

IN MEMORIAM

Sheila Davidson Pressley

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) was saddened to learn that Sheila Davidson Pressley, DrPH, CPH, DAAS, REHS, HHS, passed away on January 24, 2020. Dr. Pressley was the dean of the College of Health Sciences at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). She was born on May 2, 1967, in Asheville, North Carolina. She attended Western Carolina University for her undergraduate education and earned graduate degrees from Tufts University and the University of Kentucky. The University of Kentucky honored her in 2017 with the Lyman T. Johnson Torch of Excellence Award.

Dr. Pressley worked in environmental health for more than 20 years in the public and private sectors and academia. She enjoyed working with undergraduate students as her mentors and college professors did with her. She joined EKU in 2004. She became the first African American to chair the EKU Faculty Senate from 2012–2014. She also served on various other committees and councils. Dr. Pressley was named dean of the College of Health Sciences in 2017.

Dr. Pressley was an active member of NEHA and the American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS). She became a diplomate of AAS in 2008. She joined NEHA in 2005 and volunteered her time and talent through various ways. She was cochair of the hazardous materials and toxic substances technical section from 2007–2011, technical advisor for environmental justice from 2011–2013, a peer reviewer for the *Journal of Environmental Health*, and cochair of the NEHA Sick, Bereavement, and Memorial Committee in 2019. Dr. Pressley was honored with the NEHA Past Presidents Award in 2015.

The following quotes from fellow colleagues and friends highlight her dedication to environmental health through her tireless work, personal interactions, and dedication to students.

“Sheila was a most persuasive and delightful person, full of enthusiasm and verve for the education of students. I enjoyed her interest in providing real world discussions of how these students could find their way into the environmental health profession,” James J. Balsamo, Jr., NEHA past-president and professor.

“A decided bright light with such passion for environmental health. Her smile brightened every room. We honor her and her contributions to environmental health,” Dr. Bryan Brooks, professor.

“Dr. Pressley’s exuberance and commitment to environmental health created a nexus between theory and practice that transcended two generations. Her character, vision, leadership, and participation as a role model and mentor will influence generations to come,” Brian Collins, NEHA past-president.

“Dr. Pressley will be always remembered as a beautiful human being, a great friend, and a first-class professional,” Dr. Amer El-Ahraf, NEHA past-president and professor.

“I reflect on what might have been different in my life if I had not met Dr. Pressley. I learned as much from her as many have learned from me. She had a way of making me feel better about almost everything,” Dr. Larry W. Figgs, division chief.

“Sheila became one of EKU’s most popular and creative faculty. She was very good at recruiting students as well as working on



Dr. Sheila Davidson Pressley accepting the National Environmental Health Association's Past Presidents Award at the 2015 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition in Orlando, Florida. Photo courtesy of Joe Deats Photography.

making her classes interesting and enjoyable. Sheila was a very hard worker and a super friend. She was a gift to us for a short time and will be deeply missed,” Dr. Carolyn Harvey, NEHA past-president and professor.

“Dr. Pressley was a dedicated friend; devoted mom and wife; committed and multitalented professional; caring teacher, professor, dean, and mentor; visionary and forward thinking leader; epitome of the consummate environmental health professional; and a star gone too soon,” COL Wendell A. Moore.

“I could write a book on the many accomplishments, pleasing personality, and sharp leadership characteristics of Dr. Pressley. She was a true leader that would light up the room. She was not a stranger to anyone and kept a smile on her face that warmed our hearts,” Dr. Priscilla Oliver, NEHA president.

“Sheila was always looking for ways to help environmental health students. She would organize special sessions at the NEHA AEC to help students find jobs, mentor the students on taking the REHS/RS exam, and provide one-on-one mentoring opportunities,” Vince Radke, NEHA past-president.

“Sheila was funny, kind, caring, supportive, and sisterly. I will always cherish our sweet friendship,” Dana Reed Wise, bureau chief.

NEHA extends its deepest sympathies to Dr. Pressley’s family, friends, and colleagues. Her contributions to the profession will be long lasting due her passion and dedication to the students she taught and mentored, as well as the relationships she cultivated. She will be greatly missed. 🙏

Editor’s Note: We thank everyone who provided quotes and information regarding the life of Dr. Pressley. If you would like to share information about the passing of an environmental health professional to be mentioned in a future In Memoriam, please contact Kristen Ruby-Cisneros at kruby@neha.org. The *Journal* will publish the In Memoriam section twice a year in the June and December issues, or in other issues as dictated by time and page space considerations.