

CHATTANOOGA STATE
DINNER OF FIRSTS
10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

HONORING

Rebecca Ashford



EVENT CHAIR, STACY LIGHTFOOT

THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2022 · CHATTANOOGA CONVENTION CENTER

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Our Purpose

We support and empower everyone in our community to learn without limits.

Our Values

We cultivate an inclusive environment.

We care about the well-being of each other.

We instill trust through integrity and transparency.

We encourage fearless innovation and resilience.

We collaborate to build a better future

Our Mission

We are Chattanooga State, a dedicated team that delivers accessible, innovative learning opportunities that surpass expectations.

Together, we enrich the lives of students and their families; develop a talented workforce; and partner with our community to lead boldly into the future.

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CHATTANOOGA STATE DINNER OF FIRSTS 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

HONOREE

Rebecca Ashford

The Program

- 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. Reception
- 7:00 p.m. Seating for Dinner
Welcome *Stacy Lightfoot, Event Chair*
Invocation *James Fry*
- 7:40 p.m. Master of Ceremonies. . *David Steele*
- 7:45 p.m. Opening Toast *Jay Dale, First Horizon*
Greg Vital, Morning Pointe
- 7:50 p.m. First in the Family. *Dr. Edna Varner*
- 8:00 p.m. Roasters. *Tom Griscom*
Molly Blankenship & Miles Huff
David Wade
Stacy Lightfoot
Richard O’Neal
- 8:35 p.m. Rebuttal. *Rebecca Ashford*
- 8:50 p.m. Adjournment *Stacy Lightfoot*

Proceeds of the event fund scholarships for first-generation students and are divided equally between the annual First in the Family Scholarship and the Tom Edd Wilson First in the Family Endowed Scholarship.

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Rebecca Ashford

A native Floridian, Rebecca grew up in Merritt Island, Florida, where her dad worked as a technician at the Kennedy Space Center and her mom was a beautician. She and her older sister, Elizabeth, enjoyed growing up in the warm Merritt Island climate, where they would swing from the fronds of the queen palm tree in their front yard and eat tangerines and oranges from the fruit trees in their back yard. Being so close to the Kennedy Space Center meant they watched space shuttle launches from their driveway, and they were forever changed by the Challenger explosion in 1986.

After graduating from Merritt Island High School, Rebecca attended Brevard Community College, never knowing that her experience there as a student would eventually start her path to becoming a community college president. When she graduated from BCC and transferred to the University of Central Florida, she majored in English Education and expected to be a high school English teacher for the rest of her life. However, while a student at UCF, she worked in the College of Education Advising Office and developed a love for advising college students. After graduation, she got a job as an academic advisor at BCC and moved back to Brevard County.

Over the next several years, Rebecca gained experience working in community college student services and continued her education earning a master's degree and later a doctoral degree. During this time, she met her husband, Richard O'Neal, and they had their first daughter, Caroline, in 2005, as she was finishing her doctoral degree from UCF.

In late 2005, Rebecca and her family moved to Binghamton, NY when Rebecca was hired as the Vice President of Student Affairs at Broome Community College. While living in Binghamton, she and Richard had their second daughter, Lilianne. In 2008, being so far from home and living in the cold upstate New York climate, Rebecca applied for and landed the Vice President for Student Affairs position at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, TN, and the family was thrilled to move back to the South. They knew they were in Volunteer country when Caroline learned to sing Rocky Top during her first week of pre-school!



Favorite Scripture

Hebrews 12:11

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Favorite Quotes

"You are what you repeatedly do."

—Aristotle

"There is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way."

—Thich Nhat Hanh

To her pleasant surprise, Rebecca was nominated to apply for the presidency at Chattanooga State Community College in 2017. Becoming a college president was not on her radar. With some hesitancy, Rebecca applied for the job and was happy to move through each stage of the application process, and in early May, she accepted the position. Just three days after that, she traveled with a group of Pellissippi State students to Cherbourg, France. But, before leaving the country, Rebecca and her family made a quick trip to Chattanooga and put an offer on a house; she completed the paperwork on her phone while traveling!

Rebecca and her family have settled in to the Chattanooga community. Rebecca serves on a number of community boards--the Chamber Board and Executive Committee, the McNabb Center Board, the Enterprise Center Board, the Chattanooga Tourism Board, Chattanooga 2.0 and is a member of the Downtown Rotary. When not working, Rebecca loves to garden, exercise, and read. Richard is a chef with Sodexo at McCallie School. An avid reader and writer, Caroline is a junior at Signal Mountain Middle High School and is involved with the theater program. Lilianne is pursuing her passion for visual arts as a freshman at the Chattanooga Center for Creative Arts, where she is a member of the climbing team.

In her time at Chattanooga State, Rebecca has focused on student success and organizational culture. She wants to empower everyone to learn without limits and hopes to create a culture of truly human leadership for Chattanooga State employees—a culture in which everyone feels that they belong and are cared for. When faculty and staff feel cared for, they are better able to care for students.

*“I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted and behold, service was joy.”*

—Rabindranath Tagore

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Event Chair

STACY LIGHTFOOT joined the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in July 2021 as the institution's first Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement. In this role, she serves as a catalyst to foster a more inclusive campus community and provides strategic leadership for diversity and inclusion initiatives. Prior to UTC, Stacy was the Executive Vice President at PEF where she worked for twelve years facilitating partnerships with regional and national constituencies to achieve parity in student educational outcomes.

In 2015, Stacy testified before the US Senate regarding what families need to know to make informed decisions about college. In 2017, she was invited back to D.C. to speak to congressional staff about simplifying the federal financial aid form. She has received numerous awards throughout her 22-year career in college access and success, including the 2016 National Excellence in Education Award. Previous recipients include former First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Ben Carson.

Stacy participated in Leadership Tennessee in 2019 and Harvard Business School's Young American Leaders Program in 2017. She earned a BA degree in Communications from DePauw University and MA degree in International Service from the University of Roehampton in London, England.



Stacy Lightfoot

Master of Ceremonies

DAVID STEELE is chief of staff at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Prior to assuming his current role, he served in the Chancellor's office as Director of Civic Engagement and Assistant Professor of Practice. His prior work in higher education has included posts at the University of Notre Dame, Purdue University, the University of South Florida, and Polk State College, a community college in central Florida. In addition to his administrative duties over the years, David has taught undergraduate courses in political science, organizational communication, leadership studies, and at UTC's Honors College.

Prior to making the move to Chattanooga, David helped to lead the Florida Department of Citrus as Deputy Executive Director and Chief Marketing officer, and he has also helped to lead chambers of commerce in three states.

David holds a bachelor's degree from Ashland University (Ohio), a master's degree from Notre Dame, and is in the process of completing a PhD at the University of South Florida. He is a graduate of numerous leadership programs, including Leadership Tennessee, Leadership Chattanooga, Leadership Savannah, and Leadership Lakeland, as well as Harvard University's Young American Leaders Program and has served on many community boards and committees. He is a passionate youth soccer coach.

He and his wife, Shannon Lanier, reside in North Chattanooga and are parents of a daughter, Savannah Grace, 10, and son, Freddie, 8. David once made someone in the south of France giggle and therefore considers himself to be "an internationally recognized humorist."



David Steele

Roasters

MOLLY BLANKENSHIP serves as Head of Culture & Inclusion at U.S. Xpress, Inc. where she oversees the enterprise's efforts to create an employee experience and culture where all are included, developed, and empowered.

Throughout her professional career, Molly has managed complex nonprofit organizations, business operations, and community partnerships. Before joining U.S. Xpress, she served as Executive Director of Chattanooga 2.0, the Cradle-to-Career partnership of Chattanooga. In 2020, she was recognized in this capacity as a Forbes 30 under 30 for her work to bring community partners together to improve education and workforce development systems.

Prior to joining Chattanooga 2.0's staff, Molly served as Vice President of Talent Initiatives at the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce where she oversaw the Chamber's drive to ensure regional employers have a skilled, diverse, local workforce. Previously, Molly was based in Washington, D.C. where she held multiple roles at national associations and provided consultancy support to nonprofits across the country on topics ranging from diversity, equity, and inclusion, education, workforce development, and more.

In a previous life, Molly co-founded two arts-focused nonprofits, served as frontwoman for an indie rock band, and had a brief (embarrassing) stint as a child actor.

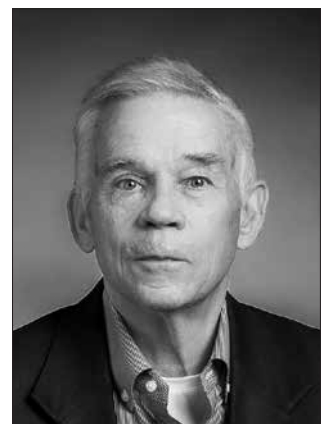
A Tennessee native and proud Chattanooga, Molly has a passion for bringing people together to make positive change. In her fleeting free time, she enjoys cooking, playing guitar, and traveling to new places. Molly lives on the southside with her family and is a proud Hamilton County Schools parent. She holds a bachelor's degree from Middle Tennessee State University where she studied public administration and social work.



Molly Blankenship

TOM GRISCOM Over 40 years as a communicator, Tom Griscom has been a journalist, external relations executive for a Fortune 50 company, a senior advisor in public policy, and press secretary for U.S. Senator Howard Baker and communication director for President Ronald Reagan. As a member of the Tennessee Board of Regents, he was involved in 7 presidential searches, including the selection of Rebecca Ashford as president of Chattanooga State Community College. He currently serves as chair of the Tennessee Public Charter Commission.

A veteran and a graduate of Brainerd High School and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, he is an advocate for public schools and public education. He and his wife Marion have been married for 50 years, have three children and two grandchildren.



Tom Griscom

MILES HUFF was born in the hills of eastern Kentucky in Harlan County, and is proud to have been born and raised in Appalachia. Miles settled down in Chattanooga after completing graduate school, and is a proud first generation graduate. He fell in love with the city and is now proud to call Chattanooga home. Prior to moving to Cempa Community Care, Miles served as the Vice President of Talent Initiatives for the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce.

Miles currently serves as the Advocacy and Development Administrator for Cempa Community Care. In this role, Miles oversees marketing, communications, development, community outreach and government relations. Miles has volunteered for several years with Cempa, and this role is one that aligns his personal passion for fighting health disparities and ending the stigma of HIV and AIDS with his professional endeavors.



Miles Huff

Miles and his husband Drew live in Highland Park, and have three beautiful four-legged children named Stella, Amos, and Sirius Black.

RICHARD O'NEAL grew up in Ocracoke, a little island off the coast of North Carolina. Ocracoke is a tiny sandbar where Blackbeard the Pirate was killed; boiled drum with “Osh” potatoes is the preferred dinner; and fig cake is the preferred dessert. If you can understand the strong brogue of the locals, then you must be one of them. The only way on and off the island is by ferry. It is a place so far removed from civilization that the first time Richard took Rebecca to visit, she asked, “Are you taking me somewhere to kill me?”

Richard graduated as salutatorian of a class of eight from Ocracoke School. This was a large class for the school, and three of the other graduates were also O’Neal’s, but not as academically inclined as their cousin with his 3.0 GPA. You get the picture.



Richard O'Neal

After high school he and a few friends spent a couple of years sailing through the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, the Virgin Islands, and on down to the Venezuela where their search for oro (gold) was put on hold by the local Federales. He then backpacked through Europe, making his way from Great Britain to Greece, Prague to Amsterdam, Portugal to Gibraltar, with stops in London, Paris and Rome. It was a long and life-changing trip, of which he has many pictures and fewer memories.

Richard then returned to the states to follow his passion for food and cooking. His journey began at the Jolly Roger restaurant in his hometown, but he decided there might be more to life than fried bluefish, crab cakes, and tartar and cocktail sauce. So he was off to The Culinary institute of America, in Hyde Park, NY where he graduated with honors. He then went on to have a long and storied career as a restaurateur and executive chef. But, we will not hear those stories tonight, or see them on paper. He is currently working as the Executive Chef at McCallie School in Chattanooga.

Richard’s major accomplishments are being Dr. Rebecca Ashford’s husband for going on 18 years, and the father of the other two loves of his life, their daughters Caroline and Lily. He is also proud of his volunteer work with Signal Mountain United Methodist Church and its food ministries.

His bio would not be complete without mentioning his sidekick and “ole buddy, ole pal,” Jack the dog and new additions to the family, kittens Saucy and Minx.

DAVID WADE In 2016, David was named President and CEO of EPB of Chattanooga after serving in various roles at the company for 30 years. His contributions range from hands-on construction in his early career to engineering and executive leadership roles. While serving as EPB's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, David led EPB's deployment starting in 2008 of one of the country's most sophisticated smart electric distribution systems and a community-wide 100% fiber optic network. As a result, EPB was the first in the nation to launch a ubiquitously available 1,000 Mbps internet service, earning Chattanooga its designation as "Gig City."

David holds a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He is a board member (and recent Chairman) of Tennessee Valley Public Power Association (TVPPA). He also serves on the U.S. Department of Energy's Electricity Advisory Board.



David Wade



Planning Committee Volunteers



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The Chattanooga State Foundation was chartered in 1977 by citizens interested in the educational well-being of Chattanooga State's students, faculty and staff. In addition to providing 452 deserving students \$871,423 in scholarships the past two years, the Foundation supports professional development, excellence in teaching and special capital projects to help the college fulfill its mission.

The Chattanooga State Foundation is a nonprofit organization and maintains a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation is supported by private donations and contributions, tax-deductible as allowed by law.

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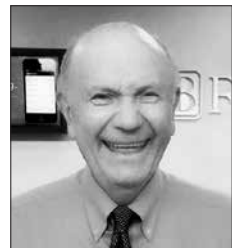
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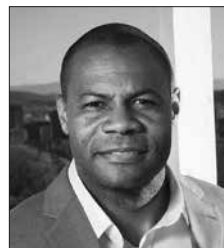
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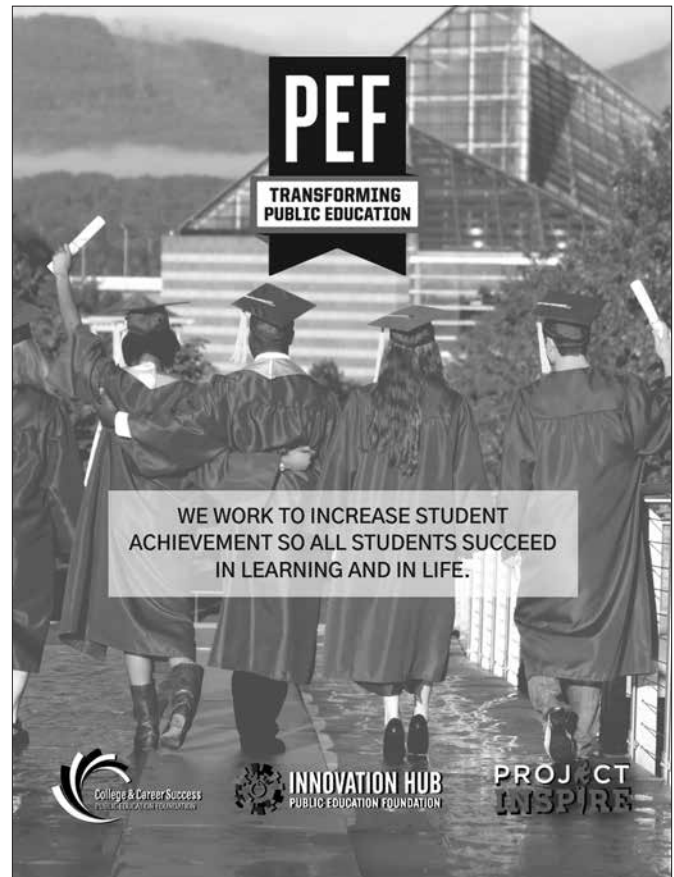


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Ally–Political Science

Bethany–Psychology

Brayden–Dental Assisting

Brittany–University Parallel

Francesca–Paralegal Studies

Kaitlyn–Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Katelyn –Radiologic Technologies

Kayla–Foreign Language

Kaylene Social Work

Kelli–University Parallel

Lillie–Allied Health

Madalene–Allied Health

Maylee–Dental Assisting

Megan–Exercise Science

Michael–Psychology

Nathan–Computer Support Technician

Olivia–Civil Engineering

Payton–Early Childhood Education

Roland–Computer Information Technology

Ryan–Radiologic Technologies

Sara–Industrial Electricity

Sophia–Health Professions

Sophie–Health Professions

Stella–Health Professions

Tiana–Health Professions

Ximena–Pre-Nursing

Yoselin–Fine/Studio Arts

Letters from some of our

FIRST IN THE FAMILY SCHOLARS

I would like to personally thank you for awarding me scholarship money. I am a mom of three toddler girls and am working hard to be able to provide a financially stable future for my daughters. This scholarship not only contributed to my success, but contributed to a secure future for my girls. I can never thank you enough.

Francesca

Thank you for your generosity in assisting with the payment of my tuition and fees. As a working-class young adult I am not eligible for enough free federal aid to push me through school without debt. Your contribution to my education is allowing me the opportunity to attend school without the burden of picking up an extra job. This allows me to allocate more time to my studies, and overall increases my chances of success.

Michael

Thank you for granting me the TEW First in the Family Endowed Scholarship. This scholarship has helped me afford textbooks, buy groceries, and pay rent. Being the first in my family to attend college, my parents were not aware of the variety of struggles college students may face. I can do all the things my parents dreamed of but were not financially prepared for. I hope that with my success after receiving my degrees, I can give back to future students in the same situation as me.

Olivia

I want to say how grateful I am that you selected me to receive this scholarship. You awarding me this gave me the validation I need for me to know, I am supposed to go to Chattanooga State and earn my degree. Having this scholarship allows for more much needed financial stability, and for that I am forever grateful! It is highly appreciated, and it won't be taken for granted.

Sophie



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