



Honoring Traditions, Looking Towards the Future

Delaware State University blends with Wesley College **BY STEVEN H. NEWTON**

WESLEY COLLEGE has stood as a fixture in downtown Dover for 147 years, but on May 15, 2021, the last graduating class ever walked across the stage to receive their diplomas. A victim of the times and economic forces arrayed against small, private liberal arts colleges, Wesley was acquired by Delaware State University on July 1, ending its independent existence.

Yet instead of ending, the Wesley story is now intertwined with the 130-year history of Delaware State University, and the jewel of that university's new downtown campus is the Wesley College of Health and Behavioral Sciences.

President Tony Allen is explicit about the intentionality of that decision: "Both Delaware State University and Wesley College have rich traditions in the health sciences. The two nursing programs, which will now



Left: Students from both Delaware State University and Wesley College's student government associations stand in front of the Wesley College Center, which will become the new home of the Wesley College of Health and Behavioral Sciences. Above, Wesley's College Center, also known as DuPont Hall.

become one, enjoy the best of reputations up and down the state. Wesley's Occupational Therapy program and our Master's in Social Work degree, both unique in Delaware, will be joining with Psychology, Allied & Public Health, and Kinesiology on a health-themed campus with room to grow over the next generation."

Allen emphasizes that the University has no intention of allowing the Wesley brand to fade into obscurity. "I was working for MBNA when Bank of America acquired us," he says. "I understand what it feels like on that side of the process." Delaware State University has reached out to faculty, students, alumni, and community members alike with the message that Wesley traditions will be respected and supported.

The actions behind those words have already begun as Dr. Stacy Downing, the newly appointed chief administrative officer for DSU Downtown observes, "Hundreds of current Wesley students will be completing their degrees with us; we offered jobs to 60 percent of their faculty and staff; and our alumni associations have been talking." Downing, the University's longest-serving vice president, understands the critical importance of tradition and community programming in such a venture. "Current Wesley students have been offered the opportunity to continue living on the downtown campus if they choose, we're actively reaching out to community groups that have had agreements with the college, and there's a major effort under way to safely preserve and eventually display Wesley archives, memorabilia, and athletic awards."

Two key members of Downing's campus management team, Laura Mayse and Gwendolyn Scott-Jones, exemplify the potential for successfully melding the two traditions, as their own timelines contain fascinating parallels.

Mayse graduated from Wesley College in 1992, returning five years ago as director of development "to give back to the college that formed

so much of my personal and professional character." She transitioned to become the director of development and community relations at downtown campus where she will play a central role in curating those treasured Wesley traditions.

Laura's daughter, Abbey, was in the final graduating Wesley College class. She will join Delaware State University's Early College High School as an English teacher this fall, while also entering the University's graduate program in Education. In 2022, mother and daughter alike are excited at the opportunities created by the transition, but also mindful of the sadness of change. "This is a time of both celebration and tears for us," Laura said, "but now we are all moving forward."

Scott-Jones graduated from Delaware State University in 1996, earned her MA there in 1999, and, like Mayse, found herself drawn back to her alma mater A decade later she

returned as chairperson of the Psychology Department, rose to assistant dean, and now will be the founding dean of the new, blended college. In another telling similarity with the Mayse family, Scott-Jones' daughter, Nicole, graduated from Delaware State University this year.

"Both of us understand the compelling nature of institutions that draw students and families back across the generations," said Scott-Jones. "That's why we are so insistent on interweaving the best of both traditions in this college and on this campus."

Scott-Jones also points out that the Wesley College of Health and Behavioral Sciences fills a critical need within Delaware. "Each of our nursing programs has been graduating about 40 fully qualified nurses annually, and we expect to double that output within three years," she said. She noted that such an increase was critical in a state where the job-fill rate for nurses still lingers below 20 percent. "The same situation holds true in occupational therapy, and to some extent in social work, where we will be the only institution offering associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees."

The special mission of Historically Black Colleges and Universities is never far from Scott-Jones' mind. The University's Academy for Healing Trauma, which is becoming a major resource for teaching health care professionals new models of culturally competent care, will also be part of the new college.

The physical elements of the campus transition will be handled in phases, Downing reminds everyone. "It's not like somebody turns out the lights at Wesley on June 30 and everything goes back into operation on July 1. Moving departments and renovating campus facilities will be a multi-year process intended to modernize the buildings while still respecting the character of the campus." She laughs, then adds, "Our first students will be arriving in late August, but we're going to be living with construction crews for at least two or three years." ■



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