

STAY FOCUSED

MAGAZINE

FROM CAREER To CALLING:
A Trailblazers Journey

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**Velda
Jones-
Potter**

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From Career to Calling: A Trailblazers Journey

By Monique Howard and Tonya May Avent

Excerpt, First Published Fall 2020



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that number, there were no African American women until I attended and graduated with a degree in engineering. These challenges, I feel, brought feelings of loneliness and isolation.”

Inspired by a strong Black Student Union and motivated from the lack of racial and gender diversity, Velda helped establish the Resource to Inspire Successful Engineers (RISE) program, along with a Peer Counseling program to support the success of minority students. Programs that are still operating very successfully today. She also pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the first black sorority on campus.

(Awarded Consortium for Graduate Study In Management Fellowship. Attended Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana and received an MBA with concentration in Finance.)

Velda would soon make groundbreaking strides on an unexpected path. During her tenure at the DuPont Company, she expanded her expertise to include business and finance, allowing her to increase her analytical skills. A prominent assignment followed; she was recruited and appointed by former Wilmington Mayor James Sills to serve as the city’s first Female Finance Director. An executive on loan from DuPont, Velda became the financial voice of a city once on the verge of fiscal ruin. During her temporary leave from DuPont to the city, Velda tackled the city’s financial challenges, including the crisis of a four-year operating deficit.

Using her financial savviness, Velda led a financial turnaround that resulted in a \$5.1 million surplus just eighteen months after arriving at the city. “This money helped the city hire 32 new police officers and settle contracts that remained open from previous years,” she recalls. “In addition, we introduced a new automated system to detect water consumption,



Velda Jones-Potter, Trailblazer

which meant workers no longer had to enter your home to read the water meter, so it had a great deal of safety and value to citizens.”

Velda returned to corporate America, after completing her momentous assignment, but seeing the direct impact her work had on people’s lives, public service never left her heart. “Making such tangible accomplishments showed me how my corporate skills were



On loan from the DuPont Company, Velda served as Finance Director with Wilmington’s first African American Mayor James Sills; helping the financially distressed city achieve a budget surplus after four year deficits. (1997)



Velda and husband, Charles, attend a holiday reception hosted by Vice President Joe and Dr. Jill Biden at their residence in the Nation's Capital.



Velda greeting residents in Wilmington's diverse neighborhoods.



Velda Jones-Potter, fulfilling her Calling.

very transferable and impactful in a positive way in people's lives. From this time forward, I was vested in helping communities and doing things that lifted people, and in some cases, changed their lives."

Velda found another way to make a positive impact and began working on a venture capital team. She reflects, "I wanted to have impact in others' lives in a direct and tangible way." Working with Dick Vermeil, former coach of the Philadelphia Eagles, along with other investors, the venture capital team provided access and capital to women and minority owned business.

In 2009, Velda received a groundbreaking appointment by then Governor Jack Markell, to become the Delaware State Treasurer. This gave Velda the distinction of being first African American to hold a statewide elected office. Fortuitously she was inaugurated to this office on the very same day that Barack Obama, was inaugurated as the country's first African American President. She received national acclaim for the financial education and empowerment initiatives rolled out during her tenure. She noted, "I was committed to helping people in our city and state get access and opportunity."

Eight years later, Velda achieved another historic distinction of being elected the first female and African American Wilmington City Treasurer. Inspired to impact and tangibly improve the lives of her community, Velda secured over \$20 million in savings for taxpayers and facilitated an additional \$4 million into the local economy through pension benefits.

Fully committed to closing the racial and gender gap, Velda returned to the University of

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Delaware shortly after graduating to tutor and mentor engineering students through the RISE program, recognizing the impact it had on her success. Velda continues to be a staunch promoter for educating youth in engineering, math, and science, explaining that **learning how to solve problems, and thinking analytically and critically leads to opportunities in fields across multiple disciplines.**

Being the first to achieve monumental and distinguished achievements will always come with unique challenges. Anchored by her Christian foundation, Velda was able to overcome obstacles created by race and gender to not only excel but also utilize the opportunities her career afforded her to help others. “It’s been my faith that has allowed me to step into unknown territory with confidence and the security of knowing that it’s going to be alright,” she attests. “It’s allowed me to manage some of the bumps and bruises that come during a lifetime. God hasn’t failed me, and I know that he won’t.” She admits that those initial endeavors into new vocational arenas were difficult but trusting God with her future became easier with each leap of faith she took.

Reflecting on her life and her transition from the corporate world to public service, Velda shares, “Public service wasn’t a career choice but more of a calling. My life has a very different outcome than I expected, but one that I wouldn’t change for the world. Advice I would give my younger self is, ‘seize an opportunity when it presents itself and step up to the challenge and the need when it reveals itself.’”

As her term as City Treasurer comes to an end, Velda contemplates her next chapter.



Constituents share concerns about lack of jobs and affordable housing.

“I’m prayerful, and I’m listening for how I am to contribute next to society, my family, all of those who I might have the opportunity to help.” **Undoubtedly that will include caring for the less fortunate, working for equal access, and treating others with respect.** Spending quality time with her husband and two adult sons is important to Velda, as she maintains a work-life balance by prioritizing her responsibilities, including finding time to relax by enjoying cowboy movies, watching sports,



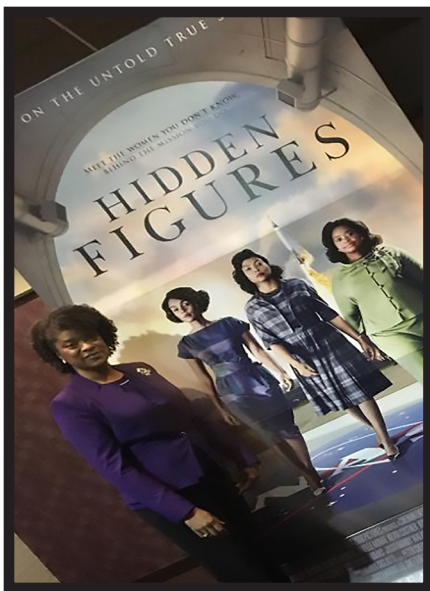
Velda marches in the annual Labor Day Parade in memory of her father, a member of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA Local #1694), for more than 34 years.

and dancing, some of her favorite pass times and entertainment activities.

When considering a legacy and how she'd like to be remembered, the most important aspect is the impact she has on peoples' lives. She desires to help people who have been marginalized have the same benefits, access and opportunity as those who have been afforded more privileges.

Velda encourages young minorities that are starting off their educational career and endeavors to, "**Lean on your faith. I would also say be bold [and] don't hold back.** Just put yourself out there for what you know and believe you are capable of doing. Don't second guess yourself."

Such wise advice coming from years of service and achievement. May we all be so bold to seize opportunities and venture on an unexpected journey to bring impactful change to the lives of the less fortunate all around us, opening doors and inspiring others to do the same.



Velda Jones-Potter and other Trailblazing Women

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MAGAZINE

From the Publisher's Desk

Excerpt, First Published Fall 2020

... I am most excited (in this issue) about our feature story. **I had the opportunity to meet and connect with Velda Jones-Potter of Wilmington, DE.** After reading her enclosed story you will understand why the writers of her story, Monique Howard and Tonya Avent call Velda a *Trailblazer*. Black women, and all women, in need of a little inspiration, encouragement, or a little pick me up, **read Velda's full story and shall be fulfilled.**



Deanna L. Garlic, M.A.
CEO / Publisher

I would even venture to say that many of you are Trailblazers in the making. Now is not the time to stop, quit, or take a break. Seek out your full Harvest of Blessing from the Lord by Staying Focused on your purpose in life. Get God's work done as you find your way and accomplish your own goals too.

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WOMEN INSPIRING WILMINGTON

& Velda for Mayor 2024 Announcement



★MARCH 31, 2023★

Wilmington Public Library

THANK YOU

to everyone who attended this special event to celebrate women of our city and announce my mayoral campaign.

Thanks also to those who were with us in spirit
and those who wished us well from afar.

I am encouraged by the enthusiasm across our city that a
bright and prosperous future is on the horizon for the
people of Wilmington.

As you enjoy this Special Edition Magazine - let us all
STAY FOCUSED!

~ Velda Jones-Potter