

46th Annual
**YMCA Black Achievers
Awards Celebration**

February 15, 2025



**THE WORLD
IS OURS**

2025 YMCA Adult Achievers

Adult Achiever of the Year
Distinguished Achiever of the Year
Legacy Award Recipient
YMCA Adult Achievers (by company)

2025 YMCA Black Achievers

Youth Achiever of the Year
Youth Achiever of the Year Finalists
YMCA Black Achievers



Corenza Townsend
Chief Administrative Officer
Norton West Louisville Hospital

Corenza was named chief administrative officer for Norton West Louisville Hospital in November 2022. Known as a change maker and visionary, Corenza specializes in finding operational solutions around known community and workplace opportunities, which are sometimes complex.

Corenza's career spans over two decades, beginning her career with Norton Healthcare in 2009 as a clinical super-user when the organization implemented Epic. She began her leadership journey in 2012 as a practice supervisor with Norton Medical Group. In 2016, Corenza was promoted to practice manager at the world-renown Norton Leatherman Spine Center, overseeing its day-to-day operations.

From 2020-2022, she served as a director of provider operations for Norton Medical Group, overseeing multiple medical practices and their management teams and developing strategic growth plans and operational goals for the groups.

With a passion for empowering individuals and organizations, Corenza has established herself as a thought leader in the fields of leadership development, innovation, and organizational transformation.

Corenza's contributions to the field of leadership and organizational development have been widely recognized. She has been named one of the "Top 50 Leadership Experts to Follow" and received numerous awards for her work in promoting access and education in both the workplace and community.

Corenza is active in the Louisville area, serving as a board member for several nonprofit organizations, including Dare to Care, GLI Foundation, Kentucky Derby Festival, Greater Louisville Medical Society, and ElderServe. She also is a multi-small business owner.

Corenza earned her bachelors of business and marketing and her nursing degree from Sullivan University in Louisville. She is the mother to Michael, a student ambassador and athlete.



On November 11, 2024, Norton West Louisville Hospital officially opened its doors, bringing top-quality care and innovative services right to the heart of West Louisville. Corenza Townsend, chief administrative office, addressed staff and community members, celebrating a new chapter in Louisville's history!

2025 Distinguished Achiever of the Year



Damion Lee
NBA Player, Phoenix Suns

Damion Lee is an accomplished professional basketball player currently with the Phoenix Suns. Throughout his career, he has built an impressive resume, highlighted by being a finalist for the 2022–23 Twyman–Stokes Teammate of the Year Award, winning the 2022 NBA Championship with the Golden State Warriors, and representing the United States as a member of the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup team.

Damion’s journey to the NBA began with a successful college career, where he played three seasons at Drexel University, before he transferred to the University of Louisville as a graduate student for the 2015–16 season. During his time at Louisville, he quickly developed a deep love for the city and its community. Inspired by this experience, Damion became determined to give back to the people and neighborhoods that had embraced him, setting the stage for his future community-driven efforts.

Off the court, Damion holds a bachelor’s degree in General Humanities and Social Science from Drexel University and began a master’s program in Special Education with a Concentration in Assistive Technology at the University of Louisville.

Beyond basketball, Damion is dedicated to giving back to the communities which have shaped his life. In 2017, he co-founded The L.E.E. Way Foundation with his mother, Michelle Riddick, focused on supporting communities in Baltimore, Louisville, and Philadelphia. In December 2023, the foundation’s name was changed to Damion Lee Family Foundation to better reflect its family-driven mission. The foundation actively collaborates with local organizations, including Grace M. James Academy and the Chestnut Street Family YMCA in Louisville. Its initiatives include hosting free basketball clinics, giving backpacks for Back-to-School Drive and an Annual Summer Cooking Camp, now in its third year.

To date, the foundation has donated nearly \$50,000 to Grace M. James Academy, supported mental health initiatives, provided curriculum resources, and contributed to library and mindfulness spaces. They have also organized events such as the Annual Winter Ball Dance for students at Grace M. James and W.E.B. DuBois Academy. Additionally, the foundation partners with organizations such as JP Morgan Chase, Belmont Charter Middle School (PA), Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering (MD), the Maryland Fuel Fund, the Foster Children Alliance, and Helping Hands (AZ).

A devoted family man, Damion is married to his wife, Sydel. The couple has two children, Daxon and Daryn, and are expecting their third child in May.



NBA champion and former UofL star Damion Lee spent time giving back to the community by teaching young campers at a local basketball camp in July, 2024.



Congratulations to 2025 Legacy Award Recipient Thomas Cork Sr. (in memoriam)

Thomas Cork Sr. (February 23, 1929–November 30, 2024) embodied a life defined by service, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to family and community. Born into a family of six children during the challenging times of the Great Depression, Thomas began working at the age of seven. This was a testament to his determination and work ethic, values that would shape the foundation of his extraordinary legacy.

In 1948, Thomas answered the call to serve his country by enlisting in the United States Marine Corps. He trained at Paris Island, South Carolina, and proudly served as one of the Montford Point Marines—the first Black marines who persevered through segregation and adversity to pave the way for future generations. During the Korean War, Thomas displayed remarkable courage, earning the solemn distinction of being among the “Frozen Chosin” at the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir. Despite enduring frostbite and the hardships of war, he survived and later shared his story of resilience and heroism through books, documentaries, and public appearances. His contributions were honored with the Congressional Gold Medal in 2014 and his induction into the Kentucky Veterans Hall of Fame in 2022.

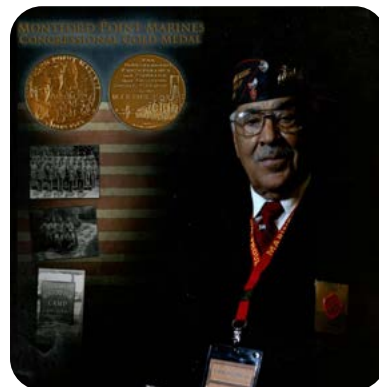
Upon returning to Louisville, Thomas embarked on a 30-year career with the U.S. Postal Service and became a cornerstone of his community. He found love and partnership at West Chestnut Street Baptist Church, where he married Gwendolyn House Cork in 1956. Together, they built a family rooted in faith, love, and excellence, raising three children: Thomas II, Vicki Lynn, and

Bryan Sr. Thomas’s pride in his family extended to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, instilling in them the values of perseverance, service, and leadership.

A devoted champion of the Chestnut Street Family YMCA, Thomas dedicated over 25 years to raising significant funds for programs, events, and renovations, including steadfast support for the YMCA Black Achievers program. His community involvement extended further as a board member of the Epicurean Club, a social organization in West Louisville, and as a mentor and supporter of countless youth initiatives, leaving an indelible impact on the lives of many.

Thomas Cork Sr.’s legacy is one of love, leadership, and enduring service—a legacy carried forward by the countless lives he touched and the generations he inspired.

Thomas Cork Sr.: A life well-lived, a legacy well-earned.



Thomas Cork Sr. and the Congressional Medal given to members of the Montford Point Marines.

RIVER CITY BANK THANKS THOMAS CORK SR. FOR HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CITY OF LOUISVILLE AND THE YMCA BLACK ACHIEVERS HISTORY.



GE Appliances, a Haier company

TJ Williams
Program Engineer

TJ Williams is a Program Engineer with a proven track record of excellence in engineering and leadership. Based in Louisville, KY, TJ currently serves as a Design Engineer II at GE Appliances, a Haier company. He leverages his

expertise in program development and design to drive innovation and deliver exceptional results.

TJ brings a wealth of experience from his diverse roles at GE Appliances, Ford Motor Company, and the University of Louisville J.B. Speed School of Engineering. A committed leader and mentor, he has also contributed to community and professional development through his active involvement with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

A lifelong learner, TJ earned his Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Business Administration and Management from Northern Kentucky University in 2024, equipping him with a strong foundation in business strategy and organizational management. His technical expertise, combined with his business acumen, positions him as a forward-thinking engineer who consistently delivers impactful solutions.

Outside of his professional pursuits, TJ is passionate about fostering innovation, mentoring the next generation of engineers, and contributing to his community in meaningful ways.



Humana, Inc.

Schaka Davis
Medicaid State Implementation Leader

Schaka Davis is a dedicated Medicaid leader with a deep commitment to serving underserved populations. With numerous years of healthcare experience, her passion is helping to expand access to

quality care for individuals facing economic and social challenges. Schaka's goal is to enhance patient outcomes and reduce disparities in healthcare. Her leadership combines strategic vision with compassion, ensuring that vulnerable communities receive the support and care needed to thrive.

Prior to joining Humana, Schaka worked on the provider side for Hospital Corporation of America (HCA), one of the nation's leading companies for healthcare services. She also worked at Rx Crossroads managing a team of nurses and staff dedicated to assisting women who experience challenges with child conception.

Schaka is passionate about addressing disparities amongst undeserved and under-represented populations while leading the charge to combat bias and prejudice. She prides herself on helping create spaces that embrace equity and inclusion, and consistently challenges other decision-makers to rethink routine by diversifying leadership where there is a void.

Outside of Humana, Schaka is a board member for an organization called Sowing Seeds With Faith (SSWF). SSWF is a local nonprofit geared towards engaging youth academically and socially in the Greater Louisville community. She is a proud graduate of the University of Louisville (GO CARDS!), and holds dual Bachelor's degrees in Communication and Marketing, as well as an MA and MBA. Schaka is also the mother of twin 15-year old girls who keep her very busy with chauffeuring them around to various extracurricular activities.



Humana, Inc.

Ashley Neal
Center Administrator

Ashley has been with Humana for over seven years, currently serving as Center Administrator for CenterWell Senior Primary Care in West Louisville. A proud Radcliff, KY native, Ashley grew up in a military family and graduated with honors

from Indiana University. She was also the 2015 Kentuckiana Metroversity Adult Student Learner of the Year.

Deeply committed to community service, Ashley is an active member of the Fort Knox Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and mentors through nonprofits focused on student success, girls' empowerment, and economic development. She is the proud mother of two daughters—Braelyn and Kerrigan—and enjoys traveling, cheering on the Louisville Cardinals and Pittsburgh Steelers, and continuing her family legacy of advocacy and servant leadership.



Humana, Inc.

Yonbretta Stewart
Community Engagement and Outreach Manager

Yonbretta Stewart is a passionate Humana Healthy Horizons Community Engagement and Outreach Manager for KY Medicaid. With over 30 years of fostering meaningful connections

between organizations and the communities she serves, Yonbretta specializes in developing and implementing outreach strategies that promote inclusivity and collaboration.

Throughout her career, she has successfully led numerous initiatives that connect diverse populations with resources, services, and opportunities. She has led enterprise-wide efforts such as Humana Mobile Mammography with the goal of increasing utilization of preventative care where she organized mobile mammography units at Humana locations that enabled over 100 associates to be screened; QPR/Suicide Prevention where she trained Humana associates and community partners to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to recognize the warning signs of suicide and intervene effectively; and the Poverty Simulation where she has facilitated this immersion experience to over 1,000 associates and community partners to educate about the communities we serve.

Her approach emphasizes active listening and understanding the unique needs of each community, ensuring that outreach efforts are both effective and impactful. She thrives on building partnerships with local organizations, stakeholders, and community members, leveraging those relationships to create programs that empower individuals and promote social change. Her experience includes organizing workshops, community events, and volunteer opportunities that not only engage participants but also foster a sense of belonging and community pride.

Yonbretta was born in Greenwood, Mississippi but grew up in Louisville. She is a graduate of Sullivan University where she received her bachelor's in accounting, Master of Business Administration, and Master in Conflict Resolution/Management. She is also a Family Court Certified Mediator.

Yonbretta spends most of her time watching her son, Leonardo Jr., play football and run track. She is an active board member of Education First Foundation, Inc. (Showcase of HBCU) and member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. She is a Louisville Cardinals fan that enjoys all events from football to baseball to basketball. She loves sports, music, dancing, and shopping.



Kroger Company

Demetrius Frazier
Center Store Field Specialist

Demetrius Frazier is a Center Store Field Specialist at Kroger where he assists with department leader development, merchandising, and ensuring the company's grocery and drug departments are being ran with efficiency. With a

focus on improving store performance, Demetrius plays a key role in delivering exceptional service and maintaining high standards of quality for customers. He has a passion for developing people and driving results.

Demetrius was born in Topeka, Kansas and grew up in Tennessee prior to going to school in Kentucky. He attended Kentucky Wesleyan College from 2013-2017, where he received his Bachelor's in Business Administration with a minor in Marketing, and was a member of the Track & Field program where he competed in sprinting events ranging from the 60-meter to the 400-meter dash.

Outside of work, Demetrius is passionate about health and fitness, music, and attending sporting events.



Kroger Company

Crystal King
Associate Resource Manager

Crystal King began her career with Kroger in 2022 as a fuel clerk and now serves as an Associate Resource Manager, focusing on recruiting, hiring, and retaining top talent. Known for her caring and approachable nature, Crystal creates a

welcoming environment for associates and customers while embodying Kroger's Purpose of feeding the Human Spirit.

Crystal was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. She graduated from Fairdale High School and attended National College where she studied Business Management and Human Resources.

Outside of work, Crystal enjoys going to the movies with her daughter and son on the weekends. As a family, she likes to travel to Chicago multiple times a year for concerts and exploring the city. Crystal's vision for the future is to continue growing with Kroger in management.



Kroger Company

Makesha McDaniels Store Leader

Makesha McDaniels began her career with Kroger in February 2017. After completing the Management Training Program, she advanced to Assistant Store Leader roles in multiple Lexington, Kentucky locations, later transitioning to

Human Resources Leader before becoming a Store Leader. In her current role, she focuses on training and developing associates, building a successful store team, and ensuring exceptional customer service for both associates and customers.

With 20 years of prior experience in retail and restaurant management, Makesha brings a wealth of leadership expertise and a passion for community involvement. She actively coordinates community events and serves as co-chair of the Professional Development Committee for the African American Associate Resource Group.

A graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, Makesha holds a degree in Computer Information Systems with a minor in Spanish. In her free time, she enjoys cheering on UK basketball, spending time with her husband Charlie and son Jacob, and caring for their pets—three dogs (Lulu, Smurf, and Leo) and their munchkin cat, T’Challa.



MSD

Ricky Mason Chairman of the Board of Directors

Ricky Mason is a visionary entrepreneur, engineer, and community leader whose career spans aerospace, agriculture, and academia. From launching rockets with NASA and United Launch Alliance to

serving as a weapons test engineer at the Department of Defense, and a computer engineer at the CIA, Ricky’s professional journey is a testament to his expertise and dedication to innovation.

As the CEO and founder of Kentucky AgriTech and BrainSTEM EdTech, Ricky has turned technical expertise and bold ideas into award-winning ventures. Through Kentucky AgriTech, he pioneers the use of mobile apps, blockchain, and AI in agriculture to revolutionize urban farming and sustainable food systems. At BrainSTEM EdTech he develops VR, gaming, and metaverse technologies to deliver cutting-edge educational experiences, setting new standards in training and workforce development.

As chairman of the Louisville MSD Board, Ricky has championed transformative initiatives like the Community Benefits Program, Supplier Diversity, and the Small Business Enterprise program, promoting innovation and sustainable infrastructure that reduces environmental impact and benefits the local community. His leadership reflects a commitment to equitable economic development and improving quality of life in Louisville.

Ricky’s passion for community development stems from his own story of how early exposure to STEM changed the trajectory of his life. Inspired by a robotics engineer he met in the 5th grade, he founded BrainSTEM University, a nonprofit providing immersive STEM education that has empowered over 5,000 students in Kentucky with the skills and inspiration to pursue STEM careers. Further extending this mission, Ricky co-founded Network N’ Chill, a podcast and event series designed to create an inclusive community for storytelling, fostering meaningful relationships, and educating professionals and entrepreneurs on creating wealth, building businesses, and making strategic investments.

At the heart of Ricky’s mission is his family. As a devoted husband and proud father of two boys, he draws daily inspiration from guiding their growth and empowering them to chase their dreams. Grounded by his personal mantra, “Keep Making Moves,” Ricky continues to inspire individuals and communities to reach their potential, break barriers, and embrace new opportunities.



MSD

Dr. Carmen Moreno-Rivera
Chief Administrative Office/Chief of Staff

Dr. Carmen Moreno-Rivera is the Chief Administrative Office/Chief of Staff of Louisville Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD). She has over 20 years of unique leadership experience across public and

private sectors in engineering and operations, aviation safety, and government. Her broad scope of work includes strategic planning, systems design and evaluation, and operationalizing equity and inclusion in the workplace. Driven by a passion for helping others, Carmen has worked on large-scale strategy and transformational projects in the areas of social impact, education, public safety, and economic mobility.

Dr. Moreno-Rivera serves as Board Chair for TECH-Nique, on the Kentucky Science Center Board of Directors, the University of Tennessee's Black Alumni Council, and as a strategic advisor for the Lambda Theta Alpha Foundation. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, a Master of Science in Management from Indiana Wesleyan University, and a Doctor of Education in Leadership from Spalding University.



MSD

Kellie S. Watson
General Counsel/Legal Director

Kellie Stallard Watson is the General Counsel/Legal Director for Louisville MSD. She serves as Chief Legal Officer responsible for the oversight and management of all MSD legal initiatives, strategies, and affairs. Kellie serves as

counsel, advisor, representative, and transactions facilitator to the MSD Board, Executive Director, and senior management. She also serves director of the legal division and manager of outside legal resources and is a member of the Executive Management Team and Counsel/Secretary to the Floodplain Board.

Kellie joined Louisville MSD in May 2020 as the first Equity and Compliance Officer. As the Equity and Compliance Officer, she monitored and analyzed policy and programs for equity, as well as compliance with legal and ethical principles and standards.

Prior to MSD, Kellie was the first Chief Equity Officer for Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer. She served in several positions within the Fischer Administration, including General Counsel/Legislative Liaison, and Director of Human Resources/Labor Relations. Prior to these positions, she was the Director of the Office of Human Resource Management and Acting Director of the Office of Civil Rights and Small Business for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, as well as the Director of the Louisville Metro Human Relations Commission and the Director of the Office of Affirmative Action for several years under Mayor Dave Armstrong.

Kellie is a member of the Kentucky Bar Association; past Chair of Louisville Metro Civilian Review and Accountability Board; Baptist Hospital Louisville Advisory Board Vice-chair; Fund for the Arts Board Member and Chair of the Equity Committee; Kentucky Derby Festival Board Member; past Chestnut Street Family YMCA Board Member; and Kentuckiana Girl Scouts Board Member. Past memberships include inaugural Ignite Louisville class, Bingham Fellows 2019, and Leadership Louisville 2022-2023. She was also an Alden Fellow from Community Foundation of Louisville. Kellie is also a 2022 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Champion Award from Louisville Central Community Center, and a 2023 Louisville Business First Enterprising Woman.

Kellie received a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science/Policy Analysis from the University of Louisville, Cum Laude, and a Juris Doctorate degree from Vanderbilt University. Kellie is also certified in Lean and Six Sigma Green Belt, and has a Diversity and Inclusion Certificate from Cornell University. She is a Louisville native and the mother of one son.



Norton Healthcare

Dr. Sylvia A. Cole
Physician

Sylvia A. Cole, MD, is a board-certified physician specializing in Internal Medicine. She currently practices with Norton Community Medical Associates where she is dedicated to providing comprehensive, evidence-based,

compassionate care to her patients.

Dr. Cole earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education with a major in chemistry and a minor in biology from the University of Kentucky. She obtained her medical degree from the University of Louisville. Her internship was completed at the University of Louisville, with completion of residency training at Louisiana State University - Charity Hospital.

She is an active member of the Eta Omega Graduate Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and the Fall City Medical Society. Dr. Cole resides in Louisville, KY with her husband, Dr. James Railey. They have two children, Caylyn and Cole. She values quality time with her family and friends, and enjoys gardening, cooking, mixology, reading, and philately.



Norton Healthcare

Shakaye Peters
Associate General Counsel, Norton

Shakaye Peters serves as associate general counsel in Norton Healthcare's legal services department, specializing in supply chain contracting. In her role, she negotiates contracts for critical medical supplies and equipment, ensuring the

organization has the resources needed to provide exceptional patient care while mitigating risks and driving savings.

Before joining Norton Healthcare 6 1/2 years ago, Shakaye began her career as a physical therapist, later transitioning into health care law to explore new challenges. Her unique career path reflects her passion for health care and her commitment to making an impact, even from behind the scenes.

A dedicated leader both at work and in the community, Shakaye actively participates in Norton Healthcare's African American employee resource group, Synergy, and serves on the Women Influencing Louisville board. She is a proud member of the service organization Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and is a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters' School to Work program.

Outside of her professional pursuits, Shakaye enjoys exploring new restaurants, attending football games, and spending time with her dog, Harlem. She is motivated daily by her desire to make her family proud and to leave a positive impact on the world around her.



Republic Bank

Derek Bell Chief Accounting Officer

Derek Bell is a highly accomplished financial professional with a wealth of experience in the fields of accounting and finance. Serving as Republic Bank's Chief Accounting Officer of Republic Processing Group (RPG) in Louisville, Kentucky, since

2023, Derek has consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership in managing interactions with external auditors, overseeing rigorous audits, and upholding the highest standards of financial integrity and transparency. His contributions have been instrumental in championing the adoption of advanced forecasting models and activity-based analytics, providing critical financial insights for strategic planning and fiscal discipline. Derek's commitment to precision and efficiency is evident in his oversight of the RPG budget process, financial reviews, month-end close process and his role in producing and disseminating financial statements to keep various stakeholders well-informed about the RPG's financial performance.

Before joining RPG, Derek worked in Technical Accounting at Global Foundries in Malta, New York, overseeing global accounting policies, analyzing IFRS standards, and conducting complex financial transactions. He played a key role in financial analysis, cost-saving initiatives, and cash flow forecasting while collaborating with Investor Relations and senior leadership. Additionally, he managed SEC filings and financial reporting communications.

Derek's career journey also includes significant roles at Humana Inc., YUM Brands, and LG&E/KU Energy Services, where he made valuable contributions to financial reporting, technical accounting, budgeting, and integration projects. Derek is a Certified Public Accountant in the State of Kentucky and holds an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University, as well as a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Louisville.

Beyond his corporate achievements, Derek is committed to education and serves as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Louisville, teaching undergraduate and graduate accounting and finance courses.

He and his wife Ebony have four children: Derek, Donovan, Desmond, and Elaina. Derek is involved in his community and holds Board seats on organizations such as LHome, Brightside Inc., and Breakaway Recovery House. He serves on the Accounting and Auditing Committee, and the Members in Industry Committee at the Kentucky Society of Certified Public Accountants. He is a member of the National Association of Black Accountants, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the Kentucky Society of CPAs, and the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants.

Derek's career reflects his dedication to financial excellence, education, and community service.



River City Bank

Danica Aguon Head Customer Service Representative

Danica Aguon is a dedicated banking professional with a passion for customer service and leadership development. She began her career at River City Bank in 2022 as a Teller and was quickly

promoted to Head Customer Service Representative in 2023. Working at both the Downtown and Pleasure Ridge Park branches, Danica gained valuable experience and insight into customer needs and operational excellence.

In 2024, she expanded her impact by training new hires alongside the Deposit Trainer, reflecting her commitment to mentorship and team growth. Danica aspires to become River City Bank's first Black Branch Manager, a milestone she is working toward with the support of her family, friends, and colleagues.

Outside of work, Danica enjoys traveling and spending quality time with her husband and three children. Her drive, dedication, and focus on growth make her a standout professional in the banking industry.



UAW

Evan Palmer
Bargaining Committee Representative

Evan Palmer is a dedicated advocate for workers' rights and a skilled entrepreneur with a passion for excellence. As a Bargaining Committee Representative at Ford Motor Company, Evan represents a workforce of approximately 8,400

employees, consistently earning the trust and confidence of colleagues through top-choice votes in elections. In this critical role, he works closely with union leadership and management to negotiate fair wages, benefits, and working conditions. By staying engaged with members and prioritizing their needs, Evan ensures their voices are heard and their interests are upheld at the bargaining table.

In addition to his impactful work at Ford, Evan is the CEO and visionary behind 502ChefRev, a culinary business dedicated to delivering high-quality dining experiences. As a self-taught chef with a deep passion for cooking, Evan combines innovation and expertise to create memorable dishes that delight clients. His entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to excellence define both his professional and culinary endeavors, making him a standout leader in every field he pursues.



UAW

Dana Watkins
UAW Women's Committee and Election Committee

Dana Watkins has been a dedicated production assembler at the Ford Louisville Assembly Plant since January 2007. As a proud member of UAW Local 862, she is deeply committed to union

involvement and community service. Dana serves on the UAW Women's Committee and has been re-elected to a second term on the Election Committee. Since April 2024, she has shared her expertise as a part-time UAW trainer at the UAW Training Center, helping to empower and educate fellow members.

Passionate about giving back, Dana actively supports UAW-sponsored prom events, homeless shelters, and food banks. She is a member of the UAW 862 Pink Ponies, where she helps raise funds for breast cancer research by selling pins and shirts and participates in the annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk in Louisville. In addition to her advocacy work, Dana dedicates her time to volunteering for various causes. She enjoys dressing up and passing out candy at UAW Trunk or Treat events, supporting The Salvation Army's Angel Tree program, and raising funds, shopping, and attending the Adopt-a-Child holiday party.

Dana's unwavering commitment to her profession, her union, and her community is a testament to her passion for making a positive impact in the lives of others.



WLKY

Alexis Mathews

Reporter

Alexis Mathews joined the WLKY team as a General Assignment reporter in 2020, at a time when much of our staff was working remotely. We met her on Zoom calls and immediately realized she would become a huge asset. Not only is Alexis

an excellent writer and storyteller who can report on any type of story, she genuinely cares about this community and her co-workers. Whether it's covering major breaking news, breaking down a complicated policy or political issue, or sharing an emotional or uplifting human interest story, Alexis can do it all. While she is passionate about reporting on issues that impact minority communities and in-depth people stories, she brings that passion and drive for the truth to every story she covers.

During her time at WLKY she led our station's coverage of a hazardous home that was condemned by the Environmental Protection Agency. That coverage was honored with a National Headliner Award. She's also contributed to nearly every big story in the market since joining our team. From Breonna Taylor, and the JCPS Busing Crisis, to more recent stories like the LMPD Consent Decree and the Givaudan Plant Explosion. Alexis also recently expanded her skills to the weekend anchor desk on our evening newscasts. She is often asked to represent WLKY at local community events whether it's as an event emcee or moderating a panel regarding a local issue.

Alexis' work ethic, dedication and leadership have made her an invaluable member of our team and we could not be more proud to select her as WLKY's 2025 Black Achiever honoree.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 ADULT ACHIEVERS.

You show commitment to your companies and the community we live in and provide an outstanding example for others.



Makayla Brown
J. Graham Brown School

Makayla Brown is a senior at J. Graham Brown School, a unique kindergarten-through-12th-grade institution she has attended since sixth grade. In addition to excelling in her high school coursework, Makayla has also taken dual-credit courses at Jefferson Community and Technical College, earning valuable college credits.

Since her freshman year, Makayla has been an active member of the YMCA Black Achievers program, where she campaigned for and won the position of Teen Senate President. She has proudly served as President for the past three years, demonstrating her commitment to leadership and service.

Makayla Brown has studied Spanish for seven years and is learning Portuguese. She plans to major in Global Studies with a minor in Spanish. She plans to study abroad to as many South American Countries as she can to immerse herself in the language. Her ultimate goal is to become fluent in multiple languages, allowing her to travel and immerse herself in different cultures while honing her language skills. She dreams of a career as a linguist or translator for the FBI and is also considering pursuing a law degree to specialize in international law after earning her bachelors degree.

Throughout high school, Makayla has been deeply involved in her school community. She serves as President of the Black Student Union, plays as a setter on the varsity volleyball team, and has achieved first-chair cello in her school's orchestra. Outside of school, she has gained work experience as a retail associate at the Louisville Zoo for three seasons and as a front-of-house team member at Chick-fil-A.

In her free time, Makayla enjoys writing poetry and songs, often accompanying herself on the guitar as a creative outlet and way to unwind. Her passion for music has inspired her to pursue it further in college, with plans to one day share her work on Spotify.

Above all, Makayla values her faith and strives to keep God at the center of everything she does, using her accomplishments as a way to honor her beliefs.



Youth Achiever of the Year, Makayla Brown and fellow achievers visited the World War II Memorial and Washington Monument in the nation's capital during the HBCU College tour.

2025 Youth Achiever of the Year Finalists



Amie Jobe
Central High Magnet
Career Academy

Fun Facts:
Amie plans to attend Bellarmine University. An immigrant from Gambia, she plans to be a nurse anesthetist. Her passion for helping people is as strong as her braiding skills. She's on a mission to revolutionize healthcare, break barriers and build a system that truly cares for all. She's here to shake things up!



Yewande Olusesan-Adu
duPont Manual High School

Fun Facts:
Yewande plans to attend the University of Kentucky to major in Marketing and minor in Communications. She plans to have a career in Real Estate and be a Public Relations Specialist. Although she enlisted in the Army National Guard, she plans to do ROTC to commission as an officer in college.



Mia Roberts
duPont Manual High School

Fun Facts:
Mia plans to attend Alabama A&M University and major in Business and Entrepreneurship. She aspires to become a Project Manager or Operations Manager. Two things Mia will never get tired of: cracking into a good seafood boil and singing along to *Hamilton*. She's basically unstoppable when butter and Broadway collide!



Estella Smith
Louisville Collegiate School

Fun Facts:
Estella hopes to attend Emory University to major in Biomedical Sciences, minor in Neuroscience, and become a Cardiothoracic Surgeon. A state track champion, Estella owns an award-winning lemonade business specializing in healthy, delicious drinks, including options for dietary and health-conscious customers.

2025 Youth Achiever of the Year Nominees

Amari Birch
Ballard High School

Makayla Brown
J. Graham Brown High School

Stephon Daisey
Louisville Male Traditional High School

Amie Jobe
Central High Magnet Career Academy

Nasir Hakim
Louisville Male Traditional High School

Addai Conell Morris
Fern Creek High School

Yewande Olusesan-Adu
duPont Manual High School

Mia Roberts
duPont Manual High School

Estella Smith
Louisville Collegiate School

Quincy Lamont White
duPont Manual High School

Youth Achiever of the Year committee members

Angela Blanks
Casie Bush
Chris Evans

Pashens Fitzpatrick
Howard Holloman Jr.

Christina Scotland
Marcel Williams

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR CLASS OF 2025 NOMINEES



The YMCA of Greater Louisville wishes to honor
all of our 2025 graduating
YMCA Black Achievers
and congratulate our
YMCA Black Achiever of the Year
Makayla Brown



Kennedy Anderson

YMCA Black Achievers has really shown me that no matter what race you are, you can do anything to follow your dreams. This program has helped me to be confident in myself and has given me opportunities that many young people don't get.



Amari Birch

If I have kids one day, I will put them in the YMCA Black Achievers program early on so they can experience what I did, but sooner.



Krystal Barnes

YMCA Black Achievers means to be dedicated to Black excellence and success. Black Achievers opens opportunities for young Black students to showcase their intelligence and give back to the community.



Makayla Brown

For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.

—Jeremiah 29:11



Josiah Burton

To whom much is given much is required.
—Luke 12:48



Cameron Dickerson

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

—Martin Luther King Jr.



Destiny Cardell

"When I sing, I feel like I'm part of something bigger. Music has no color, no boundaries—it's for everyone who feels."
—Leontyne Price



Ashlynn Ellis



Anaya Coleman

To me, YMCA Black Achievers means embracing the excellence of being a Black leader who uplifts their community. It's about striving for greatness, creating opportunities, and leaving a lasting impact on the world. The YMCA Black Achievers program has shown me the importance of community and has empowered me to grow as a leader.



Malachi English



Laya Evans



Stephon Daisey



Trinity Evanson



Nasir Hakim

"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

—Martin Luther King Jr.



Amie Jobe

Black Achievers means taking advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. Nothing should stop you from achieving and especially not the color of your skin.



Daishon Hamby

To me, Black Achievers means that your skin color should not be an obstacle or a burden.



Alianna Johnson

There is not competition because nobody can be.

Tatiana Hamilton

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—Philippians 3:16



Adrian Lee

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

—Romans 12:2



De'Andre Hicks



Madison Howard



Cameron Lewis

I strive to be my best self and break the generational curse in my family.



Kennedy Marshall

If fate whispers to you “you can’t withstand the storm” whisper back “I am the storm!”

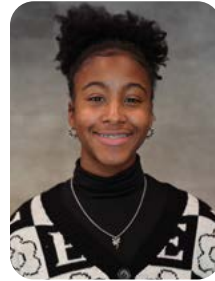


Kalia Newbolt



Addai Morris

You may not always be chosen but you have to be ready to answer the call when the opportunity is presented. Black Achievers is a program of various opportunity that you may not be prepared for, but you have to take advantage of every opportunity that preserved itself.



Jordin Noah

The YMCA Black Achievers is a symbolism of black excellence and fortitude. Despite the many people who constantly try to bring us down as a whole. Black Achievers strive to beat these very odds and I’m glad to be a part of it.



Dariana Morton

I’m glad I made it through the year. Thanks to Black Achievers!



Anthony Northington Jr.

“We may not have crossed the finish line this time, but the race for justice, equality, and freedom continues—and I know we will get there together.”

—Kamala Harris



Rianne Moss

Achievers means sanctuary. A place where everyone has themselves, by themselves, to be themselves.



Jadon Okyere

YMCA Black Achievers give me the strength to pursue any possibilities with achieving my goals. I’m confident that with these new opportunities, I will turn my goals into reality.



Yewande Olusesan-Adu

Being a YMCA Black Achiever means embracing the strength of my heritage, breaking barriers with determination, and creating opportunities for others to follow in a legacy of success and empowerment.



Mariah Peebles

YMCA Black Achievers means empowerment, opportunity, and community to me. This program has provided me with valuable career experiences and leadership skills. Through this amazing program, I expanded my knowledge, built confidence, and connected with mentors and peers who encouraged me to reach my full potential. Most importantly, YMCA Black Achievers provided me a path forward to achieve my career and educational goals with determination.



Mariah Poyntz



Mia Roberts



Bryann Smith



Estella Smith

YMCA Black Achievers exemplify resilience and innovation, breaking barriers to inspire generations and redefine excellence.



Charles Smith III

Anthony Steele Jr.

We have two lives, the second one begins when we realize we only have one.



Chandler Thomas

"Excuses are tools of incompetence used to build bridges to nowhere and monuments of nothingness, and those who use them seldom specialize in anything else."

—Vernon Brundage Jr.



James Vaughn

I remind myself to “be prepared” and “persevere” every day.



Quincy White Jr.

Programs such as YMCA Black Achievers provide kids with the opportunity to discover and explore their interests.



Joshua Wathen



Jaivyon Wright

YMCA Black Achievers is to be surrounded by Black excellence that motivates you to achieve your dreams, to take you out of your comfort zone and push you to success.



Alexander Weaver

I can do anything if I try hard enough. To be a YMCA Black Achiever it means I must maintain good grades and a voice in the community.



Jamison Young

We have so much more in common than what separates us.

Not Pictured

- Faith Allen
- Averie Austin
- Markeyse Bartee
- Justin Brents
- Cameron Bryant
- Serenity Cash
- Cristopher Duncan
- Brooklyn Franklin
- Destinee Gill

- Isaiah Green
- Jania Hadley
- Tatiana Hamilton
- Kailen Harley
- Leroy Holden IV
- Gary Johnson
- Ahmad Jones
- Xamora Jones
- Nevaeh Logan

- Da’zjai Malone
- Jaidance Malone
- Azana McDuffus
- Dwayne McKellery
- Keontre Mitchell
- Juron Morton
- Leaje Pope
- Makyha Pryor
- Demrion Seewright

- Trinity Slaughter
- Chaz Stallard
- Anthony Steele Jr.
- Daunelle Stum
- Surayya Turley
- Amija Wilks