

THE DONOR IMPACT EDITION

SPRING 2023

# Invention

THE MAGAZINE OF THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY



**N.J. Assemblyman  
Raj Mukherji, BA '05  
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Dear Alumni, Students and Friends,



On behalf of the Thomas Edison State University Foundation and our dedicated Board of Directors, I want to thank everyone who invested in the University's mission in 2022. It was a remarkable year for the University and the Foundation! As we celebrated the University's 50th Anniversary of providing flexible, high-quality collegiate learning for adults, we also set our sights high for the next 50 years.

Throughout the year, the Foundation's Board of Directors focused on two 50th Anniversary challenges: targeted outreach to introduce TESU to new groups and a 50th Anniversary Scholarship Fund. I am pleased to report that we contacted 100 potential new donors and raised nearly \$17,000 for the scholarship fund at our Annual Grande Ball.

The Foundation's endowment continues to be an important resource for the University. In 2022, funds were used to create and upgrade new career-relevant degree programs, facilitate technology enhancements that will meet the demands of today's students and enable TESU to develop innovative programs for the healthcare industry.

Also, we now have two teams focused on grants: the first will be dedicated to corporate and foundation grants in our Office of Advancement; the second team will focus on state and federal grants in the Office of Grant Acquisition and Operations. Through your generosity and the hard work of these teams, \$470,000 was raised in 2022 for scholarships for deserving

students. Education has a long reach and these scholarships provide access to opportunities not only for our adult students but help to create a brighter future for their families and communities. We were also grateful to receive a new Endowed Scholarship for First Generation Students established by a generous donor on our board.

We welcomed 272 new donors this year, many of whom are recent graduates paying it forward for future TESU alumni by supporting our [Philanthropy Cord initiative](#). The annual TESU Day of Giving on Dec. 1 resulted in 92 donors contributing nearly \$16,000, making it our most successful Day of Giving to date.

This edition of *Invention* is our opportunity to share stories about our students and donors. However, the following pages only provide a glimpse of the incredible determination and strength of the students the University serves and the philanthropic spirit of our incredible supporters. With your continued dedication, you serve as a catalyst to ensure the University fully realizes its vision to help students Build their Careers, Advance their Professions and Empower their Lives.

Thank you for your partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Gloor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy Gloor  
Chair, Foundation Board of Directors

**D**ear Alumni, Students and Friends,

Knowledge is power.

On the surface, the impact of this adage is obvious, but the more I connect with our students and alumni and learn their stories, the more I appreciate its dimensions. A TESU Genius Program participant whose story appears in this edition eloquently offered her interpretation:

The knowledge I have earned is my power. And when shared with the community, it will always be multiplied. ~ Disha Patel, BA '20

Her statement summarizes the essence of what drives our University, and the value TESU students and alums bring to their households, communities and workplaces as a result of their learning. Every day I bear witness to the empowerment that a degree can deliver for graduates like Disha, and I am incredibly proud of our role in that continuum.

In this edition of *Invention*, we learn about New Jersey State Assemblyman Raj Mukherji, BA '05. As an emancipated minor and successful IT business owner by the age of 17, he would later serve in the U.S. Marine Corps before becoming a public affairs and healthcare entrepreneur, elected official, lawyer, municipal prosecutor and law professor. In serving New Jersey's most densely populated legislative district, he is now making sure its families are provided with the essential resources, opportunities and support structure they need to succeed and prosper.

We will also meet Mimi Nkwepo, a 2014 Master of Science in Human Resources Management graduate and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) student, who said that she never took a traditional path to her education. Donor support is ensuring that she is not deterred from her goals. As a busy mother and head of Talent Acquisition for a large company, Nkwepo knows the value of persistence, expanding her human resource management expertise and finding a doctoral program that exceeds her expectations.

And we hear from Andrew Hafford, BA '19. There was a time when he had just enough money to purchase new work shoes and gas to get to his driver-training job. Today, a U.S. Operations XR developer and training manager for UPS, he advocates for the TESU Foundation to ensure other students receive the same opportunities.

These profiles affirm that knowledge is never more powerful than when it is dispersed. Most importantly, we would not be reading these stories without the collective work of our friends, donors, supporters and a resolute academic community. You are TESU's bedrock. Because of you, our students and alumni continue to break down barriers and advance faster than they ever thought possible.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Invention*.

Be well, and to a brighter future,



Merodie A. Hancock, PhD  
President





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## Continuous Improvement: Altereek Stembridge, BSBA '19, MS '21

Despite his experience in the IT field, Altereek Stembridge had reached a professional stalemate.

Though his 10 years as a systems analyst were fulfilling, it was becoming apparent that advancement would require a college degree. He learned about Thomas Edison from a colleague who was attending and became inspired to apply.

"I've been in the field of IT in various roles beginning with help desk support, to my current role as director of Information Technology for one of the oldest freight forwarding companies in the U.S.," said Stembridge. "After graduating with my Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) with a concentration in Computer

Information Systems in 2019, I thought I would be completely satisfied."

That finish line, however, became a moving target. Fueled by his BSBA achievement, he enrolled in Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology's Master of Science (MS) degree in Information Systems program in October 2020. He intended to earn his degree within a year, but that did not go as planned.

"I completed all program requirements in 10 months with a 3.95 GPA," he noted. "Not only am I the first man in my family to complete a master's degree, but I also fulfilled a personal dream."

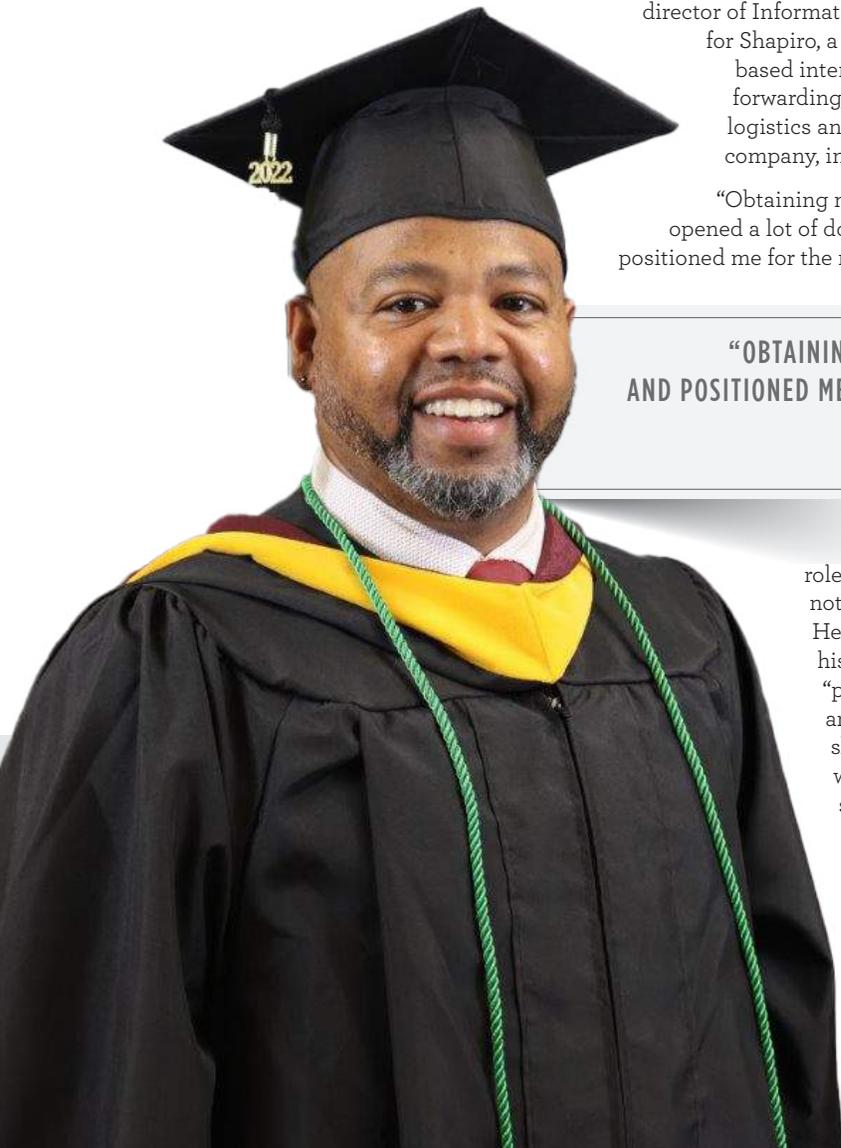
His MS degree was officially conferred by TESU's Board of Trustees in December 2021, and he began his role as director of Information Technology for Shapiro, a Maryland-based international freight forwarding, transportation, logistics and supply chain company, in March 2022.

"Obtaining my degrees opened a lot of doors and positioned me for the most important

purchased a green TESU Philanthropy Cord to show his solidarity with students who will follow in his footsteps. The cord recognizes the generosity and spirit of giving in graduates and their support of the next generation of learners.

Since the Philanthropy Cord program was launched two years ago, 374 new TESU alumni have contributed nearly \$14,000 that has funded seven scholarships for current students. "Earning my BSBA degree made me realize that I have the power to make positive changes in my life and the lives of others as long as I commit to continuing to improve. It was not easy, but it was worth it. That's why I give back."

Stembridge hears regularly from family and friends who say that he's inspired them to pursue their dreams.



**"OBTAINING MY DEGREES OPENED A LOT OF DOORS  
AND POSITIONED ME FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE OF MY CAREER."**

Altereek Stembridge

role of my career," noted Stembridge. He also said that his grandmother's "prayers were answered" when she watched him walk across the stage during TESU's 2022 Commencement ceremony. Before the ceremony, Stembridge

And he is not stopping there, he is now enrolled in TESU's Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program.

To learn more about the programs offered by the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology visit [tesu.edu/ast](https://tesu.edu/ast). To learn more about the programs available in the School of Business and Management, visit [tesu.edu/business](https://tesu.edu/business).

For more information about the Philanthropy Cord Initiative, visit [tesu.edu/alumni/support/philanthropy-cords](https://tesu.edu/alumni/support/philanthropy-cords).

# Bringing it HOME

Tiona Edge, BA '22

Scholarship support and a shatter-proof resolve helped Tiona Edge cross the undergraduate degree finish line. She now joins 65,000 TESU alumni who proudly overcame educational barriers while elevating their communities and making their families stronger.

As a single mother of five, Edge also knows the value of perseverance. She earned her BA degree in Psychology in June 2022 after working toward that goal for years with the help of funding support that clinched her progression. Edge was awarded a \$10,000 scholarship from The Albert M. Stark Scholarship Fund that was established for students who demonstrate academic promise and financial need.

"I know I will be an asset to my employer as well as my community with my degree. I am the type of person whose objectives have never connected to personal gain, but to the outcomes of others," she said. "The scholarship support helped me complete my degree, 20 years after I started my studies - all while raising my children and balancing multiple responsibilities."

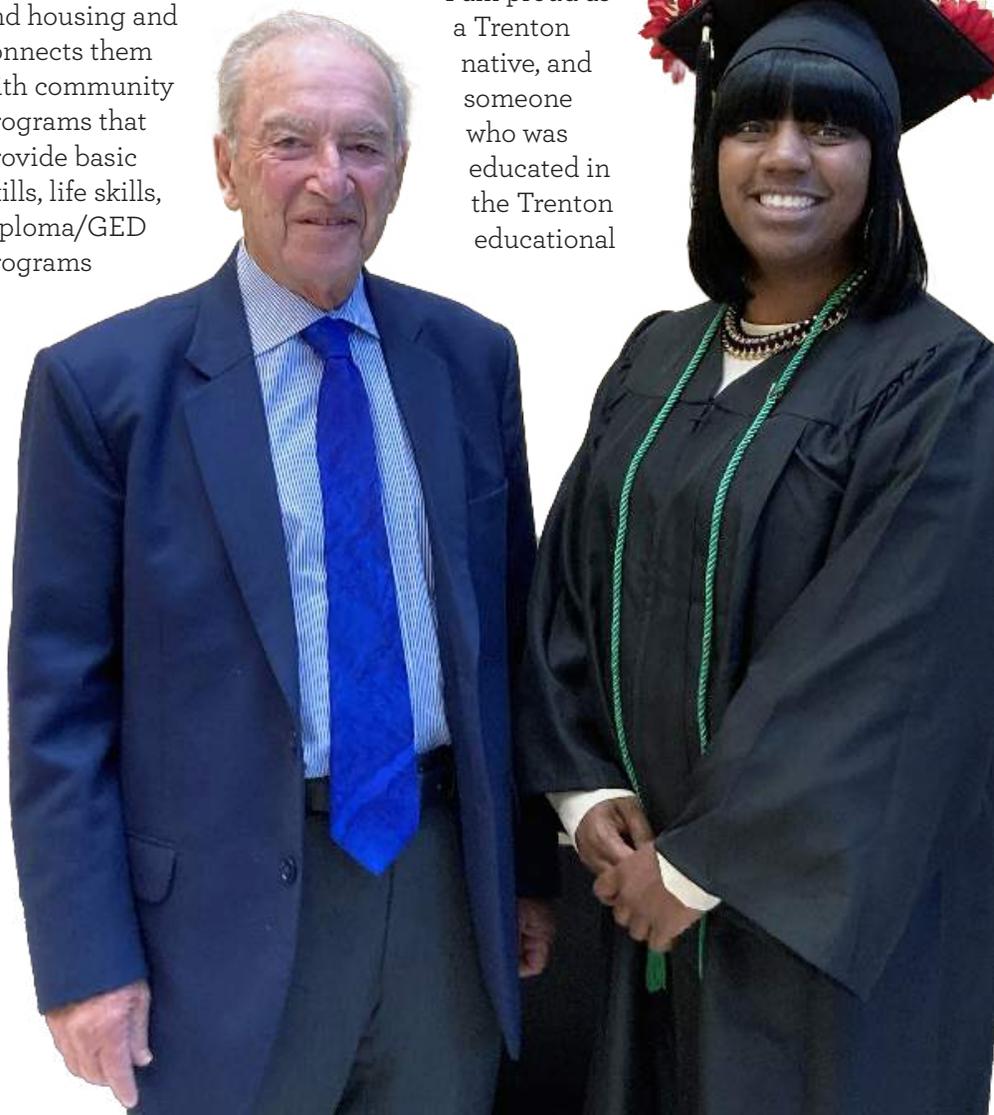
Her degree has served as the catalyst to land a position as a social worker at the Mercer County Board of Social Services

in Trenton, N.J. With her new credential, she was able to secure her "dream role" of helping adults on the state's General Assistance (WorkFirst NJ) program to work toward self-sufficiency. Offering them the necessary tools and resources, she coordinates with third-party vendors to provide program participants with mental counseling, substance abuse counseling and housing and connects them with community programs that provide basic skills, life skills, diploma/GED programs

and hands-on vocational skills training.

"These combined efforts provide our clients with the tools they need to lead productive lives. I am grateful to be able to return what I owe to my local community. It is an honor to say that I am a product of my environment and have that statement stand for something positive.

I am proud as a Trenton native, and someone who was educated in the Trenton educational





From left to right (back row) Samuel Rowell III and Gavin Edge; (second row) Anirah Edge, Albert M. Stark, Tiona Edge and Ameiriss Rowell; and (front row) August and Ashtyn Rowell.

system, to receive a degree from an accredited university in my hometown,” she said. “My children are now enrolled in a great charter school that promotes higher education and, as a university graduate, I am now the example they see at home.”

The Albert M. Stark Scholarship Fund has already benefited four other TESU students working toward their degrees. The scholarship’s namesake was inspired by Edge’s determined spirit and commitment to her community.

“When I met Tiona, I met a woman with the heart and passion to make a difference not only for herself and her family but for the lives of others in her community,” noted Stark. “The example she set for her children by never giving up on her dreams is so powerful, and I am truly humbled to have been a part of her success. I am

pleased that the scholarship had such a meaningful impact on someone else’s life.”

Edge said that she always emphasized higher education to her children because she did not have the privilege to pursue a degree herself following high school.

“Twenty-one years ago, I couldn’t afford to enroll in college. After I had my fourth child, I vowed that I would return to school because I could not enforce the values of earning a degree to my children when I had not earned mine,” she noted. “It was challenging but I did it. I am very grateful to everyone in the TESU community who made this possible.”

Edge hopes to motivate others, especially those in her community, who

feel they may not have the time or energy to pursue a degree.

“I truly hope my story inspires others, especially those in my community who feel as though they’ve hit a brick wall in their career paths or academic pursuits,” added Edge. “Unbeknownst to them, a gem is right in our backyard!”

To learn more about programs in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit [tesu.edu/heavin](https://tesu.edu/heavin).



*Remembering a founding trustee, trailblazer and advocate.*



# Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Eleanor “Ellie” Spiegel

April 16, 1925 – Oct. 18, 2022

As one of its founding trustees, Eleanor “Ellie” Spiegel was a tireless advocate for Thomas Edison’s pioneering academic model and its enduring position in higher education.

When Edison College was established in 1972, it took a small group of tenacious innovators to breathe life into

its unconventional educational model and guarantee its permanent place in the state’s higher education ecosystem. An advocate for social justice and unfettered access to quality education, by many accounts, Spiegel left the world a more equitable place and TESU positioned to thrive.

“Ellie was a key participant in the planning meetings convened by the state’s chancellor of Higher Education to discuss the creation of a new institution

that would focus on educational opportunities for adults,” noted Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president of the University. “Those original steering committee discussions led to the establishment of our institution. When our first Board of Trustees was constituted in May 1973, she was appointed to serve as chair in recognition of her leadership and passion for our mission.”

Eleanor Mary Durham Spiegel was born in Ithaca, N.Y., in 1925 and grew up near Cornell

University where her father served as the university's chaplain. According to a 2013 interview for *Leonia Lives*, her childhood home was a refuge for people from multiple cultures and backgrounds. Following her graduation from Northwestern University, she began visiting universities across the country to raise funding and awareness for the Student Relief Program for European Students following World War II.

Upon meeting his future wife, Hans B.C. Spiegel noted in a family memoir that he was struck by their immediate connection. Both were affiliated at the time with the Georgia Workers Education Service Center. He was fulfilling a weekend internship, and she was volunteering for the program.

"Among the group of us in the back of a pickup that day was Eleanor Durham, who, at the age of 22, was the Southern Regional secretary of the World Student Service Fund, a student relief organization that helped local student groups raise funds to rebuild universities in war-ravaged Europe and Asia," he said. "She held an exciting job... and I was impressed."

As they bumped along the rural roads of Georgia while Hans played the guitar, he recalled that they bonded over a strong belief in social justice, the capacity to act on their convictions and their ability to carry a tune.

That admiration culminated in their marriage in 1948 and a union that lasted for 72 years. A sequence of household moves followed to accommodate her husband's educational and career pursuits and the couple's

ongoing international relations and humanitarian work. The couple eventually set down roots in Leonia, N.J., in 1966 where they became pillars of the suburban enclave while raising their four children and taking advantage of their proximity to New York City.

While balancing her active lifestyle with caring for young children, Spiegel became a member of the Leonia Board of Education, worked for Fair Housing in Bergen County and, later, in her capacity as program director of the International House in New York City, launched the Women's International Leadership

Distinguished Service Award in Trusteeship.

"If this University had a godmother, it was Ellie Spiegel," noted Dr. George A. Pruitt, who became the institution's third president in 1982 and served in that role for 35 years before retiring in 2017. "As a member of the original steering committee, she established the foundation on which this institution was created. Her vision, commitment and dedication to our mission were calibrating forces for me and my predecessors. It is hard to imagine the pioneering achievements of this University without her inspiring presence.

**"IF THIS UNIVERSITY HAD A GODMOTHER, IT WAS ELLIE SPIEGEL."**

Dr. George A. Pruitt

Program before serving as an advisor for the Kellogg Women's Leadership Program and a U.N. representative for the Association of International Educators.

She served for multiple years as a trustee representative and, later, as chair for the N.J. Council of State Colleges. Due to her expertise and background, she contributed greatly to the first State College Autonomy legislation put into law by the N.J. State Legislature in the mid-80s. This pivotal legislation shifted operational control of public institutions from the Department of Higher Education to the public colleges and universities themselves. In fall 1984, she received the national Association of Governing Boards

I had great respect and deep personal affection for this wise and wonderful woman."

Spiegel was preceded in death by her husband and is survived by her four children: Karen Tashjian, and Mark, Steven and Peter Spiegel as well as several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"Ellie's commitment to diversity and access to quality education had a profound influence on our institution," added Hancock. "Many of our policies that carry over from our early years are a reflection of her focus on opening the doors of opportunity as widely as possible. We continue to be inspired by her remarkable example, and hers is a legacy that will be felt for generations to come."



# MOVING FORWARD

**Andrew Hafford, BA '19**

There was a time when Andrew Hafford had just enough money to buy new work shoes and gas to get to his new driver-training job. Today, the U.S. Operations XR developer and training manager at UPS shares his good fortune by supporting the TESU Foundation to ensure other students receive the same opportunities that his education has afforded him.

During a video presentation at the Thomas Edison State University Foundation 31st Annual Grande Ball, Hafford, BA '19, shared his journey as a UPS employee, TESU student, husband and father of three with Gala guests.

His remarks were the highlight of the evening, providing attendees with a glimpse into his life and how the TESU and UPS partnership has provided professional advancement opportunities while allowing him to spend more time with his family.

The presentation detailed how Hafford joined UPS during a cold North Dakota winter. At the time, he was living in an RV with no power or water and limited finances. However, what Hafford originally thought would be just a job to get him on his feet, turned into a life-changing career.

“UPS embraced me as an employee and a person who was trying to make ends meet and provide for my family,” Hafford recalled. “UPS’s partnership with Thomas Edison gave me the opportunity of a lifetime. Being able to work,



finish my degree and be there for my family all at the same time was truly a gift. After earning my degree, I was promoted to an On Road supervisor, and I am grateful that UPS invested time and money into my career path.”

Since then, Hafford earned the opportunity to relocate his family to Phoenix, Ariz., and become a corporate trainer.

When the COVID pandemic began, Hafford had just graduated from TESU with his Bachelor of Arts degree and a Certificate in Computer Science. He put his degree to use immediately creating training videos UPSers could access remotely. The success of these videos led to Hafford and his team building patent-pending training technology that simulates on-road challenges and maximizes the ability for UPS drivers to be safe while driving for the company.

Hafford is now deploying automated, interactive training experiences at UPS hubs across the country. “None of this happens without Thomas Edison and the support of UPS leadership that allowed me to do something impactful,” he explained. “I’m very proud to be a Thomas Edison alum – and extraordinarily proud and grateful to be a UPSer.”

UPS is one of the world’s largest companies and provides a broad range of integrated logistics solutions for customers in more than 220 countries and territories. Focused on its purpose statement, “Moving our world forward by delivering what matters,” the company’s more than 500,000 employees embrace a strategy that is simply stated and powerfully executed: Customer First. People Led. Innovation Driven.

Reflecting on the challenges that face many adult students, Hafford

## A night of celebration and purpose at the Annual Grande Ball - Page 10

noted, “It’s a complex story when you are a working adult, single or married, trying to finish your education – to answer the call of the workplace, to display competence, to demonstrate that your dreams for the organization are well supported and carefully considered. UPS and Thomas Edison have made investments in me for which I am eternally grateful.”

Hafford also thanked TESU supporters in the room stating, “Your investment in adults that have a less traditional path is an investment in more than one person. It is a leg up for a family you will never meet and an investment in the human spirit – a technology that will never lose its value or become obsolete.”

THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

# Annual Grande Ball



It was a night of celebration and purpose at the Thomas Edison State University's annual Grande Ball held last October in Princeton, N.J. As long-time supporters, alumni, friends and students gathered to celebrate the University's 50th Anniversary, guests were treated to a look back and inspired by a glimpse of the University's future. In opening remarks, Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, TESU president, said, "The University, along with its Board of Trustees, has reflected on our rich history and envisioned our bold future. Our purpose is straightforward and is, perhaps, even more important today than it was 50 years ago."



Hancock shared that the purpose of TESU has been claimed as the vision for the University. "Building Careers. Advancing Professions. Empowering Lives. That is our continued commitment through the success and impact of our graduates. We could not do it without our students, and they could not do it without your generous support," she said.



Two instrumental University partners who share TESU's values around education and opportunity were recognized. Hancock presented the Spirit of Edison Community Leader Awards to Dave Carroll, head of Total Rewards at UPS, and to Dr. Walt MacDonald, retired president and CEO of ETS. For the last 15 years, UPS has been the University's largest corporate partner, and ETS helped shape many of the learning outcomes assessments from which the University built its foundation. Andrew Hafford '19, TESU alumnus and the U.S. Operations XR developer and training manager at UPS, was also featured.

While the event raised more than \$100,000 in support of the University, an additional \$17,500 was raised during the event to benefit the 50th Anniversary Scholarship Fund.

To view the photo gallery from the event, visit: [tesu.edu/advancement](https://tesu.edu/advancement).

## Donating to an Educational Gateway: Patricia R. Danielson, AA '73

Supporting Thomas Edison State University was and is an obvious choice for Patricia R. Danielson. She said that the education she received at TESU offered a path to numerous successes.

"I donate to Edison because I believe in education," Danielson confirmed. "It was my first credential, and I will always be grateful to the institution for that and, because it was a school that was created to help people, like me, who fell through the cracks educationally to get credit for schoolwork they had already completed."



When Danielson first attended the newly minted Thomas Edison State College, little did she know that the unique institution created to serve adult learners would change her life.

"TESU was the gateway for me," Danielson explained. "In those early days, Edison State (as it was known at the time) was brand new, and people didn't understand what it was. I had no degree; I had dropped out of a teacher's college in upstate New York because student teaching was a junior and senior year requirement, and I realized I didn't want to teach. So, I came home, took a train into New York City for work and, soon after, got married."

Years later, a friend told Danielson she could get credit for her two-year Buffalo State tenure at this new college called Edison. She applied in 1972 and, in 1973, was among the 70 students at Thomas Edison's first Commencement ceremony. Danielson was able to transfer all her Buffalo State credits and earn her Associate in Arts (AA) degree at Edison in one year.

"Thomas Edison helps working people who can't take time off to go to school. That is the beauty of Edison, you don't have to stop your life to get a degree. But you must work for it. You must take courses at night or on weekends, whenever you can; there are ways to do it. Thank God for Edison."

Following her graduation, Danielson, a suburban homemaker and community activist, wanted to

learn more about urban policy, so she began auditing courses in the architecture and engineering schools at Princeton University. While auditing graduate courses and passing them, Danielson caught the attention of Dr. Mary Bunting, president of Douglass College at Rutgers, who had been brought to Princeton to recruit women who had fallen through the cracks. Bunting sponsored Danielson's admission to the university's graduate school. Five years later, Danielson graduated with a master's degree from Princeton, on the merits of an AA degree from Edison, which allowed her to completely skip a baccalaureate degree.

Danielson's persistence landed her a job in housing policy analysis for New Jersey Gov. Brendan Byrne's Office of Policy and Planning. She later worked in the state's labor and corrections departments. Now retired, Danielson says that Princeton "broke every rule" for her and changed the course of her life in the process but it was ultimately her Edison experience that made it all possible and for that she noted she is eternally grateful.

"There is value in education, and my first step was Edison, without that credential I wouldn't have had that career," said Danielson, who returned to the college to serve two six-year terms on the Board of Trustees, including serving three years as the chair. "I don't have a lot of money, but I do give what I can afford just because it was my first credential, my first degree, and I give to Princeton too. If I had more money, I would give more - both to Edison and to Princeton University. I am a big believer in education. I couldn't have done what I did without it."

Pat Danielson, right, with her daughter, Louisa Soto, at the 2017 Grande Ball.



## The Power of a Doctorate, Determination and Donor Support

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# BALANCING ACT

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Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program alum Mimi Lenyugha Nkwepo understands the value of developing leadership skills while working full time and raising a family. In turn, TESU's donors and supporters recognize the importance of her succeeding in those endeavors.

"I never took a traditional path in my education. My graduate-level endeavors occurred after I was married, raising my two sons and running a household while working," noted Nkwepo,

who was the recipient of a \$2,000 award from the Dr. George A. Pruitt Endowed Scholarship Fund that helped to offset the costs of her degree pursuit. "As a working adult returning for my doctorate, I was grateful to receive the tuition support and it's been one of the high points of my academic journey."

Nkwepo, a 2014 Master of Science in Human Resources Management program graduate, was a participant in the School of Business and Management's Cohort VII Orientation, Research

Symposium and Professional Networking Event in December where she shared her experiences as a student and heard from alumni who completed the program. During the sessions, Dean Michael Williams, PhD, and course mentors shared their expertise and insights while alumni discussed how they balanced their DBA coursework, the approaches they adopted in completing their culminating Scholar-Practitioner Field Project and the way their degree will benefit them personally and professionally.

“It helped to hear what others at different stages of the DBA program have to say,” said Nkwepo, an Old Bridge, N.J., resident who is the head of Talent Acquisition for Coach USA. “If I can do it, I’m convinced that others can too. It comes down to putting in the time and work. The interaction with fellow students who bring diverse leadership perspectives to our online discussion assignments is a priceless component of our courses.”

The DBA is a 48-credit, fully online, student-centric program centered on a scholar-practitioner curriculum model that provides concierge support and adult learner-oriented instructional delivery. Students complete one

3-credit course during each of the consecutive 8-week terms and can complete the program in 32 months. Areas of specialization include organizational leadership, human resource management and general management.

“Ms. Nkwepo, who is accustomed to summoning the strength and skills necessary to manage the multiple dimensions in her life, has successfully incorporated the academic rigor and time commitment needed to benefit from all aspects of the program,” noted Williams. “The program’s interdisciplinary academic model has established a new and innovative standard in doctoral education while preparing students like her for professional advancement. The program is

designed to be a transformative experience and a crucial personal and professional milestone. Many of our DBA students are TESU alumni, U.S. military members and veterans as well as professionals from both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors.”

A grant from the Thomas Edison State University Foundation is helping to support the cost of developing low- or no-cost course materials for students enrolled in the program.

To learn more about the DBA program and how to apply, visit [tesu.edu/dba](https://tesu.edu/dba). To learn more about the programs in the School of Business and Management, visit [tesu.edu/business](https://tesu.edu/business).

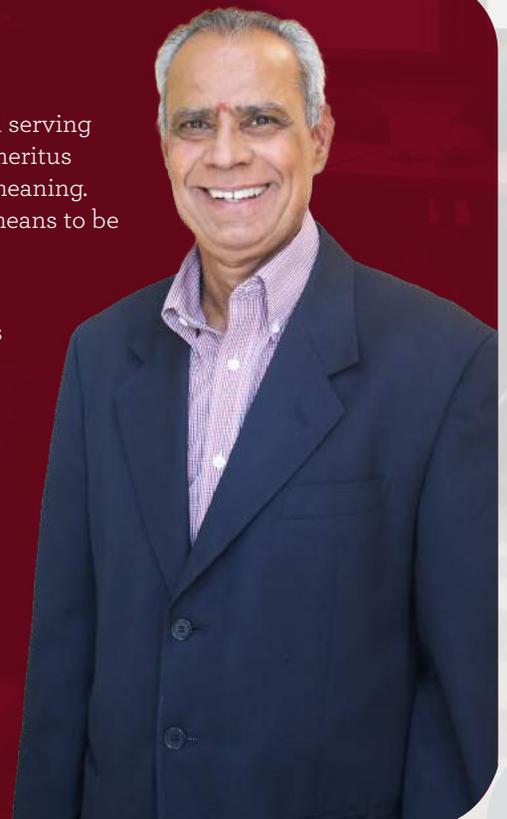
## Meet Upendra Chivukula, DBA

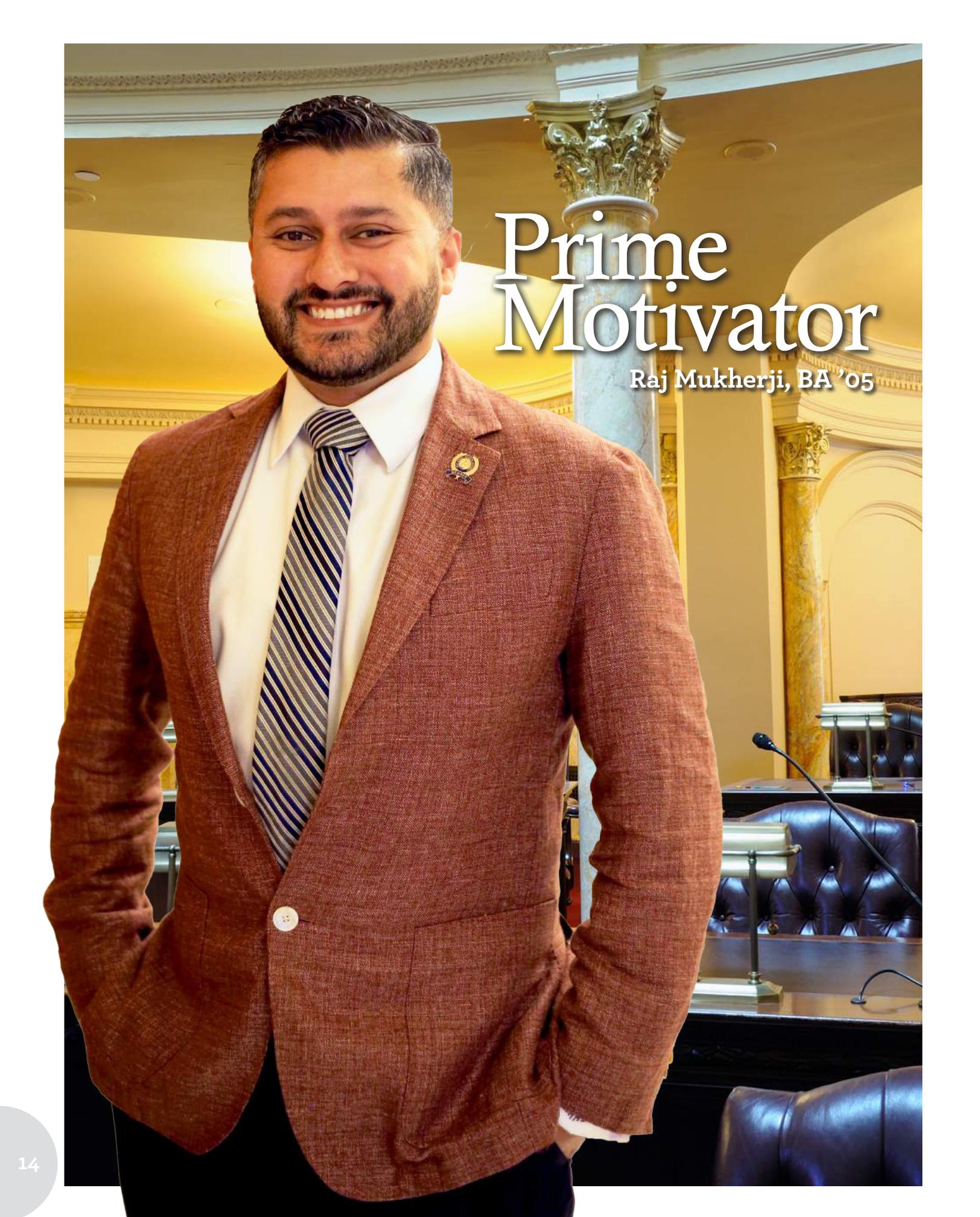
Upendra Chivukula is a proud member of TESU’s inaugural Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) graduating class. He began the program in 2020 while still serving as commissioner of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. As commissioner emeritus of the state agency, he is now focused on several initiatives that have a personal meaning. Having earned his DBA degree at the age of 71, he is also the epitome of what it means to be a lifelong learner.

As Chivukula completed his DBA degree with an area of specialization in Organizational Leadership and learned more about TESU, he found opportunities to expand his engagement. From attending the TESU Foundation’s Annual Golf Classic in May and the Annual Grande Ball in October, to participating in the DBA Research Symposium and Professional Networking event in December, Chivukula has maintained his connection with the University. His engagement hasn’t stopped there. With a generous gift, he and his wife, Lucrecia, established The Upendra and Lucrecia Endowed Scholarship Fund at the University. The scholarship will benefit students in the DBA program.

“As education is the greatest equalizer, our donation and that of others can help provide many students equal access to those opportunities that would otherwise not be possible,” he noted. “Together, we help to further the mission of this wonderful institution.”

To learn more about making a gift or establishing an endowed scholarship fund, contact Leanne Kochy, senior director of Advancement, at [lkochy@tesu.edu](mailto:lkochy@tesu.edu).



A man with a beard and short dark hair, smiling, stands in a grand, ornate room with high ceilings and classical architectural details. He is wearing a brown textured blazer over a white shirt and a blue and white striped tie. A small circular pin is visible on his lapel. The background features a large, decorative column and a desk with a microphone and a leather chair.

# Prime Motivator

Raj Mukherji, BA '05

## Sitting on the sidelines has never been an option for New Jersey State Assemblyman and TESU alum Raj Mukherji.

**A**s an emancipated minor, Raj Mukherji withdrew from high school to run an expanding software development and internet consulting company. Later, prompted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 17-year-old son of Indian-Bengali immigrants sold the lucrative business and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps as a reservist in military intelligence.

Identified by the media as a prodigy in both business and politics, the successful IT, real estate, public affairs and healthcare entrepreneur, lawyer, municipal prosecutor and law professor, was commissioner and chair of the Jersey City Housing Authority by the age of 24. He later served as that city's deputy mayor before making his way to the New Jersey Legislature.

He admits that his professional ascent may have stemmed from a yearning for security.

"To borrow a phrase from New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, our family was 'middle class on a good day,' but we also experienced periods of austerity and hardship," noted Mukherji, a 2005 BA degree in Liberal Studies graduate. "Despite this, my parents made sure our household was always filled with love and joy without regard to economic circumstances."

An unforeseen decline in the health of his father, Asim, left

the family in a quandary. No longer physically able to do his job, Mukherji's father couldn't afford the healthcare coverage to address his debilitating medical conditions and return to the workforce. Consequently, both parents returned to their native India to regain their footing. With his parents nearly 8,000 miles away, Mukherji remained in the United States independently. He became an emancipated minor, expected to support and care for himself by relying on business ventures through his late teens.

He said that being thrust into adulthood solidified his resolve and worldview.

"Enduring those circumstances at a young age, and seeing my father struggle to access healthcare, made me feel helpless. The 9/11 attacks evoked the same sense of powerlessness. The notion that it could occur in my country and just across the river is the reason I walked into a Marine Corps recruiting office two weeks later," he recalled. "I think my fear of helplessness and my determination to avoid it has always been a prime motivator. I could never be satisfied sitting on the sidelines and spectating. My passions – centered on public policy, advocacy and social justice – are informed by my family's immigrant story. As a result, I've always been driven to defend those who can't speak for themselves."

Mukherji chose an unconventional academic path but tackled his degrees in quick succession.

"I withdrew from high school at the age of 15 and enrolled in the early college program at Bard College at Simon's Rock because

it would have been impossible for me to operate my growing businesses otherwise," he said.

Completing his BA degree requirements at TESU, he earned a Master of Liberal Arts focused on national security from the University of Pennsylvania, and his juris doctor degree (cum laude) from Seton Hall University School of Law.

"I valued TESU's affordability as well as its flexibility in accepting my transfer credits and credits from my USDOD/Marine Corps transcript when other institutions were not willing to do so, which made it possible for me to stay on track and graduate on schedule. I also valued the level of sophistication in TESU's ability to assess prior learning. It enabled my transition from undergraduate studies to grad school and law school while I pursued my career.

"My coursework was always completed at night, and my legislative endeavors, which have included a focus on college access and affordability, have drawn upon my experiences as a nontraditional student. My parents always stressed the importance of higher education and, even though we faced hardships, my older brothers put themselves through Harvard and MIT," he noted.

As an elected official to the New Jersey State Legislature in 2013, he now represents the 33rd Legislative District. The most densely populated of the 40 state districts, it is also one of the most diverse. The decennial redistricting process now places him in the new 32nd Legislative District – comprised of Hoboken and most of Jersey City –



Mukherji with his wife, Natasha, and their two children, Leo, age 3, and Liana, age 1, photographed by Diana Kupershmit.

resulting in his candidacy for the New Jersey State Senate.

Since 2022, Mukherji has served as deputy speaker of the New Jersey State Assembly after serving as Majority Whip in a prior term. In the General Assembly, he serves as chair of the Judiciary Committee and vice chair of the Appropriations Committee as well as a member of the Budget Committee.

Outside of state government, he is co-founder and CEO of several companies that he has grown and sold to publicly traded buyers.

“Despite the challenges we’re witnessing in higher education, TESU has been an institution that continues to set an example for others,” he said. “The academic model is ideal for anyone who needs to work but does not

want to give up on their dreams of attaining an associate, baccalaureate, master’s or a doctoral degree.”

A model of self-sufficiency during his formative years, he is now focused on making sure New Jersey families are provided with the necessary resources, opportunities and support structure they need to succeed and thrive.

“I was a political junkie as a kid. I always knew I wanted to serve the community and the public, but I wasn’t sure in what capacity,” he said. “I got started by volunteering for my city’s housing authority when a twist of fate allowed me to advance into the role of deputy mayor and, later, as an elected official. Along the way, the concept of public service has

taken on a new meaning for me, and it’s been the privilege of my lifetime.”

Mukherji lives in Jersey City with his wife, Natasha, and their two children, Leo, age 3, and Liana, age 1. His mother, Anju, lives nearby in Jersey City. Sadly, his father succumbed to a brain stem stroke and passed away in 2013.

To learn more about the programs in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit [tesu.edu/heavin](https://tesu.edu/heavin). To learn more about Assemblyman Mukherji, his legislative and judicial service and current activities in the New Jersey State Legislature, visit [njleg.state.nj.us/legislative-roster/364/assemblyman-mukherji](https://njleg.state.nj.us/legislative-roster/364/assemblyman-mukherji).

# New Foundation Board Members



**Dr. Matthew W. Lamb**

**Development Head, Immunology & Fibrosis, Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS)**

Dr. Matthew Lamb is a senior drug development leader with more than 25 years of experience across biotechnology, midsize specialty and large-cap biopharma companies. He is currently vice president, head of Global Development for Immunology & Fibrosis at Bristol Myers Squibb.

Lamb was previously vice president, Global Regulatory Affairs at Celgene Corp and Actavis Inc. Before that, he spent 10 years at Hoffman-La Roche in global development roles both within Regulatory Affairs and Clinical Pharmacology, gastroenterology, rheumatology and women's health.

Lamb completed a Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Clinical Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and received his Doctor of Pharmacy and Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science.



**Carol Voorhees, BSOL '15**

**Senior VP and Chief Information Officer, NJM Insurance Group**

Carol Voorhees has served as senior vice president and chief information officer at NJM Insurance Group since April 2018.

Voorhees leads Information Technology and the company's Project Management and Customer Experience Departments. In those roles, she leads technology and digital transformation efforts in support of NJM's strategic goals.

Voorhees joined NJM in 1996 as a systems analyst. Over the ensuing years, she held positions of increasing responsibility, culminating in her election by the Board of Directors to her current position.

She represents NJM on the New Jersey PBS Board of Trustees and serves on the Guidewire Innovation Council. In addition, Voorhees is an active member of the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriting Society and holds a Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter designation. In 2021, she was named one of the Best 50 Women in Business by *NJBIZ*.

Voorhees graduated from Thomas Edison State University with a BS degree in Organizational Leadership and earned an MS in insurance management from Boston University.



**Dr. Jamal Watson**

**Executive Director, Center for Advocacy and Philanthropy, ETS**

Dr. Jamal Watson is an educator and trained historian, whose research focuses on media and the civil rights movement. He currently directs the Center for Advocacy and Philanthropy at ETS and serves as a graduate faculty member at Trinity Washington University.

Watson is the author of the forthcoming biography *The Evolution of Al Sharpton: The Provocative Politics of the People's Preacher*, and has begun work on a book tracing the student debt crisis in the United States.

Before joining ETS, Watson served for more than 15 years as the executive editor of *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education*, a periodical focused on minorities and diversity-related issues in higher education.

He serves on the Board of Trustees for several organizations including the Education Law Center, the Melvin C. Terrell Educational Foundation, Inc., and Life Pieces to Masterpieces.

Watson earned his bachelor's degree in English from Georgetown University, a master's degree from the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and a master's and a doctoral degree in Afro-American Studies from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

## TESU's Commitment to the Armed Services Garners Two Recognitions

Thomas Edison State University (TESU) has long been renowned for its contributions to military education. That commitment to members of the armed forces was recently recognized by two prestigious military organizations, the Council of Colleges and Military Educators (CCME) and the National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services (NAIMES).

CCME recognized TESU as its Institution of the Year at its awards luncheon during the organization's annual symposium in New York City in January. The CCME Institution Award is presented "to a higher education institution in recognition of its significant contributions to the cause of military education," according to CCME, which added that the recipient is a college or university that supplies quality education programs to the armed services.

"For 50 years we have strived to meet the needs of our men and women in uniform while they serve and protect our country," said Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president, in accepting the CCME award. "Thomas Edison State University, like all CCME institutions, appreciates the dedication and commitment it takes to meet this unique population's goals. Thank you CCME for the award and for all you do for our military and for continuing the promise of VolEd."

CCME is a not-for-profit organization founded nearly 50 years ago to promote, encourage and deliver quality education to service members and their families in all branches of the armed services. Its membership is principally composed of military educators, civilian educators, postsecondary educational institutions and suppliers of quality education products and services.

Also honored at the CCME Symposium with a 2022 NAIMES Student Spotlight Award was TESU student SSgt. Leo Gilbert Bunting. The award celebrates the academic achievements of military students in the Armed Forces Voluntary Education programs.

Bunting earned an Associate of Applied Science degree in criminal justice from

the Community College of the Air Force and is completing his BS degree in Homeland Security and Emergency Management at TESU. A graduate of the prestigious Phoenix Raven Qualification Course, Bunting has ambitions to pursue a Master of Business Administration degree in Project Management at the University.

An executive aircraft security mission scheduler at 816th Security Forces Squadron, Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, Bunting is responsible for assigning and leading teams of security personnel as well as planning mission requirements to protect deployed United States Air Force assets in austere locations.

Bunting, who lives with his wife, Laura, their son, Lennox, and their Goldendoodle, Hank, in Maryland, noted that he is extremely grateful to be the recipient of the NAIMES 2022 Student Spotlight Award, adding that he is excited to continue his education at TESU, applying the NAIMES scholarship toward his master's degree program.

"We are all incredibly proud of what SSgt. Bunting has accomplished, and we are equally proud that he was recognized nationally for his educational success," said Hancock.

The Student Spotlight Award is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their academic achievement to the military and civilian educational community through an exploration of how the academic experience has influenced their military career.



Bunting with his wife, Laura, and their son, Lennox.



NAIMES is an organization comprised of institutional members dedicated to the delivery of quality postsecondary education programs to the military community. Through collaborative partnerships with the Department of Defense voluntary education leadership; sister organizations and agencies, NAIMES continuously seeks to promote quality degree programs, student support services and principles of good practice. At its core, NAIMES is committed to the academic success of students within the military community.

## TESU Builds On Collaboration With edX

The University has expanded its partnership with edX, a leading global online learning platform from 2U, Inc., by joining its venerable group of MicroBachelors program providers.

TESU's Critical Information Literacy (SOS-110) program will now be offered alongside Harvard University, NYU, Arizona State University, Southern New Hampshire University, Western Governors University and Doane University MicroBachelors programs on *edX.org*. While TESU has been a provider of college credit for MicroBachelors programs on edX since early 2020, this is the University's first program offering.

"This marks an important milestone as the University's first undergraduate modular online program offering

through the partnership," said Dr. Jeffrey Harmon, vice provost for Strategic Initiatives and Institutional Effectiveness at TESU. "We are working toward offering additional bachelor's-level introductory courses and a fully-stackable TESU associate degree is currently in development with edX."

MicroBachelors programs on edX are created with input from industry leaders and academics to deliver immediately transferable skills for the workplace or further study. The new MicroBachelors program in Information Literacy is open to everyone and ideal for students just embarking on, or returning to, college-level study. Through interactive instructional software, those enrolled can evaluate and strengthen their skills in critical thinking, professional communication and information literacy.

"We are committed to continually breaking down the barriers of time and cost for working adults and are proud to be part of the MicroBachelors program movement," said Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president of TESU. "We value our ongoing partnership with edX and our latest role among its partners. Coupled with other programs on the platform TESU has evaluated for credit, it equates to a flexible and efficient method of earning a degree through a group of highly respected and groundbreaking institutions. We look forward to our continued work with edX to identify programs we can add or evaluate for credit."

To learn more about edX MicroBachelors programs evaluated by TESU for credit, visit [tesu.edu/degree-completion/edx-credit](https://tesu.edu/degree-completion/edx-credit).

## TESU Celebrates Its Accelerated Nursing Program Cohort With a Pinning Ceremony

The W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions at Thomas Edison State University honored the 19 pre-licensure nursing students from its September 2021–December 2022 Accelerated BSN Program with a Pinning Ceremony.

The ceremony heralds an entrance into the profession for program completers who are now eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) before entering the field.

Nearly 195,000 job openings per year – with a median salary of \$75,330 – are projected for the field through 2030, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The expanding Accelerated BSN Program will help address a looming nursing shortage resulting from more seasoned RNs and baby-boomers retiring from the profession.

The 15-month program is already distinguished for its consistently high NCLEX-RN pass rates and enduring connection with the Trenton community. Staff and students in the school have



The W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions at Thomas Edison State University honored the 19 pre-licensure nursing students from its September 2021–December 2022 Accelerated BSN Program with a Pinning Ceremony on Dec. 22

collaborated with the Trenton Department of Health in delivering thousands of COVID-19 vaccines and volunteered at various other community events.

During the ceremony, Moriah Lanteigne of Middlesex, N.J., received the Dr. Christine M. Rosner Clinical Excellence Award. The award honors the memory of

Rosner who served as an associate dean of the School before her untimely death in 2014.

To learn more about this and other academic programs available through the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions, please visit [tesu.edu/nursing](https://tesu.edu/nursing).

## ➤ **Ruth A. Wittmann-Price, PhD, appointed dean of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions**

Ruth A. Wittmann-Price, PhD, joined the University as dean of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions. Beginning her tenure in May, Wittmann-Price brings with her a wealth of experience in developing and expanding nursing and health professions programs as well as supporting traditionally underserved student and patient populations to her new role. In addition to lending her deep expertise and academic vision to areas that are essential to the institution's ability to attract pre-licensure nursing students, RNs and nurse leaders to its programs, Wittmann-Price will also shepherd the expansion of the School's health professions programs and strengthen the University's initiatives in the Trenton community

Most recently, Wittmann-Price served as a professor of nursing and undergraduate programs chair at Jefferson College of Nursing (JCN) in Philadelphia. Prior to her role at



Ruth A. Wittmann-Price, PhD

JCN, she served as the founding dean of the School of Health Sciences at Francis Marion University, S.C., where she oversaw the launch of the school's flagship Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs. Earlier in her career,

she served as a nursing and health professions professor at various colleges and universities in eastern Pennsylvania.

Wittmann-Price earned her BSN degree from Felician College in Lodi, N.J., and a MS degree with a specialty in perinatal clinical nursing from Columbia University, N.Y. She completed her PhD in Nursing Science at Widener University, Chester, Pa., with a dissertation that earned her the Dean's Award for Excellence. She possesses Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Clinical Nurse Educator (CNE), Certified Academic Clinical Nurse Educator (CNEcl), Certified Healthcare Simulation Educator (CHSE), Academy of Nursing Education Fellows (ANEF) and Fellows of the American Academy of Nursing (FAAN) credentials. She is an editor, co-editor or chapter contributor of more than 70 publications, articles and refereed presentations, and has provided numerous conference keynotes and podium presentations nationally.

## ➤ **Saeed Esmaili Sardari appointed Associate Dean in the Heavin School**

Saeed Esmaili Sardari, PhD, was appointed associate dean in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology. In this position, Esmaili Sardari is responsible for organizing, planning and coordinating curriculum development, recruitment, retention, strategy development, along with research and development (R&D) activities for the School. He is charged with leading and directing the development, implementation, continuous improvement and academic review of undergraduate and graduate degree programs and certificates in cybersecurity, computer science and related programs. He also works as a liaison with other Schools, programs, coordinators and administrative offices to facilitate the goals and objectives of the Heavin School.

Esmaili Sardari joined the University from Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Harrisburg, Pa., where he served as program director for the Information Systems and Information Technology Program as well as an associate professor and program lead for the Computer and Information Sciences Program, the most popular undergraduate program at the university. Earlier in his career, he served as an operations research analyst with Amarex Clinical Research LLC. and, prior to that position, he was a teaching/research assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park, Md.

Esmaili Sardari earned a PhD, MS and BS in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the A. James Clark School of Engineering at the University of Maryland, College Park.



Saeed Esmaili Sardari, PhD

## TESU's Workforce Collaborations Uncover College-Level Learning Wherever it Occurs

Roxbury High School students pursuing hands-on training in the building trades no longer find themselves at a fork in the road when they graduate. Ongoing synergies between Thomas Edison State University (TESU) and skilled trade organizations guarantee that they have the best of both worlds.

By leveraging TESU's Professional Learning Review (PLR) in assessing the pre-apprenticeship Career Connections certifications they have already earned, students at the Morris County, N.J., school can receive up to 16 college credits and potentially save \$7,000 in tuition toward a college degree.

The high school's Career Connections collaboration with TESU is the first of its kind for both institutions.

"TESU reviewed the Carpenters International Training Fund's Career Connections program in 2022 and through its PLR methodology and rigorous academic evaluations, determined that the learning taking place in the program equated to 16 college-level credits," noted Dr. Jeff S. Harmon, vice provost for Strategic Initiatives and Institutional Effectiveness at the



TESU's Dr. Jeff S. Harmon, vice provost for Strategic Initiatives and Institutional Effectiveness (far left), and Alison Maysilles, associate director for Strategic Initiatives (fourth from right) visited Roxbury High School in Morris County, N.J., recently to meet with faculty and students participating in the Career Connections pre-apprenticeship program

University. "Students participating in the program have the option to apply those credits to an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree in Construction and Facilities Support, a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Construction or in Technical Studies at the University, or they can obtain an Individual Learning Account (ILA) transcript with the credits applied and transfer them to another institution."

According to its website, the Career Connections program was developed to provide high school students with an opportunity to learn firsthand the required skills and values needed for a successful career as a skilled carpenter. In tandem with their potential academic tracks, the students are encouraged to enroll in the registered apprenticeship

program at the Northeast Regional Carpenters Apprentice Training Center in Edison, N.J.

TESU staff recently visited the high school in Succasunna, N.J., to meet with faculty and students participating in the program. Harmon joined Ali Maysilles, associate director for Strategic Initiatives at TESU, to meet with approximately

30 high school seniors who have already earned the certification. The sessions were coordinated by Frank Caccavale who oversees the Structural Design and Fabrication classes and the Career Connections program implementation at the high school.

Caccavale's students are already proving their aptitude in the building trades and an early propensity for community service. Their latest group project involves building a modular three-bedroom Habitat for Humanity house on the school's property. The finished home will be transported in two sections to a local site and donated to a family in need.

To learn more about TESU's PLR process and how your industry's professional training and certifications can equate to college credit, visit [tesu.edu/plr](https://tesu.edu/plr).

## Remembering Former Provost Dr. Jerry Ice

Dr. Jerry Ice, who was appointed provost and vice president for Academic Affairs at Thomas Edison State University in 1983 and served for 19 years as the chief academic officer, died in February.

Ice was instrumental in the development of many of the University's academic programs and degree offerings as well as many academic policies and procedures.

His responsibilities included the development and review of all academic degree programs, the evaluation of student credentials, the direction of program advising services, testing and assessment programs and distance-learning courses. He has also directed the University's recruitment, marketing and outreach programs, admissions services and corporate partnerships.

He remained a good friend and advocate for Thomas Edison State University throughout his life. Ice is survived by his wife of 46 years, Janice Donkersloot Ice, and their sons, Jason (Elise) of Ellicott City, Md., and Tyler (Stephanie) of Plymouth Meeting, Pa., and grandchildren Brennan, Cameron, Colette and Weston.

## TESU Partners With Hunterdon County in Innovative Program For Public Employees

An innovative program designed to enhance professional skills for public employees was launched recently through a partnership between Thomas Edison State University (TESU) and Hunterdon County, N.J.

The Public Sector Leadership Development Program was conceived during a recent New Jersey Association of Counties annual meeting. At the gathering, representatives from Hunterdon County inquired about the development of a training program for their midlevel managers with TESU's John S. Watson School of Public Service staff.

"We immediately moved forward in customizing the new program structure, course content and timeframes with the municipality," said Dr. Malcolm Oliver, dean of the School. "We also identified TESU course mentors who have executive-level experience in local government and the academic credentials to oversee coursework in the areas of Hunterdon County government leadership, public budgeting, human resource management, strategic planning and effective communications."

The 20 Hunterdon County employees in the inaugural program completed four



Dr. Malcolm Oliver

group projects that were immediately applicable to their professional objectives and work environments. Course topics ranged from county economic development, digitization of county services and integration of human resources and recruitment activities, to hybrid work structures in the post-COVID environment.

"This is a convenient and innovative pathway to leadership development for our employees," noted Hunterdon

County Administrator Brad Myhre. "The flexibility of the program allows for our employees to balance other responsibilities while they develop cross-departmental relationships and workplace competencies that are tailored to their professional aspirations in public service."

Each student submitted a culminating report and took part in a presentation during the term's final session in December 2022.

"We look forward to expanding on this partnership," said Dr. Cynthia Baum, provost and senior vice president for Academic Affairs at TESU. "The Public Sector Leadership Development Program will empower students to lead their divisions and more efficiently serve their communities while preparing them for advanced study. As an institution uniquely structured to serve adult learners, our emphasis on the practical application of course content directly aligns with the immediate needs and career objectives of Hunterdon County's employees."

To learn more, visit [tesu.edu/watson](https://tesu.edu/watson) or email [watsonschool@tesu.edu](mailto:watsonschool@tesu.edu).

## TESU Named One of the Top 5 Digital Schools Most Recommended by Experts

Thomas Edison State University was featured in *studyfinds.org* as one of the top five schools most recommended by experts in Best Online Colleges In 2023 for its exceptional preparation of students for the professional world.

The outlet noted that adults looking to go back to college to boost their career prospects should feel right at home at Thomas Edison State University - most TESU students are non-first-time, part-time students balancing school with other responsibilities. TESU awards an average of 38 credits for prior work, life or military experience, saving students time and money, and, as a result, 95 percent of recent graduates say they

would recommend the school to others the outlet added.

*Intelligent* and *Academic Influence* were two of the expert sources used in the research by StudyFinds, which noted, at *Intelligent*, TESU wins the top pick for adult learners.

"A key component of Thomas Edison State University's mission is to serve adult and nontraditional learners. They support this mission with programs and courses designed to be flexible, accessible and career-focused," says *Intelligent*. "We love Thomas Edison State University's commitment and passion to serve busy yet motivated adults," adds *Academic Influence*.



## Barbara Anne Blair, BSN '22, Recognized for Excellence in Nursing Care

Barbara Blair's role as director of Nursing for a 180-bed long-term, subacute care facility comes with plenty of professional rewards. Doubly gratifying is the recognition she recently received from TESU's W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions for excellence in her field.

The 2022 Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program graduate and this year's recipient of the School's Regina Sanchez-Porter Award noted that her professional focus has always been centered on long-term patient care. As director of Nursing for Morris Hall Senior Care Communities in Lawrenceville, N.J., she puts that skill set to use every day.

"I am responsible for the oversight and implementation of nursing best practices, staffing and compliance to our facility's policies. I'm also responsible for ensuring that our facility meets state and federal regulations in our subacute care practices," said Blair, a Hamilton, N.J., resident. "From the very beginning of my nursing education, I aspired to work in a senior care environment."

She began her career at Morris Hall Senior Care as a charge nurse shortly after graduating from Mercer County Community College with an associate degree in nursing. She was subsequently promoted to unit manager and, later, to the position of clinical care coordinator before advancing to her current role.

"I was very grateful to receive the Regina Sanchez-Porter Award from the School. It was especially gratifying after also receiving the Arnold Fletcher Award from the University during October's Commencement for my achievements in online learning. I feel blessed that my years of hard work, time and effort were so honorably acknowledged," noted Blair.

The Regina Sanchez-Porter Award is presented annually to a BSN or MSN graduate who has provided outstanding service to the profession and community, combined with high academic achievement. The award is in memory of Regina Sanchez-Porter, PhD, RN, who was an esteemed member of the School's leadership team from 1986 through 1991.

"Barbara's persistence in pursuing her educational goals, commitment



Barbara Anne Blair, BSN '22, (center) recipient of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions' Regina Sanchez-Porter Award, is flanked by TESU's Dr. Lia van Rijswijk, associate dean of Undergraduate Nursing Programs, and Maureen Clark-Gallagher, assistant dean and director of Distance Learning, during the University's Commencement ceremony in October.

to lifelong learning and dedication to quality nursing care for one of our most vulnerable populations exemplify the service to the community and profession for which Regina Sanchez-Porter was known," noted Dr. Lia van Rijswijk, associate dean of Undergraduate Nursing Programs at the School.

As a student, Blair said that she valued the collaboration she found through the School's online Discussion Board assignments and liked the structure of her online courses.

"The course Discussion Boards allowed me to interact with professional colleagues across several nursing disciplines as well as nurse mentors in a positive and informative way. Our exchanges set the tone for the students and instructional staff to maintain open communication," she noted. "Learning from fellow nursing students delivers a wider range of knowledge that benefits everyone. The course structure and curriculum offer a variety of material that helped maintain my interest and prepared me for further study."

According to Blair, success in her profession relies largely on the right mindset.

"I've found that, when one has the desire to learn and enjoys what they do, their success is inevitable," said Blair. "My position encompasses many areas of nursing practice and my passion for learning allows me to grow professionally. My most gratifying moments are in witnessing positive patient outcomes resulting from my efforts. Those efforts not only lead to successful treatment, but they help in our patients' long-term recovery and can restore the quality of their lives."

As a nursing director, Blair's hours can be long and exhaustive, often extending to her off hours.

"Without the flexibility of online learning at TESU and the helpfulness and support of the TESU staff and advisors, I probably could never have completed my BSN degree," she noted.

To learn more about the programs available in the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions, visit [tesu.edu/nursing](https://tesu.edu/nursing). To learn more about the Regina Sanchez-Porter Award, visit [tesu.edu/nursing/students/regina-sanchez-porter-award](https://tesu.edu/nursing/students/regina-sanchez-porter-award).

# BY THE NUMBERS

The support of TESU alumni provide a framework for future success of the University.

By referring friends and family, participating in social media platforms and sharing unique stories, alumni volunteers devoted more than 1,400 hours of their time to help advance the mission and vision of the University. Thank you to all of our alumni volunteers who engaged with TESU in 2022.

 **639** VOLUNTEERS

 **13731** SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS

 **1474** VOLUNTEER HOURS

 **88** FEATURED IN STORIES AND PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGNS

 **418** STUDENT REFERRALS

## Meet a TESU Genius: Disha Patel, BA '20

Disha Patel's path has had its share of bumps along the way but attending Thomas Edison State University has helped to smooth the journey.

"Before I came to the U.S. and became a student, I was accustomed to spending time with my friends and family back in India. I moved to the United States in 2016 and the migration was not easy. Leaving everything back in your hometown and developing your career and educational path to success is always challenging," noted Patel.

As she settled into life in New Jersey, education became a priority. She learned about TESU when searching for the best universities to apply to in the Mercer County, N.J., area. She also found that the reasonable fee structure and convenience made it an ideal fit.

"It has made a wonderful impact on my career. Getting my BA degree in Computer Science has opened many doors for me," she noted. "You gain so much knowledge in the program, not only about computers and tech, but also about data analysis and how to code or solve technical issues. My future looks bright with the degree as I have already gained a position as a project manager at a reputable IT firm," she added. "The knowledge I have earned is my power. And when shared with the community it will always be multiplied."

As an alum, Patel continues to engage with TESU through its Genius Program. She is considering a master's degree, and she is proud to recommend the University to friends and colleagues given the flexibility and the skills of the mentors in the courses.

To learn more about the programs in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit [tesu.edu/heavin](https://tesu.edu/heavin). For more information on TESU's Genius Program, visit [tesu.edu/genius](https://tesu.edu/genius).



## Be a TESU Genius!

Alumni and friends of TESU are invited to join the new Genius Program. Simply complete five steps to be eligible for the prize! See complete details at [tesu.edu/genius](https://tesu.edu/genius).

## Keep Us Posted!

To connect with the Office of Alumni Engagement and fellow TESU alumni, join the conversation on social media:

**Alumni Facebook Group:** [tesu.edu/FacebookGroup](https://tesu.edu/FacebookGroup)

**Student and Alumni LinkedIn Group:** [tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup](https://tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup)



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Thomas Edison State

## University Store

**TESUshop.com** is Thomas Edison State University's online store for TESU students, alumni, employees, mentors and TESU families. Declare your TESU pride with apparel and products bearing Thomas Edison State University's logo.

# JOIN US FOR THE TESU VIRTUAL 5K RUN/WALK/BIKE '23

Please join us for the 3rd Annual Thomas Edison State University Virtual 5K event!

By running, walking, biking or whatever activity you choose, you will support TESU students in a big way as event proceeds support the TESU Student Relief Fund.

Race results are submitted on the honor system, so brush off those fitness watches to track your results! **Simply email your name and time to [alumni@tesu.edu](mailto:alumni@tesu.edu) between May 26, 2023, and July 4, 2023, to receive your custom TESU medal!**

Show your TESU spirit by sharing pictures in all your sweaty glory in the Thomas Edison State University Alumni Facebook group and share on your personal social media outlets with #TESUnited.

**Get outside - walk, run, ride and have fun!**

Register at [give.tesu.edu/5k2023](https://give.tesu.edu/5k2023)

**May 26  
- July 4,  
2023**

