

# CONQUER & PREVAIL

## WOFFORD COLLEGE



ISSUE #68 | JUNE 17, 2021 | FROM THE OFFICE OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

## Following in his footsteps



Susu and George Dean Johnson Jr. '64 have honored Corry Oakes '89 and his contributions to their company, as well as to the college and Spartanburg community.

Corry Oakes '89 was just out of college and in his fourth interview with WJB Video, a Blockbuster Video franchisee, when he met George Dean Johnson Jr. '64, who was the managing partner at the time. Within 15 minutes, Johnson had offered Oakes the job saying, "See you in the morning at 7 a.m."

Now, 32 years and several ventures later, Johnson and Oakes are still business partners, and Susu and George Johnson just honored Oakes' friendship and service to their company, the community and Wofford College by establishing the Corry W. Oakes III Endowed Interim Support Fund to provide opportunities for students with financial need to make the most of international travel and internship experiences.

"We wanted to do something to honor Corry and the person he is, including his tremendous leadership on the college's board of trustees," says Johnson. "We also wanted to support students who are following in his footsteps."

Oakes just finished a 12-year term on the board and two years of service as the chairman. When he and Johnson first met, however, Oakes had never been out of the country, partly

because of the demands of playing football for the Terriers and partly because of financial constraints.

“We have become more connected,” says Oakes. “This fund will give students the opportunity to participate in study abroad or internships, giving them a different perspective that’s critical. ... I’m incredibly grateful for this wonderful gift and to continue to be associated with George. Our relationship is one of the great gifts in life I have received.”

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## Stories on other high-profile “For Wofford” gifts geared toward experiential learning opportunities:

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## The Thinking Men



Wofford College asked poet Nikky Finney to dedicate a poem to the enslaved men who built its Main Building. An excerpt from the poem is part of a memorial to the men that can be found on the first floor of the building’s east tower.

Their names aren't recorded anywhere in the college's history, but they made a central piece of the Wofford College experience possible.

Main Building was built by enslaved men.

Every Wofford College graduate takes at least one class in Main Building before graduation. After a 2007 renovation, a portion of brick was exposed in the building's east tower and a poem by the poet Nikky Finney was dedicated to the men.

"John Lane (a Wofford professor emeritus) called saying he was on a committee that wanted to publicly commemorate what had never been spoken about," says Finney of how she accepted the task of writing "**The Thinking Men.**"

She received a box that included a history book about Wofford and documents related to the construction of Main, including specifications for the size of rooms.

"These men were enslaved in South Carolina," says Finney, who is the John H. Bennett Jr. Endowed Professor of Creative Writing and Southern Letters at the University of South Carolina. "We don't know their names, and I had to piece together what it would have emotionally been like to be an intellectually curious person building a school that you could not attend."

Saturday is Juneteenth, a holiday that commemorates the official end of slavery in the United States, two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. Earlier this week, the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives passed a bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday.

Finney looks back at "The Thinking Men" and sees the work as capturing the history of the United States while still having relevance today.

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## Melvin's reflections on fatherhood (Father's Day gift idea)



Trustee Craig Melvin '01, an NBC "Today" show host and NBC News anchor, wrote a book reflecting on fatherhood and his relationship with his dad. "POPS: Learning to be a Son and Father" was released earlier this week.

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