

Scholarship recipients honored at Mary S. Nelums Foundation Tea

“It’s demonstrating a love for humanity and it is a movement to help these students move to the next level, to contribute to society.”

That is what Dean Emeritus of the College of Public Service, Dr. Gwendolyn Prater had to say about the Mary S. Nelums Foundation. “It’s very important and I’m so glad that she started it.”

Each year, the Mary S. Nelums Foundation works to honor Master of Social Work Students who stand out in their field. They seek trailblazers and those who go above and beyond what is asked of them. This year, five recipients were honored at the scholarship tea that the foundation hosted on Thursday, April 19. From 5 to 7 p.m. Students and guests alike enjoyed a dinner prepared by Sugar’s Place while hearing from various speakers. Senator Hillman Frazier, Dr. Safiya Omari, Dr. Ricardo Brown, and Dr. Isiah Marshal were among those to offer their greetings.

This year the tea hosted at Anderson United Methodist Church honored Kayla Langford, Jun Lyons, Mario Johnson, Roy Harness, and Tershuna Bass. Each recipient was spoken highly of. Just a few of the accolades collected by the recipients include Mario Johnson’s status as a Casey Fellow and Roy Harness’s status as a Vietnam veteran, along with his involvement in fighting for disenfranchised citizens who have lost their ability to vote because of their involvement in the criminal justice system. Each recipient was highly acclaimed.

Following the presentation of scholarships and a parade of the various hats worn to the tea, there was an auction for a different array of hats, with all of the proceeds going towards the Mary S. Nelums foundation.

Wrapping up the evening, Dr. Nelums spoke about the importance of honoring trailblazers and understanding that positions that African-Americans in the field hold were fought for.

“What I say to young people all the time is, if you don’t understand your past and how you got where you are, you will not appreciate it today...This is why we celebrate trailblazers. For those of you who are in social work and have those wonderful jobs, we didn’t get them because we’re cute. We got them because we stand on somebody’s shoulders.”

Her speech was met with a chorus of agreements as she went on to tell the story of Gwendolyn Loper.

“One of the most important trailblazers that we honor is Mrs. Gwen Loper. For those of you who work at the VA hospital—and some of you do your field placements there—you all stand on Mrs. Loper’s shoulders. When she worked at the VA hospital, she had to sit down in the basement in one room and they would not allow her to supervise anyone but African-Americans. Mrs. Loper now has her name on the building...So you will do this work with integrity, you will do this work because you love it.”

