

# SEGUE Pays Tribute to Johnetta Haley

by Doug McIllaga  
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EDWARDSVILLE - On this week's episode of Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's weekly radio program exploring the lives and work of the people on campus and beyond, Chancellor Randy Pembroke interviews numerous guests in

remembrance of Johnetta Haley, a prominent member of the SIUE and East St. Louis community.

This episode of Segue airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, May 23. Listeners can tune into WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or [siue.edu/wsie](http://siue.edu/wsie).

Haley, whose service at SIUE spanned nearly 48 years, passed away on January 30. She is best remembered for her inspirational, motivating mentorship and supportive spirit shown to everyone she encountered.

Following her mother's footsteps, Haley graduated from Lincoln University in 1945 with a degree in music education. She was a fourth-generation college student, a rarity for her era. Haley earned a master's in music from SIUE in 1972 and continued her education by studying at the University of Illinois, the University of Michigan, Georgetown University, Washington University in St. Louis, and the University of Montpellier in France.

After college, Haley taught at East St. Louis Lincoln High School as a vocal and general music teacher. She later became the vocal music director and chairperson of the Nipher Junior High School in Kirkwood, serving for 18 years. Haley was an integral member of the teachers who integrated Kirkwood Public Schools in 1955.

Haley joined the SIUE faculty as an assistant professor in the Department of Music from 1972-1984. She then served as the executive director of the SIUE East St. Louis Center from 1984-1993. Upon her retirement, the Department of Music named her professor emeritus.

Throughout her career, Haley earned numerous awards and achievements encompassing education, volunteering and business. She was recognized with a St. Louis Woman of Achievement Award in 1988 and received the Leadership Award from the St. Louis Community Empowerment Foundation's Annual Salute to Women in Leadership in 2010. Most recently, Haley was awarded SIUE's Distinguished Service Award in May 2017 for her countless contributions to the University and surrounding communities.

Pembroke's first guest is Tim Staples, EdD, executive director of the East St. Louis Center. Staples met Haley during high school while participating in SIUE's Upward Bound program.

"What was it like knowing Ms. Haley as a student?" inquires Pembroke.

"Through the Upward Bound Program, we took English, math and science courses at the East St. Louis Center," explains Staples. "Other students and I looked up to Ms. Haley

and saw her as a role model. Everyone came to military attention when she was around, and everyone had immense respect for her.”

“Johnetta served as the executive director of the East St. Louis Center, the position you currently hold,” notes Pembroke. “What did Johnetta mean to the center?”

“I don’t believe there would be a center without her,” answers Staples. “She was instrumental in creating our major programs that have a great effect on the East St. Louis community. Professor Haley built these programs and this center to become a full-service social and educational organization. My work today is easier because of the reputation she built.”

In 1994, SIUE named the Johnetta Haley Scholars Award in honor of her many contributions to the University and East St. Louis community. Rachel Stack, CEO of the SIUE Foundation and vice chancellor for University Advancement, has been instrumental in fundraising for the scholarship.

“Rachel, you’ve had the opportunity to get to know Johnetta during the last several years,” says Pembroke. “What stood out to you about her presence?”

“I met Johnetta shortly after starting at SIUE in 2014, and I wanted to find out why and how she started the Haley Scholarship,” shares Stack. “She explained how important education was to her and her family of four generations. She wanted to share this legacy with other minority students, so she used her considerable leverage and connections to create this fund.”

Prince Wells, associate professor in the Department of Music, described Haley as a phenomenal teacher who supported students throughout the most challenging music classes.

“What are some of the most memorable lessons Ms. Haley taught you?” inquires Pembroke.

“She taught me the nuts and bolts of music through music theory,” says Wells. “I gained an appreciation of a broad spectrum of different types of music because of her. She was always proud of her students and a mentor to us. When it came to music, she was highly regarded and widely known.”

Eugene Redmond, emeritus professor of English and East St. Louis Poet Laureate, reminisces on looking up to Haley during his youth, noting how erudite and graceful she was in the classroom.

“What was Ms. Haley’s teaching and directing style?” asks Pembroke.

“She was a strong person, a teacher who was commanding a circus and took no backtalk,” explains Redmond. “She was in charge throughout her life, whether she was teaching in the public schools or administering SIUE programs. We were all proud of her when she ran the East St. Louis Center.”

Pembroke’s final guest is Karen Douglas, daughter of Haley.

“What did SIUE mean to Johnetta?” asks Pembroke.

“SIUE meant a lot to my mother,” says Douglas. “We got our master’s at the same time, and when she received a letter asking her to come on as an associate professor, she was over-the-top excited. I still have that letter and read it a couple of weeks ago.

“When she was able to serve the East St. Louis Center, she was delighted. My mother was always working to improve education and life for the community she worked for and grew up in. She strives for excellence, and you could see that when visiting the East St. Louis Center under her leadership.”

Before the show, WSIE asked all guests to describe Haley in one word. Here are their insights: inspiring, unforgettable, dynamic, supportive, brilliant, self-assured, graceful, exceptional and insightful.

“Thank you for joining us for an extended Segue honoring the life of professor emeritus, Johnetta Haley,” ends Pembroke. “Following will be a few musical selections from her era. I hope you enjoy listening to the music, and if you were lucky enough to know Johnetta, reflecting on her life and remembering this incredible woman.”

Tune in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, May 23 to WSIE 88.7 The Sound to hear the entire conversation.

Photo: SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke presents the University’s Distinguished Service Award to Johnetta Haley.