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CELEBRATING A-STATE WOMEN

"I aspire to be the woman I needed when I was younger."

RACHEL RUDD
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

These women are a part of Arkansas State University's history. Whether she was crowned Miss America, the first female Ph.D. recipient, or the first Black female drum major, each one said they hope they've created a legacy to inspire the women after them.

Jennifer Bouldin:

Jennifer Bouldin is the first female Ph.D. recipient at A-State, director of the Ecotoxicology Research Facility and dean of the College of Science and Mathematics.

Getting her bachelor's in 1976 in medical technology from the University of Arkansas School for Medical Sciences, Bouldin said she decided to pursue her Ph.D. to open up more avenues for herself in the science field.

Bouldin earned her doctorate in environmental sciences in 2004 as a nontraditional student. She waited until after her youngest child graduated high school to return to education.

"I've had a lot of female students who were kind of inspired by that because I know what it's like to go through a program like that," Bouldin said.

After working as the quality assurance manager at the Ecotoxicology Research Facility, Bouldin was promoted to director in 2006. Since becoming director, Bouldin has added new analytical equipment and hired three full-time technicians.

The new equipment allows for the facility to test more samples at one time, as well as allow researchers to test water samples for metals. Bouldin said having both sampling and analytical equipment allows for results to be more easily publishable.

Despite serving as dean and Ecotoxicology Research Facility director, Bouldin is still in the classroom, teaching everything from ecology principles to wetland evaluation to agriculture and the environment.

Even though she acts as an inspiration to her students, they are the ones who continue to inspire her.

"I am always re-inspired by the young women that are up and coming," Bouldin said. "I realize why I do my job because then I can turn around and inspire them as well to accomplish what they want to accomplish."

Cherisse Jones-Branch:

Historian, U.S. Army veteran and dean of the Graduate School, Cherisse Jones-Branch, Ph.D., has been all around the world.

Jones-Branch, a published author, writes extensively about women's activism and the role of Black women in agriculture.

"I remember that we had a set of the 'Encyclopedia Britannica' and the 'Ebony Encyclopedia of Black History' and I read them both," Jones-Branch said. "I was always curious about how people put stories together and how one determined whose story mattered and whose story didn't."

Jones-Branch studied American history, earning her bachelor's and master's degrees from the College of Charleston. In 2003, she earned her doctorate in American history from Ohio State University. She is the first in her family to get a Ph.D.

However, during her sophomore year of college, Jones-Branch was sent overseas to serve in the Persian Gulf War as part of the U.S. Army Reserves from 1988 to 1996. Jones-Branch said she joined the Reserves to help pay for college.

Jones-Branch was part of the 941st Transportation Company, providing fuel to military equipment. She left service at the rank of specialist.

> **"We can go much farther if we go together than we would if we would go alone," Cherisse Jones-Branch said.**

Jones-Branch said she struggled to return to civilian life because many people, including herself, didn't recognize the signs of post-traumatic stress. She added that for many years, she never talked about being a veteran because she thought veterans were men.

"People have been going to parties and hanging out and I'm like, 'I just spent the last six months looking at Scud missiles going overhead and having to keep a gas mask close by and wondering if I'm gonna get to see my family again.'"

Nowadays, Jones-Branch said she is working to show women are veterans too. She is also chairing a committee that will host the Arkansas Women's Veterans Symposium at the Clinton Museum in Little Rock March 23.

"I aspire to be the woman I needed when I was younger, to provide access and opportunity wherever I can for women," Jones-Branch said. "We can go much farther if we go together than we would if we go alone."

Argelia Lorence:

Argelia Lorence, Ph.D., is a bioengineer and part of the team that discovered a new biosynthetic pathway for vitamin C in plants.

In 1998, a group in the United Kingdom proposed a pathway for vitamin C in plants, which if boosted, can create plants more tolerant to environmental stressors such as extreme temperatures or lack of water. Shortly after, groups from around the world began discovering different pathways.

While at Virginia Tech, Lorence's team discovered one. These pathways convert the compound myo-inositol into vitamin C, with the pathway Lorence studied taking four steps to do so. In 2004, the team discovered the first step in that process.

"Since 2005 to now, my students and I have discovered the second, the third, and the fourth step in the pathway. We have now completed the entire pathway for vitamin C."

> **"I am always re-inspired by the young women that are up and coming," Jennifer Bouldin said. "I realize why I do my job because then I can turn around and inspire them as well to accomplish what they want to accomplish."**

Lorence added that vitamin C is her favorite molecule, not only because of her role in discovering the pathway but also because she fully understands what it can do for plant and human health.

CONTINUED: CELEBRATING, 4A

Graphic by Rachel Rudd | Editor-in-Chief