

February 13, 2014 | By Jade Griffin

## Memorial Tribute to Late Actor and UC San Diego Alumnus James Avery Set for March 1

**Performances featuring faculty, alumni and “Fresh Prince” cast member Daphne Maxwell Reid**



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The University of California, San Diego will host a special tribute to James Avery, the late acclaimed actor, poet and UC San Diego graduate of 1976, on Saturday, March 1 at 2 p.m., at the campus’s Mandell Weiss Forum. The event, which is open to the public, will include an afternoon of theater, live music, personal reflections and poetry readings in Avery’s honor. Best known for his portrayal as the charismatic Uncle Phil Banks on “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,” Avery was a classically trained UC San Diego actor and scholar. He died on December 31, 2013, due to complications from heart surgery. He was 68.

The memorial tribute will feature campus artists, friends and performers including UC San Diego faculty emeriti Cecil Lytle, Arthur Wagner and Jorge Huerta; alumni Monique Gaffney, ’93 and John Wesley, ’77; and Daphne Maxwell Reid, who played Avery’s television wife, Vivian Banks on “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.”

Avery’s long playing character, Uncle Phil, was ranked among TV Guide’s “50 Greatest TV Dads of All Time.” His many credits include appearances on the television shows “Grey’s Anatomy,” “The Closer” and “That ’70s Show.” Avery lent his iconic voice to over a dozen animated television series and features. He was also the primary host of the popular PBS travel and adventure series, “Going Places.”

Avery frequently returned to his alma mater as a featured guest, performer and commencement speaker. Together with his wife, Barbara, he established the *James Avery Scholarship* to support African American students studying performing arts at UC San Diego. Barbara Avery is also an alumna of UC San Diego; she received her Ed.D. in 1974.

“James Avery was a talented artist, and a strong champion of our campus and our students,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “He established a legacy of support for future student artists with the *James Avery Scholarship*, an endowed fund that will continue to help generations of students.”

A scholarship recipient himself, Avery earned his bachelor’s degree in drama and literature in 1976 from UC San Diego after serving in the U.S. Navy in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. Upon leaving the military, Avery moved to San Diego and began writing TV scripts and poetry for PBS. He won an Emmy for production during his tenure there and then received a scholarship to UC San Diego, where he attended Thurgood Marshall College (then Third College). Thurgood Marshall College is a part of UC San Diego’s six-college system, which provides students with many of the advantages of a small liberal arts college plus the opportunities and resources of a large research university.

“James represents the best attributes of our college in his stellar achievements as an artist, as a social activist and Navy veteran, and as a philanthropist helping younger generations of college students in the performing arts,” said Allan Havis, provost of Thurgood Marshall College.

In a 2012 interview, Avery reflected on his philanthropy: “The gift of success obligates one to give back. I have been blessed with success and that is why there is a *James Avery Scholarship* at UCSD. Education should be accessible to all and scholarships help make this happen.”

Family and friends have established a new scholarship—the *James Avery Memorial Scholarship*—to honor Avery’s achievements and support the dreams of future undergraduate students. The family intends the scholarships to be awarded to students pursuing studies in the performing arts.

The free event is open to the public. The program will be followed by a reception. To register or make a gift to the scholarship established in Avery’s memory, please visit [the James Avery tribute website](#).

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