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# ALUMNI NEWS

## HOMECOMING 2022



Red Hawks returned to the nest for fun, games, barbecue, student performances, football and a ceremony honoring football legend Sam Mills '81 (see story page 32).

For more photos and video, go to:





Photos by Mike Peters, John LaRosa and Shelley Kusnetz



## Living Her Legacy



Wamwari Waichungo '90 is living more than her best life; she is living her legacy. With a deep belief in the power of education, she is creating opportunities for the next generation of food science leaders through her ongoing support of the Wamwari Waichungo Food Science Scholarship and a recent seven-figure gift commitment to Montclair State University.

"I want others to have the opportunities I had," Wamwari says. "It is an honor to be able to pay it forward."

As vice president of Global Safety Assessment and Regulatory Affairs at SC Johnson, Wamwari leads a team of more than 140 regulatory compliance, registration and safety experts. The company's numerous brands, which range from pest control and cleaning products to air care, home storage and personal care, are something of a departure for the food scientist, whose prior experience includes product guidance, marketing, innovation, strategic planning and regulatory roles at The Coca-Cola Company, Campbell Soup Company and ConAgra.

"I bring an innovative and strategic approach to the safety, regulatory and registration aspects of SC Johnson brands and products," she explains.

Serendipity played a role in Wamwari's road to Montclair and the career she loves. Her father, who was studying at Harvard while his daughters finished high school in Kenya, learned of Montclair from a classmate who was the son of then President David W.D. Dickson.

Then, a long line in a hot gym during registration changed the trajectory of her education and set her on her path. "I stepped

away for a minute, to speak to a gentleman sitting at a table with no line. It happened to be Dr. John Specchio from the Nutrition and Food Studies department. We talked about my interest in food and my love of cooking. By the time we finished, I was sold and decided to change my major from Mathematics to Home Economics with a concentration in Food and Nutrition."

Specchio also remembers the conversation well – both he and Food Science as a major were new at Montclair. "As I explained the curriculum to Wamwari I could see her interest growing and her face lighting up. We talked about how food impacted everyone's life and the potential of a career in food science. She became one of my very first students."

"If it weren't for that conversation, I would have gone in an entirely different direction," says Wamwari, who went on to earn a master's degree and PhD in Food Science at the University of Missouri-Columbia. "He showed me the path to the incredible career I have today. His advice was priceless."

Wamwari makes it a priority to serve as a catalyst for the next generation of STEM leaders, particularly young women and young professionals of color, including supporting scholarships at Alliance Girls High School in Kenya, the first high school for African girls, which her mother attended as a young girl. Wamwari has also established the Waichungo Study Abroad Scholarship at the University of Missouri-Columbia, College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources. Wamwari offers students advice on how to cultivate and grow their careers.

Montclair, and the students here who share her love for nutrition and food science, hold a special place in Wamwari's life. Staying involved, she has participated in Women Entrepreneurship Week, hosted a reception for alumni in Atlanta, serves on the College of Education and Human Services Advisory Board, and has been part of the President's Club since 2015.

In 2015, she established the Wamwari Waichungo Food Science Scholarship at Montclair for students pursuing degrees in Nutrition and Food Science. This year, Wamwari took her support further with a significant commitment that will continue to transform students in the Nutrition and Food Science program by including additional endowment support for scholarships and student initiatives. The gift, honoring Wamwari's legacy and family, will be recognized in the naming of the University Hall courtyard as the Waichungo Family Courtyard.

The Wamwari Waichungo Food Science Scholarship helped Megha Barot '21 pursue her goal of a career in food product development. "The financial support was important, of course," she says. "But receiving the scholarship also motivated me. It was especially encouraging to know that the scholarship I received was funded by a successful alumna in my field."

When Barot met Wamwari, the accomplished alumna offered guidance and inspiration. "She encouraged me to have confidence and to embrace my accomplishments," Barot says.

"It makes me happy to help students like Megha," Wamwari says. "I am creating a legacy for my family, and for my sister, who also is a Montclair graduate," Wamwari continues. "And by making my legacy commitment to the University now, I get to enjoy the experience of giving."

In addition, Specchio and Wamwari have kept in touch over the years, with Specchio taking pride in his former



**Left:** Wamwari speaking as the distinguished alumna at the 2021 College of Education and Human Services Convocation ceremony.

**Below:** Wamwari visits with her mentor Nutrition and Food Studies Professor John Specchio on campus.



student's accomplishments, pointing out the impact of alumni participation and support. "When alumni like Wamwari show an interest in students, their understanding of their own potential expands," he says.

In June 2021, as Wamwari was honored as a distinguished alumna of the College of Education and Human Services and addressed the undergraduates at Convocation ceremonies, she couldn't help thinking of her own graduation. "I see myself in the students," she says. "It motivates me to listen to their stories and to let them know that I have been in their shoes. It is my turn to help them with the path forward." ■

—Michele Hickey

## ONE DAY FOR MONTCLAIR



Montclair alumni and the campus community are invited to celebrate the University's annual giving day, One Day for Montclair, on April 27, 2023. "One Day for Montclair is an opportunity for everyone – alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff and friends to come together on one day to do something special," says Director of Annual Giving Kara Baldwin Brennan '92. "When we all come together, we are saying we believe in the tremendous gift of higher education and the amazing opportunities here at Montclair." One Day for Montclair coincides with World's Fair Day on campus and includes fun activities, fundraising challenges and giving initiatives, like last year's "give a latte." It is a day to celebrate the contributions that allow Montclair to provide increased opportunities to help students follow their dreams. Check your inbox for more information.

## Graduated in the last 10 years? Join the Recent Alumni Network!

Recently graduated? We invite you to join the newly created Recent Alumni Network (RAN). RAN works to meet the needs and interests of alumni from the past 10 graduating years. Working with the Office of Alumni Engagement, the RAN committee will develop, plan, promote and deliver quality programs for our most recent alumni. Interested in serving on the committee? Contact Linda Kavan, associate director for Alumni Engagement, at [kavanl@montclair.edu](mailto:kavanl@montclair.edu) or **973-655-4141**.



Recent graduates get together for a night of fun and networking at The Barrow House in Clifton.

## Hot Fun in the Summertime

Alumni and friends gathered at McLoone's Boathouse in West Orange in June for the opportunity to meet President Jonathan Koppell, network with Red Hawk alumni and enjoy a beautiful summer evening.



## A Night to Remember



For more photos:



Alumni and friends gathered in October for the first-ever Black Alumni Advisory Council (BAAC) Gala to reconnect with classmates, rediscover their alma mater and pay it forward to students. They honored former Associate Dean of Students and University Ombudsman James Harris '68, '70 MA, recognized BAAC Rising Star Medinah Muhammad '16 and celebrated the legacy of Sam Mills '81. Proceeds support the Emergency, EOF and James Harris book funds. The BAAC was created to strengthen relationships with the Black community and promote social justice, equity and inclusion among alumni and students. To join BAAC and help build and strengthen the network and support student success email [baac@montclair.edu](mailto:baac@montclair.edu) or call the Office of Alumni Engagement at **973-655-4141**. Photo: President Jonathan Koppell and Rocky with the BAAC founders (l to r): Doreen Tucker '83, Diane Gipson '80, Brenda Coleman-Caldwell '78, Donna Teel '80, Joanne Bowman '82, Antoinette Clay '80, Greg Collins '79, Randal Yorker '89.

## 50th Reunion Committee

It's almost time for the Class of 1973's 50th reunion. Want to serve on the Reunion Committee? Contact Linda Kavan, Office of Annual Giving and Alumni Engagement, at [kavanl@montclair.edu](mailto:kavanl@montclair.edu) or **973-655-4141**.

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