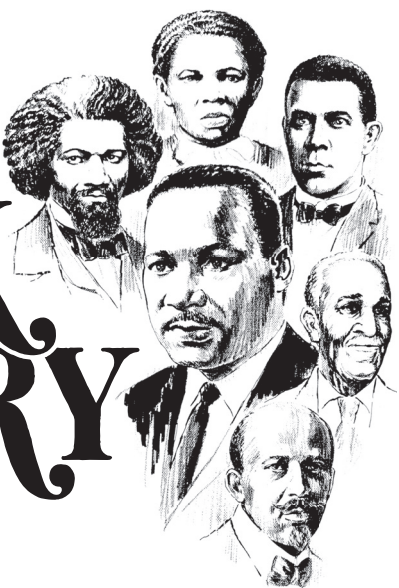


# A Tribute to BLACK HISTORY

Special Edition  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2025



## CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH STORYTELLING

For the past several years during February, The McKenzie Banner has produced a special edition featuring local Black residents and their stories.

We do this not because other stories are less important, but because many of these stories have remained untold. To be true stewards of history, we need not shy away or cherry pick the narrative, but welcome all voices to be part of the collective history. Only by doing this will we achieve harmony.

The Banner is thankful for each person who took the time to meet with us and share his or her stories. Thank

you for the dedication and sacrifices you've made in your respective career fields and in service to our country. Your impact on the world is greater than you realize. Thank you for entrusting us to tell your stories.

Additionally, we are grateful to each sponsor of this edition. Your support makes local journalism possible. Reader, please remember to shop local first. Small businesses are the backbone of America, and your support makes the difference.

It is our great honor to work with the Webb Alumni Association and its members to bring you this tribute to Black history.



Top Left, William Milam Jr. met President George W. Bush before his deployment. Bottom Left, William Milam Jr. (right) floats down the Danube River between Romania and Bulgaria with Randy McCadams of McKenzie and of Union City's 913th Engineer Company (center) and two Bulgarian soldiers and another from the 913th. Center, William Milam Jr. and wife, Ella. Top Right, William Milam Jr. en route to Baghdad. Bottom Right, William Milam Jr. (left) with fellow soldiers during minefield training.

## William Milam Jr. A Profile in Service

BY BRAD SAM  
brad@mckenziebanner.com

William Milam, Jr., better known as "Junior," has dedicated his life to service, both to community and to country. It's a trait he attributes directly to an act of kindness he experienced in the wake of a tragedy at a young age.

The lifelong Henry native was in first grade when he arrived on the bus one afternoon to find that his home had burned to the ground. The next day, when he arrived at school, his teacher, Becky Aldridge, presented him with all of the clothing he needed.

Milam also credits his parents, William Milam, Sr. and the late Betty Jean Milam, with instilling in him the values of hard work, honesty and "doing what's right when no one's looking."

Milam joined the military as a senior in high school, influenced by his vocational teacher, Staff Sgt. Lester Earl Teague of the National Guard.

He enlisted into the Paris National Guard 890th Engineer Company to begin a remarkable 21-year career, reaching the rank of Army Master Sergeant and accumulating a laundry list of accolades, including:

- Bronze Star Medal
- Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
- Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
- National Defense Service Medal
- Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal
- Distribution Management-Coalition Forces Land Component Command
- Numerous Army Commendation Medals for Outstanding Service
- Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) of the Year for the State of Tennessee 2001
- Nuclear Biological Chemical Defense - Most Outstanding Student
- Nuclear Biological Chemical School - Most Outstanding Student
- Military Engineering School - Most Outstanding Student

Milam deployed with Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom to five countries. Prior to deployment, he met President George W. Bush, who assured the Master Sergeant his hands would never be tied and he would always get the resources he needed.

Milam's orders overseas included overseeing the water and fuel supplies in five countries.

According to his Bronze Star Medal certificate, Milam oversaw the distribution of over 630 mil-

lion gallons of multi-grade bulk petroleum and 4.5 billion gallons of vital water support to over 250,000 U.S. and Coalition forces.

He recalled the monumental stress of the assignment. "The Government Accountability Office came every 30 days to go over our account books. We were spending tremendous amounts of money, and every penny I was responsible for was always accounted for." There were also briefings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff three times a week.

He says he would sometimes go three nights without sleep and lost a lot of weight.

One notable assignment he was given was personal security for a U.S. general. Milam drove the general from Point A to Point B at a blistering 125 miles per hour with another vehicle on his bumper. He recalled that the general and his staff sent gifts back home to his wife following the trip. He also recalled, "When I first got back home, I didn't drive for a week."

Another interesting exercise was training of Bulgarian soldiers. He traveled by boat down the Danube River between Romania and Bulgaria (along with Randy McCadams of McKenzie) for the assignment. "In Bulgaria," Milam said. "I think I was the first black person they had ever seen."

He said of his time overseas, "I saw a lot, more than I really wanted to see. But it was a good tour. There were a lot of good people, and everyone did their job well."

Following that deployment, Milam retired from military service, in part because his mother was in poor health. "I took care of her

for five years before she passed."

Besides his military career, Milam worked maintenance at Gaines Manufacturing for about ten years before becoming a meter reader for the West Tennessee Public Utility District. Now with the company for over 30 years, Milam is a foreman supervisor with a long list of responsibilities, including maintaining the company's Atmospheric Corrosion Program. He also oversees the youth program WTPUD hosts for part-time workers.

Since his military retirement, he and his wife of 38 years, Ella, have focused on volunteer work.

He is a member of McKenzie Rotary Club, Mary's Kids, Community Action Network and the Henry County Chamber of Commerce. He is a board member for Henry County Helping Hands and for the Henry County Airport Board and a former member of the Henry Board of Aldermen. Milam is a past chairman of Boy Scout Troop 423.

His extensive service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars includes former positions Commander for Post 4939 in McKenzie, West Tennessee Chief of Staff and, on the national level, inspector general.

Milam will be the Memorial Day speaker for the City of McKenzie this year.

Accolades for his public service record include: Modern Woodmen of America Hometown Hero, 2023 Henry County Veteran of the Year, 2024 Woodmen Life Fraternal Spirit Award and the Paris/Henry County Ministerial Alliance 2025 Martin Luther King Drum Major for Justice Award.

Accomplishments

A remarkable 21-year career, reaching the rank of Army Master Sergeant and accumulating a laundry list of accolades, including:

- Bronze Star Medal
- Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
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- Numerous Army Commendation Medals for Outstanding Service
- Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) of the Year for the State of Tennessee 2001
- Nuclear Biological Chemical Defense - Most Outstanding Student
- Nuclear Biological Chemical School - Most Outstanding Student
- Military Engineering School - Most Outstanding Student

Milam said, "It's for all of us to set a great example for the youth of our community. If you see anyone that needs help, try to help them. Always be encouraging and set a good example. One day, somebody's going to have to help you. My first grade teacher didn't have to help me, but she did. It's all about public service."

He emphatically includes Ella in the credit for the service he's been able to provide. "We're a package deal. She's always right by my side." He added, "And she did an excellent job taking care of the family while I was overseas."

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This month, we are honoring our employees of African American descent by highlighting their achievements and contributions to their communities on our Facebook page. Join us in learning, appreciating, and continuing the conversation!

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# SHARON OGLESBY *A Pioneer of Acceptance*

BY BRAD SAM  
brad@mckenziebanner.com

In the fall of 1965, desegregation began in McKenzie schools. A handful of black students in each grade were selected to transfer from Webb School to McKenzie public schools.

One of two first grade students to make the move that fall was Sharon Oglesby. The young pioneer knew little of the historic significance of her entry to McKenzie Elementary School, nor did she recognize the lifelong path of curiosity, acceptance and exploration on which she was embarking.

Oglesby told The Banner, "I remember my parents explaining that the children may receive us and they may not, but it's not based on them. It's based on what they heard at home. So I was kind of prepared, but being that young, we didn't care."

"My teacher, Caroline Blades, made it a little easier, even though it was a big adjustment."

Oglesby said she had been expecting to share a class with fellow black first grader Ruth Gilbert.

"Ruth and I were really close, we grew up together and we went in thinking we were going to be in the same class, but she was in a different class."

"It took a while, but I think some of the children were curious. They wanted to get to know us for who we were. And that kind of helped ease into 'I'm gonna like you because I really don't see color.' Because at that age, you really don't know that you're supposedly different until it's brought to your attention."

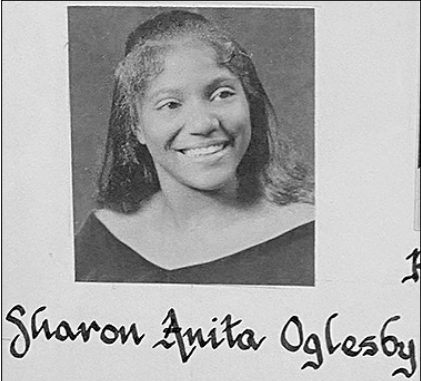
"I think my teacher had a lot to do with how we were received. I loved her. She was the best teacher. I don't know if she had prepared the students prior, but I know that the reception and the way she treated us helped the students to treat us like fellow students and not look at our color."

"The playground was always the experience, because at recess you had all of the other first grade classes, including those that didn't have a black student. That's when some of the racial slurs would come up."

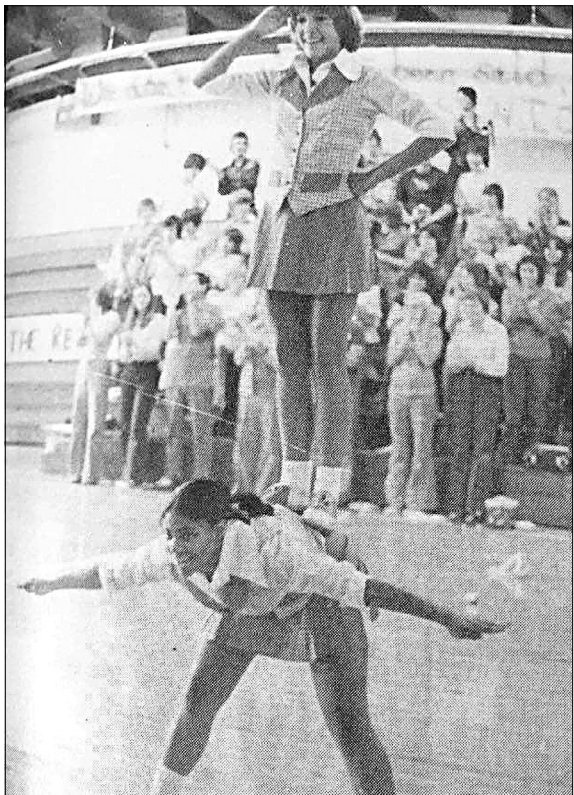
She noted, "Ruth was always defending me. She was tall," but added, "I don't recall ever being bullied to the point where I dreaded going."

"They had to find out who we really were and we had to find out who they really were and kind of put aside things that you heard, whatever was said in the home that made them think that I was just so totally different they wouldn't be able to relate to me or talk to me or play with me. It was a time of us getting to know each other for who we were, and after that it was ok."

"Now that I think back on it, it wasn't a really bad experience. I'm grateful for



Top Left, Sharon Oglesby's Kindergarten graduation photo at Webb School. Bottom Left, Sharon Oglesby's photo in the McKenzie High School Class of 1977 composite. Center, Sharon Oglesby, present day. Top Right, Sharon Oglesby holds steady for DeAnne Kirk during her cheerleading days at McKenzie High School. Bottom Right, Sharon Oglesby appeared in The Banner for winning a state speech contest. She would finish third at the national level.



it, I really am, because it taught me to see people for who they are and to accept them for who they are. They can't help it if they were born one race and I was born a different race. But we're all together, we're the same. So I enjoyed it."

"I never did understand how they selected us, but somebody had to be first. I was a baby, I didn't understand law. All I know is my mom and dad sat me down and said, 'Ok, this is what's happening.' I was looking forward to being with my Kindergarten class again. [Oglesby graduated Kindergarten at Webb School.] But I knew if my parents said it was ok, it was ok, and I knew I would be ok because they wouldn't have put me in a situation where they felt I would have been threatened or mistreated. And I cannot say that I was ever mistreated. Of course we heard the n-word because they heard it. I was never offended by it because that's not who I am. And then we got past all that and everything was fine. When I got older, I felt like I had been a guinea pig, but it was a good thing. It worked out ok."

"I think the second grade was easier, because by that time all of the other integration had happened. More students that I grew up with and was used to seeing were there. But I still had really close Caucasian friends too."

By high school, Oglesby says things had gotten gradually better. "Everybody just accepted each other, because we were able to get to know each other on a different level. You're not listening to what your parents are telling you about this person. You're actually

interacting with them on a daily basis. We couldn't help but to grow closer. It was a good experience, traumatic maybe for some, but for me it was a good experience across the board."

"The Class of '77 was a very close-knit class because of what we went through during the integration period. Getting to know each other for who we really were and figuring out it's okay to like me even though my skin is brown, and it's okay for me to like you even though your skin is lighter than mine."

She noted that in high school, she started to have black teachers. "That played an integral role in being accepted. Some of the students loved those teachers, and they respected them. When I started seeing people respecting each other and at some point even defending each other, it was like, okay, now it's not an issue of me being black and you being white, we've come together for one common cause. We're here to learn, here to make friends, here to have fun."

Oglesby was a member of the band and the chorus, and she was elected president of her freshman class.

As a senior, she became McKenzie's second black cheerleader, following in the footsteps of her brother Kenneth.

"I think it was on a dare, like 'go out and see if you make it.' I was also popular because my brother Tommy played basketball and was in the band."

She was already friends with fellow senior cheerleaders Brenda Ridley and Janet Fields. "They took me under their wings and taught me everything I needed to know."

She cheered at both football and basketball games. "Basketball was my favorite."

I loved the energy, being able to be in front of the crowd to get the student body up and cheering. Everybody was on one accord. There was no color at that point, just red and gray."

She also participated in VICA, Vocational Industrial Clubs of America. Her senior year, her teacher Richard Sanders selected her to compete in extemporaneous speaking. She won first place at the regional and state level and finished third at nationals. "He saw something in me that I didn't."

She attributes her ability to adapt and to stay grounded to her six older siblings and her parents, Alvernia and Willie Oglesby Sr. Her father was a pastor in Paris. "I think I'm a lot like my father, I just have a natural love for people. I love meeting different people and seeing people do different things."

Oglesby admits, "It was probably different for my older siblings and the other older students integrating. They probably faced more rejection than I did." But she noted, "Webb made those older students well-equipped, well-taught, well-

trained because of how Webb was structured."

After graduating, she attended Bethel College for a short time and worked at the Milan Arsenal before embarking on her next adventure.

She moved to California and lived there for ten years. "It could have been a total culture shock that would have set me back, but because of what I went through here, I eased into it with no problem. All of these people from different walks of life, and now I get to meet them and become friends with them and learn about them."

"I'm grateful because my daughter [Anetra (Williams) Hillsman] got to experience that as well. But it all started with me being the little chosen one to be the only black in the class."

She was a member of Friendship Baptist Church in Yorbalinda, the largest black church in Orange County, a county with an otherwise small black population.

"We saw black people of status. Doctors, lawyers, engineers. It was an eye-opening experience to see affluent black people and not just hear about them. It broadened my daughter's view of what you're capable of."

A revelation that opened this reporter's eyes wide was that Oglesby had the opportunity to meet civil rights icon Rosa Parks. "She came to our church, and I got to shake her hand. To meet her and see the way she carried herself, she commanded respect. She was soft-spoken but strong-willed."

While in California, Oglesby worked in customer service for the Orange County Register newspaper in Santa Anna.

After returning to McKenzie, she worked at an eclectic set of jobs, including a teacher's assistant at both McKenzie Elementary and Head Start (she also worked as a receptionist at the latter). She spent a stint in Nashville, where she took medical billing and coding courses and worked for Amerigroup.

Most recently, she worked as an office manager at a medical practice in Huntingdon, a position she recently retired from.

She serves as the associate minister at Greater Enon Baptist Church and operates a ministry called Wonderful You. Oglesby is an ordained minister and a certified Christian counselor.

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"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

— HARRIET TUBMAN



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# WILLIE OGLESBY JR. *On the Front Line of Integration*

BY BRAD SAM  
brad@mckenziebanner.com

Desegregation began in McKenzie schools in the fall of 1965 when a small number of black students in each grade were selected to transfer from Webb School to McKenzie public schools.

One such student was sophomore Willie Oglesby Jr., the oldest of the seven children of Alvernia and Willie Oglesby Sr.

Oglesby told The Banner, “When we arrived that first day, it was a different experience. The kids were outside chatting, and then everything got quiet. For the first few days, really, everybody was pretty much in shock. But we acclimated. We found out where everybody stood in life. There were difficult days. You would hear little snipes, sometimes the n-word. But you keep going.”

He recalled an incident after PE in the showers. “It got quiet, and the guys were just looking. Someone said, ‘We were told you guys had tails.’”

Oglesby felt he did have one advantage in integrating. “I had the upper hand, because my mother was a maid for Bethel President [Roy N.] Baker, so I knew more people.”

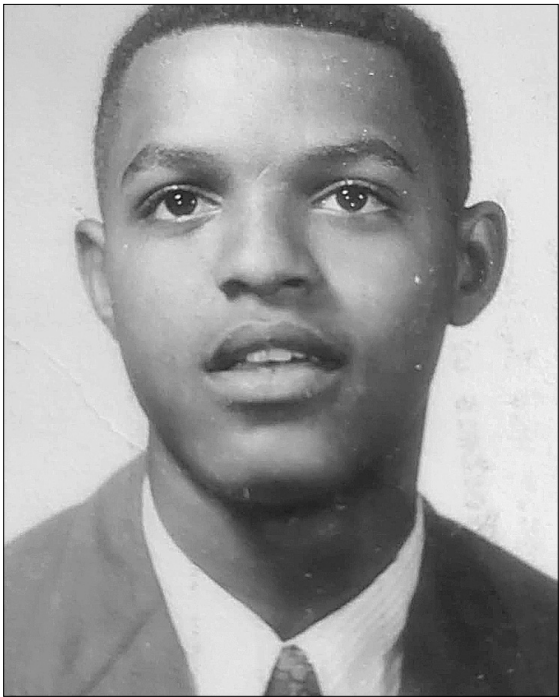
He said, “Teachers were the ones that gave a lot of support.” For one, he already knew Coach Dewey Chism as his mother had kept Chism’s kids.

“Naomi Blanche,” Oglesby said, “was the most inspirational. She was my English teacher. Some teachers wouldn’t call on you, but she did.” He also noted the support he received from teachers Barbara Boyd and James Kirk.

“I’ve always been a person who



Left, Willie Oglesby Jr., present day. Right, Willie Oglesby Jr.’s senior photo at McKenzie High School.



likes someone for who they are, and my classmates gravitated toward me. The parents had a tendency to paint a bad picture, but the kids saw for themselves and rebelled.”

“At Webb, I was always in plays. I went out for the play at MHS, but I wasn’t allowed. Then, students wanted to vote for me for sophomore class president, but the administration wouldn’t have it.”

“I was allowed to try out for the band. It was Mr. [Charles] Pruneau’s first year. I was a drummer and had been in band at Webb since sixth grade. At MHS, the music was different, and so was the atmosphere.”

His musical career would spill

out of the school halls as he played drums with local band Authority, who traveled to play gigs around the country.

At MHS, he recalled, “There were some fights, and I can remember being spit at. But I never complained to my parents.”

“My parents talked to all of us siblings. My youngest sister Sharon was going, and I wanted to go too. Webb would shut down for over a month for harvest, and MHS didn’t do that. That was the main reason I wanted to go.”

He paid a certain price for that decision. “Some people at Webb weren’t as welcoming after I went to MHS. Some thought that I thought I was better than them.”

On the contrary, Oglesby says leaving Webb was the hardest part. “I didn’t know how much I had learned there. It was the best training for the transition. I had great teachers and lots of activities. There was a rich history, and we learned black history. That stopped when I got to MHS. My parents bought us a set of black encyclopedias to continue that part of our education. So I owe a great debt of gratitude to Webb. Webb set the standard, set the tone, and MHS was the finishing product.”

When Webb closed and all of the students integrated, they would turn to Oglesby to ask about the people at MHS. With

the influx of more black students, he said there was more tension and doubt.

Then, his senior year, Martin Luther King was assassinated. “We had to learn how to navigate those waters. We learned how to be comfortable being uncomfortable. My dad told me to learn to pick my battles.”

“There were serious lessons learned about life that have taken me a long way. If I had to do it over again today, I still would have done it.”

After spending some time in Chicago, Oglesby would attend Bethel, where he met a more diverse population. He marched in the first MLK memorial in Memphis with other Bethel students.

Oglesby married Gail, a Paris native, in 1972 and worked at the carburetor plant in Paris.

It wasn’t long before the couple left McKenzie and headed west. “That little town gave me so much confidence.”

They first tried Houston, but he didn’t care for it. After visiting a brother already living in California, Willie and Gail moved to Orange County, where they have lived for over 40 years.

Willie was a social worker for the county and is now retired. He says he still works with addicts in the area. “I meet people from all walks of life. Addiction doesn’t discriminate.”

Oglesby expressed his disappointment in the slow progress and setbacks since the initial Civil Rights Movement. “It’s frustrating to be in 2025 and still dealing with these issues. I can find too many reasons to like or dislike someone that doesn’t have anything to do with color.”

# Tara Tansil-Gentry *Hall of Famer, Coach, Educator*

BY JOEL LANCASTER  
jlanaster@mckenziebanner.com

Tara Tansil-Gentry has built a life of excellence on the court, in the classroom, and within the community. From a standout basketball career to shaping future educators at the University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM), her journey is one of dedication, adaptability, and a deep-rooted passion for service.

Originally from Greenfield, Tara left her mark in West Tennessee basketball history, earning jersey retirements at both Greenfield High School and UTM. She was later inducted into the UT Martin Hall of Fame and was part of the inaugural class for the Weakley County Sports Hall of Fame.

Her contributions to basketball were further recognized in 2022 when she was named an Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) Basketball Legend. She was honored alongside notable figures such as NBA star Ja Morant, Terry Taylor, and Darby Maggard. As part of the OVC Basketball Legends Class of 2022, she was celebrated during the league’s championship tournament with video board recognition, PA announcements, and a game program feature story. Tara became the seventh Skyhawk representative to receive this prestigious recognition.

“Basketball opened so many doors for me,” she said. “It gave me opportunities, friendships, and experiences that shaped who I am today.”

After years of success as a player, she transitioned seamlessly into coaching, first as an assistant and later as head coach at UTM. During her collegiate career from 1991-95, she started all 105 games, earning three All-OVC selections. By the time she finished playing, she held records in 13 statistical categories and remains the only UT Martin women’s player to accumulate at least 1,700 points, 650 rebounds, 400 assists, and 250 steals. In January 1996, her No. 24 jersey was retired at the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center, and she was inducted into the UT Martin Athletics Hall of Fame in 2000.

But as much as she loved the game, a shift was coming.

“I was living out of a suitcase,” she said. “Recruiting, traveling, scouting—it never slowed down. I went to school to teach, and I wanted to get back to that.”

In 2009, she left coaching and fully embraced academia, bringing the same discipline and leadership she honed in sports to her role as a lecturer.

Now in her 30th year at UTM, Tara teaches courses in health and human performance, including sports psychology, coaching theories, and first aid certification. She mentors students pursuing careers in physical education, athletic training, public health, and sports administration.

“I tell my students all the time, ‘You don’t have to be the best athlete to be a great coach. You have to know people, understand how they think, and build trust.’ That’s true whether you’re coaching, teaching, or leading in any field.”

She also helps develop future coaches



by immersing them in real-world decision-making scenarios, from budgeting for equipment to analyzing game strategies and managing teams.

“They learn what it means to really run a program,” she said. “It’s more than X’s and O’s. It’s about handling people, expectations, and challenges.”

Her influence extends beyond the university. She serves as an assistant coach for Greenfield’s girls’ basketball team, balancing her teaching schedule with practices and games.

“I love watching that transition,” she said. “Seeing students go from freshmen just figuring things out to confident seniors ready to take on the world never gets old.”

Her impact doesn’t stop at sports and education. Tara is deeply involved in the community, serving on multiple boards, including the Friends of Weakley County Training School, where she helps preserve the legacy of a historic Black school in Martin. She also sits on the hospital foundation board and participates in service organizations that focus on health and education initiatives.

“I’ve always believed in giving back,” she said. “So many people poured into me when I was young. It’s only right to do the same for others.”

Though her career has evolved, Tara still finds herself drawn to technology. With a doctorate in educational technology, she has become the go-to person in her department for troubleshooting classroom tech issues.

“I’m kind of a geek,” she admitted with a laugh. “If something isn’t working, people call me before they call IT.”

Even with her packed schedule, she remains committed to her students and athletes. As Greenfield prepares for district tournaments, she is already thinking ahead, planning coursework for students in case the team makes another deep postseason run.

Through it all, her passion remains the same: helping others grow, learn, and succeed.

# Rosa Parks: Civil Rights Icon

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus. This act of defiance sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movement.

Born February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama, Parks grew up experiencing racial discrimination in the segregated South. She attended Alabama State Teachers College until her grandmother’s illness

forced her to withdraw.

At 19, she married Raymond Parks, a barber and civil rights activist. Together, they worked with various social justice organizations. Rosa eventually became secretary of the Montgomery NAACP chapter.

By 1955, Parks was an established civil rights organizer. Contrary to popular belief, she didn’t refuse to move because she was tired. As she later explained: “The only tired I

was, was tired of giving in.”

Her arrest led to the 381-day Montgomery Bus Boycott, which ended segregation on public transportation. However, Parks lost her job for participating.

She later moved to Detroit, continuing her civil rights work until her death on October 24, 2005, at age 92, leaving behind a powerful legacy of resistance against racial injustice.

Source: National Women’s History Museum

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# The Lasting Legacy of Daisy Nolen Dudley

Daisy Nolen Dudley, a 1957 graduate of Webb High School, has left an indelible mark on the McKenzie community through her decades of service as an educator. Recently honored at a ceremony marking Webb School's addition to the National Register of Historic Places in 2024, Dudley's career reflects a lifelong devotion to teaching, mentorship, and community leadership.

Dudley's journey into education was set in motion during her childhood. Every week, she traveled with her aunt from McKenzie to Yuma, where she was immersed in the environment of a one-room schoolhouse. It was in this setting that her passion for teaching first ignited.

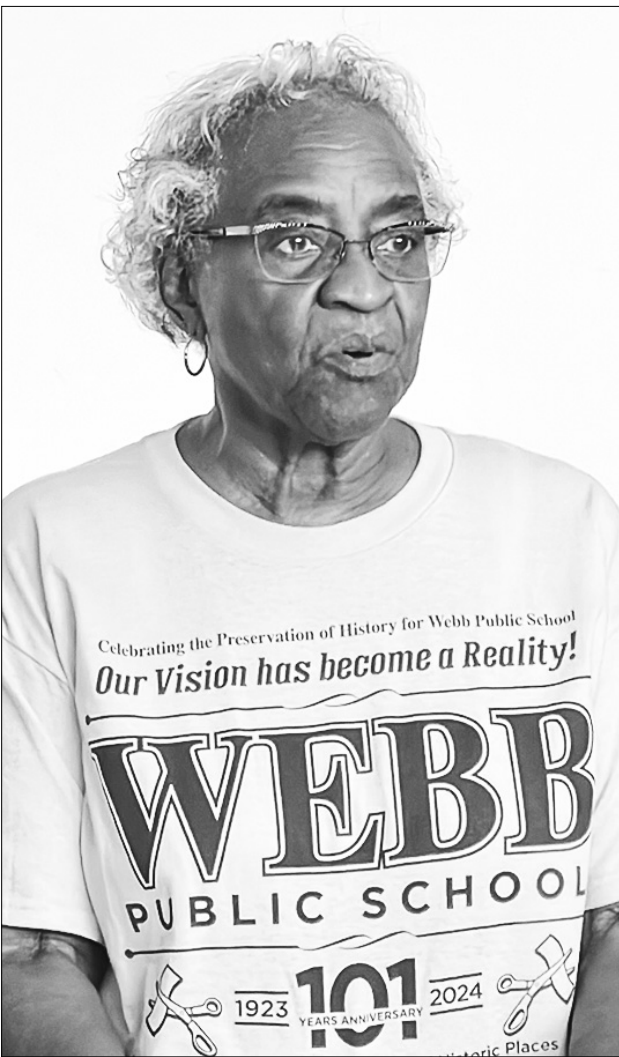
"I have always wanted to be a teacher," she shared, reflecting on the profound influence of those formative years.

Her early experiences in the classroom with her aunt, who taught all subjects, left a lasting impression on her.

"I would leave with her on Sunday and come back on Friday," she recalled. "I cherished being in that space with other children, learning and observing."

Raised in a family that valued perseverance, Dudley's parents set strong examples. Her mother worked for many years as a cook at Bethel College before transitioning to social services, while her father, a butcher by trade, later became a long-haul truck driver.

Education was highly



valued in the Nolen household, and Daisy followed her siblings' footsteps to Webb School. There, she learned the importance of excellence, instilled by teachers who demanded the best from their students.

"All the teachers expected the best from us," she said, a sentiment that would guide her own teaching career.

"I remember asking my students, 'Is that your best?' If it was, then that's it."

Upon graduating from

Webb High School, Dudley pursued an education degree at Lane College in Jackson, Tenn., earning her degree in 1961.

Her teaching career began at MTA in Atwood, where she taught third grade. MTA was the result of a consolidation of three local Black schools, serving children from McMoresville, Trezevant, and Atwood.

Two years later, she returned to Webb School in

McKenzie, where she taught first and second grades until 1966, when integration began. She then transitioned to Huntingdon Elementary, later moving to Huntingdon Primary, where she continued her work until her retirement in 2001.

Dudley's teaching philosophy was shaped by a belief that personal experience plays a central role in learning.

"Children learn what they live," she noted, emphasizing that the challenges and triumphs in students' lives influence how they engage with their education.

As a teacher, she recognized the importance of mentorship in shaping students' academic and personal growth.

"Sometimes, you can re-route their thinking in a way that encourages learning," she explained.

This belief fostered deep connections with her students, many of whom confided in her about their struggles.

"Children are honest," she said. "They will tell you what has been said and what's been done. I always felt happy that they were comfortable enough with me to share those things in their home lives."

Throughout her career, Dudley found strength in the encouragement of her own mother. When she faced challenges with students who seemed difficult to reach, her mother's support was a constant source of motivation.

"I would come home and share with her things about some kids I wasn't getting through to or who were

acting rebellious," Dudley recalled. "She would always encourage me to keep trying to reach them, and I always did."

Dudley also recalls that, while Webb taught her the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, it was the life lessons that stuck with her.

"We learned how to live," she said, emphasizing that her teachers at Webb provided not only academic instruction but also guidance that shaped her worldview and teaching style.

In particular, Miss Sarah Bowden and Miss Seets had a profound impact on her, providing not only knowledge but also wisdom that guided her throughout her life.

"They gave us life lessons that I carry with me today," Dudley noted. "Those are the things I try to pass on to my students."

In 1963, Dudley married Robert Dudley, whom she met at school. Robert, originally from Trezevant, moved to McKenzie at age 12.

Together, they have one son, Duvonn, and celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in October 2024.

Outside of her classroom work, Dudley has been deeply involved in the Webb Alumni Association since its founding in 1969. She served as national treasurer and contributed to various finance committees over the years.

Her dedication to the organization reflects her long-standing commitment to Webb School.

"Whatever needed doing, I did," she said, underscor-

ing her readiness to serve wherever necessary.

Her involvement was not just about maintaining connections to her alma mater, but also about preserving and strengthening the legacy of Webb School.

"The pride we Webbits feel for Webb is what I hope others come to know about us," she said.

To her, Webb School is not just an educational institution; it is a symbol of shared history, tradition, and pride.

As Dudley looks to the future, she is confident that the legacy of Webb School will continue.

"Webb meant a lot to those who came before us," she said, noting that even among alumni who did not personally attend the school, the connection to its history remains strong.

"Even though they didn't attend Webb themselves, those whose families did are doing a great job continuing the tradition and purpose of the group," she remarked.

Dudley is certain that the alumni community will ensure that the traditions and values of Webb School live on for generations to come.

Daisy Nolen Dudley's contributions to education, mentorship, and the Webb community are a testament to her commitment to service.

Her work continues to impact the lives of students and fellow alumni, and her legacy will undoubtedly shape the future of Webb School for years to come.

## REMEMBERING DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

# 'I Have A Dream' Speech

MARCH ON WASHINGTON – AUGUST 28, 1963 – ABRIDGED

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

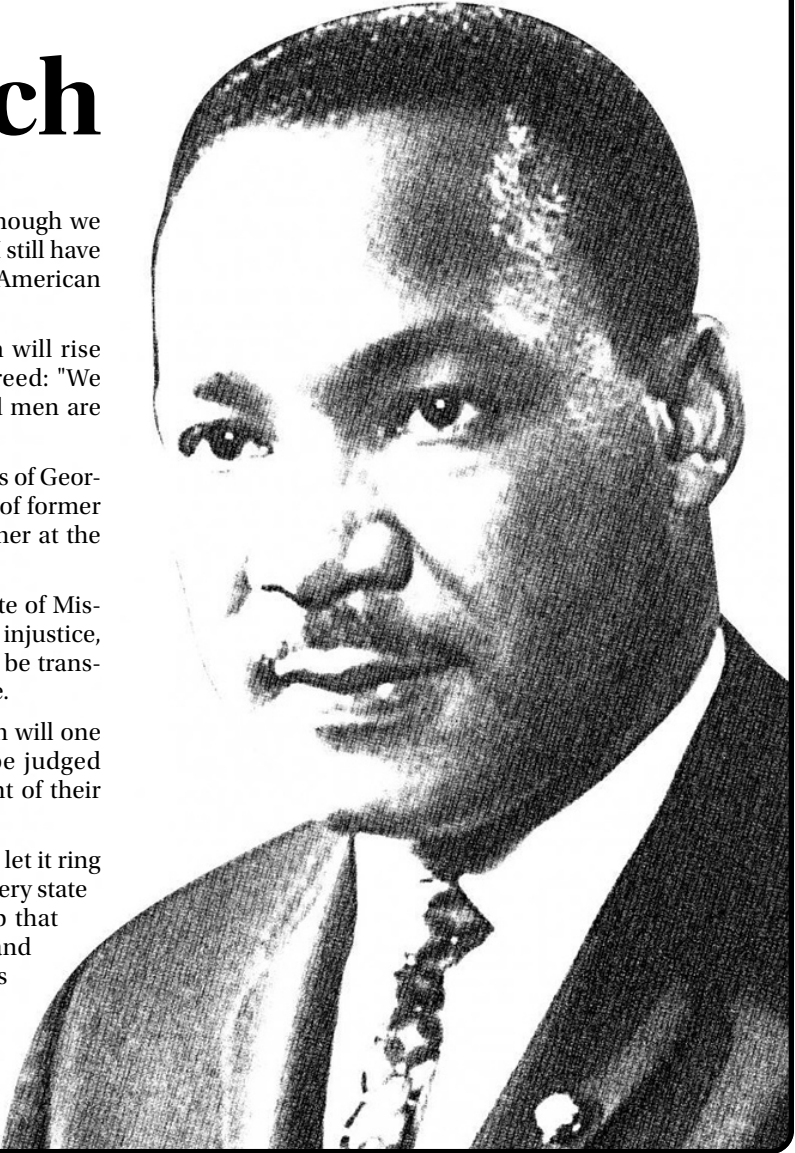
I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"



"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die,  
life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly."

Langston Hughes

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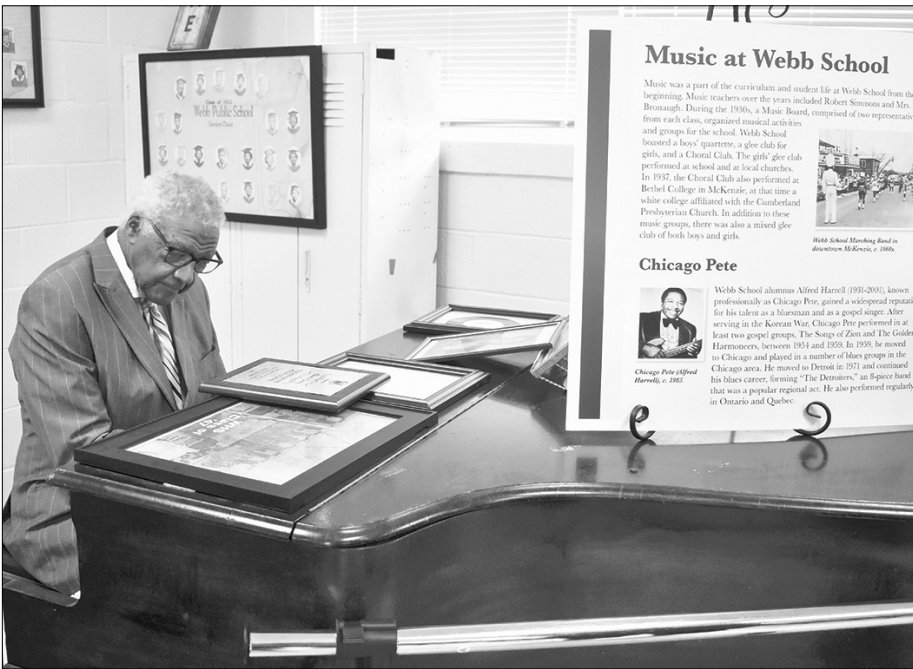
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Above, Kim Bell Webb presents a plaque to Charlie Scates, former educator at Webb School. Below, Charlie Scates plays the Webb Alma Mater on a piano in the Webb museum.



# Charlie Scates

## A Teacher's Impact, A School's History

Charles "Charlie" Scates has dedicated much of his life to education, both as a student and as a teacher. A native of Trezevant, he attended Webb High School, graduating in 1959. He continued his studies at Tennessee State University, earning his degree in English with distinction in 1963. His passion for education led him back to his alma mater, where he spent three years teaching before moving on to a long career in the Shelby County School System in Memphis.

Scates was honored for his contributions to Webb School during a ceremony on July 20, 2024. The event marked the school's placement on the National Register of Historic Places, a testament to its lasting impact. It also featured his inclusion on the newly established Teacher's Wall, a tribute to the educators who shaped generations of students.

Reflecting on his time at Webb, Scates recalls a school environment built on discipline and high expectations. "I went to high school at a time when discipline was one of the most important things in school. And believe me, we had that here," he said. "We had a wonderful time. Students

were always in line, and they prepared us well for college, a career, or the future."

"The education we received was second to none. Our teachers cared about us and made sure we were prepared for whatever came next," he said. Scates credits Webb's rigorous academics and emphasis on respect for much of his later success.

After earning his degree, Scates returned to Webb High School as a teacher, where he embraced the opportunity to give back to the institution that shaped him. "It was one of the best experiences that I've ever had," he said. "It was at a time when teaching was easy because there was so much discipline."

"We were working at a time when students were getting more opportunities to go into different aspects of society. Webb did a wonderful job preparing students for the future." During his tenure, Scates witnessed a period of great transition, as students began accessing broader opportunities in education and employment. "The discipline and values instilled in us at Webb gave students confidence to succeed beyond our small town," he noted.

Although Scates has not been heavily involved with the Webb Alumni

Association, he acknowledges the importance of their work. "They are doing a great job," he said. "It's interesting to know that so many years have passed since the school closed, and the organization is still functioning. That is something to be proud of."

"The fact that people are still dedicated to honoring the legacy of Webb speaks volumes about what this school meant to its students," he said. Throughout his life, Scates has remained a firm believer in Webb's legacy of discipline, academic excellence, and life preparation.

"Almost everyone knows that Webb had a lot to do with the success of its students," he said. "Going way back to the 1940s and 1950s, Webb prepared students in discipline, academics, and understanding what life is really about. Those of us who graduated from Webb are proud to say we attended this school."

"It was a great place for me," he said. "And I am proud to tell everyone that I graduated from Webb High School."

"The friendships, the discipline, and the education we received made us who we are today," he said. "It's something that stays with you forever."

# James Hunt

## Carrying the Spirit of Webb High School

James Hunt grew up knowing that success meant hard work. At Webb High School, that belief was reinforced daily—by strict teachers, high expectations, and the understanding that nothing would come easy.

When he graduated in 1960, he left with more than a diploma. He took with him a determination to push forward, whether in his career, his military service, or his life-long commitment to his community.

"We entered Webb to learn, and we left Webb to serve," Hunt said.

During his years at Webb, Hunt was deeply influenced by his teachers, particularly Mr. T.A. Walford, a history teacher and former Marine.

"He was a very, very, very strict man, but he taught me a lot," Hunt recalled. "I learned not just from the books but also about life and how to live it."

At a time when society was still segregated, Webb's teachers instilled in students a determination to succeed.

"They taught us not to let that affect us in any kind of way," Hunt said. "They also taught us that we had to be better than the next person. We had to study harder."

Academics at Webb emphasized reading, writing, and arithmetic as the foundation for future success. Hunt took these lessons to heart, excelling both in and out of the classroom. He was elected class president in his sophomore, junior, and senior years and served as president of the student body during his final two years. He was also a member of Webb's basketball team, which had a strong showing in his last two seasons.

After graduating, Hunt pursued his longtime dream of moving to Los Angeles, California. He had saved money beforehand, allowing him to support himself as he settled into a new city.

While exploring his neighborhood, he came across a large supermarket and noticed young men working as baggers.

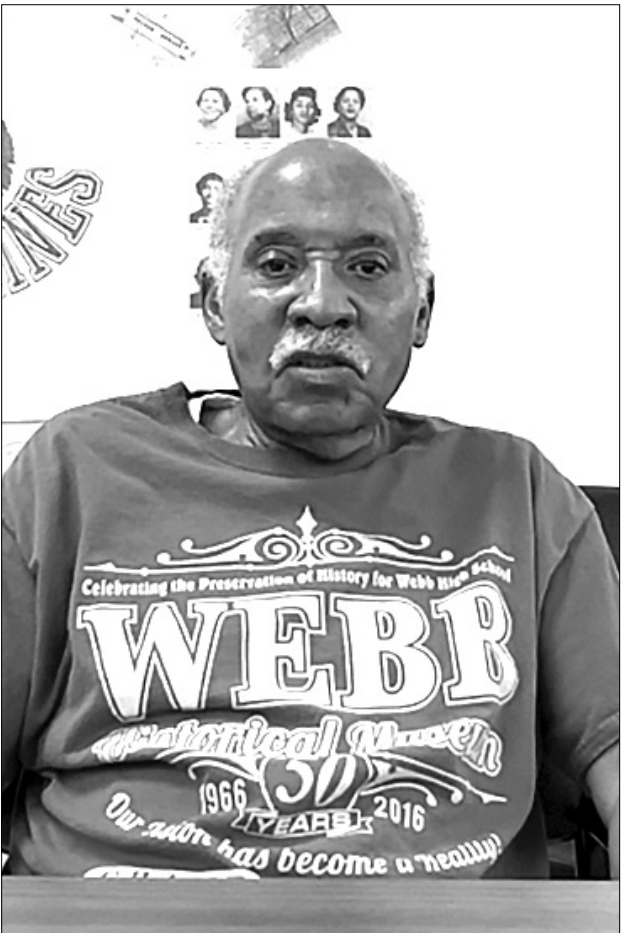
"I walked up there one day and asked if they needed any help," Hunt said. "One of them told me if I put in an application, I could probably get hired."

That moment led to what became a 23-year career with Country Farms Market, a chain of grocery stores. Hunt started as a bagger in 1966 and worked his way up, eventually becoming a supervisor overseeing multiple stores before leaving the company in 1986.

Hunt's career path was briefly interrupted by the Vietnam War, but his military service took him to Germany rather than Vietnam.

"I was in the military from 1966, and that was during the Vietnam War," he said. "But they sent me to Germany for two years."

After completing his service, he returned to Country Farms Market and continued working there until the late 1980s.



In 1991, Hunt moved back to Huntingdon, where he began working with adults who have mental disabilities. He remained in that role for 15 years, continuing his lifelong dedication to helping others.

Hunt also rejoined his home church, New Reedy Creek Baptist Church, where he took on a new mission—bringing more children into the congregation.

"We didn't have many young kids coming to church at that time," Hunt said. "So I talked to the deacons and the pastor about getting a church van."

With their support, he began driving a church van to pick up children from Huntingdon, Hollow Rock, Bruceton, and other nearby towns.

"To this day, I still do that," he said. "I am 82 years old, and I still drive that bus every Sunday and some Wednesdays, taking kids to

church. It has been a true blessing."

Through every chapter of his life, Hunt credits Webb High School for the success he achieved.

"I attribute all of my success to being a young man out of Webb High School," he said. "They taught more than book sense. They taught us how to be young men. They taught us how to work for whatever we wanted."

His love for Webb remains strong, and to show his appreciation, Hunt ended his conversation with a verse from the Webb High School alma mater:

"Oh, Webb, we lift our voice... We love thee, Webb, we love thee, Webb... God bless the blue and gold."

Hunt continues to carry forward the values Webb instilled in him—hard work, leadership, and service to others.

*"In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute."*

— Thurgood Marshall

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# Kim Bell Webb

## A Lifetime of Serving Others

Service is second nature to Kim Bell Webb. Whether providing school supplies for children, delivering Thanksgiving meals to families in need, or organizing breast cancer awareness events, her work in the community is constant. She sees Webb School as a symbol of discipline, purpose, and commitment to others—values that align with her life's mission. Today, as a leader in multiple community initiatives, Webb continues to inspire her work.

Bell Webb's dedication to service is deeply personal, rooted in the strength of the women who raised her. "I come from a long line of strong women—my mother, my grandmother, and my aunt," she said. "They taught me about serving and being a servant." That foundation of resilience, faith, and determination has guided her throughout her life.

Her parents, she says, have been an anchor—a constant source of strength and inspiration. "My parents and family have always instilled in me and my brothers the importance of hard work, compassion, love, and integrity," she said. "Those values are what I've built my life on."

Her faith remains a cornerstone of that strength, captured in one of her favorite scriptures: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." – Philippians 4:13

Through her annual back-to-school program, children receive clothes, shoes, and supplies to start the year with confidence. What started as a small effort has grown significantly, with local businesses and volunteers stepping up to assist.



On February 16, 2025, Kim Bell Webb was a recipient of the 2024 Governor's Volunteer Stars Award.

"I don't put names out there. Some people don't want others knowing they're struggling," Bell Webb said. "They trust me, and I take that trust seriously."

Thanksgiving provides another opportunity to support those in need. Each year, she organizes meal deliveries for elderly and disabled residents, partnering with ministries to distribute hundreds of meal bags. At Christmas, she ensures families who have faced hardship, such as house fires or job losses, have what they need to celebrate.

"It's about making sure people know they're not alone," she said. "The community supported me when I needed it most, and I want to do the same for others."

Her dedication to service is deeply personal. In 1992, her daughter was diagnosed with leukemia, beginning a years-long battle that included remission, relapse, and a bone marrow transplant. Throughout it all,

the McKenzie community rallied around her family.

"The love and support we received—it kept us going," she said. "I'll never forget that, and that's why I do what I do."

Beyond individual outreach, Bell Webb plays a leading role in health awareness initiatives, particularly for breast cancer. Inspired by family members who have battled the disease, she helped establish the Pink Ball at Webb, an event that honors survivors and remembers those lost. Now in its third year, it has become a meaningful tradition.

She has also been active in Relay for Life, assisting communities in launching their own events. Her efforts in cancer awareness and advocacy have reached individuals throughout the region, bringing vital attention to early detection and support resources.

Though Webb School is no longer an active institution, its spirit lives



on through the work of its alumni. In her role as Financial Secretary and Marketing Director for the Webb Alumni Association, Inc., Bell Webb not only ensures that the school's name remains visible in the community but also continues to garner recognition for her volunteer efforts. On February 16, 2025, she was honored with the Governor Star Award for Volunteer of the Year in Carroll County—a distinction captured in the featured photos.

"Webb was a predominantly Black school, but everybody used it," she said. "I wish more people would come together to celebrate its history and impact."

Upcoming events, including the General Assembly in April and the Labor Day homecoming, continue to bring alumni and supporters together to celebrate Webb's lasting influence. These gatherings not only honor the past but also keep the connections between former students strong.

She emphasizes that while Webb was historically significant, its role should not remain confined to the past. The community today can still benefit from the values it upheld.

Through every stage of her life, Bell Webb has embodied the values Webb represents—service, leadership, and the belief that no one should be left behind. Whether through education, healthcare advocacy, or simply lending a helping hand, her work is a reminder that community isn't just about where you live—it's about how you serve.

"My favorite scripture is 1 Corinthians 13—the chapter about love," she said. "I have a heart for serving, and I want people to know there are still those who care."

She has worked for Community Health Systems since 1990, previously serving as marketing director, business office director, and patient access director at McKenzie Hospital until its closure in 2018. Since then,

she has continued working at the corporate level, advocating for healthcare access and patient support.

Webb Alumni Association, Inc. members, alongside Bell Webb, continue working toward strengthening their outreach and honoring the school's legacy. Her hope is that in time, more people will recognize the importance of preserving the school's history and ensuring its contributions to education and the community are never forgotten.

"I wish we could come together as one," she said. "We do it for class reunions—we should do it for Webb. Seeing all the classes reunite is such a powerful moment. The community can still rally around Webb and what it stands for."

With decades of service behind her and no signs of slowing down, Kim Bell Webb continues to ensure that Webb School's legacy is remembered and carried forward.

# John D. Williams

## A Life Shaped by Webb High School

When John D. Williams looks back on his years at Webb High School, he doesn't just think about textbooks and lessons. He remembers the guidance, discipline, and sense of purpose that shaped his future.

Graduating in 1965 as part of a class of 52 students, Williams carried those lessons into a career that spanned decades. Though he never attended college, he found success in the workforce, crediting Webb for instilling the skills and confidence that helped him move forward.

"Not all of us had that opportunity," Williams said.

"But the education we received at Webb gave us the tools to handle whatever came our way."

After graduation, Williams took a job with Nichols Construction Company, but it wasn't the right fit. He explored other opportunities before enlisting in the U.S. Air Force, where he served for four years. When he returned home to Huntingdon, a new opportunity awaited him.

A local aluminum company, RJR Archer, had recently opened. Williams started as a packer, preparing materials for shipment. Over time, his attention to detail and strong work ethic led to promotions.

"After learning that job, I was asked to become a lab technician," Williams recalled. "Then I became a final inspector—the last person to approve all material before it left the plant."

His leadership skills didn't go unnoticed. Williams was promoted to supervisor in the finishing department, managing an entire shift. Later, as the company expanded, he stepped into the role of superintendent, overseeing operations.

"When management expanded, I became superintendent of the finishing department," he said. "I worked for 33 years and retired in 2002 as the startup coordinator for a new plant."



Retirement didn't slow Williams down. He transitioned into ministry, becoming

the pastor of Timberlake Grove Baptist Church in Wildersville, Tenn. In this

role, he continues guiding and mentoring others, just as he did throughout his career.

"Webb prepared me to do all of these things," Williams said. "I didn't have the chance to go to college, but everything worked out. God has given me the opportunity to sit down and say something about Webb High School, and I'm grateful for that."

Williams emphasizes that Webb's teachers instilled more than just academics—they prepared students for real-world challenges.

"I learned how to talk to people, how to treat people," he said. "That gave me opportunities I probably wouldn't have had otherwise."

Decades later, his gratitude remains unchanged.

"With that, I say thank you to Webb High School," he said. "And thank you to the staff who shaped my life."

### CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

We take time to honor the pioneers who fought for freedom and civil rights, so that future generations of African Americans could become the leaders we see today. We remember their struggle and sacrifice, and we honor their achievements.

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# Ike Gilbert *Preserving the History of Webb School*

For decades, Ike Gilbert has worked to ensure that the legacy of Webb School remains alive. As a leader in the Webb School Alumni Association, he has dedicated himself to preserving the memory of the historic Black school in McKenzie. More than half a century after its closure, Webb School's impact continues to resonate, thanks to his unwavering commitment to education, community, and history.

### A Lifelong Connection to Webb School

For Gilbert, Webb School is more than a historical institution—it is a vital part of his identity. Growing up in McKenzie, he witnessed firsthand the role the school played in educating Black students at a time when opportunities were scarce. “The teachers at Webb weren’t just teaching,” Gilbert said. “They were preparing us for life.”

Webb School provided education for Black students when segregation severely limited opportunities. The school became a cornerstone of the community, producing generations of teachers, business leaders, and professionals. Though it closed in 1966, its alumni have never let its memory fade.

Gilbert has made it his mission to ensure the school’s story is not forgotten. Walking through its halls, he points out original photographs and artifacts, each carrying a piece of history. “This isn’t just a building,” he said. “It represents everything we fought for.”

### Preserving History and Overcoming Challenges

The Webb School Alumni Association has worked tirelessly to maintain the school’s historical significance. The building, filled with original photographs and artifacts, stands as a testament to the school’s lasting impact. However, preserving the site has been no small task.

“We bought the school and 30 acres for \$95,000,” Gilbert explained. “Now it’s worth nearly \$4 million. But that also means our insurance and upkeep costs have skyrocketed.”

The alumni association has relied on grants, community fundraising, and private donations to cover maintenance expenses. Recently, they secured a \$50,000 grant to help with restoration efforts, including repairs to the front entrance and auditorium.

Webb School’s aging alumni are still working to preserve what they can. Gilbert, alongside Neil Williamson, a former president of the association, meets every Tuesday to go over school affairs, discussing repairs, fundraising, and alumni outreach. The need for funding is constant, with recent projects including replacing damaged flooring, maintaining the fire suppression system, and making structural repairs to the auditorium.



Williamson, who served as president for eight years, emphasized the challenge of sustaining the school’s upkeep. “Every time we fix one thing, there’s another issue to deal with,” he said. “But we won’t stop. This place matters.”

The building itself tells a story of resilience. The auditorium, once a central gathering place, now requires extensive maintenance, including a costly fire suppression system upgrade. The library has been converted into a conference room, a necessary adaptation for the association’s meetings. Structural repairs continue to be an ongoing concern, with the group balancing financial constraints and historical preservation.

Over the years, the school has faced not just physical deterioration but also historical erasure. Fires destroyed portions of the school’s early records, and when the school closed, much of its furniture and materials were either discarded or destroyed. Gilbert and other alumni have worked to recover lost pieces of history, including the school’s original cornerstone, which was found buried in a nearby field.

“Finding that stone was like finding a piece of our past,” Gilbert said. “It’s proof that this school stood strong.”

### Investing in the Next Generation

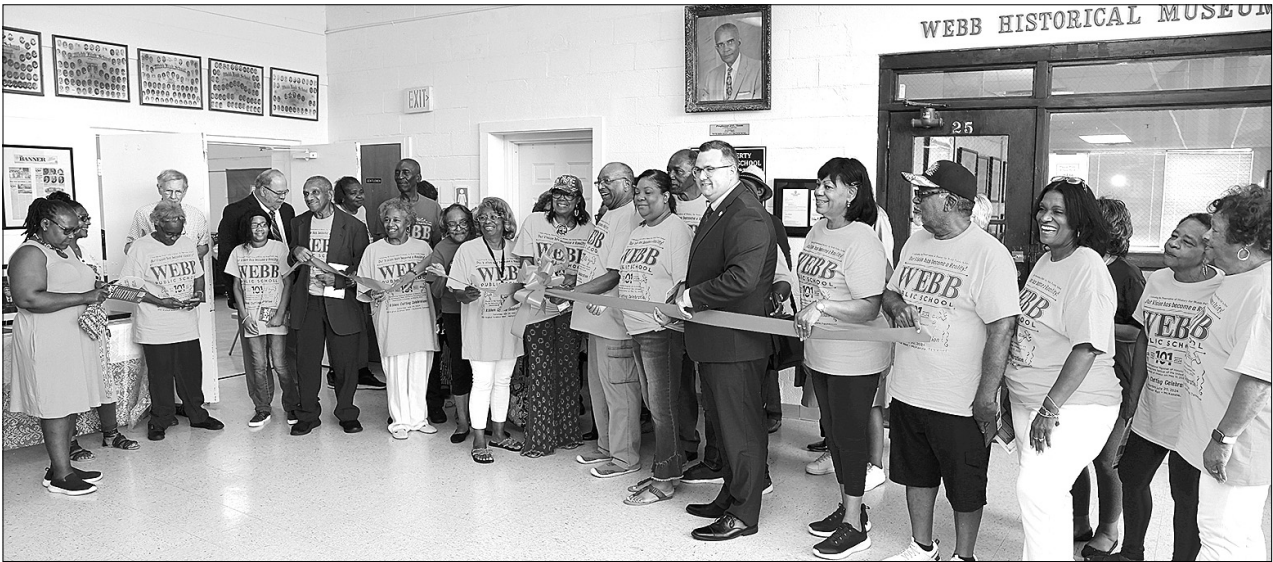
Beyond maintaining the physical structure, the alumni association remains committed to investing in future generations. They continue to award scholarships each year, reinforcing the school’s long-standing mission of education and empowerment. The alumni have also discussed shifting their annual gatherings, which have traditionally taken place twice a year, to a single large event to ease logistical and financial burdens.

“We’re still giving back,” Gilbert said. “That’s what Webb School was all about—building a future.”

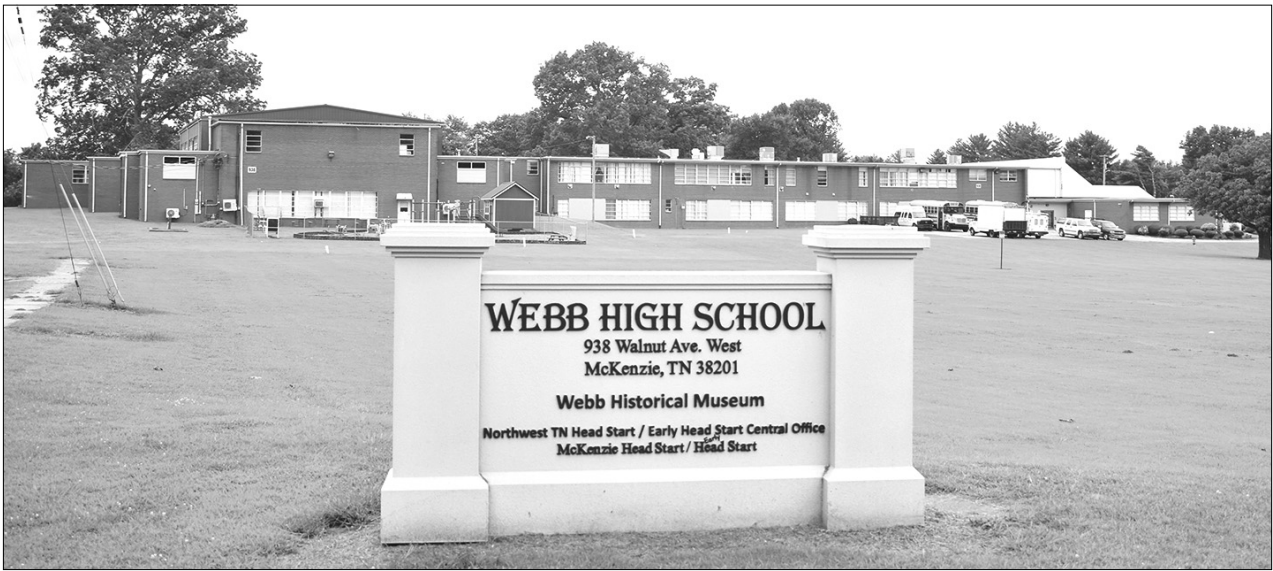
However, sustaining these efforts requires new leadership. Many alumni association members, including Gilbert and Williamson, are now in their seventies and eighties. Finding younger individuals to carry on their work has been a challenge.

“We need younger people to get involved,” Gilbert said. “This history belongs to them, too.”

Webb School’s General Assembly, an annual event, has long been a pillar of alumni engagement. This year, the gathering will be held in Jackson on April 27, drawing attendees from across the country. The event serves as both a reunion and a strategy ses-



Top Left, Webb Alumni Association's logo with the Wolverine mascot. Top, A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on Saturday, July 20, 2024 to commemorate Webb School's placement on the National Register of Historic Places. Above, The entrance to Webb School. Below, The sign for Webb High School located at the corner of Walnut Ave and Park Street in McKenzie. Bottom, Mary Luter Jordan unveils the plaque signifying Webb School's placement on the National Register of Historic Places.



sion, determining the future of the association’s work.

The alumni also continue to push for historical recognition. The school is already on the state’s historical registry, and efforts are underway to expand its recognition through additional preservation grants. “We’ve got to protect what’s here,” Gilbert said. “Once history is gone, you can’t bring it back.”

### Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future

Webb School’s legacy is one of resilience, perseverance, and progress. For Gilbert, the work he does is not just about preserving a building—it’s about ensuring that future generations understand the school’s role in shaping lives.

As part of ongoing efforts to bring more attention to Webb School’s history, the



association is expanding outreach efforts to local schools and community organizations. They are working to bring in more visitors and ensure that Webb School is remembered not

just by those who attended, but by those who benefit from its lasting influence.

“We have to tell this story,” Gilbert said. “Because if we don’t, who will?”

Thanks to his efforts,

Webb School’s history will not be forgotten. Through restoration, scholarships, and community engagement, Gilbert continues to honor the past while inspiring the future.

## ALMA MATER

Oh, while we meet let our voices now ring,  
We love thee Webb, we love thee Webb.  
God bless the Blue and Gold while we sing,  
We love thee Webb, we love thee Webb.

We will so live that for thee we can be.  
A torch to burn for all men to see.  
You'll always stand for true loyalty,  
We love thee Webb, we love thee Webb.

Dearly we love thee wherever we meet,  
We love thee Webb, we love thee Webb.  
We'll always meet with a hello to greet,  
We love thee Webb, we love thee Webb.

Our school day memories will linger on,  
'Til that great day with our books we will roam.  
Let us remember the vows that we made  
To dear Ole Webb, to dear Ole Webb.

### REYNOLDS AND SNEED



Dorothy Dorris Reynolds Woodard and Louise Sneed are credited with writing Webb School's Alma Mater.



# Karlene Brown

## From Champion on the Field To Champion in Her Field

BY BRAD SAM  
brad@mckenziebanner.com

The melting pot that is America offers opportunities to those willing to seize them, but sometimes, what America gets out of the exchange is even more valuable.

Such is the case with Jamaican native, Bethel athletic standout and McKenzie educator and coach Karlene (Ellis) Brown.

Brown was born in St. Catherine, Jamaica, the fourth of seven siblings.

She told The Banner, “Where I grew up, it was in the country, and we were poor. My mom [Gloria Ellis] was the driving force for me. She didn’t have an education, but she pushed for it. She was a domestic helper. I had no lunch money, but I had taxi fare to get to school. In high school, my coach made sure I had lunch and something else to eat after training.”

She attended primary school at Simon All Age and then attended St. Jago High School. She ran track and was a member of the first team from her school to win the national championship in 1998.

She then began to play soccer under Coach Donald Cleary, in which she also won a championship. Brown was a two-year captain of the team.

After graduating in 2000, she attended pre-university, or sixth-form.

She was awarded a scholarship to an American university in 2002 but was denied a visa.

For a time, she worked for the non-profit Children First, an organization for poor children led by Jamaican actress Claudette Pious.

In 2003, Brown received a scholarship to Bethel College and played soccer and ran track from 2003-7. Recruited two years prior by Lady Wildcat Soccer Coach Brian Delong, who departed in the meantime, she was coached by Misty Aird and Melvin Delong, brother of Brian. Her track coach was Matt Aird, husband of Misty.

She told The Banner, “It was difficult coming. The transition was hard. I wasn’t producing at first, but then it clicked.”

Brown was a four-year starter and part of the first Lady Wildcat soccer team to advance to nationals, which they did three years from 2003-5. She was a captain for two years.

Brown was the first in her family to graduate high school and furthermore to graduate college, earn a Masters and a Masters plus 30.

After graduating from Bethel, Brown worked at the now-defunct Carroll County Special Learning Center for eight or nine years. While there, she established the Carroll County Special Olympics.

After the learning center’s closure, she came to McKenzie, where she currently



Left, Karlene Brown. Right, Karlene with her children (L to R): twin daughters Amina and Amelia and son Lamarr.

teaches Special Education at the middle school and coaches both the boys and girls McKenzie High School soccer teams alongside Jeremy Bilger.

Brown has been an American citizen since 2012, having come on a student visa, then completing the green card process before finally earning full citizenship.

She said, “The process was expensive and difficult, but it represented an opportunity to provide better for my family, to give my children more opportunities growing up.”

She continued, “A lot of people think that people come here and depend on the government, but that’s not the truth. If you don’t have a green card, you’re not able to get help. If you have a green card, it doesn’t matter how you got it, you have to have it for three years to apply for citizenship. And if you have a green card and get assistance, you can’t earn citizenship. And you have to pay for the process the whole way through.”

She spoke about some of the differences in Jamaica and the U.S., noting first that the climate and food are “totally different.” She noted that most in Jamaica cook at home on Sunday, while Americans tend to eat out. She added that church on Saturday is much more common in Jamaica.

She said, “There’s more opportunity here to work and grow. In Jamaica, more people are self-employed, whereas here, there are job opportunities.”

She described the schools as totally different as well. “Jamaican schools are harder, and you have to pay for high school [which begins in seventh grade]. There are no school buses, just public transportation. In Jamaica, you take a sixth grade exam, and you choose three high schools. Your score determines which school you attend, and you must commute.” She also noted that it’s harder to get loans there.

She noted that her sister, Althea Ellis, attended college in Jamaica, self-paid, and worked in the U.S. in the summers on a visa. She has since earned a Masters in the U.S. and teaches in Colorado.



Above, Karlene Brown (14) with the 2004 Bethel College Lady Wildcat soccer team, the second of three consecutive teams to advance to the national tournament. Below, Karlene graduates from Bethel College in 2007.

Brown spoke about teaching Special Ed. “I love my job. I tend to be drawn to students with different behavior because I have the patience to draw it out, because I understand not having what I need, having to work extra hard. I understand these students. I know how hard it is to be different and to work hard. I teach them that if there’s something you want to achieve, if you work hard, you’ll be able to achieve it, no matter where you came from.”

She said black history is an important part of her life because, “I have three beautiful children [son Lamarr and twin daughters Amina and Amelia]. I want them to know their roots, where they came from. I want them to be able to have conversations with people about it and be proud of who they are. I have to teach them, so I’m digging deeper myself. When my children ask something, I can know. I’m a lifelong learner.”

Brown has been able to take Lamarr to Jamaica several times and looks forward to taking the twins. “Most of my family is there besides my mother, brother and sister, who live in the U.S.”

Brown also tries to give back as much as possible to those in Jamaica who are where she was. “We got help from people we didn’t know. Now we’ve got to give back what we have gotten.” In the past, she has led efforts to send school sup-



plies to Jamaica to the less fortunate. She hopes to start a foundation to expand on those efforts.

She noted in particular that special education there is not what it is here. “Those students are not as fortunate. Inclusion is not as advanced.” Her ambitions include collecting used tablets and other devices to improve special education students’ lives.

She put a fine point on the contrast by complimenting her colleagues in McKenzie. “My workplace is amazing. My Special Ed team is amazing, Megan [Wortham] and Jessica [Hochreiter]. Principal [Dorethea] Royle has been an amazing mentor.” She beamed that other spe-

cial ed teams in the area come to observe the MMS classes. Brown and fellow MMS teacher Amanda Morris will be giving a presentation on co-teaching at the upcoming West Tennessee Special Education Conference in Memphis.

Brown’s passion for education only slightly overshadows her passion for athletics, particularly the two soccer teams she has coached to great success. In her tenure, the Lady Rebels have three district championships, one region championship and three state tournament appearances. The Rebels have earned two district championships, two region championships,

three substate or sectional appearances and two state finalist appearances. Brown is a three-time district Coach of the Year.

Despite her successes, she acknowledges there is still work to be done.

“I tell my players, coaches and children, I want you to grow up loving people, no matter their race. Also, I know the world we live in. I’ve been judged. Parents have thought I was an assistant. By the way, there’s nothing wrong with being an assistant. I couldn’t do my job without them. I tell my students to respect them like they do me. But it’s about assumptions. We are not less than you.”

# The Harlem Renaissance

*An explosion of creativity that rocked the United States in the 1920s, 1930s*

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, was a period of great cultural activity and innovation among African American artists and writers, one that saw new artists and landmark works appear in the fields of literature, dance, art, and music. The participants were all fiercely individualistic talents, and not all of them saw themselves as being part of a movement. But in time writers such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes; painters like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden; and musicians and composers such as Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith became widely known as members of the Harlem Renaissance.

Much of the foundation of the Harlem Renaissance was laid by earlier generations of African American educators, students, and intellectuals. In the decades following the Civil War, many racial barriers to education were removed, and African Americans took advantage of the new educational opportunities in great numbers. Dozens of African American colleges and universities were founded, and African American professors and other intellectuals took increasingly public roles. By the early 1900s, intellectual leaders like W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson were writing, lecturing, and being published in journals such as Crisis and The Messenger.

At the same time, African Americans were moving in huge numbers from the South to northern industrial cities, like New York, where they could find work and escape some of the institutionalized discrimination and mistreatment caused by the South’s Jim Crow laws. Innovative young African American writers, painters, and musicians began gathering in a number of neighborhoods in Manhattan, including Harlem and Greenwich Village, working together and developing new ideas, and in the years after World War I they gained national attention.

Some of the most prominent works created during the Harlem Renaissance were in the field of literature. Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Langston Hughes produced novels, poetry, short stories and memoirs.

Hurston produced important work in a number of fields. An anthropologist and folklorist, she studied with the eminent anthropologist Franz Boaz at Columbia University, and used the music and stories that she collected as a folklorist to inform her novels, plays, and other books, including Mules and Men and Their Eyes Were Watching God. She also performed music based on her folkloric research, and has left a number of recordings along with her manuscripts.

Langston Hughes, best known as a poet, also wrote plays, a novel, short stories, and an autobiography. Many of his poems were set to music by African American composers, and he collaborated with Zora Neale Hurston on a play, Mule Bone. Another artist who achieved great things in a number of fields was the multitalented Paul Robeson. An honor student and All-American athlete while at Rutgers University, Robeson went on to graduate from Columbia University Law School, and soon after became a famed concert singer, recording artist, stage and film actor. He was an impassioned advocate of political causes, and his performance tours and activism took him around the world.

Harlem was a center for musical and theatrical performance as well as literary work, as musicians drawn by the neighborhood’s nightlife collaborated with writers, artists, and each other to create original works. Some of this work drew on musical forms that had grown from the African American experience—gospel, jazz, and blues. Other African American musicians worked in classical forms. Bessie Smith was a legendary blues singer, Marian Anderson broke ground as a classical contralto, and Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington took jazz to new levels of innovation.

Eubie Blake was a prolific composer of the Harlem Renaissance, and was one of the creators of the musical revue Shuffle Along. This show was written and produced by African Americans, opened in New York in 1921 to great success, ran for one year in New York, and then toured for an additional two years. The visual arts also were part of the Harlem Renaissance. Among the best-known artists of the period were Aaron Douglas, Laura Wheeler Waring, Edward Harleston, and the painter and collage artist Jacob Lawrence.

Source: Library of Congress