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## **PARA ANNOUNCES GRAND MARSHALS OF THE 46th ANNUAL WEST ALABAMA CHRISTMAS PARADE**

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. –Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority (PARA), announces the selection of four individuals to serve as Grand Marshals of the 46th Annual West Alabama Christmas Parade. The Parade is the largest of its kind in the state of Alabama and is scheduled for Monday, December 5, in downtown Tuscaloosa.

Criteria for Grand Marshal(s) nominations is as follows:

- Significant community contributions
- Lifetime achievements with a lasting community impact
- Career accomplishments

A Grand Marshal Selection Committee comprised of community leaders reviewed all nominations and is pleased to name the following individuals who have agreed to serve as Grand Marshals for 2022 parade.

“The Grand Marshals selected for the 2022 West Alabama Christmas Parade are Lyda Black, Clell Hobson, Sr., Gary Minor, and Dr. Samory Pruitt,” said Becky Booker, parade chairperson. “While each is set apart by their own unique path, all four are a testament to the strength of service to the community, and their impact in education and recreation across Tuscaloosa County is undeniable,” she said.

### **Lyda Black**

Lyda is a retired Associate Dean of Shelton State Community College. She is an accomplished educator and award-winning teacher, including being a recipient of the Alabama College System’s Chancellor’s Award for Excellence six times throughout her career. She was the recipient of the John Todd Award for Exceptional Achievement in Teaching and was part of the team that developed and designed the current campus. Black has served on the Alabama Post-Secondary Curriculum Committee and is a member of the Post-Secondary Advisory Council. She is a charter member of the Shelton State Foundation.

Black has touched the lives of a multitude of students in her professional career and has kept in touch with many over the years as their careers blossomed. She is a

well-known editing expert among several book publishers for her proofreading and formatting skills in reviewing eBooks and textbooks.

She has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards including the 2018 Pillars of West Alabama presented by the Community Foundation of West Alabama, Career Accomplishments Award presented by the West Alabama Tombigbee Girl Scout Council, Women Helping Women Award presented by the Tuscaloosa Soroptimist International, Named Gift Recipient presented by AAUW, Northport's Citizen of the Year presented by the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, and Tuscaloosa's Distinguished Young Woman.

Black is involved in numerous civic and community organizations and actively participates in each group where she holds membership. She currently serves on the Board of Directors and Steering Committee for the Kentucky Art Center and Festival, is a Commissioner for the Northport Housing Authority, Board Chairperson of the Tuscaloosa County Department of Human Resources, West Alabama Regional Commission RLF Committee Board of Directors, Board of Directors for Friends of Historic Northport, and served as Secretary for the Tuscaloosa County Bicentennial Commission, Inc. She was appointed by the Northport City Council to the Northport Zoning Board of Adjustments serving six terms and has served on the Board of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama.

### **Clell Hobson, Sr.**

In a city known for legendary champions, Clell Hobson at 91 is the oldest living former quarterback for the University of Alabama's Crimson Tide football team. Born in Tuscaloosa, he attended local schools and then entered the University of Alabama on both football and baseball scholarships. During the Crimson Tide's second appearance in the Orange Bowl in 1953, he led the team to an impressive victory over Syracuse University. The final score of 61-6 set an NCAA record for largest margin of victory in a bowl game, which stood until 2008. The 55-points still stands as the largest margin of victory for an Alabama football team in a bowl game.

After college, Hobson pursued a professional baseball career. He then returned to the Tuscaloosa area where he was both a teacher and a highly successful football coach in Bibb County, Pickens County and Bessemer High Schools. He later served as principal for Davis-Emerson Middle School and served on the Tuscaloosa City Council for one term during 1997-2001. He is well known for his kindness and sense of humor.

### **Gary Minor**

Birmingham native Gary Minor is an avid outdoorsman whose majority of life's work has been devoted to creating recreational opportunities for all ages.

He worked at the University of Alabama as head golf professional and Shelton State Community College as head golf coach but is likely best known in the community

for his work through PARA. His employment with PARA started as Program Coordinator and he worked his way through the ranks to Recreation Manager and Superintendent of Recreation prior to being named to the top position.

Minor was named Executive Director in 2011, the third of only three executive directors since the organization's creation in 1969, and one month prior to the tornado that devastated our community. He hit the ground running with tornado relief and his leadership assured that all available PARA resources, including staff, equipment, and properties worked smoothly toward relief efforts while the Belk Center operated as largest and longest operating temporary storm shelter in the state.

He led the agency to earn the prestigious Alabama Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) "Agency of the Year" award in 2015 and 2020, which is limited to once every five years. PARA is the only agency in the state to be awarded the honor back-to-back. He currently serves on the board of directors for the Tuscaloosa County Economic Development Authority, Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports, and the University of Alabama Recreation Committee.

As executive director, he oversaw construction of four activity centers, the McDonald Hughes Community Safe Room, and multiple playgrounds. In line with his passion for the outdoors, he helped develop public access for Hurricane Creek Park and designed Van de Graaff Arboretum and Historic Bridge Park as a nature park. Both parks provide easy access to nature near urban areas.

Minor will officially retire from the organization on December 31, having realized tremendous growth in the organization's properties and attendance, including offerings for youth sports to revitalizing PARA4life, PARA's brand for active senior programming, and more.

### **Dr. Samory T. Pruitt**

Dr. Samory T. Pruitt has served as Vice President for Community Affairs since the Division's creation in 2004. In this post, he is responsible for developing and managing the University's public outreach programs and providing campus leadership to enhance the quality of life both within and beyond the campus community.

Since 1986 he has worked for the University in increasingly responsible positions in management and administration, including roles in the divisions of Financial Affairs and University Advancement, as well as in the President's Office, prior to being named to his current position.

Dr. Pruitt is actively involved in the West Alabama area, where he has served on the Board of Directors for The First Tee of Tuscaloosa; the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce; the Tuscaloosa Library Board; Big Brothers, Big Sisters; the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama Education Policy Council; the Board of Directors of the Literacy Council of West Alabama; the Black Belt Community Foundation Board; the Board of Directors of Success by Six; the Paul R. Jones Art

Collection Advisory Board and the Board of Directors of Youth Emergency Services. He is the founding sponsor of the 100 Black Men of Tuscaloosa chapter.

He is a member of the Tuscaloosa International Rotary Club, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and is a 1995 graduate of Leadership Tuscaloosa. He chairs the Martin Luther King Jr. Realizing the Dream Initiative committee and serves on the leadership team of the annual UA United Way Campaign.

In 2008, he was appointed by the governor of Alabama to serve as Education Chair for the West Alabama Regional Action Commission, which covers six Alabama counties. In 2002 the University presented him with the Award for Outstanding Commitment to Public Service.

In 2016, he received the E. Roger Sayers Distinguished Service Award — given to a faculty or staff member who has gone above and beyond their normal duties and performed in an exceptional manner in order to further the mission of UA.

Dr. Pruitt serves as Immediate Past President of the Board of Directors of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC), consisting of institutions located in the United States, Canada, and Nigeria, and in fall 2019 was named to the Commission on Economic and Community Engagement Executive Committee of the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities (APLU). He currently serves on the Stillman College Board of Trustees and on the Board of the Academy of Community-Engaged Scholars (ACES). Additionally, he is the publisher of the international Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship.

The 2022 parade theme is "A Retro Christmas." For a complete listing of Grand Marshals since 1968, sponsorship, parade entry registration, or a parade route map, please visit <https://www.tcpara.org/west-alabama-christmas-parade> or @TuscaloosaPARA in social media.

PARA invites the community to kick off of the holiday season with flair by attending the 46th Annual West Alabama Christmas Parade on Monday, December 5. The Tree Lighting on the steps of the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse begins at 5:15 p.m. and the Parade begins at 6:30 p.m. in downtown Tuscaloosa.

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