



Media Release Public Relations

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LATE JSU STUDENTS SHARED COMMON BONDS

(JACKSON, Miss.) – Trista Danielle Martin and Kristy Lorraine Murray had a lot in common.

They were high-school salutatorians who went on to earn bachelor's degrees in physics from Jackson State University.

They were pursuing doctorates in materials science and engineering at Pennsylvania State University while dreaming of becoming physicians.

And they were looking forward to returning home to Mississippi to spend Thanksgiving with their families and friends.

But this week, those who knew them will be giving thanks for their lives and their legacies. Their funerals will be held Wednesday, Nov. 22, and Friday, Nov. 24.

Martin, 22, and Murray, 23, died Friday, Nov. 17, in a two-vehicle accident in Pennsylvania. They were driving to the airport when their vehicle swerved to avoid hitting a deer, according to news reports.

"It's an incalculable loss to their families, and it's a severe blow to the nation to have lost two of our promising minority scientists," said Dr. Quinton L. Williams, chair of Jackson State's Department of Physics, Atmospheric Science and Geoscience.

Williams said the department plans to establish an academic scholarship in their honor to award to an African-American female physics major beginning in fall 2007.

"They finished their degrees in physics and became part of this very small, elite group of African-American female physicists," he said.

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Williams met the young women 3 ½ years ago when they were sophomores. As their professor and mentor, he often worked with them in the lab and took them to conferences. “It was a strong bond,” he said.

“They were outstanding students, fine young ladies, intellectual, smart and very beautiful,” Williams added. “They had developed themselves and were beginning to show brilliance.”

Dr. Hilliard Lackey III, president of the Jackson State University National Alumni Association, recognized their potential when he recruited them to JSU. At the time, Trista, Lackey’s goddaughter, was a senior at South Pike High School in Magnolia, Miss., while Kristy was a 12th-grader at Hazlehurst High School in Mississippi.

“I tell the truth, I loved them like they were my own children,” Lackey said.

The young women excelled in their hometowns and at Jackson State.

Kristy’s mother, Carol Neal of Hazlehurst, said she played basketball and was a member of the Beta Club and the ROTC. She also loved to sing and was a role model to many young girls at her church. At Jackson State, she was active in pageants.

“She was a loving person, a very generous person to her family, and she made friends with everybody,” said Neal, a 1976 Jackson State graduate. “She was looking forward to life. She was going to be a physician one day. She was torn between research and being a pediatrician.”

Martin’s mother, Sara Martin of Fernwood, Miss., said her daughter sang and spoke well in church, played the piano some and served as Sunday School secretary. At Jackson State, she was inducted into an honor society as a freshman and was a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. She also served as a freshman and sophomore class senator, junior class vice president and secretary of the Student Government Association during her senior year, her mother said. She planned to study ophthalmology after studying at Penn State.

“She lived the life of a 50-year-old with all the things that she was involved with, with all the places she had been,” said Sara Martin, a 1977 and 1997 Jackson State graduate. “She has accomplished more in 22 years than I think a lot of people will accomplish in a lifetime.”

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After they graduated in May 2006, Kristy headed to New York to intern at Corning Inc., while Trista headed to south Mississippi for an internship at Northrop Grumman Ship Systems in Pascagoula. They reunited this fall when they headed to Penn State as first-year graduate students.

Penn State's Black Graduate Student Association held a private memorial ceremony for Martin and Murray on Monday night, according to the university's Office of Public Information.

"She loved Jesus, and I know she's gone to heaven," Kristy's mother said.

Said Trista's mother: "She believed in God, so I know my child is gone to be with Him. Because that's who she was."

Funeral arrangements

Funeral services for Trista Danielle Martin and Kristy Lorraine Murray, May 2006 graduates of Jackson State University, will be held this week in their hometowns.

Martin's services will begin at 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 22, at New Zion Baptist Church, 235 E. Pine St., in Magnolia, Miss.

Murray's services will start at 1 p.m. Friday, Nov. 24, at New Life Cathedral of Worship, 28172 Highway 28 East, in Hazlehurst, Miss. Viewing will be 2-8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 23, and 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 24.

Photos

<http://www.jsums.edu/~announcements/MurrayandMartin.jpg>

<http://www.jsums.edu/~announcements/Kristy4.jpg>

<http://www.jsums.edu/~announcements/Kristy6.jpg>