas, originally from the northeastern woodlands near Toronto, and now centered in Kansas and Oklahoma. While attending University City High School, Smith became interested in the fine arts and began working in clay and other natural materials like wood, leather and stone. He was also enchanted by family stories about his ancient Wyandot heritage and began exploring his native roots. After high school, he earned an associate's degree in art from Meramec Community College, and then studied at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he developed a profound interest in pottery.

In 1978, Smith moved to Arizona, where he served as an art instructor at a Navajo mission school. In Arizona, he worked with native clays and discovered ancient Puebloan potsherds and fragments that profoundly influenced his designs and a new style of pottery. Smith's creations have been described as reminiscent of prehistoric corrugated pottery found in the Southwest, featuring exposed and rough-textured coils that pay homage to the ancient basketry of the Wyandot people and further blends influences of Anasazi pottery. His creations have been recognized internationally and pieces are on permanent display in museums and galleries throughout the United States.



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Smith is also actively involved in revitalizing the Wyandot language. Since its decline in the 1960s, Smith has studied and taught the language with the help of trained linguists teaches the language, songs and dances to the Wyandotte people of Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma, contributing to its reemergence within the community.

Through his art, studies and community collaborations, Smith bridges the past and the present, celebrates the beauty of his heritage, and continues to influence the art world.

Jerryl Christmas, Class of 1981

Jerryl Christmas is active in many local and national social justice causes and continues to apply his legal skills to some of the region's and the nation's most profound cases regarding the policing of African Americans in the United States. Christmas earned his bachelor's degree in speech communications and criminal justice administration from Central Missouri State University.

After graduation, he worked in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, first with the Missouri Department of Youth Services and then as a parole officer for the Georgia Board of Probation and Parole. He went on to earn his law degree in Houston from Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law.

Starting in 1994, Christmas worked for seven years in the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office as an assistant prosecutor and then became the senior prosecutor in the Sex Crimes Unit. In 2001, Christmas established his own law practice and litigated criminal, civil and wrongful death cases. He participated in many high-profile cases regarding the policing and African Americans, particularly after the death of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson. He has worked closely with social justice advocates, national and local politicians and area organizations to promote social justice, youth empowerment and racial equity. Christmas has also made significant contributions to various professional and charitable organizations throughout his career, serving as a board member for the Central Missouri State University Alumni Board, president of the Mound City Bar Association and regional legal counsel for Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., among others.

He has been honored for his work by the National Conference of Negro Women and Lane College. His cases have garnered national media attention and he has frequently shared his legal expertise on national and local television and radio programs.

Christmas serves as a mentor in the Kilalo Rites of Passage program at Central Baptist Church and is active in the Mound City Bar Association, National Bar Association, American Bar Association, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., 100 Black Men Metropolitan St. Louis and the University City Alumni Association.



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Gary Boyd, Class of 1982

Gary Boyd, also known as “Mr. Gary,” is a hospitality professional, community advocate and television and radio host based in the St. Louis region. A graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, he has more than 40 years of experience in the global hospitality industry.

Boyd, aka “Mr. Gary,” is best known for hosting the popular local television program “Them Yo People.” With his distinctive crown and scepter, he takes to the streets to showcase the stories of St. Louis people and institutions in an engaging and uplifting manner. The show's mission is to educate, engage, excite and entertain diverse communities, highlighting the often overlooked families, organizations and small businesses that deserve recognition. His interviews have featured notable celebrities, national leaders and accomplished individuals from various fields.

An ardent supporter of his alma mater, Boyd frequently covers special events in The School District of University City through his television and radio shows. He can be found celebrating University City students on the first day of school, during homecoming celebrations and at special assemblies featuring hand-picked entertainment and music acts. In 2022, he organized two assemblies to support University City families and students affected by severe flash flooding.

Throughout his career, Boyd has collaborated with major hotel chains, convention bureaus, corporations and meeting professionals across the United States. He has successfully organized and produced events for fraternal organizations, religious groups, social organizations and the renowned UniverSoul Circus.

Boyd actively serves on committees and boards for numerous organizations and events, including leadership roles in the University City Alumni Association, University City Fair and The Gateway Classic. He also contributes to religious conference management, diversity boards, and community events including the Dr. Martin Luther King Annual March and Inner-faith Service.

In addition to his professional engagements, Boyd is an active member of local chapters of the NAACP and the Mizzou Alumni Association. He also attends the LaSalle United Methodist Church and participates in the St. Louis Mayor's Committee on Racial Harmony, emphasizing his dedication to promoting unity and equality within the St. Louis region.

Petra Jackson, Class of 1982

Petra Jackson had a passion for basketball starting in childhood. She played with her brother and his friends in her backyard and received priceless mentoring through the fence from the next-door neighbor, the great Hasan Houston, who told her to “just keep shooting.” She further honed her skills by playing pickup games with juveniles in Clayton under the supervision of her dad, who was a juvenile detention officer. In high school, she excelled in basketball, volleyball and softball, playing varsity for three years. She also competed in track and field. In her junior



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year, Jackson led the University City High School girls' basketball team to a 12-1 league record, scoring an average of 22 points per game. In her senior year, she averaged 25 points and 10.8 rebounds per game and scored 38 points in a single game against St. Charles West.

Jackson attended Southern Illinois University-Carbondale on a full athletic scholarship and accumulated 1,475 career points to put her fourth on the SIU-Carbondale all-time scoring list. She guided the Salukis to four 20-win seasons, including a perfect conference record of 18-0 and an overall exceptional record of 25-4 in 1985-1986 that earned SIU-Carbondale its first-ever consecutive NCAA Tournament bid.

In 1995, she became a star player for the St. Louis River Queens basketball team in the Women's Basketball Association and was named the league's MVP. Currently, Jackson serves as the head coach of the St. Louis Surge in the Global Women's Basketball League. Her coaching career also includes head positions at St. Louis Community College-Forest Park, Shoreline Community College and the Block Yeshiva High School for six seasons. Jackson held assistant coaching positions at Harris-Stowe University and Saint Louis University. She also coached a local AAU team that consisted of players from Visitation Academy, Wellston, Ladue, Rosati Kain, Vashon, Cor Jesu and Lafayette High Schools.

Throughout her coaching career, she participated in numerous charitable events and initiatives, such as the Annual Urban League Turkey Giveaway and the St. Louis Surge Community Impact Fund Foundation. She also served as an AAA/ACE Ambassador for United Way.

Dorthea B. Nevils, Class of 1984

Dorthea B. Nevils began teaching English at University City High School in August 1988 and remained with The School District of University City for 31 years, making countless contributions to the school and the lives of her students.

Nevils actively engaged with her students and dedicated time to them outside of the classroom. She served as a class sponsor, club sponsor and choir sponsor and fostered numerous extracurricular activities. She initiated Dress for Success days, revitalized Friday Black and Gold Days and organized events including the "Love Jones" Poetry Night. She also coordinated talent shows that showcased students and faculty/staff members. She was the founder and director of the University City High School Alumni Gospel Choir, which raised funds for student scholarships.

Nevils was dedicated to the betterment of the high school culture. She served as a character education building representative, building representative for the University City Federation of Teachers and building liaison for the University City School District Council. In these roles, she effectively communicated building concerns and advocated for the needs of students and faculty.

Nevils participated in community-wide initiatives, such as planning and performing in the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Committee remembrance program. Her community



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commitment extended to patriotic events, where she served as a soloist for the national anthem at the University City High School Junior Officers Training Corps (JROTC) Veterans' Day Programs and banquets.

Her dedication and contributions were recognized when she received the Excellence in Education Award in 2018 through the St. Louis American Foundation. After retiring in 2019, Nevils remains an active presence in the high school and University City communities.

George Eugene Harper Jr., Class of 1987

Retired Naval Petty Officer First Class George Eugene Harper Jr. was affectionately known as “Big George” by his peers and family.

Upon graduation, he immediately enlisted in the Navy and found his purpose in serving and defending democracy both domestically and abroad. Throughout his career, he earned dozens of prestigious accolades, including three Navy Achievement Medals, four Sea Deployment Ribbons, two National Defense Service Medals, a Kuwait Liberation Medal, a Southwest Asia Service Medal, a War on Terrorism Medal, five Navy Good Conduct Medals and the Humanitarian Service Medal.

He served around the world in a career that spanned 20 years, participating in operations and historic events that included the fall of the Berlin Wall, the war in Afghanistan, Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Harper consistently answered the call of duty, serving in multiple roles in whatever way was needed. This included working as a boatswain's mate; master trainer, rigged bull boat instructor; surface warfare specialist; air warfare specialist; assault boat crewman; and law enforcement specialist.

Harper's deep sense of service to others along with a lifelong trait of humility instilled in him during his time at University City High School, became a driving force in his naval career. Sailors who served alongside him owe their success and resilience in the military to his mentorship and leadership.

After his honorable retirement in 2008, Harper returned to academia and earned a bachelor's degree in business from Wayland Baptist University and taught in the San Antonio Independent School District. He continues to actively participate in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Roderick Smith, Class of 1987*

Roderick Smith demonstrated talents early as part of the University City High School's Jazz Ensemble, football team and Martial Arts Club.



On February 21, 1911, with a City population of only 2,417, The School District of University City was officially established. Classes began in September 1912 with a total school population of 769. Today, you will find outstanding educational programs serving a student population of approximately 2,800 with a preschool, four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. In May 2023, University City High School held its 106th formal Commencement Ceremony.

The Jazz Ensemble sparked an enduring career in music as a keyboardist, vocalist, teacher and promoter. After graduating high school, he attended Columbia College in Chicago where he studied music composition. His knowledge in music theory and his skill in keyboarding opened doors to the music world. He performed with international acts that included Michael Bolton, Fontella Bass, Keith Sweat and Lisa Left-Eye Lopez, the founder of the sensational female hip-hop group, "TLC." From Lopez, he gained the nickname "LS Bless," which stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Early in his career, he had a passionate interest in the martial art of Kung Fu where he practiced styles that included Mui Tai, Wing-Chun, Tai Chi and Praying Mantis.

Also a professional wiring technician, Smith was devoted to mentoring and supporting the local St. Louis music scene. He was a force behind the creation of "The Dirty Muggs," a popular hip-hop, R&B and pop band in which he frequently performed. At one point in his career, he moved to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, to be the lead keyboardist for "The Soul of Motown," a popular headliner show at the famed Grand Majestic Theater. He was also the minister of music with his church, World Changing Word of Faith in Granite City, Illinois. In 2014, he and his wife, Michelle, founded the label Luminary Entertainment, an enterprise that showcased their contemporary gospel duo, "El and Elle," and provided a variety of musical specialties to the film and entertainment industry.

*Posthumous

Michael Silverman, Class of 1989

Michael Silverman took his love of performing in the high school Jazz Ensemble and grew it into an international career as a pianist, keyboardist and composer. He performs and records classical, jazz and New Age music. His touring band, Bach to the Future, performs the classics such as Beethoven symphonies and Bach fugues in a variety of styles, including jazz, rock and rhythms from around the world.

Silverman is one of the most downloaded solo pianists in the world, with 6 billion downloads and streams. He has had 14 albums reach number one on the Classical, World Music and New Age Charts.

His music is part of mainstream American culture as part of hundreds of film and TV productions, including "Two and a Half Men," "The Good Wife," HBO's "The Leftovers" and "American Horror Story." He and brother, Rob Silverman, are the founders of one of the largest instrumental record labels, Autumn Hill Records.

The Silverman brothers have founded several music festivals in the St. Louis region, including the Chesterfield Wine and Jazz Festival, the U City Jazz Festival and the St. Louis Winter Jazz Festival in Grand Center. They are also sponsors of the Old Webster Jazz and Blues Festival, the Clearwater Jazz Holiday, the Gateway Jazz Festival and the Hermann Wine and Jazz Festival.



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Tanya Smith-Johnson, Class of 1994

Tanya Smith-Johnson is a prominent figure in the field of maternal health and midwifery. Currently the president of the National College of Midwifery, she has made significant contributions to expanding access to quality midwifery care in disenfranchised communities and improving maternal health outcomes.

After graduating from high school, Smith-Johnson joined the Navy and participated in the B.O.O.S.T College Prep Program. Through this program, she received early training at the United States Naval Hospital and the Bethesda Naval Hospital Clinic, where she gained firsthand experience working in a maternity ward. This exposure sparked her interest in maternal health, the social determinants of health and inequity in treatment and health outcomes faced by mothers and babies from marginalized communities.

Smith-Johnson went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in biology and medical science from Hampton University. A mother of six who frequently moved due to being a military spouse, she remained dedicated to social justice around the birthing experience.

In 2013, Smith-Johnson embarked on a career as a midwife to explore alternative approaches to improve maternal care and birth outcomes. She obtained her full certification in 2016 from the Midwives College of Utah where she remains on staff, and quickly became a teacher and a national advocate for midwifery and equitable access to maternal health care.

As president of the National College of Midwifery, Smith-Johnson plays a pivotal role in selecting and guiding future midwifery students. Additionally, she serves as the Executive Director of the Birth Future Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides grants to support empowering birth experiences.

Smith-Johnson is also the policy director for the Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Hawaii, where she is involved in developing and implementing programs that address the needs of vulnerable populations. She was also a member of the Birth Place Lab's Global Perinatal Task Force during COVID-19. In this capacity, she helped garner resources and promote safe maternity service delivery during the pandemic. She also contributed as a delegate to the United States Birth Summit IV, advocating for equitable and quality care across communities.

Smith-Johnson is the vice president and founder of the Birth Future Foundation, which focuses on funding initiatives that promote racial justice and equity in midwifery.



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