

MEDIA Coverage



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"Successful because of diversity": Centenary President discusses founding black halls of fame

By Priscilla Liguori



HACKETTSTOWN, NJ - February is Black History Month, though the head of Centenary University is devoted to educating people about black history all year long. He co-founded the Black Excellence Alliance, which highlights black history and accomplishments via different halls of fame.

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"My dad knew and marched arm and arm with Dr. King, and my mom was a school teacher, and they grew up in the South, and so they grew up around segregation," said Dr. Dale Caldwell, Centenary University's first African American president.

Understanding history is important to Caldwell.

"If we don't know our path or our history, we're doomed to repeat the bad parts of history, and so by really educating people about the struggles of others, it gives us a sense of what's going on today," said Caldwell.

It's why Caldwell founded five black halls of fame. The first one was for tennis in 2008, and then came inventors, entrepreneurs, authors and educators.



"There are so many people, especially African Americans, who did amazing things, but we're left off out of the history books, and so I said, well, why don't we try to do something to make sure that that history is memorialized, and those people are recognized," said Caldwell.

Centenary's library director is also on the board of the Black Inventors Hall of Fame.

"I've just learned so much, and I've been able to share that history as well," said Susan Van Alstyne, the director of the Taylor Memorial Library at Centenary University.

Some of that history is documented in the library's Dr. Caldwell room, which full of hundreds of books he donated to the school community, upon taking the job of president last year.

"He and his daughter came here one day in a U-haul," said Van Alstyne.

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Caldwell, who is an author too, says more halls are in the works.

“This idea of unifying America, with black history.... we’re approaching the Super Bowl. The winning Super Bowl team is going to have a center and a wide receiver and running back and defensive backs. All different people, different body types, but they’re successful because of their diversity,” said Caldwell.

Centenary is holding events with the different halls of fame throughout the month.

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