

Original Version

This story was originally written by another author immediately after the event and posted on the Lipscomb University website. The goal at that time was to highlight the record-breaking donation announced at the event and secondarily to describe the Johnsons' talk at the event.

HEADLINE: Imagine 2017 celebrates story of redemption, largest gift in university history

April 3, 2017 is a date that will likely go down in the annals of Lipscomb University lore as one of the most significant in the institution's history.

Imagine 2017 "Nashville: Prosperity for All Corners of the City," held in Allen Arena on Monday, April 3, was a significant evening for Lipscomb University as the largest gift in the institution's history was announced and Los Angeles Lakers president of basketball operations Magic Johnson and his wife, Cookie, shared their story of faith, redemption, entrepreneurship and community transformation.

More than 2,000 Lipscomb Associates gathered for the second annual evening of donor appreciation that serves as the launch of an important community conversation each year. This year, university officials began the evening of celebration by announcing a \$15 million gift — the largest in university history — from George Shinn, former owner of the Charlotte/New Orleans Hornets.

"I think it's a wonderful institution. I've had an opportunity to meet the people and just be a part of it," said Shinn. "We've just become really close. I'm a believer and things worked out. I'm very happy about it. I was looking for a faith-based institution to be a part of and I found it."

"After visiting campus a few times and seeing what was going on, I had the feeling that Lipscomb has a great future ahead of it. I like what they're doing, and I think it's important for us to invest in the future of our young people and particularly young people that love the Lord."

Edited Version

The edited version was to run several months later in the university's alumni magazine. The donation was discussed elsewhere in the magazine, so my goal was to hold the readers' attention by focusing on the Johnsons' compelling life story. Additional biographical information on the Johnsons was added, as the magazine has an audience of diverse ages, and information on the Johnsons' civic roles was moved up in the article to show how their careers and advocacy fit with the event theme of prosperity for Nashville. The strike-through text represents text I had to cut to make the article fit the design, and the highlighted text I added in the on-the-page edits to keep the spirit of the article intact.

HEADLINE: Imagine 2017 celebrates story of redemption

One is a dreamer, and one is a cheerleader. They make a great team.

And Lipscomb University called on the nationally known, innovative team of Magic and Cookie Johnson this past April to join them in imagining a more prosperous future for Nashville and beyond.

Lipscomb's annual event, Imagine, an evening of donor appreciation that serves as the launch of an important community conversation each year, this year featured Los Angeles Lakers President of Basketball Operations Magic Johnson and his wife, Cookie, who shared their story of faith, redemption, entrepreneurship and community transformation.

The Imagine 2017 theme was "Nashville: Prosperity for All Corners of the City." More than 2,000 Lipscomb Associates gathered for the second annual event. ~~which kicked off with the announcement of a \$15 million gift — the largest in university history — from George Shinn, former owner of the Charlotte/New Orleans Hornets.~~ *(Read more about this gift on page X.)*

~~The rest of the~~ evening was focused on Magic and Cookie, whose life and business endeavors reflect key areas the Imagine initiative is examining in 2017.

"Together Magic and Cookie Johnson have changed communities and changed lives, and they bring a wealth of experience and ideas to us as we look to be a driving force for positive collaboration and change in Nashville," said John Lowry, vice president for development and external affairs.

Shinn made the gift as an investment in Lipscomb University's College of Entertainment & the Arts and to fund a new events center among other initiatives. In recognition of this gift, the college will be named the George Shinn College of Entertainment & the Arts. *(Read more about this gift on page X.)*

Last year, Lipscomb launched its Imagine initiative to convene conversations of significance that bring leaders from around the world to Nashville to engage the community in topics of local and global importance and to share their stories and unique perspectives. President George W. Bush was the featured guest in February 2016 for the inaugural Imagine convening.

Lowry said the planning team searched nationally for a speaker whose story reflected the key areas to be examined in 2017.

"Together Magic and Cookie Johnson have changed communities and changed lives, and they bring a wealth of experience and ideas to us as we look to be a driving force for positive collaboration and change in Nashville through the Imagine initiative," said John Lowry, vice president for development and external affairs. "Lipscomb has the reputation for being a convener of significant conversations in our community, and Imagine helps us expand that to be more strategic with these conversations so they have a greater impact."

"Magic and Cookie Johnson have a powerful story that helped launch our examination of these very important topics in our community," Lowry continued. "While many people *think* they know the story of Magic and Cookie from stories of his career in the NBA, there is a narrative that most people don't know. It was powerful to hear how their story aligns closely with our institution, which is a place of faith, redemption innovative solutions and entrepreneurship. Nashville needs this story, and Lipscomb is the conduit to deliver this story to the city. We believe their story will be a catalyst for new thinking that will result in improved quality of life in every corner of Nashville as we continue to examine these topics in the coming months."

Last fall, Cookie Johnson released *Believing in Magic: My Story of Love, Overcoming Adversity, and Keeping the Faith*, her memoir, published by Howard Books, about her marriage, motherhood, faith, and how an HIV diagnosis 25 years ago changed the course of their lives forever.

"When I look back over those 25 years, I think, 'Wow, we've overcome a lot,'" she said. "God has brought us through so much, and that is why we wanted to write this story. When God gives you these blessings, he doesn't expect you to keep them to yourself. This book is our testimony and our way of sharing that with the world, that if you believe in Him no matter what the odds are, no matter what people are telling you, if you believe in Him, He can bring you through."

"While many people think they know the story of Magic and Cookie from stories of his career in the NBA, there is also a narrative that most people don't know," Lowry continued. "It was powerful to hear how their story aligns closely with our institution, which is a place of faith, redemption innovative solutions and entrepreneurship."

Magic Johnson played as a point guard for the Los Angeles Lakers for 13 seasons in the 1980s and 1990s and helped take the team to four NBA Championships. Twenty-five years ago he was diagnosed with HIV and toggled between retirement and continuing to play for the Lakers until 1996.

Since his NBA career, Magic and Cookie together have formed the Magic Johnson Foundation to spread information on HIV. ~~Magic morphed into a business powerhouse who has dedicated his life to leaving a positive impact in underserved urban communities.~~ Cookie has worked with the foundation to reduce HIV infections in the African American community; launched her premium denim line, CJ by Cookie Johnson; and wrote a memoir titled *Believing in Magic: My Story of Love, Overcoming Adversity, and Keeping the Faith*.

~~"We believe their story will be a catalyst for new thinking that will result in improved quality of life in every corner of Nashville," Lowry said. "Nashville needed this story, and Lipscomb was the conduit to deliver it to the city."~~

~~Magic shared memories of his childhood in Lansing, Michigan, and lessons he learned from his mother with the crowd gathered at Imagine.~~

~~"We were poor, but my mother was always giving things to others," he recalled. "We also had a lot of snow in Michigan. She made me go shovel everyone's driveway. I'm thinking, ok, I'm going to get some money for doing this. I said, 'Ok, mom, who is going to pay me.' She said, 'Nobody. You're just going to go do it because they need it done.' And now, I'm just like her. I want to help everybody and to give back. I have her smile and her heart."~~

~~"I'm also like my father," he continued. "He worked two or three jobs all of his life... I'm strong like he is. He also taught me that in everything in life, I need to do it the right way. I became a perfectionist because of that."~~

Magic said that even though he grew up poor, he "didn't have poor dreams."

"Just because you don't have everything you want or would like to have, you can still dream outside your neighborhood, outside your community and your financial means. I was a big dreamer," said Magic. "I dreamed that I would play in the NBA and buy my parents a house. I used to dream that I would be a businessman... And that's what I did."

Since retiring from the NBA more than 20 years ago, the former Los Angeles Laker

Learning about her husband's diagnosis was not easy, however. She recalled the conversation with her husband 25 years ago when he told her he was HIV positive.

"I thought that my whole world had crashed," said Cookie. "We just fell in each other's arms and cried. After the crying we started talking. In that moment I realized that I had the choice that I could leave and let him die or I could stay and help him live. And I loved him, so I decided to stay and help him live."

Cookie said she decided to "fight this thing" by getting on her knees and praying.

"I knew that Jesus said, 'by my stripes you are healed,'" she said. "There was a revival going on that week at my church, so I went. What that did for me was sent me to the Word. When something like this happens you need more understanding of God. That He will never leave you and He will protect you. In the Bible, you learn about God."

She said she attended Bible studies to learn how "God was going to help us through this. That was my journey."

"Every day I would find a new scripture and I would put it in my mind or put it on my mirror," she recalled. "Whenever I would have those bad thoughts about death, I would think on those scriptures. That is our weapon when we are fighting the spiritual warfare. That's how I made it through. If you put God first in your life, you can make it through anything."

Cookie and Magic also learned as much as they could about the disease. They formed the Magic Johnson Foundation to help share the information they learned with others. Cookie is secretary of the board of directors of the Magic Johnson Foundation, which is committed to transform urban America through HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs, Community Empowerment Centers and the Taylor Michaels Scholarship Program. Celebrating over 20 years of success, the Magic Johnson Foundation has become one of the most recognizable philanthropic organizations around the world.

In addition, Cookie is instrumental in the five-year effort to help reduce new HIV infections in the African American community by educating minority women about the disease and providing helpful tools for prevention and testing. She previously served as the spokesperson for the National Medical Association Immunization Public Service Announcement. She educated parents and caregivers from all communities on the importance of immunizing children in urban areas against the 10 vaccine preventable diseases. Cookie was also instrumental in establishing the BREATHE Program, a national asthma awareness initiative that works to educate children and parents about the impact of asthma in urban environments.

star has morphed into one of the most powerful African American businessmen in the world, **and he uses that business acumen to transform communities.**

~~Magic has used his business interests to transform communities.~~ He is credited with ~~having the vision to~~ **kickstarting the** revitalization of Nashville's Gulch area ~~and by~~ investing more than \$20 million a decade ago into the Terrazzo condo project ~~to jump-start the transformation.~~ He is chairman and CEO of Magic Johnson Enterprises, an investment conglomerate which ~~provides products and services~~ focuses primarily on ethnically diverse and underserved urban communities through strategic alliances, investments, consulting and endorsements.

He is known for forging unprecedented partnerships. In 1998, he teamed with Starbucks **in a** to become the only franchisee in the history of the company, acquiring and eventually selling 125 stores in a lucrative move which further solidified his position in the business world. The venture **that** served as a catalyst for redevelopment in urban communities and is widely recognized as the corporate blueprint for engagement and success with urban consumers across America.

~~Operating under the philosophy that true success is making others successful, h~~ He is also one of the leading investors in a number of minority-owned tech companies.

"But when you have dreams, you also need someone who can be your cheerleader and tell you that you can do it. And Cookie has been that for me," said Magic.

Last fall, Cookie Johnson released her memoir, published by Howard Books, about her marriage, motherhood, faith and how an HIV diagnosis 25 years ago changed the course of their lives forever.

"When I look back over those 25 years, I think, 'Wow, we've overcome a lot,'" she said. "God has brought us through so much, and that is why we wanted to write this story. ~~When God gives you these blessings, he doesn't expect you to keep them to yourself. This book is our testimony that if you believe in Him, no matter what the odds are, no matter what people are telling you, He can bring you through.~~"

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Also a businesswoman at heart, Cookie recently launched her premium denim line, Cj by Cookie Johnson, currently sold at Nordstrom, SAKS Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

After Lipscomb President L. Randolph Lowry interviewed Cookie, Magic joined the conversation. The Imagine event was the first time the couple had been interviewed together live.

Magic shared memories of his childhood in Lansing, Michigan, and lessons he learned from his mother.

"She took us to church, so that was important," he recalled. "We were also poor, but my mother was always giving things to others. If someone needed something, she gave it to them. We also had a lot of snow in Michigan. She made me go shovel everyone's driveway. I'm thinking, ok, I'm going to get some money for doing this. I said, 'Ok, mom, who is going to pay me.' She said, 'Nobody. You're just going to go do it because they need it done.' And now, I'm just like her. I want to help everybody and to give back. I have her smile and her heart."

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On Feb. 21, Magic was named president of the Los Angeles Lakers. He said in the weeks before the announcement, he was up early one morning "being still, because that's when you receive your blessings."

"I was asking God, 'What do you have in store for me? What's next for me?'" he recalled. "I'd been successful. I'd given back. I wanted a new journey. I wanted a new path."

After that time of quiet, Magic went through his morning routine with that still on his mind. Two days later, he received a call from Jeannie Buss, controlling owner of

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~~Two just days after~~ expressing these sentiments ~~and dwelling on them,~~ he received a call from Jeannie Buss, controlling owner of the Lakers who was also serving as president of that time. ~~She asked him to meet her for dinner.~~

"I figured she wanted to lean on my shoulder and tell me that the Lakers aren't doing well again," he said. ~~I met her for dinner and started telling her that I know they aren't doing well and on and on and ...~~ she said, 'Stop. I want to make you president of the Lakers. We need a change, and I want you to lead us.' I went home and I told Cookie that it's amazing how God works.

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"This is amazing and truly how God can use you. I got drafted by the Lakers. I played for the Lakers. I coached the Lakers. I was the owner of the Lakers. And now I'm the president of the Lakers," said Magic.

He credits Cookie with bringing him "back to the church and to have my own personal relationship with the Lord."

"That day, 25 years ago, we went to the pastor and he prayed over us and with us," he said. "That day really changed my life and got me back into the church. That's how God is using me now. He blessed me and now I'm able to bless others. But my wife is the main reason. It's a blessing to have someone else help you be a better man ... a better person. We've had an incredible journey, but life has been wonderful. But it all revolves around God. He has blessed me more than I could have ever dreamed."

Since retiring from the NBA over 20 years ago, the former Los Angeles Laker star has morphed into a business powerhouse who has dedicated his life to leaving a positive impact in underserved urban communities and is one of the most powerful African American businessmen in the world.

Magic has used his business interests to transform communities. He is credited with having the vision to revitalize Nashville's Gulch area and invested more than \$20 million a decade ago into the Terrazo condo project to jump-start the transformation. He is chairman and CEO of Magic Johnson Enterprises, an investment conglomerate valued at an estimated \$1 billion which provides high quality products and services that focus primarily on ethnically diverse and underserved urban communities through strategic alliances, investments, consulting and endorsements.

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Johnson continues to expand his influence through a number of other investments.

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~~The Imagine event was the first time the Magic and Cookie power team has been interviewed together live.~~

~~Other highlights of the event included Grammy Award-winning singer Michael Tait of the Newsboys performing with students from Lipscomb's newly named George Shinn College of Entertainment & the Arts and an inspirational performance of "Redeemer" by Nicole C. Mullen, award-winning recording artist.~~

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Imagine is an invitation-only event for Lipscomb Associates, donors of \$1,000 or more annually. To become an Associate visit www.lipscomb.edu/giving/associates or call 615.966.6232.

The full version of this story was posted on Lipscomb's University's website.

He currently has controlling interests in EquiTrust, a \$14 billion financial services company; ASPiRE, an African-American television network; and SodexoMAGIC, a food service and facilities management company. Operating under the philosophy that true success is making others successful, he is also one of the leading investors in a number of minority-owned tech companies.

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