

Phyllis Darden-Caldwell - Emerita

Phyllis Darden-Caldwell earned her B.S. and M.S. degrees from Prairie View A & M University in 1980 and 1981, respectively.

She retired after 31 years with the international law firm of Vinson & Elkins L.L.P. as a paralegal where she practiced in the areas of complex litigation and antitrust from case inception to trial and case appeal. As a paralegal, Ms. Darden-Caldwell served on and was a member of various professional organizations, boards, and committees including the Houston Metropolitan Paralegal Association, the Texas State Bar Paralegal Division, and Houston Community College Paralegal Advisory Committee. She served on the firm's Pro Bono Advisory Committee, Paralegal Advisory Committee and was the coordinator of Vinson & Elkins L.L.P.'s Innocence Project Paralegal Pilot Program which led to the exoneration of several wrongfully convicted defendants in Texas. Phyllis worked on several high-profile litigation matters and managed complex litigation paralegal and support staff case teams. She has coordinated, facilitated, and presented at several paralegal seminars and workshops over the years for various professional seminar organizations. She recently returned to the profession as a contract paralegal.

Ms. Darden-Caldwell participated in various community organizations including Neighborhood Center, Inc. Ripley House Advisory Board both as a member and as Chair for several years; NAACP Act-So; HISD Volunteer in Public Schools Leadership 2000; and in various fundraising activities including TransAfrica Forum, Women for Turner, University of Houston's African American Studies Program and the Clara Meek Endowed Scholarship and various political campaigns over the years.

She served on the Prairie View A&M University Capital Campaign Cabinet as Co-Chair of Special Alumni Gifts. The Campaign successively raised \$32.6M.

Ms. Darden-Caldwell is a co-founder of the Prairie View A&M Foundations and served as Trustee/Corporate Secretary from 2009 – 2015. With the assistance of Vinson & Elkins, L.L.P., she collaborated with attorneys to research and prepare the necessary documentation to organize the Prairie View A&M Foundation and successfully file for 501c3 tax-exempt status.

Phyllis has served on several university committees including the Sports Hall of Fame Executive Committee, College of Juvenile Justice & Psychology & Crime Prevention Center Advisory Board, and the Homecoming Committee as well as several search committees. She has also served as a Judge several times for the Miss PVAMU and Mr. PVAMU Scholarship Pageants and the Black History Month Essay Contests and was the guest speaker for the Fall 2017 Alumni Initiation Pinning Ceremony.

In 2015, she was responsible for facilitating the successful "The Soul of Philanthropy" exhibition and panel discussions on behalf of the university at the Buffalo Soldiers Museum. The exhibition created by Valaida Fullwood and photographer, Charles W. Thomas, included 50 black-and-white images of "philanthropic musings across generations". The panel discussions held over six weeks were designed to stimulate conversation about philanthropic efforts on several levels including individual, community, and corporate efforts.

In 2016, Ms. Darden-Caldwell facilitated the 2016 Ted Ellis and Ronney Stevens Art Exhibit on campus which brought artwork selections individually valued from \$10K to \$50K. One artwork selections had been commissioned by the City of Selma to commemorate the 50th year anniversary of the March on Selma and another was commissioned by Washington, DC officials for the celebration of the 2009 Inauguration of President Barack Obama.

Phyllis has volunteered extensively over the years with the Athletic Department to re-engage former student-athletes and identify fundraising opportunities for athletic programs. She worked with the football program to develop a Career Symposium for Football Seniors and the Champions Road to Success Series as part of the fall football camp. The events engaged both alum and non- alum as workshop facilitators and presenters. The Career Symposium and subsequent efforts brought NFL and PVAMU alumni to campus to speak to the team including Mel Gray, Detroit Lions; Fred Newhouse, Olympic Medalist; Kenny Houston, NFL HOF'er; members of the SWAC 2009 Championship Team; international motivational speaker, Ahmard Vital; and NFL HOF'er, "Mean" Joe Greene as a Homecoming motivational game speaker to the football team on two occasions. She currently volunteers with the PVAMU Go Team with the PVAMU Women's Basketball Team.

Ms. Darden-Caldwell has been involved in several fundraising activities for the university. She spearheaded the 2016 PVAMU Athletics fundraising benefit for the Kenny Houston Endowed Scholarship receiving donations from both the NFL, former NFL players, PVAMU alumni, and family and friends of Kenny Houston. She serves as the liaison to Kenneth and Dr. Gustie Houston to identify fundraising opportunities for the scholarship fund. Phyllis was also instrumental in working with the family of Sandra Bland to initiate and develop the Sandra Bland Endowed Scholarship for Social Justice.

Ms. Darden-Caldwell has personally recruited and served as a mentor to many students over the years including as a mentor to the Lady Panthers Softball team. She currently participates with the College of Business Mentorship Program. Phyllis believes that through mentorship, students can see "alumni giving back" in action. She believes that as alumni, we are obligated to become self-appointed Ambassadors of Prairie View A&M University and the "Chairperson" of our own personal Recruitment Committee. Alumni should each seek to promote the university to prospective students and donors while contributing our time, talent, and treasure. As alumnus, we are obligated to listen to and mentor students while providing network opportunities that eliminate some of the obstacles that we faced as students and young graduates.

Ms. Darden-Caldwell was honored in March 2017 by the Prairie View Women's Week Committee as a PV Girls Rock Honoree and the naming of the Phyllis Darden-Caldwell Alumnae Legacy Award which is to be awarded each year to a deserving alumna. In 2019, a bench was placed in her honor in front of the Memorial Student Center for contributions to the university.

Ms. Darden-Caldwell has one son, Philip Tidwell.