

A man with short black hair and glasses, wearing a black suit, white shirt, and black tie, stands on the left. He is looking down and to his right. A woman with curly black hair, wearing a bright red blazer, stands in the center, looking directly at the camera with her arms crossed. The background is white with large, abstract red and black shapes. The word 'AFFIRMED' is written in a red serif font, with a red swoosh above and below it. The year '2025' is written in a large, red, outlined font to the right. The text '@ulypgso' is written in a white cursive font on the right side. At the bottom, the phrase 'CREATING LEGACIES OF EXCELLENCE' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

AFFIRMED

2025

@ulypgso

CREATING LEGACIES
OF EXCELLENCE

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2025 AFFIRMED HONOREES



Welcome to Affirmed,

It's a joy to welcome you to Affirmed, a one-of-a-kind celebration that honors the talent, drive, and leadership of young Black professionals across our region.

Today is about more than recognition. It's about creating space to affirm the excellence already present in our community, to uplift those who are blazing trails, creating impact, and showing what's possible through purpose and passion. It's a reminder that Black brilliance is not rare — it is all around us, and it deserves to be seen, valued, and celebrated.

If you are one of our honorees, know this: you deserve this moment. You've earned it through your commitment, courage, and consistent work in pushing boundaries and shaping the world around you. We honor not just what you do, but who you are — leaders, innovators, change-makers, and community builders.

Let today serve as both a celebration and a charge to keep dreaming boldly, leading fearlessly, and standing proudly in your truth. You are proof that the future is not only coming, it's already here, and it looks like you.

So let's enjoy this time together, to reflect, to connect, and to affirm that the future is bright because of the leaders in this very room.

With deep appreciation,

Deanna Hillard

PRESIDENT, URBAN LEAGUE
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS OF
SOUTHWEST OHIO



Planning AFFIRMED, an esteemed annual event that highlights the accomplishments of Greater Southwestern Ohio's top young professionals, is a powerful and transformative movement. This celebration is not just about recognizing achievements; it is about empowering the next generation of leaders who are redefining the landscape of Greater Cincinnati. These young professionals are not only excelling in their fields but also contributing to the cultural and economic vibrancy of the region. Celebrating their success is a profound honor, as it inspires others to strive for excellence and fosters a sense of community and shared purpose. The dedication and innovation of these emerging leaders serve as a light of hope and growth in a world where OUR creativity, funding, and advancement often face obstacles.

Together, we reflect a resilient spirit determined to keep culture, pride, and progress vibrant and alive. This event is a testament to the power of community and the importance of recognizing and nurturing talent. By celebrating these young professionals, AFFIRMED not only acknowledges their remarkable contributions but also encourages continued growth and development. The connections made here today are vital, forming a network of support and inspiration that will drive positive change in the region. Thank you all for being a part of this celebration, and I truly hope to stay connected with each of you as we continue to champion the incredible potential within our community.

Marissa Staples

VICE PRESIDENT, AFFIRMED CO-CHAIR



As a proud member of the 2023 AFFIRMED class, it is both humbling and deeply meaningful to return this year as Co-Chair of this extraordinary celebration. Affirmed is not just an event—it is a sacred space. It is the only platform in our region solely dedicated to honoring young Black professionals: individuals who are often at the forefront of innovation, yet too frequently pushed to the margins.

In times like these, when our contributions can be overlooked or undervalued, it is a profound honor to help curate a space that says *we see you, we celebrate you, and we believe in the power of your brilliance*. For the second year in a row, I've had the privilege to witness the planning of this event unfold with intention, love, and deep respect for our community.

This morning, we do more than present awards—we *rewrite the narrative*. We reclaim our place as architects of the future, as visionaries whose leadership is shaping every corner of this region and beyond. This space is our reminder that excellence is not the exception among us—it is the *standard*.

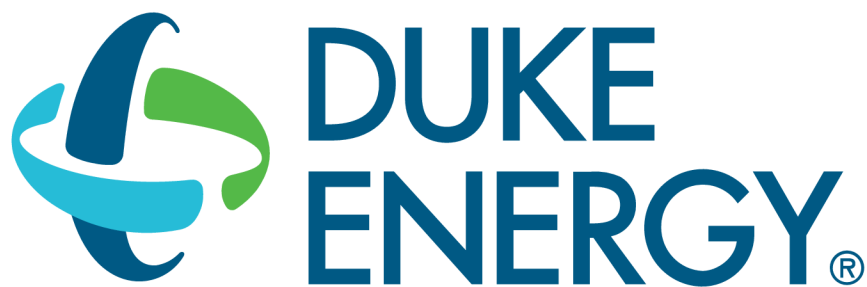
To this year's awardees—*congratulations!* You have already done extraordinary things to move our region forward, and I know you stand on the precipice of even more. We celebrate not only what you've accomplished, but who you are and all you will become.

May tonight be a reminder that your work matters. That you matter. And that this community will always show up to honor your legacy in the making.

Nia Thomas

TREASURER & FUNDRAISING
CHAIR, AFFIRMED CO-CHAIR

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS 2025 AFFIRMED SPONSORS



We extend our sincerest thanks to each of our sponsors for your generous support of Affirmed: *Creating Legacies of Excellence*. Your investment helps us honor the brilliance of young Black professionals and sustain a space where their impact is not only seen, but celebrated.

Your commitment affirms the power of community, the importance of equity, and the enduring value of lifting as we climb.

Because of you, this celebration is not just possible—it is unforgettable.

Thank you for standing with us in *The Movement*.

MEET THE BOARD

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TURKEY SAUSAGE

BEEF SAUSAGE

THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

MORGAN ANGELIQUE OWENS, 2017 AFFIRMED AWARDEE



RAFFLE PRIZES

THE WORK FROM HOME BUNDLE

3 CHAIRS FROM LOFT, \$25 DEWEY'S PIZZA GIFT CARD, \$25 CHEESECAKE FACTORY GIFT CARD, *\$1,350 VALUE*

CINCINNATI SNEAKERBALL

2 VIP TICKETS, *\$300 VALUE*

BENGALS FAN PASS

2 PRESEASON OR 2 REGULAR SEASON TICKETS (SEC. 131), *\$400 VALUE*

THE GOAL DIGGER

1 SIGNED FC CINCINNATI SOCCER BALL, *\$150*

SLUGGERS NIGHT OUT

2 TERRACE LINE OR 4 VIEW LEVEL CINCINNATI REDS TICKETS, *\$60 VALUE*

LIONS, TIGERS, & TREATS!

2 CINCINNATI ZOO TICKETS, PARKING PASS & \$15 HELLO HONEY GIFT CARD, *\$80 VALUE*

THE WINE DOWN

COOPERS HAWK LUX TASTING FOR 4 & 2 BOTTLES OF MCBRIDE SISTERS WINE, *\$100 VALUE*

CURTAINS & COURAGE EXPERIENCE

2 PLAYHOUSE IN THE PARK & 2 UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER TICKETS, *\$33 VALUE*

ZENCINNATI ESSENTIALS

1 MONTH MEMBERSHIP & YOGA SET (YOGA MAT, BLOCKS, HAND TOWELS & YOGA STRAP), *\$120 VALUE*

RAFFLE TICKETS

Please share proof of payment or provide cash to the nearest raffle team member to claim your tickets.

Winners will be announced at the end of the program and **MUST BE PRESENT** to claim their prize.

\$5 FOR 1 TICKET

\$20 FOR 4 TICKETS

\$30 FOR 7 TICKETS

\$50 FOR 12 TICKETS

PAYMENT OPTIONS

CASHAPP - \$URBANLEAGUEYPSGSO

VENMO - @ULYPGSO

CASH

WHAT YOUR GIFT MAKES POSSIBLE

Every donation directly strengthens the work of the Urban League Young Professionals of Greater Southwestern Ohio. Your support invests in leadership, equity, and opportunity for the next generation of changemakers.

\$35 – Sponsors 1 student membership for the year

\$50 – Sponsors 1 standard YP membership for the year

\$75 – Sponsors 2 domestic partners with full membership access

\$200 – Fully funds 1 Empower Hour (Signature Monthly Community Gathering)

\$500 – Sends 1 ULYPGSO Board Member to the 2025 National Urban League Conference in Cleveland, Ohio

WHY YOUR GIFT MATTERS

Your gift helps us build a pipeline of empowered Black leaders—equipped, connected, and committed to creating meaningful change in our region. Whether it's covering a student's dues or supporting national-level training, every dollar fuels *The Movement*.



DONATE TODAY!



THE ASHLEE YOUNG AWARD YWCA GREATER CINCINNATI **TAYLOR CURTIS**

Taylor Curtis was recognized at the age of 25 as the youngest African American woman to be tenured at an institution of higher education in the history of the United States, which is now commemorated on December 1st as Taylor Curtis Day. She is a Professor of General Psychology, Social Psychology, Black Psychology, and Black Studies, and the former Director of Black Studies at her previous institution of higher education. Taylor Curtis is an inspirational speaker, holistic self-care consultant, minister, author, and Co-Founder of Bronze Glow Soul Care, a non-profit dedicated to spiritual liberation. She is a global psalmist, vocalist, and solo performing artist creating liberation music to connect the community to empowerment through the arts.

YWCA Rising Star Taylor Curtis left the institution of education riddled with structural racism to engage hands-on in the community as the YWCA Greater Cincinnati Senior Director of Racial Justice and Advocacy, working strategically to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Through this role, she offers Justice, Antiracism, Cultural Competency, Liberation, DEI (Diversity/Equity/Inclusion), Mutual Respect, Ethical Leadership, Resiliency, Healing Centered Conflict Management, and other training and consultation services as well as engagement in community programming, advocacy for policy change, and grassroots activism within the community.



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Scan to Enter Our Ritual Space



FOREVER KINGS INC.

JORDAN BANKSTON

EMPOWERING YOUNG KINGS AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES THROUGH LEADERSHIP, MENTORSHIP, AND VISION.

Jordan A. Bankston is a nationally recognized nonprofit leader, entrepreneur, and youth advocate based in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is the Founder, President, and CEO of Forever Kings Inc., a thriving organization dedicated to empowering boys and young men of color through mentorship, education, and community support. Under his leadership, Forever Kings has grown from an idea into a movement impacting over 3,000 young men across 51 schools and 22 zip codes, boasting a 100% on-time high school graduation rate.

In addition to his nonprofit work, Jordan leads Bankston Enterprises LLC, which owns a successful Menchie's Frozen Yogurt store, and founded Thee Mr. JB, a coaching and consulting brand focused on personal growth, leadership development, and youth empowerment. With a background in educational leadership, Jordan has raised over \$2 million for community initiatives and continues to serve as a trusted voice in education, philanthropy, and systems change.



PATA ROJA TAQUERIA - MORTAR, CO-FOUNDER

DERRICK BRAZIEL



DERRICK BRAZIEL BLENDS CULINARY INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL IMPACT.

Derrick Braziel is a nationally recognized social entrepreneur and the founder of Pata Roja Taqueria, one of Cincinnati's top new restaurants of 2025. Over the past decade, he has played a central role in shaping Cincinnati's entrepreneurial landscape through his work with the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce and as a co-founder of MORTAR, a nonprofit that has supported over 500 entrepreneurs and expanded to seven cities nationwide.

Derrick is an Obama Foundation Fellow, Echoing Green Fellow, and Common Future Fellow, and has been honored by Forbes' 30 Under 30 and the Cincinnati Business Courier's 40 Under 40. His work blends creativity, community-building, and economic empowerment to drive meaningful, lasting impact.

MAYOR, CITY OF FOREST PARK - GREATER
CINCINNATI FOUNDATION

AHARON C. BROWN

BOLD LEADERSHIP AND FRESH VISION DRIVING FOREST PARK'S HISTORIC REVITALIZATION.

Aharon Brown is the 17th and youngest-ever Mayor of the City of Forest Park, Ohio—the second-largest city in Hamilton County. He also serves on the City Planning Commission and Economic Development Commission, where he brings a bold vision centered on community revitalization and economic growth. Since taking office, Mayor Brown has launched several transformative initiatives, including organizing new city events, leading the decriminalization of marijuana, and initiating the first new housing developments in over two decades. His leadership has resulted in the acquisition of nearly 100 acres of vacant and underutilized land to attract businesses and expand residential options.

Beyond his mayoral duties, Aharon has demonstrated a deep commitment to civic engagement through his volunteer service on the boards of the Mill Creek Alliance, Cincinnati Young Black Professionals, and the Urban League Young Professionals of Greater Southwest Ohio. He is a proud graduate of Miami University, where he earned both an Associate's degree in Social Sciences and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science, and he holds a Master's degree in Community Planning from the University of Cincinnati.



ABUNDANCE UNIVERSITY

LAWRENCE CAIN JR.

EMPOWERING GENERATIONS WITH THE TOOLS TO BUILD WEALTH, ONE LESSON AT A TIME.

Lawrence Cain is a financial coach, author, and CEO of Abundance University. Abundance University is a financial literacy company specializing in personal finance and entrepreneurship programs. What makes Lawrence unique is that he has workshops and books for both youth and adults.

Dedicated to sharing what he has learned throughout the years, he has a degree in business management and has been in the finance field since 2010. He is the author of 4 books and has created an online platform where people can learn financial strategies at their own pace.

Recently, Lawrence was featured in the New York Times in an article regarding closing the wealth and class gap among minorities.



UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI, COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

DR. STEVEN D. KNIFFLEY JR.



CHAMPIONING BLACK MENTAL HEALTH AND RACIAL HEALING THROUGH SCHOLARSHIP, SERVICE, AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE.

Steven D. Kniffley Jr., PsyD, MPA, MBA, ABPP is a licensed clinical psychologist, associate professor, and higher education administrator specializing in research and clinical work with Black males and the treatment of race-based stress and trauma. He is also a sought-after organizational diversity consultant, having advised a wide range of organizations from grassroots nonprofits to Fortune 500 companies. Dr. Kniffley has authored numerous books, chapters, and scholarly articles addressing topics such as Black male mental health, racial trauma treatment and training, criminal justice, academic achievement, and program evaluation.

Dr. Kniffley's leadership and advocacy have earned him wide recognition. He is the Past-President of the Kentucky Psychological Association and currently serves as Vice-President for Diversity for the Ohio Psychological Association. His accolades include being named one of Louisville's Top 40 Under 40 in 2020, receiving the 2020 MediStar Healthcare Advocacy Award, being honored as a 2021 Louisville Healthcare Hero, and receiving the inaugural University of Louisville Diversity Leadership Award. Most recently, he was inducted into the Black Psychologists Hall of Fame at Hampton University.

EBONY J MEDIA

EBONY J WYNN



THE MEDIA MOGUL MAKING WAVES, BUILDING BRANDS, AND EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS.

Ms. Ebony J, known as “The Host That Does the Most,” is a dynamic entrepreneur, educator, and media powerhouse with over 15 years of experience. She is the founder of the Ebony J Media Learning Center—the first Black-owned media school in Cincinnati—where she provides hands-on training in DJing, podcasting, music recording, and marketing. Ebony J began her media career at Radio One and quickly rose to prominence as a producer and host for 101.1 The WIZ and 100.3 R&B Cincy. Her expertise has earned her collaborations with major platforms like TV One and respected institutions such as the Urban League of Southern Ohio, Hamilton County, and Cincinnati Public Schools. A trusted coach to CEOs, artists, and podcasters, she is celebrated for her creative strategy and deep connections in the media world.

Through her company, Ebony J Media, she launched impactful programs like Media Coins Academy to help entrepreneurs build six-figure brands with strategic media and marketing. Her passion for empowering women and youth shines through her I Am Queen Awards and the I Am Queen Program, both dedicated to uplifting future leaders. Ebony J is a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and the Greater Cincinnati Black Journalist Association. Whether mentoring young professionals, leading workshops, or hosting major events, she continues to inspire and educate with purpose, leaving a lasting legacy rooted in service, leadership, and community empowerment.

Immigration Lawyer Nazly Mamedova

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