

At the Vanguard

'La Tech NSBE,' Distinguished Chapter of the Year



Officers of the Louisiana Tech NSBE Chapter, onboard the guided missile destroyer USS Halsey, during a VIP tour of Naval Station San Diego in August: (left to right) Marcus Sumbler, Secretary; Maya Rucks, Vice Chair; Christopher Smith, Treasurer; Olabiya Oluwatobi (of Prairie View A&M University); Trevan Jenkins, Chapter Chair; and Kendall Belcher, Retention Program and Recycling Committee Head

By Cindy Atoji

The Twitter updates from Louisiana Tech University's NSBE chapter (@LaTechNSBE) tell a story of students on the move:

"NSBE recruiting in full effect! Stop by Bogard Hall for info! Sniff sniff... Do I smell a free lunch for u?"

"See you all at the Gumbo fest tomorrow!"

"Study Jamz at 7"

"NSBE Week starts tomorrow!"

"Don't forget about our Walk for Education this Saturday!"

And a tweet from last spring: *"Still amazed... Louisiana Tech NSBE, the 2011–2012 National Distinguished Chapter of the Year!"*

These social media postings were just one way that the Louisiana Tech National Society of Black Engineers chapter (La Tech NSBE) kept its members informed about happenings in the group, as it pursued NSBE's mission and earned the title Distinguished Chapter of the Year. And when the honor was achieved — the highest award that NSBE collegiate chapters can receive — the La Tech NSBE members celebrated with delight.

"I was more than excited, and I'm still excited and smiling, even now," says Trevan Jenkins, 23, of Shreveport, La., the 2011–13 chapter chair. "It was a big accomplishment and proved that all our efforts were worth it."

It was a banner year for the Louisiana Tech chapter, a Region V ("Vanguard") chapter ("How deep? Five deep!"), whose objec-

tives include empowering black engineers, African Americans in general, and other minorities, as well as helping students excel academically in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses. La Tech NSBE also assists its members in getting internships, co-ops and permanent jobs, and it works to positively impact the campus and community at large. Besides taking the top honor, the chapter received the Region V Chapter of the Year Award; NSBE's Retention Program Award for its new program geared toward keeping its member in engineering; and top regional awards for community outreach, most innovative Technical Out-Reach Community Help (T.O.R.C.H.) event of the year, and highest grade point average.

"We believe you only get out of NSBE what you put into NSBE, and we set out to accomplish our goals with passion and responsibility for NSBE as well as Louisiana Tech University," says Jenkins, a senior majoring in aviation management.

LA TECH NSBE: "IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY TO JOIN #NSBE HAVE YOUR FACE IN THE PLACE!"

Louisiana Tech, a public university located in rural Ruston, La., already has the reputation of small-town collegiality, but Christopher Smith, 20, La Tech NSBE's 2011–13 treasurer, says being a member of NSBE is what really made him feel at home at the school.

"It's a well-rounded organization to be in and opened so many opportunities for myself and others," says Smith, who

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hails from New Orleans and is studying civil engineering. “We all help each other, whether it’s learning to become successful in our respective fields or serving and impacting the community.”

For busy La Tech NSBE, it was a busy program year — NSBE Recruitment Day, gumbo fest, and fall fling; study jams throughout the year, engineering workshops, career fairs, resume and interview seminars — culminating with a picnic and the annual chapter banquet in May. La Tech NSBE board members say they kept the chapter’s activity level high to assure tangible contributions and achievements. Smith was just one of the many upperclassmen who helped tutor freshmen and sophomores in math, science and other STEM subjects, an outreach that also encouraged camaraderie among students. The chapter’s successful “A Walk for Education” — a Martin Luther King Jr. birthday observance — was a highlight of events in the winter. Hundreds of volunteers walked door-to-door, mainly in low-income, minority communities, distributing packets of information about admission to area colleges and vocational schools, financial aid and other academic opportunities. Kendall K. Belcher, 20, 2011–12 community service chair for La Tech NSBE, says he felt empowered by participating in the walk and giving to those in need.

Another project, a spring recycling drive hosted by the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) and NSBE, encouraged students to bring paper, batteries, plastic, cans, ink cartridges and old appliances to centrally located bins on campus.

“This tech beautification project helped to create awareness about how much trash we produce and how to minimize it,” says Belcher, a senior in civil engineering, who adds that the chapter has a well-deserved reputation for social responsibility, advocacy and community-

building. Rachel Baker, 20, a junior in biomedical engineering and SWE member who worked with NSBE on the university-wide recycling program, says, “NSBE is a very forward-thinking and dynamic organization to work with.”

NSBE also collaborates with other organizations. Louisiana Tech’s Office of Multicultural Affairs, Ruston High School and the Boys and Girls Clubs of North Central Louisiana were important partners.

LA TECH NSBE: “SHOUTOUT TO EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS QUARTER A SUCCESS!”

The influence of La Tech NSBE is felt not only by members — who have access to opportunities in leadership, training, professional development, mentoring and career placement services — but also by the neighborhood and beyond.



The chapter’s Pre-College Initiative (PCI) program worked with students at Ruston High School, helping the NSBE Jr. chapter there excel academically and encouraging these members to pursue technical degrees. Chapter volunteers also encouraged interest in STEM at the Boys and Girls Clubs of North Central Louisiana, says administrator Sabrina Love. There, she reports, NSBE engineering fairs, tutoring and “just hanging out” sparked interest in technology in young teens,

many of whom had never been exposed to science or engineering.

“The seeds were planted to create a lifelong journey in these professions,” says Love.

Earning the Distinguished Chapter of the Year honor was just a beginning for La Tech NSBE. The national award comes with cash prizes totaling \$7,350, and the La Tech chapter plans to use the funds to improve its programs and community service projects. It has already donated \$1,000 of its winnings to Louisiana Tech’s new Integrated Engineering and Science Building fund.

“It’s just one of our many ways of giving back,” says chapter chair Jenkins.

But the chapter’s biggest winnings come as improvements to people’s lives. Chapter member Maya Rucks, 22, of Sterlington, La., a mathematics major with a concentration in engineering, is spending the summer working with middle school students as a mentor in NSBE’s Summer Engineering Experience for Kids (SEEK) program in New Orleans. Rucks, a junior and the Pre-College Initiative chair for the chapter, says that growing up, she didn’t have any role models to show her the roles and responsibilities of engineers.

“I look forward to giving back,” says Rucks. “To me, that’s part of what NSBE is all about.” ■

Cindy Atoji is a Boston-based blogger and editor who specializes in diversity issues and technology writing.

