



Johnston County Public Schools

P.O. Box 1336, Smithfield, NC 27577

919-934-6031

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CONTACT:

Richard Carr

Chief Communications Officer

919-934-2016 x 1002

richardcarr@johnston.k12.nc.us

JC Board of Education recognizes 2024-2025 Living Legend Award recipients

Smithfield, NC - During the December 10, 2024, regular session meeting, the Board of Education recognized the 2024-2025 Living Legends, Mrs. Pearl Blackmon, Mrs. Darla Peedin, Mrs. Darlene Williford, and Mr. James E. Barbour.

The Living Legend Award is presented to former Johnston County Public Schools (JCPS) educators who were dedicated to the children they taught and left a legacy of influential teaching styles.

This is the 21st year of honoring the Living Legends of JCPS. These honorees, who have positively transformed the educational landscape of Johnston County Public Schools, have demonstrated excellence in education for more than 100 years.

Pearl Blackmon was a professional educator for 30 years, before retiring from JCPS in 2007. Blackmon is a graduate of JCPS, namely Johnston Central High School in Smithfield, NC. She later graduated from Elizabeth City State University, College of St. Elizabeth, and Meredith University, where she pursued postgraduate study.

Blackmon's educational journey includes being an educator at Woodland Elementary (Morristown, NJ), South Smithfield Primary (Smithfield, NC), and Selma Elementary (Selma, NC).

She has served as the Financial Secretary and President for the National Association of University Women (NAUW), and past president of Johnston County Association of Educators. As a civic leader, Blackmon has served in many ways, including Steward Pro-Tem at St. Mark A.M.E. Church in Smithfield, N.C., Chairperson of the Johnston County Heritage Commission Black History Committee, former member of the Eastern Stars, and former Member of Johnston Community College Foundation.

Considered by many to be a decorated educator, Blackmon has received several honorable awards and recognitions, such as the NAUW Supreme Service Award, the NAUW Woman of the Year Award, the NAUW President's Award, the National Educator's Migrant Education Award, the Friends of Distinction Sponsor's Award, the Johnston County Association of Educators President's Award, and the Migrant Education Master Teacher Award.

Darla Peedin enhanced the lives of students through education for 30 years before retiring in 2012.

During her tenure with JCPS, Peedin taught at Four Oaks Elementary for 7 years, North Johnston Middle for 6 years, and North Johnston High School for 17 years. While in education, she taught music in grades K-12, including Honors Chorus, Beginning Chorus, Ensemble, and the renowned JCPS SHOWCASE OF STARS event, which is still one of JCPS's most renowned events.

Peedin is a graduate of Atlantic Christian College, presently known as Barton College, East Carolina University, and a National Board Certification recipient.

She currently serves as the Director of the Johnston County Education Foundation, promoting innovation, involvement, and excellence in Johnston County Public Schools, and is an active member in her community. She faithfully serves as the Pine Level Free Will Baptist Church pianist and has taught a music course at Johnston Community College since 2014. Peedin also serves as an influential member of the local Rotary, Delta Kappa Gamma, the North Carolina Association of Educators, and the North Carolina Music Educators Association.

Peedin's philosophy of effective teaching revolves around a few core principles that emphasize the teacher's role in inspiring and facilitating student-centered, meaningful learning. She believes that all teachers must believe in their students and their potential, build meaningful relationships, utilize and engage in relevant teaching methods, have a lifelong learning mindset, and have a passion for their particular field.

Darlene Williford epitomized versatility during her professional career, having contributed to the education of students in many ways over the span of 30 years. Williford taught grades 5 through 7 in all math subjects, as well as adult education at Johnston Community College.

She has been previously recognized as a Johnston County Flame for Learning Teacher of the Year, the Who's Who among American Teachers award, along with many other educational recognitions.

Williford has been a mentor and trainer for Effective Teaching for Johnston County certified personnel and an evaluator for the North Carolina Writing test. She was affiliated with all of the Educational organizations, local and state.

A lifelong learner, Williford graduated from the illustrious Smithfield-Selma High, before receiving a bachelor's degree from Atlantic Christian College and a master's degree from Campbell University. She has also received National Board Certification as a Middle School Generalist.

Williford is an active and passionate member of her local church. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Johnston County Arts Council, and is committed to various civic and social organizations, positively impacting the community and the citizens thereof.

James E. Barbour is a homegrown product of JCPS, a graduate of Johnston County Training School, later renamed Johnston Central High, and a trailblazer in education.

During his professional education career in JCPS, Barbour served as a science teacher at South Campus and Smithfield-Selma High, and served as principal at Smithfield Junior High, Smithfield Primary, and Smithfield Elementary. His educational journey included a tenure at Johnston Community College, where he also taught science and math, and became the first basketball coach.

Barbour is a graduate of North Carolina A&T University, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree, and a Master of Educational Administration degree.

He has served the citizens of Smithfield as a former town commissioner and mayor pro-tem, and served on the town board for 17 years. Additionally, Barbour was a member of the North Carolina Principals' Association, the American Legion Post 518 in Clayton, NC, and former chairman of the East Smithfield precinct.

He currently serves as a trustee at St. Peter Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, assistant Sunday school teacher, member of the Mass Choir, St. Peter's Male Chorus, past president of the Progressive Men's Club, a founder and a charter member of the Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity for 58 years. He is the only living founder of the Kappas in the Smithfield Chapter and has previously received the Kappa Man of the Year Award, St. Peter's Living Legend Award, and was a Second Lieutenant in the US Army.

Johnston County Public Schools has a rich legacy of legendary educators. These four individuals will have their names added to the long list of award recipients hanging inside the Living Legends Room of the Evander S. Simpson Building, located at 2320 US 70 Business Highway East in Smithfield.

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