



## **UEI Founder W. David Tarver to receive the 2024 ECE Alumni Merit Award from the University of Michigan’s College of Engineering on September 13**

***As one of the nation’s first millionaire Black tech entrepreneurs, this tech founder/investor/educator was also selected to present the coveted ‘featured lecture’ as part of scheduled U-M Engineering Homecoming activities.***

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Detroit – July 17, 2024 – The [Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative \(UEI\)](#) is pleased to announce that Founder and President [W. David Tarver](#) has been named recipient of the 2024 ECE Alumni Merit Award by the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. This award—which recognizes alumni who have achieved significant success in academic, governmental, and/or industrial positions—will be presented to Tarver at U-M’s 2024 Alumni Awards Dinner and Ceremony on Friday, September 13.

Each year, Michigan Engineering honors distinguished alumni in conjunction with Homecoming Weekend. As part of the awards process, University of Michigan tradition dictates that distinguished alumni present a lecture during their visit. Tarver has been chosen to deliver the prestigious “featured lecture” on September 13, 2:30 p.m.–3:30 p.m.

“It is an honor to be recognized among such an elite class of leaders who have served their communities with creativity, teamwork, innovation, and excellence,” Tarver said. “The College of Engineering has been my home—not only during my student days but also currently, as a faculty member in the Center of Entrepreneurship. There, I have taken on the challenging but rewarding role of inspiring and preparing the next generation of entrepreneurs to change the world via innovation and entrepreneurship. It is an honor to receive the 2024 ECE Alumni Merit Award, and I’m grateful for the Michigan Engineering education which has enabled me to make meaningful contributions to society.”

Among his many accomplishments, Tarver recently relaunched the Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative (UEI) to empower a new generation of urban innovators to improve the quality of life in urban communities. Seed funding for the UEI relaunch was provided by a \$250,000 grant from the University of Michigan.

Originating in 2014, UEI has consistently advocated for urban-focused entrepreneurship. The main vehicle employed by the organization was an annual symposium that convened regional and national entrepreneurs and thought leaders in business, academia, community organizations and government. Each symposium sought to raise awareness about the need for urban entrepreneurship, to discuss best practices and solutions, and to recognize accomplishments. The organization also provided direct advice to entrepreneurs, facilitated development of a university-level course in urban entrepreneurship (now offered at U-M), and hosted (in 2018) an eight-week “Urban Launchpad” bootcamp at the SpaceLab Detroit co-working community. When the Covid-19 pandemic caused tremendous disruption in urban communities, Tarver decided that UEI needed a reboot. The relaunched organization, “UEI

2.0,” is taking on a more active role by recruiting members to a new, proprietary online platform that will connect, inform, and inspire urban innovation professionals.

A Flint, Michigan, native, Tarver holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. In 1983, at age 30 and after developing breakthrough technologies at AT&T Bell Laboratories in New Jersey, Tarver launched Telecom Analysis Systems, Inc. What began as a basement enterprise engaged in the design, manufacture, and sale of advanced test equipment products for the telecommunications industry grew to a business with over \$10 million in sales in 1995. Tarver sold the business that same year to London-based Bowthorpe plc., (Spirent). He remained with the company for four years, ultimately assuming the role of Group President - Telecommunications. Through acquisitions and organic growth, Tarver grew the company’s revenues to over \$250 million.

Tarver left Spirent in 1999 and started the nonprofit Red Bank (New Jersey) Education and Development Initiative to tackle the problem of low academic performance by local students. In the Initiative’s first four years, the percentage of Red Bank Public School students who passed the New Jersey math performance assessment increased from 22% to over 60%. Tarver relocated to Southeast Michigan in 2007 to be closer to family. He published the book [Proving Ground: A Memoir](#) in 2012 and established the Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative in 2014. The IRS certified UEI as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in 2015.

Tarver has served as a faculty member in U-M’s College of Engineering / Center for Entrepreneurship since 2012, teaching students from a broad range of disciplines. In 2015, he created the Urban Entrepreneurship Practicum course, which introduces students to developing or enhancing businesses that aim to improve the quality of life in urban communities. In 2016, Tarver received the University of Michigan College of Engineering Distinguished Service Award.

Tarver is frequently asked to share his advice on business, innovation, and entrepreneurship topics. He recently discussed how the next generation of urban innovators can improve the quality of life in urban areas on WDET’s “The Metro,” WXYZ’s [Spotlight on the News](#), and CBS Detroit’s “Michigan Matters.”

### **About the Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative (UEI)**

Detroit-based but globally minded, the nonprofit Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative is constructing a proprietary Urban Innovator Platform for entrepreneurial professionals and the organizations that support them. UEI is committed to connecting its members to education, technology tools, business resources, and funding sources that further their efforts to create sustainable, scalable business solutions that increase the vitality of urban communities. Learn more at [urbanei.org](http://urbanei.org).

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