

The Earl N. Smith III Memorial Scholarship

Honoring the life of a cherished individual who was a beacon for educational equity, racial, and social justice has been a deeply meaningful endeavor. The Paul Cuffee School community, under the leadership of Head of School Christopher Haskins and its Board, embarked on a heartfelt mission to commemorate this beloved community member by launching a grassroots fundraising campaign to establish the Earl N. Smith III Memorial Scholarship at the Rhode Island Foundation.

Who was this man for whom this scholarship is named? “Earl N. Smith III was a mentor and motivator for many who doubted their academic potential. He was a bridge for countless students and adults, guiding them towards realizing their higher education dreams and career aspirations,” recalls Christopher Haskins.

In 2010, while Assistant Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rhode Island (URI), Earl became an active member of Paul Cuffee School’s community, joined its Board of Trustees, and later became Board President. Christopher explains, “Earl was an inspiring presence for everyone he encountered. He was a passionate voice against institutional racism and was acutely aware of the uneven playing field affecting people of color. He shined a light on those issues to catalyze systemic change.”

Ana Barraza, a Rhode Island Foundation Equity Leadership Initiative alumna and URI graduate who is now Director of the URI Women’s Center, met Earl during her freshman year of college. Their friendship was immediate and endured throughout adulthood. Ana describes Earl as a loyal friend who shared his wisdom and selflessly guided others. Despite facing serious health challenges, she remembers him regularly checking in on his friends and family and offering his unwavering support.



A URI alumnus and now Academic Advisor for the university’s Talent Development Department, Earl’s younger brother Kevin Smith described his brother’s integrity, humility, and perseverance, and his genuine interest in and support of others. “He taught me to get involved, to try my hardest, and to have confidence in myself. I wouldn’t be where I am today without his influence on my life,” reflects Kevin.

“There simply aren’t enough words to express our gratitude for Earl,” Christopher Haskins concludes. “Continuing to grow the Earl N. Smith III Memorial Scholarship at the Rhode Island Foundation will allow us to continue his legacy for generations to come. We are grateful that donor contributions and annual distributions will make it possible to assist exemplary graduating seniors at Paul Cuffee School, who like Earl, are determined to pursue higher education while uplifting and supporting others along the way.”