



2018 SBAS Presidential Address - Sustainability, Relevancy and the Society of Black Academic Surgeons: The making of an academic surgeon

Anthony Stallion^{a,*}

^a Beaumont Children's, Beaumont Health, Surgery and Pediatrics, Oakland Univ. William Beaumont School of Medicine, Royal Oak, MI, 48073, United States

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Good Afternoon. I want to thank the University Alabama Birmingham (UAB), Chairman of Surgery Dr Herb Chen, Dean Vickers, the local program chairs Dr. Martin and Dr. Gray, and the administrative staff Ms. Leslie Franklin and Ms. Meagan Yeatts for graciously agreeing to host our 28th annual scientific assembly and meeting of this august organization. You have been outstanding hosts and I know that all will agree that you have put on a spectacular meeting.

The title of my Presidential Address is: **“Sustainability, Relevancy and the Society of Black Academic Surgeons: The making of an academic surgeon - Is the old paradigm enough?”**.

This is the 29th year of the organization and it is my privilege to have served as the 23rd president over the past 12 months. Thank you for the opportunity and distinct honor to serve you and thank you for the podium and your attention.

First, those of you who know me, know that my faith is important to me and it is only by GOD's Grace and Mercy that I stand before you today. It is because of his abundant blessings and guidance and never leaving or forsaking me that I am a living testimony to his love.

As I began to think about what I wanted to say for my presidential address, slowly things came to mind, and at the same time nothing at all. Those who have gone before me know that this is one of the most difficult tasks. You want to say something that is meaningful and impactful, but you aren't quite clear of the direction. The advice received from many was similar because they too pondered the same thing for many months during their presidency.

The common themes from each of those that advised me, was to “think about my aspirations for the organization's future”, and “as

the president what did I try to accomplish? But maybe most importantly, “what legacy do I want to leave, that would maintain the organization over the long haul?”. All this advice I took to heart.

So, what was/is my vision for SBAS? Before stating my vision for and challenge to the organization I want to take a few moments to visit the past. To look at two roads traveled. The one being that belonging to SBAS. The other being my own because it, I believe, personifies all that is SBAS.

The Society of Black Academic Surgeons blazed a new trail with that initial meeting held at Duke University in 1989. The founding members had the following goals:

- 1) To encourage and support professional development
- 2) To attempt to recruit the best and brightest minorities into a career in surgery.
- 3) To Promote and support the development of black and minority academic surgeons

SBAS was founded when the landscape at the time had no other organization focused on the black academic surgeon. The Surgical section of the **National Medical Association or SSNMA** served a special role for the African-American surgeon but did not go far enough for those striving to EXCELL in the halls of academia. The place of the African-American surgeon in the American College of surgeons at that time was still uncertain. [Fig. 1](#).

Dr. Claude Organ, one of the fathers and benefactors of this organization served as one of its distinguished presidents and the first executive director. I was fortunate enough to have a letter of support from him for my first promotion to associate professor. I recall, as does Pres elect Brock in separate conversations, Dr. Organ would express that he hoped one day that the purpose of this group would no longer be needed. As many of you may recall, he would wax eloquently that we as African American surgeons would gain our place in American Surgery. Part of the original goal of SBAS was to become extinct. If successful to be no longer needed.

What Dr. Onye E. Akwari described as mentorship and academics are foundational to SBAS. This will always be the core of what SBAS stands for. This organization has had a storied past over the last 30 Yrs. Each past president, except for one, due to illness

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: anthony.stallion@beaumont.org.



Fig. 1. Original SBAS meeting photo, program, local article and state proclamation.

cutting Short his brilliant surgical career, has reached the level of Chief, Chair, Surgeon in Chief, Dean, Director, Provost, and Senior Vice-President with three becoming president of the American College of Surgeons. This being one of the highest honors in the career of any surgeon. [Fig. 2.](#)

The accomplishments of the past presidents have put in place the building blocks on which we all stand.

They established a culture of mentorship and support. They laid the fertile ground for careers and an organization to grow.

As their careers soared they wore the SBAS “t-shirt”. They worked to have SBAS recognized as a premiere surgical organization. As they got a seat at the table they made sure SBAS gained one as well. As SBAS advocated for the academic minority surgeon, they each in their own way advocated for SBAS. They each were and are the embodiment of what is SBAS.

Each president continued a laser focus attempting to strengthen the organization and create what we see today. [Fig. 3.](#)

For example:

L. D. Britt, MD, FACS, MPH is former President and current SBAS Executive director who helped to guide us into the main stream of American Surgery. Dr. Britt not only championed legitimacy and the rightful place of SBAS in American Surgery he gave stability by providing a consistent central office. Selwyn M. Vickers, MD, FACS championed the cultivation of the next generation of leaders and launched the Leadership institute. Robert S. Higgins, MD, FACS established a culture of institutional and departments of surgery sponsorship, as well as took the banner to oversee the Leadership Institute and continue the work of cultivating young leaders. Henri Ford, MD, FACS, MHA stressed external support for a growing organization. Edward M. Barksdale, Jr., MD, FACS leveraged his position at Pittsburgh to garner institutional seed money for the establishment of SBAS Leadership Institute and championed member involvement by establishing standard committees. Lynt B. Johnson, MD, MBA, FACS orchestrated redoing the constitution to reflect a modern surgical organization, stressed financial solvency, growth, and increase institutional membership. Orlando C. Kirton,

MD, FACS, MCCM lead the charge to increase value to the membership with CME, engagement with numerous external organizations, as well as bringing a more consistent flow between SBAS's elected leadership and the central office resulting in the organization's agreed upon Standard operating procedure or S.O.P. manual. Patricia Turner, MD, FACS stressed extension beyond our comfort zone reaching out to other organizations to broaden the tent which will be an important factor in achieving sustainability for the organization. Also, she as the first female president of the organization stressing gender empowerment and equity.

This is not an exhaustive list, but I hope it demonstrates the progress and the building of a premiere surgical organization. Each successive leader adding their mark and making SBAS stronger. This has been the road of SBAS.

Now, I want to retrace my steps, my road because I believe it is indicative of what SBAS was founded to do. There have been so many who have influenced and supported me that the entire presidential address could be dedicated to these individuals. Although, this is not an exhaustive list, but some of the highlights and individuals that will illustrate my point.

Time, the arc of history and events have a way of revealing itself. The embodiment of SBAS was hard at work even before its existence. I am living proof. I am a true native son of SBAS. In the Ville neighborhood of North St. Louis, Sumner High School was the first high school for Black students west of the Mississippi River. It graduated the likes of world renowned musicians Josephine Baker and Chuck Berry, comedian and activist Dick Gregory, and extraordinary athletes like 1962 heavy weight champion Sonny Liston and the winner of Wimbledon, the Australian Open and the US open, Arthur Ashe.

Dr. William Buckner, the principle of Sumner High School, saw something in my sister, made a way for her to attend college and forever change the trajectory of our family. An example of how the actions of one person can have a positive life changing effect on many.

Louis Cross and Bill Andrews, were the Canaries in the mine



Fig. 2. Past SBAS presidents.

signaling danger for African American males in North St. Louis. A practice that I am sure is now outlawed by P.E.T.A. The caged canary was carried down in the tunnels by coal miners. The loss of consciousness or death of the canary was the first sign that the toxic gases had reached a dangerous level and that the mine needed to be evacuated. Mr. Cross and Mr. Andrews started the ASSIST program that was a true public private partnership that altered the lives of many young African-American males, mine included. It exposed me to something I had never known. It resulted in my getting a private high school scholarship and I subsequently graduated from the very

institution where our father chauffeured kids to school.

These are the many, that through actions and words paved the way for me. Behind the scenes. Mentoring and opening doors. Teaching through example of how to become the best you. Setting an example and becoming those that you never wanted to disappoint. Dr. Akwari is one of these individuals that I never want to disappoint. He critiqued my first national presentation. That was so impactful, as well as all my many interactions with him after that. I relive that moment in some way before every presentation. This one included. He told me what I should be before I knew what I

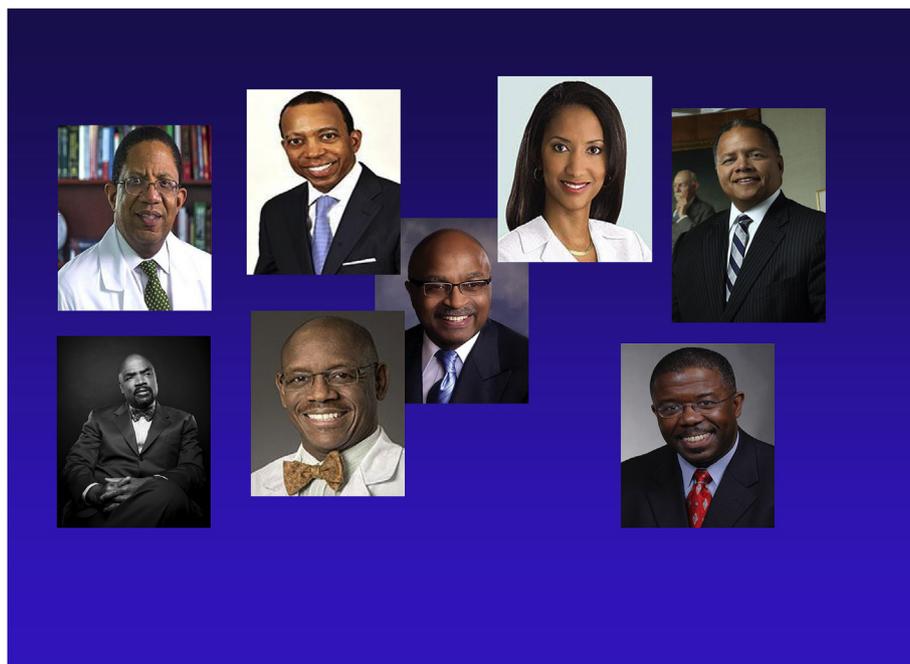


Fig. 3. Drs. Britt, Turner, Higgins, Barksdale, Kirton, Ford, Vickers, and Johnon. (clockwise from center).

wanted to be.

I grew up in the shadows of the famous North St. Louis Homer G Phillips hospital. It was known as Homer G to those of us in the Ville. It was built in 1937 as a state of the art facility that was at one time one of three places, including Meharry and Howard, where African American physicians could train. It was the practice and training ground of many famous AA surgeons that led the way and laid the foundation of the SSNMA and the fledgling SBAS that had the inaugural meeting by the time of my first presentation. Into my first SSNMA meeting walked Dr. Lesli Bond one of the stalwarts of the St. Louis surgical and medical community, a product of Homer G Phillips. Dr. Bond was the former president of the SSNMA. He watched over me as a guardian angel as I went to school with his sons. That was my first experience in a white setting of any kind as I tried to make my way at St. Louis Country Day school as 1 of only 7 black students in a student body of 500. **Fig. 4.**

Fred Cason, MD, FACS – a role model and supporter at every turn. Whom I met at the age of 12 when he was a “big brother” to my best friend while he was a med stud at St. Louis University. LD Britt, MD, FACS- What can I or anyone say of him that has not been said? Mentor, coach, protector, advocate, friend. But I will add one: **Guiding Light.** My first introduction to him was in the Associate Dean’s Office at the University of Illinois on Chicago’s west side medical campus. Dr. Britt was a new young trauma fellow at Cook County fresh from his time at Harvard. I was there for a summer premed program. The Associate Dean told me to keep an eye on this handsome young doctor that he would be running the world real soon. I think Dr. Williamson was spot on. To this very day, you are and always have been what I strive to be.

David Jacobs, MD, FACS – Mentor, friend, protector. My career would not be where it is and I would not have survived Charlotte without you.

Lyn Weaver, MD, FACS -ardent supporter. Always ready to help and promote me at every turn. Sorry that I never joined you in the ATL. Thank you for wanting me. Ken Davis, MD, FACS - “Uncle Kenney” as those of us who survived the University of Cincinnati Joe Fischer years so affectionately call him. To me he is more than

being a friend and a mentor he is like Maverick’s commander in every trauma surgeon of that era’s favorite movie: *Top Gun*. A leader who will let you fly with your hair on fire, who knows when to pull your coattails, he will defend you when no one else will and he will gladly join you in a dog fight: All it takes is a call. Claude Organ, MD, FACS – everything has been said. His words and actions had and have a profound effect on me. Rosalyn Sterling, MD, FACS taught a young green surgeon the do’s and don’ts of starting out and talked to me about a plan for career building.

Henri Ford, MD, FACS, Ed Barksdale, MD, FACS, Steve Stain, MD, FACS, Bob Higgins, MD, FACS. What can you say. With that frontline behind the scenes making holes for you to run through. You can’t help but score. Thank you to each of you. Orlando Kirton, MD, FACS, thank you for monthly mentorship phone calls. Often talking me back from the ledge during a tumultuous professional year. Thank you for being a friend. And yes, the calls will continue. The next 8:45 am call is already on your calendar. Patricia Turner, MD, FACS, always the wise word, timely advice in the humblest way. Thank you for your continued mentorship, friendship and being an example of a strong leader.

Andrea Hayes-Jordan, MD, FACS, thank you for your friendship, support, collaboration and encouragement as I have tried to expand clinically in a challenging environment. Congrats on becoming a Tar Heel as the new pediatric surgeon-in-chief. Well deserved.

It is a true Blessing to have this many people in your life that have had an effect. But also, it is to illustrate a point. This, my life, my journey is SBAS personified. How someone from The Ville in North St. Louis stands before you today. The true embodiment of what SBAS was founded to do. We/I stand on the shoulders of giants. I am a native son. I was meant to be here. My life and career have been the karma of SBAS. It is the embodiment of all that is SBAS. From my first meeting of Fred Cason in Jr High to meeting LD Britt in the Associate Deans office.

Not that this moment in time was owed to me or some how I was entitled to this 15 min of fame, but it is just interesting how the arc of history and its many twists and turns brings you to this very moment. This very place. This could apply to many if not all of you.

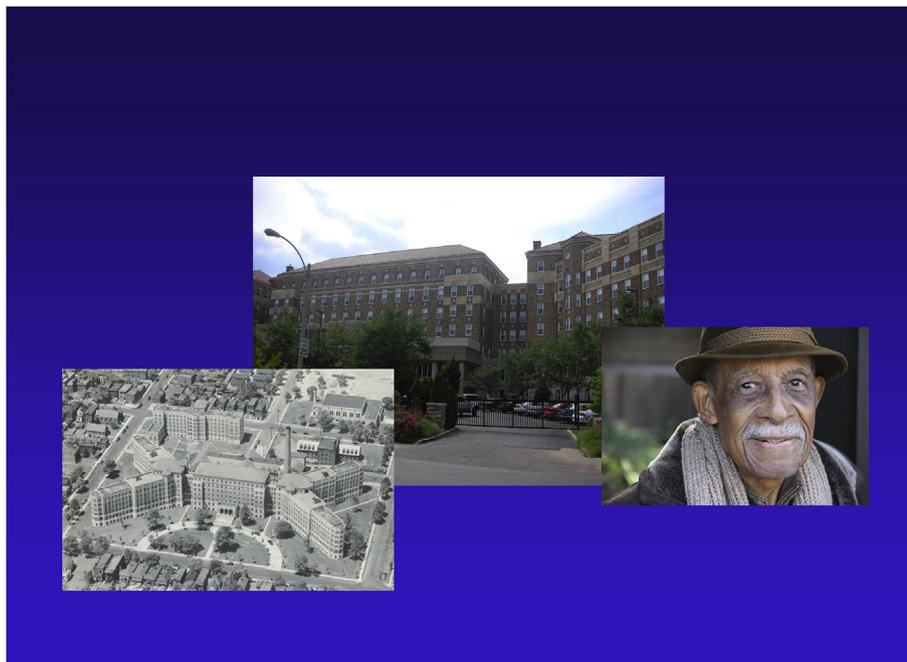


Fig. 4. Homer G. Phillips hospital and Dr. Leslie Bond.

All native sons and daughters of SBAS. Each story a similar one. Each of you in your own way is the embodiment of all that is SBAS.

I hope that you have not only a picture of SBAS from my viewpoint, and what this organization means to me as I know that it has a special place for many of you.

Now what?

Given our current climate I feel, as I'm sure many of you do as well, that there was a great need when SBAS was founded and an even greater need for SBAS today.

This is illustrated by a recent article in the American College of Surgeons Bulletin by a young resident at the University of Virginia commenting on the Charlottesville incident, of which we are all too familiar, and the issues of being a person of color in training.¹ This spoke volumes to what is still an issue for minority trainees and many minorities in medicine. This is consistent with the findings of an article published by two of our own, Drs. Paris Butler and LD Britt, entitled “Major Deficit in the Number of Underrepresented Minority Academic Surgeons Persists”² This is also reinforced by recent AAMC data that demonstrates that Whites have declined to less than half of applicants compared with 2011, Black or African American applicants increased by 6%. Yet! Whites, are more than half the acceptances resulting in a 44% acceptance rate. On the other hand, not only have Black or African Americans applicants declined, their acceptance rate is 34%, which is lower than White applicants.³ This lets us know that the need for SBAS is as great as ever. Not only for its core mission but for much more.

This passage, written by Dr. Vernon Henderson, an early member of SBAS and a mentee of Dr. Claude Organ, is proudly displayed on the SBAS website.

“What started out as a forum for discussing issues of concern for black academic surgeons has grown into a formidable scientific forum in which surgeons of all backgrounds can feel free to participate. Nurturing and concern for the plight of the black academic surgeon will remain the primary mission of this organization; however, augmenting our reputation for scientific excellence may represent the most appropriate expression of our mission. We look forward to the future with great anticipation.”

This passage is inspirational, it acknowledges a migration to something more than the original mission of SBAS and in many respects very prophetic by looking forward to the future and eminent change.

Dr. Kirton's presidential address 2 years ago so prophetically focused on change management.⁴ He was giving a different view of the landscape and the potential challenges for the organization. He was the canary in the mine. Part of the challenge is that in the face of great success how do you determine that you need to be something more, take a different approach or become something new. It was Daryl Connors now famous phrase from the 1990s “burning platform” that became the battle cry for change management.⁵

What is SBAS's burning platform?

The only thing that is constant is change. It immediately brings feelings of stress and uneasiness. We all want to be comfortable and do what we do and know what we know. But one thing is for sure, we have a couple of choices, we can “either embrace it and manage it proactively or resist it and let it drag us to our fate”. Successful adaptation to change is crucial. Change is often to replace something. Now, transformation on the other hand is to become something improved and always multidimensional.

Most organizations change to survive and often are reactionary and sometimes proactive. Organizations that transform thrive. This occurs by taking bold proactive steps. To look to the future and become what you envision that future to be. Not to just keep up with, but to be ahead of the curve. So, as I prepared for this past year as president, I realized that the biggest challenge that this

organization faces is not only change as Dr. Kirton so aptly described to us 2 years ago, but I believe there is now the need for transformation.

Some may say why the need for transformation. I believe that there are both internal and external factors. First, the internal is a competitive drive of this collective body and wanting to be something bigger and better and meaningful for each of its members. I have been involved with the SBAS since 1998, and I have watched it go through 20 years of “growth and evolution”. As I look out upon the audience over the last several meetings the organization is changing in many respects much more rapidly than other surgical organizations.

This is illustrated by changing demographics in surgery. This is demonstrated by AAMC data that shows in 2003, women applicants surpassed men by a slight margin; however, since 2005, men have represented a very slight majority of applicants. Among African American applicants, there continues to be a noticeable gender difference with a much higher rate of female applicants. African American females are accepted at a rate higher than African American males and now African American females make up greater than 50% of medical school faculty positions.³

This is now reflected in the change in surgery residencies and in the SBAS membership. An ever more youthful organization and increasingly female membership that needs to have a voice and influence on where we go from here. Fig. 5.

Second, the external factors are increasing demands of and for SBAS. These external factors are threats. They are threats to our business as usual and a challenge us to move out of our comfort zone. These internal and external factors result in a challenge to remain relevant. To stand tall and distinct among the sea of surgical organizations and to have continued support of our members as well as a voice, and influence on surgery, medicine and our communities. As I look at the landscape of American surgery many small organizations struggle to remain relevant and meaningful to the people they are intended to serve.

What struck me over the last 2–3 years is that the organization needed to begin to “transform” and embrace a new paradigm without losing its core values and DNA. As I became president-elect I saw an organization on the precipice of a new Chapter and if not careful finding itself out of step and not relevant to its body. Thus, as president I called on leaders and members of the organization to assemble an aggressive agenda and begin to tweak our structure to challenge our norms to help the organization transform. This I hope will position the organization to meet the new challenges of a rapidly changing landscape and remain a leader and not be a reactionary. SBAS in its' original form helped to bring in a lot of firsts. Now we must consider what are the new firsts? The first African-American female chair? SBAS should be leading this charge. If not us then who? ***In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr “The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict”*** –. We can no longer stand on the sidelines while there are many social issues that need to be addressed such as youth violence, gun violence, and the health of our inner cities. We have a voice and a platform that must be used for further progress beyond the initial focus of mentorship and science.⁶

As an organization we must do what we advise each of our members to do in their respective careers, not just be a caretaker. As president we are responsible for maintaining the organization on our respective watch, but also for being the Canary in the mine. That is what I see as a crucial part of the president's job. To be a part of that early warning system. To try and anticipate what lies ahead and ready the organization for the challenge.

We have more interest than ever for Partnerships with other surgical organizations, other parts of the healthcare sector and non-



Fig. 5. SBAS The inaugural meeting in Durham and 2018 on the steps of the 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, AL.

medical organizations. There is more being asked and expected of SBAS. Internally from our membership and externally by our institutional partners, our peer organizations and by society at large. Notice I say peer. We now have a well-recognized seat at the table. “What are we going to do with it?” We now have a voice. “What are we going to say?” We cannot sit silently. SBAS has developed an outstanding brand in American Surgery, but, we cannot do what we always have done and expect to successfully meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Thus, it is imperative that SBAS not only be viable, sustainable, thriving and vibrant but also transformational to meet the challenges ahead as we move into the next decade and beyond.

My challenge to the executive committee and the organization has been to look forward and begin to put in place those building blocks to become what we want to be and not just maintaining what we are and have been. We are in a position afforded few minority organizations. The opportunity to influence beyond our comfort zone. Beyond our original mission.

Mentorship and now outstanding science is a given. That is at our core and what we do. But what next? What will keep us at the table? How will the organization be viewed as we move into an uncertain future? We need to broaden our focus, and our mission without losing our core.

Let's be clear the mentorship, the fellowship, the support and comradery is now the dessert. At one time it was the main course, the steak. It now comes as the result of other work that needs to be/ that must be done. If we do not remain relevant and looked to as a leader in surgery, in medicine, in our communities and in our entire society, we will no longer lead but risk becoming irrelevant and our ability to leverage our position and advocate for members and those like us becomes diminished or nonexistent.

TO REMAIN RELEVANT IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE: That folks is our “burning platform”. Our work has expanded beyond that early mission so eloquently stated by Dr. Henderson. There is a price for a continued seat at the table. If we are to continue to have the dessert that we covet, we must remain **Strong, Viable, Assertive and most importantly Relevant** to all our constituencies,

internal and external. That is my song as this moment's canary in the mine.

So, what are the Next steps? This past October the SBAS retreat was held at the American College of Surgeons annual meeting in San Diego. At that time the Executive Committee embarked on defining what that future looks like and what we need to realize that future. We began to work out the pieces of what I labeled.

Sustainability 2025: Medically Relevant and Financially Sound

The goal is to be strong, viable, assertive and most importantly a relevant organization as we move into the future

The letter that the members of the organization received from me in January was outlining the work that the EC did at the retreat to begin on the journey toward that transformation. We must build on the tenants put forth by Dr. Kirton and not only change but to be transformational. The Pillars of the sustainability 2025 project I would argue are necessary for viability and relevancy. We are strong but cannot be complacent. We must be transformative to remain relevant.

The key drivers of this transformation:

- 1 Starts at the top
- 2 Involved in every aspect of the organization
- 3 Make a strong case why this is important
- 4 Provides a roadmap
- 5 Ownership
- 6 Communication
- 7 Understanding the core values
- 8 Speak to the individual
- 9 Addressing the cultural shifts

These are the key drivers of Transformation. These I believe we have begun to address over this last year and will continue with this presidential address and hopefully into the future as I hand off the reins to President Elect Brock. I am so grateful to have as wonderful

a partner in this endeavor as the in-coming president.

This is not done in isolation. For it to be successful it must be collaborative. This has occurred with President Elect Brock. We are attempting to do something that we as an organization have not done before. To be collaborative and plan across multiple years. That is to embark on a multi-year platform that will take the organization into a new phase, a new mode and into the next decade. Thank you, President Elect Brock for your buy in and support. You have been a trusted friend and confidant.

We developed what I believe is an aggressive 7-point strategy.

First - We felt that the Mission, Vision & Values are important to set. If we are to navigate these new waters, we must have a well-defined anchor.

You cannot be bold and transformational until you know and agree on who and what you are.

MISSION:

To improve health, advance science, and foster careers of African American and other underrepresented minority surgeons. This has evolved from that original statement by Dr. Henderson.

VISION:

To be the preeminent surgical organization and relevant voice in healthcare that:

- Increase minority faculty in academic surgery
- Cultivates surgical scientists
- Promotes members to leadership
- Eliminates health disparities

VALUES:

The Society of Black Academic Surgeons recognizes that its members are its most valuable asset.

These are the organization's core values:

- **Mentorship** – (We cultivate an environment of mentorship and career development.)
- **Advocacy** – (We advocate for the success of underrepresented minority surgeons and for healthcare equity of underserved patient populations)
- **Excellence** – (We promote the highest level of scholarship in all clinical, scientific and educational endeavors)
- **Community** – (We celebrate the importance of fellowship in achieving our mission)

Second - we need Advanced Mentorship –

led by past president Ed Barksdale. The goal of this effort is to be deliberate and intentional in our efforts to deliver on our core mission. We worked to get people into leadership positions yet, we have not addressed how to stay in leadership positions. We must be intentional about all stages of the pipeline and be purposeful about all phases of leadership development and retention. We have had intentional mentorship. Now we must have intentional sponsorship. This means taking career advocacy to the next logical level to have a sustained impact. To that end we established a monthly call to support and coach those in leadership.

Also, we set a goal that:

- 1) We should have 12 additional leadership positions by 2022
- 2) We plan for 55 by 2025
- 3) And in that the first African American female chair?

As we embrace a new landscape the organization needs to be out front helping to lead that charge. There is no reason with the talent within this organization we cannot achieve this particular goal within the next 5 years.

Third - NEW REVENUE STREAM –

This being led by president elect BROCK. He has taken on how to expand income circles which is key for our viability and the ability to expand our reach.

Fourth - Expand subspecialty membership and an increase our partnerships.

To continue to drive the work started by Dr. Turner. **We will/ must broaden our tent** to the other sub specialties and to have an even stronger voice to leverage on behalf of those without a voice.

We also this year expanded our current partnership with the SUS to support each organization's leadership development efforts that resulted in a joint program and grant submission.

Fifth - Future Leadership.

We introduced new committees (Medical Student, Resident, Young Surgeon, Women in Surgery, and Health Disparities) to the structure to give an increased voice to all members. We need to prepare the future leadership and allow the organization and its direction to be influenced by the changing membership. As you see from the business meeting earlier and the written reports, that these committees have already done great work and are beginning to change the organization. We added parallel sessions to this meeting for the first time to directly address the needs of a growing section of the membership. This is the present and future of this organization and the future of minorities in Academic Surgery. Our younger more diverse membership must have a hand in shaping the organization that they will inherit, operate and defend.

Sixth - Advocacy.

To redefine The Advocacy committee's mission. It is to address the health of the minority community through advocacy. To ensure that the organization maintains its social relevance by proactively addressing important issues related to minority health, minority health care, and academic achievement. To use the respected voice of SBAS for the improvement of our communities.

Seventh – Increased Exposure.

We empowered Dr. Tettah, our Informatics officer, to take the SBAS exposure and interface to the next level through advance IT. He continues to expand on the web site and SBAS's web presence to reflect a modern organization and to better engage with our increasingly youthful membership. I also, want to congratulate Dr. Tettah on the two national media awards that the SBAS web site received this past year.

These are what I hope are building blocks for the future

The Guiding principles of this initial effort are: To bring more meaning and involvement for a younger more diverse membership. To start our efforts in the advocacy arena and begin to find our voice advocating for the elimination of health disparity and social issues affecting our communities. Being proactive in not only increasing the number of minority academic surgeons, but to ensure that we are at the table of leadership in American Surgery for generations to come striving for diversity in that leadership. As we go forward we have new challenges before us, but I have no doubt that we can rise to meet them as a better, stronger organization. We must not just protect the outstanding SBAS brand, we should, we must build on it.

As SBAS approaches its 30th birthday, we need to embrace this opportunity to refine our mission and vision, without losing focus on our original goals.

And yes, although the statistics beg that there is much more work to be done on the original front, our scope must broaden. The original work that still needs to be done and that which is upon us, are not mutually exclusive. The demand and ask of us is much more. We can no longer be a “one trick pony”. Our core principles will carry forward but we cannot stay the same. We must be intentional.

We must be transformational.

So, what does success look like?

In the future a stronger, larger organization with diverse leadership that touches, influences, impacts as a force in American Surgery, medicine and the community beyond our traditional walls. When an important topic arises in medical education, patient care or the health of communities I want to hear the words, “What does SBAS think”.

The future SBAS – a force well known throughout medicine and beyond.

These are my observations, my challenges to the organization, the beginning of solutions and the legacy that I want for future generations.

This is my call as this moment’s CANARY IN THE MINE!!

Now comes personally the best and hardest part about this. This is where I take the liberty of the podium and began to try to thank so many people who have influenced me and my career. Even after thinking about this for an entire year invariably someone will be left out. For any oversight I apologize in advance.

This is the opportunity to thank those guardian angels sent from God to watch over me and mine.

I earlier cited many individuals that have impacted my life and career and please take those words as a heartfelt thank you.

They say in life that you should always marry up. Well, you should do the same in your career. Stretch for that which is just out of your reach. Each situation was a reach for me. I had champions at each place, at each stage that supported me, encouraged me, advocated for me.

Louis Cross and William Andrews. They chose me and launched me on an even higher trajectory. Stephen Ramsburg, MD, FACS – from Medical School. He is someone I still try to emulate. Ed Kempchinsky, MD, FACS – from Residency. He was hardnosed, no nonsense, tough as nails. My silent benefactor. Diana Farmer, MD, FACS, FAAP. - From Fellowship. My littermate. We may have come from different mothers, but we are siblings forever. Arvin Philippart, MD, FACS, FAAP and Mike Klein, MD, FACS, FAAP – fellowship. They taught me what it means to be a pediatric surgeon. David

Dudgeon, MD, FACS, FAAP –and Enrique Grisoni, MD, FACS, FAAP– My first practice partners.

The best partners that every junior faculty should have. They supported my every breath and whim as new faculty no matter how farfetched.

Champions. Everyone needs a champion. I have been BLESSED with so many at the different stages of my life. They will wear your t-shirt. They stand up for you and promote you and want you to succeed. A heartfelt thank you to each.

Lastly, I must thank my family. Fig. 6 I am the product of two working class people who barely finished high school. They provided the Rich Clay that so many took a turn at molding. We know GOD is the ultimate Potter, the original blacksmith. But through many hands he forges the final product. Anna and Robert Stallion two of the original change agents. They were doing change management before anyone knew what that was. My parents called it surviving and making a better life. Change management is nothing new to our community. We have mastered that over the last three centuries. They were trying to raise us in the only America that they knew to be possible coming from the Jim Crow south. They were trying to secure the future of a black girl and six black boys in The Ville of North St Louis. They were able to recognize a new paradigm from what they had hoped for their children as they migrated north. Something entirely different from the only reality that they knew. A new trajectory and potential for their children that they could not even imagine. To set a new and different course that has allowed me to be standing before you today.

I embody the values and work ethic of Robert and Anna. Each were role models. Simple people who spoke truth into every situation. They are my moral compass. I am the embodiment of their DNA. A Strong work ethic, the highest moral compass that guided the lives of seven children that resulted in the first ever to go to college in either family and to go on, directly after training at Homer G Phillips hospital, to become what I believe was the first African-American female head of a department of medical records in the country at a major hospital.

Five rock head boys who embodied the can do never quit spirit

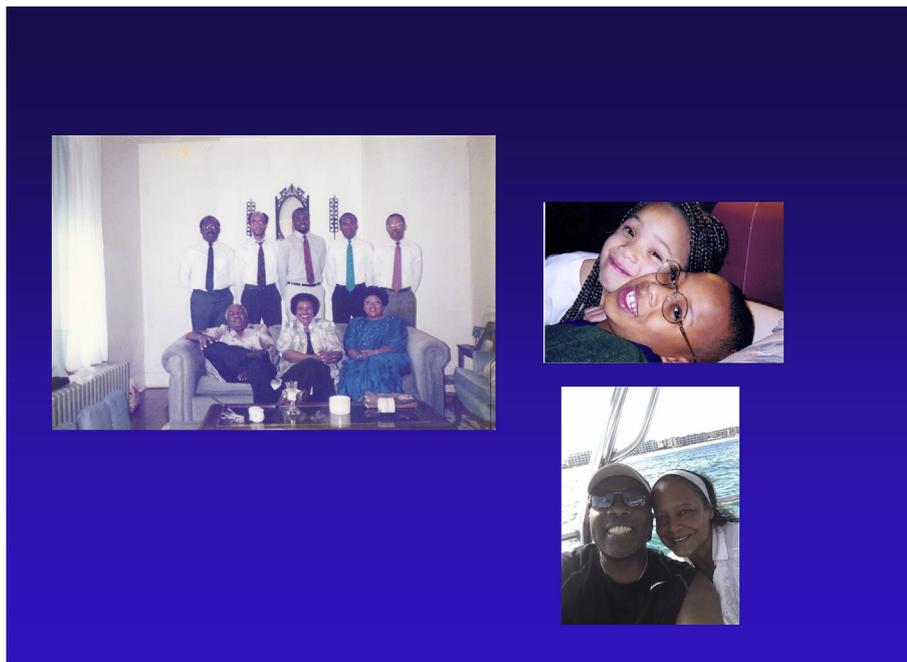


Fig. 6. Stallion Family photos: (clockwise) Stallion parents and siblings. Son- Rob and Daughter- Tara. Wife Paulette.

instilled by their parents. Emulating their work ethic would serve each of us well in our respective pursuits. Our parents both used to say, “If you're not going to do it right don't do it at all.” We booby trapped, teased, tortured and supported each other through thick and thin and without whom I know I would not be here today. I have lost 3 of 7 siblings to cancer. One I never got to know and two that profoundly influenced who I am. Rosetta, the oldest, only girl and the second mother to us all. She led the way. She broke a glass ceiling before we knew there was a glass ceiling. It was more of an opaque concrete block more commonly known as overt racism. She was always present for each of her brothers no matter what. To the very end. David taught me the true meaning of unconditional love and patience.

There are 4 of us remaining. James, the oldest son, demonstrates our parents tireless work ethic; he is so kind and the best big brother. He is always looking out and will give you the shirt off his back. I still owe him the money he gave me to take the Kaplan course to prepare for the MCAT. I am afraid to ask what I owe with inflation, interest and penalties. Yes penalties. He might be nice but don't mess with his money. Robert. My road-dog. He is always down for whatever. As he always says “it ain't nothing but something to do. Let's roll”.

Mark my spiritual anchor, my confidante, my friend. Although he is my younger brother, he is someone I hope to be when I grow up.

We have come a long way from 4226 West Cote Brilliante. I know that Mother Stallion and Da are proud.

Robbie and Tara the lights of my life. My heart and soul. Those who know me well know that I hold them to a high standard but will go to the end of the earth for each of them. They know that they stand on the shoulders of giants being 2 generations removed from sharecroppers. They know that they're great-grandparents eked out an existence and withstood much hardship so that their grandparents could have a job. Their grandparents had a job so that their parents could have a career. Their parents have a career so that they can have a dream. I am so proud of you both. My heart overflows with pride.

Thank you for your undying support and the looks of “it's OK” when I could not be there or my mind being overwhelmed and I

simply forgot.

I Love you.

And speaking of marrying up. I try to take sage advice. I know that I truly succeeded. To my lovely wife. The love of my life. As we use to say back in the day, we have been together for minute. Thank you for your undying support and encouragement in every endeavor of my life both personally and professionally. The answer has always been yes and how do we get it done? Thank you for saying the ultimate yes!!

You enrich my life and as a famous line in a movie goes:

“You make me want to be better man”. I meant it when I said to our pastor that I truly would regret if I left this world not having the privilege of calling you my wife. Thank you. I Love You!!

With that I want to thank each of you for your support over the past year. The answer was always yes to every ask no matter how lofty or ridiculous. I have been blessed to help write the beginning of the 1st chapter in the next volume of a great organization. Stay tuned. There remain many more chapters to be written. Each better than the one before.

It has been a distinct honor and privilege to serve as your President.

A time that has truly been the pinnacle of my career.

Thank you!!

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