

INTRODUCTION: Hello, this is Michael Eure and I'd like to invite you to the Michael Eure show featuring student hosts and very special guests talking about a variety of interesting topics.

You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube channel.

TAJ HEWITT: Welcome again to another episode of The Michael Eure show here today with me is my fellow co-host Damian Johnson and Jenny Aguilera.

And then of course, you have a very special guest, Mr. Corey Branch, who is an electrical engineer or received an electrical engineering degree from North Carolina A&T.

But I'll let us do some better introductions soon. And, as for now, I'm gonna ask Jerry if you could just display those web pages that...

DAMIAN JOHNSON: And Jerry should be getting those up anytime soon. Now, there they go.

HEWITT: So, just gonna read a brief snippet of information from the College of Engineering from NC A&T.

And so the College College of Engineering.

So, I'm just gonna read the the vision. The College of Engineering at North Carolina A&T State University cultivates leaders who excel at academics, innovation, and research. Which is why you could see that in the actual head, in the clear is spelled wrong. If you were wondering why it's spelled wrong, it was done on purpose.

I'm in the mission statement, of course. The College of Engineering is committed to excellence in engineering and computer science. The college through education and research creates innovative and collaborative solutions that address the evolving societal and economic challenges of North Carolina, the nation and the world.

So, that is just a brief introduction of what the College of Engineering and NCA&T actually does, and so, we should have a web page for Raleigh City Council to just view.

And so here we go. Raleigh City Council. So, which is actually Raleigh's governing body.

And so, Jerry, if you just scroll a little bit.

We'll see that the City Council is Raleigh's governing body, as I just said, consistent of eight members who are elected for two-year terms, three of them members, including the mayor, are elected at large, while the other members are elected from 5 districts, ABCD&E. The City Council sets city policy and acts laws and allots the city budget each year.

And for all you folks at home the links for both these websites are gonna be put in the link in the description, so feel free to check them out.

And right after that we are gonna play a video from the Care Center at Wake Tech, so we we go.

VOICE OVER: The Care Center is here to provide wrap-around services for our students for when out of the classroom challenges arise. I'm Mike Coleman Dean of Student Engagement and Impact here at Wake Tech.

My name is Magdalene Crist and I'm a student at Wake Tech in the associate of science program. The Care Center at Wake Tech has been a great hub for resources such as food success, coaching, technology support, brief mental health counseling, emergency financial assistance, and transportation assistance.

I've gotten a lot of great help with questions and just navigating Wake Tech. If I'm ever having a tough day or a tough time in class, the student success coaches are always there to help me whenever I need it.

Students can connect with us by visiting one of our locations, online at our website or by email.

But you, my fellow students, if you ever need help with anything the Care Center is your one-stop shop and I highly recommend. And most importantly, we are here to support our students and make sure that they soar.

HEWITT: Okay. And that was a Care Center video from Wake Tech. A very great place, if you go to Wake Tech, to get certain things that you might not be able to get from elsewhere.

And so, moving on I wanna hand over to Jenny and she can give you guys a message from DEI.

JENNY AGUILERA: Hi everyone DEI is so excited to have had such a successful Black History Month. The event turnouts were amazing. Absolute phenomenal.

We're so excited for the rest of the year. We do have a few more events planned, so keep an eye out on that.

A quick plug, student government is the one that hands out a lot of their Flyers and stuff, so for more details feel free to ask any of your student leaders for more info on it.

Applications for that are also open.

HEWITT: Great. Great. Thank you, Jenny.

And now I'm gonna hand over to my other fellow co-host Damien. And he's gonna run us into some introductions.

JOHNSON: Yeah, of course.

So, I'll start off. You guys argument Taj. You met Jenny. We're hopefully gonna meet Mr. Branch here. Where he gets to talk to you a lot about what he does and City Council, life at A&T and things like that.

But my name is Damien Johnson. I'm a current STARTS intern. It's my second semester here at Wake Tech compared to Taj's. I think it's his last, correct Taj? Yep, it's about to be his last semester. So, you guys might see a lot more than me for you soon.

I'm really happy to be here. I'm happy to go co-host with Taj as well. We get to meet some amazing people, so I'll hand off the introductions to Jenny and Taj and then we'll finally start off with Branch, alright.

HEWITT: Jenny, you could go ahead.

AGUILERA: OK, cool. I'm Jenny, I'm Senator chair for North Campus and I'm also involved in the DEI Council, Student Success Work Group.

I'm also in in a few other things and I'm just really excited to be here.

This is one of my favorite days of the week to do this show because I get to meet a whole bunch of cool people and I just get to kind of learn more about the different jobs that are out there and careers and just get to meet some very impressive people. So, I am really happy to be here. Taj?.

HEWITT: Excellent. Thank you. Thank you.

Once again, my name is Taj Hewitt. I am a Scott scholar and also on the SGA with Jenny.

I am a senator and yeah, I've been doing the Michael Eure Show for about, since the start of the school year. And it's always great to come on Thursdays and, you know, like my fellow co-host said, you get to meet some incredible and intellectual people.

So, I'm looking forward to you today, Mr. Cory Branch, so going straight to you and let you give us a brief rundown.

COREY BRANCH: First off, thank you for having me. Uh, it's a great honor. And as you are pursuing your education, if anything, I definitely wish you the best.

If there's anything I can do to assist you, definitely let me know.

So, I'm a Raleigh native, you know, I'm a graduate of Enloe High school in Raleigh. Left after graduating, I went off to A&T and majored in electrical engineering.

Upon graduation, I returned back to the area, first working for IBM and then AT&T, and now I work for a company called Kyndryl and I manage a network support team, a global support team.

So, I have people from multiple sides of the world that I support and give directions to.

I was elected to Raleigh City Council in 2015, and I've been on the City Council representing District C, which is southeast Raleigh. I have half of downtown.

I go all the way out towards Knightdale and Garner, you know, as we move forward.

So, I look forward to answering some of your other questions, but it's just a little bit about myself.

HEWITT: Yeah, excellent. I'm glad you gave us, sorry... I am glad you gave us a little bit of background information, but the first question I really want to ask you is what really inspired you to become an electrical engineer?

BRANCH: So, it was interesting. Everyone has a cell phone now. Um, but back in 1994 when I was in school, people were transitioning with pagers to cell phones. And then you know, one of the things, one of the big companies was Motorola and I was just really interested in signals and things while I was a student at Enloe High school.

And I got a chance to be a part of a Jr. NESBE team partnering with NC State and going to conferences and seeing engineers. And NESBE stands for National Society of Black Engineers and being a part of that, you know, seeing people who look like me and talk like me and have, you know, fun like me all doing engineering.

And then I said, well, what about engineering? And, as I thought about it, signals and waves and understanding it and also about physics. But I chose electrical engineering as the field of choice.

HEWITT: Great. Yeah.

I know a lot of have a lot of friends that are actually going to the school of engineering as well. So, I hope they have the same passion for it as you do.

Yeah, and right before we get into our second question, we actually have a short video from the NC A&T College of Engineering.

So, Jerry should you pull that up for us?

VOICE OVER: A&T puts you in a space where both upperclassmen and underclassmen are all hungry to learn and all hungry to really tackle the world's challenges.

You chose to study medicine at Meharry and Engineering at NC A&T because you want to lead and serve and I'm here to tell you it made a great choice.

HEWITT: Definitely. I so I am going to hand it over to Jenny now, and she's going to lead us in.

AGUILERA: Yeah. So, we do have a background that you graduated from North Carolina agriculture, agricultural and Technical State University. For those who don't know, that's in Greensboro and it is the number one producer of African American engineers in the United States. Super awesome.

It's also nationally known for its programs and of course, agriculture and the typical STEM.

So, science, tech, engineering and math, among some other nationally accredited departments.

Umm, why did you choose that specific institution? Of course it's, you know... one of the leading schools and you did mention that you know you were meeting people who look like you, talk like you, had fun like you. It's such an important part of the college experience, but you know, were those the only reasons that you chose it and did it make you feel prepared to actually work as an engineer, like in the field? Or...

BRANCH: So, we're gonna go back to middle school, actually. I was in the Math, Science Education Network, MSEN Pre-college program at NC State.

So, as part of that program, we have statewide competitions and I... my very first state-wide competition was actually at A&T and being a part of just seeing the campus. I was like, whoa, you know, being from Raleigh, I know about Shaw. I know about St. Aug, and I was always on NC State's campus, so I know about NC State OHA, their engineering and their nuclear lab. All of that.

So, I looked around and I was like, wow. And I think what helped me too was my brother wind up going to A&T after starting at NC State.

So, he started NC State. He didn't have the best experience when he started. My brother and I are nine years apart. So, he graduated from Enloe in '87 and he wound up transfer... he set out a year, he transferred to AT&T and he graduated from A&T in '94 in industrial engineering. He stayed and got his masters in computer science.

Uh, so I was on the campus while he was a student there. I graduated in '96, but just the overall experience and when you have the number one producer of African Americans in

engineering, you know our career fairs are the largest. I'll put our career fair over NC State's career fair.

And the key point that people, I would say people of color need to realize is that companies go to A&T looking for people of color.

Companies got to other other universities looking for people with high degrees. High GPA's so there's a difference there. There's an intentionality there. I know you mentioned you're part of DEI. Being intentional is very important when you're trying to be inclusive.

So, those were the things that helped me and got and that drove me to AT&T and then just being an AT&T, I mean those are the best four years of my life.

AGUILERA: Thank you so much for sharing.

Umm, so you were already exposed to A&T before it was even your time to start applying.

That's so cool that you were in your, you know, graduate school before you, even though you were gonna be graduating there. That's awesome.

JOHNSON: Yeah, I think that's amazing. Now you said you were in MSEN correct?

BRANCH: Correct.

JOHNSON: I was. I was an MSEN for about 6 years myself. I just thought that's why my face lit up when you said it. You don't hear too many, it's such a great program for minority students in general and I just don't hear it talked about enough.

So, it's actually really nice to know that you where there. And of course you know how it is.

We were very familiar with NC State and stuff. We're always on that campus there, but

BRANCH: Right.

JOHNSON: Umm, wow, that's just so great.

Are there any other like memorable experiences? I'm sure you have a huge list.

BRANCH: So, here's a here's a fun fact of while I was at A&T, actually two. One is not to engineering, it's just me getting involved on campus doing things. Umm, knowing people on campus. I was asked my sophomore year going into my junior year to be part of student government as far as helping with voter education and registration.

So, that was really the first time that I led initiatives to get people registered. A&T has a precinct on campus. They're trying to take it away. They still have it, thank God.

But just getting student, educating students and then after that, just continue to work with the student government on different activities and functions.

So, that was a great experience for my junior year. My senior year, umm, everyone knows about engineer's week. This is engineer's week.

Well, A&T back in the day, I don't think still have it, but they had a basketball tournament.

So, they have people from every department playing in the tournament and my, no double E's, we won it our junior year and we knew a lot of the chem-e's who actually played Women's basketball. Well, they got a new coach and the coach wanted, you know, a way to help her team practice.

So, she actually reached out to our entire team our senior year and so we got NCAA clearance and everything and we practiced with the women's basketball team that entire season to try to help them prepare for their season and for the games that they had going forward.

So, you know, those are just two great experiences that happened because of A&T and also because of engineering.

JOHNSON: Wow, so did you spend the whole time... I guess not the whole time doing that, but your whole time there with the women's team when you were working with them?

BRANCH: It was just my senior year.

JOHNSON: It was OK.

BRANCH: Just my senior year.

JOHNSON: Thank you for the clarification.

Umm, this might be a little interesting. So, you went to school for electrical engineering, which was something I was kind of considering myself. A&T was actually very high on my list, next to NC State, when I was trying to choose between the two. It was either I am going here, or I am going there.

I'm currently obviously doing my undergrad or part of my undergraduate stuff at Wake Tech, so as I'm studying to be an engineer, what type of tips or what would you say to students that are thinking about basically becoming an engineer in terms of like preparation, in terms of strategy, day in the life?

You know, I know they have a lot of career fairs and such. How should we turn out to those as like minority students, how can we better promote ourselves?

BRANCH: So, the first thing I say is always be prepared. Learn the language. Engineers speak a different language. Umm, you know if you're going into electrical engineering, electrical engineering is so wide.

Whatever company you speak to know how they utilize an electrical engineer.

They may, you may go to Duke Energy and you know you're looking at voltages and things of that nature.

Or you may go to Amazon and you may look be working in their computer room and connecting different departments.

The beauty behind, when I came out, was there was no computer engineering. Computer engineering is a combination of electrical engineering and computer science. That's how it came out to be.

So, I came right... I graduated in 2000. I think they started coming up with computer engineering majors in 2001.

So, just understanding the major. If you're in mechanical engineering, if you're industrial engineering, you know, understanding whatever companies you're looking at, how do they utilize that skill set?

And then just trust the part... you know, I say I always been prepared.

You know, a lot of people say it's shirt and tie. I would always present shirt, tie, jacket. That's how I would go, ladies... business attire as well, that suits you. And bring your best, but also be well rounded.

A lot of people think engineers are boring. You know, you look at old 70s and 60s movies. It's the guy in the white coat with the pens and the front pocket or whatever but be well rounded be able to relate to people and that's the biggest asset.

I'm a manager now, so I've been managing a team for 15 years, so in doing that you know I don't log into the devices every day and look at our network, but I know how to do it. I know how to talk the language and I can translate it to someone that doesn't.

JOHNSON: And would you think, that's a work skill that you learned on the job or is that more skill that you kind of learn through undergrad and networking?

BRANCH: So, I'll say both because the beauty about undergrad is that, you know, I was in NESBE while I was at A&T. So, I was a freshman committee president at the time, my first year.

So, when you're interacting when you're talking and when you're presenting, you learn those skills. But also, when I when I'm not in engineering and I was working with student government, I had a different exposure.

So, I was able to put a lot of different things into the toolkit and that's what it's gonna take to be a successful person or even engineer. You have to be able to code switch.

JOHNSON: Got it. Thank you so much.

Of course. Yes, thank you so much.

HEWITT: Yeah. And I am in SGA, like I said. And, Damian and I are both also in NESBE and you spoke about being well rounded, which I think is a very good trait to have.

And so, I know you are the assistant director for AT&T for 13 years, right? So, yeah, so could you tell us a little bit about that role? And then also your current position as the team lead manager at Kyndryl.

BRANCH: So, it's associate director and they actually just change our titles at Kyndryl.

So, I'm now an associate director again. Umm yeah, they just made the change recently.

So, basically I am a first-line manager that manages, I have three people in the US, have three in Canada, I have two in India and have six in the Czech Republic that I manage directly. And I also help oversee about 10 people down in Latin America. People in Argentina, Chile area. So, a day-in-the-life of what I do a lot is trying to put out fires and trying to give direction.

HEWITT: How do you keep everyone on the same page? You just have a large website group.

BRANCH: Yeah. So, a lot of it is talking to my teams daily, reaching out, they have my cell phone so if something happens within their time zone and I may not be online, they can reach me.

The beauty is that have a senior team so I don't have to give a lot of direction too. But at the same time, I have still have to do a lot of clarity and a lot of times it's just clearing the runway so they can do the work.

Uh, you know, we're setting up firewalls. We're setting up routers for multiple companies that we provide network services for.

So, in doing that, you know I have to understand the difference between our switches and our firewalls. So, when I go to upper management, I can say, okay this is how many people I need to work on this issue or how many people work on this issue or I can say OK this is

down. We're waiting on folks, so there's a lot that goes on even in my day job. No two days are the same.

JOHNSON: Yeah, that makes sense.

HEWITT: That makes sense.

JOHNSON: I'll say I know they definitely makes sense. I would never imagine it to be the same.

I imagine your job to have to deal with a lot of versatility and as a leader you know you have to know how to communicate with people and such. Also being on the Raleigh City Council you literally are Raleigh leader.

You have to know how to communicate as such and I wanted to know did you, and that doesn't just come easily, you know, you have to have experience with that, whether that be at AT&T or whether that be within your community.

I wanted to ask how you ended up getting that experience with leadership roles?

BRANCH: So, part of it started when I was young. Umm, I was telling... it's interesting. I was telling someone the story just the other day. At church growing up, you know, I was, you know, second Sundays, you Sunday and they will always have a young person, you know, do the morning prayer and a lot of times they will come to me and ask me right before church would start. Hey, can you pray today and you have to be ready and having to do that at such a young age, middle school, high school and then being involved in organizations.

I'm a member of Alpha Phi fraternity incorporated, but I came up through their youth program African American leaders of tomorrow at the time. And being a leader there amongst my peers working with them, umm, working with, having mentors to give me opportunity.

No one makes it anywhere, you know, by themselves. If you ever, there's old saying, if you see a turtle on a post, you know it didn't get there by itself. So, it's just trying to be accessible and be open and be willing to listen.

I think the biggest thing is always listen first, before ever speaking our because when people come to you a lot of times they're very emotional, sometimes with issues on City Council as well as engineering.

I have to get past the emotional part and really listen to what it is they're saying the problem is and trying to figure out how we can work together.

JOHNSON: Uh, OK, so it sounds like, you know, to listen, make sure you're listening to people, what they're saying. I feel like there's also a bit of risk you kind of have to take, you know, not to be afraid.

So, I think that's something I'm taking away today and I want to say thank you for that.

BRANCH: No problem.

JOHNSON: Of course.

AGUILERA: With what you said about having to kind of manage all kinds of folks and stuff, umm, and almost clearing the runway, right for your team to just kind of deal with their own thing, get stuff done. How do you address issues that are brought to you in City Council? Is it about the same techniques? Is it just about, you know, kind of being flexible and adaptable or is that more of a processed position? Is there more of a ABC and then that's it? How would you describe that and what kind of issues are addressed by City Council?

BRANCH: It would be about the same from the standpoint of everyone comes with their own experiences, lived experiences. So, you have to listen to what their challenge is and then try to figure out what's the best opportunity to help, you know, resolve that matter.

It may be a referral to the county because maybe a service that the county provides. It may be a referral to a nonprofit. Maybe something the city can handle if it's a housing matter. If it's a street matter, is the issue they're having problems with people speeding?

Is it that, you know, people are too fast and based upon the type of street, do we do stop signs?

Do we know, do modifications to the road to do street calming to try to get people to slow down? Do we need speed humps?

So, it's about really listening to the issue and then trying to look at the full picture and figure out what are the different tools that are available to maybe assist them.

And sometimes it's just listening to people. Sometimes they may not want us to fix their issue, they just wanna know that you're listening and that you care.

So, it's about, you know, being that part, you know, carrying that part to so umm, you know, that's again, there's no two things. It could be parks and rec, dealing with young people.

You know what opportunities they want, you know, and needs.

AGUILERA: OK, so like Damian said with having to be versatile and just kind of wearing different hats because the way that you would address somebody who is a little bit older

and more you know in the senior category, you probably wouldn't approach you know, a college student that's, you know, that has a grievance.

BRANCH: Right. It's really and it may be a situation like I say this if I have a single person that's unhoused, and if I have a family that's unhoused.

AGUILERA: Right.

BRANCH: They both have the same issue, but the solution for them may be different.

AGUILERA: Right. There's different programs and avenues to address their dilemmas.

Okay.

JOHNSON: So, wearing so many hats, Jeez, it's like I see how you can get all the experience in your in your lives over time. It definitely has to come over time, though I could never imagine.

We actually have a question of kind of concerning that if you had for instance, I think it should be showing up on the screen, right?

Yes, if you had like a 9-year-old daughter who's an elementary school, how do you think you should prepare her or just kids in general, how would you prepare them to get interested in a field such as engineering? Where it can be so math, heavy science, heavy conceptual and such?

BRANCH: So, it's interesting. When I was a kid, I had toys and I liked to see sometimes how they work, so they got broken. Umm, and I would try to figure out how to put them together. I think you know at age 9 that is probably what 3rd, 4th grade?

I would just look at things that are age appropriate as far as, you know, engineering and just things that they can play with, you know, and you wanna build the creativity side of them.

Being an engineer is about being creative because a lot of times an engineer is being asked to come up with a solution to something that previously has not had a solution.

You know, so, I will look at different experiences overall as far as traveling to schools. It's never too early to visit a college campus and just talk to people. Find out what science they like. The science you like does matter overall as well.

JOHNSON: So, it's not necessarily about getting them to be good at mathematics, you know, when they're very young or about, you know, teaching them physics when they're fifth grade.

BRANCH: Right.

JOHNSON: It's about making sure they're exposed to creativity of the creative side of their mind and problem solving. Critical thinking is really what want to be teaching them.

BRANCH: Definitely because I had someone tell me years after I had graduated. They didn't know I was gonna really do well in engineering because I didn't have the best math scores. But I love physics and I love trying to figure things out.

JOHNSON: All right. Well, thank you so much. I think it's actually time for some of our closing statements. Don't want to keep everybody here too long.

Corey do you wanna start? You know, if you have anything else left to say to the audience.

BRANCH: I just wanna say just, you know, try. Go out there and try, you know, take a risk, a smart, educated risk.

But you know, just try, learn new people, new people, and just, you know, just go from there. You know that that's the main thing I say and just have a strong foundation for whatever you believe in. It gets you through the difficult times.

HEWITT: Excellent, excellent. And, as for me having to say that I think next year is a great field and it really shows the ingenuity of humans, and I mean, historically it's really what brought the human race a long way and the thank you for coming today Mr. Branch.

I just want to say we appreciate everything that you do for the engineering world and the community. And yeah, I mean, please come back on the show again.

BRANCH: Just let me know cause Michael loves cutting time.

HEWITT: Already, Jenny.

AGUILERA: Thank you so much for sharing your experiences, especially with sharing how you do have to be well rounded and you don't have to sacrifice your more technical skill for creativity or your creativity for the more technical like physics and heavy math and stuff like that.

Because you're right, a lot of STEM careers, you on TV, they look like these, like boring, you know, squares and white lab coats. And like you know, pens in the pocket to spice it up or whatever.

So, thank you so much for sharing and just telling us about your journey to get here.

And I'd also like to thank the audience and everyone who watched and ask questions.

It was so fun getting to hear your response on how to introduce children into STEM.

And I'd also like to thank the I, specifically for supporting the show and for letting me come on here to kind of represent them. It's always so fun to do that.

Umm, Damien.

JOHNSON: Of course. I'll try not to run too long.

Mr Branch, I might actually ask you to stay just a little bit, because I have so many questions I wanna talk to you about. But, thank you so much for coming onto the show.

You gave us some really valuable insight into not just how to be an engineer, but how to be a successful person who thinks like an engineer and to bring people together and such.

So, I like I said, I wanna thank you for coming on the show.

Thank you, Taj, Jenny, DEI and the audience.

If there any more questions, feel free to put them in the chat and I think that's it for us.

HEWITT: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you everyone for coming, as usual.