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Complimentary

Nashville newspaper names Chattanooga Darrell Freeman 'Man of the Year'

By Rosetta Miller Perry



Darrell Freeman was named 'Man of the Year' by the Tennessee Tribune.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Tennessee Tribune has always celebrated and championed people of courage, those willing to speak truth to power, no matter the situation or individuals involved. That's why we've selected entrepreneur Darrell Freeman our Man of the Year for 2021. Freeman dared to expose hypocrisy and challenge powerful people to do more than pay lip service to issues of diversity and inclusion. He did that during an address at Middle Tennessee State University's Dec. 8 board of trustees meeting.

The board has supposedly been studying and debating for several months MTSU's poor record in terms of retaining and graduating students who are Black, low income and/or the first generation in their family to attend college. Freeman, who built a highly successful, extremely profitable technology company Zycron Inc. before selling it for a huge profit, isn't one of these people who doesn't put his money where his mouth is. He's paying for 50 students to attend a key program at MTSU.

During the speech where he made this announcement Freeman also accused university leaders of "turning a blind eye" to racism at the institution. "Serving this board as the only African-American is difficult," he said. "I realized that some of you, you don't care about people of color or poor white people. I'm not saying that you're racist, but I am saying that you don't mind turning a blind eye to the racism that exists on this campus. Racism is present in this board room, and on this campus. I felt it 30 years ago when I was a student. Today I feel it as a businessman and a trustee. I'm going to use my name, my reputation and my resources to fight it and expose it."

He also called on MTSU President Sidney McPhee to "quit downplaying and being a smoke-screen for the racism that's here." President McPhee's response was the typical one people in power, and sadly in too many instances Black people supposedly in charge, gave. He claimed Freeman's comments were "inaccurate and misleading."

"I don't want to give the impression that we're perfect and reached the mountaintop. We know there's more to be done," McPhee told the Nashville Business Journal. "I just want to dispel this narrative that nothing is happening, that the university is not committed, the board is not committed — and me personally, as an African-American president, that I am not committed or supportive of initiatives in this area. The evidence will show a different picture altogether."

Of course, McPhee didn't cite that evidence. All he issued were meaningless platitudes rather than direct responses to the charges that Freeman made. Freeman also called out MTSU board chair Stephen B. Smith, saying he was trying to use parliamentary procedures "to silence me when I have been speaking up for African-Americans and people of color." Smith, who also chairs his family's Brentwood-based

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'American Idol' winner Ruben Studdard to teach at UTC in Spring 2022



Contributed Photo: "American Idol" winner Ruben Studdard sang the National Anthem before the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Mocs football team's Oct. 16 game.

By Camm Ashford

An Oct. 16 Chattanooga Mocs football game visit has led to exciting news for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Department of Performing Arts. The department's Music Division last week announced that Ruben Studdard, winner of the second season of "American Idol" and a Grammy Award-nominated recording artist, will lead a series of master classes on campus during the spring 2022 semester.

"This is an opportunity to share all the wisdom that I've gained with young people and I'm so looking forward to it," Studdard said. "I understand the importance of 'See it, be it,' and there are a lot of young people that want to be involved in the music industry that are music majors or theater majors or just in the arts, in general, and they really don't know what that looks like in a real way."

Studdard's road to UTC began when, at the behest of longtime friend Stacy Lightfoot, UTC vice chancellor for diversity and engagement, he sang the National Anthem at Finley Stadium prior to the Oct. 16 football game between the Mocs and the East Tennessee State University Buccaneers.

The son of two educators—his mother, Emily, still teaches in the Birmingham public school system while his father, Kevin, is a former auto body collision technology teacher—Studdard received a bachelor's degree in vocal studies from Alabama A&M University in 2000.

"When I was in school, I just wanted information," Studdard recalled, "and I loved my music history class. That was one of my favorite classes, not because I thought I would learn from Bach's experience, but I just wanted to know about it. There may be kids that have that same desire to know for the sake of knowing. I'm sure these guys will be sponges. They'll be looking for information that will help guide them if the music industry is something that they want to do."

As part of Studdard's new assignment, he will work with the UTC Singing Mocs, a group specializing in contemporary singing styles, including pop, a cappella and vocal jazz. A singer of rhythm and blues, pop and gospel, Studdard rose to stardom during the second season of "American Idol" in 2003, earning the nickname "Velvet Teddy Bear" from R&B legend Gladys Knight. Studdard defeated Clay Aiken in the televised competition's season finale.

Studdard has seven studio albums to his credit. The Recording Industry Association of America awarded him platinum status—more than 1 million sold—for his debut album, "Soulful." His follow-up record, "I Need an Angel," was the best-selling gospel album in the U.S. and was certified gold—more than 500,000 sold.

He received a Grammy Award nomination in December 2003 for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance for the song "Superstar," and his songs have appeared in the Top 10 singles charts in five different categories: Hot 100, R&B/Hip Hop, Adult R&B, Urban Contemporary and Gospel. Studdard also has appeared in several television shows as a guest star. His theater credits include starring as Fats Waller in a national tour revival of the musical "Ain't Misbehavin'," which received a Grammy nomination for Best Musical Theater Album, and touring alongside actress Robin Givens in the play "I Need a Hug."

After winning "American Idol," he created an advocacy program, the Ruben Studdard Foundation for the Advancement of Children in the Music Arts, to promote music education for students in his hometown of Birmingham, Ala. He has run summer music camps for middle school and high school students since 2003.

Dr. Sonia Stewart named deputy superintendent for Hamilton County Schools

CNC Staff Reports



Dr. Sonia Stewart, deputy superintendent for Hamilton County Schools.

Newly selected superintendent, Dr. Justin Robertson, last week named Midtown Learning Community superintendent, Dr. Sonia Stewart, deputy superintendent for Hamilton County Schools (HCS).

This appointment ensures the district continues on a pathway of success and student learning through the current period of transition.

"Dr. Stewart brings a wealth of experience in developing leaders and improving learning opportunities for all students," said Dr. Robertson. "I am excited to serve alongside her, as she plays an instrumental role in the work of continuing to implement our Future Ready 2023 plan."

Dr. Stewart currently serves as community

superintendent for the MidTown Learning Community. During her time in HCS, she designed and implemented a robust and focused turnaround plan, leading to improved state percentile rates in all MidTown schools.

Dr. Stewart has also been an integral part of the district's talent selection, development and compensation efforts.

Additionally, Stewart utilized her knowledge and success in community schools work to collaboratively design Community Forward, HCS' Community Schools effort in partnership with the city of Chattanooga.

"I am excited to continue the transformational work happening in HCS," said Dr. Stewart. "We have built a foundation of excellence on which we can build on our commitment to ensuring that all children thrive and experience a future without limits."

For more than two decades, Dr. Stewart's commitment to young people and the desire to spend her life invested in improved learning outcomes for students has directed her into ar-

reas of education and community revitalization. A career educator, she has served as a teacher, principal and district administrator.

Prior to joining HCS, Dr. Stewart served as the executive officer for Organizational Development in Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). She was named MNPS' Principal of the Year, and during her time leading Pearl-Cohn High, the school was recognized as a National School of Excellence by the Coalition of Community Schools and featured on Edutopia's "Schools That Work" series.

Dr. Stewart has a doctorate in education, leadership, and policy from Vanderbilt University, a master's in educational leadership from Trevecca University, and a bachelor's in mathematics from Biola University.

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