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## Four to join WKU's Hall of Distinguished Alumni

Sep 23, 2023



Claude Bloch

Four alumni will be joining Western Kentucky University's Hall of Distinguished Alumni during homecoming 2023.



Charles Reynolds

The 32nd class of noted alumni will be inducted into the Hall of Distinguished Alumni during the inaugural Hilltopper Excellence Awards on Nov. 9 at WKU's Knicely Conference Center.



Renee Shaw

This year's inductees are:



Adm. Claude Charles Booth, former commander-in-chief of the United States Naval Fleet and Commandant of the 14th Naval District in Pearl

Amir Zaheri

Harbor at the time of the Japanese attacks on Dec. 7, 1941, was born in Woodbury in July 1878. He attended Ogden College and later graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy. Rising through the ranks of the Navy, he received his first medal, the Meritorious Medal, for his role at the battle of Santiago de Cuba. He was also awarded the Navy Cross and Legion of Merit, two of the most prestigious commemorations in the U.S. military. He served in the Spanish-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, the Philippine-American War, World War I and World War II. In addition to helming the USS California and the USS Plattsburgh, Adm. Bloch served as the Navy's budget officer and the judge advocate general before being awarded the duty of commander-in-chief of the fleet from 1938-

1940. He retired from the Navy in 1942, but remained as Chairman of the Navy Board for production awards. He was the highest-ranking Jewish officer in the Armed Forces until well after World War II and died on Oct. 4, 1967.

Justice Charles H. Reynolds ('48) was a distinguished attorney, decorated World War II veteran and justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court. A native Kentuckian, Reynolds was born in Bowling Green in 1924. He served in air combat during World War II, for which he was awarded the Bronze Star for valor on three separate occasions. From 1944-1945, Reynolds saw combat in the Pacific Theater as a sergeant in the U.S. Army's 20th Air Force. He was awarded the Bronze Star and two Oak Leaf Clusters for valor. His

formal education included a Bachelor of Science in economics from WKU in 1948 and a Juris Doctor from the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law in 1950. After completing his legal degree, Reynolds commenced private practice in Bowling Green and soon thereafter joined with the Bell and Orr law firm, eventually becoming a partner with the firm name changed to Bell, Orr & Reynolds. He practiced general law until his appointment to the Kentucky Court of Appeals in 1976, shortly after Kentucky's judicial system was modernized by a constitutional amendment that created an intermediate appellate court known as the Court of Appeals.

Reynolds was one of the two original appointees from the Second Judicial District and served until his election to the Kentucky Supreme Court in 1990. Reynolds was sworn in as a member of the Kentucky Supreme Court in January 1991. During his time on the Kentucky Supreme Court, the opinion he authored in the *Steelvest v. Scansteel* appeal continues to be recognized as the benchmark in Kentucky on the complicated and highly technical subject of summary judgement. An active participant in community affairs, he was also prominent in banking, business and regulatory agencies. Reynolds became a director and later president of Bowling Green Bank and Trust Company. Justice Reynolds was serving on

the Kentucky Supreme Court at the time of his death at 71 in 1996.

Renee Shaw ('94, '96) is a director of public affairs and moderator at KET, as well as host of KET's weeknight public affairs program Kentucky Edition, the signature public policy discussion series Kentucky Tonight, the weekly interview series Connections, election coverage and KET forums. Shaw earned both a Bachelor of Arts in broadcasting and a master of arts in communication from WKU. Since 2001, she has been the producing force behind KET's legislative coverage that has been recognized by the Kentucky Associated Press and the National Educational Telecommunications Association. Under her leadership, KET expanded

its portfolio of public affairs content to include a daily news and information program, Kentucky Supreme Court coverage, townhall-style forums and multi-platform program initiatives around issues such as opioid addiction and youth mental health. Shaw has earned top awards from the Ohio Valley Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS), with three regional Emmy awards.

She was inducted into the Silver Circle of the NATAS, one of the industry's highest honors recognizing television professionals with distinguished service in broadcast journalism for 25 years or more. In 2018, KET earned a national media award from Mental Health America for its

multi-dimensional content on the opioid epidemic shepherded by Shaw. That same year, she co-produced and moderated a six-part series on youth mental health that was awarded first place in educational content by the National Educational Telecommunications Association.

Shaw was recently inducted into the Silver Circle Society of the Ohio Valley Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. Additional awards include the Women Leading Kentucky's Gov. Martha Layne Collins Leadership Award and induction into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame. She was honored by the AKA Beta Gamma Omega Chapter with the Coretta Scott King Spirit of Ivy Award, earned the state media award



from the Kentucky Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution and was named a Charles W. Anderson Laureate by the Kentucky Personnel Cabinet.

She received the Green Dot Award for coverage of domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking, as well as the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy's Anthony Lewis Media Award for work on criminal justice reform.

Dr. Amir Zaheri ('01) is an American composer, conductor, performer and educator of Persian and Appalachian lineages with a career in professional, faith-based and academic settings. Born in 1979, the Kentucky native earned a Bachelor of Arts in music from WKU in 2001, followed by a master's

degree from Georgia State University and a doctorate from the University of Alabama. Before joining the faculty of the University of Alabama School of Music in 2013, Dr. Zaheri held the prestigious Ben and Coy Narramore Fellowship while pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in music composition. At the same time, he also completed a secondary concentration in musicology, concentrating on the music of Nazi Germany and “degenerate art,” most notably the early music of Paul Hindemith.

An internationally esteemed composer, conductor and performer, Dr. Zaheri routinely garners high praise in his award-winning career spanning nearly three decades in multiple professional settings. His

compositions demonstrate a genuine interest in diverse media, from works for the concert hall and operatic stage to those for electronics, film, screendance and other dramatic art forms. In June 2022, Dr. Zaheri conducted the Carnegie Hall world premiere of his composition “After a Season of Silence” for chorus and orchestra, the second of his pieces to receive its inaugural performance at the celebrated venue. An esteemed organist, he has given solo performances throughout the United States and several European cities and has been featured in concerts with numerous choruses and orchestras. Currently, Dr. Zaheri holds multiple roles at the University of Alabama, including associate director of the School of Music and

director of Academic Affairs, Student Wellness and Student Affairs. He is also the Composition and Theory program chair, an associate professor of Music Composition and the Contemporary Music Ensemble artistic director. Additionally, Dr. Zaheri serves as university organist and carillonneur of the historic Denny Chimes.