

Jamaican Makes History: First Black Woman To Earn Biophysical Chemistry Degree In Virginia



Jay-Anne Johnson

By Stephanie Korney
Jamaica.com

Jamaican Jay-Anne Johnson is set to be the first black female student to graduate from James Madison University (JMU) in Virginia with a bachelor's degree in biophysical chemistry.

According to Linette Watkins, the head of the University's Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, JMU is the only school in the Virginia Commonwealth to offer this degree.

According to Isaiah Sumner, professor of chemistry at JMU, Johnson joined his lab as a first-year student in 2018, which he noted as "kind of remarkable in itself," as many first-year students do not feel ready to join a chemistry lab in general and one like his in particu-

lar. Johnson said it was also difficult for her to avoid realizing that she stood out for other reasons. She said that it took a few weeks in class before she noticed that she was the only black student there.

Sumner followed her growth as a biochemistry student with interest and watched her go on to present her research at national conferences. At one of the conferences, he received an email from someone who saw her present her work and wrote, "Wow, this is fantastic! She should come to my school for graduate work!" This was the first time anything like that had ever happened, Sumner added. A publication based on Johnson's work is currently in preparation.

Johnson's sorority sister, Lauryn Johnson described Jay-Anne as being "involved in so much stuff" that she has to check her planner to schedule time with friends. Johnson's impact on JMU is evident

in the list of clubs and organizations she is a member: co-founder of the JMU Chapter of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers; helped to establish an LGBTQ+ organization for minority students at JMU.

According to

Lauryn, "Jay-Anne has made her mark on the campus. Many people know her, and many are likely to follow in her footsteps."

Johnson is hoping that other black and minority students like her will "flood the hospitals, flood the health care world, flood the STEM fields with black chemists, black engineers, black biologists, and just let them know

that we as black people are amazing." Everyone who knows Johnson, including Professor Sumner, has no doubt that she will go on to inspire others in the future. "I told her once, 'You may be the first black woman to earn this degree, but guaranteed you're not going to be the last. You opened doors that weren't open before,'" Sumner said.

United Order Of Mechanics Donates Bikes, Helmets To Help Decrease Chronic Absenteeism

By John Perkins

Chronic absenteeism is of serious concern for Hartford Public Schools. On average approximately 25% of students are chronically absent.

Evidence has shown that students who are chronically absent have higher rates of reading difficulties, less engagement in school-related activities, and overall lower achievement scores. According to research some of the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism are listed below.

According to a January 29, 2021 article published in the *Hartford Courant*, Hartford Public Schools are considering extending the school day or moving to a longer school year to address attendance and academic achievement issues that have worsened during the pandemic.

The article continues, this school year, 48% of in-person learners are considered chronically absent in the Hartford Public Schools. Meanwhile, only 44% of high school students are on track for graduation, and only a quarter of elementary school students are reading on grade level, according to the dis-

trict's January budget preview.

To help motivate students to attend school regularly, the **Independent United Order of Mechanics** located at 3363

Main Street, Hartford, CT adopted three elementary schools (Wish, SAND, and Rawson). They donated six (6) bikes to each school to be awarded to students, male and

females, who demonstrate significant attendance improvement for a specified marketing period. The bikes may also help to boost health as the summer approaches and restrictions are lifted giving more

children more options for outdoor activities after having being indoors for almost a year.

The helmets were donated

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Barriers	Negative School Experiences	Lack of Engagement	Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illness, both chronic and acute• Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care• Trauma• Unsafe path to/from school• Poor Transportation• Frequent moves or school changes• Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggling academically or socially• Bullying• Suspensions and expulsions• Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience• Undiagnosed disability• Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction• No meaningful relationships with adults in school• Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school• Unwelcoming school climate• Failure to earn credits/ no future plans• Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused• Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning• Sporadic absences aren't a problem• Attendance only matters in the older grades

Donation Of Bikes, Helmets

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by **Safe Kids Connecticut**, a program based out of the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center in Hartford, a statewide network of organizations and individuals who work together to prevent unintentional injury in children ages 0-19. Safe Kids Connecticut is a multifaceted organization that works to reduce death and injury rates of children through community education, public policy change, creating safe environments, and conducting research.

The Independent United Order of Mechanics Lodge believes that such a project would help to foster the social, culture, and behavioral supports needed to motivate emotional and academic outcomes for all students.

The funds to purchase the bikes were made possible from a grant of the West Indian

Foundation. The funds were granted to support the lodge customary Children’s Christmas party and back-to-school supplies. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and in keeping with the State of CT and CDC recommendations the Christmas party was cancelled.

The District Grand Master subsequently made a decision to redirect the funds to what the lodge saw as a more viable and beneficial program to assist students’ outcome.

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Warning: Credit Card Skimmers Ahead Of Summer Travel

The Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) is reminding consumers to be cautious when paying at the pump, following a report of a skimming device at a gas station in Plymouth, CT.

“People are driving more, and that means they’re filling up more, but the last thing many consumers are thinking about is whether or not their gas pump card reader is secure,” said **DCP Commissioner Michelle H. Seagull**. “The easiest way to avoid a credit card skimmer is to pay in cash or to pay inside the gas station, but we understand most consumers prefer the convenience of paying at the pump. Still, consumers should keep track of when and where they’re stopping for gas, and regularly check their credit card statements for fraudulent activity.”

“With more people hitting the road to go on summer vacations now that they’re vaccinated, it’s important to be vigilant of credit card skimming devices when you’re stopping for gas,” said **Attorney General William Tong**. “Before filling up your tank, check the seal of the gas pump to make sure it hasn’t been tampered with. If you can, pay with cash inside. If you plan to use your credit card to pay for gas, check your statement regularly to identify and catch potential fraud early.”

As consumers gear up for summer travel, DCP is offering the following tips that can help prevent thieves from stealing financial and identifying information:

What You Can Do at the Pump:

- **Check the seal.** Many stations use security seals on the fuel dispenser access panels. Make sure

the seal on each gas pump isn’t broken or tampered with. If it is, that indicates that someone not authorized to inspect a gas pump has tampered with it.

- **Report it to an attendant.** If you see a pump that you believe may have been tampered with, don’t use it. You should report that pump’s issue to the gas station attendant.

- **Use your credit card or pay by cash.** If you pay by cash, you won’t fall victim to a skimming attack. If you use your credit card, you will be able to recover your funds more easily and keep money in your bank account.

- **Pay inside.** Paying inside reduces your risk of falling victim to a skimming attack significantly because it’s much harder for fraudsters to place a skimmer indoors near the cash register. If you must pay outside, pick the pump closest to the building or security camera.

What You Can Do at Home:

- **Check your credit card statement regularly.** If you have a charge that looks unfamiliar, it’s important that you notice as soon as possible and report it immediately to your credit card company so that you can take the steps necessary to get a refund and possibly cancel your card.

- **Plan your trips.** If you’re taking a long road trip, plan ahead so you know where you’re getting gas and you can re-trace your steps if need be. According to reports, stations on or near the interstate are at the most risk for skimming.

- **Notify the authorities.** If you believe you’ve fallen victim to a skimming attack, make sure you alert your local police and DCP. If consumers have questions for DCP, or need to file a complaint related to gasoline, they may contact our Food and Standards Division at dcp.foodandstandards@ct.gov.

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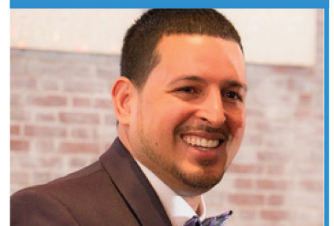
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