



**FINAL SUMMER CAMP PERFORMANCE**... Mark your calendars as the Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey will host its final Missouri camp performance. AlleyCamp Missouri will be held Wednesday, July 12, from 7 to 8 p.m., at the Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts, 4747 Flora Ave.



**ALVIN AILEY KANSAS CITY NEWS**... In the left photo, Chief Executive Officer Melanie Miller and Director of Development Tamara Weaver accept the Hunt Family Foundation Grant from Clark Hunt, CEO of the KC Chiefs. In the right photo, De'Anthony Vaughan becomes the newest member of the Ailey American Dance Theater. -- Photos by Brian Guillaux.

## KC AileyCamp Alumnus Joins Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Kansas City native De'Anthony Vaughan has been dancing since the age of 3. Growing up, he attended AileyCamp and classes at Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey and continued his dance career at The Ailey School in New York on scholarship. He received additional training from the Kansas City Ballet and

later danced professionally with the Von Howard Project. Vaughan joined Dallas Black Dance Theatre in 2014. He recently became a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater! In other news, KCFAA was grateful to receive a \$5,000 grant

from the 2023 GEHA Gives Grant Program to support AileyCamp! KCFAA was also excited to receive a grant from the Hunt Family Foundation to provide student transportation to AileyCamp. The Hunt Family Foundation is committed to supporting programs that enrich the health and wellness of

KC youth. Both of these grants ignite the mission to empower and uplift our community through AileyCamp, the award-winning summer program where area youth learn life skills through dance, demonstrating the transformative power of the arts.

## Meet Lonnie Johnson: The Man Who Made A Splash In Toy Industry By Inventing The Super Soaker



LONNIE JOHNSON

By The Skanner  
Newspaper Staff

PORTLAND – Dr. Lonnie Johnson is a former Air Force and NASA engineer, and the president and founder of Johnson Research and Development Co., LonnieJohnson.com reports. An HBCU graduate, Johnson earned his bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering, his master's in Nuclear Engineering, and an honorary Ph.D. in Science from the famed Tuskegee University. Getting his start as a research engineer, he eventually joined the U.S. Air Force, where he served as Acting Chief of the Space Nuclear Power Safety Section. He eventually left the Air Force to accept a position at NASA, working

on spacecraft system designs at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. During his near-decade career there, he received multiple achievement awards while simultaneously receiving honors for his time in the armed services.

### Tinkering Leads To Toy-making

In 1989, Johnson launched his own company, embarking on a different type of engineering that would catapult him to fame - toy making. Recalling how he stumbled into the industry during an interview with USPTO, Johnson reflects on how working on a new heat pump for NASA helped him stumble on the genius inven-

tion.

"I was working on a new type of heat pump that would use water as a working fluid instead of freon and I was experimenting...and I machined these nozzles and, I'd hook them up to the sink in my bathroom, and I was looking at the stream of water coming out of a nozzle, and I turned and shot the stream across the bathroom, and I thought geez it would be neat to have a really powerful toy water gun," explained Johnson.

He had been inventing things since he was a child but this was the first one he felt he could really commercialize and possibly make enough money to become a full-time inventor. Thus the Super Soaker water gun was created, with Johnson licensing the toy to Larami Corporation, the popular children's toy garnering more than \$200 million in sales just two years after its release. It went on to become the number one selling toy in America, and when Larami was purchased by Hasbro Corporation, the Super Soaker became licensed to the second largest toy manufacturer on the globe. The Super Soaker became a staple in American households everywhere and a hallmark of summer fun. To date, the toy has generated nearly a billion dollars and a generation of children owe their childhood memories to Johnson.

### Johnson's Community Work

Today, Johnson holds more than 100 patents and over 20 pending patents, including one for the NERF gun and many other toys. He is the author of several published works on spacecraft power systems and two of his companies are currently working on new energy technology. In addition to his groundbreaking work, he also runs the Johnson STEM Activity Center in Atlanta. The nonprofit is geared toward funding high school robotics teams and providing young people with a creative space to work, with students previously qualifying for the worldwide robotics competition.

While proud of his work in the toy industry, Johnson likes to remind people that he is an en-

gineer first and contributes much of his time to inspiring the next generation to get into careers in STEM.

"It's interesting that the Super Soaker gets so much attention...I really like to think of myself as a serious engineer!... If I can make an impact...clearly it's something I want to do," he previously told reporters.

The All  
New  
www.kccallnews.  
net