FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Daphne Thomas, PR & Marketing Director
(901) 435-1539 or (901) 220-3098

LOC President Johnnie B. Watson to Retire in 2015

Memphis, TN (June 17, 2014) LeMoyne-Owen College President Johnnie B. Watson announced earlier today that effective June 30, 2015, he will retire from the college he once attended as a student and ultimately served as its 11th president.

“When I graduated from LeMoyne-Owen in 1960, I never could have imagined having the privilege to serve my alma mater in this capacity,” he said. “It has been an enjoyable, fruitful and memorable journey thanks to our talented faculty, dedicated staff, loyal alumni and supportive board of trustees.”

Watson became the first alumnus in the College’s 151-year history to serve as president when he took the reins in 2008 after serving as interim president for two years. During his tenure, LeMoyne-Owen College overcame a crushing deficit to emerge from accreditation probation in 2007. “We were placed on probation due to fiscal instability, not academic inadequacy,” he said. “Our academic standards were never in question.” As proof of the College’s clean bill of health, last year the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reaffirmed LeMoyne-Owen College’s accreditation through 2023.

LOC Board of Trustees Chair Robert Lipscomb praised Watson for bringing stability to the College during turbulent times. “Johnnie is a staple in this community who is well known and respected. People know him to be a calm, steady leader and that is what we needed.”

Watson was undaunted when enrollment fell to 500 students in 2006. He leveraged his life and work experiences to right the ship.

“Challenges are nothing new to me. I overcame rheumatic fever as a small child,” he said. “I also was on the frontlines of the desegregation of the Memphis City Schools in 1973 and was charged with plotting new school bus routes throughout the city. Facing these challenges prepared me to stare down the naysayers and roll up my sleeves and work hand-in-hand with the faculty, staff, students, board of trustees, my fellow alumni and supporters to restore my alma mater.”
The progress is evident. Enrollment topped 1,000 students in 2013. The $1.7 million deficit was erased and replaced with an endowment. Campus facilities were renovated and a new, 336-bed residence hall opened last fall.

Watson attributes this success in part to his amicable relationships. “I seek to empower people, build consensus and always treat everyone I encounter with dignity and respect,” he said. “Another important factor was the support and accessibility of the board members, Chairman Lipscomb in particular,” he added.

Lipscomb credits Watson’s leadership style to the College’s resurgence. “Johnnie brought the LeMoyne-Owen College family to the table and listened before he made decisions,” he said. “He valued everyone on the team and made them feel appreciated. He was a calming force during the storm.”

Lipscomb and his fellow trustees will immediately begin charting the College’s future by assembling a committee to conduct a national search for Watson’s successor. “Our goal is to assemble a diverse team of individuals who care about the College and have a vested interest in its future,” he said. “Higher education is changing on every front and we are looking for a leader who has the vision to help the College adapt to the evolving landscape, while ensuring it stays true to its legacy and mission to foster leadership, opportunity, change and justice through education.”

As Watson thanked the College’s many supporters and donors, he asked them to stay the course. “Higher education faces growing challenges today and LeMoyne-Owen College is not immune,” he said. “The College and the students need the continued support of our dedicated alumni, friends and the corporate community as we transition.”

Watson stressed that he is under no pressure to retire and is confident that the College’s future is bright. “Because of the current status of the College, I am confident that the board of trustees will find a replacement with the talent and skill to take LeMoyne-Owen to a higher tier,” he said.

“I have been in education for nearly 55 years. It’s time to pass the torch.”

---

**ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING PRESIDENCY**

- Implemented Strategic Transformation Plan and increased focus on student retention
- Appointed faculty to President’s Cabinet and improved campus morale
- Increased community partnerships
- Enhanced articulation agreements with other colleges
- Balanced the College’s budget each year of his presidency—2007-2014
- Retired debt on Steele Hall and old dormitories and oversaw major facility renovations
- Led efforts to construct and open a new, 336-bed residence hall in 2013
- Led campus expansion efforts through the purchase of adjacent properties
- Addressed salary inequities

###
President Johnnie B. Watson

FACT SHEET

1960  Graduates from LeMoyne-Owen College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in education

1960  Begins working at Carver High School in Memphis, Tennessee as a social studies teacher

1966  Graduates from Indiana University with a Master of Arts degree in 1966

1982  Negotiates the consent agreement between the Memphis Board of Education and the plaintiffs in the Northcross v. Memphis Board of Education case that resulted in reduced transportation and the return of many students to their neighborhood schools

1988  Memphis Board of Education promotes him to deputy superintendent

1992  Retires from Memphis City Schools and accepts appointment as professor in the Department of Education at Rhodes College

1999  Accepts appointment as Chair of the Department of Education and Distinguished Associate Professor at Rhodes College

2000  Begins 8-year term on the LeMoyne-Owen College board of trustees

2000  Memphis Board of Education appoints him interim superintendent. After a national search did not yield an acceptable candidate, the board unanimously appoints him superintendent later that year

2001  LeMoyne-Owen College awards him the Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree in recognition of his distinguished 40-year career in education

2003  Retires as superintendent of Memphis City Schools
2006 LeMoyne-Owen College board of trustees appoints him interim president

2008 LeMoyne-Owen College board of trustees unanimously appoints him to serve as the College’s 11th president

2010 Memphis Chamber of Commerce appoints him to its board of trustees to help address higher education and workforce development issues in Memphis

2014 Announces retirement from LeMoyne-Owen College effective June 30, 2015

OVERVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING PRESIDENCY

• Led the College’s successful efforts to receive 10-year accreditation reaffirmation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges in 2013
• Implemented Strategic Transformation Plan
• Doubled enrollment
• Increased focus on student retention
• Appointed faculty to President’s Cabinet
• Increased community partnerships
• Enhanced articulation agreements with other colleges
• Led the College’s successful fundraising campaign to overcome a $1.7 million deficit and emerge from accreditation probation in 2007
• Balanced the College’s budget each year of his presidency—2007-2014
• Retired debt on Steele Hall and old dormitories
• Led efforts to construct and open a new, 336-bed residence hall in 2013
• Led major facility renovations efforts
• Led campus expansion efforts through the purchase of adjacent properties
• Addressed salary inequities
• Improved campus morale

MEDIA CONTACT: Daphne Thomas, PR & Marketing Director
(901) 435-1539 or (901) 220-3098