

Greater Huntsville Section Commemorates Black History Month 2017

by

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Images by Tammy Statham, Arloe Mayne, Lisa Philippart & Alan Lowrey

The Greater Huntsville Section commemorated Black History Month (BHM) 2017 throughout February with a full slate of activities to honor the contributions of African-American citizens to our nation and profession.

In his BHM kick-off message to the membership, Section Chair Brandon Stiltner stated the month was “a time to celebrate the achievements of our African-American colleagues, forebears and fellow citizens and their indispensable contributions to our institute, industry and nation.” He announced that the Greater Huntsville Section had planned several events in February to celebrate the proud achievements and contributions of African-Americans to the aerospace industry. The schedule included a section viewing of the movie *Hidden Figures*, a presentation on the Tuskegee Airman at the monthly luncheon, announcement of the Southern Museum of Flight’s student art contest honoring the first African-American military pilot, a meeting of the section book club to discuss *Hidden Figures*, and a section trip to Tuskegee, Alabama to tour the Tuskegee Airman National Historic Site, Tuskegee University, Booker T. Washington’s house and to visit with the section’s Tuskegee University Student Branch.



Section members & guests after watching *Hidden Figures*

Special Projects Officer Tracie Prater arranged a section trip to the theater to view *Hidden Figures* on February 7. Eight section members and guests met for dinner before the movie. Afterwards, twice that number showed up to watch the film about African-American female mathematicians who worked at NASA during the early days of the US space program and their indispensable contributions to America’s achievements in space.

Next, the Greater Huntsville Section helped promote the Southern Museum of Flight’s student art contest honoring Eugene Bullard, the first black American military pilot through multiple email announcements.

On February 14, the section hosted its monthly lecture luncheon featuring Marshall Space Flight Center’s Mr. Don Harris. Don’s talk, “*The Tuskegee Airmen and Me: Their Impact on My Life,*” provided a brief history of the Tuskegee Airmen and discussed Don’s relationships with several of the Airmen at pivotal points in his life that influenced his career decisions. Thirty members and guests



Don Harris speaks on the Tuskegee Airmen.

attended this riveting presentation including fellow professionals from the North Alabama Chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. Mr. Harris talked about how individual Tuskegee Airmen guided him and served as role models from his high school in Detroit to earning his degree at Tuskegee University to his career as an engineer at NASA. Don's presentation was so well-received, he was subsequently asked to speak at Marshall Space Flight Center and to a group of Boeing veterans.

Mr. Harris' presentation was an excellent prelude to the section's February 25 trip to Tuskegee to visit many of the sites featured during the talk

Thirteen Greater Huntsville Section professional members and guests, including one professional member from Auburn and two from Tuskegee, met up with 18 AIAA Tuskegee University Student Branch members for a full day of tours and networking. The group began the day at the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site at Moton Field, to tour the museum and the flying field where Tuskegee Airmen trained. Coincidentally, five busloads of Officer Trainees from Maxwell Air Force Base were also touring the museum, allowing an



Section members with PT-17 primary training aircraft.

The group then traveled the short distance to Tuskegee University where Tuskegee Student Branch Vice President and Tuskegee Ambassador Jessica Dedeaux led a walking tour of the campus on a beautiful sunny day. Jessica led the group to points of historical interest and outlined the institute's storied history in an entertaining yet poignant manner.

After a hearty brunch at the student cafeteria, the group convened at the General Daniel "Chappie" James Aerospace Center for a quick tour of the Aerospace Engineering Department's facilities. The tour was followed by an in-depth [presentation](#) by the student branch members on their branch's activities. The presentation was conceived by and added to the itinerary by the students themselves. Well-structured and

unplanned opportunity to interact with the fledgling Airmen on historic ground. During the tour, the section learned the history of the Tuskegee Experiment through a spell-binding video, historic aircraft and educational static displays. All came away with even more respect for those who had endured and given so much to our nation.



Section members underneath a Red Tails P-51

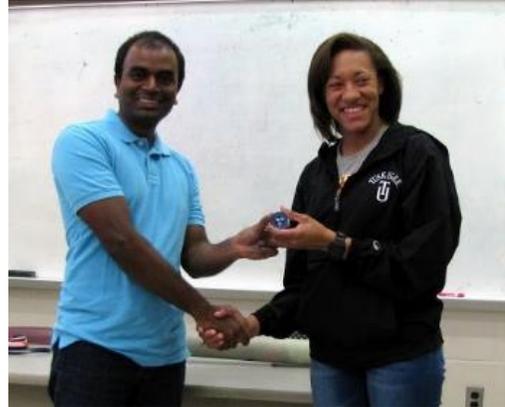
professionally presented by multiple students, the presentation conveyed the students' enthusiasm and commitment to engineering and added greatly to the Huntsville-based members' understanding of the section's capabilities at Tuskegee University. Dr. Vetcha presented the Greater Huntsville Section challenge coin to the Tuskegee University Student Branch in recognition of their achievements and commitment to excellence. After the formal discussions, the group convened outside in front of General James' Vietnam F-4 Phantom for a group photograph.

Next on the agenda was a guided tour of The Oaks, Booker T. Washington's home. The National Park Service conducted the tour, offering insight into a great man and life in the 19th century.



Greater Huntsville Section professional members & students in front of General Chappie James' F-4 at Tuskegee University.

Finally, the section capped its BHM 2017 activities with a meeting of the Greater Huntsville Section Book Club for in-depth discussion of the best-selling book *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly.



Greater Huntsville Vice Chair Naveen Vetcha presents the section coin to Tuskegee University Student Branch Vice Chair Jessica Dedeaux.

The day concluded with a relaxing group dinner allowing one more opportunity for professional members and students to socialize and network. Contact information was exchanged and immediately upon return, section members followed up on several student requests for employment opportunity connections and resume reviews. Two student members were subsequently introduced to the Chair of the Alabama Ninety Nines to further their flying careers, a fitting exclamation point to a very successful weekend trip!



Greater Huntsville Section Professional and Tuskegee University student members network over dinner.