President’s NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2020

DILLARD UNIVERSITY

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2020 is definitely a year that will go down in history, one unlike any other, at least in my lifetime. Front and center is the coronavirus pandemic that swept in at the beginning of the year and, along the way, closed schools, churches, and businesses. It created new phrases like “social distancing,” “wear your mask,” and taught us about ventilators. Tragically, over 300,000 died due to the virus.

Being stuck at home this summer helped us to see another pandemic more clearly—racism. In a moment where life imitated art, the death of George Floyd at the knee of the Minneapolis police was a real-life Radio Raheem from Spike Lee’s “Do The Right Thing” some 30 years earlier. It caused hundreds of thousands of people around the world to take to the streets to protest.
This vision, despite this year’s challenges, has been affirmed by the support from friends and philanthropists who have invested in Dillard University. From the new scholarship program funded by NFL legend Peyton Manning, record Giving Tuesday donations, the leadership of UNCF carving out HBCU dedicated funds for pandemic relief, and finally the $5 million gift from Mackenzie Scott; 2020 was a year where being resilient through all the challenges eventually led to new resources.

But it has. The pandemic pulled off the band-aids that covered health disparities. This was our notice to ramp up the work of the health disparities center formed by a $25 million NIH grant in 2011, to refine the work of the state’s oldest nursing program to help meet a critical shortage, and to invest in the new pre-health advising program, knowing that underserved communities need health professionals that look like them.

The racial reckoning led to robust conversations at the Board of Trustees level, birthing the idea for a Center for Racial Justice to study and develop solutions related to the criminal legal system. It affirmed the work of the pre-law program, creating a national model for increasing the number of students of color able to enter law school and, ultimately, the legal profession.

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In fact, this year, we are presenting an updated mission and vision statement, timely actions during a period where the world was forced to look at everything. Watching the world through this pandemic lens helps not only to clarify why Dillard University exists but where we must focus our efforts. This was a tough year. But the philanthropic support provided will amplify our inventiveness as we enter 2021.
Dillard University’s supporters provided $780,772 in donations within 24 hours during Giving Tuesday on December 1, far surpassing its goal of $500,000. Themed “Beating the Odds,” the campaign garnered donations from alumni, faculty, staff, students and the general public.

“This year, Giving Tuesday meant so much more than in any other year because of the challenges and hardships the pandemic has created, not just for the University and its students, but also for those who gave despite the challenges that they themselves have suffered in the wake of the pandemic,” Adrian Guy Anderson, assistant vice president for the Office of Development and Alumni Relations said. “This sacrifice by our supporters demonstrates just how much Dillard alumni and friends believe in the work that we do here.”

“We began our Giving Tuesday campaigns in 2015, wondering if we could leverage the national attention for that day to raise money for Dillard University,” President Walter Kimbrough said. “The $36,000 we raised that day seemed like a win, but we saw great potential in this program. Five years later, we are now raising approximately 20 times that amount. The vision of the advancement team and buy-in by alumni and friends have made Giving Tuesday a significant event each year for the University. We are grateful to everyone who continues to support Dillard University.”

Part of the University’s success was a match by an emeritus board member. The funds collected on Giving Tuesday are shared among Dillard’s SAFE (Student Aid for Financial Emergencies) Fund and areas for which donors designated their gifts.
Dillard University launched its Center for Racial Justice (CRJ) in July 2020 in response to the mounting police brutality cases in the United States. As a historically Black university, Dillard is set to become the leading educational conduit between law enforcement, community leaders, and citizens in New Orleans and the nation.

In an assessment of the racial climate, the CRJ believes that “minority and ethnic communities have become increasingly competent in understanding the role of law enforcement, and the expectation for professionalism has been elevated from previous years” said Dr. Ashraf Esmail, the inaugural director of the CRJ. This is especially important in the digital age where there is no room to hide. Police misconduct can be filmed and sent worldwide in seconds and because of this, the CRJ insists that law enforcement be vigilant and do the right thing to stop the pattern of heinous crimes against people of color.

The mission of CRJ is to bring systemic change to the way policing is done in communities of color and to promote partnerships with law enforcement including police departments and sheriff’s offices, graduate, and professional schools. The CRJ will be a reservoir for lectures, research, advocacy training, civic engagement, and political participation.

It will also brand Dillard University as the top choice for undergraduates seeking meaningful careers in or related to law enforcement and a place for expanded public interest discourse, workshops, and distinguished lectures. CRJ’s goal is to change the way people of color and their communities are policed through education, community relationship building, civic engagement training, services, partnerships, and utilization of relevant resources. The center will develop a 30-hour certificate program, offering courses such as: Policing in Society, Sociology of Black Americans, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Social Welfare, Policy and Services and Leadership in Ethical Decision Making.

The first class to debut from the center was Police Brutality: Violence and Social Control, this fall. The course introduced students to the origin of police violence, the culture of police brutality, and understanding police power. Students examined how law enforcement utilizes violence, social control, and racial profiling through various theoretical perspectives and empirical data. Students studied the laws, bias, and policies that have allowed several offenders to escape penalization. The course also covered Civil Rights violations and practices that have been utilized to prevent violence and force accountability. The Police Brutality course also explored control, treatment of offenders, and the tools used to prevent violence.

For more information on the Center for Racial Justice at Dillard University, please contact Dr. Ashraf Esmail, Program Coordinator of Dillard’s Criminal Justice program at aesmail@dillard.edu.
“What a beautiful campus!”
It is a widely shared sentiment when visitors and passersby first feast their eyes on the “Jewel of Gentilly.” The “gleaming White and spacious green” is also an immense source of pride for Dillard alumni. Now, the secret is out thanks to Cosmopolitan. The lifestyle and fashion magazine, whose website attracted more than 46 million visitors in June, ranked 50 of their “most beautiful college campuses.”

One of two Louisiana campuses ranked, Dillard was ranked the top local campus. Cosmopolitan’s Laura Hanrahan wrote, “Dillard’s campus is quintessential college—gorgeous oak trees, sweeping grassy lawns, very walkable.” Few are more pleased than President Walter Kimbrough. “It is always nice to be recognized, but of course I think we’re a top 10 campus. I’ll start my shadow campaign for next year soon,” he quipped.
JERICHO BROWN’98
PULITZER PRIZE WINNER

DILLARD UNIVERSITY ALUM JERICHO BROWN’98 WINS THE PULITZER PRIZE IN POETRY
Dillard University alumnus Jericho Brown ’98 won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for his collection The Tradition, which the Pulitzer board deemed “a collection of masterful lyrics that combine delicacy with historical urgency in their loving evocation of bodies vulnerable to hostility and violence.” The Pulitzer Prize was funded and established in 1917 by the will of journalist and newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer. It is awarded in 22 categories, focusing on journalism, literature, drama, history, and music.


“I’m happy to bring this prize back home, and by that I mean back to black folks, back to the South, back to Louisiana, and back to my alma mater, Dillard University. Dillard is where I first took creative writing workshops as classes toward my major, and it’s where I first began to envision a life for myself as a writer,” the Shreveport, Louisiana native shared in a statement. “These are not easy times for any of us, but I’d like to believe that this prize in this particular instance can show that there is still possibility for us no matter how rough the terrain may seem. And I’m grateful to have gotten the education necessary to make it to this moment.”

Brown’s Pulitzer Prize win was no surprise to Dillard faculty members, especially Dr. Mona Lisa Saloy, folklorist and professor of English. “While [he was] a student here, [Brown] wore business suits daily with a matching bow tie, along with his fellow male classmates aiming for the study of law. They were serious about school and worked hard,” she said. “Indeed, he had “that something,” and I urged him to consider that perhaps he was sent here for something more than the law, that there was a fine writer buried inside of him, just waiting to be released.”

Brown is currently an associate professor and the director of the Creative Writing Program at Emory University. He is the recipient of several fellowships from: Guggenheim Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He is also the winner of the Whiting Award. Brown’s first book, Please, won the American Book Award and his second book, The New Testament won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. The Tradition is his third collection of poetry.
COMMUNITY AND CHURCH RELATIONS DIRECTOR KEEPS DILLARD CONNECTED WITH NEW ORLEANIANS THROUGH COVID-19
It is the first day of free COVID-19 testing on campus with a steady stream of masked New Orleanians moving through the Student Union. COVID-19 may have taken the city’s world famous spring festival season away; but it has not taken away warm greetings, smiling eyes and laughter. The biggest laugh, however, comes from Nick Harris who presents every single test taker with a complimentary tote bag as if he has known them for years.

Harris, Dillard’s director of Community and Church Relations (CCR), has never met a stranger and everyone from Gentilly to Uptown back to New Orleans East knows that. It is no wonder that he was referred to in the spring 2018 issue of “Dillard Today” as “the other mayor of New Orleans.” Harris’s energy and persistence is the reason Dillard is the only local institution of higher learning on the Greater New Orleans Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster list. He was also named a Neighborhood Navigator by the Mayor’s Neighborhood Engagement Office in conjunction with Forward Together New Orleans to assist residents with questions pertaining to available COVID-19 resources.

CCR has been busy since Mayor LaToya Cantrell and Governor John Bel Edwards began taking precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19. Leveraging a healthy variety of partnerships, Harris began communicating with local citizens about the locations of food pantries and free meal deliveries in the first couple of weeks of the stay-at-home orders. Other services that CCR has helped facilitate are grocery and prescription medication pick-ups, financial assistance for hospitality and gig economy workers, legal services for under resourced communities, a nonprofit directory and even resources for nonprofit agencies.

Because of Harris’ work, the University was recognized among the network of local colleges and universities providing PPEs to New Orleans’ healthcare community. In March, CCR teamed up with the College of Nursing to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) to agencies including Excelth Primary and DePaul Community Health Center.

In typical fashion, Harris made sure that the free testing on campus was a collaborative effort. CCR worked with the University’s Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center and the New Orleans Health Department to include Dillard as a testing site. Certainly, there is much more work to be done especially with more of COVID-19 on the horizon. With Harris’s tireless efforts, Dillard is sure to remain committed to being an institution of service.
In today’s higher education landscape, non-traditional students are increasingly becoming the new norm on college campuses. However, at Dillard University, non-traditional students have always been a consistent group within the Dillard community and its legacy. Dillard is committed to being a historically Black college that is inclusive in educating African-American students, no matter their age, academic or familial background. An example of this is Karen and Lee Anderson, ages 55 and 56. The married couple enrolled this fall to complete their undergraduate degrees in their home city of New Orleans. To Lee and Karen, earning these degrees would allow them to pour back into their community by opening a therapy practice for those suffering from anger issues, broken homes, or perilous marriages. In this feature, you will learn more about how Karen met Lee, why they chose Dillard, and the importance of education.

A Love Story
Lee: We met in New Orleans in 1979 when Karen met her first husband, but interestingly enough, we grew up a block apart and didn’t even know each other! When we met, it wasn’t love at first sight; Karen divorced her first husband after 18 years and later remarried. After six years of marriage, her second husband passed. A year later, she and I got married. At that point, we knew each other for 29 years. Today, we have been married for 12 years; we dated for six weeks before getting married at a drive-through wedding chapel in Las Vegas. Between us, we have three adult children. We enjoy our journey one day at a time because we understand love is a choice, and we choose to love each other at all times.
How has COVID-19 Impacted Your Life?

Karen: We’re musicians and owners of Algiers Brass Band, LLC. Our company performs at weddings, corporate events, funerals and other celebrations centered around New Orleans’ second line traditions or jazz funerals. Before COVID-19, we performed nationwide but now perform at nursing homes. Recently we worked on a virtual project that was released in early October. In our personal time, we are members of Black Tide. At Dillard, we are members of the B. K. Clark Psychology Club.

When I perform music, the genre I specialize in is Jazz and Christian Worship; my instrument is my voice. Lee plays his trumpet and usually performs Louis Armstrong covers. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has eliminated our live performance schedule, but we are working on a project to get into senior homes around the country and perhaps even around the world. Lee has helped me in my music career by simply being supportive and allowing me to do what I love to do. At first, he really wasn’t interested in performing, but at some point, I was able to convince him that it would be a great idea, so now he does.

What’s Your Why?

Lee: I have a helicopter pilot’s license and, when I went to flight school, I was the only Black person at the airport. I realized half-way through school that I wasn’t going to school for me. I was going for all the other Black guys coming after me. Generally speaking, there’s not a lot of Black men flying anyway but, I don’t think they are aware of the career opportunities they can have outside of what they see. Many believe that they have nothing to live for. They see opportunities but, they think, “that can’t be me.”

Karen: I agree with what Lee is saying; young people in the hood aren’t seeing the Drs. Kimbrough or Bullard. You know? [They have not met] people who have worked hard to achieve their success. They see the dealers or women who have five kids with no support. It is only one extreme they are observing. So when they get to the point where they do see successful Black people, they think, “Oh! That must be magic.” Young people have to learn that you have to put your nose to the grindstone as my grandmother used to say. Our “why” is to fix broken families and promote healing within the Black community. We know of people who have spent a lot of money on therapists who aren’t connected to their racial or socio-economic experience. We believe we can fix and fill that void within the therapy market, especially in New Orleans.
WHERE the MONEY RESIDES:
Miss Dillard Kaylan Tanner ‘21 Talks Slaying Grades While Managing Hair Care Business

Kaylan Tanner ‘21 serves as the 85th Miss Dillard University and is known on campus for her quick-witted debate skills, intellectual aptitude, and majestic ‘fro that crowns her head. This fall, she received recognition for her commitment to community service and reproductive healthcare advocacy from Seventeen Magazine. In an interview with the Office of Communications and Marketing, the graduating senior shared how she launched Kurly Sistaz Hair Co., a vegan hair care company, as a college student. Tanner notes her parents for having the professional acuity to shape her and little sister Sabrina’s (Tanner’s business partner) goals. Find out how Miss Dillard was prepared to go “where the money resides,” with her non-toxic products for Black women.
Dillard University (DU): What pulled you to start a hair-care business?
Kaylan Tanner (KT): I’ve always had a fascination with growing natural hair and I wanted to turn my passion into a business. While watching YouTube videos, I noticed that the natural hair influencers’ techniques and products they were promoting weren’t working for me and weren’t completely natural. So my sister and I decided to start our own natural hair company to teach and empower young Black women and girls to grow healthy natural hair.

DU: Your products are vegan. Why is it important for Black women to not use or minimize the amount of toxic chemicals (relaxed or natural) in their hair and skin?
KT: We pride ourselves on hand making 100% vegan and natural products. It’s important that Black women limit the amount of toxic chemicals they apply to their hair because it can damage their hair by altering their curl pattern and stunting growth.
DU: How did you learn to make your products?
KT: I learned to make products by watching “Do it Yourself” YouTube videos. Since 10th grade, I’ve been educating myself on how to formulate natural recipes using ingredients you may already have in your kitchen. Now I’ve expanded my knowledge to different oils, herbs, seeds, powders and butters from Africa and India.

DU: Your younger sister is your business partner; what has that experience been like for you?
KT: Working with my younger sister Sabrina, is truly a blessing! Our relationship has grown stronger as I am able to coach her on how to make products, create effective marketing strategies, budgeting and shipping. At only 14 years old, she oversees our operations in Los Angeles with the help of our mother, as do I in New Orleans.

DU: What is it like building a business while in undergrad? How do you balance your time?
KT: Building a business in undergrad has been extremely difficult because sometimes I want to dedicate my full attention to Kurly Sistaz Hair Co. but realistically I can’t. I continuously have to check myself to keep myself on track with being a full-time student-athlete, Miss Dillard University, handling multiple internships and being a business owner. To balance my time, I plan certain days of the week and hours in a day to dedicate myself to my business.

DU: Your hair is your most recognizable feature. How do you maintain it on a college budget?
KT: Maintaining natural hair can be expensive however, I am a stickler for using natural products in your kitchen. For example, egg, mayo and honey can be used to create an amazing mask to promote stronger hair. When it comes to getting my hair trimmed, I make sure I save up at least $60 to get my hair professionally cut at natural hair salons in the city.

DU: How did you develop your ecommerce site and what advice do you have for those who are interested in launching a business while in college?
KT: My father invested in us by hiring a web developer who taught us the ins and outs of designing our ecommerce site. I used inspiration from other natural hair brands to build our content for our website. However, if you aren’t able to hire a web designer or developer, you can easily access information from Google, YouTube and website builder programs. If you are interested in launching a business in college, do it! Use the resources from your connections at your respective college or university. I utilized my connections with other HBCU Campus Queens by making them brand ambassadors for Kurly Sistaz Hair Co. Just remember that you’re a student before you’re an entrepreneur.

DU: Who is your hairspiration and why?
KT: My hairspiration is Yara Shahidi, she is the queen of natural hair styles.

Season’s Greetings