Investing in Workforce Development:
Mississippi Automotive Manufacturers Association (MAMA) Surpasses $400,000 in Scholarships Awarded to Mississippi Community College and University Students

With the announcement of Mississippi Automotive Manufacturers Association's 2023-2024 Scholarship Recipients, MAMA's scholarship fund that has supported 205 students enrolled in Mississippi community colleges and universities reached a total of $407,500 awarded since 2006.

From an outstanding applicant pool, MAMA has awarded 13 scholarships for the 2023-2024 academic year to community college and university students interested in pursuing a career in the automotive manufacturing industry. MAMA has supported the growth of a strong workforce essential to the health of all industries in the state since its inception in 2006. This year's scholarships were awarded to technical and engineering-related majors, as well as non-traditional majors, that can be applied within the automotive industry.

Safety and environmental issues, along with the potential to make cars safer and more accessible for everyone, particularly individuals with disabilities, were recurring interests expressed in essays submitted by this year's recipients. The students discussed the possibilities of integrating innovative technologies into vehicle production to create a world where each driver and passenger could embark on safe and enjoyable journeys. They expressed excitement about the opportunity to be part of this transformative process and to witness the continuous advancements in automotive technology.

MAMA serves it members by promoting growth, development, and improvement in the automotive industry in Mississippi, as well as serving as a forum for interaction among automotive manufacturing companies in the state. In extending his congratulations, Kevin Burgess, MAMA's President, said, "Mississippi has an environment conducive to advanced manufacturing. We are proud that Mississippi's higher education system has invested heavily in educational opportunities and facilities which ensures the state will be able to produce the talented workforce necessary to keep the automotive industry strong. MAMA is committed to doing our part to recognize that workforce. I congratulate each of these students and wish them success in completing their degree, followed by a successful start in our industry!"

Among the successful 2023-2024 MAMA Scholarship candidates were:

Community College Winners

Quen'Darrius "Que" Chandler is a sophomore at Itawamba Community College majoring in Industrial Maintenance Technology and is in the Advanced Manufacturing Technician Program at Toyota Mississippi. In his application essay, Que wrote, "I am currently working at the Toyota plant in Blue Springs, MS, where I am experiencing real-world maintenance training. I am hardworking and dedicated to becoming more knowledgeable about the automotive manufacturing industry, and I desire to improve it in any way that I

can within my company and the industry as a whole." His group leader at Toyota MS recognized Que's commitment in his letter of recommendation saying, "Quen'Darrius has consistently shown his interest in learning new skills while applying his analytical abilities and critical thinking skills. He also actively seeks out opportunities to improve on the skills he has obtained while deepening his understanding of the high-level of technological advancements in the maintenance of manufacturing/industrial equipment and processes."

Julius Lyons, a sophomore at Itawamba Community College, is studying Industrial Maintenance and is in the Advanced Manufacturing Technician Program at Toyota Mississippi. A 2022 high-school graduate, Julius learned to balance work and school during his high school years, holding down jobs at Sam's Club, Walmart and McDonalds. Those balancing skills have come in handy as he attends classes at ICC two days a week and works three days a week at Toyota MS in the AMT Program. Julius shared in his application essay that through high school he was always interested in taking tech classes such as robotics and electrical classes. The Toyota AMT program piqued his interest because it was a job where he could work with his hands and use critical thinking to be successful. In a letter of recommendation, one of his instructors stated, "Mr. Lyons will be an asset to whatever company is lucky to hire him."

Omar Ramirez is a sophomore enrolled in Diesel Power Technology at Northeast Mississippi Community College. One of Ramirez's instructors said Omar has shown excitement and determination for Diesel Power Tech since day one. Ramirez himself best explained his career choice, "I have always had an interest in this type of work and gained experience with different vehicles and machinery during the three years I worked at Whittington Metal Services. Between working at a local salvage yard, spending time in the diesel program, and an apprenticeship opportunity with TAG Truck Center, I know this is a great career path for me and my future. I also took the opportunity in high school to participate in a skilled trade program at the New Albany Career Center, and this helped me develop my interest in hands-on-work even more … I chose to pursue a two-year degree in diesel so I could keep doing the hands-on-work I excel in."

Elton Thompson, a sophomore at Holmes Community College in the Collision Repair Technology program, has been dedicated to academics, extracurricular activities, and community service all while working two jobs. His love of restoring old vehicles and repairing today's more complex vehicles that have been involved in accidents led Elton to the Collision Repair program where he is excelling. Thompson's instructor described him as one of his best and hardest working students. Elton received the program's 2023 Collision Repair Technology Award while maintaining a 3.8 GPA. After a class visit to an automotive restoration shop, Elton returned to the restoration shop to enquire about part-time help. With recommendations from Thompson's instructor, Mike Martin at Classic Restorations in Gluckstadt, MS, hired Elton and has been pleased with his work ethic and high level of body work skills. The company hopes to hire him upon his completion of the collision repair program.

University Student Winners

Ari Avant is a senior at Jackson State University majoring in computer science. Avant is a member of the Management Leadership for Tomorrow Career Prep Program (MLT CP Program) allowing her the opportunity to train with industry professionals, connect with top employers, and network with other like-minded university students. Ari represented Jackson State University at the Association of Computer

Science at Minority Institutions (ADMI) 2023 Symposium competing in a hackathon with her peers and presenting her research on the topic of Uncoding Algorithms with Coded-Bias Used to Sway Voters. She has interned two summers with Deloitte's Information Technology Services (ITS) department. Ari is a leader on campus, serving as secretary on the executive board for the JSU robotics club, secretary on the executive board for the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), and as a member of the College of Engineering Student Leadership Board. She also was a member of the Sonic Boom of the South Marching Band for two years.

Jade Bland, a senior at Mississippi State University, took an unusual path when she changed her major from fashion merchandising to industrial engineering. Jade is a member of Tau Beta Pi, has been on the President's list for five semesters and maintains an overall GPA of 3.84. She was the recipient of Freshman Excellence and Colvard Leadership Scholarships and a Student Success Scholar Award. Bland serves as Vice President of Kappa Delta Sorority and Co-President of Backstage for MSU's Fashion Board. Jade sums up her career choice best, "I have no regrets in changing my major, as Industrial Engineering has allowed me to apply both my creativity and love for design as well as problem solving and numbers. I learned to toss out preconceived notions on the stereotypes that come with each major and embraced that I could be a people person and still be a STEM student – that I could have a broad imagination and still be a factual thinker."

Terrence Conley is a senior at Jackson State University majoring in electrical engineering. Terrence is a member of the WEB DuBois Honors College and has consistently demonstrated academic excellence while working part-time at Continental Tire in Clinton, MS, as an engineering intern. He is a member of the Entergy Scholars Program and serves as the NPHC representative within the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. Conley has been involved in campus life serving as a Mister Service Ambassador and as Vice President of the National Society of Black Engineers JSU chapter. Terrence recently concluded an internship with Black and Veatch, an engineering, procurement, and construction firm in Overland Park, Kansas. During his stay in Kansas City, Conley also had the privilege of contributing to the Non-profit organization, Operation Breakthrough as a facilitator, guiding and organizing lab sessions for children hailing from underrepresented backgrounds and low-income families, providing them with valuable exposure to STEM topics.

Aashish Dhakal, a junior at the University of Mississippi pursuing a major in computer science with a minor in manufacturing, is a member of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and has served as a Distance Learning Facilitator and Undergraduate Teaching Assistant. Dakal has participated in experiential learning classes at Nissan and CITE Armored Vehicles and is currently interning at GreenServ, Inc. He has served as a Student Ambassador at the Center for Manufacturing Excellence and as an Event Coordinator for the student organization NEPSA. Aashish defined his passion for automotive manufacturing, "I am poised to contribute to a new revolution defined by software, automation, and green energy. I eagerly await a lifelong journey in an industry that continually inspires, innovates, and challenges. My journey is fueled by dedication, curiosity, and a sincere passion for the ever-evolving automotive industry. This passion extends beyond the mere mechanics of cars, ignited by the fascinating fusion of computer science, manufacturing, and electrical engineering that shapes this industry."

Peter Fennell is a junior at the University of Mississippi majoring in mechanical engineering with an emphasis on manufacturing and minoring in mathematics. Peter is a Provost Scholar, on the Dean's Honor

Roll, and recipient of an Academic Merit Scholarship and a Haley Barbour Toyota CME Scholarship. He has competed in numerous business competitions including the Land Shark Business Competition finishing in third place and the Rebel Venture Capital Fund which he won. Fennell is on the Provost Student Advisory Board, a member of the Collegiate Automotive Manufacturing Society (CAMS) and the Entrepreneurship Club and has served on the CME Advisory Board and Events Committee. Peter was the Team Leader of an experiential learning class at Taylor Power Systems and interned at Parker Hannifin Hose Production Plant. In a letter of recommendation, one of Peter's mentors shared, "Peter works hard in the classroom and takes his academic career very seriously. … Peter is a young man who possesses all the skills necessary for today's and tomorrow's leadership roles."

Cameron Fowler, a senior at Mississippi State University with a 4.0 GPA, is majoring in industrial engineering and business administration. He describes himself as an effective problem-solver with a history of improving processes for internal and external customers, leading new development and integrating that development into existing processes and turning raw data into an actionable decision. Fowler has completed an engineering coop at Mercedes-Benz where he was involved in development and optimization efforts on a project to be globally integrated in the Mercedes-Benz infrastructure, as a research assistant in the Athletic Engineering Department at MSU assisting in data analysis for various coaches, and as an industrial engineering intern at United Launch Alliance where he conducted capacity analysis and worked to identify potential bottlenecks in the production line. In his application essay, Cameron stated, "I have really enjoyed the data-driven nature of the automotive industry and using that data to create a more efficient line. I also enjoy the fast pace of the automotive industry."

Kennedy Keyes is a senior at Mississippi State University majoring in software engineering. She served as a research intern with UCLA and Amazon this summer, serves as a research assistant for the MSU Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems, is the online editor for MSU's newspaper, The Reflector, is an information assistant with Housing and Residential Live, and represents the BCoE Diversity Program as the engineering diversity delegate. In a letter of recommendation, her professor stated, "Kennedy has been an outstanding student researcher in her time at CAVS. Kennedy actively participates in programs and initiatives that aim to increase representation and support for underrepresented groups in STEM fields. Kennedy is one of the brightest undergraduate students to come through my labs at CAVS." Keyes has been active with the National Society of Black Engineers, MSU National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, W.E.C.E., F.L.A.R.E., Cyber Security Club, Association for Computer Machinery, Maroon Volunteers, Japanese Club and the MSU Student and Alumni Association Events.

Brodie Rials, a junior mechanical engineering major, is transferring from Jones College to Mississippi State University for the Fall 2023 semester. At Jones College, he was a member of the honors society Phi Theta Kappa and on the President's List with a 4.0 GPA. Brodie started 32 games over his two-year career as a member of the Jones College men's soccer team which won the MACCC Conference Title and were the NJCAA Region 23 Champions. He was recently announced as a 2022-2023 NJCAA Academic All-American, becoming the first NJCAA Academic All-American in Jones' men's soccer history. Rials' advisor at Jones stated that his natural intelligence combined with a "championship" minded work ethic earned him extremely high marks in the classroom and a state championship on the soccer field. Brodie completed an internship at Howard Industries this past semester where he shadowed several different engineers. Modeling and design piqued his interest, and he is excited to further his exposure to that area at MSU.

Ranjan Subedi, a junior at Mississippi State University majoring in computer engineering, has completed a coop at Kohler Power, worked as an undergraduate research assistant at MSU and a math domain tutor for the Department of Statistics and Mathematics. He began an internship with Tesla this July. Ranjan wrote in his application essay, “I have always been fascinated by the automotive industry and its potential to revolutionize the way we move around. Specifically, I am deeply interested in controls engineering for autonomous vehicles, and the autonomous drone I built has only fueled my passion for this field. What intrigues me the most about controls engineering is the ability to design, develop, and optimize control systems that enable autonomous vehicles to operate safely and efficiently.” His mentor during his computer engineering coop at Kohler Power stated that under his supervision, Subedi’s programming skills played a crucial role in resolving issues with auto-lube robots, reducing labor complexity, and increasing plant efficiency, and that his ability to work effectively in a team and communicate complex technical ideas in simple terms made him a valuable asset.”