

**Presidents of the Association of Negro Teachers**



(Photo: Currie Ballard Collection— Oklahoma Historical Society)

***Oklahoma African American Educators  
Hall of Fame, Inc.***



***First Induction Ceremony and Banquet***

*Oklahoma History Center  
800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

*Friday, September 30, 2011 7:00 p.m.*



## Dr. Donnie L. Nero Sr.

### *Thoughts from the President*

It is often stated, “Where there is no vision, a nation will perish.” The incubation of the Oklahoma African American Educators (OAAE) Hall of Fame has come to fruition but not without much planning and deliberation by the OAAE Hall of Fame Board of Directors and Committees. As the opportunity presents, please acknowledge their steadfastness in bringing this evening together.

This Inaugural Class represents some of the best of the best in Oklahoma education. Their experiences range from public elementary education to higher education. The legacies they bequeath are the “footprints” thousands

have ensued through their journey of life. Although some of the inductees have passed from this life, their influences will remain as vital as the air we breathe. They all have truly made a difference in their respective communities, the State and Nation. Congratulations to each inductee and their families.

I have been asked, “Why should there be an Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame?” I have responded accordingly, often depending on the nature of the question. The basic assertion is there is not a venue, which recognizes the dedicated Oklahoma African American Educators in the State, specifically during the dismal era of “separate but equal” edict. As we consider the responsibilities of these educators of educating the masses with limited and substandard resources, recognition today is the least we can do. Thus, my standard answer to the aforementioned question is, why not have an Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame?

I encourage the citizens of this great State to embrace the vision of this Hall of Fame, which profoundly states, “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.” Proverbs 3: 27.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donnie L. Nero".

Dr. Donnie L. Nero



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*Oklahoma African American Educators  
Hall of Fame Inductees  
September 30, 2011*

*Mr. Curtis Brackeen*

Muskogee, Oklahoma

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*“Decision Maker”*



Mr. Curtis Brackeen taught 33 years as an elementary, junior high and high school teacher. In addition, he served as a counselor and school administrator. A Muskogee native, Mr. Brackeen graduated from Muskogee Manual Training High School. In 1956, he received his Bachelor of Science degree from Langston University and in 1965, a Master's degree from Northeastern State University.

His career in education began in the McAlester school system from 1960 to 1963. He served the next fourteen years in the Muskogee Public School system. Many described this educator as the man who made significant differences in the lives of many students. He conveyed to his students, “If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail.”

In 1977, Mr. Brackeen became a counselor at Indian Capital Vocational-Technical School in Muskogee. In 1985, he became the principal. He has also served as administrative assistant, interim acting superintendent and curriculum development coordinator. In 1995, the Indian Capital Technology Center Board of Education elected Mr. Brackeen as one of their Board of Directors where he served until 2010.

Among his many distinguished achievements are; All-State School Board Member, ICTC Distinguished Service Award, 2009 Langston University Athletic Hall of Fame, 2009 Muskogee Athletic Hall of Fame, and named in his honor the ICTC Curtis Brackeen Center.

His leadership in the community and the State of Oklahoma is evidence of Mr. Brackeen's commitment to education in Oklahoma.

*Mrs. Willie Mae Etheridge*

Checotah/Warrior Community

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*“School & Community  
Servant”*



Mrs. Willie Mae Etheridge had a sense of community in the classroom and taught through example and encouragement. Not only did she guide students academically, she instilled moral and ethical values to last a lifetime. Students from McIntosh or Muskogee County School Districts would address “Miss Green,” as some of her students referred to her maiden name affectionately, had limited resources to teach, but made sure they “mastered” her class.

Mrs. Etheridge holds a place of distinction in the local community for most of her 95 years. A graduate of Langston University, an educator for 35 years, she made a difference in the classroom and in the Checotah/Warrior Community. As she approaches her 96<sup>th</sup> birthday, former students remember her passion for teaching and her work in the school and the community. Her warm inquisitive personality and genuine concern endeared her to the multicultural mixture of Caucasian, Native American, and African American area residents. The community respected her, not just as teacher, but also as an expert on everything whether it is a civil rights issue, business matter, legal issue, or any other concern.

Mrs. Etheridge credits her family and former students for her longevity. Her service extended to being active in the NAACP, McIntosh County Transportation Coalition, Order of Eastern Star, Oklahoma Federation for Colored Women, and the Silver Haired Legislature, to name a few.

## *Dr. Henry Kirkland Jr.*

Atoka, Oklahoma

### *“Inspiring Teacher”*

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Dr. Henry Kirkland Jr., a native of Atoka, was born in 1934 to Henry and Isabelle (McSwain) Kirkland. Being the grandson of freed slaves, he was well aware of his heritage and he appreciated the struggle his ancestors endured and credits them for his success. He graduated from Dunbar High School in Atoka and in 1959; he entered Langston University where he received a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in biology.

In 1961, after his military discharge, El Reno Public Schools hired him to teach biology and coach football and basketball at the Booker T. Washington High School. After several years of teaching and coaching, he served as an adjunct teacher where he taught general biology and comparative anatomy.

In 1972, he began a career in higher education at Southwestern Oklahoma State University as a biology teacher and part-time administrator. During his tenure at Southwestern, he enjoyed a great deal of success as a professor in the area of life sciences.

He also became interested in paleontology and his research resulted in professional presentations along with other researchers who shared their findings at various professional conferences. He published several articles in the *Southwest Naturalist*.

Dr. Kirkland's students spread his legacy throughout the country through their successes in their chosen careers. He captured a sincere interest in his students and provided much assistance to them. One of his students, Wade McCoy, MD and co-author Patrick Chalfant published a novel based on Dr. Kirkland's story, *Rainbow In The Dark*.

## *Rev. Willie B. Parker*

Spencer, Oklahoma

### *“Magna Cum Laude Graduate”*

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Rev. Willie B. Parker, born near Eagletown, Oklahoma in 1920, attended school in Eagletown and graduated from Dunbar High School in Broken Bow. Following high school graduation, he entered Langston University where he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture Education. Later, he earned a Master of Science degree from Oklahoma State University.

Rev. Parker taught Vocational Agriculture at Dunjee High School in Oklahoma City for 25 years. He also sponsored the New Farmers of America, an organization of African-American students studying agriculture and many of his students won awards in national competitions. His favorite motto is “What you give lives” and is demonstrated daily in his life. He has a passion for his family, church, students, Dunjee/Spencer community, and the State of Oklahoma. Known for helping his students develop agricultural and rural leadership, his students say that he encouraged them to improve their home, farm, and surroundings. He believed his students could achieve academically in any subject. He has been an active participant and leader in the fight for educational equity and justice for

the disadvantaged.

At 90 years of age, Rev. Parker continues to be very active in his church and community. He serves on numerous boards and participates in many organizations. He is the founder of Operation Cloud of Witnesses, an organization that has given over \$100,000 in scholarships to high school graduates and college students. He also founded SCOPE, which supports the Industrialization Center of Oklahoma County and annually contributes \$10,000 to Langston University.

Rev. Parker continues to receive honors and awards for his labor of giving. His love for people keeps him going, going, going, and going!

## *Mr. William Robert Patterson (Posthumously)*

Lawton, Oklahoma

*“Determined to Make  
A Difference”*



Mr. William Robert Patterson enjoyed a distinguished career in education. His service covered 37 years as a teacher and principal in the State of Oklahoma. He had two firsts: as principal at Lawton Dunbar Consolidated School and at Lawton Douglass High School. Vision, innovation and compassion characterized his career – all in providing quality education under racially segregated conditions.

Mr. Patterson, a graduate from Langston University with a BS in Math and pursued additional study at the University of Colorado and Clark University in Atlanta. In 1945, he had completed the major portion of his work toward a master’s degree with Atlanta University prior to his premature death.

His significant accomplishments occurred in Lawton, Oklahoma. At his hiring, Douglass High School, then known as Vernon School, had one room, a few high school courses and four faculty members. By 1931, the school’s name changed to Douglass and relocated to a 5-acre tract with ten classrooms and a gym. The school was fully accredited and had eight staff members. He served as principal until his death in 1945.

Under his leadership, Douglass High School experienced tremendous growth in facilities and academics. Additionally, student numbers increased largely due to the influx of soldiers and their families to Fort Sill during World War II.

“Professor” Patterson created a strong positive atmosphere for his school community while attempting to shield it from the ravages of an oppressive, segregated society in which the school received the “leftovers” from the local school board. In spite of these constraints, “Professor” Patterson believed that a successful Douglass High School would emerge if he were successful in engaging the community. His premature death abbreviated his vision.

## *Dr. Meshack M. Sagini*

Langston, Oklahoma

*“Student Centered  
Educator”*



Dr. Meshack M. Sagini, is a distinguished researcher and scholar who believes in the capacity of all students regardless of their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. He motivates students to become seekers of knowledge and truth. Dr. Sagini believes that education is important to the extent it is applied to bring positive change for the advancement of humanity. His students describe him as outstanding, visionary, genuine, very knowledgeable, and the best teacher they have ever had. These descriptors speak volumes about his teaching philosophy. Dr. Sagini personifies the educator who truly supports young people through involvement in activities and research projects designed to improve their lives. Many of his students are recipients of his eclectic and Socratic methods of teaching.

Born in Metembe-Kisii, Kenya, Dr. Sagini is proud to refer to Oklahoma as his home. He is fluent in six languages and presented papers at many national and professional conferences. Because of his academic success, in 2009, President Barack Obama appointed him as an honorary member of his “Kitchen Cabinet.”

Dr. Sagini is recognized with 21 awards, which include the following: an Author and Scholar by Langston University Most Outstanding Political Scientist of the Year, Excellence in teaching and research by the American Political Science Association, Appointed as an Honorary Member of President Obama’s “Kitchen Cabinet”, and Awarded The Congressional Order of Merit by the United States Government for Distinctive Service, Dr. Sagini is the author of five books and a variety of articles. Dr. Sagini received his formal education at Cambridge University (UK), Northern Caribbean University, Mandeville, Jamaica, Andrews University in Michigan (USA) and Oklahoma State University. He has a total of 30 years of teaching, 23 years in Universities and seven years in high schools and middle schools

## *Mr. Eddie Walter Warrior (Posthumously)*

Muskogee, Oklahoma

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### *“Steel Belted Education Ambassador”*



Mr. Eddie Walter Warrior’s great-grandmother arrived in Indian Territory during the winter of 1836 crossed the “Trail of Tears” as a slave in the Creek Nation. Mr. Warrior, born in 1902, at Warriorville, Indian Territory was the last member of his immediate family that the Dawes Commission enrolled as a “Creek Freedmen New Born.”

Mr. Warrior graduated from Muskogee Manual Training High School, Kansas State Junior College and Langston University where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree. He began his career in education at Warrior Consolidated Schools in 1924 as a teacher and in 1932; he became the principal of the first Rosenwald School in McIntosh County. He later provided leadership as a principal and superintendent with a far- reaching agenda that included construction of a new elementary and high school in Taft.

In 1947, Governor Roy Turner appointed Mr. Warrior Manager of the Consolidated Negro Institutions of the Deaf, Blind and Orphan Institutes in Taft, now the Eddie W. Warrior Correctional Center. After becoming Superintendent of Taft Schools in 1961, he was instrumental in working with the Department of Public Welfare to construct a senior high school on the campus of the Oklahoma Children’s Center, and an elementary school on the campus of the former school for the deaf, blind and orphans.

From 1967-1979, Mr. Warrior served as a Board member of the new Indian Capital Vo-Tech District No. 4. He was the first African American to serve on that Board as its President. Mr. Warrior wanted students to have economic security. His 54 years in education explains why he earned the title “The Steel Belted Education Ambassador.” He brought the number of accredited academic units from 23 to 86, and the number of teachers from 17 to 52. Mr. Warrior believed in educating students in three ways, the head, the hands and the heart.

In 1975, Muskogee Public Schools named the junior high in his honor, The E. W. Warrior Junior High School. He was truly an educator with vision and commitment.

## *Mrs. Jimmie Beatrice White Williams (Posthumously)*

Idabel, Oklahoma

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### *“Leading With Enthusiasm”*



Mrs. Jimmie Beatrice White Williams was born April 6, 1910 in Direct, Texas to Jim and Nettie White. Mrs. Williams was four when the family moved to a farm in southeast Oklahoma. She graduated from Slater Rosenwald High School and was a member of its first graduating class. In 1941, she earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Langston University in Elementary Education

As an educator for 40 years, Mrs. Williams began her career in a one-room schoolhouse near Tom, Oklahoma. During her career, she taught elementary school children, coached boys’ basketball at Valliant, served as a 4-H advisor, drove a bus, and served as a custodian. Mrs. Williams later served as principal and teacher at Richland School.

Mrs. Williams was the driving force for her students to participate in 4-H Club. She stressed public speaking by participating in discussions and speeches about timely topics and team demonstrations. Her students were winners of many awards. Failure for Mrs. Williams’ students was not an option. One of her students described her as a teacher who made you seek answers, develop interest and become self-confident in every endeavor.

Throughout her forty years of teaching, Mrs. Williams believed all children could learn and she never accepted the word “can’t.” In order for her students to have success, they must feel good about themselves. To accomplish this, she provided clothing and/or shoes whenever needed. In addition, Mrs. Williams believed in making learning fun, especially in math, which was her favorite subject. With dedication and optimism, Mrs. Williams impressed upon her students the value of education. She instilled in them that it was an important milestone for them in their endeavor to become career oriented and successful individuals.

## *Dr. La Verne Ford Wimberly*

Tulsa, Oklahoma

*“Visionary Leader”*



Dr. La Verne Ford Wimberly is the younger of two daughters born to Jesse and Clydie Ford. Following her graduation in 1956 from Booker T. Washington High School, she continued her education at the University of Tulsa where in 1961 she received her Bachelor's Degree in Clinical Psychology and in 1970, a Master's Degree in Teacher Education. Dr. Wimberly earned a Doctorate of Education in 1989 in Administration from Nova Southeastern University.

Dr. Wimberly made history in 1975 when she became the first African American female assistant principal at the secondary level in Tulsa Public Schools. In 1982, continuing on her path of upward mobility, Tulsa Public Schools appointed Dr. Wimberly as Principal at Carver Middle School. In 1986, TPS appointed her Middle School Director, and she went on to serve as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. In 2000, Dr. Wimberly became the first African American female Interim Superintendent for Tulsa Public Schools.

In each position of leadership, she held the focus on raising student achievement. Asking tough questions and continually seeking the best solutions for the students as well as for the entire community has never been an obstacle in her life. She dedicated her work to providing a quality learning experience to every child without exception.

Dr. Wimberly believed that exemplary servant leaders often did not follow where the path led, but went where there was no path and left a trail for future generations to follow. Not only did she serve well, she blazed a pathway for many aspiring educators, especially educators of color.

## *Mr. Tom Anthony Withers Jr. (Posthumously)*

Clearview, Oklahoma

*“Futuristic Leader”*



Upon graduating from Langston University in May 1948, Tom Withers Jr. began his teaching career in August of the same year, as a Vocational Agriculture Teacher in Clearview, Oklahoma. Because of enrollment decline in 1964, the high school consolidated with the neighboring Weleetka High School. Mr. Withers then became the Principal, 7th, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher of the remaining elementary school. Mr. Withers taught his students how to be proud and never give up. In addition to his commitment to academic preparedness, he strived to equip his students with tools to succeed, and to learn from their mistakes.

Mr. Withers is a native of Cushing, Oklahoma, being the first born of Tom and Mattie Withers. He graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1938. Like many of his era, World War II interrupted Mr. Withers' college education. Mr. Withers served our nation proudly from July 1942 through May 1946, and honorably discharged as a First Sergeant Military Policeman in the United States Army. Upon returning to Langston University in the fall of 1946, Mr. Withers became a proud member of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity

He especially wanted to prepare his students who attended Clearview's racially segregated elementary school for the "big leap" from segregation to an integrated high school. He advised his students about some of the problems they might encounter, but most of all, he taught them to stand up for what they believed in and more importantly to believe in themselves. Mr. Withers was blessed with an uplifting spirit coupled with a demeanor that provided never-ending words of encouragement and hope to his students and their parents.

Even though Mr. Withers passed from this life after only 17 glorious years in education, he left a lasting impression on his students. He was very passionate about his students. Students addressed him "Prof," short for "Prof-The Man for All Seasons." He touched and inspired not only his students, but also the community at large to believe in themselves and to achieve their dreams.





# 2011 - OAAE Hall of Fame Program

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Welcome

Ms. Sharon Hill-Wooten, Idabel  
Vice President: OAAE Hall of Fame  
Board of Directors

Invocation

Mr. Albert Johnson, Lawton  
OAAE Hall of Fame Board of Directors

Dinner

Opening Remarks

Dr. Donnie L. Nero Sr., Clearview  
President: OAAE Hall of Fame  
Board of Directors

2011 Induction Ceremony

Dr. Donnie L. Nero Sr.

2011 Inaugural Inductees:

*Mr. Curtis Brackeen*  
Muskogee, Oklahoma

*Dr. Meshack M. Sagini*  
Langston, Oklahoma

*Mrs. Willie Mae Etheridge*  
Checotah/Warrior Community

*Mr. Eddie Walter Warrior*  
Muskogee, Oklahoma

*Dr. Henry Kirkland Jr.*  
Atoka, Oklahoma

*Mrs. Jimmie Beatrice White Williams*  
Idabel, Oklahoma

*Rev. Willie B. Parker*  
Spencer, Oklahoma

*Dr. La Verne Ford Wimberly*  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

*Mr. William Robert Patterson*  
Lawton, Oklahoma

*Mr. Tom Anthony Withers Jr.*  
Clearview, Oklahoma

Closing Remarks

Dr. Donnie L. Nero Sr., President

# OAAE Hall of Fame, Inc.

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*In 2010, The Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame was constituted and incorporated as a nonprofit organization to recognize and to honor those professional Oklahoma African Americans, who have taught at least five years in the State of Oklahoma, who have exemplified a commitment while demonstrating exceptional abilities in realizing ideals, service or leadership in the teaching and guidance of their students.*

## **Sponsors:**

*The Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame is co-sponsored by the Oklahoma Historical Society Black Heritage Committee.*

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