

For Immediate Release

Contact: Courtney McCall
(314) 340-3391
mccallc@hssu.edu

A Tradition of Family Shines Through Harris-Stowe's 2013 Commencement Convocation

ST. LOUIS, MO (April 29, 2013) – Commencement Convocation at Harris-Stowe State University has always been a family tradition – bringing loved ones together to celebrate the academic accomplishments of their students. This year is no exception, as Executive Assistant to the President Lea Sutherlin, a 22-year employee of HSSU, walks across the stage with her husband Steve Sutherlin, who is also graduating, as members of the 2013 class.

Both Sutherlins had previously taken college courses years before, and it was in 2008 that they vowed to finish – together! Lea and Steve will earn their bachelor of science degrees in Business Administration, joining the ranks of their alumnae daughter, Tasha Sutherlin, valedictorian of the class of 2008.

“Steve and I had both taken classes here and there, but you know how life takes over,” Lea explained. “When Tasha graduated, as soon as we got to her through the crowd at the end of the ceremony and told her how proud we were, she said, ‘Thank you – your turn!’”

Lea, with her military background, put off going to college to be a wife and mother of three daughters, while working full time at HSSU. Additionally, Steve, also an Army veteran, supported his family as a bonding officer for the St. Louis County Department of Justice.

Undeniable advocates of education, the Sutherlins put aside their own aspirations of earning degrees to provide support to their daughters, Tasha, Angela and Tiffany. After completing her studies at HSSU, Tasha earned a master of arts degree in Communications and an MBA, both from Lindenwood University. She is currently studying law at Case Western Reserve School of Law in Cleveland, Ohio.

Lea further recalls Tasha's strong encouragement of her parents returning to school. Said Tasha, “Both of you have worked very hard to get my sisters and I to where we need to be; now you must do something to reinvent yourselves! Go to college and graduate so when you both retire, if you want to pick up something new that requires a degree, you'll be ready!”

And that readiness has come after both were comfortable with the paths that their daughters have chosen. Angela, the middle child, has dabbled with school off and on during her pursuit of an acting, singing and dancing career. Known as Dharma Jean to the St. Louis arts community, the junior Education major had a brief stint on Fox 2's “American Idol,” and frequently performs her own original music around town. Outside of singing, you can find her serving as a residential

assistant in the Rev. Dr. William G. Gillespie Residence Hall at HSSU. Understanding her parents' urging of education has kept her grounded and focused on what's important.

"While my parents have always supported my talents and dreams of being a superstar," Angela says jokingly, "I have known through it all that they wanted me to earn a degree. It's taken me a while, but I'm growing into my own at HSSU, and looking forward to the doors that being an educated black woman will open for me. I have my parents to thank for laying that foundation."

Tiffany, their youngest girl, completed her pre-requisite courses at Harris-Stowe prior to enrolling at Barnes Jewish/Goldfarb School of Nursing. She graduates this spring with a bachelor of Nursing degree.

"Harris-Stowe State University has been an educational staple for our household for many years, and has created an opportunity for new career paths for our entire family," said Lea. Her husband Steve agreed, saying, "Oftentimes, we found that pursuing higher education simultaneously has helped us to better define problems and formulate solutions in a productive manner as a family, and as a family, we believe that with God, all things are possible!"

Harris-Stowe's commencement convocation will be held on Saturday, May 11, 2013, at 11 a.m., in the Emerson Performance Center's Board of Regents Gymnasium. The 2013 valedictorian Matthew C. Wright, a four-year starter on HSSU's soccer team and four-time scholar athlete.

Also this year, KWAME Building Group CEO and Chairman of the Board Tony Thompson will deliver the keynote address and be recognized with an honorary doctorate of Humane Letters. Thompson founded KWAME, a full-service construction management firm, which is headquartered in St. Louis, in 1991. Thompson and his company have been long supporters of HSSU, and his story of how he rose to success in the construction industry as a minority engineer is one that is sure to captivate Harris-Stowe graduates.

Charles Hoessle, emeritus director of the Saint Louis Zoo and former member of the Harris-Stowe Board of Regents will also be awarded an honorary doctorate of Humane Letters. Atty. Wayman F. Smith III, who will be the recipient of an honorary doctor of laws degree, has been an active member of the university Board of Regents for more than 20 years, and chairman of that body for the majority of those years. Both individuals have made outstanding contributions to the university and the overall greater St. Louis community, state and nation.

Harris-Stowe State University, located in midtown St. Louis, is a four-year institution that offers 14 degree programs in the areas of Accounting, Business Administration, Biology, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Health Care Management, Hospitality and Tourism Management, Information Sciences and Computer Technology, Mathematics, Middle School Education, Professional Interdisciplinary Studies, Secondary Education and Urban Affairs. Ranked by *U.S. News* as one of America's Best Colleges in the Midwest, the university, which has been in existence for more than 150 years, offers the most affordable bachelor's degree in the metropolitan area.

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