

THE 2ND ANNUAL

50 Under
FIFTY

MISSISSIPPI'S TOP
URBAN ELITE PROFESSIONALS

BLACK TIE GALA

JANUARY 31, 2026
THE MISSISSIPPI TRADEMART CENTER

50 Under FIFTY

MISSISSIPPI'S TOP
URBAN ELITE PROFESSIONALS

ABOUT 50 UNDER FIFTY

THE LEGACY NETWORK FOUNDATION IS COMMITTED TO EMPOWERING UNDERSERVED AND UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES THROUGH MENTORSHIP, WORKFORCE READINESS, EDUCATION, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT. OUR MISSION IS TO CREATE PATHWAYS FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, FOSTER COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP, AND TO DRIVE LASTING. IMPACT ACROSS MISSISSIPPI.

EACH YEAR, WE BRING THIS MISSION TO LIFE BY HOSTING THE MISSISSIPPI TOP URBAN ELITE PROFESSIONALS AWARDS GALA, AN EXCLUSIVE CELEBRATION RECOGNIZING 50 OF THE STATE'S MOST INFLUENTIAL AFRICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS UNDER 50 YEARS OLD.

THESE INDIVIDUALS ARE LEADERS IN THEIR INDUSTRIES, CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE, AND ROLE MODELS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

AWARD CATEGORIES:

OUTSTANDING CITIZEN – CIVIC LEADERS WHO ARE MAKING A MEASURABLE DIFFERENCE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP – INNOVATORS AND BUSINESS OWNERS LEADING WITH VISION

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY – CHAMPIONS OF EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT – CREATIVES AND CULTURAL INFLUENCERS SHAPING OUR NARRATIVE

EDUCATION – EDUCATORS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

WHY THIS EVENT MATTERS?

THE AWARDS GALA IS MORE THAN A CELEBRATION. IT IS A PLATFORM FOR RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE, AMPLIFYING SUCCESS STORIES, AND FOSTERING COLLABORATION AMONG. MISSISSIPPI'S RISING LEADERS. BY HIGHLIGHTING THESE TRAILBLAZERS, WE INSPIRE THE FUTURE. GENERATIONS AND STRENGTHEN THE NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS COMMITTED TO BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES.



THE LEGACY NETWORK FOUNDATION

WHO WE ARE...

AT LEGACY NETWORK FOUNDATION, WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF SERVICE, LEADERSHIP, AND COMMUNITY TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE.

FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF EMPOWERMENT, ADVOCACY, AND EQUITY, OUR MISSION IS TO UPLIFT UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES BY PROVIDING ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL RESOURCES, EDUCATION, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH.

THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS, AND DEDICATED OUTREACH, WE ADDRESS KEY SOCIAL ISSUES, INCLUDING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH EQUITY, AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT. OUR INITIATIVES AIM TO BREAK BARRIERS, FOSTER LEADERSHIP, AND CULTIVATE A NETWORK OF CHANGEMAKERS COMMITTED TO LEAVING A MEANINGFUL LEGACY.

WITH A STRONG COMMITMENT TO SERVICE AND IMPACT, LEGACY NETWORK FOUNDATION CONTINUES TO CHAMPION INITIATIVES THAT INSPIRE CHANGE AND BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Co-Founders

Dr. Krystal Logan
Jeffery Turner

Board of Directors

Garsheo Black
Jarrett Becks
William Carter
Derrick Hicks
Dr. Monifa Beal Horton
Dwayne Jamison
Donese Logan
Karanja Matory
BreAnna Newborne
April Robinson
Melanie Sanders



50 Under FIFTY

MISSISSIPPI'S TOP
URBAN ELITE PROFESSIONALS

2026 COMMITTEE



Bradley Ford
Allstate Insurance:
Bradley Ford & Associates



Dr. LaToya Scott, Principal
Natchez Adams School District



Kerry Nash
The Vibe Controllers LLC



Dr. Keila Brown, FNP
Anna Grace Event Design



Derrick Hicks
cybersecurity professional



Dr. Monifa Beal-Horton, DNP, FNP-BC
Independent Health Ambassador
Plexus & G.V. Sonny Montgomery
Medical Center



BreAnna Newborne
Board Certified Behavior Analyst
Subject Matter Expert



Dominique Beaseley
Opulent Keys, Broker



Cheronda Minor Cox
ElectricWorks, Inc
Anna Grace Event Design



MESSAGE FROM THE 50 UNDER FIFTY GALA COMMITTEE & THE LEGACY NETWORK FOUNDATION

ON BEHALF OF THE SECOND ANNUAL 50 UNDER 50 GALA COMMITTEE AND THE LEGACY NETWORK FOUNDATION, WE THANK EVERYONE WHO HAS SUPPORTED AND BELIEVED IN THIS GROWING MOVEMENT.

TONIGHT IS MORE THAN A CELEBRATION. IT REPRESENTS MOMENTUM, IMPACT, AND LEGACY IN MOTION. WHAT BEGAN AS A VISION HAS BECOME A TRADITION ROOTED IN EXCELLENCE, LEADERSHIP, AND COMMUNITY UPLIFT.

TO OUR HONOREES, YOUR LEADERSHIP AND DEDICATION INSPIRE US ALL. YOU ARE TRAILBLAZERS WHOSE INFLUENCE EXTENDS FAR BEYOND THIS EVENING, AND WE ARE HONORED TO CELEBRATE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS.

TO OUR SPONSORS, PARTNERS, FAMILIES, AND SUPPORTERS—THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US. YOUR COMMITMENT MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO ELEVATE THIS PLATFORM AND INVEST IN FUTURE LEADERS.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US FOR THE SECOND ANNUAL 50 UNDER 50 GALA AS WE HONOR TODAY'S LEADERS AND BUILD A LEGACY THAT WILL INSPIRE GENERATIONS TO COME.





Lauretha Bellinder

Lauretha L. Bellinder is the owner of B-Excellent Tutoring and Director of Programs for Bridge Builders Leadership Initiative. A certified educator in Mathematics and Business, she holds degrees from Dillard University, Jackson State University, and the University of Texas at Arlington. She brings over a decade of nonprofit and community leadership experience and lives in Brandon with her husband and two children.

Olivia Draine

Olivia Draine is an Assistant Vice President and Branch Manager at Renasant Bank in downtown Jackson, bringing over 10 years of experience in financial services. She holds a BBA from Mississippi Valley State University and an MBA from Delta State University and has been recognized as a Sunflower County "Best of the Best" banking professional and an MVSU 40 Under 40 honoree.



Dr. Lauren A. Day-Page

Dr. Lauren A. Day-Page is a clinical pharmacist practitioner and public health advocate specializing in geriatrics and palliative care. A Xavier University of Louisiana alumna and pharmacy educator, she is an award-winning leader in healthcare and community service. She is a devoted wife and proud mother of a congenital heart defect warrior, and her family fuels her passion for service.



Curtis Luckett

Curtis Luckett Jr., a Jackson native, is the Director of Bands at Callaway High School and a Jackson State University alumnus. An award-winning music educator with over a decade of experience, he is also a committed mentor through Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., where he supports youth development through the Kappa League. He has earned numerous accolades, including leading award-winning ensembles and serving as a director of the Mississippi Alumni All-Star Band.



Brandi Twillie

Mrs. Brandi K. Twillie is a Hattiesburg, Mississippi native and career educator. A Magna Cum Laude graduate of Tougaloo College, she holds advanced degrees in Secondary English Education and Educational Leadership from Mississippi College. She currently serves as Head Principal of Oak Grove High School in Lamar County School District. Mrs. Twillie is married to Carlos Twillie and is the proud mother of their daughter, Allyson Kyle, and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.





Kristen Barnes

Kristen Barnes, a Jackson, Mississippi native, is a special education teacher at Kirksey Middle School with over a decade of experience. A person with a disability herself, she brings empathy and advocacy to her work, empowering students with disabilities through inclusive instruction. Kristen holds degrees in Biology from Mississippi University for Women and Mississippi College, an Educational Specialist degree from Liberty University, and is pursuing her Doctorate in Education. She is also a Special Olympics Mississippi coach, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and an active leader at New Jerusalem Church.

Dr. Kiana N. Pendleton

Dr. Kiana N. Pendleton, a Jackson, MS native, is an educator and leader in literacy and school improvement. She made history as the first African American female principal of Laurel Magnet School of the Arts, leading the school to its first "A" rating, Top 10 state ranking, and National Blue Ribbon recognition. She now serves as Director of Implementation and Instruction at Curriculum Associates, supporting schools nationwide. Dr. Pendleton holds a BA in English, an MS in Communications, and a PhD in Educational Leadership, and is a proud mother to her daughter, Kinsley.



Charles "Chuckway" Washington

Charles "Chuckway" Washington is a Jackson-based creative and founder of Fulloflava, with 15 years of experience in music, fashion, and civic projects. A Murrah High School and Jackson State University alumnus, he is a celebrated photographer known as the "Sight of the City," a mentor to aspiring artists, and a two-time Jackson Hip Hop Awards Photographer of the Year.



Taylor Turnage

Taylor Turnage, a proud Mississippian, is an advocate, community organizer, and entrepreneur. She led the 2020 movement to remove Confederate imagery from Mississippi's state flag and runs Sweet T's Vintage & Thrift, a brand celebrating community, culture, and sustainability. Taylor is pursuing a Master's in Social Justice and Community Organizing at Prescott College and is committed to inspiring change through activism, mentorship, and creativity.



Dr. Jasmine Martin-Smith, PT, DPT

Dr. Jasmine Martin Smith, a Jackson, Mississippi native, is a licensed Physical Therapist and Co-Owner of Healing Hands Rehabilitation Services, LLC. With over 16 years of experience, she provides compassionate, evidence-based care across diverse settings and has expanded access to rehabilitative care in underserved communities. Dr. Smith has received numerous honors, including recognition as one of Mississippi's 50 Leading Business Women, and is an active community leader in Gluckstadt, MS, with her husband and two children.





Antonio Knight

Antonio Knight is a Tuskegee University graduate with a master's from Jackson State University and a devoted husband and father of two. A former college football player and 15-year coach, he has over 25 years of experience in personal training and is the founder of Freestyle Fitness 29, a thriving and trend-setting fitness business.

Dr. Latibbie Cavett

Dr. Latibbie Cavett, a Collins, MS native, is Founder and CEO of A New You Counseling and Consulting, LLC and Executive Director of Second Chances Outreach Services in Jackson.

With 15+ years in social services and mental health, she has developed programs supporting at-risk youth, mental health advocacy, and community empowerment. Dr. Cavett holds degrees from Jackson State University and Mississippi College, is a Licensed Professional Counselor, and is a proud mother of two.



Dr. Charcy Rogers

Charcy Rogers. Charcy native of Jackson, MS, who is the wife of Andre Rogers and the mother of two girls and three stepchildren. Charcy is the Executive Director of HamiltonDavis Home Care and the owner of Party Girl Inc., Polished to Perfection Cleaning Services and Protege Jackson All Stars Mentorship and Community Service



Dr. LaMonica Davis-Taylor

Dr. LaMonica Davis Taylor, a native of Mound Bayou, MS, is a pediatric dentist, founder of Smiles on Broadway Dental Care, and co-creator of Tons of Smiles Mobile, providing dental care across Mississippi. She completed her DMD at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and specialized pediatric training at Bronx-Lebanon Hospital. Dr. Taylor is a former Assistant Clinical Professor, mentor to dental students, and has performed over 5,000 surgeries for children and adults with complex needs. She is married to Anton Taylor and is a proud mother of two, actively involved in community and church initiatives.



Quincy Alexander

Quincy Alexander is a civil engineer and organizational leader overseeing a team of 150+ professionals focused on data, technology, and national decision-making. He leads STEM workforce initiatives, mentors students and early-career engineers, and has held leadership roles in professional engineering associations. Quincy holds a bachelor's and master's in civil engineering and is active in his church's digital outreach, guided by faith and a commitment to service.



A New You

Counseling & Consulting, LLC

Your Healing. Your Growth. A New You.

Services Offered:

- ◆ Individual Counseling
- ◆ Family Counseling
- ◆ Group Counseling
- ◆ LPC Supervision
& Clinical Training

Dr. Latibbie J. Cavett,
DPC, LPC, BC-TMH, MRT

Led by a trusted mental health professional,
speaker, and advocate addressing:

- ◆ Mental Health • Human Trafficking
- ◆ Crisis Intervention • Homelessness
- ◆ Substance Abuse

Take the First Step Toward Healing Today

You don't have to navigate life's challenges alone. Whether you're seeking support, professional growth, or community impact—
A New You starts here.

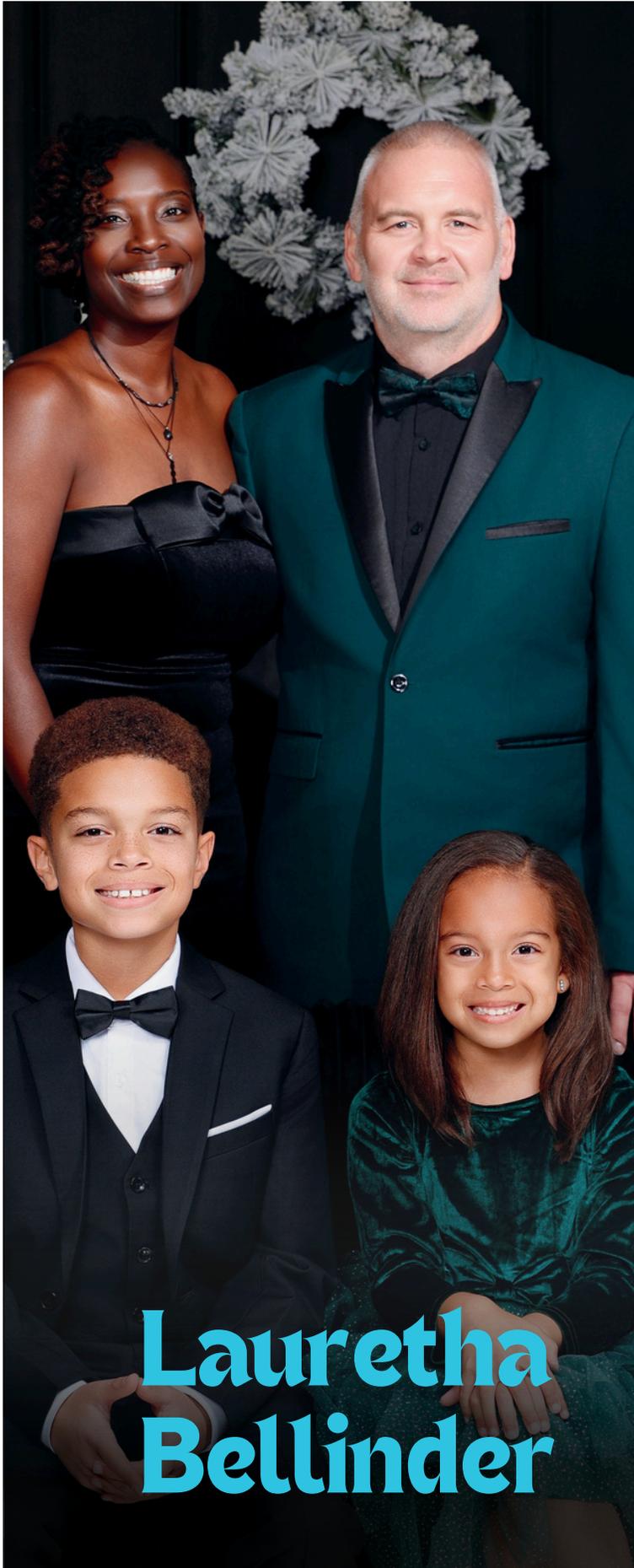
[Schedule Your Appointment Today](#)

[Book a Consultation or Learn More >](#)

anewyou-counseling.com

Because healing isn't just possible—it's powerful.



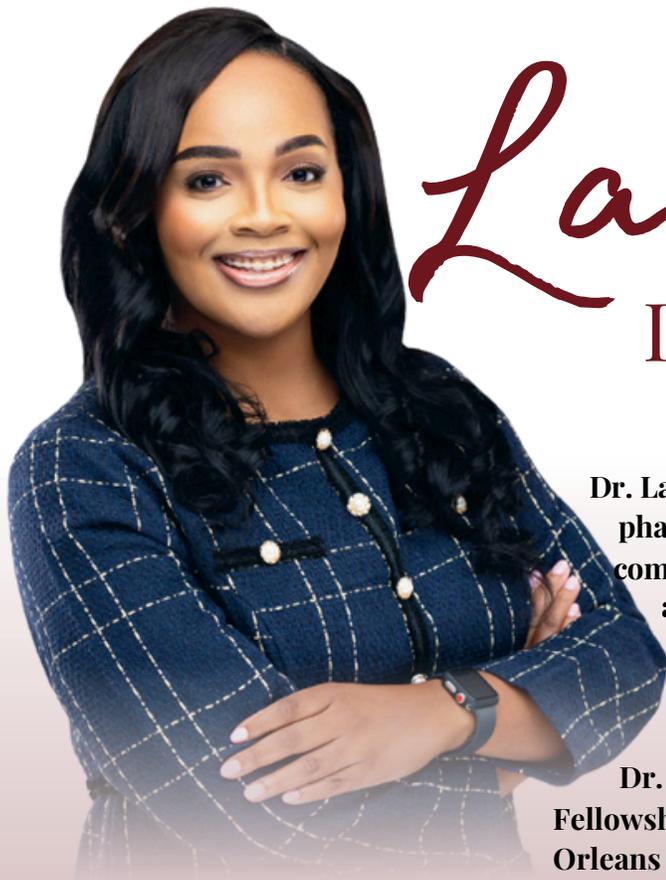


**Lauretha
Bellinder**



Honoring a Woman of Purpose, Excellence, and Impact

Lauretha,
Being named a 2025 50 Under Fifty Mississippi Top Urban Elite Professionals Honoree is a reflection of what so many of us already know—your leadership, your discipline, and your impact matter deeply to this state and to the lives you serve.
But before the titles, the accolades, and the work that has touched hundreds, you are the heart of our family. As a mother to Landon (10) and Robbi (6), you model faith, perseverance, compassion, and purpose every single day. They are watching a woman who shows them what it means to work hard, love well, and walk boldly in who God has called her to be.
Your accomplishments as an educator, entrepreneur, and nonprofit leader are significant and well-earned. Through your leadership at Bridge Builders Leadership created opportunities, and changed the trajectory of countless young lives across Mississippi. You do this work with integrity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. you have opened doors, What makes your achievements even more powerful is initiative. you are while accomplishing them. You are present. You are intentional. You are grounded in love and purpose. Our family is stronger because of you, and so is our community.
I am incredibly proud of you—not just for what you do, but for the woman you are to me, to Landon and Robbi, and to everyone fortunate enough to be led by you. Congratulations, my love.
This honor is well deserved, and your legacy is already being written.
With love and endless pride,
Your husband,
Thomas Bellinder



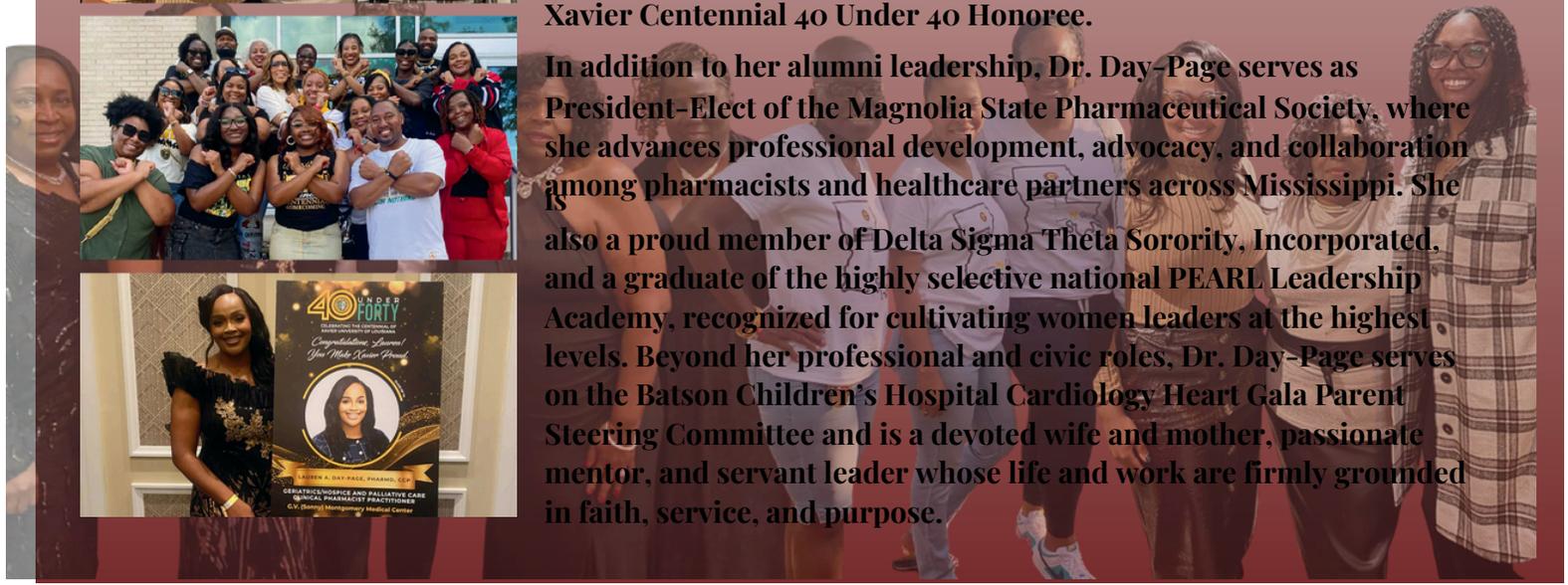
Lauren A. DAY-PAGE, PHARM.D

Dr. Lauren A. Day-Page is a nationally respected clinical pharmacist practitioner, public health advocate, and community leader whose work reflects excellence, service, and lasting impact. A native of Missouri City (Houston), Texas, she is a proud graduate of LV Hightower High School and earned her Doctor of Pharmacy degree from Xavier University of Louisiana.

Dr. Day-Page completed the Albert Schweitzer Public Health Fellowship, advancing healthcare access in underserved New Orleans communities. Her dedication to public health earned the Excellence in Public Health Pharmacy Practice Award, presented by the 18th U.S. Surgeon General.

Dr. Day-Page assisted in chartering the Xavier University of Louisiana Jackson Metro Area Alumni Chapter and currently serves as President, providing visionary leadership centered on education, service, and community engagement. Under her leadership, the chapter adopted Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School, championing initiatives that deliver essential resources, expand STEAM programming, and address critical staff needs, while also leading college fairs, Thanksgiving outreach, and other impactful community service efforts throughout the Jackson area. Her sustained commitment to Xavier University of Louisiana's mission of service, scholarship, and leadership earned her recognition as a Xavier Centennial 40 Under 40 Honoree.

In addition to her alumni leadership, Dr. Day-Page serves as President-Elect of the Magnolia State Pharmaceutical Society, where she advances professional development, advocacy, and collaboration among pharmacists and healthcare partners across Mississippi. She is also a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and a graduate of the highly selective national PEARL Leadership Academy, recognized for cultivating women leaders at the highest levels. Beyond her professional and civic roles, Dr. Day-Page serves on the Batson Children's Hospital Cardiology Heart Gala Parent Steering Committee and is a devoted wife and mother, passionate mentor, and servant leader whose life and work are firmly grounded in faith, service, and purpose.





Jordan Whittington

Jordan Whittington is an accomplished basketball coach with experience at every level of the game, including Division I, junior college, and high school. Beyond coaching, he has directed numerous camps and built a reputation for helping athletes grow through his own player development program. Jordan is also an entrepreneur, running a successful clothing brand that reflects his passion for sports, culture, and community. His work continues to impact athletes both on and off the court, combining mentorship, development, and innovation.

Amanda Ray

Amanda Ray Purvis, a Jackson, MS native, is a hairstylist and creative director with over 12 years of experience, empowering clients and young women through her mentorship program, Mentorship with Mandiee. She also serves as a Site Foreman with Slater Enterprises and Infinity Investment Group and is pursuing a real estate license to expand her impact in community development.



Jovie Williams

Jovie E. Wilkerson-Williams, a Jackson, MS native, is an educator, minister, and gospel artist. She serves at Callaway High School, is founder of Jovie Williams Ministries, and leads community initiatives including School's In, Let's Win and Purpose Clothing Co. Ordained as a minister in 2020, Jovie has performed with nationally recognized gospel artists and is a member of the Mississippi Mass Choir. She has received multiple awards, including the 2025 Emerging Leader Award, and is recognized for her lasting impact in faith, education, and the arts.

Jonathan Townes

Jonathan Townes, a Greenville, MS native, is Vice President of Career and Technical Education, Sponsored Grants, and HBCU Initiatives at Hinds Community College. He has held multiple leadership roles supporting STEM education and workforce development, including serving as PI/Co-PI on NSF and NASA-funded programs. An active mentor and community leader, he is involved with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the MS Urban League, and 100 Black Men of Jackson, and has been recognized by Jackson State University's Top 40 Under 40 and numerous leadership fellowships.



Dr. Tanea Fisher

Dr. Tanea Fisher, a native of Utica, MS, is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Alcorn State University and a PhD in Environmental Science. She is a STEM mentor, community advocate, and active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, NAACP, and Morning Star M.B. Church. Dr. Fisher's research focuses on environmental issues impacting underserved communities, and she is dedicated to inspiring youth and promoting equity in STEM.





Ramous Austin

Ramous Austin Sr., a Hattiesburg, MS native and 2007 graduate of Alcorn State University, is the CEO and Founder of Austin Security & Crime Prevention Consulting, LLC. A 13-year decorated law enforcement veteran and member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., he is a sought-after expert witness in civil cases involving excessive force and premises liability.

Austin also serves as President of Operations for RaeBrooke Properties LLC and JAB Enterprises, specializing in real estate development and investment. He currently serves the State of Mississippi as Southern Region Bureau Director for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, coordinating preparedness training for first responders across 24 counties.

Wilburn Smith

Wilburn Smith, a Mississippi Delta native from Tchula, MS, is an educator and leader based in Jackson, MS. He holds degrees from Mississippi State University, Grand Canyon University, and Arkansas State University, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education. With over a decade of experience, he serves as a Professional Learning Specialist with Curriculum Associates, supporting educators nationwide, and is Vice President of the Mississippi Urban League of Young Professionals.



Dr. Danelle Nunaley

Dr. Danelle "Dr. Dee" Nunaley is a Doctor of Nursing Practice, award-winning nurse educator, and executive NCLEX expert. With 17 years as a registered nurse and over a decade in nursing education, she teaches at Alcorn State University and is the founder of Nurse Danny Review Services, helping nursing graduates pass the NCLEX worldwide. She is also the owner of Trauma Recovery Coaching with Dr. Dee and a recognized Mississippi business leader and honoree.

Brittney Shelby-Bell

Brittney Shelby-Bell is a mental health professional, community advocate, and faith-driven leader dedicated to empowering youth, families, and survivors. She is the founder of Project247: HelpHealHope, an organization focused on breaking cycles of abuse, and continues to serve youth in educational and correctional settings. A member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Brittney is recognized for her leadership, resilience, and impact across Mississippi.



Justin Harris

Justin Harris, a Jackson, MS native, is a career law enforcement professional who currently serves as Chief Investigator for the Mississippi Attorney General's Office Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, overseeing investigators statewide. A respected leader recognized for exposing the Rankin County "Goon Squad" corruption case, he has received multiple honors for integrity and service. Justin is a graduate of Jackson State University and remains active in community and professional organizations.



Jessica Dixon

Jessica Dixon is a celebrity stylist and community advocate from Jackson, Mississippi. With over a decade of experience, she is known for transforming looks and empowering women and girls through confidence and style. Raised by her great-grandparents, Jessica's faith and purpose guide her work with local nonprofits, uplifting her community and inspiring others to embrace their worth and potential.

Dr. Michael Bookhardt

Dr. Michael Bookhardt is a Jackson, MS-based physician, healthcare leader, and community advocate. Board-certified in family medicine, he co-founded Good Faith Wellness Center and serves as a hospitalist. An Oakwood University and St. Matthew's University alum, he also holds an MBA in Healthcare Management.

Dr. Bookhardt is active in medical organizations, speaks at national healthcare forums, hosts the "Telehealth Tuesday" podcast, and volunteers through Community United Outreach. He is a devoted father, musician, and small business owner, dedicated to advancing health and wellness in his community.



Tiffany Crawford

Tiffany Crawford is the Sexual Assault Response Program Manager for the Mississippi National Guard, overseeing statewide SAPR programs for both Army and Air Guard. A Lieutenant Colonel in the Mississippi Army National Guard, she has 25+ years of service and was honored as the 2025 Liz Blanc Exceptional SARC of the Year.

Tiffany is active in her community through Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the Junior League of Jackson, and Word of Life Church. She is a dedicated wife, mother, and advocate for service members and women's empowerment.



Amanda Williamson

Amanda Williamson is a Canton, MS native and hairstylist with 19+ years of experience. Founder of a top-rated Jackson salon and a Cranial Prosthetic Specialist, she restores beauty, confidence, and hope for her clients.

Amanda is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated, and a proud mother of Amiya Williamson. Her career reflects resilience, faith, and a commitment to inspiring others to embrace their gifts.



Verlencia Myers

Verlencia Myers, FNP-BC, is a proud Brandon, MS native and a healthcare leader, entrepreneur, and nurse practitioner. She's the CEO of Reliable Healthcare Services and Kids' Kastle LLC and also owns Vinyl Gallery, LLC. With over 20 years in healthcare—from emergency medicine to pediatric care—she combines clinical expertise with compassionate leadership.

A member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Verlencia is also a devoted wife and mother of three sons. She's passionate about faith, family, and giving back to her community, showing every day how purpose and service go hand in hand.





Salutes Tiffany Crawford

Thank you for your outstanding works in the community.

Congratulations for being selected a 50 Under Fifty Awardee!!

Services for Children/Youth and Adults:

Individual Therapy
Group Therapy
Medication Management
Assertive Community Treatment
Psychosocial Rehabilitation
Peer Support
Community Support
Family Therapy
Crisis Intervention

601-487-8594 - Office
601-218-6381 - Referrals

"The Journey of a
million miles
begins with
a single step"
--- Lao Tzu

Take the first step!



Wilton Charles Jackson,

Judge Carlyn M. Hicks serves as Hinds County Court Judge for Sub-district One and presides over Hinds County Youth Court. A Jackson native, she's dedicated her legal career to public service, earning accolades for improving access to justice. The only African American Certified Child Welfare Specialist in Mississippi, she's a proud alumna of Jackson State University and Mississippi College School of Law. Judge Hicks is committed to integrity, fairness, and community service. She and her husband, Derrick, a military veteran and local business owner, are active in civic efforts and PTA initiatives. They have one daughter, Leigh, and attend Mount Helm Baptist Church.

Dr. Jameshyia Ballard

Dr. Jameshyia Ballard is a public health leader and social impact strategist, serving as State Director for Mississippi WIC and founder of Alchemy Integrated Projects. A Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Lactation Counselor, she holds a BS, MS, and PhD from Mississippi universities. Active in Alpha Kappa Alpha and local boards, Dr. Ballard is dedicated to maternal health, community empowerment, and turning challenges into opportunities through faith-driven leadership.



Tamia' Taylor

Tamia' Taylor, a native of Heidelberg, MS, is an educator, mentor, and community leader. With 17 years in education, she is Lead Teacher and 10th Grade Administrator at Laurel High School, Student Council advisor, and Associate Executive Director of the Mississippi Association of Student Councils. She holds degrees in accounting, guidance and counseling, and educational leadership, and is pursuing her doctorate. Tamia' is the founder of I.N.S.P.I.R.E. You Leadership Academy and a founding member of Better Together Heidelberg. She is active in her church, Junior Auxiliary, and leadership programs, dedicating her work to developing students and revitalizing her community.



Dr. Antwon Woods

Dr. Antwon D. Woods is Dean of the School of Business at Alcorn State University, leading faculty, student mentorship, and strategic programs. A published scholar with a PhD in Urban Higher Education and multiple advanced degrees, he has earned national recognition for his leadership in higher education. He and his wife, Dr. Constance Barnes-Woods, co-founded Beanstalk Pediatrics and Woods Management Group and are parents to their daughter, Bella Elizabeth.



James Haynes

James Haynes, originally from Kosciusko, MS, is the owner and principal photographer of Big Game Photography and has served 28 years as an optician at Jackson Walmart. Married for 24 years with two children, he is an active community volunteer and Deacon Chair at New Jerusalem Church. James is committed to serving Jackson and fostering a stronger, more vibrant community.





Crystal Moore

Crystal Moore is Head of Workforce Development at The Coca-Cola Company, creating career pathways for 200,000 employees nationwide. Formerly VP of Brilliant Black Minds at Karat, she led programs with Serena Williams to expand Black talent in tech. A 2017-2018 White House Fellow, Crystal also served on the Domestic Policy Council under the Obama Administration. A third-generation HBCU alumna, she holds degrees from Xavier University and Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, CHIEF, and the Council on Foreign Relations, and actively serves on nonprofit boards promoting diverse talent.

Dr. Candice Vance

Dr. Candice Vance is an author, educational consultant, and nationally recognized leader in special education and school leadership. Author of *Where the Wild Things Learn!*, she advocates for inclusive, student-centered education that honors differences and empowers educators. A Mississippi native, Dr. Vance partners with schools across the South to strengthen special education systems, develop inclusive practices, and build leadership capacity. Her work blends scholarship, strategy, and heart, helping leaders and teachers create classrooms where every student is seen and supported.



Meaghan Odum

Meaghan Odum is a nationally recognized healthcare operations leader, AI innovation strategist, and community advocate based in Jackson, Mississippi. With 15+ years in clinical operations and value-based care, she has led programs improving care for thousands of patients nationwide. A two-time breast cancer survivor, Meaghan's lived experience fuels her passion for patient advocacy and operational excellence.

She is also one of Mississippi's first Black women sommeliers and the founder of Trillwinewife, a wine education and lifestyle platform. An active community leader, she serves with the Jackson Symphony League and Junior League Jackson. Meaghan is married with two children and is currently completing her Doctorate of Healthcare Administration. in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the Junior League of Jackson.



Terrance Hill

Terrance Hill is an educational leader with nearly 20 years of experience in Mississippi schools. He currently serves as Assistant Superintendent of Greenville Public Schools, overseeing district operations and driving student-centered improvement. A former teacher, assistant principal, and principal, he has led multiple schools to A ratings and is known for elevating school culture, academic growth, and organizational effectiveness. Mr. Hill is a doctoral candidate at Jackson State University, focusing on equity and resource access for urban students. His leadership is grounded in collaboration, continuous improvement, and a commitment to student and community success.



Her impact is woven into every success story that comes through BBLI's doors, and her commitment continues to shape the next generation of Mississippi leaders.



Lauretha Bellinder



A Leader Shaping the Future of Mississippi's Youth

Leading with Excellence. Serving with Heart.



Lauretha L. Bellinder is a steady, compassionate force behind Bridge Builders Leadership Initiative (BBLI)—a nonprofit, tuition-free afterschool and summer leadership program for 6th–12th graders. Over the past eight years, BBLI has blessed more than 400 students, giving them life skills, mentorship, and opportunities that expand their vision for the future.

With degrees from Dillard University, Jackson State University, and the University of Texas at Arlington, Lauretha brings both academic excellence and heartfelt dedication to her work. As a certified educator with nine years of classroom experience, and the owner of B-Excellent Tutoring, she has spent her career helping young people discover their strengths.



Since becoming Executive Director of BBLI in 2018 and now serving as Director of Programs, Lauretha has worked tirelessly to build a program known for quality, structure, and love. She connects students with local professionals, exposes them to new environments, and opens doors to experiences many never imagined possible. Every decision she makes is guided by one purpose: to help students grow.



Her dedication is more than organizational; it is personal. Lauretha believes deeply in the potential of every child and works daily to ensure they feel seen, supported, and capable of becoming the leaders they are meant to be.

From educator to entrepreneur to nonprofit leader, Lauretha “Lee Lee” Bellinder continues to inspire excellence wherever she goes. BBLI thrives because she leads with vision, integrity, and a sincere love for the youth of Mississippi.

Lauretha Bellinder is a true servant leader, a champion for students, and a pillar of purpose in our community.

Learn More about Bridge Builders at BBLI.ORG

Kerry Thomas



Kerry Thomas is a nonprofit and grants management leader with 15+ years of experience in government, healthcare, and philanthropy. As Director of Grants and Contracts at Molina Healthcare, he oversees federal contracts and compliance, and he is also CEO of Grants Insight Consulting. A Tougaloo College and Jackson State University MBA graduate, Kerry is known for strategic leadership, fiscal excellence, and community impact. He is also a musician, married to Dana Thomas, and father of two daughters. Kerry Thomas is a nonprofit and grants management leader with 15+ years of experience in government, healthcare, and philanthropy. As Director of Grants and Contracts at Molina Healthcare, he oversees federal contracts and compliance, and he is also CEO of Grants Insight Consulting. A Tougaloo College and Jackson State University MBA graduate, Kerry is known for strategic leadership, fiscal excellence, and community impact. He is also a musician, married to Dana Thomas, and father of two daughters.

Karanja Matory

Karanja Matory, a Jackson, Mississippi native and Jackson State University graduate, is a civic leader and policy analyst dedicated to empowering communities and advancing equitable public policy. He has held leadership roles in Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., served as a volunteer coordinator, and works with nonprofits including the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and the MS Reentry Coalition. Karanja is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Planning at Jackson State University.



William "Bill" Carter

William "Bill" H. Carter Jr. is a seasoned sales and business professional with over 20 years in home improvement and B2B sales. Founder of We Kare, Inc., he helps families achieve homeownership and maintain their homes through quality remodeling. Currently with Zintex Remodeling Group, Bill is recognized for integrity, leadership, and results. A Life Member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and active Mason, he is committed to mentorship and community impact.



De'Barius Thigpen

De'Barius Thigpen is our next 50 Under Fifty honoree. De'Barius is a dedicated chef with over 6 years of hands-on culinary experience, known for precision, creativity, and kitchen consistency. Traveling across the country, De'Barius brings passion to every dish and thrives in fast-paced environments while delivering high-quality food and memorable dining experiences. Cooking isn't just a career for Chef De'. It's a lifelong commitment.

[See less](#)



LeCleaise Smith

LeCleaise is a respected community leader and entrepreneur whose influence continues to shape the Jackson, MS metropolitan area. As the founder and owner of Mogul Mentality Entertainment, he has leveraged his platform to uplift others while driving cultural and economic impact. His commitment to service, philanthropy, and leadership has left a lasting mark on the community, exemplifying the spirit of excellence, dedication, and integrity this award represents.





La Tanya Sanders-Kelker

Tanya Sanders-Kelker, MBA, is a Mississippi native, wife, and mother of three. She is CEO of Body Party Wax & Beauty Studios, a profit and growth strategist, esthetics educator, nonprofit CFO, author, global speaker, and PhD candidate in Accounting. Known as “BAE,” she helps service-based and beauty professionals build scalable, profitable businesses. With nearly 20 years as an entrepreneur, Tanya has earned local, state, and national recognition for her leadership and community impact.

Derrick Hicks

Derrick Hicks, a Vallejo, California native and retired U.S. Army veteran, is a cybersecurity professional, doctoral candidate, and community leader. He holds a Master of Public Policy and Administration from Jackson State University and certifications including CISSP and CCNP. Derrick is founder of Carlyn Photography, a devoted husband and father, and a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., dedicated to service, scholarship, and community impact.



Steven Randle

Steven Randle, a Vicksburg native, is a poet, writer, and teaching artist whose work turns life's trials into lessons for future generations. He has self-published three books, performed spoken word nationwide, and created custom poems for events and the New Orleans French Quarter. Steven serves as a teaching artist with the Mississippi Arts Commission and advocates for arts integration through the MS Whole Schools Initiative. He is also the founder of S.C.R.E.A.M., a nonprofit empowering teens through creative writing, expression, and civic engagement.

MISSISSIPPI'S TOP
URBAN ELITE PROFESSIONALS

Scholarship Winners

50 Under Fifty
**LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP
RECIPIENT
2026**



Kristopher Gaylor
St. Joseph Catholic School

College of Choice: Southern A&M University Honors College



50 Under Fifty
**LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP
RECIPIENT
2026**



Aubrey Norman, III
Germantown High School
College of Choice: East Central Community College



50 Under Fifty
**LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP
RECIPIENT
2026**



Chyrran Willis
Germantown High School
College of Choice: Mississippi State University



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!



WE MARQUEE
EVENT RENTALS



BLACKEXCELLENCEWATER.COM



GOOD FAITH
WELLNESS CENTER



THE
LEGACY
NETWORK FOUNDATION



MOGUL MENTALITY
ENTERTAINMENT



WHERE LUXURY MEETS LIFESTYLE.



Dominique Beasley
REAL ESTATE BROKER
601-896-3742

THE 2ND ANNUAL

50 Under FIFTY

BLACK TIE GALA
MISSISSIPPI'S TOP
URBAN ELITE PROFESSIONALS



We are so proud of you and all that you've accomplished. Your dedication, compassion, and hard work continue to inspire us every day.

We celebrate your commitment, integrity, and impact. Your family, friends and patients are so proud to stand beside you.

Congratulations

**DR. LAMONICA
DAVIS TAYLOR**