



OCTOBER 2021

THE DEEP BENCH

A Monthly Newsletter by The Office of African American Affairs

The Office of African American Affairs is proud to recognize the many Black professionals throughout New Mexico who are committed to impacting the lives of Black New Mexicans. Their education, expertise, and experience have poised them to be leaders in their careers, in the public and private sectors.

Each month we recognize three individuals, spotlighting their accomplishments and their impact on New Mexico. If you would like to nominate a Black professional (including yourself) to be in the Deep Bench, please send your name and contact information to AndreaT.Watson@state.nm.us.



Isaac Brundage

Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management,
Western New Mexico University

Dr. Isaac Brundage, Ed.D., is vice president for student affairs and enrollment management at Western New Mexico University, specializing in student enrollment, retention, and community outreach and engagement. A career that began in the K-12 system,

Dr. Brundage began work in education as a science teacher and science resource specialist, gaining a perspective on the education modalities and challenges facing students early in their education careers.

Prior to joining Western New Mexico University, Dr. Brundage established the Florida Gulf Coast University Office of Community Outreach and served as its founding director. And in a more than two-decades-long career in higher education, has held leadership positions in the areas of university housing, multicultural affairs, Greek life, and university Ombuds.

Dr. Isaac Brundage graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology/Education from Florida A&M University. He later received his Master of Education, Educational Specialist, and Doctor of Education degrees all from Florida Gulf Coast University.

What do you believe are the strengths of the NM Black Community?

The Black community in New Mexico is small, but whereas some may consider that a weakness, I find it to be a strength that allows people of varying backgrounds to find commonality within a tightly knit community. As a resident of the southwest part of the state where the Black community is small compared to the population, I find our community incredibly welcoming, civic-minded, and supportive. When I first moved to the area from Florida, a welcome reception was held in my honor in which the local Black community showed up in force to welcome my arrival and ensure I was made to feel at home.

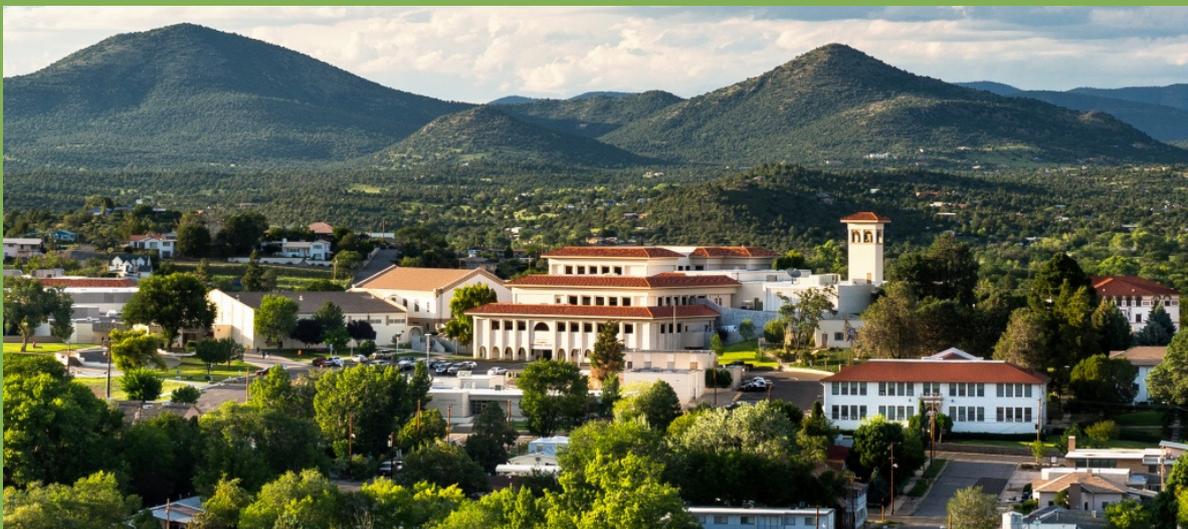
What do you want your influence on the NM Black Community to Be?

Several years ago, one of my mentees gifted me a statue of a man kneeling on a stand, arms stretched out with the inscription, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). On the back, it reads, "Thank you for allowing me to stand on your shoulders." That is the influence I want to leave with all New Mexicans, especially the Black community. Just as I stand on the shoulders of those who paved the way for me, I want to be seen as a resource for upcoming young men and women looking to achieve the goals that will allow them to continue paving the way for future generations.

What can NM do to attract more Blacks to our state?

New Mexico is rich in culture, traditions, and opportunities the rest of the country is not fully aware of. As a state, we must continue to highlight these areas and share not only what New Mexico has to offer the Black community, but the diversity and economic prosperity that a growing Black community can bring to our state.

Upon moving to New Mexico, I experienced many first quintessentially New Mexican adventures. I had my first outdoor experiences in the beautiful open spaces of the Land of Enchantment. I attended my first rodeo, which now allows me to declare with certainty that "this ain't my first rodeo." I learned to understand why a Hatch green chile cheeseburger is a culinary event, and I learned to appreciate the moving passion of mariachi music. I can proudly say I live where Billy the Kid and Buffalo Soldiers once made their homes, now populated by artists, educators, and working professionals. From outdoor adventures to cultural experiences, what New Mexico has to offer is extremely attractive to Black families looking for the right place to build a life.





Yaw Adjei-Poku

Electrophysiologist,
New Mexico Heart Institute at
Lovelace Medical Center

Dr. Yaw Adjei-Poku is currently a staff electrophysiologist at New Mexico Heart Institute. Dr. Poku is originally from Ghana, West Africa. He moved to the United States at age 6. He studied biomedical engineering at Yale University, where he served as the president of the Yale chapter of the national society for black engineers.

Dr. Poku received his medical degree from the University of Utah. He was quite active in community service and volunteered at a homeless clinic and another clinic for minorities from underserved communities. He left Utah to pursue further internal medicine training at Boston University and served as a chief medical resident. He continued his interests in helping other minorities during his time thereby serving as the coordinator for minority recruitment attempting to increase minority representation throughout the medical community.

After residency, he pursued cardiology and cardiac electrophysiology subspecialty training at Harvard Medical School.

In Summer 2017, Dr. Poku accepted a position with New Mexico Heart Institute, where he has been practicing since. He has gone on to serve as the medical director for the device clinic, director of the electrophysiology service line, and president of the New Mexico Heart Institute Foundation.

What do you believe are the strengths of the NM Black Community?

Despite the small number of African Americans in New Mexico, our strength lies in our diversity inexperience. We all have very different experiences and skills. Together with our respective skills, we can make a significant impact in the lives of others in New Mexico.

What do you want your influence on the NM Black Community to Be?

I want to serve as an inspiration for younger minorities in the community. I think role models are important for African Americans in New Mexico to have someone to potentially look up to and emulate.

What can NM do to attract more Black people to our state?

The best way for New Mexico to attract more African Americans is for the current residents of the state to show how welcome they feel by living here. We need to ensure others know about the beauty of New Mexico and highlight African Americans who are thriving and successful in the community. This will encourage others to consider moving here.



Rodney Prunty

President & CEO,
United Way of Central New Mexico

Rodney Prunty is a passionate, dedicated community servant with 34 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, including 14 years with United Way. Rodney began employment at United Way in 2007 as a resource development manager for United Way of Rock River Valley in Rockford, IL (UWRRV), where he was responsible for developing and implementing fundraising strategies and donor cultivation for the annual campaign.

In 2010, he was promoted to vice president of UWRRV. In this role, he oversaw an array of activities for the organization, including human resources, organizational budgets, volunteer recruitment, community partnerships, community initiatives, campaign, and grants.

Rodney joined United Way of Racine County (UWRC) in Racine, Wisconsin, in August of 2013 as the President and Chief Professional Officer. During his tenure, Rodney helped create a culture of relationship management in UWRC's resource development department, which was integral to UWRC's fundraising success. Rodney's leadership in Racine led to its United Way campaigns being ranked in the top ten of the highest fundraising totals in the organization's history.

Rodney began his role as President & CEO of United Way of Central New Mexico (UWCNM) in June of 2019. In his first year, Rodney's experience in fundraising, relationship-building, community engagement, and collective impact began to have an effect in central New Mexico. Under his leadership, UWCNM exceeded its campaign goals for the past two years. UWCNM was also selected as one of forty-seven local United Ways across the country to receive a transformational gift from MacKenzie Scott in 2020. UWCNM also raised over \$1.4 million in COVID-19 recovery and other emergency funding in 2020.

Mr. Prunty is unwavering in his focus to create long-term, positive community change at scale. He holds a Master's Degree in Organizational Leadership and a Bachelor's Degree in Human Services.

What do you believe are the strengths of the NM Black Community?

Although I have been in New Mexico for two years, the pandemic has limited my capacity to learn more about the NM black community. However, what I have learned is that there are many strengths that the NM black community brings to the Land of Enchantment. One strength that rises to the top is how the black community embraces and supports new black leaders in New Mexico. There is an authentic desire for new black leaders to succeed. For example, I was publicly welcomed with open arms a few months into my tenure as CEO by the New Mexico African American Chamber of Commerce and the connections I formed during that event proved to be very helpful to me in navigating the landscape in Central New Mexico. Another strength I would highlight is the determination and resolve of many black leaders to ensure that the voice of the black community is heard in the nonprofit sector and public policy arena. This is highly commendable, inspiring, and necessary.

What do you want your influence on the NM Black Community to Be?

Beyond supporting community initiatives and partnerships that focus on creating equitable outcomes in Central New Mexico, I am dedicated to providing a platform for more black voices to be regularly heard, providing more resources to black-led nonprofits to strengthen their capability to accomplish their respective missions, and providing recognition and professional development for those who work in the nonprofit sector. These efforts represent the three pillars of our DEI United partnership with the Albuquerque Community Foundation.

Which are as follows: 1. Community Engagement; 2. BIPOC Nonprofit Funding; and 3. Equity in Learning and Leadership. We have just begun the implementation of two of the three pillars, and I am very excited about what the future holds. Stay tuned.

What can NM do to attract more Blacks to our state?

New Mexico is such a beautiful state with so much to offer. I do not believe that it is emphasized as much as it could be across the US. In addition, there is an impression in most parts of the country that there is little to no African American presence in New Mexico. Although the percentage of African American presence is smaller in New Mexico compared to most states in the US, the actual number of African Americans in New Mexico is sizable. As such, I believe that it is important to highlight and amplify the contributions, accomplishments, and presence of black leaders, organizations, businesses, and initiatives. There needs to be an intentional and concerted effort through marketing and outreach to dispel that myth.



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