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Commissioned Officer and Graduates with Distinction are Among LeMoyne-Owen College's 2009 Graduating Class

MEMPHIS, TN – **May 9, 2009** – On Saturday, May 9, 2009 at 10:00 a.m., LeMoyne-Owen College will proudly present seventy (70) graduates at its 139th Annual Convocation for The Conferral of Degrees. The Ceremony will be held at Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church-Westwood, 620 Parkrose Avenue in Memphis. For the first time in its history, one of the graduates, Dwayne Reed, a Business Major, is also graduating as a Commissioned Lieutenant in the U. S. Air Force.

“I am extremely proud of these students for their dedication and determination to complete the necessary requirements to achieve an undergraduate education especially in the current economic climate that we are experiencing in our nation,” said LeMoyne-Owen College President Johnnie B. Watson. “This diploma from LeMoyne-Owen College is the first step toward becoming productive and contributing citizens of our community. It is our sincere hope and expectation that many of these students will not stop here, but will continue on to higher learning which can only fuel their opportunities in the future.”

This year's Commencement speaker is Sybil Wilkes, co-host of the Tom Joyner **Morning Show**, a nationally syndicated radio program heard in over 115 markets with an audience of more than eight million. An original member of the show, initially joining the crew as a news anchor, each morning Wilkes provides “the voice of reason” alongside host Tom Joyner and co-host J. Anthony Brown. She is a native of Chicago who began a career in radio in 1985.

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The Commencement Ceremony will also feature the presentation of four Honorary Doctorate Degrees; one to Ms. Wilkes and three to local Memphians who have made significant contributions to their communities, professions and to academia. The honorees include Mr. & Mrs. Jed Dreifus (Jeanne). Retired businessman and philanthropist **Jed Dreifus** has been an advocate for racial harmony, education, and human services all of his adult life. As early as the 1950s, Mr. Dreifus was involved with the Memphis Better Schools Committee. In 1968, he joined ranks with another prominent Memphian, Mrs. Frances Dancy Hooks, and co-founded the Memphis Volunteer Placement program (now the Prep Scholars program of the Memphis Rotary Club), through which qualified inner city youth go away for challenging summer experiences at a number of major prep schools.

In 1981, Dreifus received the first Frances E. Coe Award for Public Education because of his contributions to education. Demonstrating his commitment to higher education, Dreifus accepted an appointment to the Board of Trustees of LeMoyne-Owen College in 1983. Since that time, he has served various roles on the Board from Chairman to Chair of the Academics Affairs Committee. Dreifus is a 1946 graduate of the Choate School. He also attended Harvard College and the Harvard Business School. Most of his professional career was spent as part of Dreifus Jewelers which operated in Memphis for more than 30 years.

Jeanne Dreifus is a recognized philanthropist and community servant. She served as coordinator of the Youth Services Co-op in the 1970s which eventually became the Human Services Co-op. Mrs. Dreifus coordinated the agency from 1977 to 1992 when she retired. The agency was sponsored by the University of Memphis, then Memphis State University, and evolved into an umbrella organization with a membership of over 80-plus community organizations. Members included large agencies such as Metropolitan Interfaith Association (MIFA), Associated Catholic Charities, and United Way of Greater Memphis as well as smaller neighborhood associations. By 1998, the organization had continued to grow and Mrs. Dreifus won several awards for her contributions associated with the initiative. The Co-op's purpose was to provide a non-competitive, non-political forum in which human service providers could share resources and information and find ways to work together on community issues.

Mrs. Dreifus served as president of the local National Council of Jewish Women.

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She served on the War on Poverty Committee and the Community Day Care and Comprehensive Social Services Association and has been a longtime member of the Social Action Committee at Temple Israel. Mrs. Dreifus was given the prestigious Hannah G. Solomon Award when members of the Memphis Section of the National Council of Jewish Women celebrated its 100th anniversary. She is the fourth recipient of the award, given to the person making an outstanding contribution to the council and the community.

The fourth recipient of the Honorary Doctorate Degree will be Pastor Lester Basken. Dr. Basken is the senior pastor of Middle Baptist Church in Whitehaven where he has served for more than 38 years. He is also a graduate of Memphis Theological Seminary where he received the Master of Arts

Degree in Religion. His doctoral work was completed at Tennessee School of Religion where he received the Doctorate of Theological Studies. Dr. Basken preaches and teaches the Word of God; and as the church's highest officer, he governs church operations and provides leadership to staff, officers, and volunteers. He also provides guidance and direction to the entire congregation from the oldest member to the youngest.

“My dad was a farmer who taught me the value of planting seeds. He used to say, ‘No seeds, no crop.’ So, I came to realize that unless we plant something inside our young people, nothing will grow in them. Children have to have an education, if they are going to be prepared to take over when we are gone,” Dr. Basken said. Dr. Basken is married to the former Irene Jackson. The couple has two daughters Sharon and Marilyn. One son, Chrislyn is deceased.

Students who are graduating with Distinction will be announced at the Commencement Ceremony.

LeMoyne-Owen College is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097; Telephone number 404-679-4501) to award the baccalaureate degree.

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