

GUNAA HISTORY

First, we want to thank all the loyal members, supporters, and friends who have been the wind beneath the wings of Grambling University National Alumni Association, Inc. (GUNAA).

Grambling University National Alumni Association, Inc. has been fortunate to have had several dedicated alums to serve in the leadership roles of this philanthropic organization. The organization was originally governed by a Board of Governors, which is currently named the Board of Directors. An Executive Committee was later established.

To serve and/or carry out the duties in the role of president was: Henry L. Essex, Reuben L. Gaulden, Wilber Purvis, II, Wesley O. Thompson, E. Faye Williams, Darrell Walters, Jesse Prudhomme, Johnny Adams, James Bradford, Sharon Armstrong, Dr. Birdex Copeland, Johnny Williams, and Clifton Lemelle, Sr.

Grambling University National Alumni Association, Inc. had its beginnings in the 1950s at a time when school loyalty, innovation, dedication, and inspiration was at an all-time high. Furthermore, there was a great need to financially support the college and its students. To facilitate assistance to the college, members began to organize in Grambling (1950s), Houston and Natchitoches (late 1950), Jennings (1960s), and other places to form chapters.

Through the steadfastness of the charter members, over the next few years our organization continued to grow in both spirit and wisdom. The first known chapter chartered under Grambling College Alumni Association was the Grambling Alumni Chapter (Elizabeth Robinson Alumni Chapter).

On April 11, 1959, the State Alumni Meeting was held on the campus of Grambling College. Chapter representatives attended the meeting and prepared an overview report for his or her chapter (*The Alumni Link*, July 1959, 3(4), pg. 4).

On April 22-23, 1960, the regular Spring Meeting of the Grambling group was held in conjunction with the National Alumni Association (NAA) meeting on the campus of Grambling (*The Alumni Link*, July 1960, (4(3) pg. 6).

In 1962, a Joint Grambling Chapter Meeting and/or convention was held on the campus of Grambling College with Robert T. Ennis, Sr. presiding. During this period, the meeting was still called the Annual Spring Meeting. The national convention was revisited in 1992 and enhanced to the current annual national alumni convention held during the summer of each year. The enhanced version also included rotating the convention around the country hosted by GUNAA chartered chapters of that area, and financed by a member registration fee, etc. The first known "off-campus" convention was held in Chicago, Illinois. To assist with this new option, a Sites Committee was established by the organization.

The early days saw the organization sharing space with the university until moving into its current home of 386 RWE Jones Street, Grambling, Louisiana.

On October 9, 1967, the national organization was incorporated in the State of Louisiana and given the name of Grambling College Alumni Association with the following members signing the Articles of Incorporation: Robert T. Ennis, Sr., Helen L. Richards, Leon Whittaker, and Wilber Purvis, II. The first known president of the organization was Henry L. Essex. The Executive Director of Alumni Affairs was Robert T. "Coach" Ennis, Sr.

In 1967, the national organization held the following memberships: American Alumni Council, National Alumni Association, and the Louisiana Alumni Council (*Alumni Link*, November 1967, 8(4), pg. 16).

In September 1969, the organization was granted exemption from federal income tax under section 501 ©3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

In 1978, Roy Jackson served as the Executive Director of Alumni Affairs followed by Joseph Morale and J. McJimmerson. Under McJimmerson's tenure, Vickie Joe served as the Executive Secretary of the Office of Alumni Affairs. She eventually began to serve a dual roll serving as the office manager for GUNAA as well as an employee of the university in the Office of Alumni Affairs. She continued to loyally serve GUNAA even after her retirement from the university followed by Dr. Ruby Higgins. Robert Piper assumed the role of Executive Director of Alumni Affairs after McJimmerson followed by Dr. Herbert Simmons who served until 2005.

Under the leadership of Dr. Simmons, the mission of the Office of Alumni Affairs was: (1) To assist GSU and GUNAA in promoting good relations with alumni, students, parents, friends, and supporters of GSU, and (2) To strengthen the ties of loyalty and devotion to GSU while furthering the interest of the university. A key method to improve alumni communication was the creation of the alumni magazine, *GSU Visions: The Grambling State University Alumni Magazine*. The magazine was published quarterly by the Office of Alumni Affairs. Prior to the *GSU Vision*, there was an alumni newsletter published quarterly by the Grambling College Alumni Association under the direction of the Executive Director of Alumni Affairs called *The Alumni Link (1950s - 1960s)*, *Alumni Link (1967)*, and *The Link (1970s)*.

In the 1980s, GUNAA incorporated a strategic plan to recruit the valedictorians and salutatorians from the area schools to attend Grambling; thereby, increasing enrollment. The plan was successful. During this time, enrollment increased with many of those students accepting academic scholarships to attend Grambling. The plan included a deep concentration on providing scholarships to students in an effort to assist them with educational financial obligations. Consequently, the plan also included the need to enhance and promote fundraising and alumni giving.

Additionally, in the 1980s the Consent Decree was achieved thanks to GUNAA becoming a "Friend of the Courts" and diligently concentrating on serving as the *Champion* for Dear Ole Grambling. Therefore, the 1980s saw the organization playing a major role in enhancing and broadening the scope of the organization.

In 1992, the organization had a membership of less than 500. Membership has managed to increase through the efforts of enhanced communication, enriched programs, and the continuous promotion of positive school loyalty.

On November 5, 1994, an amendment was completed with the State of Louisiana renaming the organization with the current name of Grambling University National Alumni Association (GUNAA).

The chartered chapters under the umbrella of GUNAA currently stand at 61 Chapters within 12 Regions throughout the United States. In 2008, the North Dallas Alumni and the San Antonio Alumni Chapters both in the State of Texas became chartered chapters. In 2011, the Ruston, Greater Houston, and Union Parish Alumni Chapters became the latest chartered chapters to-date with others expressing interest.

In 1996, the organization purchased the home of the late President Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones (Prez), the 2nd President of Grambling State University to serve as our Alumni Center along with an acre of land. Later the organization purchased the additional 6.99 acres adjacent to the property for future expansion.

During this period, the organization purchased the home of Charles P. Adams (Founder and 1st President of Grambling State University) and donated it back to the university. The 1st and only Endowed Professorship was established by GUNAA in honor of Robert Piper. Later, following the lead of their national office, chapters and chapter members under the umbrella of GUNAA established endowments. The first national website was created. Scholarship giving was increased. A student book program was implemented.

From 1999 – June 2005, GUNAA handled the business of the Bayou Classic (annual collegiate football game between Grambling State University and Southern University) on behalf of our Alma Mater.

In 2001, GUNAA played a major role in helping Dear Ole Grambling celebrate its centennial birthday. The annual convention was held on campus that year. Moreover, the organization was able to assist our “World Famed Tiger Marching Band” financially with some much needed funds by presenting them a check in the amount of \$10,000.00.

In 2005, Debra Johnson came in as the Office of Alumni Relations Director (formerly the Office of Alumni Affairs) followed by Ralph Wilson assuming the role as Interim Alumni Relations Director. Following Mr. Wilson, Ms. Johnson assumed the position of Director for an additional tenure.

In 2007, the Grambling family lost one of its icons, Coach Eddie G. Robinson. The association took on a major role in assisting with Coach Rob's homegoing celebration. The organization became a donor of the Eddie G. Robinson Museum. GUNAA incorporated into its fundraising efforts and held its first Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament.

In 2008, the organization became a member of Louisiana Video Bingo. The doors were officially opened on May 14, 2008. Funds from the effort play an integral role in financially

supporting the educational aspects of GSU, our SGA, student scholarships, the Professional Experience Laboratory of the College of Education, and GUNAA.

In 2009, GUNAA contributed toward the much needed funds to assist our "World Famed Tiger Marching Band" attend the inauguration of our first African American President of the United States of America, President Barack Obama.

In 2010, the organization taking the lead from the university experienced "**A New Beginning.**" GUNAA gained a new direction and new leadership consisting of a diverse group of alums ranging from a graduate of the class of 1959 to the class 1993. Additionally, GUNAA have members of the class of the 2000s bringing in innovative ideas while assisting in helping to implement many of those ideas.

In keeping with the theme of "A New Beginning," GUNAA presented a check to our new university president Dr. Frank Pogue as a first installment of a pledged donation to the university. Moreover, the organization continued with the theme of "A New Beginning" by implementing improved communication methods such as a regular eNewsletter, automating many processes, and the rolling out of a completely newly designed website that includes everything from "Meet the Board of Directors" to "Post a Job." The organization is striving for excellence by using a focused team concept and continuing to practice inclusiveness by promoting positive and regular communication and participation.

On February 12-13, 2010, the organization lead by example by serving as a sponsor of the "Grand Opening" of the Eddie G. Robinson Museum. Many chapters and members served as sponsors and participants providing the largest number of participants as an organization for this grand event.

On November 27, 2010, the Annual Bayou Classic Alumni Breakfast was held with many stakeholders and *Champions* for GSU in one room including the complete GUNAA Board of Directors (Clifton Lemelle - President, Melissa Bickham - Vice President, Bobbie Williams - Secretary, Bobby Rabon - Treasurer, Russell Leday - Financial Secretary, and Veronica L. Johnson - Business Manager), GUNAA Regional Representatives, GUNAA Chapter Presidents, Dr. Ruby Higgins - GUNAA Office Manager, Former GUNAA Presidents, Former GUNAA Office Manager, University President Dr. Frank Pogue and his wife Dorothy, Dr. Kenoye Eke the Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Interim Director of the Office of Alumni Relations - Ralph Wilson, President of the GSU Athletic Foundation - Dr. Birdex Copeland, Chair of the GSU Legends - Henry Dyer, many GSU staff members, alums, future GSU students, and supporters of GSU.

In 2011, the organization continued with the theme of growth and unity. The GUNAA National Convention and the Legends Annual Fundraising Banquet were hosted during the same weekend during the summer. Many homecoming events were enjoyed by the host of alums, supporters, and friends of GSU. GUNAA and the university are once again housed in the same hotel during Bayou Classic. New chapters were chartered in various areas around the United States due to the interest and excitement of those chapter charter members. Additionally, GUNAA saw an increase in alumni giving and participation as reflected on our website as we continue to recognize those who give of his or her **time**,

talent, and/or resources to ensure that our *Dear Alma Mater* is all that she can be.

GUNAA's primary goal is to bring the organization into the 21 Century of communication while continuing to serve as a beacon of light to and for our university, Grambling State University.