

The Buffaloes' Hall of Fame Inductee Vanilla Nelson Hannah



Vanilla Nelson Hannah is a retired Arkadelphia High School counselor who was a main source of continuity for students amidst changes and challenges both inside and outside of school. Her thoughtful encouragement and consistent presence helped students feel seen and supported. As school counselor she provided the comfortable space many students needed. Whether it was a listening ear, a place to calm down, or a trusted presence nearby, she had a way of meeting students' needs – oftentimes even before they realized they needed support. She was the type of counselor who changed lives for the better, one day at a time.

Vanilla grew up in Camden, attending church at St. Paul Baptist Church and singing in the choir from age two. She graduated from Lincoln High School and started college at Ouachita Baptist University (OBU.) She had previously attended the Upward Bound Program there (1966-1968). While at OBU, Vanilla worked in every position in Upward Bound program, including as a dorm counselor. She is presently a consultant for the TRIO program. This chapter took on memories that left a lifetime impression. She became friends with Brenda Brownlee and the “West End Crew.” She even attended Senior Prom at Peake with her Buffalo friends.

Here are the highlights of Mrs. Hannah's life experiences:

Activities at OBU: OBU Singers, Concert Choir, BASS, ROTC Drill Team, Phi Beta Lambda President, Alpha Rho Tau President.

Affiliations: Church- Greater Pleasant Hill Baptist Church – Supt/teacher, Choir, AEA/NEA, OES/Universal Evergreen Verbena #192, Justice of the Peace #3 for 18 Years, Sunshine Service Club, Hot Springs Area Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, INC, NAACP, CASA volunteer, Democratic Party, Retired Teacher Association.

Awards: Recently awarded the Gold Tigers (50th-year graduation from OBU) and Milestone Award (Outstanding Service to Arkadelphia Community and OBU).

Education: BSE-BA – OBU Office- Administration and Business Education, MSE-HSU – Guidance Counselor, Numerous continuing education hours, “High Schools That Work,” workshops, Graduate of HSU - ESL Academy, Chief Examiner for GED testing.

Teaching Experience: Sparkman High – Keyboarding, Accounting, & Business Education Courses. Arkadelphia Public School- Keyboard, Counselor at Goza Middle School and AHS, YOU Program at HSU.

Vanilla Nelson was named by her brother, who declared that she was the best thing in their home since vanilla wafers! (After eight births, their mother didn't have the energy to name another child!) He hoped she would soon gain enough strength to start making his favorite banana pudding. Her parents, James Artie & Annie Mae Nelson, as well as seven siblings, and her children's father are deceased. She is a proud mother and grandmother of Grenellya, Roxie (Jeff), Kendall Vanilla, and Dr. Kimberley (David, Esq); her grandchildren are Hannah, Gabriel, Jai Parker, Reese, Jesteen Joy, and Amiyah Lily.

Vanilla says, “It has been a joy to work with the Buffaloes Foundation in various capacities since its inception in 1993. Thank you, Peake Buffaloes, for adopting this Lincoln High Tiger!”