



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### 2013 Highline College Graduate Named 2023 Distinguished Alumnus

DES MOINES, Wash. — Josias Jean-Pierre is no stranger to Highline.

Throughout the 10 years that separate the 2013 grad from his time at the college, the motivational speaker and five-time author has stayed involved through the college's annual Black and Brown Male Summit, leading workshops with young men of color.

And it's because of his work to inspire others and succeed despite the odds stacked against him that Highline's Alumni Association chose the 29-year-old Federal Way resident as the recipient of the 2023 Distinguished Alumnus Award.

As part of the award, Highline College will honor Jean-Pierre during Highline's Commencement ceremony on June 15.

"To be selected as the recipient of this award is amazing," Jean-Pierre said. "It's an honor to be selected, and to say that the tools I apply today in life is gained because of what I have learned from others on campus — faculty and staff who look like me, instilling in me the tools that I need to flourish and grow — be able to apply those tools in everyday life and get honored is just an honor."

Described as "a product of the Thunderbird," Jean-Pierre's high school history teacher Jim Dyer said Jean-Pierre is changing lives throughout the country by inspiring Black and brown youth through his books, many speaking engagements and activism.

"Josias' story is bringing hope to other Black and brown youths who are fatherless and to the individuals with learning disability, that they, too, can blossom into what they want to blossom into," Dyer said. "Josias had a dream at a young age that he would be speaking, empowering, equipping and transforming lives in the nation."

Today, Jean-Pierre has received the ranking of Amazon's No. 1 best seller in eight different categories for his book, "Our Cry For Justice." He's spoken on over 300 platforms city and nationwide and has been featured in LA Wire, "30 under 30" with Ariana Grandè & Lil Nas X,

New York Weekly, The American Reporter, CEO Weekly, Yahoo Finance with Ice Cube, Thisis50, OurBlk Men magazine, Kivo Daily and Influencive.

Although Jean-Pierre has worked hard to secure this dream that has become a reality, it wasn't without significant challenges.

At 10 months old, Jean-Pierre was diagnosed with epilepsy, which affected his learning and required an Individualized Education Plan while he attended school. He also had to learn English as a second language, as he and his family are from Haiti, and he experienced stuttering when he spoke.

"I have been told by peers and students to give up on my dreams of being a speaker and an author because I was in special ed," Jean-Pierre said. "I talked too fast, I stuttered, I didn't know how to enunciate my words and I needed more time to grasp [the concepts]. When I told folks I would be an author and a speaker, everyone just laughed at me and made fun of my disability and said because of your disability, you can't be that."

Jean-Pierre didn't give up and that's in large part to the people he met along his educational journey.

Rashad Norris, founder of Relevant Engagement LLC and former director of community engagement at Highline College, said he first met Jean-Pierre in middle school.

"I remember going to his class and presenting on the Career/College Pathway and he sat in the back of the class making jokes and disturbing my session," Norris recalled. "During my session, I recall calling him out for his behavior and inviting him to spend some time with me outside of class."

Norris said the two went on to have a great discussion around education attainment for young Black males and how important it is for him to be successful after school.

"He took the information that I shared with him very seriously and he and I started a mentee/mentor relationship," Norris said. "After high school, he attended Highline College where I was employed and he followed the guidance that I was providing, and he thrived as a student and graduated within two years to earn his AA degree."

Norris said he's seen Jean-Pierre grow into a productive, well-rounded young man who has thrived in his ability to write and perform spoken word and advocate for the Black community.

"He has and continues to be a beacon of light to so many young people," Norris said.

Jean-Pierre said Highline College has contributed to his success in multiple ways by giving him the tools he needed and providing some tough love from faculty and staff who look like him. But he especially values the Black and Brown Male Summit's role in his life.

“That summit changed my life,” said Jean-Pierre, now a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). “If it wasn’t for the summit, I don’t think I would be where I am at today.”

As for advice to Highline College students, Jean-Pierre recommends students erase the word “impossible” from their vocabulary and “have a why that is bigger than your why not.”

“Have a ‘why’ that is bigger than your excuses,” he said. “And when you have that ‘why’ fully firm and established, let that be your fuel to keep going no matter what. When you take an ‘L’ don’t see it as losses, see it as lessons. Behind every setback, there’s a bounce back, and understand and know that you can bounce back from whatever it is you’re going through.”

Jean-Pierre is the 35th recipient of Highline’s annual award, the most prestigious award given to alumni.

Former [Seattle Mayor Norm Rice](#), who attended Highline from 1968-69, was the first recipient of the award in 1990. Other [distinguished alumni](#) include [Sandra Cravens Robinson](#), nurse and Army veteran; [Ezra Teshome](#), an agent with State Farm Insurance and TIME magazine global health hero; award-winning author [Linda Yoshida and entrepreneur Junki Yoshida](#); and Cal Poly Humboldt President [Dr. Tom Jackson](#).

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**Attachment:** Photo of Josias Jean-Pierre

**Links within this release:**

- <https://alumni.highline.edu/recognition/rice.php>
- <https://alumni.highline.edu/recognition/>
- <https://www.highline.edu/about-us/highline-profiles/sandra-cravens-robinson/>
- <https://alumni.highline.edu/recognition/teshome.php>
- <https://www.highline.edu/about-us/highline-profiles/linda-junki-yoshida/>
- <https://www.highline.edu/dist-alum-2021/>

*Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves 13,000 students. With over 75% students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor’s degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida, Dr. Tom Jackson, president of Cal-Poly Humboldt and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.*