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# Edna Cook-Norvell leads list of 2020 Southern Arkansas University alumni honorees

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Edna Cook-Norvell will posthumously receive the Southern Arkansas University Lifetime Achievement Award.



Dr. Gayle White is the 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Golden Mulerider.

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Jim Andrews has been named a 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Alumni.

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Allan Robbins has been named a 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Alumni.

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Gwendolyn Roland has been named a 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Alumni.

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Cody Burkham has been named a 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Young Alumni.

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Dr. Kristofer Freeland has been named a 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Young Alumni.

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Dr. Genese Lavalais has been named a 2020 Southern Arkansas University Distinguished Young Alumni.

The Southern Arkansas University Alumni Association, Inc., will honor eight outstanding SAU alumni during the organization's annual Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 7.

Award recipients will be honored in four categories, said SAU Director of Alumni Relations Megan McCurdy.

The Lifetime Achievement Award will be presented to Edna Cook-Norvell (posthumous); Dr. Gayle White will be recognized as the Distinguished Golden Mulerider; Jim Andrews, Allan Robbins, and Gwendolyn Roland will receive the Distinguished Alumni Award; Cody Burkham, Dr. Kristofer Freeland, and Dr. Genese Lavalais will be honored as Distinguished Young Alumni.

**[CLICK HERE to buy tickets online. Individual tickets are \\$20, and a table of eight seats can be purchased to \\$160.](#)**

Here are profiles of the individual honorees.

### **Edna Cook-Norvell '38 (Dayton, Ohio)**

#### **Lifetime Achievement Award (posthumous)**

Edna Cook-Norvell was born in Venice, IL, and moved with her family to Buckner in Lafayette County in the 1930s. She attended Stamps High School before becoming a student at Magnolia A&M. She graduated from A&M in 1938. She received a BA degree from Louisiana State University and an MS from the University of Montana.

Norvell embarked on a teaching career spanning 55 years, nine states and four countries, including Japan, Libya, Germany, and England. Her late husband, Maj. Robert Norvell (USAF, Ret.), was an aeronautical engineer and served during World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Throughout their careers, the importance of and love for education was never lost.

Her generosity has transformed SAU's College of Science and Engineering through donations totaling more than \$2 million to benefit student scholarships. Norvell told Dr. Trey Berry, SAU President, that she chose to make the gift because of all the generous people who helped her while she was a student at Magnolia A&M. She often remarked how proud she was to be a graduate of Magnolia A&M (now SAU). She was quick to give credit to SAU for giving her a start when she didn't know exactly what to do. Her charitable gifts support Mulerider students through endowed NORCO SAU Engineering Scholarships.

In April 2019, the SAU Board of Trustees approved a resolution to honor Norvell through the rebranding of the Engineering Building – formerly known as the armory – to the Norvell-Cook Engineering Center. Mrs. Norvell was also honored through membership in the Mulerider Society, which honors alumni and friends who have given \$500,000 or more in their lifetime.

### **Dr. Gayle White, '63 (Goldsboro, N.C.)**

#### **Distinguished Golden Rider Award**

Dr. Gayle White, Turner Professor of Management and SAU Distinguished Professor, taught for 43 years in the Rankin College of Business at Southern Arkansas University. She graduated from Southern State College in 1963, then earned an MBE in 1966 and an Ed.D in 1972 from the University of Mississippi. Post graduate studies from the University of Illinois in 1984 and Harvard University in 1989 followed.

Dr. White's leadership on the state and national levels included president of the National Council of Alpha Chi, 1987-1991 (National Council Member 1979-2005); state president of Kappa State Delta Kappa Gamma, 1979-1981 (served on two international committees); president of the Arkansas Deans' Association, 1984-1985; and president of the Arkansas College Teachers of Business and Economic, 1989.

Her major contributions to SAU included chairmanship of four major institutional studies: North Central Association Self Study, Arkansas Department of Higher Education Evaluation of Business Programs Self Study, Title IX Self Study, and Arkansas Department of Higher Education Evaluation of Computer Information Systems Programs. Additional contributions to students included sponsor of Alpha Chi, national college honor scholarship society, for over 20 years and sponsor of Sigma Beta Delta, national business honor society, 10 years.

Dr. White's research has been published in such journals as Journal of Business & Economic Research, American Journal of Business Education, Journal of Management and Marketing Research, Journal of Instructional Pedagogies, Ethics and Critical Thinking Journal, Review of Business Research, Journal of the Academy of Business and Economics, and the International Journal of Business Disciplines as well as numerous other journals.

She received the SAU Faculty Excellence Award for Research in 2003. In addition, Dr. White was selected SAU Honor Professor, 1997-1998. Early in her career she was selected by the Arkansas Business Education Association as the 1980 Arkansas Business Educator of the Year.

Dr. White and her husband have one daughter and two grandchildren; they recently moved to North Carolina to be near them.

### **Jim Andrews, '86 (Smackover, AR)**

#### **Distinguished Alumni Award**

Jim Andrews graduated from SAU in 1986 with a Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in Industrial Management. He represents the second of three generations, and one of nine members, of his extended family who have attended SAU.

While a student at SAU, he was active in the Student Government Association, Residence Hall Association, and was a member of the Phi Beta Lambda business fraternity and Sigma Tau Gamma men's fraternity.

After graduation, he earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Baylor University, a Juris Doctor degree from Southern Methodist University, and was commissioned as a Supply Officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve where he attained the rank of Lieutenant Commander and was awarded both the Navy Achievement Medal and the Navy Commendation Medal on three occasions.

During his business career, he has worked in a variety of positions for several companies ranging in size from a small start-up company to a Fortune 500 company. In 2018, he was part of an executive team that negotiated a \$3 billion merger from which PotlatchDeltic Corporation was formed.

His past volunteer service includes service on the SAU Alumni Association Board and the SAU Foundation Board. Today he serves as general counsel for the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism and is of counsel to the law firm of PPGMR PLLC, while also serving as a gubernatorial appointee on the Arkansas Economic Development Council, as well as serving on the Board of Economics Arkansas and the Business Advisory Council for the Rankin College of Business.

He and his wife Amanda reside in El Dorado and are the parents of four children – James, Sierra, Fisher, and Lauren.

### **Allan Robbins, '86 (Kailua Kona, Hawaii)**

#### **Distinguished Alumni Award**

Allan Robbins grew up in Arkansas, moving to Magnolia in 1976. His father was SAU faculty member Dr. Dale Robbins, and Allen Robbins spent much time on the SAU

campus, befriended by a number of SAU faculty. Graduating in 1981, Robbins attended Baylor University for four years, before transferring to SAU, 1985-86, adding a Spanish minor and graduating August 1986.

Robbins has led a life of servant leadership with a global impact. His college experience of three summers of volunteer medical mission work in war-torn Central America marked the trajectory his life would take: a commitment to improving access to basic health care and child survival in countries around the globe.

Soon after graduating from SAU, Robbins was invited to join the faculty of the University of the Nations (UofN), whose parent is the Christian mission YWAM. Studying and working as an instructor and field assignment leader, Allan earned a Graduate Diploma in Primary Health Care Practice. In 1992 he completed his Master in Public Health from the Tulane School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine before returning to the UofN to lead their Community Health Department.

He's helped train community-based health workers and set up long-term training programs in some 25 nations. Challenged to pioneer, when he started with the UofN, they had 2,000 staff in 22 operating locations. Today, they have some 20,000 students in 600 campuses in 142 nations. Robbins oversaw much of the growth of Community Health and Primary Health Care training, serving 15 years as the university's international associate dean for Global Health. In his 36 years of work he has lived over 10 years in 45 nations of the "two-thirds world." His Community Health capstone course helped launch numerous ministries and projects that remain today.

Robbins' work has included consulting with World Vision and the U.S. CDC to eradicate polio in Liberia; CARE, UNICEF and WHO in Benin and Sierra Leone on improving Child Survival and Food For the Hungry in Bolivia on eliminating widespread hunger. Robbins helped found the Water For Life Institute through

which for two decades he has taught workshops sustainable clean water resources in places like Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar and Uganda.

Working with Hawaii County, Robbins has trained members of some 23 Community Emergency Response Teams around the Big Island and this spring led the UofN CORVID-19 Response Team. He has long served as an assistant scoutmaster, a church deacon and a H.S. STEM mentor.

Allan and his wife of 27 years, Dee, who has taught Community Development at the university, have led integrated field practicums in a number of nations and their three children, have grown up with a unique global perspective.

### **Gwendolyn Roland, '86 (Houston, Texas)**

#### **Distinguished Alumni Award**

Gwendolyn Roland is a 1968 Mulerider alumna with a BBA in Industrial Management. She was the yearbook editor, student reporter/photographer, and was a member of the Residence Hall Association. She continued to complete U.S. Ordnance Advanced Courses from 1991-92, and also attended Command and General Staff College (CGSC) in 1999-2000. She attended Air War College from 2010-11, where she studied in the Field of Study Overseas program, which included cultural visits to Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Jordan. Roland is a Distinguished Military Graduate (DMG), who placed in the top 20 percent of all ROTC cadets nationwide.

Roland has 20+ years of experience in the United States Army. She has service experience as a senior executive, program manager, and foreign military sales analyst. She has adept experience managing daily operations planning and coordinating logistics, supply chain, support services, security and facilities for over 110 international military, civilian, and contractor personnel across 28 different nations, while directing a \$5 million budget and operational funds for the project.



Roland served on Army Review Board Agency in 2014-15, and was the deputy/executive officer as well as the Branch Chief Operating Officer of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a military alliance committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in Mons, Belgium. Roland has served as a regional director of the U.S. Army Security Assistance Command, and as a commander/Army Field Support Battalion for the Army. Roland received the Bronze Star Medal in 1991 and 2007.

Roland served a founding member, mentor, and youth leader of Reach One – Teach One in Edgewood, MD from 2001-03 and Teens in Touch (TNT) from 1998-99.

Roland currently resides in Houston.

### **Cody Burkham, '14 (Little Rock, AR)**

#### **Distinguished Young Alumni Award**

Cody Burkham grew up in Hope, Arkansas. He is a 2014 graduate of Southern Arkansas University with a degree in Political Science and History. He served on the Student Activities E-Board, Upward Bound, Political Action Committee, Phi Sigma Alpha Honor Society (Political Science), Phi Alpha Theta Honor Society (History), Student Government Association, and was a Becoming a Mulerider (BAM) Leader and President's Ambassador. During his time at SAU, Burkham was the first student recipient of the William C. Nolan Public Affairs Endowed-Internship, where he worked with Rep. Rick Crawford from the First Congressional District.

After graduation, Burkham returned to Washington, D.C. and served as the Field Director, Director of Legislative Communications, Agriculture Liaison, and Legislative Assistant for Congressman Bruce Westerman from 2014-2018.

During 2018, his passion for agriculture led him back to Arkansas to become the executive vice president of the Arkansas Cattleman's Association. The Arkansas

Cattleman's Association is focused on leading the cattle industry in the State of Arkansas toward continued improvement through legislation, education, advocacy, and development.

Burkham is active in the Arkansas Society of Professional Lobbyists, Arkansas Society of Association Executives, and the University of Arkansas Agriculture Development Council. As an advocate for agricultural youth, Burkham also serves on the Arkansas Future Farmers of America (FFA) Foundation Board of Directors, responsible for the management of funds to help stimulate and promote the best interests of students of agricultural education on a local, district, or state basis. Burkham is also a board member for the Arkansas Sheriff's Youth Ranch, whose mission is to address, remedy and prevent child abuse and neglect by creating safe, healthy, and permanent homes for children.

Burkham and his wife Jessica reside in Little Rock.

### **Dr. Kristofer Freeland, '03 (Little Rock, AR)**

#### **Distinguished Young Alumni Award**

Dr. Kristofer Freeland grew up in Fordyce, Arkansas before heading to Mulerider Country. He graduated from Southern Arkansas University in 2003 with a B.S. in Biology. Freeland was a member of Sigma Tau Gamma and was a member of the Mulerider Football Team. He continued his education at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences where he graduated with honors and obtained his MD degree. He completed his General Surgery Residency, where he was named Chief Resident, at LSU Shreveport and his Cardiothoracic Surgery Residency at the University of Alabama Birmingham. During his time as a resident, Freeland was a Resident Research Competition Finalist and Regional Trauma Paper winner. He also won the Resident Teaching Award in 2010.

Dr. Freeland was a patient care partner before continuing on with his education. Dr. Freeland is a Cardiothoracic Surgeon at the Arkansas Heart Hospital and UAMS, with an interest in coronary vascularization, structural heart disease including the trans-catheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) procedure as well as aortic pathology. He is board certified by the American Board of Thoracic and Cardiac Surgery. During 2016, Dr. Freeland was named a finalist for Physician of the Year by Arkansas Business. Freeland has performed multiple live surgical cases during the Heart Summit, including a percutaneous TAVR in 2019.

Dr. Freeland is a member of many professional surgery organizations, including the Arkansas Medical Society, Pulaski County Medical Society, the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, and the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association. He is also a contributor to Champions for Health, a nonprofit organization with a goal to empower kids to their own health and inspire future generations to create a legacy of health in Arkansas. In 2018, the organization changed their focus to address a growing public health epidemic in Arkansas – childhood obesity.

He resides in Little Rock with his wife, Nicole, and their two daughters – Stella and Hadley.

### **Dr. Genese Lavalais, '04 (Hampton, Va.)**

#### **Distinguished Young Alumni Award**

Dr. Genese A. Lavalais grew up in Marksville, LA. She graduated from Southern Arkansas University in 2004 with a degree in Applied Sciences and a concentration in Health, Kinesiology, and Recreation. She was a member of the Lady Muleriders basketball team. She became a member of the Lambda Mu chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., among many other organizations during her time at S.A.U.

She is an alumna of Grambling State University '07 and Jackson State University '19, where she received her Master's in Sports Administration and her Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education, respectively.

After a combined six years of volunteering, Lavalais began her career in athletics serving student-athletes at Alabama State University, Grambling State, and Jackson State University. Dr. Lavalais currently serves as the director for Athletics Academic Support/Life Skills at Hampton University (H.U.) in Hampton, Virginia. She manages the Office of Academic Support Staff, monitors academic progress at H.U., and is the manager of the Life Skills Program and advisor for the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and Chi Alpha Sigma, Virginia Delta Chapter.

Her motto, "Empower students, grow champions, and develop leaders," serves as her compass to encourage students to be leaders. For five straight years, the J.S.U. Division of Athletics led the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) in academics and was recognized by the NCAA for high A.P.R. performance. During her tenure, students earned a divisional G.P.A. of 3.10 each year, 981 APR score, and had an 82-percent graduation rate. Dr. Lavalais offered a monthly "S.I.P. T.E.A." (Support, Inspire, Promote, Teamwork & Elevate Achievement) meeting to women in various departments to promote teamwork and encourage collaboration.

Lavalais served as a member for the NCAA Committee on Academics, NCAA Region 6 Post Graduate Studies Committee, and was the Chair of the Life Skills Committee for the National Association of Academic Advisor for Athletics (N4A). She was the 2014 Recipient of the N4A Professional Promise Award. She is an alumna of the 2011 N4A Professional Development Institute, 2012-13 NCAA Leadership Institute, and 2014 Women Leaders Institute for Administrative Advancement East. Additionally, she was an inaugural faculty member for the 2017 N4A HBCU professional development institute.

She is committed to leading through diverse community service opportunities that reach a multitude of demographics and populations of people. Her volunteer

efforts have helped provide countless youth with access to a free camp, raise breast cancer and early detection awareness, taught student-athletes to learn to speak up against domestic and sexual violence, among many other activities. She has also engaged with the Read Across America and Smart About Sports programs to encourage young people to live, read, and lead a healthy lifestyle Dr. Lavalais is dedicated to leading a service-driven life through inspiring and creating leaders.

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