



Celebrating

**The Next Generation Of
WNY Entrepreneurs and
Business Professionals**

April 26, 2025

One Seneca Tower, Buffalo NY



THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 SPONSORS!



Office of Niagara County Legislator Jeffrey Elder



Anthony Baldi & Associates
Ameriprise Private Wealth Advisory Practice



BUFFALO STATE
UNIVERSITY



Mark Overall, Esq.

© University of Buffalo 2025

To become a Sponsor or Supporter Go to www.empower716.com

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

Saturday, April 26, 2025

One Seneca Tower, Buffalo, NY

Program Agenda

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Networking, Vendors, Food & Refreshments

12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Sponsor & Elected Official Recognition

Special Awards Presentation

Youth Entertainment Performance

6-Month Program Highlights & Pitch Contest Winner Announcement

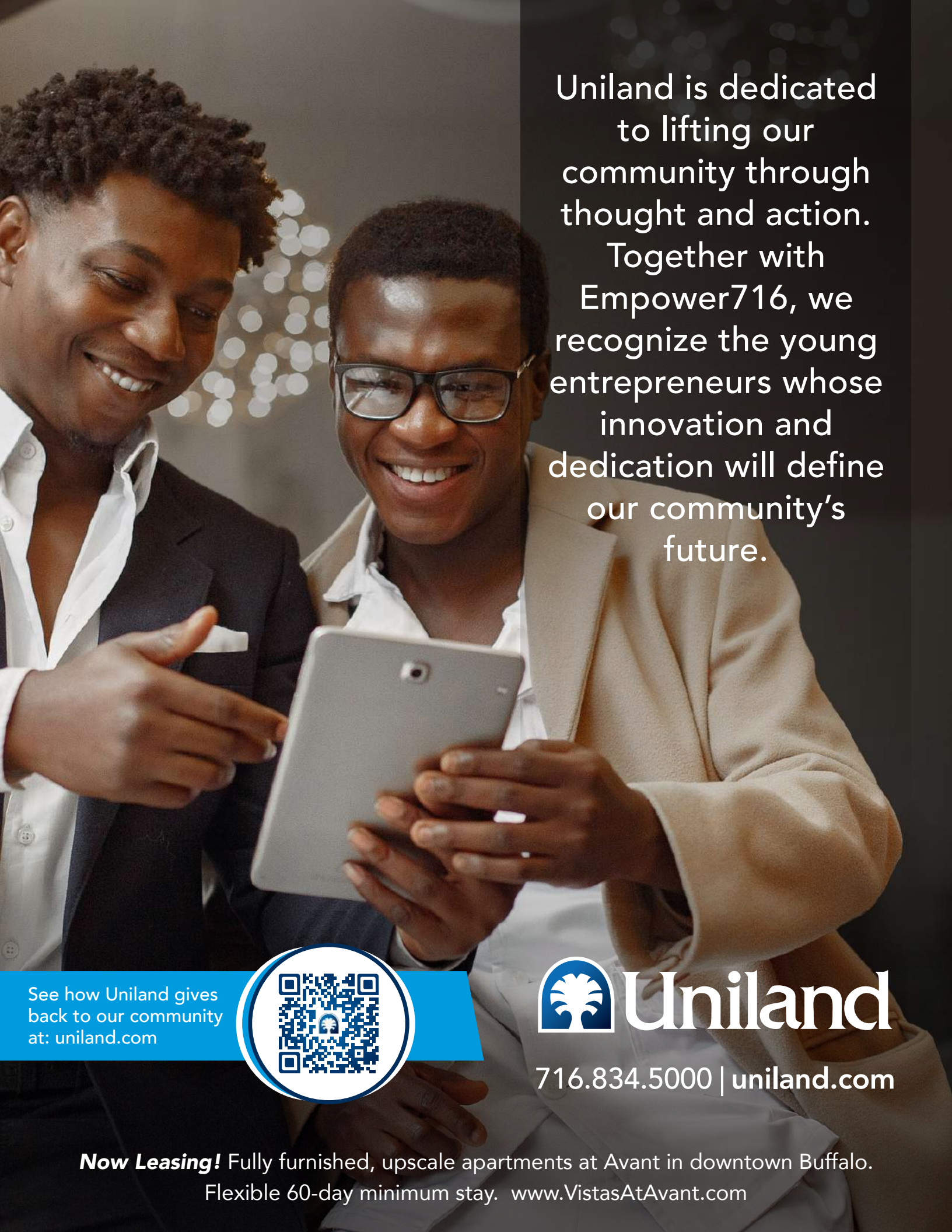
Youth Entertainment Performance

Honoree Presentations

Entrepreneurial Spirit Award Presentation

Closing Remarks

Final Networking & Vendor Showcase



Uniland is dedicated
to lifting our
community through
thought and action.

Together with
Empower716, we
recognize the young
entrepreneurs whose
innovation and
dedication will define
our community's
future.

See how Uniland gives
back to our community
at: uniland.com



Uniland

716.834.5000 | uniland.com

Now Leasing! Fully furnished, upscale apartments at Avant in downtown Buffalo.
Flexible 60-day minimum stay. www.VistasAtAvant.com

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

Special Awards – Honoring Legacy and Leadership

For the first time in Empower716 history, we are proud to introduce three special awards—each created to honor not only business success, but the legacy, resilience, and community leadership that power it. These awards represent our belief that while the future belongs to the next generation, it's built on the foundation laid by those who came before them.

The **Lifetime Empowerment Award** honors individuals whose lifelong work has strengthened our community and empowered others across generations. The **NextGen Excellence Award** recognizes a rising young leader who is already making an impact and changing the narrative for youth entrepreneurship.

Lifetime Empowerment Award



Michael Williamson

Michael Williamson is the third-generation owner of Williamson Funeral Home in Niagara Falls—the city's first and only Black-owned funeral home. He began working in the family business at age 12 and has upheld a legacy of compassionate service and excellence. A leader in both business and faith, he serves as Chair of the Deacon Board at New Hope Baptist Church and as a council member of the Niagara Area Foundation. His life is defined by purpose, family, and dedication to community.



Kenneth & Sharon Holley

Kenneth and Sharon Holley are the co-founders of Zawadi Books, one of the longest-standing Black-owned bookstores in the nation. Since 1976, they've created a space for culture, learning, and representation in Buffalo's Black community. Sharon, a master storyteller and retired librarian, and Kenneth, a veteran and community advocate, have built a legacy of literacy, empowerment, and cultural pride for nearly five decades.

NextGen Excellence Award



Shelden Gibbs

At just 19, Shelden Gibbs is the founder and CEO of Classic Knot, a handcrafted bow tie brand he launched at age 10. A graduate of Nichols School and now a student at Canisius College, Shelden has been featured in news outlets across New York for his leadership and creativity. He is a bold voice for youth entrepreneurship and a shining example of what it means to lead with faith, vision, and excellence.



BankOnBuffalo is proud to support
Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color in
their mission to foster innovation, drive growth,
and create a lasting impact on the community.



www.BankOnBuffalo.bank

Member FDIC

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

The Dennis Wilson Jr. Entrepreneurial Spirit Award

The **Dennis Wilson Jr. Entrepreneurial Spirit Award** recognizes a young entrepreneur who exemplifies exceptional leadership, creativity, and a commitment to community service. Named in honor of Dennis Wilson Jr., this award is a tribute to those who consistently show up, create impact, and build with purpose—serving as an inspiration for others to follow.



Dennis Wilson Jr.

Entrepreneur and Business Owner _____
Mrdwilson Limited Corp.

Dennis Wilson Jr. is a multifaceted entrepreneur, educator, and community advocate based in Buffalo, NY. He is the co-owner of The Oakk Room, one of Buffalo's premier Black-owned establishments and a cornerstone for community, culture, and connection. In addition to his work at The Oakk Room, Dennis leads a graphic design firm and an event promotion company, while also serving as a high school teacher in Buffalo Public Schools.

His impact extends beyond business—Dennis has used his platforms to empower, mentor, and invest in the next generation of leaders. This award honors his legacy by recognizing young people who are building their own paths while lifting others along the way.

2025 Dennis Wilson Jr. Entrepreneurial Spirit Award Recipient

Donald Pettiway III

Founder, Lawn Barber Lawncare & Landscape _____



Donald Pettiway III is the embodiment of this award: vision-driven, community-focused, and unapologetically committed to growth.

At just 13 years old, Donald Pettiway III launched Lawn Barber Lawncare & Landscape with a single push mower and a bold vision. Using a bike and trailer, he began servicing lawns in his neighborhood, quickly gaining a reputation for being reliable, professional, and community-minded. He took pride in helping elderly and disabled residents maintain their homes with dignity.

When his motorized bike was stolen, Donald didn't give up—instead, he leaned on community support, started a GoFundMe, and used the momentum to bounce back even stronger. Now operating with a truck, full equipment, and an expanding team, Donald offers services from lawn maintenance and landscaping to surface washing and tree trimming.

More than just a business owner, Donald is a role model to his peers and younger brother. He leads with humility, consistency, and character, and continues to dream big—working toward a future in civil engineering where he can blend business and design for greater impact.

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

Honorees



Lynda Brundige

Marie Enterprise LLC

Founder of a licensed contracting firm, Lynda began her journey at age 12 working on community projects with her family's nonprofit. A standout student-athlete, she earned a degree in Physics and holds multiple licenses including real estate and CDL-A. Committed to breaking barriers, she mentors youth and empowers Black women in construction while expanding her business.



Anita Collins

Saints and Friends, LLC

Anita's Christian clothing brand blends fashion and faith to spread uplifting messages. She's a motivational speaker, singer, and photographer, balancing business, ministry, and education. Anita's mission is to inspire others, expand internationally, and pursue a doctorate in psychology while building a legacy rooted in faith.



Anaiyah Marshall

Ni's DreamLab

Anaiyah is the founder of a beauty and esthetics business that promotes confidence through skincare, waxing, and wellness education. Starting from home, she now operates in a professional suite and mentors young women. Her goal is to expand services while keeping them affordable and accessible in her community.



JEFFREY
ELDER

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



one open door can open doors across a community.

We believe that together we can keep our communities full of hope, compassion, and opportunity. KeyBank thanks RL Experience and True Community Development Corp., for making a difference.



©2024 KeyCorp. KeyBank Member FDIC.
221108-1326908-1268978406

Honorees



George Wiley V

Spray Lab

George customizes and restores shoes and clothing, with a client base that includes NFL and NHL athletes. A standout student and football player, he uses his creativity for charitable causes and balances academics, athletics, and entrepreneurship. George is committed to growing his brand while giving back.



Elias Torres

Eli Cutz

From Home Cuts to Becoming the Brand — Meet Elias Torres, the Self-Made Master Barber & Stylist Known as Eli Cutz. What started in 2022 as casual home cuts for friends has transformed into a powerful movement built on skill, style, and purpose. A graduate of the BOCES/Harkness Barbershop program, Elias inspires others through mentorship, community outreach, and professional excellence.



Eman Wajed

Buffalo Fashion Runway

Eman co-founded Buffalo Fashion Runway to spotlight local designers and creatives. Through events, workshops, and collaborations, he's built Buffalo's most-followed fashion platform. His mission is to expand BFR's impact, support young artists, and elevate Buffalo's fashion scene with innovation and purpose.



Anthony Baldi & Associates
Ameriprise Private Wealth Advisory Practice

Proud to Support the Next Generation of WNY Entrepreneurs and Business Professionals



*Your vision of your future is unique, and your financial plan should be too. As Ameriprise **financial advisors**, we have the qualifications and knowledge to help you **grow and preserve your wealth**. We'll work with you to find the right financial solutions for your individual needs. Ameriprise Financial is a longstanding leader in **financial planning and advice**.*

We are located at: 8310 Wehrle Dr, Williamsville, NY 14221

Call us at: 716-626-3296

Email us at: Anthony.F.Baldi@ampf.com

Investment products are not insured by the FDIC, NCUA or any federal agency, are not deposits or obligations of, or guaranteed by any financial institution, and involve investment risks including possible loss of principal and fluctuation in value.

Ameriprise Financial cannot guarantee future financial results.

The Compass is a trademark of Ameriprise Financial, Inc.

Investment advisory products and services are made available through Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC, a registered investment adviser.

Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. Member FINRA and SIPC.

© 2025 Ameriprise Financial, Inc. All rights reserved.





Helping businesses thrive is important.

At M&T Bank, we understand that small business is the lifeblood of any thriving community. Which is why we are committed to providing our support and keeping our lending decisions local. [See what we can do for your business at your neighborhood branch or **mtb.com** today.](#)

M&T Bank is proud to sponsor the Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards.

M&T Bank
Understanding what's important®



Equal Housing Lender. ©2023 M&T Bank. Member FDIC.

Support provided by The M&T Charitable Foundation and its corporate sponsor, M&T Bank.

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

Honorees



Jaden Martin

Jaden's Journey

Jaden launched his nonprofit to support underserved communities through outreach and creative expression. Despite personal challenges, he's volunteered for food drives, supported the homeless, and showcased his art in exhibitions. Jaden is committed to expanding his impact and using his story to uplift others.



Isaiah Gethers

IG Entertainment

Isaiah is a singer, mentor, and music teacher who founded IG Entertainment to combine artistry and community impact. He teaches young musicians, produces music, and uplifts through mentorship. Isaiah's vision is to grow his platform and inspire youth through the power of music and service.



Mekhi Edwards

Capture Me Visuals

Mekhi founded his photography business to capture life's most meaningful moments. A Canisius University student and marketing professional, he's also led fundraising efforts and mentors young creatives. Mekhi's goal is to expand his brand and blend photography, marketing, and social impact into one powerful platform.



Quality Youth Enrichment Programs

To learn about the
Police Athletic League of Buffalo,
please visit:

Buffalopal.com



SCAN TO DONATE



Honorees



Paulae Pope

UND

Paulae created UND, a sustainable fashion house that helps individuals express identity and reduce waste. She teaches clothing repurposing in schools, runs community drives, and promotes accessible fashion. Her mission is to build a platform for creativity, sustainability, and self-expression.



Rhalon Bragg

Legacy Tour

Rhalon leads Legacy Tour, a youth mentorship and sports program focused on leadership and community. As a coach and event organizer, he engages youth through basketball and giveaways. Rhalon's vision includes growing his brand, launching merchandise, and pursuing coaching, real estate, and life coaching to build generational impact.

Congratulations to the

Empower716

Young Entrepreneurs of Color Honorees



BLANC
PHOTOGRAPHIE

DM OR EMAIL US REGARDING OUR

POP-UP EMPLOYEE HEADSHOT PROGRAM

SERVING THOUSANDS EVERY YEAR.

BLANCPHOTOGRAPHIE@GMAIL.COM

☎ (716) 319-8979



Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

About the Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs Program

The Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Program is a six-month initiative created specifically for youth in grades 8 through 12. This hands-on, real-world experience equips young visionaries with the tools, skills, and support needed to explore and grow their entrepreneurial dreams.

Through dynamic workshops, one-on-one mentorship, professional networking, and pitch development, participants gain critical insights into business fundamentals, branding, financial literacy, and leadership. This program isn't just about learning—it's about launching.

From classroom concepts to boardroom confidence, the initiative empowers youth of color in Western New York to transform ideas into action—and passion into purpose.

Faces of the Future

Meet four of our outstanding 2025 six-month program participants:



Mateen Thomas



**Curtis Lamar
Clemons Jr.**



Angie Walker



Aaliyah McCarleu

THANK YOU TO OUR COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS



To become a collaborative partner or supporter go to www.empower716.com

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

Empower716 Program Leadership

The Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs Six-Month Development Program was created to equip students in grades 8 through 12 with the tools, confidence, and community they need to pursue their dreams and bring their business ideas to life. Through a combination of hands-on workshops, real-world learning, and personalized mentorship, this program served as a launchpad for the next generation of bold thinkers and doers.

At the heart of this effort was a dynamic leadership team that brought passion, guidance, and inspiration to every session.

Program Coordinator



Dr. Clement Kwakye

Dr. Kwakye led the overall coordination of the six-month initiative, ensuring that every experience was impactful and aligned with the mission. His leadership helped bring structure, purpose, and vision to the program.

Program Facilitators



Tamara Zantrell

As the founder of Raising a Mogul, Tamara led the first half of the program with powerful insight and real-world strategies. She helped students explore their "why," define their business identities, and take ownership of their entrepreneurial journeys.



Zandra Cunningham

As a nationally recognized teen entrepreneur and founder of Zandra Beauty, Zandra brought energy, authenticity, and vision to the second half of the program. Her mentorship challenged students to elevate their thinking and believe in their ability to lead.

With Gratitude to Our Collaborative Partners

This program was made possible through the support of incredible community partners. These organizations provided mentorship, resources, spaces, and services that transformed a vision into a reality. We are deeply grateful for your investment in our youth.

Thank you for walking alongside us.

Empower716 Young Entrepreneurs of Color Awards Gala

Planning Committee

We gratefully acknowledge the dedicated members of the Empower716 Planning Committee, whose leadership, creativity, and commitment made this year's program and celebration possible. Their passion for uplifting youth entrepreneurs of color continues to drive this mission forward.

Committee Members



Stephanie W. Cowart



Candice Thompson



Mark Overall



David E. Collins



Tanika Shedrick



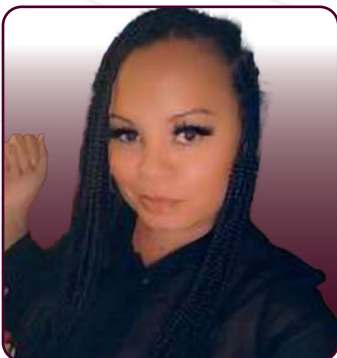
Talisa King



Janice McKinnie



Shanna Smith



RaQuell Hall



Crystal Morgan



Shara Armprester



THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 SPONSORS!



Office of Niagara County Legislator Jeffrey Elder



Anthony Baldi & Associates
Ameriprise Private Wealth Advisory Practice



BUFFALO STATE
UNIVERSITY



Mark Overall, Esq.

© University of Buffalo 2025. All rights reserved.

To become a Sponsor or Supporter Go to www.empower716.com