

QUARTERBACK OF COMMUNITY

CALS alumni husband and wife dedicated to shaping communities

BY TAYLOR VOLLIN

SEE BETTER, KNOW BETTER, DO BETTER.

A simple yet powerful affirmation **Wayne and Qula Madkin** tell themselves each and every day. For the Madkins, their purpose lies beyond their professional positions and is rooted in extending their knowledge into their community to help it flourish.

Wayne, a 2001 agribusiness alumnus and Huntsville, Alabama native, says he dedicates every day to prioritizing the community through his role with Entergy Corporation.

“When I wake up, I think that the work I am doing is actually helping our community get ready for the next generation,” Wayne said. “Part of our mission at Entergy is to make sure we are involved in the community, and we are providing value for the people that we serve. I take pride in donating my time.”

Wayne works with Entergy Corporation, an energy company devoted to electric power production. Madkin works with the key string innovation lab to build infrastructure and electrical vehicle infrastructure in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. He sees a bright future for electrification in the South.

“You’re going to see a lot of changes happening the more we adapt to these new technologies. If we’re able to put our arms around it, it’s going to be a windfall for not only our community but for our social economies,” Wayne stated. “This electrification is coming quickly, and it’s going to create jobs and opportunities for a lot of people.”

Prior to his time with Entergy, Wayne

touched the hearts of Starkville as a quarterback for the Mississippi State University football team from 1998 through 2001. He graduated as the best quarterback in Bulldog history with 25 wins and 6,366 passing yards, a record that wasn’t touched until 2015. Despite his standout SEC career, Madkin is humble about his prior achievements but honest about the lessons the sport taught him.

“Football obviously shaped me, and it goes with me every day, but I don’t usually bring it up a lot,” Wayne said. “As quarterback, I was using people skills, understanding the importance of teamwork, and knowing the importance of having a strong message when you communicate with people. That’s one of the biggest things I brought with me from sports—being able to communicate. When I communicate with a strong message, I get everyone on the same page to reach the same goal.”

Today, Wayne’s number one team consists of four children and a wife with goals and a drive to match his own. Wayne met his wife Qula while students, on the steps of the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Building, one of the many buildings that houses departments in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Together, Wayne says they share a passion for impacting the community.

“We talk about it every night before we go to bed. We have meaningful conversations about life, those meetings of the minds to just talk about things,” Wayne said. “We’re very passionate about our community, sharing knowledge, and

seeing the community grow. The biggest thing we realized is that it’s about education. It’s about knowing better, seeing better, and doing better.”

A dream of winning did not end on Scott Field in Davis Wade Stadium. Wayne said he still hopes to accomplish all the goals he sets, while also building a legacy of knowledge for his children and future grandchildren.

“I want to be productive and win,” Wayne said. “I aim to set goals, reach them, and then set more goals. My ultimate goal is to raise my children and pass on the quest to learn and serve others to them, so they can prosper and serve others. That’s the biggest thing I can do in life—pass on a legacy of knowledge to my kids so they can serve their community.”

Qula, too, has her sights set on creating a legacy for their children. The Purvis, Mississippi native said she is driven by her family.

“Everything that I do is driven by my family and what I want for my children and their children,” Qula said. “I am trying to set up a legacy that is viable, strong, and long lasting. I’ve seen it in other families, and I want that in mine.”

The first-generation college graduate received her undergraduate degree in human sciences in 2001 and went on to obtain her master’s degree in nutrition in 2003. Now a registered dietitian, Qula said she stumbled upon the program in her dorm in Sessums Hall her freshman year.

“I’m a registered dietitian, but when I

came to college, I knew nothing about what it was,” Qula laughed. “I originally wanted to become a physical therapist, but when the requirements changed, I went through the course catalog with a pink highlighter to find what program aligned with the courses I had taken. All of my classes counted for food, nutrition, and dietetics, so that is what I pursued.”

Though she came across her career path by divine intervention, as she likes to say, the route was a perfect fit. Qula currently works as a nutrition specialist for the MSU Extension Service. In this role, Qula develops nutritional programming for the state of Mississippi, working on educational materials, publications, social media, and other outreach programs tailored to a wellness perspective. In a sense, Qula said her position is comparable to an umbrella.

“I don’t really work with individuals anymore, I’m more like an umbrella,” Qula said. “I’m not over Extension agents, but I work alongside them to help plan community education programs. I collaborate with the agents, and I believe in that strongly. It’s important to me that what we do is going to matter to the community and the agents.”

Qula’s role may have shifted from working with individuals to larger communities, but it still relies heavily on interpersonal skills. Qula said getting the message across in an impactful manner makes all the difference.

“It boils down to assessing the needs of the person and the community, and leading with care and compassion. I



Wayne and Qula Madkin (photo by Chao Photography)

really want to engage Mississippians in what it means to be nourished,” Qula said. “There is so much good information and programs out there, but the message that is being delivered and believing in that message matters. Communicating that requires a strong approach.”

At the end of the day, laying a simple foundation proves successful for Qula, who said she focuses on little victories for individuals and communities that will make the largest impact on their lives.

“Seeing individuals make changes to better themselves, whether small or large, thrills me,” Qula said. “Like having people get their blood pressure under control by making good decisions. Getting people to understand that poor health does not have to happen to them and that there are things they can do to prevent it. That to me is so valuable. It’s never been about the accolades for

me, it’s about teaching people simple changes that could save their life.”

As it is with Wayne, helping communities understand the importance of knowledge is one of Qula’s largest goals. She said she hopes to make an impact on those around her by helping them understand knowledge is the key to life changes.

“I want the community to not just understand that knowledge is power but that the use of knowledge is wisdom, and that is how we can change lives,” Qula added. “Using knowledge and information positively for individuals and communities—that’s the impact I want to make. I want to impact lives positively, and I believe in each one, teach one. I believe that if we go from person-to-person we can reach families and communities, and we can help people understand and make better choices. I am my community, so I’m totally invested.” 🐾