

# Virginia State University and JMI Launch The Big Dipper Innovation Summit, JANUARY 12, 2023

*Big Dipper is a 3-day experience spotlighting the foremost thought leaders and talents in tech, innovation, sustainability, entrepreneurship, music & culture.*

RICHMOND, VA, UNITED STATES,  
January 4, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ --  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 4, 2022

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[www.bigdippersummit.com](http://www.bigdippersummit.com)



Level Up at the Big Dipper Innovation Summit January 12-14

[VSU](#) AND [JMI](#) LAUNCH THE [BIG DIPPER INNOVATION SUMMIT](#), JANUARY 12, 2023

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*VSU President Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D.*

JMI and Virginia State University (VSU) announce the inaugural Big Dipper Innovation Summit (Big Dipper) to be held Thursday, January 12 through Saturday, January 14, 2023, at VSU's Multi-Purpose Center, located at 20809 2nd Avenue, Petersburg, VA, 23803. For full details, and to register and purchase tickets, visit [www.bigdippersummit.com](http://www.bigdippersummit.com).

The Big Dipper is a three-day multi-faceted experience (keynote speakers, breakout sessions, exhibitions, etc.) designed to spotlight the foremost thought leaders and

talents in tech, innovation, sustainability, entrepreneurship, music, and culture.

“The summit is a destination for creators, entrepreneurs, big dreamers, big thinkers, makers, and curators who want to talk innovation, new ideas, and the next frontier across major industries and emerging markets,” said Ken Johnson, President and CEO of Summit co-founder, JMI.

Featuring a variety of speakers and presenters, the Big Dipper invites attendees to:

- Come see media mogul and Radio Hall of Fame inductee, Charlemagne Tha God, as he shares his journey on becoming a voice of the culture and building a new media empire
- Be inspired by the prophetic voice of Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley, Senior Pastor, The Historic Alfred Street Baptist Church, one of America's most dynamic spiritual leaders
- Hear how Charis Jones, CEO of Sassy Jones, turned her side hustle into the fastest-growing privately held retailer
- Get an inside view on CNN's Bakari Sellers' outlook on the next frontiers of policy change
- Listen as Stephen Benjamin, a former president of the United States Conference of Mayors, Mayor Levar Stoney of Richmond, and Mayor Sam Parham of Petersburg discuss innovative solutions for problems facing our cities
- Learn from serial entrepreneur Kendrick Ashton, CEO of The St. James, as he shares how to leverage data to realize big opportunities
- Learn how James Beard award-winning chef and restaurateur, Rodney Scott, turned Southern cuisine into a cultural destination enterprise
- Join Dr. Dietra Trent, the Executive Director of the White House Initiative on HBCU's, as she discusses the future of HBCUs with the Presidents of VSU and Virginia Union University (VUU)

A full list of presenters is available on the website.

"The Big Dipper Innovation Summit experience will serve as a catalyst for attracting, preparing and developing informed, capable and ethical leaders," said VSU President Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D. "We are beyond excited to be a part of the journey."

Big Dipper opens Thursday, January 12 with the Kickoff Coffee Conversation, followed by Big Sky Vision, a session that brings together entrepreneurs who have been able to successfully challenge their own notions of something bigger than big and move into areas of opportunity they previously thought unimaginable. The weekend culminates on Saturday, January 14, with the 2023 Freedom Classic Festival with programming highlighted by the double-header matchup between HBCU rivals VUU and VSU women's and men's basketball teams. Learn more and purchase tickets at [www.freedomclassicfestival.com](http://www.freedomclassicfestival.com).

Also featured on Thursday are sessions addressing the State of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Black Entrepreneurship, and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG). There will be a luncheon session focused on Black Travel, and a keynote address on New Policy Initiatives. Each day, during sessions and transitions, there will be opportunities for guests and attendees to network and engage in experiential activations as part of Big Dipper.

Programming on Friday, January 13 features sessions on Community Reinvestment, Health Innovation, Investments and Finance, and Agriculture. The focus of Friday's keynote luncheon is Culture and Media, and the afternoon closes out with the Innovation Next pitch competition where attendees will hear from emerging innovators who are making sense of complex

challenges and turning them into lucrative opportunities. The winner takes home a \$50,000 prize.

Additional programming includes breakout sessions on both days, and the Mega Mentors Fine Arts Benefit & Sale to be held at the Hippodrome in Richmond on January 13. Friday night also features Art of Noise, a DJ Dance party featuring surprise guests, from 8:00 pm to midnight at the VSU Multipurpose Center.

#### About VSU

VSU is the nation's first state-supported HBCU to offer both a college program and a normal program, thereby opening doors for transformative experiences, opportunities, and access to a diverse population of lifelong learners in an inclusive environment for more than 130 years.

[www.vsu.edu](http://www.vsu.edu).

#### About JMI

JMI is a brand strategy and consulting firm focused on community engagement. They serve as a bridge, building dialogue and trust to forge meaningful, lasting relationships between their clients and communities. [www.johnsonmarketing.com](http://www.johnsonmarketing.com).

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