

November 2023



## Meet and mingle with your fellow class members at the Annual Alumni\* Luncheon 2023

Join us in celebration of the  
2023 Honorary Alumni member **Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole.**

Wednesday, November 29, 2023  
11:00 am - 1:00 pm

### Schultz Center

4019 Boulevard Center Dr, Jacksonville, 32207

Meet the new graduates from the Leadership Jacksonville Class of 2023,  
and Next Generation 2023, and hear the announcement of  
the annual LJ "Best Class" distinction.

### [Register here](#)

\*This event is for alumni only. Current LJ class members are welcome to  
participate in the Annual Alumni Luncheon upon completion of the program.



## Nominations are currently open for the Leadership Jacksonville Class of 2025!

Share with your friends and colleagues!  
Online nominations are open now through midnight December 15, 2023.

[Nominate here](#)



**LEADERSHIP  
JACKSONVILLE**

## Leadership Jacksonville 2024 Poverty Day

LJ 2024 class members participated in Poverty Day at the Jessie Ball duPont Center on October 19. The day included discussions with Northeast Florida leaders focused on understanding poverty and the impact on the community. Thank you to Program Day Sponsor [LISC Jacksonville](#), lunch sponsor Helen Jackson (LJ 1995) and the Women of Color Cultural Foundation, Inc, and to all of the volunteers and facilitators for their time and talents.





# Youth Leadership Jacksonville 2024 "Inside the System" Day



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**YOUTH LEADERSHIP**



YLJ 2024 "Inside the System" Program Day was held on October 5 at the Jessie Ball duPont Center. Through different discussions and activities, participants learned about the criminal justice system, the impact of crime on society and its victims, and discussed potential solutions. Thank you to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and the volunteers and speakers for their time and expertise.



**LJ Alumni Spotlight: Adam Chaskin (LJ 2021)**

Having lived in Jacksonville for just under five years, **Adam Chaskin** (LJ 2021) feels fortunate to have experienced the LJ flagship program. "The people I have met through the program have become personal friends, business associates, mentors, mentees, and some, all of the above." Adam discovered LJ from his JCA Board members who had experienced the program and raved about the benefits. "Ultimately it was **David Miller** (LJ 2008) who explained the great benefits of the program and encouraged me to apply."

"The most impactful part of the LJ program was the 'crash course' in Jacksonville history (the good, bad and the ugly) coupled with how and where the nonprofit community plays a role alongside with the rest of the community. The program really opened my eyes to Jacksonville's potential.

"Last year after the antisemitic incident at the Florida/Georgia game, **Eric Mann** (NLS 2012) and I spoke about the need for our organizations to come together and educate people in our community. That led to our staffs coming together and the creation of the six month series **Together Against Hate**, in which we focus on a different form of hate each month. Our goal is to educate people and help break down the barriers that have caused hate.

"We all have a goal of living in a better place, and helping each other. LJ provided an opportunity for me to ensure that my agency is a leader in accomplishing these goals," Adam shared.

## Upcoming Leadership Connect Dates

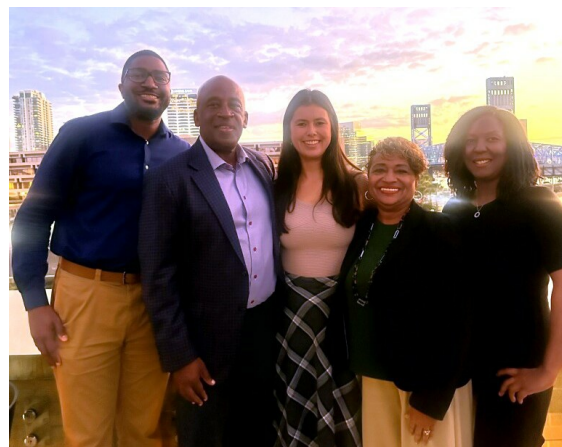
**Leadership Connect** builds relationships and fosters new alumni connections across Alumni members. Reserve your spot for an upcoming Leadership Connect breakfast, lunch, or happy hour meetup.

### Upcoming Alumni Gatherings:

**Chris Kennelly (LJ 2016), December 5**

**Dawn Lockhart (Honorary), December 14**

**January dates will be shared in the next edition of the LEAD Story.**



## 2023 LJ Events & Program Days

### **LJ 2025 Online Nominations**

Open now through midnight, Friday, December 15

YLJ 2024 "Leading For A Lifetime" Day

Thursday, November 2

LJ 2024 Justice Day  
Thursday, November 9

**Annual Alumni Luncheon 2023**

Wednesday, November 29

YLJ 2024 "Everyday Creativity" Day  
Thursday, November 30

LJ 2024 Education Day  
Thursday, December 7

**NextGen and YLJ Alumni Reconnect 2024**

Thursday, January 4

## Upcoming Class Socials

*Do you have an upcoming LJ Class social? Please email Manisha Joshi at [manisha@leadershipjax.org](mailto:manisha@leadershipjax.org) and we will include it in the monthly newsletter.*

**LJ 2021** is hosting a "Friendsgiving" on Thursday, November 2 from 6:00 - 8:30 pm at Office Environments and Services (OES) in San Marco. RSVP to **Madelen Salter** at [msalter@oesjax.com](mailto:msalter@oesjax.com).

**LJ 2016** is hosting a happy hour on Tuesday November 7 from 5:00 - 8:00 pm at Seven Bridges. Contact **Tina Wirth** to RSVP at [twirth@gmail.com](mailto:twirth@gmail.com).

**LJ 2019** is hosting a class social on Thursday, November 9 at 8:00 am at Maple Street Biscuit Company in Jacksonville Beach. RSVP to Patrick Johnson at [patrickjohnson@regencycenters.com](mailto:patrickjohnson@regencycenters.com)

**NextGen 2022 and 2023** Alumni members are invited for a tour at the Jacksonville Humane Society hosted by **Linda Stein** (Honorary) at 9:00 am on November 4. Space is limited to 15 attendees. RSVP to Conrad Jennings at [crad254@gmail.com](mailto:crad254@gmail.com).

**NextGen 2022 and NextGen 2023** Alumni members are invited for a tour of the Jacksonville Humane Society hosted by Linda Stein (Honorary) at 9:00 am on November 4. Space is limited to 15 attendees. RSVP to Conrad Jennings at [crad254@gmail.com](mailto:crad254@gmail.com).

**LJ 1993** celebrated their 30th reunion on October 12 at Midtown Table.

First row: **Alberta Hipps, Deborah Stapp, Barbara Darby, Jane Wood, Sherry Magill.**  
Second row: **Gracie Simendinger, Sandra Hull-Richardson, Janice Donaldson, John Bottaro, Michael Stewart and Robert Harris.**







**LJ 2018** class members met for a class social at River and Post on October 16.



## Alumni Class Notes

Submit your news to  
[manisha@leadershipjax.org](mailto:manisha@leadershipjax.org)

### 1997

**Julie Negrete Anderson** (LJ 1997) joined the University of Florida's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean's Leadership Council for the 2023-2026 term.

### 2005

**Jackie Rowland** (YLJ 2005) was named the 2023 Young Building Professional by Florida Home Builders Association at their Fall Conference in Destin.

### 2010

**Crystal Broughan** (LJ 2010) was appointed by the International Trademark Association to a seat on its Copyright Committee for 2024-2025.



### 2014

**Cindy Watson** (LJ 2014) announced her retirement from JASMYN after nearly 30 years of exemplary leadership and dedication to the youth of Northeast Florida. Send Cindy a note of congrats [here](#).

**Kalilah Jamall** (NextGen 2014) joined Changing Homelessness as an inaugural Volunteer Programming Manager.

### 2017

**Alex Alston** (LJ 2017) is the new Chief of Sports and Entertainment for the City of Jacksonville.

### 2018

**Laura Gonzales** (LJ 2018) was one of the recipients of the Florida-Gulf Coast Connect [CRE's 2023 Women in Real Estate Award](#). Connect CRE's Women in Real Estate Awards honor the achievements and inspirational stories of women who have reached respected leadership positions and play key mentorship roles for others. Laura is the first female Market Leader for Matthews Real Estate Investment Services.

**Jennifer Brown** (NLS 2019) and **Larry Moss** (NLS 2019) were both honored as Jacksonville Business Journal's 2023 Ultimate CEOs.

## 2020

Congratulations to **Courtney Weatherby-Hunter** (LJ 2020) on her promotion to Senior Fund Development Director at Jacksonville Public Education Fund.

## 2021

**Kelli O'Leary** (LJ 2021) was appointed as Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for the Office of the Mayor at the City of Jacksonville.

## 2022

**Nelrae Pasha Ali** (LJ 2022) is now part of the Wells Fargo Financial Network as a Managing Principal, Branch Manager/Senior Financial Advisor. She is also the owner of "Array Private Investment Advisory Group", a wealth advisory firm through Wells Fargo FiNet.

**Arend Dorsett** (LJ 2022) was appointed to the Jacksonville Children's Chorus Board of Directors.

**Charles Garrison** (LJ 2022) was elected as the Chair for the City of Jacksonville Planning Commission.

**Taylor Thigpen** (YLJ 2022) was awarded Florida Farm Finalist and Southern State Finalist at the 45th Annual Sunbelt AG Expo in Georgia in October.

## 2023

**Darren Brownlee** (LJ 2023) and **Megan Hayward** (LJ 2023) joined the DuBlasé Foundation Board of Directors led by **Darrin Eakins** (LJ 2023).

**Errol White** (LJ 2023) joined the Jacksonville Urban League as the Director of Veterans Community Services.

**Laken Chaney Gudzak** (NextGen 2023) was promoted to Director of Communications at Downtown Vision Inc.

**Adrena Forrest** (NextGen 2023) was promoted to Community Partnerships Specialist at Habijax.

**Taj Johnson** (NextGen 2023) received the 2023 Alumni Achievement Award from the UNF Black Alumni Association in the fields of Political Science/Law/Criminal Justice.

**Joel Masters** (NextGen 2023) was promoted to Financial Planning Manager at VyStar Credit Union.

**Kaley Vontz** (NextGen 2023) was featured as the [Deacon Spotlight](#) by Wake Forest University.

Several **LJ 2023** Alumni members attended Scenic Jacksonville's Great Cities Symposium at the Garden Club of Jacksonville on October 4.





**NextGen 2023** Alumni members shared their wisdom on a young professionals panel hosted by Jacksonville University's Student Inclusion Center and Career Management for a discussion on navigating the path to success with students at Jacksonville University on October 11.

Congratulations to **Addison Gomez** (YLJ 2023) on the screening of her original film "Mona Lisa" as part of the [2023 All American High School Film Festival](#) at the AMC in Times Square in New York City.



**2024**

**Devin Coleman** (LJ 2024) began a new position as a Researcher at the Florida Institute for Child Welfare.

**Desiree Jones** (LJ 2024) was [featured on News 4 Jax](#) on October 10, World Mental Health Day, to break down the most common stressors and how to address them in a healthy way.



**LJ 2024** Alumni members were spotted with **Nicole Bryan** (LJ Programs Director) at ED Talks at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront on September 27.

**Combined Classes and Events**

**Gracie Simendinger** (LJ CEO) and **Cindy Edelman** (LJ 1989) were both honored at the Jacksonville University (JU) Homecoming festivities on October 20. Gracie received the Scott





Amos Recent Alumna of Distinction Award, and Cindy was honored with the Distinguished Alumni of Excellence award. Learn more [here](#).

Pictured: **Tim Cost** (NLS 2013), **Gracie Simendinger** (LJ CEO), and **Cindy Edelman** (LJ 1989)

Alumni members **Adam Chaskin** (LJ 2021) and **Eric Mann** (NLS 2012) have partnered together to take an active role in educating and inspiring our neighbors to build a more inclusive Northeast Florida. Together Against Hate: Promoting Unity in Our Community is a speaker series that will address topics impacting our area including prejudices in faith, race, antisemitism, ethnicity, LGBTQ+, gender, and diverse abilities. The next session of the series will take place on November 7. For more information, [click here](#).

## In Sympathy

Our thoughts are with **Cheryl Seals-Mobley Gonzalez** (LJ 2012) on the passing of her mother, Grace Nerrissa Sands Seals Miller, on October 5.

## Stay connected!

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[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)



[LJ Alumni Facebook Group](#)

[NextGen Alumni Facebook Group](#)

[YLJ Alumni Facebook Group](#)

## Make a Leadership Jacksonville Donation

Many companies sponsor matching gift programs that match the charitable contributions made by their employees. This is a great way to enhance the impact of your giving.

[Donate today.](#)

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