

BLACK

HISTORY

MONTH

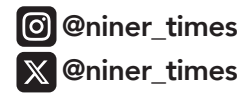
AT UNC CHARLOTTE

NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947

Feb. 25, 2026





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UNC Charlotte events calendar

Wednesday, Feb. 25
Men's Basketball v. North Texas
Halton Arena
7 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 26
Afrofusion Dance Workshop,
Cone University Center, Lucas Room
6 - 8 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 27
Charlotte's Got Talent, Rowe Hall
7 - 9 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 25
Reconnect and Reflect:
Fireside Chat with Dean Butler, Harris Alumni Center
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 26
Ninth Multi-Language Poetry Slam, Cone University Center
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4
Men's Basketball v. UAB
Halton Arena
7 p.m.

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Looking beyond the struggle

Emmanuel Perkins | Multimedia Managing Editor



There's a widely-shared sentiment that all individuals of color experience struggles that shape who they become. This isn't to say that I don't recognize or feel the tribulations — but the good outweighs the bad. Black people are under constant pressure to remain on a path set generations ago, but what about those who want a new path?

I don't dismiss the fact that we all go through hard times, but when does that become an excuse to settle and underbid our hand?

During this Black History Month, I have decided to move forward with history while still honoring the work that has guided us. I believe the best way we can honor those before us isn't to

repeat the cycle, but to make the determination that my problems may be real, my current situation may be hard, but my struggle doesn't define my story.

What will you do with your struggle? Will you use it as a crutch to hinder progress or press on toward the mark of the high calling?

From the UNC Charlotte police logs

Riley Latham | Staff Writer

The following are some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from Feb. 15 - 22, 2026.

Feb. 15 Accident/Property Damage

Officers were dispatched to Union Deck in reference to a vehicle being stuck. The driver attempted to drive above the height requirements and damaged their car. Hunter Towing was called and towed the vehicle out of the deck.

Feb. 19 Larceny

Dispatch received a call from the UREC after three lockers were broken into and multiple items were stolen. The investigation led to a suspect who had previously been trespassed from UREC for larceny. Officers searched the surrounding areas but were unable to locate him. An incident report was completed.

The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

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Emmanuel Perkins named the 2026-27 editor-in-chief of the Niner Times

Wes Packham | Writing Managing Editor

Emmanuel Perkins, a second-year student at UNC Charlotte majoring in communication studies with a concentration in media and technology studies, has been named the 2026-27 editor-in-chief of the Niner Times.

Perkins has worked as a staff photographer, served as a social media manager and is currently multimedia managing editor. He will formally take the position in May 2026, succeeding Davis Cuffe, who has served in the position for two years.

“It’s a blessing, honestly, to be able to be trusted in a role like this means a lot. To be starting as a sophomore now, to be editor-in-chief junior year and to be able to lead that many people, it means a lot,” Perkins said.

Perkins has been passionate about media and journalism for several years, having done work in the field since high school. He said that since coming to Charlotte, he’s become eager to learn more, get more involved and gain experience in the industry.

Extensively involved in photography and multimedia, Perkins’ background will likely foster a unique approach to the publication, aligning well with the modern digital journalism landscape.

Vision for the newsroom

When asked about goals for the publication, Perkins shared he was a ‘by-the-book’ person, emphasizing adherence to organizational policies and the Niner Times constitution.

Perkins also strives to enhance the efficiency and productivity of the publication, while keeping the organization from feeling burdensome to students.

“Our mentality doesn’t have to be mediocre; we can be efficient and productive while putting out some really good content to our readers,” Perkins said. “One thing I really want us to focus on is being able to keep journalism credible and keep our integrity.”

Perkins reflected on an earlier time in the Niner Times, when previous editor-in-chief and Multimedia Managing Editor Sunnya Hadavi showed faith in him by promoting him to social media manager for the sports page after just a short time as a staff photographer. He appreciated the trust that others have put into him and the people, including the Student Niner Media advisors and Cuffe.

Though many have had an impact on him through support or working together, one person stands out as the most important to him.

“My mom, my mom, she’s the backbone to everything I do, she was the first to know I was applying, first to know that I got it, you know, my mom is definitely the backbone,” Perkins said.

Perkins shared that others have set high standards for the role, and he believes that he can fill the role just as well as those who came before him. When entering the role, he wants to keep one thing in mind.

“I wrote it out on a piece of paper. ‘How much, how far, and how great do you want to be?’ That’s my one phrase,” Perkins said.

Endorsements from leadership

As Cuffe sat in his office, he reflected on the past two years of his tenure while looking towards the future.

“Looking to my left, I see all of our print covers, and I’m very proud to see the work we’ve done. But I’m very excited to see what comes next. I think there’s more excitement than sadness for me, seeing a new generation of people coming in,” Cuffe said.

Cuffe sees particular strengths in Perkins’ work, citing the rapid growth in followers since he took over in leading the social media pages.

Justin Paprocki, who works as the assistant director of Student Niner Media and serves as an advisor for the Niner Times, was part of the selection process for the position.

“He’s always kind of the steady hand. He’s enthusiastic, but it brings a sense of calm and stability to everything that he does. So that’s always something that we kind of look for, or I think it’s very beneficial for the editor-in-chief as someone who can kind of keep a steady hand on everything,” Paprocki said.

Paprocki also shared how Perkins might bring a unique approach to the publication. Perkins has a stronger background in photo, video and multimedia, differing from Cuffe’s stronger experience in writing.

Paprocki and Cuffe express confidence in Perkins and his ability to fill the role and lead the next generation of the Niner Times.

“Stay in tune with what we do, journalism is still alive, we’re still working, and our work deserves to be seen,” Perkins said.



Ivory Galloway/Niner Times

From first-generation to the Board of Trustees

DONTÁ WILSON'S JOURNEY TO UNC CHARLOTTE'S HIGHEST POSITION

Sunnya Hadavi | Lead Writer

As chairman of the Board of Trustees, alumnus Dontá Wilson has not forgotten his roots as a first-generation student. In fact, it is his life's purpose to give back to the University he credits for his success.

Wilson was elected as chair of UNC Charlotte's Board of Trustees in 2025 after four years as a trustee. He is the 15th chair of the Board of Trustees and the first African-American to hold the position.

"My mom dropped me off as a freshman. She didn't know, and we didn't have any idea what college even really meant or could do," Wilson said. "Fast forwarding to serve on the Board of Trustees to help create those same opportunities for 30,000 plus students a year is just a great privilege."

As chair of the Board of Trustees, Wilson is at the top of the University's senior leadership and governance. He leads the board in making strategic decisions for the University alongside Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber.

Having benefited from his education and experiences at Charlotte, Wilson wants the same for current students.

"While you're on campus, get involved. Be a part of as many different activities as you can so you can uncover and discover who you are and what your ultimate calling is," Wilson said.

Wilson's time at the

old. He chose UNC Charlotte because of its proximity to the city's financial hub.

With one parent in the military and the other a singer, Wilson moved a dozen times before 10th grade. So, once he became a Niner, the University became his home.

"When you move around a lot, the one thing you learn is how to deal with change. I've never had true family and a sense of community until I came to UNC Charlotte," Wilson said. "I stayed multiple years in one place, so it quickly became home to me. This is my community — this is my family. That's why I live in Charlotte today."

Wilson works out of uptown Charlotte as the chief consumer and small business banking officer at Truist Bank and a member of the Truist Operating Council. He leads 20,000 teammates in his current role.

He attributes his professional success to the education and connections from Charlotte, especially Professor Stella Nkomo.

"The faculty at UNC Charlotte have committed their lives to transforming students' lives, and the faculty I engaged with made a big difference," Wilson said. "I wouldn't be at Truist if it wasn't for the faculty."

In addition to academics, Wilson's student involvement outside of the classroom developed his leadership and selflessness.

Wilson is a proud brother of the Zeta Delta Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. at UNC Charlotte. He served as the chapter's president, called the polemarch.

"Kappa Alpha Psi played a major role in

supposed to be and become."

After graduation, Wilson pursued his purpose of helping others by giving back to the University.

"UNC Charlotte was a gift to me, being a first-generation student, so I feel compelled to be able to pass that gift forward," Wilson said. "It's a reflection of my responsibility to be able to pass that same opportunity for those that are coming after me."

Wilson's proudest moment is establishing the Dontá Wilson Belief Fund a year and a half ago. Through scholarships, the fund helps first-generation students get to and through school.

"There's a need out there to help other students access education so they can make their ultimate contribution and fulfill their purpose — it is critically important to me," Wilson said. "Often it's not the academics that prevent people from excelling collegiately, it's the financial struggle to figure it out, afford it and the stress of worrying about it. I wanted to eliminate that and level the playing field for students who deserve the opportunity."

In 2023, Wilson received the University's Distinguished Alumnus Award, one of the highest honors Charlotte can bestow. He was also recognized in 2024 with the dedication of Wilson Residence Hall, the first UNC Charlotte residence hall named after an African-American.

"It's very gratifying to see all the people that invested in me, and now I get the opportunity to pay it forward," Wilson said. "My mom is still alive, so for her to see and know all the

"UNC CHARLOTTE WAS A GIFT TO ME ... AND SO I FEEL COMPELLED TO BE ABLE TO PASS THAT GIFT FORWARD."

University dates back to 1994, when he started as an undergraduate student. In 1997, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science and Arts in business administration and management.

Finding his calling was easy; Wilson knew he wanted to be in financial services at 13 years

my life," Wilson said. "As a college student, it helped me develop leadership skills early on, it provided me a continued opportunity for service and for creating a positive impact in the lives of others."

Wilson describes his purpose to be "a dealer of HOPE — Helping Other People Excel."

"While on campus, I understood and saw the value of helping others, be it reading to the elementary school kids or helping the homeless get clothes," Wilson said. "It really showed 'That's it Dontá — that's who you are

sacrifices she made for my brothers and I to have the opportunity to be first-gen college graduates — it worked."

Regardless of the accolades and recognition, Wilson recognizes the positive effect others had on his life.

"It may be in my name, but it's really about [my mom's] work, and then all the faculty, staff and administration that put me in a position to now have the opportunity," Wilson said. "I am thankful, and I have gratitude, but it's really a recognition of all those people who painted on my canvas."



Courtesy of UNC Charlotte & Dontá Wilson

After DEI policy changes, Black History Month becomes student-led at UNC Charlotte

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Niner Times File & Courtesy of BOAB, Minorities in Sports, Society of Undergraduate Historians, Black Student Union, NAMI & OAS

On May 23, 2024, the UNC System Board of Governors passed a revised diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policy that provided new rules and requirements for DEI programs on UNC System campuses.

The policy change passed with a 21-2 vote that took under two minutes.

Following the vote was a presentation on sweet potatoes.

On Aug. 8, 77 days later, UNC Charlotte's Office of Identity, Equity and Engagement, Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion all closed. Staff members were reassigned, funds were reallocated, and DEI programming at UNC Charlotte disappeared.

Quieter than the shuttering of offices was the sharp decline of the University-led Black History Month celebration on campus.

UNC Charlotte Deputy Chief Communications Officer Christy Jackson says no policy prohibits the recognition of Black History Month by campus departments, but "events that support specific identities must be open to all members of the campus community."

In 2026, gone are the residence hall events like "Black History Month Jeopardy" hosted by Lynch Hall in 2022 and 2023. University offices that once partnered with student organizations to host major events such as the annual Black History Month Kickoff Party and the 2024 Black History Month Dinner in SoVi Dining Hall no longer collaborate in the same capacity, and many of those offices have since been dissolved. Even UNC Charlotte social media accounts have strayed away from Black History Month. On Instagram, UNC Charlotte used to post annually on Feb. 1, acknowledging the month. That ended in 2025.

Still celebrating at UNC Charlotte are student organizations. Without the help of campus departments closed by DEI policy changes, student organizations like the Black Student Union (BSU) have continued to celebrate Black History Month on campus.

On Feb. 13, the BSU, Black Organization Alliance Board (BOAB) and 11 other student organizations collaborated to hold their annual Black History Month Kickoff party. Held in the Cone University Center's Lucas Room, the event welcomed over 100 students during its duration.

Sitting at a table in front of the doors to a bustling Lucas Room were the president and vice president of the BSU, third-year UNC

Charlotte students Truth Elliott and Chandler Johnson. The two helped sign students in to the event as music from inside the Lucas Room leaked out into the halls of the Cone Center.

As third-years, Elliott and Johnson spent only one year on campus under DEI policies that allowed for more free celebration of Black History Month. Still, the two said they have noticed a change in how the University celebrates the month.

"Black history isn't necessarily highlighted throughout the campus, especially with some of the events we used to have but now we can't really do be-

change. The BSU's membership has always been majority Black students, and the organization has always been open to students of all races.

Just as the tennis team attracts tennis players, the Black Student Union will always attract Black students.

"People are gravitated to us because they see someone who looks like them," fourth-year student and BOAB vice president, Eunice Okyere said. "But that doesn't mean that we're not inclusive to others."

I spoke to Okyere following a Mental Health in the Black Community Black History Month

member of Building Black Students, served as EmpowerHer's marketing and communications officer and, of course, acts as BOAB's vice president.

Unfortunately, not all student organizations have the luxury of having Okyere or are able to collaborate with another student group to celebrate Black History Month. The University can direct paid employees to give undivided attention to organizing or supporting a Black History Month event, while members of student organizations often have jobs in addition to their regular coursework and are not paid to plan student events.

On Feb. 10, the Society of Undergraduate Historians held a Black History Month film screening. When I arrived at the event, roughly five minutes before its start, one individual was in attendance. A representative from the organization setting up the event told me that their organization was undergoing a major restructuring and that no student at the event would be able to speak to me.

A week later, the BSU collaborated with Black Women in Medicine and Brothers in Medicine to host a Black History Month panel discussion on heart health in the Black community featuring two local cardiologists. The event, which drew roughly 40 students, was held in the same room as the Society of Undergraduate Historians' film screening.

On the same day as Okyere's roundtable event, Minorities In Sports Next at UNC Charlotte held a Black History Month panel featuring students and professionals who spoke about how they advocate for Black voices in the sports industry. The organization did not collaborate with any other student group or campus office, but still saw a healthy turnout, drawing roughly two dozen students to a Belk Hall classroom.

"The changes to DEI don't change our history; we just have to find new ways to express it. I think on campus it's definitely been super student-led," Minorities In Sports Next member and fourth-year Ziyera Walker said.

At BOAB's event across campus, BOAB president and fourth-year student Lexi Johnson said the decline of University-led celebration feels like her community's "light is being dimmed."

For Walker, the lights at UNC Charlotte have never been bright enough.

"I really don't expect a lot, because Charlotte is a PWI [predominantly white institution]," Walker said. "Unfortunately, I just don't think it has changed that much."



cause of DEI policy," Elliott said.

The policy that ended those campus events was meant to promote inclusivity and eliminate programming that only supported some groups. For Johnson, this push for inclusivity has made it harder to plan for and promote events that have always been inclusive.

"We have to be very careful with our wording and make sure that our events are marketed as open to everyone," Johnson said. "So with the Black Student Union, our events are always open to the public, but some people may have the perception that it's called Black Student Union, it's only for Black people, and that's really not the case."

Keeping doors open to all and labeling organizations as "inclusive" allows for compliance with policy, but doesn't mean that the make-up of organizations like the BSU will

roundtable event hosted by BOAB, the National Alliance on Mental Illnesses at UNC Charlotte and the Organization of African Students on Feb. 16.

The event welcomed over 40 students to Cone After Hours, where they seemed to have found a supportive space. During the event, students huddled in groups and talked freely regarding mental health issues affecting the Black community. Mounted to the walls in the room were televisions from the company Trooh, an advertising network that operates screens in high-traffic areas. Free from any UNC System policy, Trooh's screens lit up with information on influential Black journalists and Black history during the event.

Okyere is no stranger to organizing events like the one held Feb. 16. She has been a

Existing in full: Afro-Latin students share stories of embracing their culture

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

For Afro-Latin students, it's never about identifying with one side more than the other; it's about embracing the fullness of who they are in spaces that don't always understand both at once.

As Black History Month unfolds, UNC Charlotte students like fourth-year Jenaya Modeste are using the month not only to celebrate Black history but also to highlight an often-overlooked community and the stories of Afro-Latinos.

Modeste shares that being Afro-Latina is like navigating two "vibrant worlds" while trying to honor both her African heritage and her Dominican roots without feeling pressured to choose between them.

But it's not just students like Modeste who have felt that Afro-Latin culture gets lost in the cracks during heritage months such as Black History or Hispanic Heritage Month.

Fourth-year students Stephenie Cunningham and Anahi Parral-Acevedo

share that they, too, have navigated the complexities of growing up as Afro-Latinas, especially in communities where they felt their full identities weren't being embraced.

Living at an intersection

Modeste recognizes that being Afro-Latina places her in both the African and Latin American worlds at the same time.

"Embracing my roots to the fullest allows me to honor and celebrate the fullness of both heritages rather than choosing one over the other," Modeste said.

Afro-Latinos/as make up about six million people within the U.S. population. This rising statistic and term acts as an umbrella for those who have descendants in various countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Brazil, Panama and Puerto Rico.

While these are just some of the countries with a rich Afro-Latin culture, several others in the Caribbean and Central America are home to large Afro-Latin communities.

Modeste thinks it has sometimes been a challenge to affirm her place in both worlds. While she is a Latina, she feels disconnected at times, as she knows her Black identity is undeniable.

"I've always been aware of my Black identity," Modeste said, recalling how her hair texture made her different from a young age.

She noticed her curls were "much curlier" than the rest of her family's and remembers how differently she was treated when she wore her hair naturally versus straightened.

Comments from stylists labeling her hair as "thick" or "hard to do" served as early lessons in how society views Blackness, Modeste shared.

While growing up, Modeste felt her Black identity was always visible and strong, but as she has gotten older, reconnecting with her Dominican roots has been more of a challenge.

Her mother chose not to teach her how to speak Spanish out of concerns for academic struggles. Despite this, Modeste has worked on her own to learn the language and mend the gap that was made.

"When I tell people I am Dominican but don't speak Spanish fluently, they sometimes claim that makes me 'less Dominican.' I don't let that discourage me, though; I view learn-

ing the language as a way to 'level up' my connection to my distant relatives," Modeste said.

'I feel 100% of both'

For Cunningham, she has always welcomed both of her backgrounds.

Growing up, she was immersed in two different cultures through music, dance and languages, which never made her shy away from either background.

As a kid, Cunningham said she loved it. The late nights with family, watching them dance to reggaeton with the sound of conversations in the background, made for unforgettable memories.

But as she grew older, she became more aware of how others saw her. Some people assumed she was adopted, and others doubted she was Mexican because of her darker skin tone.

"There was always this sense that I had to do a little bit extra to show my identity," Cunningham said. "People would ask me, 'Do you feel more Black or more Mexican?'"

The question felt limiting to Cunningham. "I feel 100% of both," Cunningham said. "I don't think other people get asked that the same way."

Cunningham shared that she feels people from other backgrounds don't get questioned about which part of their ethnic makeup they feel "most of."

She admitted that there were moments when she struggled internally, feeling "not really enough" of the other.

At times, she felt that people only saw her as Black and ignored her Mexican heritage. Other times, acknowledging one side seemed to erase the other.

Cunningham has made it her mission to preserve both sides of her family's history as much as possible.

During Black History Month, she is reminded of stories that she heard about segregation and the differences in opportunities that some of her family members had in comparison to her.

"I'm always carrying that history with me, and, I'm just very proud of how far we've come," Cunningham said. "Being in college when not a lot of people had this opportunity [is a big deal]. I feel like being in higher education is a form of resistance and a form of protest because I'm getting as much knowledge as I can from so many different sources and making sure that nobody takes

advantage of that and nobody can deny me of my history."

Finding identity

Parral-Acevedo said she actually didn't fully understand her Afro-Latina identity until high school. Her father took her on a trip to visit his hometown, an area of roughly 500 people that sits about three hours from Acapulco, Mexico.

During the two-week visit, she discovered a local Afro-Latino museum that detailed the history of Africans brought to Mexico during the transatlantic slave trade between the 1500s and 1700s.

Despite that history, Parral-Acevedo said she frequently has to explain and defend her identity.

"When I tell people I'm Afro-Latina, they'll say, 'That's not a thing,'" she said. "So sometimes I just say I'm Latina because nobody really knows that [being Afro-Latina] is a thing."

The disbelief from others can make it hard to feel seen. On campus, Parral-Acevedo said that she's met a few students who share Hispanic backgrounds but struggle to find Afro-Latinos/as to relate to.

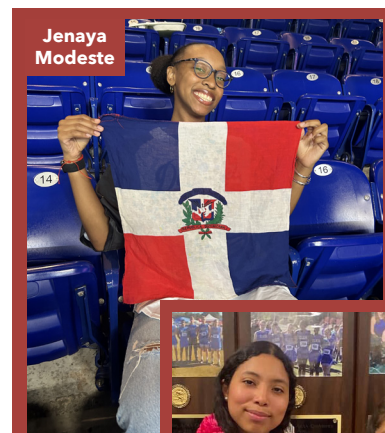
That sense of invisibility extends beyond campus, as the three said that the Afro-Latin identity is often overlooked in broader conversations about race and ethnicity.

"I feel it is often overlooked due to a lack of representation in the media," Modeste said. "Growing up, I noticed that many Black-appearing Afro-Latinas wouldn't disclose their heritage until years into their careers. Without that 'base set' of visible role models, it's hard for young people to make those connections."

Modeste said that even when the Afro-Latin heritage is acknowledged, the discussion can miss the point.

"When the heritage is discussed, the conversation often gets derailed by debates over whether the person is 'Latino or not,' rather than focusing on their place within Black history," Modeste said. "We are still unlearning the old cultural norm that you have to pick just one racial affiliation."

As Black History Month continues, Modeste, Cunningham and Parral-Acevedo hope that their stories remind others that identity does not have to exist in fractions.



Jenaya Modeste



Anahi Parral-Acevedo



Stephenie Cunningham

Razed and revived: Charlotte's Brooklyn Village

Cassandra Schilling | Staff Writer

Feb. 1 marked the beginning of the 100th anniversary of Black History Month, which was originally a week-long celebration started by historian and author Carter G. Woodson, the “father of Black history,” in 1926.

By the 1960s, Black History Week became a month-long celebration, and in 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, which designated February as “National Black (Afro-American) History Month.”

Across Charlotte, there are several landmarks, areas and historical figures that make up the tapestry of Black history in the city.

Brooklyn Village

Brooklyn Village was located in what is now the Second Ward of Uptown. The neighborhood rested on the corner of Third Street and Brevard Street.

The area's roots go back to the 1860s.

During that time, the neighborhood was known as “Logtown,” and it was a safe haven for recently emancipated enslaved people to gather together, as segregation was still widespread and legal across the South.

As Logtown became known to residents as “Brooklyn,” the area served as an independent “city” within Charlotte for its Black residents. From the 1860s to the 1880s, residents began establishing their own churches, schools and businesses in Brooklyn.

The neighborhood grew significantly in 1886, when businessman W.R. Myers donated land to Brooklyn Village to construct Charlotte's first Black grade school.

Additionally, in 1906, the Brevard Street Library opened in the area. It was the first free library for Black Americans in North Carolina's history.

Brooklyn Village also saw substantial growth in 1907, when the Afro-American Mutual Insurance Company, which sold poli-

cies to African-Americans, relocated to the town.

Following this, in the 1920s, a variety of Black-owned businesses, including hair salons, restaurants, pharmacies and barber-shops were successfully established in Brooklyn Village.

These businesses provided the neighborhood's residents with access to stores and activities they could frequent without restriction, as businesses outside of Brooklyn were not legally required to provide service to Black residents.

In 1921, businessmen J.T. Williams and Thaddeus Tate organized the Mecklenburg Investment Company, an office building for Black dentists, lawyers, doctors and other professionals who were not permitted access to office spaces in other areas of Charlotte.

This building still stands today, but the same cannot be said for the majority of Brooklyn Village.

In 1958, to determine the prevalence of its “blighted” or badly damaged areas, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission studied Brooklyn Village.

Researchers claimed that 77% of Brooklyn housing was blighted, and these findings prompted the federal government to grant Charlotte \$1,432,000 to demolish 33 acres of what the government referred to as “slum area” and relocate the area's residents and businesses.

Between 1960 and 1967, 1,007 families were displaced, and 216 businesses were closed. The majority of them never reopened.

Neighborhoods were bulldozed, and nearly every semblance of Brooklyn Village as residents knew it was erased.

Today, only the Mecklenburg Investment Company, Grace A.M.E. Zion Church and Second Ward High School Gymnasium of Brooklyn remain.

Historic landmarks: a part of Charlotte's Black History

Dedicated in 1902, the Grace A.M.E. Zion Church is one of Charlotte's oldest Black churches. In 2008, the church was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Early members of the church included Williams and Tate.

Williams was among the first three Black Americans to be licensed as a physician in North Carolina. Additionally, he was appointed to be U.S. consul to Sierra Leone by then-President William McKinley.

The Brevard Street building is still standing today for visitors to see, despite worship services being held elsewhere.

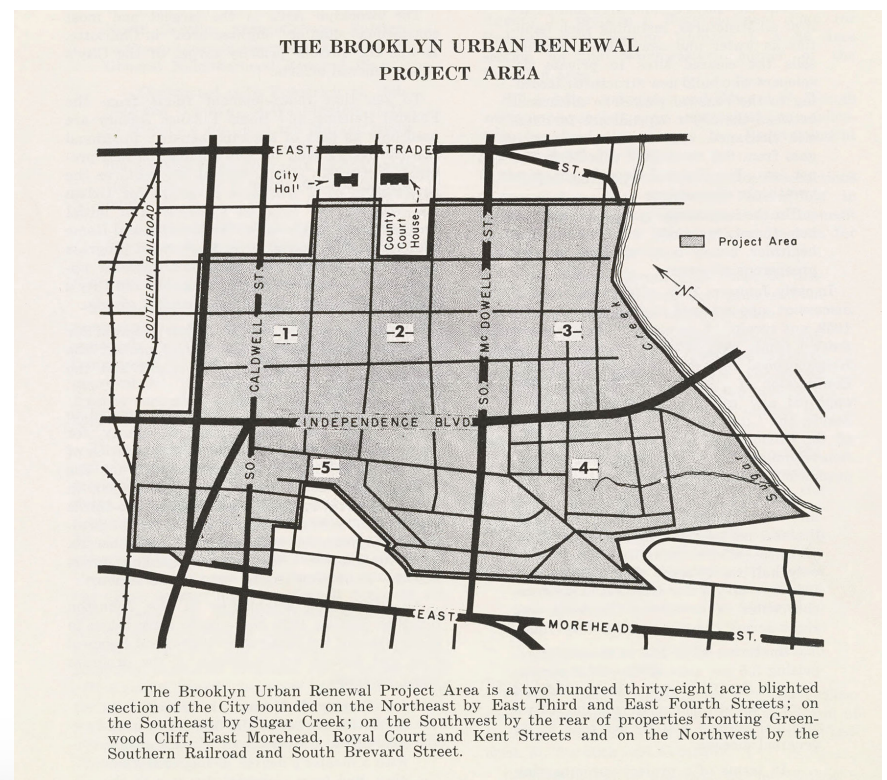
Another historical landmark is the Second

Ward High School Gymnasium.

Established in 1923, the Second Ward High School was Charlotte's first Black public high school. While the school was among the buildings demolished in Brooklyn Village's “urban renewal,” the institution's original gym was preserved as a protected landmark.

The Second Ward High School is being rebuilt as a technology and medical magnet high school. It is set to reopen in August 2028 and will be located at the same site as the historical institute.

The high school's reconstruction is fulfilling a decades-old promise made by the 1967 Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board to rebuild the institution.



The activism of David Sanders: Trailblazer for Black progress at UNC Charlotte

Hayden Herr | Staff Writer

From growing up in the beginnings of desegregation to becoming a founding member of UNC Charlotte's Black Student Union, 75-year-old David Sanders worked closely with Bonnie Cone to enhance the Black educational experience.

Graduating with a bachelor of arts in psychology in 1973 and a master's degree in education in 1977, Sanders' history with UNC Charlotte is long. Despite his original enrollment being decades ago, he still involves himself in Charlotte's Black Student Union (BSU) and Black Alumni Chapter (BAC) today.

Sanders was raised by his grandparents as the oldest of six in Chester, S.C., a small cotton mill town. It was there that he participated in the second year of desegregation, choosing to attend the previously all-white Chester High

School from 1966 to 1969.

"It was quite segregated and quite intimidating and confrontational, particularly from my white peers," Sanders said.

The path to UNC Charlotte

Sanders received little help from Chester High School counselors in applying to colleges and sought assistance from Finley High School, Chester's majority Black high school.

"My grandmother's vision was for me to go to college, and that is the real reason I went to college. She saw me as the one setting the stage for the other children, for my siblings," Sanders said.

To assist in paying for his Charlotte education, Sanders was awarded in-state tuition by Charlotte admissions officers, and a work-study grant arrived at UNC Charlotte on Sept. 10, 1969.

When Sanders was in line to receive his room assignment in Sanford Hall, a staff member pulled him aside to alert him that his roommate's parents had requested his family be investigated.

"I met him, and he was quite apologetic for his family, his mother in particular," Sanders said. "He indicated that he didn't have a problem with my being Black, but his family did, and he was sorry for that."

Sanders and his roommate became acquaintances before the roommate moved out early. Sanders held nothing against his roommate for his mother's actions.

"We became semi-friends, I would say. We never had an issue. We did a few things together, but mostly not," Sanders said.

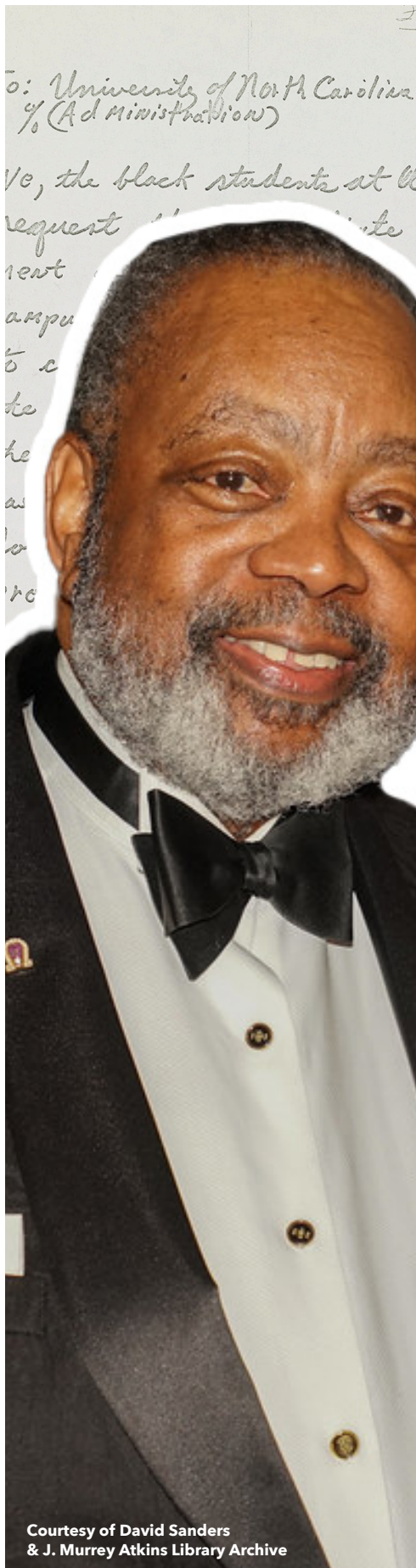
The rocky start didn't deter Sanders from making the most out of his college experience.

Sanders took part in the beginning of The Gospel Choir, the first pep band, where he played alto saxophone and the Epsilon Zeta chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. He also participated and advocated for the first classes in the Department of African Studies.

He was also on the campaign to establish an alma mater anthem, during which he went through several submissions. While this attempt was unsuccessful, it paved the way for the school anthem UNC Charlotte uses today.

The 10 Demands

On Feb. 24, 1969, during the semester before Sanders arrived at UNC Charlotte, two students — Ronald R. Caldwell and Benjamin F. Chavis — had lowered the United States Flag outside what once was the admin-



Courtesy of David Sanders & J. Murrey Atkins Library Archive

istration building, now the King Building, and raised a solid black flag in protest of the mistreatment of Black students.

Two days later, the students presented the UNC Charlotte administration with a list of “10 Demands,” two of which were the creation of an African-American studies program and the addition of a Black Student Union.

The lowering of the United States flag prompted a “rule of three,” as Sanders recalled. This rule was one of the first things he remembers being told as a student.

“The rule was [that] Black students could not walk in groups of more than three at a time anywhere on campus. If you had more than three, security would stop and break us up,” Sanders said.

While it was unclear whether the rule applied only to Black students, Sanders explained that this was how students interpreted it and how it was enforced.

To Sanders, the demand for Black Studies, which is now called the Department of Africana Studies, was an important part of the 10 Demands. The discipline now has a major with three concentrations and a minor at UNC Charlotte.

“We only made requests so that we could enhance our educational experience while there, such as having Black history information. We didn’t call it Black History, we called it Black Studies, because it’s bigger than history,” Sanders said.

Sanders connected the demand and need for Black Studies in 1968 to the current political climate, emphasizing the importance of continuing these studies.

“[They’re] taking books out of the schools that emphasize a lot of the things that the Black folks did, [that the] slaves did,” Sanders said. “We don’t even say slaves anymore; they

are enslaved people. We’ve [be]come very pretty about ugly things.”

According to a 2005 J. Murrey Atkins Library Archives interview with Caldwell, Cone was very receptive to the 10 Demands and invited the marching students into her office. Sanders echoed this sentiment.

“Miss Bonnie, as some of us called her, was a student advocate. She pushed to get a lot of the things that we got forward,” Sanders said. “I would even say that she was Black student’s advocate; she was my advocate and mentor.”

Sanders was a recipient of the “Outstanding Freshman” award from Bonnie Cone, remembering it as the first thing he had won in his life. He recalled the excitement of his father’s arrival at the ceremony in what is now the Lucas Room of the Cone University Center.

Sanders recalled that UNC Charlotte’s enrollment was roughly 1,200 students his first year in 1969, with fewer than 100 Black students.

The Wilmington 10 and the Charlotte Three

One of Sanders’ memories with the Black Student Union involved renting out two cars from the University, and attending the trial of the Wilmington 10. This historical trial sentenced 10 Black students to a combined 282 years of prison time for a fire bombing of a grocery store. These 10 activists were proven to be framed by white supremacists, intending to dissuade Black students from uniting.

Chavis was called on by Sanders to help with the advocacy and later, in 2012, launched a petition that granted pardons to the surviving four prisoners.

“We were there over several days,” Sanders said. “We walked in the march, and we

sat in the courtroom during the trial. It was very interesting. The other unsung hero for us was T.J. Reddy, who was part of the Charlotte Three.”

Following the Wilmington 10, the Charlotte Three were accused and convicted of burning a barn and political terrorism. T.J. Reddy was a UNC Charlotte student and activist who was accused of this crime. He died in April of 2019.

Black faculty

Sanders recalled one of the 10 demands being the hiring of Black faculty.

“There were no Black engineers,” Sanders said. “I was in the psychology department, there were no Black professors in the psychology department... we had very few Black professors, but again, we had very few Black students, comparatively speaking.”

Despite the lack of Black faculty and administration, Sanders and his peers pushed for a more diverse board.

“I went to Dr. Cone and asked her to get us a Black counselor,” Sanders said. “She asked me if I had somebody in mind, and I said yes. So, I was tasked with going and recruiting her. Her name was Beverly Ford.”

Ford was later hired as UNC Charlotte’s first Black counselor.

Black History Month at UNC Charlotte

“Black history of UNC Charlotte started out at a place where Black history was needed, where the Black experience was needed, because it wasn’t there,” Sanders said. “Our history on that campus grew just like the history in the nation.”

Sanders urged UNC Charlotte to celebrate Black history through the present. He

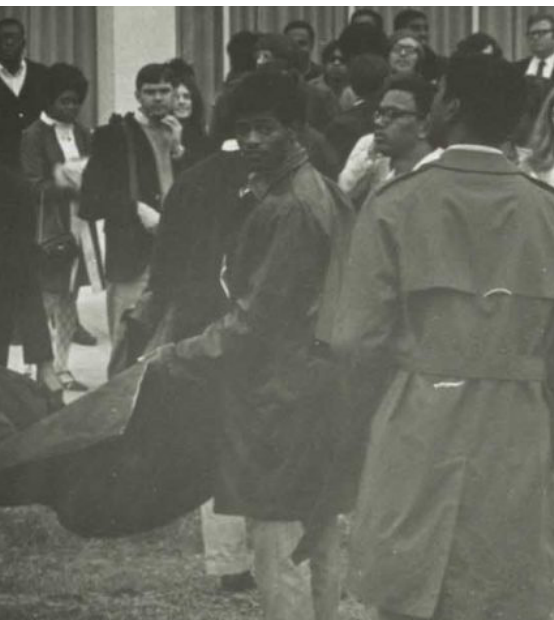
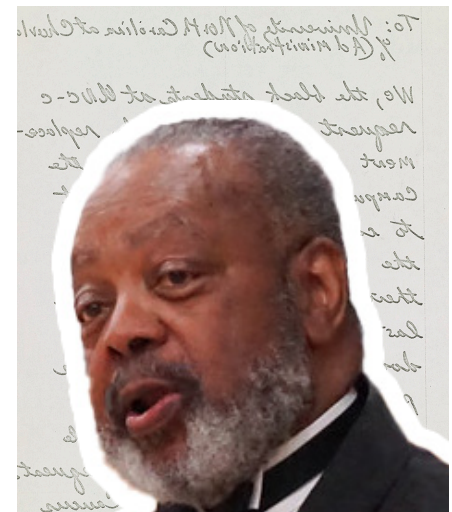
believes the community should celebrate the current excellence of Black faculty and students at UNC Charlotte.

Not only does Sanders commend the excellence of Black students and faculty, but he also recognizes the workers and staff who contribute to the community.

“Bring them all out, and showcase them all. That’s what I’d like to see, because it’s not just one. It’s not just the excellence of a student having a 4.0 [GPA], but one, or several [whose] work has impacted the community at large that has transcended the University,” Sanders said.

Through Sanders’ legacy, along with Chavis, Caldwell and Reddy, UNC Charlotte’s extensive Black history has been paved through years of activism and fighting for unity.

“The inaugural Black experience on the campus of UNC Charlotte was a microcosm of what was going on across the nation,” Sanders said. “You had Black students coming together to unify a oneness, to enhance the education experience for Black students.”



Student Legal Services left in limbo following proposed UNC System policy



Joseph Dunatov/Niner Times

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Proposed UNC System policy that would restrict the use of student activity fees and cut funds to Student Legal Services (SLS) has left students and faculty questioning how this will affect affordable legal aid.

If passed, UNC Charlotte would not be the only institution within the UNC System that would be affected by this policy.

“If approved, this would mean the closure of UNC Charlotte Student Legal Services, Inc. (as well as our counterparts at Chapel Hill, NC State and App State). We do not have a timeline for when a decision will be made or when the regulation goes into effect, if applicable,” founder and director of SLS, Ashley McAlarney, wrote in an email to SLS ambassadors obtained by the Niner Times. “While the law firm continues to operate business as usual, we wanted to notify our previous student ambassadors of this possibility.”

Since the policy draft’s existence was announced on Jan. 12, there have been no further updates as of Feb. 22 regarding when or if the draft system regulation will be approved and implemented, according to McAlarney.

On Jan. 27, McAlarney sent a message to the SLS office staff and student volunteers with the information about the policy she had from the UNC System Board of Governors.

In the message, McAlarney said she would provide updates as she received them.

Currently, the office remains in standard operating order, with student ambassadors and others left to wait regarding the future of SLS.

According to McAlarney, SLS took the opportunity to attempt to repeal the policy draft and sent information to University administrators to relay to UNC System leaders — all

in hopes of swaying the final decision.

“Our main role in this respect has been informing students and campus partners about the draft regulation so that they can express any concerns,” McAlarney wrote.

SLS student ambassador reactions

SLS takes on student ambassadors each semester to assist with outreach, engagement and promoting legal resources to the campus community. While it is an unpaid volunteer position, students participate in efforts to build various skills.

Despite being heavily involved with the SLS office, student ambassadors have received little to no communication regarding the pending closure of the office.

Second-year student and SLS ambassador Sawyer Hook told the Niner Times they learned about the policy draft during a Student Government Association meeting, where Kevin Bailey, vice chancellor for the Division of Student Affairs, announced it as part of his University update remarks.

“This was about a week or so before receiving my acceptance to become a Student Legal Services Ambassador, where the SLS staff then also informed us,” Hook said.

Eva Fernandez-Rojas, a second-year student and ambassador, shared that she found out the day that McAlarney sent out the message to the SLS office.

“It’s truly unfortunate to see all of this unravel,” Fernandez-Rojas said. “Serving as an ambassador can be valuable to students interested in pursuing a career in law. For example, participating in the courthouse tour the ambassadors went on gave me firsthand insight into how the legal system functions in North Carolina.”

Both Hook and Fernandez-Rojas share the sentiment that the closure of SLS will be detrimental to the student body.

“I think ultimately this takes away a safe space for students to ask the tough questions regarding anything legal, amongst anything going on in their lives,” Hook said. “Also, providing an affordable way to get assistance as opposed to going to a third-party firm, where there is no financial assistance for students. It ultimately, in my opinion, hurts students.”

Fernandez-Rojas emphasized overall campus safety concerns if SLS were to be closed. A majority of students who come to SLS are getting legal advice for the first time, and would not have the financial support to go to off-campus firms.

“Having access to resources like this helps students stay informed and feel protected. Programs like the Student Legal Services office are critical to maintaining a supportive and safe campus community,” Fernandez-Rojas said.

Cutting funds, compounding stress

SLS funding comes from student activity fees paid as part of tuition.

Students, both in- and out-of-state, pay a total of \$650 toward “student activities” as part of their tuition.

While not all \$650 go directly to SLS, it is one of several campus offices funded by these fees. SLS also operates as a non-profit organization, meaning that the students do not have to pay for any services.

According to the 2024-2025 SLS financial statement presented at the Board of Trustees meeting held on Feb. 18, if the organization is dissolved, its funding will be distributed across the University.

According to the financial statements, SLS revenue from student fees in 2024 was \$175,500 and in 2025 was \$190,751. This covers insurance, professional fees and dues, salaries and benefits, travel, office expenses and other miscellaneous expenses.

During this Board of Trustees meeting, there was no decision announced on whether the SLS office will be dissolved.

As University leaders weigh the future of Student Legal Services, students could soon find themselves navigating legal challenges alone, without the accessible, on-campus support many have relied on for years.

“Closure of SLS means that individual, activity fee-paying students and student organizations lose access to our law firm’s range of services,” McAlarney wrote in an email to the Niner Times. “This includes legal advice, limited representation, resources, notarization and preventative legal education. SLS is available at no additional cost and is located conveniently on campus as a confidential source for students. Without access to SLS, more students will pay a cost, whether through expensive private attorney fees and/or avoidable negative legal consequences. Legal matters cause stress for students, which can impact their academic progress, retention at the University and opportunities post graduation.”

At the time of publishing, McAlarney did not respond to the Niner Times inquiry regarding whether the University has given SLS any formal guidance on a transition in operations or a possible shutdown.

How Chase Campbell's HBCU legacy shapes culture at Charlotte

Kelli Blackburn | Staff Writer

For women's basketball Associate Coach Chase Campbell, history matters. So does impact.

When both are intentional, they build culture — and culture wins ballgames.

Campbell's understanding of that balance was shaped through his journey in college basketball, particularly at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Most recently, he helped build a nationally recognized program alongside Head Coach Tomika Reed at Jackson State University.

When Reed accepted the head coaching position at Charlotte in 2024, Campbell followed — bringing with him the same commitment to honoring tradition while building something new.

The setting may have changed, but the mission remains the same: respect history, create a lasting impact on the program and community and build a culture that wins.

Roots in the game

Campbell's life in basketball began at just three years old when he first picked up a ball. From there, the Jackson, Tenn., native went on to play collegiately at Augusta University before transitioning into a coaching role. His first steps came through AAU basketball programs, where he discovered his love for mentoring extended far beyond the court.

He coached two successful AAU basketball programs before taking his next step into the collegiate ranks — all while finishing his degree in Augusta, Ga.

Over 17 years of coaching, Campbell's path ran largely through HBCUs, including Newberry College, Paine College, Benedict College, Tuskegee University and Wiley College.

It was there that he first learned the weight of history.

At HBCUs, legacies and history are emphasized. Students and faculty learn the importance of representation, pride and generations of impact that extend beyond the classroom or scoreboard. At institutions built to educate and uplift Black students during times of exclusion, Campbell saw firsthand how history and opportunity are intertwined.

Campbell's connection to HBCUs is personal. His mother attended Lane College and his brothers went to Tennessee State University.

"Culture, pride and community are something that's always been near and dear to my

heart," Campbell said. "For us, the culture piece is about seeing yourself along with others that look like you and others that believe in the same thing as you."

That perspective followed him to Charlotte. Campbell worked to understand and immerse himself in the 49ers' basketball history — learning the standard that had been set and the responsibility of building upon it.

A natural transition

Despite nearly two decades in men's basketball, Campbell had never coached a women's game before arriving at Jackson State. Yet, the transition felt natural.

He had guided his men's teams to national top-10 rankings in scoring defense and field goal percentage. But stylistically, that side of the game never captivated him the way women's basketball did.

"I've always felt like the women's game was a much better game than men's basketball," Campbell said. "It's a much cleaner, crispier game. I think the women's game has many more fundamentals. I think the women's game has the same amount of emotion, the same amount of passion, the same amount of intensity as the men's game."

After finding success of his own, he noticed Reed building something special at Jackson State. When the opportunity came to join her staff, he embraced it, describing the move as "a match made in heaven."

Building more than champions

Campbell joined the Lady Tigers at Jackson State in fall 2021 — and the results were immediate.

In his first season, the program went 21-0 in conference play, capturing Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) regular-season and tournament titles before advancing to the NCAA Tournament. They faced Louisiana State University (LSU) on March 19, 2022.

In the closing minutes, Jackson State led by 10 before LSU rallied late, ending the Tigers' run in an 83-77 defeat.

For Campbell, the loss did not define the moment. He saw the people who believed in them, along with those who doubted. He saw the work it took to get there and the effort that sustained it. All of it fueled him to continue.

Over three seasons, Jackson State secured three SWAC regular-season titles, two tour-

nament championships and two NCAA Tournament appearances. The Tigers won 70 games during that stretch, including a 21-game winning streak in 2021-22.

Although the wins were memorable, the impact remains what Campbell values most.

During his time at Jackson State, he coached Aameysha Williams-Holliday and Angel Jackson, both of whom were selected in the WNBA Draft. Those milestones represented something greater than personal accolades.

Campbell attended Williams-Holliday's draft party in her hometown, celebrating alongside her family and teammates. When Jackson's name appeared as the final pick of the 2024 draft, Campbell immediately called her.

She answered in tears. "Oh my gosh, Coach."

"Yo, I'm happy to see it," he told her. "Now, the real work begins."

Those moments — watching players reach dreams that extend beyond the court — define success for him.

"I didn't care who I coached. I didn't care male, female, what had you," Campbell said. "It was just about the opportunity to build relationships and see kids accomplish something that's bigger than themselves."

For Campbell, success is not measured by statistics but by transformation.

"If your goal is to go be a pro, then I'm going to do everything in my power to help you reach that goal and get to be a pro," he said. "If your dream is to go be a doctor, I want to do everything I can in my power to help you go be a doctor."

Basketball is the platform. Impact is the purpose.

He looks for heart in his players. He strives to be a steady presence when they face adversity and a trusted voice when

they need guidance.

Whether supporting a student-athlete through challenges or engaging with someone who approaches him on campus, Campbell believes influence extends far beyond the sideline.

Carrying the standard forward

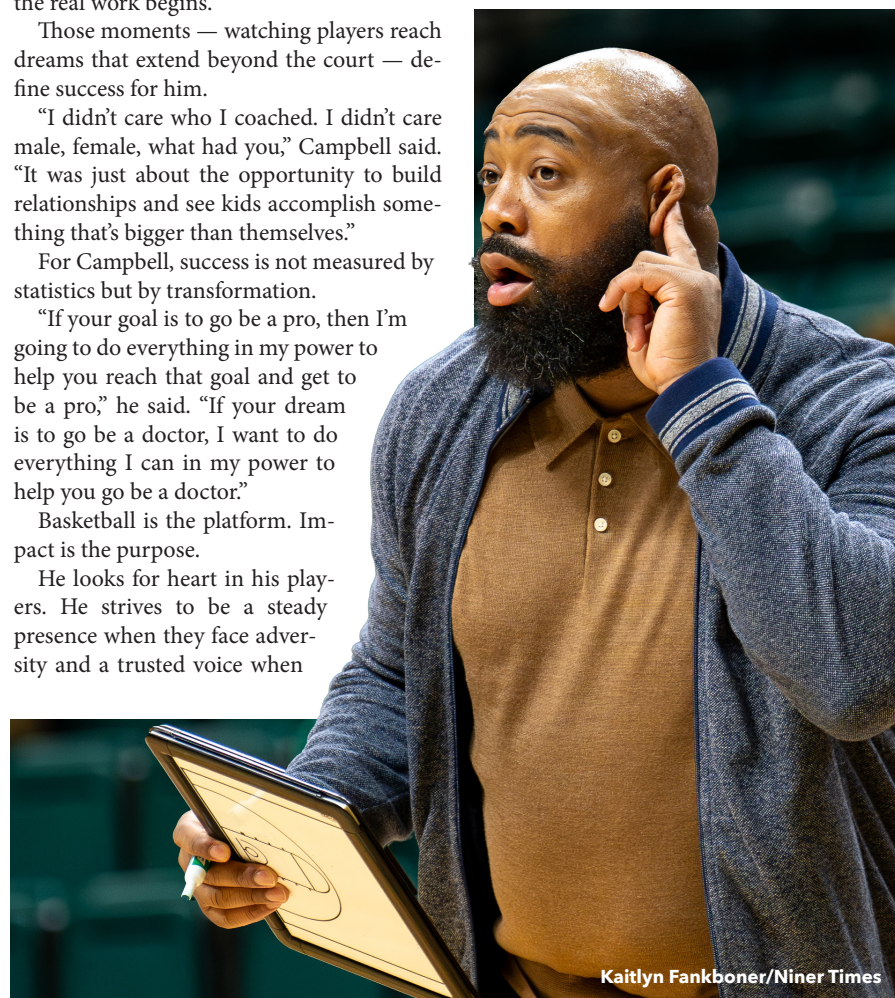
Now at Charlotte, Campbell brings that philosophy with him.

He emphasizes the program's history — not as nostalgia but as responsibility. He challenges his players to understand the foundation that has been built and to recognize that their actions will shape what comes next.

For Campbell, history matters most when it inspires impact.

And when impact is intentional, whether in daily interactions or life-changing achievements, culture follows.

And culture wins ballgames.



Kaitlyn Fankboner/Niner Times



Opinion: Greek Life has a disproportionate influence in SGA

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Davis Cuffe & Hunter Carver/Niner Times

Wednesday, Feb. 18, marked the first day of campaigning for the UNC Charlotte Student Government Association's (SGA) spring elections.

Instagram pages were created, flyers were distributed, and some candidates even put up yard signs advertising their candidacies around the Popp-Martin Student Union for all to see.

Later, these candidates will take to the podium to debate their opponents in an attempt to sway the student body to vote for them.

All the amateur political campaigning is cute and makes for a fun vibe on campus, but it is, truthfully, pointless when you account for what really sways the student government: Greek Life.

In every election, turning out harder than any other student group are the members of your local fraternities and sororities. And it shows — since 2019, all but one of UNC Charlotte's past student body presidents have belonged to one Greek Life organization or another.

Of the six members of the SGA's current Leadership Committee, five are members of Greek Life. The committee promotes communication between student government officers and branches, recommends policies intended to advance the interests of the student body and is one of the most influential committees in the SGA.

In real politics, political action committees or PACs like the National Association of Realtors or the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) have a large amount of

control over how much you see of a candidate. More often than not, donations from a PAC go to the candidate's campaign, so the more PAC donations a candidate gets, the more advertising the candidate can run — and hypothetically — the more influence that candidate has on voters. In the 2024 election cycle, Donald Trump and Josh Stein each received more PAC donations than their opponents, and both won their elections.

Similarly, in SGA elections, the more support you have from Greek Life, the more likely you are to win. Why even consider running if you know your opponent is in Greek Life and can draw support from that community, while you can't?

This year, a "pike.for.sga" Instagram account was made to exclusively promote SGA candidates from the Pi Kappa Alpha or "Pike" fraternity. The page features bios of six Pike candidates and photos displaying their cheery dispositions.

Even campus offices step in to give Greek Life some much-needed support.

When campaigning started on Feb. 18, the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life posted on its Instagram story to promote the Madison Brown-Paul Hensler presidential ticket. The story reposted content from the Brown-Hensler campaign page with the text "We endorse all @cltgogreek candidates." The post may be in violation of some UNC System institutional neutrality policy, but what do I know?

I, for one, am no opponent of Greek Life. I genuinely think their overwhelming success

in student government and real show of community isn't some corrupt scheme but rather a great demonstration of how strong their community is.

If I asked my five closest friends to like my Instagram story, four of the five might hit that little heart button in the corner. If a pledgemaster tells his batch of pledges to vote for whatever candidate, someone may hurt their thumb trying to type in their NinerNET login too fast.

Further, I'm not proposing that some candidates only win because they're in Greek Life. The only way to win an election is to get more votes, not to join a fraternity.

What is a bit concerning is the matter of proper representation in the SGA.

Should the roughly 5% of the student body that belongs to Greek Life make up a majority of the SGA?

One of the SGA's main purposes is to divvy out the \$185,000 in its budget to student organizations — including Greek Life organizations. I think it's reasonable to say UNC Charlotte's SGA has done a fine job in fairly allocating that money in past years. But, with recent UNC System policy restricting student organization funding, and SGA power moving increasingly to the executive branch, which is consistently made up of members of Greek Life, it creates a structure where those in leadership could more easily — even unintentionally — steer a disproportionate share of that money toward organizations within their own community.

That, of course, is hypothetical. There are

checks and balances in place, and SGA leaders generally make the right decision. But the concern is less about bad actors and more about structure. When a governing body is dominated by members of a single community, even unintentionally, its priorities, relationships and sense of urgency can begin to reflect that community more than others.

Representation does not guarantee favoritism, but concentration of power within one group inevitably raises questions about whose interests are most readily understood and advanced.

I've written about my perceived inefficiencies of the SGA. While they're good people with good intentions, I really don't think they do much to affect the student body in any way. I think that's well represented in conversation with the average student. Students don't know who the SGA president is. Students don't know what the SGA can do. If the SGA was more effective, they might.

Students don't vote either; the 2024 SGA election saw 1,797 voters, the highest number since the 2020 SGA election. The number is roughly 6% of the total student body.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter who is running the SGA if the organization continues to sit on its hands. Maybe the Greek Life majority that currently makes up the student government is the reason for that ineffectiveness. Maybe they aren't.

But, if you are one of the rare few who take the polls and vote in the SGA election, don't blindly vote Greek. Vote for what you believe in.



Opinion: Black women have had the biggest hand in shaping modern American culture

Jamal Pitts | Staff Writer

Black women. As a young Black man myself, I can say with certainty that without them, I would not be the person I am today. I am sure that other Black men would say the same. Their warmth, love and wisdom have shaped us into who we are today, and it doesn't stop there.

The United States would not be the same without them. However, Black women's impact on American culture is greatly underappreciated, and I think it's time we begin to recognize their contributions.

When you look at some of the biggest musical artists of today, singers like Ariana Grande, Adele and Britney Spears were influenced by Black female artists. From Whitney Houston to Mariah Carey and other R&B singers like Brandy and TLC, they were the blueprint for many of the artists that we have

today. Grande even did a cover of Brandy's "The Boy Is Mine" for her 2024 album "Eternal Sunshine."

When you take a look around on the internet and see all of the many different slang terms used by the youth of today, you will see words such as 'slay,' 'period' and 'tea.' These words are all African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), something that is not mentioned enough. Black women have been using terms like these since before Generation Z was even a thought in anyone's mind.

When it comes to fashion, the industry's success today is largely due to the emulation of Black culture.

"Every piece of clothing is influenced by black culture. Street wear? That's all Black people. Wearing oversized jeans, wearing oversized T-shirts, that's our thing," said

fourth-year UNC Charlotte student Eunice Okyere.

The Civil Rights Movement in the 1900s helped advance the country to a place where everyone, not just Black people, can live highly fulfilling and successful lives. When most consider this movement, they think mostly about the men of the time, like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

While, of course, what these men did was very significant, the role of Black women in the Civil Rights Movement is severely understated. Women like: Ida B. Wells, who was one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Mary McLeod Bethune, who founded the National Council of Negro Women; and Mary Church Terrell, civil rights activist and one of the first Black women to ever get a col-

lege degree, were pioneers in the movement before Martin Luther King Jr. was even born.

Despite all of these contributions, Black women still suffer from prejudice and harmful stereotypes in the United States. One of them is the 'strong Black woman.'

Third-year student Stephanie Davis said, "I think Black women are taught to be strong, and that's where the stereotype comes from, but because of that stereotype, you're boxed into that, and whenever you see Black women breaking the mold or being different, it's kind of hard to be anything but that."

Black women and their influence on culture are one of the best things about America. And if it were not for these women, the country that we have today would not be the same.

‘Nothing has succeeded in stopping me’: Poet Laureate Jay Ward creates a Black Future

Madeline Andrews | Arts & Culture Editor

If you spent any time on YouTube during the late 2010s, you probably stumbled across the slam poetry online ecosystem. Slam archive channels like Button Poetry showcase a collection of award-winning slam pieces performed across the country, accruing over 302 million views to date.

Junious ‘Jay’ Ward was a staple of the slam ecosystem, competing in open mics and slam circuits since 2005.

Ward is one of the most decorated poets in the country, as a National Slam champion (2018), an Individual World Poetry Slam champion (2019), author of two collections of poetry, a 2023 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow and serves on the board of four local poetry associations.

Due to his astounding commitment to preserving poetry and culture in and around

Charlotte, he was named the city’s inaugural poet laureate in 2023. His work currently intersects Southern identity, working with youth poets and the promise of Afrofuturism.

The slam ecosystem

Ward began with writing page poetry — poems designed to be collected and read in books — but after a few years, was introduced to slam poetry.

“Slam was devised as a gimmick to get people to listen to poetry, to put it into a competitive format, in which random strangers off the street, who may know little to nothing about poetry at all, assign value to individual poems,” Ward explained.

Slam poetry got its start in Chicago in the 1980s, and has since spread to every corner of the country, having deep cultural roots in major cities. There are slam circuits around the nation, similar to sports brackets, where you compete from the local level up to the national level.

“Poetry has taught me that there’s an immediacy, an urgency involved with people having to understand what you’re saying; they have to feel what you’re saying in three minutes or less,” Ward explained.

You never know which poem is going to resonate with the audience. In the 2015 Indi-

vidual World Poetry Slam Semi Finals hosted in Washington, D.C., the top 12 competitors made it to the finals; Ward placed No. 13. He wanted to retire the poem he performed, feeling as though the content wasn’t resonating with his audience. After leaving the venue feeling a little defeated, a young woman was waiting outside to talk to him.

“She basically told me, ‘I haven’t talked to my father in X amount of years, but I am gonna call him tonight,’” Ward said. “It was in that moment that I was like if I retire this poem, it was worth it for that one person, you know?”

For that audience member, the content of Ward’s losing poem inspired her to reach out to an estranged family member. Often in slam, poems that don’t score high with the judges will resonate more with the audience.

“The poem that wins is not necessarily the one people are talking about after the slam,” Ward explained. “Someone is crying in the corner to this other poet, letting them know that their words touched them in a way that they didn’t expect. And there’s somebody else saying, ‘Can you email me this poem? I’ve got a family member who needs to see this.’”

Teaching a way out

Aside from the points and accolades, the heart of Ward’s work in the arts is teaching youth poetry and slam. He currently serves as the program director for BreatheINK, a non-profit dedicated to youth poets in Mecklenburg County. Teaching has become a primary source of inspiration for Ward, and has helped him become a better writer himself.

“The first thing that happens as an adult is you get a little shocked, because you don’t realize that you are going through this,” Ward explained. “You imagine going through this and not having anyone to talk to about it or a way to safely express it.”

The uncensored space that youth organizations like BreatheINK not only foster healthy conversations, but also give kids an outlet to express the heavy emotions they have been harboring.

“I see myself in this person and in this poet, which can make a lonely existence not lonely anymore. If I read this poem, and it perfectly embodies how I feel about this thing now, I have language,” Ward said. “Just the idea that somebody else understands can be life-changing.”

BreatheINK also leads to career opportu-

nities for the youth poets they sponsor. Ward was a mentor for Venessa Hunter, a 17-year-old Charlotte native who was named the first youth poet laureate of Charlotte in 2024.

He hopes to inspire more teaching programs focused on living poets and uncensored spaces around the country. BreatheINK taught 1,600 workshops in Mecklenburg County public schools in 2023 alone, one step closer to fully funded creative arts programs in public schools.

Black history: Today and tomorrow

For Ward, history is an extension of what lies in the future. His current work is centered around Afrofuturism, his own attempt at imagining what a Black future looks like for all of us.

“The idea of resilience means we look back and our ancestors made it, this family member made it, we look forward and say we can make it and what that leaves is right in the middle,” Ward said.

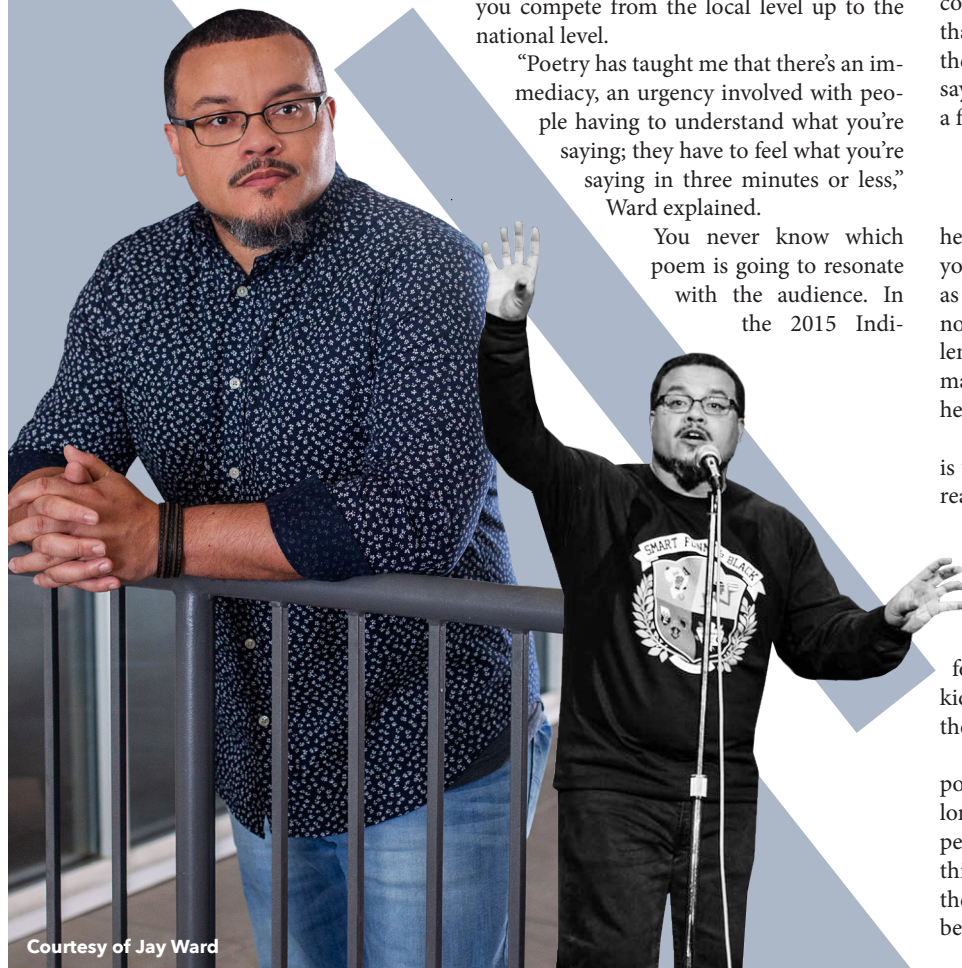
For Ward and other poets, the busiest months of the year are February and April, Black History Month and National Poetry Month. This February, Ward has been trying to highlight lesser-known historical figures who had an impact on local history.

Recently, Ward has been focused on George Moses Horton, the first African-American author published in the United States, the first African-American poet to publish a book without knowing how to write, and the first North Carolina poet of any race to publish a book — all while actively enslaved.

“He was born in the county where I was raised. He traveled through Concord to freedom,” Ward said. “I talk to people about George Moses Horton for other figures in history that are lesser known as a way to say we have this history here, history that is still being built.”

Ward encourages us to look back into our own family history in an attempt to identify our personal Black histories. Due to the structure of racial identity in America, Black pioneers are closer to us than we think.

“And I think that does reinforce the idea that Black history is still happening,” Ward said. “We are all standing on the shoulders of giants, but we ourselves are also giants. We’re also here for our shoulders to lift the next person.”



Courtesy of Jay Ward

‘An especially powerful medium’: Quilting for Climate Change sparks campus awareness and conversation

Annie Waskey | Asst. Arts & Culture Editor

Designs, colors and patterns mixed as students sifted through piles of fabric and designed quilt squares in the J. Murrey Atkins Library Makerspace on Tuesday, Feb. 17.

The Office of Sustainability collaborated with the library to host Quilting for Climate Change, an event spreading across the nation to raise awareness about the effects of the climate crisis.

This movement was inspired by the AIDS Memorial Quilt of 1985, when activist Cleve Jones wanted to bring honor to the lives lost to AIDS. He decided to urge people across the United States to create quilt panels that would be assembled to cover over 1.2 million square feet. The quilt became the largest piece of community folk art in the world, and it has been displayed in various locations, including the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Now, over 40 years later, the project returns with a different name and a new motive: The Climate Change Quilt Movement. Spearheaded by Pam Mischen, a climate activist, professor of environmental studies and chief sustainability officer at Binghamton University, the movement is spreading across the United States.

This movement will attempt to bring people together to inspire conversations about what changes need to occur.

“A lot of people care about climate change across various political spectrums and identities, but a lot of people don’t feel that they have the agency to speak up. I think seeing a large portion of people who do care about our environment and changing climate motivates others to make a difference in their own communities,” Jenny Washam, who works with the Office of Sustainability, said.

Quilting as a vessel for conversations and change

The Climate Change Quilt movement is mobilizing voices through an art form historically used for storytelling. The use of quilts in advocacy goes back to causes like abolition and women’s suffrage. During the Civil Rights Movement, quilts were hung on safes as a symbol of protection for African-Americans escaping slavery.

“I’m a historian, and quilting has been really important for storytelling and for preserving memory,” Professor Tina Shull said. “It’s also a form of activism and action, and for college students, it’s an especially powerful medium.”

Art and activism have been used together to spark change and unity for centuries.

“Using art as an avenue to spread the word and then bringing together different disciplines of college students together is just really great,” Earth Club President Lydia Kinnear said.

Spreading awareness through collaborative events like this one can be vital for facilitating discussion on issues like climate change. Activism that involves art provides a visual of people’s thoughts toward an issue, sparking conversation that is essential for raising awareness.

Without conversation, issues like climate change do not have many opportunities to be solved. Collaboration and discussion are necessary to create motivation to make a positive impact on the crisis of climate change. Especially in a college setting, conversations can be useful to students who want to make an impact on climate change through the careers they pursue.

“I think it’s fantastic to see young people speaking out. It’s their earth, and it’s so important for the public become more aware of what can be done and what the impacts of climate change are,” June Vlotnick said.

Vlotnick is a part of CleanAIRE NC, an

advocacy network that works to ensure access to clean air and a livable climate.

An end goal of increased awareness for climate change

Like the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the goal for this movement is to get enough quilts to display at the National Mall in Washington, D.C., and in other locations across the country. This will aim to give people a visual of the gravity of the current climate crisis, and a projection of the various thoughts and feelings surrounding it.

“I think whenever you’re advocating for any kind of environmental or health issue, or for public safety, the arts have always been used as a strategy to get people’s attention,” Vlotnick said.

As awareness of climate change increases, so does the motivation to make an impact. Events like Quilting for Climate Change help bring exposure to climate change and the efforts students can take to make a difference.

“We have to be aware of these things,” second-year student Taisa Koun said. “I think being able to be in a community where other people also care about climate change, sustainability and all of those things is really important.”



Ava Weaver & Gavin Binkley/Niner Times

Student-favorite Blasian Asian Way brings fusion flavor to campus

Mari Love | Staff Writer

Fusion restaurants are nothing new in the Charlotte area, but Blasian Asian Way stands out with its unique menu that combines Korean cuisine and American comfort foods. Created by Jeffrey McBride, a Fayetteville, N.C. native who is of African-American and Korean descent, Blasian Asian Way has become a popular food truck on the UNC Charlotte campus.

The black food truck with the red and blue logo reminiscent of the South Korean flag, or Taegeukgi, serves an array of dishes like their Bulgogi macaroni and cheese, Blasian smash burger, Seoulgogi tacos and kimchi-loaded fries. With both meat and vegetarian options, there's something for everyone.

"I loved their food after my first time trying out the place," fourth-year UNC Charlotte student Kyrin Dukes, said.

It is one of the few food trucks on the UNC Charlotte campus that is in constant rotation, serving long lines full of dedicated customers.

The making of Blasian Asian Way

Born and raised in Fayetteville, N.C. to an African-American father and Korean mother, McBride studied business at UNC Greensboro before transferring to Fayette-

ville State University. Afterwards, McBride went to Davenport University to receive his Master of Business Administration.

McBride started operating the food truck in 2020 in Fayetteville before setting up shop in Charlotte, where he successfully opened a restaurant in Camp North End in 2024.

Using the recipes he learned while cooking with his mother, McBride made Korean fusion dishes that gave him a unique edge in the Charlotte food scene.

McBride didn't always know that he wanted to become a chef, but when the opportunity for something unique came to him, he knew that it was something that he had to do.

"Being Korean and Black means I can do whatever I want to do. I can be as creative as I want to be and bring influences from both sides," McBride said.

Charlotte has a very diverse food scene offering cuisines from all over the world. With a variety of restaurants, it can be hard to cement yourself, but Blasian Asian Way is truly something the city has never seen before.

The challenges and advantages

When asked about the challenges McBride faces as a chef and restaurateur, he gave some insight regarding the financial aspects of

running a restaurant.

The price of food in America has been an ongoing worry for many people, and everyone is feeling the pressure — especially those with careers in the food industry.

"The economy does play a big role when it comes to staying on profits, mainly because the cost of goods has increased this year because of the tariffs. I feel as though it's not just coincidence," McBride explained.

There are still advantages to come from being involved in an oversaturated industry that has no problem making or breaking you. McBride claims that his dual heritage makes him stand out from the rest.

"I think people are intrigued to try something that they probably never tried before. I am a true fusion restaurant, and a lot of the foods I offer are different from most," McBride says. "I've always been creative when it comes to food."

McBride doesn't believe in limiting himself and allows his creativity to guide him when it comes to business matters.

The future of Blasian Asian Way

McBride plans on extending his business to more brick-and-mortar restaurants. Along with the Camp North End location, he is in the process of opening a second restaurant in downtown Concord that would serve as his first sit-down restaurant, which is projected to open in spring 2026.

McBride hopes to expand more in Charlotte and possibly in the greater North Carolina area, introducing his food to more people.

Regarding the menu, McBride has a few ideas that will incorporate more African-American soul food and perhaps even a few things from Korean cuisine that aren't as popular in America, such as squid and octopus.

The future of Blasian Asian Way is bright with a dedicated base and a unique menu.



Gia Soto/Niner Times