

# "First in Norman"

Telling the stories of legendary African American educators, leaders and citizens in our city. The obstacles and successes of these community members tell the rich history of diversity, resilience and innovation in Norman.

George W. McLaurin

1948



George W. McLaurin was the first African American to attend the University of Oklahoma. As a retired Langston University faculty member, Mr. McLaurin attended classes in the College of Education doctoral program in education in 1950 but was forced to remain physically separated from other students in the classroom, cafeteria and library. His court case pressing for an educational experience equal to other students' experience was argued in the U.S. Supreme Court and led to a reversal of the "separate but equal" legal standard and was a key case leading to Brown v. Board of Education.

The Hendersons are the first African American couple to purchase a home in Norman. George Henderson, Ph.D., joined the University of Oklahoma faculty in 1967 and has authored over 30 books. In 1969, he founded the Department of Human Relations, in which he served as director. Mrs. Barbara Henderson was the first chairperson of the Norman Human Rights Commission and has been a steadfast community advocate for years. Their leadership continues to shape Norman today.



The Hendersons

1967

Booker Shackelford

1972



Booker Shackelford began his career in Law Enforcement as the first African American Police Officer with the Norman Police Department. In 1972 after graduating from the University of Oklahoma. He served Norman for nearly 30 years, where he resided with his wife and four children.

Charlotte Shoate Gordon began her career in education in 1974 as the first African American teacher in the Normal Public Schools system. She spent 16 years teaching before transitioning into various counseling, administrative, consulting, library, supervisory and mentoring roles. As a principal for Fisher Elementary School, Gordon led the school to a Blue Ribbon School recipient and was recognized by the Oklahoma State Department of Education for achieving superior standards of academic excellence.

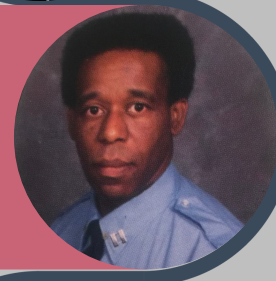


Charlotte Shoate Gordon

1974

Captain Gregory C. Watts

1976



Gregory C. Watts was the first African American firefighter/Captain for the City of Norman Fire Department. Captain Watts started his career in 1979 as a firefighter and retired in 2001 as the first African American Captain for the City of Norman Fire department. At the time of his retirement, Norman Fire Department employed 124 staff and five of them are African American.

Teresa Turner, originally from South Carolina, attended OU in 1978. As one of the first two Black women to earn a full athletic scholarship, Turner impacted the Norman community both through basketball and her 20-year career as an administrator. With her Bachelor degree in Psychology and her Master's in Guidance and Counseling, Teresa guided and mentored hundreds of students during her tenure. Turner was also passionate about community engagement, through membership with the City of Norman Human Rights Commission, and service on the boards of directors for the United Way of Norman and the Cleveland County YMCA.



Teresa Turner

1978

Community Missionary Baptist Church

1980



Community Missionary Baptist church was the first African American church in Norman, Oklahoma. In the '70s, Emma Wright pioneered a mission for many gatherings of fellowship within the community, which led to the establishment of the church on April 27, 1980. On July 27, 1980, Reverend Jesse Woodfork was installed as Community Missionary Baptist Church's first Pastor. This church remains important to many Norman community members today.

Steven Hardeman started his career with the City of Norman in 1984 as a Water Line Maintenance Worker. In 1987, he transferred to the Norman Wastewater Pollution Facility as the first African American operator. Progressing through his career, he became the plant Supervisor in 2004 and now manages all day-to-day operations at the Water Reclamation Facility and leads a staff of 20 team members. In 2010, he became the first African American plant Superintendent in Norman and the State of Oklahoma history. In 2023, he was presented with The Oklahoma Environmental Association's (OWEA) Lifetime Achievement Award.



Steve Hardeman

1984

Chief Fred Lee Henderson, Jr.

1985



Fred Lee Henderson, Jr. started his fire service career with the City of Norman Fire Department in 1985 as a firefighter. In 2001, he was promoted to Fire Inspector, and in 2003, he became a Norman Police Peace Officer. During his tenure as Fire Inspector, he received other accolades, including Oklahoma Fire Investigator of the Year. In 2010, Henderson was promoted to Fire Marshal and became the first African American Chief Officer for the City of Norman Fire Department.

Samuel Woodfork started his career on October 27, 1987, as the Deputy Assessor of the Cleveland County Assessors Department. This department surveys numerous properties within the community to determine their real estate value. Today, he is serving in this Department as the second Deputy to the County Assessor and Chief Information Officer. Sam has dedicated over thirty years to this field.



Samuel "Sam" Woodfork

1987

Anthony Francisco

1996



In 1996, Anthony Francisco became the City of Norman's first African American Chief Financial Officer, and second City Department Head. In this capacity, he oversees the City's budget, accounting, treasury, debt administration, investment, printing services, utility customer service, payroll and purchasing functions. Prior to his appointment in Norman, he served for over 13 years in public finance and administrative positions across the country and was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame for Municipal Officials in 2013.

Keith Humphrey was selected as the Chief of Police for the Norman Police Department in 2011 and served until 2019. Chief Humphrey brought with him several years of experience and set forth many initiatives, including implementing officer training on diversity and inclusion as a strategy to combat the growing public concern towards real and perceived law enforcement abuses.



Chief Keith Humphrey

2011

James Chappel

2016



James Chappel was appointed as the Norman Ward 5 City Councilman in 2016 with a goal of being measured and judicious with the responsibilities that come with representing and serving others. Mr. Chappel and his wife Claudia have continued to be involved over the last 30 years with community causes serving on local, state, and national boards and committees. Mr. Chappel still serves as a Board Member for Norman Regional Health Authority and Norman Regional Health System Foundation, chairman for Bethesda Inc, and Deacon for the Community Missionary Baptist Church.