



November 23, 2022

# Wayne State, Dow celebrate the legacy of trailblazer Bettye Washington Greene with lecture series kickoff



The inaugural Bettye Washington Greene Endowed Memorial Lecture Series honored the achievements and legacy of Bettye Washington Greene, the first African American woman with a Ph.D. in chemistry to be hired by Dow.

Bettye Washington Greene, Ph.D. '65 was a leader in the field of polymer chemistry and the first African American woman with a Ph.D. in chemistry to be hired by Dow – then Dow Chemical Company – where she had a long and successful career. On October 28, 2022, Dow and the Wayne State University

Department of Chemistry honored Greene's legacy with the inaugural Bettye Washington Greene Endowed Memorial Lecture Series.

The lecture series offers students a chance to engage in career, research and networking discussions and activities, particularly first-generation college students and students of color who face barriers to accessing these opportunities in science and research-based fields of study.



Fuad Usman

“The event was a valuable opportunity to connect with the leaders of today,” said Wayne State Chemistry Ph.D. candidate Fuad Usman. “We got to learn about the latest developments in their fields, required traits for success and how to make meaningful impact in the community.”

Among the list of speakers for the lecture and panel were Calvin Emanuel, vice president and general manager of sustainable growth solutions at Ecolab; Ivonne Ferrer, analytical leader at Corteva Agriscience; Melody Kelley, associate professor of chemistry at Georgia State University; Patrick Lindsey, vice president of government and community affairs at Wayne State University; Lidaris San Miguel Rivera, senior technical support and development scientist at Dow; and keynote speaker Clarice Phelps, nuclear chemist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL).

Phelps was part of the team at ORNL that collaborated with the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research to discover chemical element 117, tennessine. A groundbreaker for women of color in STEM fields, she has been recognized by the International Union of Pure

and Applied Chemistry as the first African American woman to be involved with the discovery of a chemical element.

Phelps, who has experienced sexism, racism, and oppression as an African American woman in her field, had not been named in the official announcement of the element's discovery nor had her contribution been covered by the mainstream press. This spotlighted the existing disparity of recognition between female scientists of color and their predominantly white male counterparts.



Keynote speaker, Clarice Phelps

“Through my story, I want to encourage young people to build their own path and make their own discovery about the potential that lies within them,” said Phelps. “I grew up poor, I only had a bachelor’s degree in chemistry with a GPA of 2.98 and yet there I was in the middle of all these engineers and scientists with their masters and Ph.D.s. And I took my seat at the periodic table with them.”

In 2021, Wayne State Professor of Chemistry Christine Chow established the lecture series with a \$50,000 seed gift. Additional gifts set the series in motion, including those from the James R. and Anita Horne Jenkins Family Foundation, as well as James and Anita Jenkins personally, Neil Hawkins and a \$50,000 gift from the Dow Company Foundation.

“Dow has and will always rely on STEM graduates to sustain the company and its ambition to be the most innovative, customer-centric, inclusive and sustainable materials science company in the world. We strive to improve our interactions within this community and with Wayne State University as a key partner,” said David Parrillo, Dow’s vice president of core research and development. “We must continue to inspire the next generation to be curious, to be resilient, and to be enthusiastic about opportunities.”



Clarice Phelps and Bettye Washington Greene's daughter, Willetta Greene-Johnson, senior lecturer in the physics and chemistry departments at Loyola University-Chicago.

Looking ahead, the lecture series aims to boost Wayne State’s visibility and reputation as an institution committed to building a diverse workforce throughout the state of Michigan and across the nation. To do

that, university leaders are committed to eliminating barriers that block equal opportunity and representation in science and research-based fields and enabling students and alumni to positively affect their communities.

“The Bettye Washington Greene Lecture recognizes the outstanding achievements of a pioneering Wayne State alumna, which offers inspiration to current students from diverse backgrounds,” said Wayne State Department of Chemistry Chair,

Matthew Allen. “The nature of a university is for students to move on after a few years, and we are excited to send students off into the world with experiences and skills that help them forge the future of STEM.”

To support the Bettye Washington Greene Endowed Memorial Lecture Series, donate online at [giving.wayne.edu/donate/washingtongreene](https://giving.wayne.edu/donate/washingtongreene) or send a check to Wayne State University, P.O. Box 674602, Detroit, MI 48267-4602, with “Bettye Washington Greene Endowed Lecture Series” in the memo line.

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## Division of Development & Alumni Affairs

5475 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI 48202  
(313) 577-2275

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