

# 2022-2023

JULY 1, 2022-JUNE 30, 2023

HARRIS-STOWE  
STATE UNIVERSITY



## CIE MECCA ANNUAL REPORT



## About

Harris-Stowe State University (HSSU) is a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) located in midtown St. Louis, offering the most affordable bachelor's degree in Missouri. The University is a fully accredited four-year institution with 63 majors, minors, and certificate program options in education, business, and arts and sciences.

In 2021, HSSU's Anheuser-Busch School of Business launched the Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE). The CIE serves the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) community, as well as the community at large. Its offerings include the MECCA program, which provides educational training and services to assist individuals pursuing entrepreneurship, fostering the growth of emerging entrepreneurs, and cultivating the next generation of business owners.



**HARRIS-STOWE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
ANHEUSER-BUSCH SCHOOL  
OF BUSINESS



**CIE**  
CENTER OF INNOVATION  
& ENTREPRENEURSHIP



**MECCA**  
MINORITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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# THE TEAM



**Kristy Jackson, Ed.S.**

Director, Center of Innovation and Entrepreneurship  
Harris-Stowe State University



**Brandi Brooks**

Director, Minority Entrepreneurship Collaborative  
Center for Advancement  
Harris-Stowe State University



**Gail Sharpe**

Innovation Coordinator, Center of Innovation and  
Entrepreneurship



**Dr. Stacy Gee Hollins**

Interim Associate Provost of Academic Affairs and  
Dean, Anheuser-Busch School of Business

## What We Do

Harris-Stowe State University's **Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE)** and the **Minority Entrepreneurship Collaborative Center for Advancement (MECCA)** curate a safe space for those who may feel that they do not belong in certain communities and spaces. CIE and its flagship entrepreneurship program, MECCA, work to advance the BIPOC community within the innovation landscape. By providing educational training and services, we foster the growth of emerging entrepreneurs and cultivate the next generation of business owners and leaders.



# DIRECTORS' MESSAGE

This has been a remarkable year for Harris-Stowe State University's Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE) and the Minority Entrepreneurship Collaborative Center for Advancement (MECCA). As you'll see in this report, in our first year with full-time staff, we are out of the "dream phase" and have truly launched!

In the '22-'23 academic year, we broke ground on our state-of-the-art CIE facility. We cannot wait until this project is complete so that we can better serve our entrepreneurs. While we have been "hammering" away, we've expanded our program and service offerings, and continued to build relationships with our fellow innovators, businesses, and organizations throughout the St. Louis start-up ecosystem.

With our current funding and after securing the **\$2.6M** funding through the Build Back Better Regional Challenge, we've been able to expand the MECCA Accelerator program, which now offers three different early-stage accelerators – graduating **80** entrepreneurs. Also, MECCA has awarded a total of **\$50,000** to entrepreneurs in pitch competitions.

Being able to provide constructive support in a safe space for our hard-working innovators has been extremely gratifying. We are appreciative of our funders, partners, and supporters who foster the growth of emerging entrepreneurs, and hope that more will join us as we carry out our mission to close disparity gaps for underserved and underrepresented entrepreneurs. And a special thank you to Dr. Stacy Gee Hollins, Interim Associate Provost of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Anheuser-Busch School of Business, without whom CIE programs and MECCA would not exist.

We look forward to continued success as we empower many more entrepreneurs to build their businesses, creating more financial security, jobs, and economic opportunities in our community.

## **Kristy Jackson**

Director, Center of Innovation and Entrepreneurship  
Harris-Stowe State University

## **Brandi Brooks**

Director, Minority Entrepreneurship Collaborative Center for Advancement  
Harris-Stowe State University

# SCORECARD

## BY THE NUMBERS

Number of Businesses Served, To-Date:	99
Funding:	\$4.63M
Economic Impact:	\$100,000
News Mentions:	15
Programs/Events Offered:	11
Virtual Community Profiles/Members:	104

*"I was able to gain clarity on my business while growing my network that includes other successful entrepreneurs in various industries."*

- Jas Joya, JEC Productions



# EVENTS & PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

## Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program

### *Summer 2022 Entrepreneurship Accelerator*

During Summer 2022, MECCA graduated its **Entrepreneurship Accelerator** cohort. This 8-week program introduced concepts, methods, activities, and philosophies of business in the world today. The program covered contemporary trends in business while introducing students to best practices, just-in-time consulting, and support activities to meet the unmet needs of minority startup populations in the St. Louis region. The summer 2022 cohort was comprised of **25** individuals who were eager to graduate from the program and use their newly developed business skills to be successful entrepreneurs in the St. Louis region and beyond.



## Fall 2022 Scale-Up and Start-Up Entrepreneurship Accelerator

During Fall 2022, MECCA held events to celebrate **27** entrepreneurs in its two Fall 2022 **Entrepreneurship Accelerator** cohorts. MECCA held a Scale-Up pitch competition and a Start-Up graduation ceremony. These events were partly funded by the *E<sup>3</sup> powered by PNC* initiative. Arch Grants and Bank of America also provided sponsorship support.

The Scale-Up cohort, comprised of **eight** entrepreneurs, participated in an 8-week program, and further developed their entrepreneurial skills and prepared for the pitch competition.

The panel of judges were: Michelle Robinson, CEO of DEMIblue Natural Nails; Mark Anthony Morgan, HSSU alum and Investment Manager at PNC Bank; Jess Bellomo, Director of Entrepreneur Recruitment at Arch Grants; and Shani Bennett, CEO and Co-Founder of Queritel.

The Start-Up cohort, comprised of **19** entrepreneurs, developed foundational entrepreneurial skills and established themselves as budding business owners. At the graduation ceremony, **Edward Wingo Jr.** (CEO of Devine Vessels) was the cohort class representative and delivered an inspiring speech. MECCA commemorated the success stories of the graduates of the Entrepreneurship Accelerator program by awarding a Trailblazer Award. The Fall 2022 recipient was **Stanley Prince** (CEO of Prince on Arize), a graduate of the inaugural Entrepreneurship Accelerator cohort.



Third Place  
Arriell Bivens-Biggs, CEO of Young Biz Kidz  
Gift amount: \$5,000 (funded by Arch Grants)



Second Place  
Shower Zhang, CEO of Equine Smartbit, LLC  
Gift Amount: \$7,000 (funded by Arch Grants)



First Place  
Kacie Starr Long, CEO of Sew Hope Community Sewing Room  
Gift Amount: \$10,000 (funded by PNC)





## Spring 2023 MECCA Start-Up and Scale-Up Entrepreneurship Accelerator

### Draft Day

During Spring 2023, MECCA graduated its Spring 2023 **Start-Up and Scale-Up Entrepreneurship Accelerator** cohorts. The MECCA team launched a new kick-off of the Accelerator programs. MECCA held a Draft Day, a formal celebration welcoming the selected entrepreneurs into the program



### Scale-Up Pitch Competition

MECCA held a pitch competition for the Scale-Up cohort, who participated in an 8-week program that introduced business growth concepts, methods, activities, and the philosophy of business in the world today. It covered cutting-edge trends in business while advancing participants' knowledge of best practices. The program led up to the pitch competition, with eight participants getting the chance to pitch their business ideas to judges, with the top three winners receiving a financial gift to help elevate their businesses.

Guest judges included: **Dr. LaTonia Collins Smith** - President, Harris-Stowe State University; **Ymani Wince** - Founder and Owner, The Noir Bookshop; **Shani Bennett** - Co-Founder and CEO, Queritel; and **David Bentzinger** - Team Lead, PNC Corporate Banking team in St. Louis.



First Place - Demetrius Bledsoe, CEO Fresh Harvest 365  
(\$10,000 gift funded by PNC)



Second Place - Dr. Tiffanie Toles, CEO of Catering to A T  
(\$7,000 gift funded by Arch Grants)



Third Place - Tiffany Lee, CEO of Think Black  
(\$5,000 gift funded by Arch Grants)

## Entrepreneurship Accelerator Graduation Ceremony

MECCA also held a graduation ceremony to celebrate both cohorts of the Entrepreneurship Accelerator program, which included the Start-Up cohort. A total of **29** entrepreneurs (Scale-Up and Start-Up combined) graduated from the program. At the graduation ceremony, **Angelia Bills** (CEO of Eagle Productions LLC) was the Scale-Up cohort class graduation speaker. **Burchell McGhee** (CEO of The Voice of Burchell) was the Start-Up cohort class speaker.



## Gift Day

Graduates of the Accelerator program also participated in a Gift Day in mid-June, receiving their choice of gift (a 12-month QuickBooks online license, a laptop with Microsoft Office and antivirus software, or a 6-month Cortex shared co-working space) for completing the program.



## Facilitator Training Program

During Fall 2022, CIE launched its **Facilitator Training Program**. CIE Director, **Kristy Jackson**, led **ten** participants through a 3-session program. The program introduced concepts, methods, and activities to develop highly effective group facilitators. It was an intensive study of best practices and required participants to fully commit to engaging in each action-oriented session.

During Spring 2023, **19** participants successfully completed the Facilitator Training Program. The 3-week intensive training program helped participants develop their leadership skills by learning how to facilitate programs to help groups meet learning and business goals.



*“This program has provided support, knowledge, and a tribe which has helped me to step into my true business identity and own my power as a serial entrepreneur.”*

- Tashara Earl, Shades of Color





# Student Pitch Competitions

09

## Fall 2022 Student Pitch Competition

During Fall 2022, MECCA and the Anheuser-Busch School of Business sponsored a **Student Pitch Competition**. As part of the school's Entrepreneurship course taught by Professor **Rebecca Wilson**, students who desired to start their own businesses participated in an opportunity to earn funds to launch their businesses. **Precious Williams**, author of *The Pitch Queen: A Woman's Journey from Poverty to Purpose & Profits*, served as the host of the event.

Guest judges included: **Mark Anthony Morgan**, HSSU alum and Investment Manager at PNC Bank; **Lynette Watson**, Regional Director with Small Business Development Corporation; and **Michelle L. Robinson**, owner of DEMIblue Natural Nails.

Three students, **Shanya Mitchell**, **Terrance Suggs**, and **Courtney Graham**, were awarded financial gifts.

Shanya Mitchell, the third-place winner who received \$1,000, is the owner of Muaah Lips. The lip gloss line, targeted to not only make lips shiny but to keep them moisturized as well, is made with coconut oil.

"It was an amazing experience to pitch for the first time and learn more about myself and my business." - Shanya Mitchell

Terrence Suggs, the second-place winner who received \$2,000, is the owner of Miracle Productivity. This business is a hair care and skincare line made with natural ingredients that also treat chronic skin diseases.

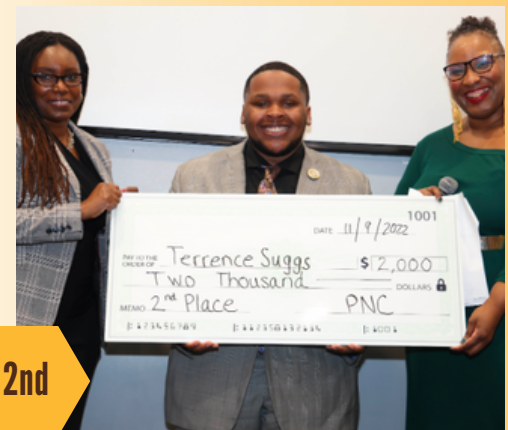
"I feel blessed and grateful to God for the opportunity to even present my business, let alone win the competition. I will spend the \$2,000 on more international supplies, good utensils, and put some money into my business account." - Terrence Suggs

Courtney Graham, the first-place winner who received \$3,000, is the owner of Embodied Serenity. Her products include candles that are environmentally friendly, toxic-free and are used as a form of aromatherapy for mental health.

"It feels surreal to have won this competition. It makes me feel like I'm going in the right direction with my business, and I will have support as I grow." - Courtney Graham



3rd



2nd



1st



## PLEASE TAKE THIS QUICK CIEIMECCA QUESTIONNAIRE!

- Do you believe that entrepreneurship is a great career pathway?
- Do you believe in supporting under-served and under-represented people looking to grow and develop?
- Do you want to help equip business owners with the knowledge, funding, and tools needed to be successful in entrepreneurship?
- Are you and your company/organization looking to align with an organization that is working to close gaps of disparity?

**If you answered yes to any/all of these questions,  
WE WANT TO PARTNER WITH YOU!**

**Please contact Harris-Stowe's CIE Director, Kristy Jackson, if you would like to explore opportunities for sponsorship, partnership, and collaboration: [CIEhssu@hssu.edu](mailto:CIEhssu@hssu.edu).**

## Spring 2023 Student Pitch Competition

During the spring, MECCA held an *E<sup>3</sup> powered by PNC Student Pitch Competition*. Hosted by **Cedric Cobb**, CEO of Best Wardrobe Solutions, six Harris-Stowe ABSB scholars pitched their business ideas to judges, with the top three winners receiving a financial gift to help boost their businesses.

The top three student pitch competition winners were:



Third Place (\$1,000)  
– Tamara Burrage,  
CEO of Mara's  
Minks and Hair  
Extension Co.



Second Place  
(\$2,000) –  
Miesha Ervin,  
CEO of  
Lighthouse  
Upholstery



First Place (\$3,000)  
– Anthony "AJ"  
Maxwell, CEO of  
OffSzn Athletics

## YBK National Day

In July 2022, MECCA hosted and sponsored the **Young Biz Kid (YBK) Day** at Harris-Stowe State University. Founded by **Arriel Biggs**, YBK Day is a fun, experiential program that teaches youth how to start, own, and operate their very own businesses. Each year, in participating cities, youth have the opportunity to experience entrepreneurship by setting up their business during their city's community-wide YBK Day. The St. Louis, *E<sup>3</sup> powered by PNC*, YBK Day marketplace featured **Michael "Mikey" Wren**, CEO of Mikey's Munchies Vending, and nearly **50** young entrepreneurs who sold their products, merchandise, and services.



## SBJ Coffee with MECCA Grads

During Spring 2023, CIEIMECCA hosted Erik Siemers and Nathan Rubbelke, of the St. Louis Business Journal, at HSSU for an opportunity to hear business pitches from recent accelerator graduates. Each participant shared the story of their business, followed by a discussion with Erik and Nathan. Featured Accelerator graduates: **Kacie Starr Long**, CEO of Sew Hope; **Chaneyll Anderson**, CEO of C5 Events and Decor; **Mellarie Thomas**, CEO of Tommy Wong Select; **Angelia Bills**, CEO of Eagle Productions, LLC; and **Stanley Prince**, CEO of Prince on AriZe.



## Black History Innovators Meet + Greet

In celebration of Black History Month in February, CIEIMECCA held its **Black History Innovators Meet and Greet** at Filament's innovation space in the Cortex district. The event featured five Black entrepreneurs, who talked about their businesses and optimism for what the future holds and shared advice for aspiring and start-up entrepreneurs. The Filament team led attendees through a networking activity that resulted in a visual representation of the dialogue. Attendees then had time to network and support vendors who were present. More than 40 people were in attendance.

The panel consisted of: **Demetrius Bledsoe**, of Fresh Harvest 365; Latasha Taylor, of Preservation Spa; **Dr. George Holmes**, of Hire Henry; **Michelle Robinson**, of DEMIblue Natural Nails; and **M-T Strickland**, of Metric Mate Inc.

Vendors: Tommy Wong Select Premium Seasonings & Sauces, MiracleProductivity LLC, Embodied Serenity, SCORE, Preservation Spa, C5 Events & Decor, Melanie Marie Consulting Co., DEMIblue Natural Nails, Young Biz Kidz, and DK Solutions, LLC.





## HBCU Entrepreneurship Week

During Spring 2023, CIE/MECCA celebrated **HBCU Entrepreneurship Week** at HSSU. The first event was a wonderful financial workshop on budgeting, which was led by **Shannon James** of Thrivent. The second event was an Arch Grants Entrepreneurship Founder Lecture for Anheuser-Busch School of Business scholars. The third event, led by MECCA Director **Brandi Brooks**, covered accessibility and challenged entrepreneurs to be mindful of how products and services can be designed with social good in mind. The last event was a “Pizza and Panel” discussion, led by **Renee Cunningham**, which involved MECCA entrepreneurs sharing their journeys. Panelists included: **Stanley Prince, Arriel Bivens-Biggs, Michelle Dillard, Leslie T. Tolliver, and Tara Robinson.**



## Women's History Tea

Celebrating Women's History Month in March, CIE held its inaugural **MadeHer: Women's History Tea** luncheon. In collaboration with Rung for Women, the event celebrated the accomplishments and successes of women leaders and entrepreneurs and also highlighted the history of “tea time” within the Black community. Honored at the event was **Dr. Stacy Gee Hollins**, with the first-ever “Women's HerSTeArY Excellence in Innovation” award. This award commemorated the exemplary work that Dr. Hollins has done at HSSU and for the community.

Emcee: **Jade Harrell** (CEO of RareGem Productions). Keynote speaker: **Emory Reigz** (CEO of Grab My Bag).





## Black Tech Conference

As part of STL Tech Week (April 24-28), Harris-Stowe State University held the **Black Tech Conference**. The conference showcased the many facets of leadership and innovation in the BIPOC tech community. It presented a series of tech founders, tech professionals, and community leaders who are driving impact in the St. Louis area.

During the conference, attendees heard from tech founders about how they have successfully raised capital, built systems of scale, and developed community advancement initiatives through innovation. There was also a strategic planning activity with Harris-Stowe State University facilitators on increasing access to resources and programs that grow the Black Tech Community.



## CIE Foundations for Founders

To commemorate National Small Business Week (April 30-May 6), St. Louis County Library and CIEIMECCA collaborated on the **Essential Entrepreneur Resources Panel**, which informed attendees about services and opportunities to support their small businesses, and also allowed them to hear from entrepreneurs about their start-up and growth business experiences.



*"In gratitude, I learned to be grateful for all that I have accomplished and know that right now I'm doing my best in the time being and with the current resources I have, knowing I will only learn and grow moving forward."*

- Uniya Arnold,  
Another Universe Candles, LLC



## PARTNERSHIPS

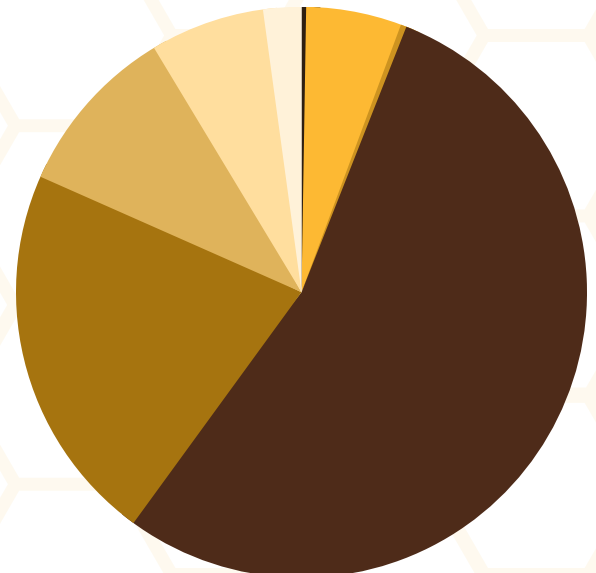


Please contact Harris-Stowe's CIE Director, Kristy Jackson, if you would like to explore opportunities for sponsorship, partnership, and collaboration: [CIEhssu@hssu.edu](mailto:CIEhssu@hssu.edu).



## FUNDING

- \$12,000 - Arch Grants
- \$250,000 - Bank of America
- \$15,000 - US Bank
- \$2.6M - Build Back Better Regional Challenge Grant
- \$1M - Federal Community Project Funding
- \$450,000 - E<sup>3</sup> powered by PNC
- \$300,000 - Kauffman Foundation
- \$100,000 - Wells Fargo





## ECONOMIC IMPACT

CIEIMECCA is greatly contributing to the Greater St. Louis area economic landscape. We've contributed a total of **\$100,000** for small business consultant fees, speaker fees, coaching fees, charter fees, membership fees, curriculum development, and startup funding. List of business contractors:

- CEO Mom Empire - Devon Moody Graham, CEO
- TechKnow Solutions - Michell Stockmann, CEO
- Gator MediaSTL - James A. Jackson, II, CEO
- The Polished Experience - Renee Cunningham, CEO
- Lents Mazur & Associates, LLC
- BLBC Herbals - Countess Edwards, CEO
- Grab My Bag - Emory Reignz, CEO
- Tee Parks Media - Tierra Parks, CEO
- Filament - Matt Homann, CEO
- HeyDaysHQ - Keisha Mabry, CEO
- Perfect Pitches by Precious - Precious Williams, CEO
- Best Wardrobe Solutions - Cedric Cobb, CEO

# IN THE NEWS

“Harris-Stowe University to Host YBK Day Event Saturday”

[Fox 2](#)

July 14, 2022

“Young Biz Kidz”

KMOX

July 14, 2022

“Mikey Wren, the Youngest Vending Machine Owner in the Country, Stopped by to Fill Us in on Young Biz Kidz Day”

[KSDK](#)

July 15, 2022

“Back to School: Harris Stowe State University”

KMOX

August 25, 2022

“A Fresh Class Of Entrepreneurs Graduating In St. Louis”

KMOX

September 1, 2022

“Harris-Stowe Celebrates 27 Entrepreneurs”

[St. Louis American](#)

December 12, 2022

“Life & Work with Dr. Stacy Gee Hollins”

[VoyageSTL](#)

January 13, 2023

“Harris-Stowe State University Expands Entrepreneurship Program with New Hires”

[St. Louis Inno](#)

January 20, 2023

“AB School of Business Named Brandi Brooks as Director”

[St. Louis American](#)

January 24, 2023

“Inspiring Conversations with Cynthia P. Davis of CP Davis Consulting, LLC”

[VoyageSTL](#)

January 30, 2023

“Daniels Jackson Named Director at AB School of Business”

[St. Louis American](#)

February 4, 2023

“Learn what CIE is From Harris-Stowe State University”

[Fox 2](#)

February 13, 2023

“Inaugural St. Louis TechWeek seeks to Re-Energize Community, Expand Opportunities”

[Missouri Business Alert](#)

April 21, 2023

“Igniting Innovation: Meet St. Louis Inno's 2023 Fire Awards Finalists”

[St. Louis Inno](#)

June 23, 2023

“50+ People Working Toward Solutions in St. Louis”

[St. Louis Magazine](#)

June 27, 2023



# PROGRAMMING ADS

## *Join the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Community*

Have you signed up for our new virtual [Community for Innovation & Entrepreneurship](#) on StartupTree – a one-stop shop for all entrepreneurial activities taking place at CIEIMECCA? By creating a *personal profile* and a *business profile*, you'll have access to various programs, upcoming events, and networking opportunities with fellow entrepreneurs. You can even create your own business profile to promote your products and services. Stay up-to-date with everything CIEIMECCA related – it's easy to sign up and will only take a couple of minutes. Join us as we build our online hub for entrepreneurs - you don't want to miss out!

**VIRTUAL INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMMUNITY**

Within our digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship Community you will have access to upcoming CIE:

- ✓ EVENTS
- ✓ WORKSHOPS
- ✓ ACCELERATORS

HARRIS-STOWE STATE UNIVERSITY  
**CIE MECCA**

**CREATE YOUR STARTUPTREE PROFILE NOW!**  
hssu-cie.startuptree.co

## *Credly Digital Badges*

Each participant that successfully completes a CIE program will be officially recognized with a digital badge for their demonstrated competencies and skills.



# PROGRAMMING ADS

## *Join the CIE Alumni Group*

You are invited to join the CIE Alumni Group if you have graduated from ANY CIE or MECCA program. This is a great time to share what support looks like for you along your entrepreneurial journey! If you would like to join the CIE Alumni Group, please email: [CIEhssu@hssu.edu](mailto:CIEhssu@hssu.edu).

## *2023-24 Sponsors and Partners*

Thank you to our new 2023-24 academic year sponsors and partners! We are most appreciative of your collaboration as we work to foster the growth of emerging entrepreneurs.



*“The MECCA Accelerator program not only gave me a voice and personality for my brand but helped me to understand the true meaning of entrepreneurship.”*

- Gabrielle Boyd,  
Potential Fame

For general inquiries,  
please contact us  
via email:  
[CIEhssu@hssu.edu](mailto:CIEhssu@hssu.edu)

**WE THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF  
OUR PROGRAMS**