

GSU honors the first members of Illinois Black Hall of Fame

BY LANA ABDALLAH
Guest writer

Governors State University held a ceremony on Feb. 25 to honor the first inductees of the Illinois Black Hall of Fame which will be housed in a new exhibit being constructed just inside the school's main entrance.

The event focused on honoring the five inaugural inductees: Timuel Black, an educator, scholar, historian and civil rights activist; Harold Washington, Chicago's first Black mayor; Spencer Leak Sr., a long-time state official and civil right activist; Rev. Jesse Jackson, founder and chairman of Rainbow PUSH; and Bessie Coleman, the first Black woman to earn an international pilot's license.

These initial members of the hall were selected in 2021, but their installation ceremony was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 inductees will be announced during the second annual Juneteenth Gala on June 19.

Will Davis, CEO of the GSU Foundation, praised GSU and all those involved in establishing the hall in his speech kicking off the ceremony.

"After careful consideration, work,



Provided photo by Lana Abdallah
Celebrating the launch of the Illinois Black Hall of Fame at Governors State University are, from left, Gigi Coleman, great niece to Bessie Coleman; GSU President Cheryl Green; and Will Davis, CEO of the GSU Foundation.

and efforts we're here to show that we are about to build and make this dream a reality ... thank you for selecting Governors State University in this legacy setting," Davis said before handing the microphone to several other

speakers including Richard Boykin, chairman of the Illinois Black Hall of Fame; Dr. Cheryl Green, president of GSU; Dr. Ceola Barnes, founder of Illinois Black Hall of Fame, and several others.

"I think that this is one of the best things to ever happen... that Governors State is the place to house the Illinois Black Hall of Fame," Boykin said in his speech. "The Illinois Black Hall of Fame is committed to honoring the past, celebrating the present and inspiring the future. I'm proud to be a part of this vision."

In her speech, Green lauded the contributions made by the inductees.

"Today we celebrate the significance and impact of the first five inductees of the class of 2021 in our state, in our region and indeed the world," she said. "This cultural showcase will serve as a constant reminder to all GSU students, faculty, and staff that here they are a part of a rich legacy and institution of higher education."

"Today we celebrate this special moment in Black history, in American history. Black history is American history."

After the formalities the inductees, GSU officials and honored guests donned hard hats and savored canapes and drinks as they circulated around the area where the exhibit will reside when it is complete.

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