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WKU to honor Shadowen among Hall of Distinguished Alumni inductees

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Aug 25, 2021



Hall of Distinguished Alumni inductees are Howard Bailey (from left), Michelle James and Dr. Rebecca Shadowen.
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Western Kentucky University's Alumni Association announced Wednesday its 2021 class of Hall of Distinguished Alumni inductees. Among them is the late Dr. Rebecca Shadowen – who died from COVID-19 in 2020 and continued to advocate for public health even throughout her battle with the disease.

“What she was doing before most of us even realized a global pandemic was on the horizon is really notable,” Ginny Hensley, director of alumni engagement at WKU, told the Daily News.



Shadowen joins Howard Bailey, the retired WKU vice president for student affairs, and Michelle June James, a marketing professional with a leadership role at Instagram, in rounding out this year's Hall of Distinguished Alumni inductees.



WKU is preparing to honor the 30th class of noted alumni during a luncheon Oct. 29 at WKU's Augenstein Alumni Center, though Hensley said specific plans are still in the works. The university's Hall of Distinguished Alumni is presented by Franklin Bank and Trust.

Last year's Hall of Distinguished Alumni luncheon was one of the few Homecoming events the university was able to hold, Hensley noted. Much of WKU's Homecoming last year was held virtually, and the date itself had to be moved up by several weeks after football opponent Old Dominion called off all fall sports, leaving WKU without a home game for its Oct. 31 celebration.



At the moment, plans are still in flux for this year's Homecoming celebrations and for the Hall of Distinguished Alumni in particular, Hensley said. Still, organizers are planning to hold the event on campus at the Augenstein Alumni Center after moving it off campus to the Sloan Convention Center last year. Hensley said the university will also live-stream this year's Hall of Distinguished Alumni, as it did last year, and follow any necessary public health guidelines.

When tickets go on sale in the coming weeks, they will be made available to the first 250 people who purchase them, Hensley said.

This year’s inductees represent three distinct fields, and “three very worthy candidates that we look forward to honoring,” Hensley said.

Currently, the university is accepting nominations for the 2022 Hall of Distinguished Alumni, which are due by Dec. 1 and may be submitted at the Alumni Association’s website, alumni.wku.edu.

The following information about each inductee comes from a news release issued by the alumni association.

Howard Bailey

The retired WKU vice president for student affairs has spent his life opening doors of opportunity and blazing a trail for civil rights and race relations in higher education. Except for a one-year stint at North Carolina State University, his entire career was dedicated to shaping lives at WKU.

Bailey came to WKU as a student in 1966 from Middlesboro in southeastern Kentucky. Though he was a third-generation college student, he was the first person in his family to attend a predominantly White university. As an undergraduate student, Bailey was a founding member of Kappa Alpha Psi, the first Black fraternity at WKU. He was also the first Black male residence hall assistant. Still an undergraduate student, Bailey began his WKU career as a full-time assistant hall director at Barnes Campbell Hall in 1970. He received his bachelor of arts degree in 1971 and completed a master of arts degree in 1973.



Over the next four decades, he served in roles that included assistant dean of student affairs, dean of student life, associate vice president and then vice president of student affairs, a position he held for nearly eight years until his retirement in 2015.

Michelle June James

James is a transformational marketing leader with a proven track record of injecting energy into organizations and leading innovative campaigns that increase brand visibility, drive revenue and deepen audience engagement.

Currently, James is at Facebook in New York as head of culture and community marketing for Instagram. In this role, she leads the development and execution of Instagram’s global cultural strategy and identifies key moments to activate the Instagram brand in partnership with internal creative teams, communications, outside agencies and cross-functional partners. After

earning a bachelor's in broadcasting and psychology at WKU, James completed a master of science in print and digital media at New York University. She also completed the Cable Executive Management Program at Harvard Business School and is an alumna of the Betsy Magness Leadership Institute.

Prior to joining Facebook, James directed the management and development of consumer marketing strategies, media partnerships and live events for shows such as "T-Pain's School of Business," "The Read with Kid Fury and Crissle West" and the ALMA Awards for Fuse Media.

Dr. Rebecca Shadowen

Shadowen was a nationally recognized infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist at Med Center Health in Bowling Green and a leader with the Bowling Green-Warren County Coronavirus Workgroup. An early advocate of wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Shadowen tested positive for the virus in May 2020. Though she continued to work, answer calls and emails and attend workgroup meetings from her hospital bed throughout her illness, she passed away in September 2020 after a four-month battle with the disease.

Born in Louisville and raised in Bullitt County, Shadowen came to WKU as a student in 1976. After graduation, she attended the University of Louisville School of Medicine. She completed Internal Medicine training as a resident at the University of Missouri at Kansas City and specialized in Infectious Disease at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, S.C. In 1989, Shadowen returned to Bowling Green to begin her practice.

The first person to bring expertise of infectious diseases to southcentral Kentucky, she was on the hospital staff for 31 years and specialized early in her career in treating people with HIV/AIDS and Lyme disease. She also assisted people who wished to go on mission trips to foreign countries by helping them identify and receive vaccines and medications they might need while there. At the time of her infection, she was running treatment trials for COVID-19 and had helped establish and direct the COVID-19 Unit at Med Center Health.

Throughout her career, Shadowen cared for patients with infectious diseases in the hospital and in her office. She also enjoyed teaching medical students and residents at Med Center Health, including helping some with research projects. She did work with new investigational drugs, completed clinical publications and held teaching affiliations with three universities. In addition, she was elected to fellowship with both the American College of Physicians and the Society of Hospital Epidemiologists of America.

In 2011, she was named Outstanding Woman of Achievement in Health and Science by the Bowling Green-Warren County Human Rights Commission. Shadowen is survived by her husband, Dr. David Shadowen, who she met as a student at WKU, as well as her children, Jesse

and Kathryn.

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