



Bearing the Torch for a Brighter Volunteer Community

The month of February is a dedicated time of reflection and remembrance of the hardships faced by people of color all across our country. This joint statement signed by various student organizations was made with the purposes of recognizing Black History Month and celebrating those who have paved the way for African Americans both on our campus and in the Knoxville community. Since the early 1600s, marginalized groups and communities of color have been oppressed for centuries. In spite of the progress made towards the advancement of equal rights and just treatment for all, we still find ourselves confronting discrimination and oppression to this day.

As Tennessee Volunteers, we strive to exemplify the values of the Volunteer Creed, “One that beareth a torch shadoweth oneself to give light to others.” These values can be seen in many former African-American student leaders from our very own home. We want to take this opportunity to reflect upon the contributions of brave torchbearer’s like Theotis Robinson Jr., the first African American undergraduate student to be admitted to the University of Tennessee, as well as activists like Jimmie Baxter, who was elected as the first African American President of the UTK Student Government Association. Though these individuals bore the torch for their generations, there is still work to be done for a brighter tomorrow.

As we continue this statement, we want to highlight ***Umoja***, the first of the seven principles within the Pan African celebration of heritage, Kwanzaa, which means unity. It is important that we internally audit the volunteer community to ensure a commitment to unity as we each follow in the footsteps of greats like Baxter and Robinson, to break down barriers and create opportunities for generations to come. We have been charged with the responsibility to work and love in unity. As that legacy continues forward, we must always reflect on our past and build off their foundation.

Lastly, we must continue to place an emphasis on collective responsibility. It is our job as Volunteers to continue to strive for social justice, equity, and inclusion. We must remember that maintenance requires patience and understanding - understanding that the problems of our fellow Brothers' and Sisters' are our shared responsibility, calling us to action.

Although it is evident that every student, faculty, and staff member originates from their own unique walks of life, the one thing that we all have in common is that we are all part of the Volunteer Family. We must work to continually support student organizations whose purpose is to uplift, advocate, and advance people of color and marginalized groups on campus and in our local community. So please, take this time to remember and reflect but also, take action to create a Volunteer Community that is welcoming to all and hostile to none.

Sincerely,

The Volunteer Community

