



THE OMAHA STAR

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Family of the Week:

New Financial Incentive For North Omaha's African American High



Students pictured participated in the Pass a Calculus test and win \$1,000 dollars. The idea is the brainchild of technology guru Robert Blackwell Jr. who founded a new organization in Omaha in 2020 called Alpha Mission. After the murder of George Floyd, Blackwell envisioned a plan to bring the Black community from poverty to prosperity by proving the free enterprise system works for all Americans. Alpha Mission asks companies to 'Just Do Business' with Black businesses in Nebraska.

Part of the Alpha Mission solution includes educating youth and providing resources and opportunities for African Americans to become digital and technology employees for Nebraska companies. The Calculus Award is one initiative starting scholars on that journey. Robert Blackwell Jr.'s ultimate goal is to have 1,000 students pass a Calculus test.

The first group of students stepped up to the mission at the kick-off ceremony. Students from various North Omaha high schools, grades 10-12 gathered to be honored as they took the challenge to pass a Calculus test. Alpha Mission is recruiting tutors to help guide the students along. Then the students can take the test whenever they feel comfortable and win 1,000 dollars. The money is a donation by the founder, it's not a scholarship. Robert Blackwell Jr. says "If you can pass a calculus test, you can do anything" His goal is to reward these students for their hard work. At the kick-off ceremony he told them, "If you want to be successful, you have to work hard. We are here to show you love and support" Inspiring, successful business leaders encouraged the students to continue doing well in school, study hard and not to give up. Speakers included: Director of Economic Development: Anthony Goins; Nebraska Lt. Governor: Mike Foley; Alpha Mission board members and Black business leaders.

Registration to participate closes on March 15th. Eligible students can go to alphamission.com and submit information under "contact us" to learn more. Alpha Mission plans to hold a celebration ceremony before the end of the year to honor all the students who passed.

These initiatives are not funded by donations or charity. Robert Blackwell Jr.'s new tech company called Quant16 is a part of the funding process. Quant 16, is a technology business that identifies efficiencies in a company's technology spend. After analyzing areas to "cut the fat" it can potentially save the company millions of dollars. Then, the Nebraska company commits to bring on a Black-owned vendor, and those vendors commit to hire Black employees and contractors. Blackwell says, "This concept of "pulling others forward" is what will economically empower the Black community, close the racial wealth gap, educate youth and decrease crime. Alpha Mission initiatives are then funded by the vendors committing a small percentage of their revenue (typically 2.5%) to Quant16.

Blackwell says, "The road from poverty to prosperity is not a mystery. It begins with entrepreneurial-led economic activity, which leads to the appreciation of education and the creation of social capital. Ask your company to 'Just Do Business' with Black entrepreneurs ready to deliver meaningful value. This will create the economic resources, social capital and aspirational roadmap that will lift your fellow Nebraskans from poverty to prosperity."

For more information go to www.alphamission.com

167th Face on the Barroom Floor

By Nancy Gaarder, OWH

Symone Sanders, an Omaha native who was an adviser to President Joe Biden and chief spokeswoman for Vice President Kamala Harris, has received the ultimate Omaha award.

Sanders, 32, was named the Face on the Barroom Floor during a roast at the Omaha Press Club. The award recognizes newsmakers who have had an impact on the community.

At the event, a caricature of the honoree is unveiled and then placed on the floor before being hung on the wall.

It was an evening of laughter and good-natured ribbing as friends, family and community supporters celebrated Sanders' success.

In her comments, Brenda Council, the former state senator, school board member and City Council member who came within 785 votes of becoming Omaha's first Black mayor, marveled at what Sanders has achieved.

Council talked about how Sanders used her moxie to earn the honor of introducing President Bill Clinton at an Omaha Girls Inc. fundraiser. And how she used the same drive to land a job as spokeswoman for then-presidential candidate Bernie Sanders (no relation).

From there, Sanders' trajectory continued upward.

"Think about that, chief adviser to the president of the United States, spokesperson for the first and only Black female vice president of the United States," Council said. "There are so many young Black women who see Symone, who see who she is and how she does what she does in her own way."

Sanders has credited Girls Inc. as helping set her on her life's path.

Others participating in the roast were Emily Mwaja, director of programs at Girls Inc.; Tom Warren, chief of staff to Mayor Jean Stothert and a former Omaha police chief; and Aida Amoura-Rezac, formerly of Mayor Jim Suttle's office.

Sanders returned the jokes, but also the love.

"I wouldn't be where I am without North Omaha," she said.

Her mother, Terri Sanders, publisher of the Omaha Star, emceed the event.

Terri Sanders talked about how her then-5-year-old daughter Symone would get underfoot in the kitchen, taking on the persona of "Donna Burns" TV broadcaster. Holding a wooden spoon for a microphone, little Symone would pepper her mother with questions: What are you doing? What are you cooking? What about this and what about that?

"Little did I know that that was just the beginning," she said. "Symone is very driven."

Sanders has since shifted from the White House to MSNBC, where she will host two shows, one on the network and the other on the Peacock streaming platform — the latter is titled "The Choice."

Her political experience includes helping then-Mayor Suttle survive a 2011 recall attempt and work on Chuck Hasebrook's 2014 Nebraska gubernatorial campaign. By age 25, she was national press secretary for presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. She served as a senior adviser in the Biden 2020 campaign, remained an adviser when he became president and joined Vice President Harris' staff.

In 2020, she published a book on how young people can make their voices heard: "No, You Shut Up; Speaking Truth to Power and Reclaiming America."

Sanders' portrait was drawn by former World-Herald political cartoonist Jeff Koterba.

Small touches in the caricature reflect on Sanders' life. She is shown driving a red car along a winding path that starts in North Omaha, then goes to the White House and beyond. Red is her favorite color. She is wearing a North O earring and the license plate on the car, as it is in real life, is the 402 area code for Omaha. The collection of people in the drawing include Bernie Sanders, Biden and Harris.

She is the 167th person to be given the award. Past recipients include politicians, local philanthropists, business leaders, sports figures and members of the news media.



Publisher's Pen

By Terri D. Sanders



Dotcom Studios

Yes, COVID-19 is still here. We have been told by the Center for Disease Control that we can lower or masks. I would not dispose of the masks just yet, because variants are still developing. Welcome to Women's History Month, the month of March. There have been many great achievements by women. For example: Theoretical physicist Dr. Shirley Jackson was the first black woman to receive a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1973. While

working at Bell Laboratories, she conducted breakthrough scientific research with subatomic particles. Her research enabled others to invent the portable fax, touch tone telephone, solar cells, fibre optic cables, and the technology behind caller ID and call waiting. Imagine all the important information you would have missed without this amazing woman!

In 1843, Nancy from Philadelphia became one of the most important people in history by patenting a design for a hand-operated ice cream maker, which is still used to the current day! We don't know what more to say other than thank you, Nancy Johnson, for helping people everywhere on hot days.

"The Landlord's Game," originally patented in 1904 by Magie, was a critique of

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My mission in life: is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style ~ Maya Angelou