

FALL 2017

# Invention

THE MAGAZINE OF THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY

GEORGE A.  
PRUITT  
HALL

TRANSFORMATION





1 > President's Message

UNIVERSITY NEWS

- 2 > University Partners with Brewer Sports International to Help Current and Former NFL Players Complete Their Degrees
- > School of Business and Management Launches Master of Science in Healthcare Management
- 3 > University Partners with Cumberland County College on Nursing Degree Completion
- > Institution Presents 29th National Institute, Maintaining Focus on Serving Adult Learners
- 4 > Vice President for Planning and Research Named American Council on Education Fellow
- > University Announces Formation of Center for Leadership and Governance
- 5 > University Mourns the Loss of Trustee Dr. Fred Abbate



FOUNDATION NEWS

- 6 > University Awarded \$197,900 Grant from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- > TD Charitable Foundation Awards \$10,000 Grant to Help Teachers Become More Culturally Competent Educators
- 7 > Thomas Edison State University Foundation Awards \$175,000 Grant to Fund Development of Two New Graduate Programs



COVER STORY

- 8 > Transformation: Dr. George A. Pruitt

ALUMNI PROFILES

- 12 > The Few and The Proud: Lt. Talia Bastien, BA '13
- 14 > Municipal Leader: Linda Peyton, MSM '16
- 16 > Class Notes



*Invention* is published quarterly and is produced by the Office of Communications and the Office of Institutional Marketing at Thomas Edison State University.

Dr. George A. Pruitt  
PRESIDENT

Joe Guzzardo  
EDITOR

Kristen Lacaille  
Kelly Saccomanno  
Linda Soltis  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Chris Miller  
ART DIRECTOR



DEAR ALUMNI, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS,

To everything there is a season.

Having the honor of serving this wonderful institution for the past 35 years as its president has been the single greatest privilege of my professional life.

I have no words to express my deep appreciation to the Trustees, past and present, as well as to my colleagues who have joined me in the work of transforming the lives of the extraordinary students, and alumni, we have been given the responsibility of serving.

In addition to giving you a glimpse into my own story, we are also pleased to introduce you to Lt. Talia Bastien, BA '13, a U.S. Marine Corps adjutant currently serving on the branch's Quantico base in Quantico, Va. She recalls her experience as a female Marine, and how her educational prowess has contributed to her continued success in her own position.

Also in this issue, we are pleased to share the story of Linda Peyton, MSM '16, city administrator for the city of Pleasantville, N.J. Peyton reflects on her role with the city and her time learning alongside the Watson School's affiliation with the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association as well as the insight she gained being a part of its network.

We are also delighted to share stories and photos from across the University, including recent grant awards, the launch of a new University graduate program and newly formed partnership announcements.

I am eternally grateful for the support, cooperation, assistance and kindness I have received from so many along this journey.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, and I hope you enjoy this issue of *Invention*.

Sincerely,

Dr. George A. Pruitt  
President



## ❖ University Partners with Brewer Sports International to Help Current and Former NFL Players Complete Their Degrees

Thomas Edison State University has partnered with Brewer Sports International to help current and former National Football League (NFL) players finish their undergraduate degrees and prepare to transition for a career after leaving the gridiron.



**"OUR MISSION OF SERVING SELF-DIRECTED ADULTS DIRECTLY ALIGNS WITH THE KIND OF MINDSET AND MOTIVATION THAT MANY PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES POSSESS, WHICH MAKES THEM IDEAL STUDENTS AT THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY."**

Janet Eickhoff

The University's partnership with Brewer Sports International, a global sports management organization with a focus on professional athlete career development, business management and sports financing, will help athletes take advantage of their National Football League Player Association (NFLPA) Trust Program player benefits among others, which include reimbursement for tuition, fees and books related to undergraduate or postgraduate course work.

"Education is the most important part of a successful second career transition," said Jack Brewer, five year NFL veteran and

CEO of The Brewer Group. "We will expand this partnership to offer this opportunity to athletes of all sports as well as entertainers, artists and influencers. Our goal is to help these athletes and influencers find that interest or passion that will guide them through the next chapter of their lives."

"We are pleased to partner with this dynamic organization, as we as an institution value these athletes and support their post-career plans of completing their degrees," said Janet Eickhoff, associate vice president, Office of Strategic Partnerships and Outreach at the University.

"Our mission of serving self-directed adults directly aligns with the kind of mindset and motivation that many professional athletes possess, which makes them ideal students at Thomas Edison State University."

For more information about the University's Corporate Choice® program, visit [www.tesu.edu/partners/Corporate-Choice-Program.cfm](http://www.tesu.edu/partners/Corporate-Choice-Program.cfm).

## ❖ School of Business and Management Launches Master of Science in Healthcare Management

Thomas Edison State University's School of Business and Management has launched its Master of Science in Healthcare Management (MSHCM) degree program, designed for individuals who wish to work in or are currently working in the healthcare industry.

"The MSHCM degree integrates key healthcare industry content in program management, data analysis and federal and state medical policy with core business course work in management, organizational behavior and entrepreneurship," said Dr. Michael Williams, dean, School of Business and Management at the University. "The degree curriculum

emphasizes critical thinking, data analysis and strategic decision making, enabling graduates to contribute to and lead in healthcare related organizations." Williams asserted that, "the MSHCM degree tracks to key developments in the global healthcare industry enabling it to maintain relevance and currency, in turn providing students with a competitive advantage in the healthcare marketplace."

Central to this 36-credit graduate degree program are courses in leadership, human capital management, finance, technology and quality improvement all focused on creating value, managing and leading effectively in healthcare organizations.

To learn more about this program or to apply, visit [www.tesu.edu/business/mshcm](http://www.tesu.edu/business/mshcm).



Dr. Michael Williams



## ❖ University Partners with Cumberland County College on Nursing Degree Completion



Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernandez, President of Cumberland County College (left) and Dr. Filomela Marshall, Dean of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing at Thomas Edison State University, celebrate an articulation agreement between their institutions, which will provide nursing students with a seamless pathway to earning advanced nursing degrees.

Dr. Filomela Marshall, dean of W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing at Thomas Edison State University, joined Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernandez, president of Cumberland County College, to sign an articulation agreement at the Paul Navone Healthcare Education Center on Cumberland County College's campus in Vineland in June.

This agreement will allow eligible Cumberland County College RN students direct entry into the RN-BSN and the RN-BSN/MSN degree programs offered by the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing at the University. Graduates

of Cumberland's RN program can transfer 80 credits and combine them with 40 credits earned at Thomas Edison State University to complete their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. The 40 credits earned at the University can be completed in one year should the student choose.

"We're delighted to partner with one of the best online education universities to provide another pathway to the BSN," said Salomon-Fernandez. "Our working adult students want a flexible schedule and our traditional college students have an intuitive facility with technology. It's an excellent partnership."

"This partnership will provide Cumberland County College nursing students a seamless pathway to earn their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, allowing them to do so in an efficient and economical manner," said Marshall. "A highly educated nursing workforce is key to the health of the community, and, through this collaboration, we will be able to continue to immerse more nursing professionals into the field."

"The partnership between Cumberland County College and Thomas Edison State University will make our students more marketable when they go into the workforce," said Stella Barber, director of Nursing at Cumberland. "The nursing profession is looking to have the BSN as entry level to practice. With this agreement our graduates will already be enrolled in a baccalaureate program and will gain employment faster than completing associate degree nursing programs."

## ❖ Institution Presents 29th National Institute, Maintaining Focus on Serving Adult Learners

Thomas Edison State University presented its 29th annual National Institute on the Assessment of Adult Learning, from June 14-16, at the Tropicana Casino and Resort, Atlantic City, N.J. This year's theme, *The Art & Science (and Business) of PLA*, got attendees thinking about the competing goals that are part of prior learning assessment (PLA) and serving adult learners.

"Institutions have no choice but to reckon with the business of staying in business, and often the introduction of new programs and policies has to take the bottom line into consideration," explained Marc Singer, vice provost, Center for the Assessment of Learning at Thomas Edison State University, and director of the National Institute. "However, PLA can enhance an institution's business model if done right. This year, the National Institute featured a number of sessions that considered how to cultivate adult-friendly policies in the current climate of dwindling funding."

More than 100 educators and practitioners from around the world attended the 2017 event to share ideas about PLA, hear

about best practices, discuss strategies for resolving potential roadblocks and learn how adult learning relates to the rest of the educational arena. Keynote presentations were made by Alan Mandell, college professor of Adult Learning and Mentoring, SUNY Empire State College; and Jon Talbot, senior lecturer (associate professor), Centre for Work Related Studies, University of Chester.

Thomas Edison State University established the National Institute in 1988 to provide an intensive learning experience for educators and professionals involved in the assessment of adult and experiential learning and to help ensure that PLA is appropriately practiced. The event also helps educators learn the best practices related to the field and understand the importance of quality assurance and accreditation issues related to PLA.

To learn more about the 2017 event, visit [www.tesu.edu/nationalinstitute](http://www.tesu.edu/nationalinstitute).



## Vice President for Planning and Research Named American Council on Education Fellow

Dr. Dennis W. Devery, vice president for Planning and Research at the University, was selected to serve as a member of the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program for 2017-2018.

Established in 1965, this unique program aims to identify and prepare promising senior faculty and administrators for responsible positions in college and university administration. Devery is one of the 46 fellows, nominated by the president or chancellor of their institution, selected this year in a national competition.

"I am honored to have this unique and exciting opportunity for personal and professional development while also making valuable contributions and building institutional capacity at Thomas Edison State University and my host institution," Devery said.

Nearly 1,900 higher education leaders have participated in the ACE Fellows Program over the past five decades, with more than 80 percent of fellows having gone on to serve as senior leaders of colleges and universities. The program combines retreats, interactive learning opportunities, visits to campuses and other higher education-related organizations, and placement at another higher education institution to condense years of on-the-job experience and skills development into a single year. During the placement, fellows observe and work with the president and other senior officers at their host institution, attend decision-making meetings and focus on issues of interest.

"Dr. Devery's acceptance into the program reflects highly on his potential as an educational leader," said Dr. George A. Pruitt, president of



Dr. Dennis W. Devery, MSM '05

Thomas Edison State University. "We nominated Dr. Devery for the program and are proud that he was selected as a Fellow. The ACE Fellows Program is one of the most effective, comprehensive leadership development programs in American higher education today and it is an honor to have one of our senior professionals selected to participate."

## University Announces Formation of Center for Leadership and Governance

Thomas Edison State University has recently announced the formation of the Center for Leadership and Governance, which will focus on the development and guidance of emerging leaders as well as strengthening the effectiveness of those already serving in leadership positions.

Linda Meehan, who currently serves as the president's chief of staff, has been appointed as director of the Center and will be responsible for guiding the development and implementation of its programs and administrative management of its budget and resources.

Meehan will work closely with Dr. George A. Pruitt as he transitions to his position as president emeritus and board distinguished fellow of the center. She plans to start her new position when Pruitt steps down as president.

"I look forward to collaborating with Dr. Pruitt and other colleagues in shaping a program of practitioner-centered support that makes leadership and governance more effective in higher education and other sectors," said Meehan.

Meehan joined the University in 1983 and has worked in a variety of administrative positions in the Office of the President, including assistant to the president. She has served as the president's chief of staff and secretary to the University's Board of Trustees since 2009. Meehan, who earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Science in Management degree from Thomas Edison State University, has also managed several projects on behalf of the president, including the institution's transition to university status and establishment of the University archives. Meehan is also a Lead New Jersey (LNJ '16) Fellow.



Linda Meehan, AA '07, BA '09, MSM '15

The Center for Leadership and Governance will be housed in the John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies.

If you are interested in learning more about the Center for Leadership and Governance or supporting the Center, please contact the Office of Development at Thomas Edison State University.

## University Mourns the Loss of Trustee Dr. Fred Abbate

Thomas Edison State University mourns the loss of University Trustee Dr. Fred Abbate, who passed away at his home in Moorestown, N.J., on Aug. 11. He was 77.

"Fred was an extraordinary person who achieved success in many different fields during his life," said Dr. George A. Pruitt, president of the University. "In addition to being a valued trustee of the University, he was a talented executive, a gifted professor, a published author and playwright and an incredibly passionate and creative volunteer. His spirit, commitment and dedication will be felt by many for years to come."

Abbate served as president and chief executive officer of the New Jersey Utilities Association and previously held numerous executive and managerial positions at Atlantic Energy. He also served as director of Leadership New Jersey. More recently, he was a partner in the Performance Excellence Group, teaching leadership skills to educators and professionals.

He taught on the philosophy faculties of Rutgers University, Iona College, the City University of New York system, and the Pennoni Honors College of Drexel University, where he earned the honors college's inaugural award for outstanding teaching in 2010. His courses at Drexel, including those focusing on Jack the Ripper, Sherlock Holmes and William Shakespeare, drew wide acclaim from his students and peers.

Abbate was also an accomplished author who published two books on philosophy as well as several essays, novels and plays, including *The Idea of Edison*, which was produced by New Jersey Public Television. His latest play, *Campion's Will*, was performed professionally in 2016 at the Shakespeare festivals in New Orleans and Chicago.

Abbate was appointed to the University's Board of Trustees in 1987 and was its longest-serving member. As a trustee, he chaired the board's Academic Affairs Committee for many years and served as board chair from 1993-1995.

Born in New Haven, Conn., Abbate earned a PhD in philosophy from Columbia University, a master's degree from Boston College and a bachelor's degree from Fairfield University. He was an avid supporter for Volunteers of America Delaware Valley, the March of Dimes and the Read Foundation in Woodbridge, N.J.

He is survived by his wife of 52 years, Rosemary, sons Jeremy, Jonathan and Jason, and seven grandchildren.

Donations may be made to Samaritan Healthcare & Hospice, 5 Eves Dr., Suite 300, Marlton, NJ 08053 or Volunteers of America, Delaware Valley, 235 White Horse Pike, Collingswood, NJ 08107.



Dr. Fred Abbate

*"In addition to being a valued trustee of the University, he was a talented executive, a gifted professor, a published author and playwright and an incredibly passionate and creative volunteer. His spirit, commitment and dedication will be felt by many for years to come."*

Dr. George A. Pruitt



## University Awarded \$197,900 Grant from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Thomas Edison State University has been awarded a \$197,900 grant from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in support of scholarships for students at the institution.

This grant will support a two-year program that will award approximately 40 scholarships to eligible University students in Nuclear Energy Engineering, Electronics Systems Engineering Technology, Radiation Protection, Cybersecurity and Information Technology undergraduate degree programs, in addition to students enrolled in the Master of Science degree in Nuclear Energy Technology Management program.

"We are humbled to once again have been chosen by the NRC as one of its grantees", said Dr. John Aje, dean, School of Applied Science and Technology at the University. "Through this scholarship program, we aim to increase student retention, help expedite time-to-degree completion and allow students the ability to enter or experience professional growth in the nuclear safety and security sectors."

Scholarship funds awarded will be determined by a few factors, including the number of credits a student needs to complete his or her degree, the student's financial need, previous academic performance and in- or out-of-state tuition status as well as other critical personal and professional considerations.

To learn more or to apply, visit [www.tesu.edu/tuition/nrc-scholarship.cfm](http://www.tesu.edu/tuition/nrc-scholarship.cfm).



Dr. John Aje

## TD Charitable Foundation Awards \$10,000 Grant to Help Teachers Become More Culturally Competent Educators

The TD Charitable Foundation, the charitable giving arm of TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank®, has awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Thomas Edison State University Foundation as part of the TD Charitable Foundation's commitment to giving back to the community.

The N.J. Cultural Competency and English Language Learners (ELL) Summer Institute Program, based in The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State University, launched in 2007 and is coordinated by the Watson Institute's Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children. The program trains and mentors educators from across New Jersey by helping them celebrate the diverse cultural heritage of their students. Funding from the TD Charitable Foundation has supported the mentor-based component of the program since 2008.

"The funding continues to support the centerpiece of the ELL program - mentoring and monitoring of teachers who work with the state's diverse population of children - by

giving them the tools to become more culturally and linguistically responsive educators," said Ana I. Berdecia, MEd, center director. "The process of becoming culturally conscious requires continuous investigation and modification to educators' thinking and teaching perspectives. During the nine-month mentorship, participants are provided with a comprehensive pathway to transform their teaching practices to support ELL students and create a shared cultural experience in their classrooms. We are immensely grateful to the TD Charitable Foundation for its ninth consecutive year of support for this endeavor."

Since its launch, ELL has trained and mentored 235 educators working in 97 classrooms across 85 schools throughout New Jersey, enabling them to create environments that affirm the cultural diversity of their students to more fully engage them in learning. This year's program focuses on early childhood centers in Trenton, N.J., and adjacent communities.

A staunch commitment to active involvement in the local community



Pictured from left to right are John Thurber, vice president, Division of Public Affairs, Thomas Edison State University; Ana Berdecia, MEd, senior fellow/director, Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children, The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy at Thomas Edison State University; Heather Quinn, vice president, U.S. Field Marketing Strategy, TD Charitable Foundation; and Joseph Tredinnick, senior vice president, TD Bank.

is a vital element of the TD Bank philosophy. TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank®, and the TD Charitable Foundation provides support for affordable housing, financial literacy and human services, with a focus on improving the welfare of children and families.

## Thomas Edison State University Foundation Awards \$175,000 Grant to Fund Development of Two New Graduate Programs

The Thomas Edison State University Foundation has awarded \$175,000 to the University's School of Business and Management to develop two new graduate degree programs, a **Master of Science in Accounting** and a **Doctor of Business Administration**.

"We are excited to support the University's development of two important new programs for both current and future students in the School of Business and Management," said Dr. Michael Toscani, board chair of the Foundation. "We are grateful for the support we receive from our generous donors, which allows us to make these kinds of investments in the future of the University."

"THESE NEW PROGRAMS WILL ADVANCE THE SCHOOL'S STRATEGIC POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE, ENABLING US TO ENROLL, ENGAGE AND EDUCATE BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT STUDENTS WORLDWIDE."

Dr. Michael Williams

With the generous support of our donors, the Foundation makes grants to the University to develop new programs, services and technology. The University's School of Business and Management had requested this grant to strengthen its graduate offerings for business leaders and accounting professionals.

The Master of Science in Accounting will provide advanced education in accounting and help students prepare to qualify for the CPA examination. This degree program will enable students to transfer equivalent graduate accounting courses and for students enrolled in the

school's Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree program in accounting to utilize a "dual course credit" option. In both instances, a maximum of 12 credits may be accepted toward earning the degree.

The Doctor of Business Administration will be a scholar-practitioner oriented program focused on preparing executives, educators and consultants for significant roles within global industries, organizations and entrepreneurial practices. The program will offer specializations in organizational leadership, healthcare management and human resources management, and will accept up to 9 credits of graduate-level work that is aligned with and equivalent to the degree requirements. Similar to the Master of Science in Accounting program, previously earned equivalent graduate credit may be accepted. This program will be the second doctoral degree for the University.

"We value and appreciate the Foundation's generosity and vision in awarding the School this grant," said Dr. Michael Williams, dean of the University's School of Business and Management. "These new programs will advance the School's strategic position in the global marketplace, enabling us to enroll, engage and educate business and management students worldwide. We believe these degrees align with key and emergent 21st century professional workforce requirements as well as establish an innovative and experiential approach for earning these personally engaging and career advancing scholar-practitioner degrees."

Both programs are expected to launch in mid-to-late 2018.

To learn more about the Thomas Edison State University Foundation, visit [www.tesufoundation.org](http://www.tesufoundation.org).



Dr. Michael Toscani

"WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT WE RECEIVE FROM OUR GENEROUS DONORS, WHICH ALLOWS US TO MAKE THESE KINDS OF INVESTMENTS IN THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY."

Dr. Michael Toscani,  
board chair of the Foundation



A transformational president prepares to start his next chapter.

# TRANSFORMATION

Dr. George A. Pruitt never thought it would last 35 years. He could not have imagined serving as president of Thomas Edison State University for so long or having such a career in higher education.

"My intention was to become a physician, which is why I studied biology and chemistry as an undergrad," recalled Pruitt, who is stepping down as president of Thomas Edison State University in December. "But it just didn't work out that way."

Instead, Pruitt became a national and statewide leader in higher education. In addition, he served as chair of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and was named one of the country's most effective college presidents in a study of presidential leadership funded by the Exxon Education Foundation. He has served five secretaries of education under three presidents of both parties as a member of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity. He has played a pivotal role testifying before Congress about the role of accreditation, the

impact on adult students of federal initiatives proposed by the U.S. Department of Education and the importance of considering the needs of nontraditional students when determining education policy.

"George Pruitt has been an extraordinary leader in American higher education and he has done it from an institution that is not as well-known as many Ivy League colleges and universities. But his impact has been just as profound," said Terry Hartle, senior vice president for Government and Public Affairs at the American Council of Education.

In New Jersey, he was instrumental in working with other college and university presidents in securing autonomy for the state's senior public institutions of higher learning. Pruitt also served as chair of the 50-member New Jersey Presidents' Council and worked closely with every New Jersey governor on higher education issues since 1982.

His leadership has transformed Thomas Edison State University into one of the leading adult-serving institutions in the country and a nationally recognized leader in the assessment of prior learning, the use of technology in higher education and serving active-duty military service members.

"I learned pretty quickly that being a college president is never about you," Pruitt said. "You're only as good as the people you have around you and stepping into this role, you need to know why you're here and why you want to do this."

It is a long way from the campus of Illinois State University in

Normal, Ill., where his career in higher education began.

As a student at Illinois State in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Pruitt was not just exposed to civil rights struggles and Vietnam War protests, he was a part of them.

Pruitt headed the black student group at Illinois State and its work to get the institution to pay more attention to underserved people of color. This included taking over the president's office for an hour and taking part in negotiations with university officials as they came to terms with racial inequalities on campus.

**"I LEARNED PRETTY QUICKLY THAT BEING A COLLEGE PRESIDENT IS NEVER ABOUT YOU. YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS THE PEOPLE YOU HAVE AROUND YOU AND STEPPING INTO THIS ROLE, YOU NEED TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE AND WHY YOU WANT TO DO THIS."**

Dr. George A. Pruitt

One of the University's negotiators who met Pruitt and other students in the president's office that day was Dr. Kenneth (Buzz) Shaw, who worked with the students to find common ground and help resolve the unrest. Shaw recalled noticing something special about Pruitt, who earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Illinois State.

"I saw in George self-confidence from the start. He was clearly a leader," said Shaw, who went on to serve as president of the University of Wisconsin system and chancellor of Southern Illinois University and Syracuse University. "He was emphatic, kind, very bright and had a really good set of values."

His experiences at Illinois State with Shaw and another administrator, Dr. James Fisher – who would become president of Towson State University in Maryland – helped shape Pruitt's career.

## ...New President announced

The Board of Trustees of Thomas Edison State College is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. George A. Pruitt as the College's third president, effective December 1, 1982. He currently serves as Executive Vice President of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL), a

national association of colleges and universities. "We are delighted that Dr. Pruitt has agreed to become the third President of Edison State College," stated Eleanor Spiegel, Chairperson of the College's Board of Trustees. "Candidates throughout the country were considered and Dr. Pruitt was selected because we feel confident that, with his experience as an educator and his commitment to nontraditional education, he is uniquely qualified to provide the dynamic leadership the College needs to continue its growth," she continued.



Dr. George A. Pruitt

## ...Accreditation reaffirmed

The accreditation of Edison State College was recently reaffirmed by the Commission on Higher Education

Dr. Pruitt, 38, has held a number of significant leadership positions in higher education, including Vice President and Professor of Education at Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee; Vice President, Executive Assistant to the President, and Associate Professor of Urban Affairs, Morgan State College, Baltimore, Maryland; Dean of Students, Towson State College, Towson, Maryland; Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Education, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois. He was born in Canton, Mississippi, and is a native of Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Pruitt attended the University of Illinois, and received the Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from Illinois State University. He received his Ph.D. from The Union Graduate School in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has served as an accreditation evaluator for the Commission on

(continued on page 2)





Pruitt and daughter, Shayla, at the University's Gala in 1993.



Dr. George A. Pruitt and wife, Dr. Pamela Pruitt, at the University Foundation's 2007 Gala.



(from left) Leonard Coleman, Nomalizo Leah Tutu, Desmond Tutu and Dr. George A. Pruitt.

(from left) W. Cary Edwards, Pearl Bailey, Dr. George A. Pruitt and John S. Watson at a Commencement.



Dr. Morris Keeton, widely known as the father of prior learning assessment, and Dr. George A. Pruitt at an early National Institute event.



Dr. George A. Pruitt with founding trustee Eleanor Spiegel at his inauguration in 1983.

Upon completion of his graduate degree in 1970, Shaw offered Pruitt a position as the assistant to the vice president of Academic Affairs at Illinois State and director of the university's High Potential Students Program.

Pruitt would remain at his alma mater for two years, before Shaw and Fisher recruited him to serve as dean of students at Towson. Around that time, Pruitt began pursuing his doctoral degree in higher education administration from The Union Institute in Cincinnati, which he completed in 1974.

Following Towson State, Pruitt moved on to Morgan State University in Baltimore, where he served as vice president, executive assistant to the president and associate professor of Urban Studies, and at Tennessee State University in Nashville where he served as vice president for Student Affairs and professor of Education.

In 1981, he joined the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) as its executive vice president and worked directly with Dr. Morris Keeton, CAEL founder and the man widely known as the father of prior learning assessment.

Thomas Edison was one of a handful of institutions that worked with Keeton and CAEL to develop the standards and methods that govern prior learning assessment programs today. CAEL was very familiar with Thomas Edison, so when the institution was searching for a new president following the resignation of Dr. Lorraine Matusak, they contacted Keeton, who recommended Pruitt for the job.

Eleanor Spiegel, a founding trustee of Thomas Edison and board chair at the time, said both she and the search committee were impressed with how enthusiastic Pruitt was about the school's unique model.



Dr. George A. Pruitt and former N.J. Gov. Thomas Kean following a 2016 New Jersey Future event where Pruitt was honored.

"We had to look at a couple of people and did a wide search, and here comes this young man and he absolutely blew everyone away," recalled Speigel, who eventually offered Pruitt the position. "He was so articulate, so charming and so knowledgeable, and he had such a commitment to the kind of education we had at Thomas Edison. I feel my greatest gift to the school was George Pruitt."

**"THE REASON I'VE BEEN HERE SO LONG IS BECAUSE I LEARN SOMETHING EVERY DAY. I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF WORKING WITH THE BEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT DID NOT EXIST. BECAUSE IT WAS SO NEW, WE HAD A CHANCE TO BUILD IT. EVERY DAY WAS DIFFERENT."**

Dr. George A. Pruitt

Pruitt said he was attracted to the institution's mission and its role as a pioneer.

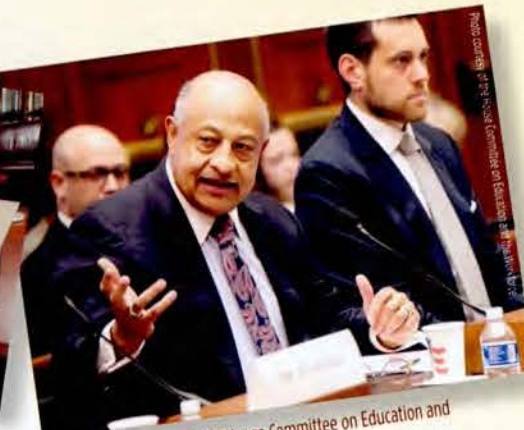
"At the time, there were only a handful of schools in the country that were solely focused on adults," he said. "The institution was only 10 years old when I got here. So, the ability to come to an establishment that was still trying to figure out what it was and build it was an incredible experience."

Pruitt's appointment became effective Dec. 1, 1982, and he quickly discovered that the higher education landscape in New Jersey was onerous.

"One of my first challenges was establishing the legitimacy of this institution, which was so radically different than anything else around," Pruitt explained. "The regulatory environment was horrible and the college was treated as an agency of state government, seen no differently than that of the Division of Motor Vehicles. So I set out to change that." Out of that



Inspecting a draft design of the first University diploma shortly after the school earned university status in 2015.



Testifying in 2017 before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in Washington, D.C.

work came a recommendation to change the environment of the college and give more authority to the institution's Board of Trustees. Pruitt committed himself to achieving statutory reform to free Thomas Edison to achieve its mission. Gov. Tom Kean signed the New Jersey state college autonomy statute into law on Pruitt's birthday, and he was given one of the governor's pens as a memento.

Working in tandem with Kean and his administration taught Pruitt lessons about compromise and being persistent in the face of adversity. He would eventually go on to forge this same kind of give and take relationship with the next eight New Jersey governors he'd work alongside.

"George was always someone I could bounce things off of, and he was dead honest with me, and that's extraordinarily helpful to a governor," said Kean. "Our programs that worked out well might not have been the same programs without George's advice and help."

Over the next few decades, Pruitt saw change in the institution each day, leading the charge and never wavering in times of uncertainty. During this time, he started evolving into a leader in higher education not only in New Jersey, but across the nation.

"My job every day was to understand and articulate this vision for the institution and then try to find these really talented people who were excited by it and figure out how to make them successful," said Pruitt. "But, you're constantly learning, really. It's the same with technology. When we started, no one had used it before so we had to create it. In doing so, we learned what works and what doesn't - then you have to shift gears. But for us, the learning

never stopped. We're still doing that today, and I hope it never stops."

Throughout the process, Pruitt gained insight that not only helped shape the institution, but also himself and others who he has helped guide and mentor.

"He has truly been an amazing, powerful leader in higher education," said Dr. Mildred Garcia, president of California State University, Fullerton. "He constantly ensures that you understand why you're a college president. It has nothing to do with titles. It's about the students and the institution you serve and that you are a true servant leader."

Pruitt is one of the longest-sitting college or university presidents in the country.

Under his leadership, Thomas Edison State University continued to be a pioneer and early adopter of online learning. It was one of the first schools in the country to offer online courses and degree programs, launching one of New Jersey's largest nursing programs and achieving university status.

Following a one-year sabbatical, Pruitt will serve as a distinguished fellow and help launch the University's Center for Leadership and Governance, where he will concentrate on public policy work focused on leadership, governance and quality assurance.

"The reason I've been here so long is because I learn something every day," Pruitt concluded. "I have had the privilege of working with the best people in the world to create something that did not exist. Because it was so new, we had a chance to build it. Every day was different."

He has an adult daughter, Shayla and grandson, Landon. He and his wife, Pamela, reside in Lawrenceville, New Jersey.



(from left) Brian T. Maloney, chair of the University's Board of Trustees, Dr. George A. Pruitt, and Trenton Mayor Eric Jackson, at the ribbon-cutting for Glen Cairn Hall in 2016. The building was recently renamed George A. Pruitt Hall.

## University Renames Newest Campus Building George A. Pruitt Hall

Thomas Edison State University has recently unveiled a portrait of University President George A. Pruitt and building signage designating Glen Cairn Hall as George A. Pruitt Hall.

"We believe this is a fitting tribute that recognizes Dr. Pruitt's leadership, vision and more than 30 years of tireless service to our University, our students and alumni, and the city of Trenton," said Brian Maloney, chair of the University Board of Trustees. "His leadership has been transformational and positions us to continue changing the lives of the students we serve."

Pruitt has maintained a fervent commitment to improving the University's campus in downtown Trenton through the restoration of several historic buildings. Under his leadership, the University has helped stimulate economic growth in the city and led many civic partnerships designed to improve the city's State House Historic District. The Glen Cairn project transformed one of Trenton's gateways.

Pruitt was active in the passage of the Building Our Future Bond Act, approved by voters in 2012. This initiative helped make it possible for the University to acquire the blighted Glen Cairn Arms apartment complex and erect the University's newest building in its place. It remains home to the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and the University's student advising center.

The new designation is now visible above the main entrance to the building facing West State Street. The president's portrait is located in the atrium of Pruitt Hall.



# THE FEW AND THE PROUD

## ❖ Lt. Talia Bastien, BA '13

Talia Bastien was only seven years old when the Sept. 11 attacks occurred, but she clearly recalls her reaction.

"I was very young when 9/11 happened, but I remember vividly wanting to do something about it," said Bastien, a 2013 BA degree in English alum. The event would later galvanize her decision to serve her country.

"For me, joining the military only meant joining the U.S. Marine Corps, and I wanted the challenge," she said. "I've always had a competitive nature but I really wanted to see if I had the mental and physical discipline required to be a Marine officer."

That youthful determination extended to academics. Homeschooled through the 12th grade, Bastien passed a series of College-Level Examination Program (CLEP®) exams – earning 21 credits in all – while still completing her high school course work. "Thomas Edison State is one of the few universities that accepted that amount of CLEP® credits," she said. "Conformist or not, I knew that getting a degree would open doors for me that would be otherwise closed. Plus, I was always a book nerd and figured English majors do a lot of reading. I later found out that what we actually do is write a lot of papers!"

Transferring her associate degree credits from Coastline Community College in her home state of California, Bastien completed all of her BA degree requirements at Thomas Edison prior to active duty. She said she enjoyed the flexibility of taking courses while being able to manage her schedule.

In addition to a bachelor's degree being mandatory for commissioning USMC officers, candidates like Bastien complete a 10 week Officer Candidate Course in Quantico, Va., before proceeding to The Basic School as a newly-commissioned officer. The rigorous training along the way is a crucible familiar to many male officers but far fewer women, who comprise only 7 percent of the USMC's active-duty population.



"I've never met a female Marine who would not jump at the opportunity to serve in whatever capacity was required," said Bastien, who would like to see more women consider military service. "Being a woman in a predominately male culture is not without its challenges. You have to assert yourself as an equal player and, from a physical standpoint, it can take a toll. I carried the same 120-pound assault pack as my 6'3", 200-plus pound male counterparts, but it is unquestionably rewarding. I've developed a presence and assertiveness among my peers that has given me confidence that I will take with me wherever I go."

Currently serving as a 1st lieutenant/G1 adjutant for Marine Corps Installations, National Capital Region – Marine Corps Base Quantico (MCINCR-MCBQ), Bastien coordinates administrative matters for various USMC staff sections and external agencies under the supervision of her base commander.

"All correspondence that comes through for the MCINCR-MCBQ commander's

signature is vetted through my office. We ensure that everything is formatted correctly and in compliance with Marine Corps orders and Department of Defense policies. We review and update various orders pertinent to MCINCR-MCBQ and oversee the Marines that stand duty 24/7/365 on the base," said Bastien, who often serves as both legal officer and a direct advisor to her commanding officer. Her collateral duties can include serving as a Unit Awards administrator, Installation Voting officer, Family Readiness officer, Casualty Assistance officer, Privacy Act coordinator, a Combined Federal Campaign representative and Government Travel Charge Cards administrator for her battalion.

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A STICKLER FOR GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION AND EARNING MY DEGREE CERTAINLY GAVE ME THE CRITICAL REASONING ABILITIES THAT ARE VITAL IN A COMPETITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT."

Lt. Talia Bastien

She asserts that her BA in English course work has made her a better adjutant. "I've always been a stickler for grammar and punctuation and earning my degree certainly gave me the critical reasoning abilities that are vital in a competitive work environment. At the conclusion of my active-duty military service, I'm hoping to work in a political press secretary capacity. Having an English/communications background will certainly support that goal."

Born and raised in Southern California, Bastien is the oldest of four children. "My hobbies include politics, reading, working out, music and culinary pursuits," said Bastien, who is now pursuing her master's degree in International Affairs and Public Policy from Liberty University in Virginia.



# TALIA BASTIEN, BA '13

"FOR ME, JOINING THE MILITARY ONLY MEANT JOINING THE U.S. MARINE CORPS AND I WANTED THE CHALLENGE. I'VE ALWAYS HAD A COMPETITIVE NATURE BUT I REALLY WANTED TO SEE IF I HAD THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE REQUIRED TO BE A MARINE OFFICER."

Lt. Talia Bastien



# MUNICIPAL

❖ **Linda Peyton, MSM '16** *Public Service Administration and Leadership*

Linda Peyton can trace the roots of her value system back to a familiar place.

"I'm a first-generation college graduate in a family raised by a single mother who planted in me the seed of hard work," said Peyton, a 2016 graduate of the University's Master of Science in Management (MSM) degree program.

That work ethic would figure prominently in her professional development.

Since attending a residential college after high school was not economically feasible, Peyton enrolled in courses while working full time. "As a working adult, I was able to accomplish the goal of completing my college education. The motivation for earning my degree went beyond self-gratification to center on my extended family and community and, later, to set an example for my children," said Peyton, who serves as city administrator for the city of Pleasantville, N.J. "The novelist Maya Angelou said '...Now that I know better, I do better.' As I apply the knowledge that I've received, it increases my performance, not only in my profession, but it enhances my life overall."

Earning a BA degree in business administration from Strayer University in 2009, Peyton enrolled in the MSM program at the John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies in 2011 and immediately found a valuable sounding board among fellow students. Her online public service administration and leadership courses offered ample opportunity for exchanges with others from different walks of life who shared the same sense of purpose.

"I loved meeting others from different backgrounds. And, my experience certainly dispels any myths regarding distance education. We were exposed to a new way of learning that not only aimed to increase our academic

my office in all meetings of the City Council," she said.

Peyton's role encompasses fiscal control, administration, review and evaluation of activities,

**"AS A WORKING ADULT, I WAS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THE GOAL OF COMPLETING MY COLLEGE EDUCATION. THE MOTIVATION FOR EARNING MY DEGREE WENT BEYOND SELF-GRATIFICATION TO CENTER ON MY EXTENDED FAMILY AND COMMUNITY; AND LATER, TO SET AN EXAMPLE FOR MY CHILDREN."**

Linda Peyton

pro prowess, but improved our time-management and critical-thinking skills," she said. "As a result of my online courses and discussion board interactions, I've become more resourceful and open-minded, understanding that there is more than one way of doing things. I listen in a different way now and am not afraid to ask questions or reach out to others who may be more informed. It was also encouraging to be among others with whom I shared a common purpose."

Time-management and critical-thinking skills are essential in Peyton's current position as city administrator. In this role, she serves as the chief executive and administrative officer under the administrative direction of the mayor and City Council who establish Pleasantville's policies for operations.

"I supervise the administration of the city's departments and prescribe rules and procedures for efficient and effective operations and represent

operations, programs and services for the municipality. This includes development and execution of the municipality's strategic plan and annual budgets. All the while, she ensures that city government operations and functions effectively serve the needs of residents and other stakeholders. As the chief administrative officer for the city, her human resource-related tasks include establishing policies and personnel practices surrounding employee grievances, HR management, labor negotiations, labor relations and contract negotiations as well as conducting performance evaluations for 10 departments encompassing 15 supervisors and 230 employees.

With most municipalities forced to do more with less, her position demands long days, resourcefulness and heavy strategizing. Peyton urges those following a similar career path to seek out a mentor early on.

# LEADER

**"AS A RESULT OF MY ONLINE COURSES AND DISCUSSION BOARD INTERACTIONS, I'VE BECOME MORE RESOURCEFUL AND OPEN MINDED, UNDERSTANDING THAT THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY OF DOING THINGS."**

Linda Peyton

"Don't hesitate to pick the brains of professors, instructors, mentors or colleagues who are familiar with your interest," she said. "Networking is the key in connecting the dots from interdisciplinary work to application. Personally, one of the reasons I chose Thomas Edison's John S. Watson School was because of its affiliation with the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association. As the business administrator for an urban city, I was afforded the opportunity to network with others in my field while gaining insight into various policy initiatives that are relative to the city and state."

Peyton lives in Pleasantville with her husband of 18 years, Ulysses, and their two sons, William and Lyndon. She is a member of New Shiloh Baptist Church and Community Life Center in Atlantic City. As an advocate for empowering young females, she has served the church as a former women's ministry director. She is a former coordinator of Pleasantville Municipal Alliance, a coalition of local organizations with a mission of preventing drug and alcohol abuse. She is also a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) worker on behalf of abused and neglected children and president of the Ralph Peterson Sr. Education Foundation. She serves as a board member for 21st Century Learning Center's STEM program; Pleasantville Envisions Pride and Prosperity committee; and the John Brooks Recovery Center.





## ❖ Eveline Brownstein BA '13, MSHRM '15

Eveline Brownstein was nominated by the New Jersey Libertarian Party at its conference in January to represent the party as its candidate for 13th Assembly District in the November 2017 New Jersey, statewide election. Brownstein has also earned her Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) and Society of Human Resources – Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP) credentials, working in the private sector. She has co-founded an internet startup company, Kestee Corporation, which currently builds websites and is on the verge of launching its first game app. As a co-founder, Brownstein is involved in all aspects of the day-to-day operations of the business as well as contributing to the creative endeavors of the company. She volunteers with the Jersey Shore Chapter of SHRM to teach modules of the SHRM certification to other human resources professionals seeking to earn SHRM professional credentials.



## ❖ James Brudnicki BA '16

James Brudnicki was named Rowan College at Burlington County's (RCBC) new culinary arts director, overseeing the culinary arts and pastry arts programs, part of RCBC's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) division, at the college's state-of-the-art Culinary Arts Center in Mount Holly, N.J.



## ❖ Brian Cole AAS '02

Brian Cole graduated from Indiana University Southeast, in New Albany, Ind., with a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education (Social Studies) degree and a Bachelor in Applied Science degree with minors in geography and geoscience on May 8.



## ❖ Hannah Edstrom BA '17

Hannah Edstrom was accepted into a Master of Science degree program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, to study ocean sciences.

## ❖ Ray Filasky BSBA '04

Ray Filasky released his third book, *The Bliss of Ignorance*. This is the first book in the *New Haven Trilogy*. Filasky is retired from a career that encompassed self-employment, direct-sales experience and more than 25 years of various levels of managerial positions. His books are available through *Amazon* and *Barnes & Noble*.

## ❖ Oscar Gutierrez BA '12

Oscar Gutierrez was hired by The Mind Trust as its senior director of facility strategy and financing. He previously served as the city of Fishers' (Ind.) first controller.



## ❖ Andy Jean BSAST '17

### ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

Andy Jean was accepted into the Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering degree program of Stony Brook University, The State University of New York.

## ❖ Colleen Layman BSAST '99

Colleen Layman received the Prism Award from The Society of Women Engineers (SWE), which recognizes an individual who has chartered her own path in the STEM fields by demonstrating a variety of outstanding career leadership activities in a technical field as well as leadership in professional organizations and the community.



## ❖ Luis LaRotta BSAST '06

Luis LaRotta was elected chairman of the Houston Bay Area Republican Liberty Caucus.

## ❖ Trace Livengood BSBA '17

### ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

Trace Livengood has enrolled as a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree candidate at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas. Throughout her degree pursuits, Livengood credits the self-discipline and self-direction instilled within her early on during her time at Thomas Edison State University as giving her a strategic approach to surmount her new goal.

## ❖ Jason Manion

### ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

BSBA '10

Jason Manion graduated with honors as part of Harvard Law School's bicentennial Class of 2017. Immediately following graduation, Manion spent the summer working in the Office of the Legal Counsel at the United States Supreme Court while studying for the Ohio bar exam. He has recently begun a one-year judicial clerkship with Judge Alice M. Batchelder of the United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit.



## ❖ William Morán-Berberena BA '17

William Morán-Berberena was accepted into the Master of Social Work degree program at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.



## ❖ Gina Pierson BSAST '16

### ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

Gina Pierson will be returning to the University this year to pursue the Master of Science in Information Technology degree with a specialization in information assurance.

## ❖ Courtenay Reece BA '11

Courtenay Reece was named library director for Millville Public Library in Millville, N.J. Prior to her appointment, Reece served as the library director at Bridgeton Public Library in Bridgeton, N.J.

## ❖ LaJuana Ruffin BA '02

LaJuana Ruffin graduated from Cambridge College in Cambridge, Mass., in July with a Master of Arts degree in mental health counseling with dual concentrations in substances abuse and personal trauma.

## ❖ Amanda Weigle BA '16

Amanda Weigle, a senior airman and mission intelligence operations specialist with the Air National Guard's 111th Operations Support Squadron, was presented with the Pennsylvania Veterans of Foreign Wars Eagle Award at the Pennsylvania VFW state convention in June.



### ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

To learn more about the Alumni Ambassador program at Thomas Edison State University, please visit [www.tesu.edu/ambassador](http://www.tesu.edu/ambassador)

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

Alumni Facebook Group: [www.tesu.edu/FacebookGroup](http://www.tesu.edu/FacebookGroup)

Student and Alumni LinkedIn Group: [www.tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup](http://www.tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup)

## Keep us posted!

Submit your news online at:  
[www.tesu.edu/classnotes](http://www.tesu.edu/classnotes)

Updates can also be sent to:

THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY  
INVENTION EDITOR  
111 W. STATE ST.  
TRENTON, NJ 08608

or [Invention@tesu.edu](mailto:Invention@tesu.edu)







111 W. State St.  
Trenton, NJ 08608

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
TRENTON, NJ  
PERMIT #112

Thomas Edison State University  
Thanks for allowing me to reach  
my career goal in a flexible  
and timely manner.

♥  
Congratulation everyone  
And thank you Donors!

You made my  
dreams come  
true  
#GOAL ACHIEVED.

Thank you TESU  
Because of you I  
was able to complete  
my BSBA  
Thank you!!

I couldn't have  
done it without  
TESU!

TESU  
Gave me the opportunity  
to see that Delayed does  
not mean Denied. I am  
GREAT!!

TESU provided a  
Flexible, rewarding way  
to complete my Educational  
goals ▽ Thanks TESU!  
#TESUGrad

**WE ♥ TESU**

...in the words of  
our new graduates

Thank you for All Your Help!  
You supported my Dream!

TESU is the best  
School in the Nation!!  
Thank you so much  
for providing to me a  
such as prestigious  
house of gaining  
and earning my  
Masters Degree!!!

Thank you for the  
opportunity to complete my  
goal of a BSN online so I can  
advance my education, pursue other  
opportunities and advocate the profession.