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Building on Success



BUILDING ON SUCCESS

◆ **Donor Barbara Armand Kushner, B.A. '93**
Once an entrepreneurial spark is ignited, it is rarely extinguished.

Thomas Edison State University alum and supporter Barbara Armand Kushner, B.A. '93, knows that success takes more than boldness and determination – it demands a healthy dose of impatience.

Kushner is the founder and CEO of the Armand Corporation, a minority-owned construction management company based in New York, N.Y. The company oversees flagship projects ranging from multifamily housing, public schools, transportation and healthcare facilities, to full-scale community disaster recovery and resiliency projects across the United States.

Her impact is also felt by TESU students.

Kushner recently provided generous scholarship support to students whose trade apprenticeship training was converted to degree credits through the University's Professional Learning Review (PLR) process. Davonte Boyer and Fredamalinda Hall are now, with Kushner's help, able to advance further than they ever thought possible.

As a Thomas Edison alum, Kushner understands the value of a transformative, student-centric academic program.

"I was looking for an alternative to the on-campus degree program that I had already begun when I turned to Thomas Edison. I was struggling with escalating tuition costs and demands on my schedule when I finally made a phone call that changed my life forever," noted Kushner, who earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in natural science and mathematics from TESU in 1993. "That degree helped my career in innumerable ways."

One of 12 children who grew up in a modest home in rural Louisiana, Kushner said her parents were devoted, resourceful and focused on inspiring their children to greatness.

"I gained my work ethic from my parents. My father was a farmer, and when he wasn't occupied with tending crops on our property, he worked as a janitor and a barber. I recall him in constant motion from 5:30 a.m. until dark every day. My mother nurtured our love for education and became a teaching assistant at the age of 50 after continuing her own education. They both fostered in me an inherent impatience for the status quo but an overarching optimism about life. As an entrepreneur, those traits continue to work in my favor."

Kushner was introduced to the construction industry as an undergraduate student when she began interning at Bechtel Global Engineering, Construction & Project Management.

"As soon as I arrived, I knew I had found my niche, but, just as quickly,

I began yearning for increasing levels of responsibility. That is when I realized I wanted to be an entrepreneur.”

Driven by optimism but grounded in realism, Kushner single-handedly launched the Armand Corporation in 1991 out of her home and steered herself for any challenges that might follow.

“I immediately devoted myself to my clients. As my business grew and prospered, I began to attract talented staff. I made sure I invested in my

Davonte Boyer, AAS '23, and Fredamalinda Hall, AAS '23

Trade apprenticeships, grant support and Credit for Prior Learning are transforming the workforce.

An influx of New Jersey state grant support, private philanthropy and credit for Professional Learning Reviews (PLR) are forging an indelible link between trade apprenticeships and a college degree.

For bachelor's degree program students Davonte Boyer, AAS '23, and Fredamalinda Hall, AAS '23, it has been an ideal union.

A recipient of \$9,792 in funding through TESU's New Jersey Pathways Leading Apprentices to a College Education (NJ PLACE) grant and \$3,686 in support through the state's GO-TESU grant program, Boyer utilized the University's PLR process to convert his trade apprenticeship training into credits. The grant support and PLRs cleared the way to his associate degree.

“The PLR pathway was invaluable in assessing my International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 269 Joint Apprenticeship training and alleviating the financial burden of taking additional courses. It also

served as an incentive to complete my Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree in applied electronic studies faster,” noted Boyer, a Browns Mills, N.J., resident and father of four.

The support Boyer found at TESU did not end there. He is now enrolled in the University's Bachelor of Science degree in electronic systems engineering technology with the help of \$5,000 in scholarship support from TESU alumni and supporter Barbara Armand Kushner, B.A. '93.

During a typical workday as a high-voltage technician, Boyer is responsible for executing maintenance testing, conducting
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community because I would not have derived any satisfaction otherwise,” she reflected.

Today, that client roster includes the Port Authority of New York, the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, MTA Long Island Railroad, the Nassau County Department of Public Works, the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, the New
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Scholarship supporter Barbara Armand Kushner, '93 (left) and student recipients Davonte Boyer, '23, and Fredamalinda Hall, '23.



Barbara Armand Kushner meets with employees on a jobsite.

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Jersey Department of Transportation and the Brooklyn Public Library.

A previous Spirit of Edison awardee, Kushner has served as past president of the New York Chapter of Professional Women in Construction, and in 2021 received her honorary doctorate in engineering from Rowan University in New Jersey. That same year, she was awarded the Richard Hale Chairman Award by the New Jersey Alliance for Action in recognition of her contribution to improving the state's economy and was recognized on Crain's New York Business' list of Notable Women Business Owners. She was also recently named to "City & State New York" magazine's Construction Power 100 list for her influence in the industry. She has garnered numerous professional recognitions: From the New Jersey Alliance for Action's Salute to Women in Construction and Eagle Awards, to the Long Island African American Chamber of Commerce's Outstanding Leadership in Business Award, to the YWCA of Camden County's Tribute to Women in Industry Award.

Throughout her burgeoning career, Kushner has focused on supporting

fellow women- and minority-owned businesses through mentoring and teaching.

"Armand Corporation's diverse talent pool has been a lynchpin in our ability to shepherd successful construction projects to completion, to adapt, to change and continuously evolve," remarked Kushner of her capable team of construction managers, project managers, project administrators, construction inspectors, architects, engineers and project analysts who share her ethos. "It is also gratifying to play a part in the increasing number of women who are experiencing success in our field."

For more than 50 years, Thomas Edison has expanded access to higher education by creating seamless pathways from workplace learning and career credentials to a university degree. Donors, supporters and a devoted academic community ensure that TESU students continue to realize their aspirations and thrive in the workforce.

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Barbara Armand Kushner, B.A. '93

"Our industry evolves rapidly, with new construction materials and processes continuously rolled out that drive innovation," said Kushner. "I am a huge admirer and advocate for my trade apprenticeship-prepared colleagues. Students like Fredamalinda and Davonte have triumphed in using this valuable pathway and I applaud the University for translating their experience to degree credits."

For information about TESU scholarships, visit tesu.edu/tuition/scholarships.



Fredamalinda Hall, AAS '23



Davonte Boyer, AAS '23

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acceptance testing and performing repairs on medium- and high-voltage equipment systems at multiple worksites.

“This includes specialized components such as transformers, breakers and relays. The nature of my role requires a diverse skillset and adaptability as I navigate different projects daily to ensure the reliability and optimal performance of electrical systems,” he said. “I also engage in acceptance testing procedures to guarantee compliance with industry standards and safety protocols. The variety of tasks and the need for precision in working with high-voltage equipment make my role both challenging and rewarding.”

In 2021, TESU was the sole higher education institution in the state to receive \$849,000 in NJ PLACE funding from the New Jersey Department of Labor for an initiative that merges apprenticeship training with higher education. The funding is expected to support 100 trade apprenticeship students in completing an associate degree at no cost.

The \$5,992 in NJ PLACE support Hall received provided an equally valuable springboard for earning her AAS degree in construction and facilities support in 2023. She recently embarked on earning her bachelor’s degree in construction at the University with the help of \$5,000 in scholarship support from TESU Foundation donor Kushner.

“Discovering the PLR program through

my union was a game changer,” noted Hall, a Verona, N.J., resident who completed her apprenticeship through the Northeast Carpenters Apprentice Training Fund.

“By combining my previously earned community college credits with my training, I only had to complete four additional courses toward my associate-level studies to become the first person in my family to earn a college degree,” noted Hall, who now serves as a cloud engineer specializing in cloud application development, cloud software development and computer networking solutions for Eclectic Industries LLC.

Through similar PLRs, numerous local and national organizations have had their existing training, professional education, licenses and certifications evaluated by the Office of Professional Learning Review (OPLR) team at the University. The process involves the work of subject matter experts and program administrators who evaluate multiple components of workplace learning. Once enrolled in the designated degree or certificate program, students like Boyer and Hall follow a specific curriculum designed to guide them toward degree completion while they are supported by the University’s resources and advising staff.

“In less than a year of taking courses, I transformed not only my life but also my family’s,” noted Hall. “Walking across that stage during TESU’s 2023 Commencement was a moment of immense pride.

The funding I received was more than financial support, it provided a beacon of hope. The University community’s belief in my potential has inspired me to set ambitious goals and make the most of this opportunity. Receiving additional scholarship support was the push I needed to continue my bachelor’s degree studies and I am profoundly thankful for the prospects it has opened for me.”

According to Jeffrey S. Harmon, Ed.D., vice provost for Strategic Initiatives and Institutional Effectiveness, the University awards approximately 65,000 credits per year to students via credit for prior learning options. To expand on that expertise, the institution has evaluated numerous workplace training programs, certifications and registered apprenticeship programs through its PLR evaluation initiatives.

“We recognize college-level learning wherever and however it occurs. Davonte and Fredamalinda’s stories are inspiring and speak volumes about our ability to propagate a future-ready workforce while curtailing student debt,” stated Harmon. “Comparative to traditional pathways, apprenticeship programs provide livable wages and establish trainees in secure positions at the onset of their careers. TESU’s skill at correlating that training to degree pathways benefits students in ways that were previously unimaginable and has been woven into our academic model since 1972.”

To learn more about TESU’s Professional Learning Review process, and how you or your organization’s training might translate to degree credits, visit tesu.edu/PLR.

