



I AM SAVANNAH BOLD

FROM SAVANNAH TO NATIONAL CHAMPS

There's nothing you can't do. Savannah State's Tiger cheerleaders are history makers. As the country's first Black squad to win the CHEERSPORT National Championship, they're solid proof of the power of a beat-the-odds spirit. Coach Tim Grant knew that his team had it in them all along.

"With every practice, I want my cheerleaders to come away with the mindset, the attitude, that they can accomplish anything. No matter where they come from, their experience, or what anyone feels or says to them, they can accomplish anything if they put the work in."



"I tell my squad, 'We have the same drive, heart, and determination as the big schools. So you can accomplish anything they can.'" – Coach Tim Grant

What did it take to get to the national stage? Practice, practice, practice. And loads of perseverance. Because, on top of rigorous rehearsals, these athletes take 18 credits as history, forensic science, behavior analysis, performing arts, and business majors. Work part-time jobs. And join other SSU clubs and organizations. Some even help support their families.

Says Coach Grant, "What these students do is so difficult. They have all this responsibility resting on their shoulders, but they keep believing in themselves."

Even when injuries and obstacles sank morale just two days before competition, the squad never stopped working and pushing and fighting. Instead, when they performed in Atlanta, they left it all – their worries, their fears, their doubts – off the floor. Stunting, tumbling, jumping, tossing, and dancing their way into the title.



Savannah's cheer squad has no height or weight requirements. So you can prove yourself no matter what.

Months later, Coach Grant is still getting calls and emails from kids in California, Ohio, Michigan, Florida, New Jersey, and New York. Inspired by the historic win, they all want to cheer for Savannah State. But despite the confidence boost, this is by no means the finish line. Coach Grant has his eyes on a bigger prize: Take home the NCA College National title with his Tigers. To get there will take even more work, dedication, and time. And the whole squad is ready for it. **Seriously Impressive**



I AM SAVANNAH BOLD

FROM SAVANNAH TO CENTER STAGE

“Take risks, make mistakes, and have an epiphany or two.” That’s the mantra Savannah State theatre instructor David I. L. Poole lives by. With his never-say-can’t personality, he’s mastered puppetry, opened his own theatre at 16, and helped found a repertory theatre company in Savannah called The Collective Face Theatre Ensemble.

In other words, he doesn’t let anything stop him. So when his company’s performance space closed down, Poole pitched a partnership: Collective Face plus SSU’s theatre troupe, Players by the Sea (PBTS).

As the artistic director for Collective Face and an advisor for PBTS, Poole had already been enlisting students as interns in the Ensemble. They’d build sets, create costumes, and work to get a leg up in the theatre community. This new win-win idea added a whole new level of opportunity. Collective Face would have a home and PBTS would get more community exposure and hands-on experience. The plan received a resounding thumbs-up.



“SSU students have so much spunk. Willingness. Talent. I love helping them hone their skills, watching them grow and transform into better performers.” – David I. L. Poole

Now, Poole is cultivating a collaborative laboratory environment for his students and Ensemble members. For their first show, *9 to 5: The Musical*, five students snagged roles alongside professional actors. And lots more worked behind the scenes. One Tiger was even invited to join Collective Face.

Poole sees this relationship as a step in the right direction for both SSU and Savannah’s growing arts scene. “Savannah is such a diverse city that it’s so important to show that diversity on stage. Partnering with an HBCU gives us so many ways to make it happen.”

His ultimate vision: For the University and Collective Face to grow into a powerhouse, must-see destination. He’s not totally sure how to make it happen yet, but that’s a risk he’s willing to take. **Seriously Impressive**



David I. L. Poole has been voted the city of Savannah’s Best Director three years running: 2014, 2015, and 2016.



I AM SAVANNAH PROUD

FROM SAVANNAH TO LIVING HISTORY

Be proud of where you come from. Dr. Amir Jamal Touré is passionate about the past. He hops on desks. Dons face paint and a rainbow of African attire. He rattles off dates in rapid fire, relaying even the smallest events, relationships, and trials and triumphs that have made Savannah, Georgia, and the country what it is today. He keeps history alive – in and out of the classroom.

“I tell my students, ‘Each one of us has a divine purpose. You’re not here by happenstance or by accident. Each one of you is great. Others helped you along that path to greatness, so you have to reach back to bring other people along.’”



In Savannah’s Franklin Square? Look up! Dr. Touré was the model for the Haitian Monument’s historian figure.

As an expert in African and Gullah/Geechee history and culture, the Savannah-area native considers himself the city’s djeli, or historian. He’s the founder of Day Clean Journeys, an African-American history tour company that runs throughout coastal Georgia and South Carolina, and the resident scholar at Geechee Kunda, a history museum and cultural center in Riceboro, Georgia, that chronicles Gullah/Geechee life.

“Folks come from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin and South America, and Iceland – from all around the world. No matter where you come from, I’m going to find a way to connect you to history and culture.”

Those connections are powerful. Because, as Dr. Touré says, when people understand their history, they have the kind of strong foundation and sense of self to take control of their own stories.

That idea has driven SSU to produce Savannah’s annual Black Heritage Festival since 2000. During February, thousands of people come together to celebrate Black history and culture through experiences like art exhibits, jazz concerts, history walks, cultural lectures, African dance ensembles, and craft and culinary classes.

The Festival is a way to connect to the past. Because history is so much more than what once was. For Dr. Touré, it’s the pride in knowing where we come from that shapes knowing where we’ll go. Or as he puts it: “History is living, and it is vibrant, and it is tangible for people.” **Seriously Impressive**



I AM SAVANNAH PROUD

FROM SAVANNAH TO PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

Put people first. Alexis Tuggle '18 was made to help people. That's why, every day, the social work major gives her all to others.

Alexis is always one of the first people to raise her hand. To sign up. To say, "I'll do it!" Whether it's to build houses with Habitat for Humanity. Counsel kids at The Boys and Girls Club. Mentor girls with Mission Evolve, Inc. Work with homeless veterans through Stand Down. Serve with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Or clean up the campus and the community. She's there, rolling up her sleeves for Savannah.



"Social work is my calling. Helping people – that feels right. That's why SSU is right where I'm supposed to be."

– Alexis Tuggle '18

The way she sees it, volunteering is about more than logging hours. It's about awakening a whole new worldview right here in Savannah. "Some people think of service as helping others around the world. But there are people right down the street who need help, too."

So when the opportunity to work one-on-one with a professional social worker at a Thunderbolt nursing home came up, Alexis jumped at it. She engaged with residents who didn't get a lot of visitors – playing bingo, creating artwork, and breaking down personal barriers. "I'd never worked with older populations before. But now it's my main focus. I love working with the elderly."

And while Alexis is making moves in Savannah, SSU social work students are also traveling across the Atlantic to places like Liberia, Ghana, and Trinidad and Tobago. That's where they get to explore social issues, reach out and serve communities, and even brainstorm ideas to start social work programs at universities in Liberia.

As for Alexis: Her service won't stop here. She wants to continue improving the lives of others by earning a master's degree in public administration and opening up a group home for girls who need mentorship. Because that's what it means to be a person for the people. **Seriously Impressive**



I AM SAVANNAH PROUD

FROM SAVANNAH TO WHITE HOUSE ALL-STAR

Take action. When Shelton Bowens '16 started at Savannah State, he never imagined that his new University would give him the chance to share a phone call with President Barack Obama. Back then, he only had one plan: Get involved.

So he became a member of NAACP, secretary of the Pre-Alumni Council, and Student Government Association public relations officer. He was a Collegiate 100 participant, student orientation leader, and attended the Thurgood Marshall Leadership Institute. And thanks to his involvement, Shelton was named a White House HBCU All-Star.



The HBCU All-Stars is a program of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities which aims to strengthen HBCUs and their students via education and career programs. As an All-Star, Shelton was recognized for his leadership, academics, and involvement at SSU. He teamed up with other HBCU students to promote scholarships and internships on behalf of the Initiative. And helped create campus-wide projects, like gun violence prevention campaigns and LGBT safe spaces.

Through the All-Star program, Shelton received incredible opportunities: networking with university presidents, vice presidents, and deans; attending a speech by Vice President Joe Biden; and tuning into President Obama's conference call on student healthcare.



“Come with a plan of action. Come with goals. Tell yourself, ‘I am coming to SSU to accomplish something.’”

– Shelton Bowens '16

And while not every SSU student gets to hang out on the phone with a U.S. president, they do get millions of eye-opening experiences. Students compete in places like Belgium and Rome for Model UN. Plant trees with the Environmental Science Club. And join W.O.R.D. Inc. to promote the arts on and off campus. You'll find SSU Tigers staging plays, reciting poetry, racing concrete canoes, cleaning beaches, mentoring inner city youth, and sending supplies to Liberia. Even better—SSU gives them the space and resources to do it all themselves, to create the experiences they want.

That freedom to take initiative gave Shelton the professional know-how to go for a dream he's had since he was nine: Become a pediatric physician at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's Egleston hospital. “Savannah State opens doors to limitless possibilities.” **Seriously Impressive**