

CELEBRATING



LEARNING FOR LIFE

ORLEAN BEESON
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

1915  2023

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY



Welcome!

Thank you for attending our seventh annual Learning for Life Awards Dinner. The inaugural event took place in 2015, Orlean Beeson School of Education's centennial year, and continues to be a pivotal opportunity to celebrate the success and contributions of our outstanding alumni and friends.

We believe one's education does not conclude when students receive a diploma but continues throughout one's life and career. This belief is foundational to Samford University, and an attitude that we actively try to cultivate in the lives of our students. Ultimately, it is why we are gathered here this evening.

Tonight, we pay tribute to our guests and honorees who have dedicated their lives to continuous learning and thus explored new and innovative ways to impact our school, our community, and the Kingdom of God.

We hope you enjoy the celebration!

Anna E. McEwan, Ph.D.

Dean, Orlean Beeson School of Education

Learning for Life Awards Dinner

Wednesday, August 16, 2023

Vestavia Country Club

WELCOME

Anna McEwan

Dean

Orlean Beeson School of Education

UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

Beck A. Taylor

President

Samford University

INVOCATION

Monique Gardner Witherspoon

Associate Professor and Associate Dean

Orlean Beeson School of Education

DINNER

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Amelia Grace Waltman

Sophomore, Human Development and Family Science

2015-22 LEARNING FOR LIFE RECIPIENTS RECOGNITION

Kathy Acton

Alumni Relations, Orlean Beeson School of Education

2017 Learning for Life Honoree

2023 AWARD PRESENTATIONS AND INTRODUCTION OF SPEAKER

Anna McEwan

SPEAKER

Jenny Waltman

CEO, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Grace Klein Community

BENEDICTION

Amy Hoagland

Professor and Assistant Dean

Orlean Beeson School of Education

2023 Learning for Life Award Recipients

Orlean Beeson School of Education graduates make a great impact on their community through their servant leadership. The Learning for Life awards seek to honor our graduates who exemplify leadership in the classroom, school administration, churches, mission organizations, nonprofits, businesses, volunteer organizations and more.

Elizabeth Brinkley 2019

Jessica DePaolantonio 2018

Peter J. Hughes 2007, 2017

Andrew Jackson 2009

Katherine Rodgers 2015, 2017

Danny Steele 2002, 2005

Elizabeth Brinkley 2019

Brinkley was raised in a family that faithfully followed Christ. She graduated in 2019 from Samford University with a degree in Human Development and Family Sciences. During 2017 and 2018, she spent a cumulative time of four months in Sofia, Bulgaria, where God revealed and confirmed He was opening doors for her to move to Bulgaria with Mission to the World as a missionary with a focus in anti-sex trafficking. There she found a new opportunity and began an education through prevention program amongst the Roma gypsy population. The program grew into a supportive partnership of a pastoral training program, where local pastors would not only be equipped theologically, but also trained up as informed safeguards in their communities. Upon the closure of her three years in Bulgaria, by God's grace and provision, over \$30,000 had been given to build and support two remote Roma churches, two soup kitchens were developed and sustained, one Christian school was supplied, various educational efforts were actualized, and a community garden was begun. Brinkley has recently moved back to Birmingham where she will continue pursuing her calling with Christian Service Mission.

Jessica DePaolantonio 2018

DePaolantonio graduated from Samford University with an Early Childhood, Special Education, Elementary, Elementary Collaborative degree in 2018. She went on to teach two years at an inner-city school in Nashville, Tennessee. In 2020, DePaolantonio helped start Haven Academy, a homeschool tutorial in Franklin, Tennessee. She has been teaching fourth grade for the past three years. In 2022, DePaolantonio was diagnosed with Chondrosarcoma, a rare bone cancer spanning across her left humerus. Staying positive throughout this chapter of her life was very important and ultimately led her to start her own t-shirt business, Happy Tees TN. She created this business as an outlet to share her story and encourage others with smiley faces and Jesus loving t-shirts. With the good Lord and help from the wonderful doctors at Vanderbilt Medical Center, Jessica had her entire humerus bone replaced and is now cancer free. Since then, she has been involved in numerous charity events to help spread awareness and fundraise for cancer research. In March 2023, DePaolantonio had the privilege to speak at Clip in 4 the Cure, which was held at the Nashville Sounds Stadium. This event benefited the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center. CycleBar Franklin started an annual Cycle Gives Ride in DePaolantonio's honor to raise money for the Chondrosarcoma Foundation. She has also had opportunities to share her story on different social media platforms to encourage others who may be going through similar situations. She loves to share what God has done in her life and prays that her story can bring hope to those around her. In May of this year, DePaolantonio and her husband were blessed to bring their firstborn into the world.



Peter J. Hughes 2007, 2017

Hughes currently serves as assistant provost and professor of pharmacy practice at Samford University. He has been a faculty member at Samford since 2009. Hughes considers his work as an educator a vocational calling to minister to students and faculty colleagues with a servant's heart. In his current role, Hughes supports a variety of initiatives out of the Office of Academic Affairs, including faculty development, office of research and sponsored programs, and global education, along with maintaining teaching and research roles in McWhorter School of Pharmacy. He has published more than 25 peer-reviewed manuscripts, as well as several textbook chapters and reviews. Hughes is actively involved in grant-funded research, namely in the area of workforce development. Over the past 12 years, he and his collaborators have received over \$1.3 million in funding from the Alabama Department of Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Hughes carries out his work to serve God by serving others and resides in the Birmingham area with his wife, Beth and three sons, Kevin, Charlie and Peter.

Andrew Jackson 2009

Jackson is a fourth grade teacher at i3 Academy, with special education and general education experience. As a first-year teacher, he taught a student with special needs whom he would later adopt. The student's situation served as a catalyst that would spark Jackson's passion for foster care, mental health advocacy and special education. Jackson was selected as the 2020-2021 Alabama State Teacher of the Year. He has served on various leadership teams including the Counseling and Mental Health Advisory Committee for Pell City Schools, the Jefferson County Court-Appointed Special Advocates Board of Directors, the Heart Gallery Alabama Junior Board, and on advisory committees with the Alabama State Department of Education. In December 2018, he became a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) and now serves as a candidate support provider for teachers working toward NBCT certification. In December, he will graduate with a certificate in educational leadership from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Jackson and his wife, Sheree, are foster parents and have adopted several children. Their newest child Tobias was born last month bringing their total number of children to 11. Jackson's children have needs ranging from gifted and talented to schizoaffective disorder and autism. Jackson's experiences in and out of the classroom have fueled his unwavering commitment to helping each child, regardless of their situation, grow into the person they were created to be.

Katherine Rodgers 2015, 2017

Rodgers is a 2015 graduate of Samford University where she received a bachelor's degree in early childhood, elementary, and special education. In 2017, she received a master's degree in elementary education. During her time at Samford, Rodgers developed a heart for serving children in the classroom and to the ends of the earth, trusting God to lead her. Rodgers served in the classroom for four years in preschool special education and second grade. In 2019, she left her teaching job while stepping out in faith as God called her to Africa. She trusted that the Lord would be faithful to provide and to make a way along every step of her journey. Katherine started a nonprofit in 2020, Purposefully Made Ministries, where she focuses on serving children with disabilities in rural Kenya. She equips parents, caregivers and teachers with crucial resources for inclusion and development. She spends half of the year in Kenya as the executive director of Purposefully Made Ministries. Kenya has such a big piece of her heart and will always feel like home to her. Katherine enjoys spending half of the year in the U.S. for fundraising and speaking events for her ministry. She gives God the glory for the work that He has done and will continue to do!

Danny Steele 2002, 2005

Steele is beginning his 31st year of education, and this school year marks his third as the principal of Homewood Middle School in Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to this position, he has served as a principal, assistant principal, teacher, coach and assistant professor of instructional leadership. In 2005, Steele was recognized as Alabama's Assistant Principal of the Year, and in 2016, he was recognized as Alabama's Secondary Principal of the Year. He has presented at numerous state and national conferences and spoken in school districts around the country. He has written five books, including two with Todd Whitaker. Steele has an undergraduate degree in history from Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. He has a graduate degree in history from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and he has an educational specialist degree in educational administration and an educational doctorate in educational leadership from Samford University. He has three children, and he resides with his wife in Birmingham.

Orlean Beeson Award

Orlean Beeson School of Education is impacted daily by those who are not graduates; faculty, staff and friends working tirelessly to invest in serving our students and furthering our mission. To honor these investments, we are proud to present the Orlean Beeson Award, in memory of our benefactor and namesake. Award recipients exemplify this same impact by using their God given talents to further our mission of enriching the community and empowering our students to educate, lead and serve.

Marla Haas Corts

Born in 1941, Corts grew up in Ashtabula, Ohio, attended Columbia Bible College for two years (1959–61), and then Houghton College in New York, where she graduated in 1963 with a major in English and a minor in secondary education. She taught high school English briefly and then married her high school sweetheart in 1964. In 1974, she earned a nursing degree and worked part time at a hospital in Wingate, North Carolina, while her husband was president of Wingate College, now Wingate University.

Corts is the former executive director of Samford's Legacy League and former first lady, during her husband, Thomas E. Cort's, years as president of Samford University. During this time, a scholarship was established in her name to honor her longtime service to the organization. The Marla Haas Corts Missionary Biography Collection in Samford's University Libraries contains more than 1,400 volumes about foreign missionaries, was established by family and friends to commemorate Marla's longtime interest in missions. She has visited mission points throughout the world and was instrumental in establishing a village school in Liberia, which is named in her honor.

In 2011, Orlean Beeson School of Education launched the annual Tom and Marla Corts Distinguished Authors series in honor of the Corts family. Corts was awarded the Lolla Wurtelle Wright Award in 2016 for her years of dedicated service and commitment to the Legacy League. Before recently moving to Fairhope, Marla was an active member of Brookwood Baptist Church where she served on various committees, taught a ladies Bible study and served as a deacon. In addition to her busy role as first lady, she was devoted to her husband and family, which includes daughters Jennifer and Rachel, and son, Chris, along with eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Jodi Newton Excellence in Character Education Award

The cultivation of character and "living a life for good" is woven into the fabric of Orlean Beeson School of Education because it is an extension of our mission to positively impact individuals, communities and the world. The faculty and staff prepare students by developing in them both professional competence and strength of character. Last fall, our Samford family and the field of character education lost one of our guiding lights. The late Jodi Newton was admired for her role in advancing P-12 character education and collaborating with character-focused leaders nationally and internationally. This award is named to honor her memory and continue her legacy through this important work. Through the Jodi Newton Excellence in Character Education Award, Orlean Beeson School of Education honors a graduate who embodies Christ-like virtues and excels in advancing character education in families, schools and communities.



Patricia Kendrick Simpson

Simpson is currently director of programs for The Hope Institute, a nonprofit organization that assists K-12 schools to cultivate character. A life-long Birmingham resident and product of Birmingham City Schools, Simpson earned her undergraduate degree in education from Birmingham-Southern College; later receiving advanced degrees (master's, specialist and doctorate) in educational leadership from Samford University. Simpson became a successful educator with 36 years of employment in Homewood City Schools as a classroom teacher, technology coordinator and assistant principal at Shades Cahaba Elementary before retiring from Edgewood Elementary as school principal. Simpson has received several notable recognitions: The Birmingham-Southern College Legacy Award, Samford's Most Outstanding Education Student, National Blue Ribbon School, and National School of Character. Blessed with a 47-year marriage to husband, Herman, the Simpsons are proud of their family: sons, Jason and Jarod, grandson Alijah, and daughter-in-law, Arrie.

Speaker

Jenny Waltman

Jenny Anderson Waltman, wife to Jason and mother to Amelia Grace and Denver, graduated from Samford University in 1998 with a degree in human development and family studies. She lives a concept of “business as mission” through her service as president of Grace Klein Construction, Inc. and CEO, founder and chairman of the board for Grace Klein Community, Inc. In 2021, she authored *God Chose the Wrong Person*, and was named a City of Birmingham StrongHer honoree. She speaks regularly at community events, including: the 2023 Mayor’s Leadership Dinner, the evening before the 59th Greater Birmingham Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast, panels with the Orlean Beeson School of Education or Young Business Leaders, company boardrooms such as The Welch Group or JH Berry & Gilbert, or through podcasts, clubs, and churches. She currently serves on the board of advisors for STEPS Ministries and is a member of Liberty Church Birmingham, Movement Birmingham, Mission Increase, and an executive round table with Cornerstone Cohorts. Grace Klein Community is recognized with a four-star rating from Charity Navigator as an organization exceeding industry standards and outperforming most charities in its cause, and it maintains the Guidestar Platinum Seal of Transparency. Waltman received The Learning for Life Award from Samford University in 2021, Game Changer Nominee of Women Business Leaders in 2022, and is the 2023 Humanitarian of the Year with Samford University.

Save the Date

Homecoming

Oct. 27-28

Tom and Marla Corts Distinguished Author Series

Feb. 20, 2024

The inaugural Learning for Life Awards took place during our centennial year. We honored more than 100 distinguished alumni. In recent years, we added 45 honorees to this prestigious group. This year, we are honored to recognize six additional distinguished alumni as Learning for Life Award recipients.

2015

Kelly Alling
Buddy Anderson
Mandy Jayne Antwine
Suzan Armstrong
Linda Bachus
Mary Sue Baldwin
Walter Barnes
Brian Bauman
Morcese Beasley
Lisa Beckham
Marissa Benjamin
Karen Birkenfeld
Bonnie Bolding
Bobby Bowden
Betsy Box
Katrina Brown
Tyler Burgess
Daphne Carr
Nita Carr
Jennifer Carroll
Sonia Carrington
Amanda Cavin
Patrick Chappell
Gwen Childs
Kara Chism
Lindy Cleveland
William Cleveland
Tyler Coffey
Dennis Conner
Joseph Connick
Janet Cumbee
Robin Duncan
Holly Dymond
Shirley Garrett
Heather Gassner
Anita Gay
Ralph Gold
Hilton Green
John Green
Norma Green
Rachel Gregory
Elizabeth Hagan
Charolette Hamby
Julie Hannah
John Haywood

Alvin Hines II
Sarah Hines
Amy Hoaglund
Lea Hoppe
Sherri Huff
Eden Hutchins
Jennifer Johnston
Ann Jones
Devyn Keith
Lyssette Kennemore
Evelyn Kernachan
Suzanne Lacey
Markanne Larberg
Phil Lazenby
Brian Lindsey
Kelsey Logan
Caroline Love
Kevin Maddox
Cathlena Martin
Jack McGill
Carol McArthur
Ann McInvale
Taylor Milburn
Josna Mishra
Shelly Mize
MaryAnn Moon
Bob Newton
Jodi Newton
Marianne Pearce
Perry Phillips
Lily Portlock
Craig Pouncey
Ryan Rainer
Mark Richardson
Wayne Richardson
Chris Robbins
Betsy Rogers
Jordan Sanders
Chuck Sands
David Saunders
Jimmy Shaw
Patricia Simpson
Christen Sloderbeck
Pamela Smith
Barbara Snyder
Anne Stone

Regina Thompson
Gwendolyn Tilghman
Leah Treadwell
James Ward
Dorothy Westbrook
Karen Westbrook
Jane Weygand
Anne Whirley
John Whirley
Trudy White
Vic Wilson
Mary Wyatt

Posthumous

Frank Adams Sr.
John Armstrong
Eulette Carter
Raymond Christian
Maralyn Christian
Martha Cox
Pearl Cranford
Arthur Dennis
Dorothy Donovan
Mae Flynt
Annie Garner
Wynema Lowry
Felix Moore
Frances Stone
Hazel Strickland

2017

Kathy Acton
Lewis Brooks
Argie Campbell
Marisa Dempsey
Sherri Foyt
Emily Freeland
Dana Mungenast
Erin Robbins
Feliccia Smith
Shelly Vail-Smith

2018

Meghan Allen
Chelsea Byrd
Jennifer Carter

Lauren Dunnam
Justin Hefner
Matthew Kiser
Jennifer Jackson
Maggie Lawrence
Jewel Littleton
Loretta Rowan
Jeremy Sandefur
Marla Vaughn
Bet Wright
Sarah Young

2019

Mary Wyatt
Crenshaw
Heather Hurt
Alice Laurendine
John Lowry
Renee Pitts
Chandra Sparks
Splond
Pat Wingfield

2021

April Harris Finkley
Jacqnaii A. Finkley
Alicia Hunsberger
Katie King
Kathleen Needham
Lori L. Sullivan
Jason Allen
Waltman
Jenny Anderson
Waltman

2022

Autumm M. Jeter
Eden Jones-Hinds
Becky Gordy
Lehmann
Meridith N. Starling
Patrick White
Amanda Wilbanks

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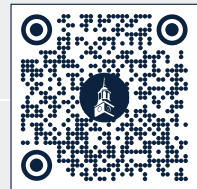
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We invite you to join us in celebrating the kingdom work of our Orlean Beeson School of Education students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends by making a tribute gift. Your gifts allow us to continually invest in the success of our students, providing scholarships and academic resources where the needs are greatest. Tribute gifts of all amounts are welcome and are tax deductible.

To make a gift, scan the QR code or visit samford.edu/education/giving.



For more information, contact Sheri Ransome, director of donor engagement for Orlean Beeson School of Education, at shransom@samford.edu or 205-726-4462.