

PRESS RELEASE

February 23, 2017

**ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS CELEBRATE
AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH**



(Front Row, from left to right) Orange Councilmember Adrienne Wooten, Chairman of the People's Organization for Progress Lawrence Hamm, Freeholder At-Large Patricia Sebold, Reverend Arnold Fox, East Orange Councilman Ted R. Green, Irvington Mayor Tony Vauss, New Jersey Assemblywoman Blonnie R. Watson, (second row, from left to right), The Honorable William Payne, Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake, Freeholder At-Large Leiby C. Jones, (third row, from left to right), District 2 Freeholder Wayne L. Richardson, Freeholder At-Large Rufus I. Johnson, Don Viapree, Reverend Vernon Carle Miller, Montclair Mayor Robert D. Jackson, (fourth row, from left to right), Calvin W. Souder, Esq., District 5 Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro, and District 1 Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla all join together during the Board's 2017 African American Heritage Month Celebration at the Hall of Records. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders held its 2017 African-American History Month Celebration recognizing excellence on Wednesday, February 22, 2017, at the Hall of Records. The ceremony commemorated the heritage, culture, resilience, and spirit of the African-American community. The ceremony was followed by a catered reception.



Essex County Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake during the Board's African American History Month Celebration. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Freeholder Britnee N. Timberlake began the program with opening remarks, sharing her joy in recognizing the African American community in Essex County, especially for the contributions African-Americans have made and continue to make today. She explained that it is important to celebrate these contributions, to know and understand African-American history, and to pass this history to the next generation.

Essex County Sheriff Armando Fontoura offered remarks on behalf of Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo, Jr., sharing the importance of the African-American

community and accentuating numerous contributions African-Americans have made to the City of Newark and Essex County.

This year's honorees included: **Assemblywoman Blonnie R. Watson** of Newark, **Councilmember Adrienne Wooten** of Orange, **Calvin W. Souder, Esq.,** of Newark, **Reverend Vernon Carle Miller** of Maplewood, **Mayor Robert David Jackson** of Montclair, **The Honorable William Payne** of Newark, **Don Viapree** of Piscataway, **Lawrence Hamm** of Montclair, **East Orange Councilmember Ted R. Green**, and **Reverend Arnold Fox** of Union.



New Jersey Assemblywoman Blonnie R. Watson giving remarks during the celebration. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

The Board honored **Assemblywoman Blonnie R. Watson** who currently serves in the New Jersey General Assembly representing District 29. However, she previously served on the Essex County Freeholder Board from 1994 to 2014, as a Freeholder At-Large, Freeholder Vice President, and Freeholder President. As a Freeholder, she spearheaded the County's Prescription Card Program, Essex County's disparity study resulting in the formation of Essex County's Small Business and Affirmative Action Department, and the Code Blue Initiative to aid the County's homeless population during extreme weather conditions. In partnership with the County Executive, Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., and his Administration, she was at the

forefront of numerous significant projects in Essex County, such as the Historic Courthouse Restoration, 911 Memorial at Eagle Rock Reservation, AA bond rating and state-of-the-art county facilities. Assemblywoman Watson was elected in 1968 to serve on the Board of Directors of High Park Gardens Cooperative Corporation, a housing development in Newark's Central Ward, where she served on the Board and as its President. She also served for many years as a Board member for the National Association of Housing Cooperatives and as an independent housing consultant. She resides in Newark with her husband, Lewis, and they have two adult daughters, Deborah Jones and Charon Motayne.

Councilmember Adrienne Wooten joined the City Council of Orange Township in 2016 where she serves as the Council's liaison to the Housing Authority. Although she is new to the City Council, she is not new to community involvement. She started her career in the private sector as a member of Marriott International Hotel's management team where she consistently exceeded the Marriott Gold standard for service and programming for guests and conferees. Later, she transitioned from corporate America to the public sector and became a teacher at Oakwood Avenue School, preparing rigorous curriculums in language arts for 5th and 6th grade students. As a public servant, Councilmember Wooten served on the City of Orange Township's Citizens' Budget Advisory Committee in 2010. In 2012, she also served as Democratic County Committee person in Orange, District 4, where she diligently worked to elect Democratic candidates to public office and assist in the promotion and development of good government on the National, State, County, and Municipal levels. Councilmember Wooten and her family live in the East Ward where they continue to be a part of the Oakwood Avenue School family. Her goal is to improve the health of the community by emphasizing prevention, environmental control, health promotion, and education.



Vice President Brendan Gill (right) reads the Board's plaque and Commendation honoring Orange Councilmember Adrienne Wooten (left). PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Mr. Calvin W. Souder, Esq., is an attorney whose practice handles numerous matters, such as, commercial and residential real estate, toxic torts, product liability, fraud and more. He assists clients in developing strategies to defend themselves from claims while effectively managing potential statutory and regulatory pitfalls brought about by litigation. Mr. Souder is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Essex County College, New Jersey's largest



Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla (right) presents the Board's plaque to honoree Calvin Souder, Esq. (left). PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

community college servicing approximately 15,000 full-time students and an additional 10,000 part-time students. In addition, he formerly served as the Vice-Chairman of Newark Now, founded by Senator Cory Booker. Newark Now has been nationally recognized for its Financial Empowerment and Father's Now programs. Also, as a trustee of the Mental Health Association of New Jersey, Mr. Souder has taken on the challenge to bring mental health awareness to bear in minority communities. Once a year, he travels to Abetifi-Kwahu, Ghana, as a Board member of Adopt-one-Village to secure life-sustaining provisions such as water, electricity, food, and education to the village's youth. He has been identified as one of the State's future leaders.



Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro (left) presents the Board's plaque to honoree Reverend Vernon Carle Miller (right). PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Reverend Vernon Carle Miller graduated Virginia Union University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology in 1988, and presently attends Eastern School of Ministry of the Palmer Theological Seminary where he is pursuing a degree in Pastoral Studies. Rev. Miller joined New Light Baptist Church in 1990, and while at New Light, he served on many ministries until he heard the clear call of God on his heart to preach the Gospel. He was licensed by the New Light Baptist Church in 2000, and on November 10, 2004, under the direction of Rev. Dr. William C. Hall, his spiritual father, mentor, and previous Pastor of New Light Baptist Church for 40 years, was ordained. Appointed as Assistant Pastor of the church in 2006, Rev. Miller was installed as the Pastor of New Light Baptist Church on November 9, 2008.

Under his leadership, the New Light Community Development Corporation and annual Community Day were established. He created Community Day for community members to come together to enjoy fun, food, educational seminars, and to fellowship. He has also established a partnership with Table to Table which assists the New Light Food Pantry in feeding individuals in need. Rev. Miller is married to Priscilla Freeman, and they are the parents of four beautiful children: Tamara, Marcus, Jackson, and Brandon. Reverend Miller has a passion for people and loves helping others achieve their goals in life. He believes that everyone is special in the eyes of God.

Mayor Robert David Jackson was honored by acclamation during the celebration. Mayor Jackson is a Montclair native who graduated from Montclair Kimberley Academy, Princeton University, and Harvard Business School, respectively. He currently serves as the Mayor of the Township of Montclair and in May 2016, became the first Mayor to be re-elected in the history of the Township. Under his leadership, the Township Council has been hailed for dramatically reducing debt, while making substantial infrastructure improvements, enhancing service delivery, and stabilizing property taxes. Under his leadership, Montclair's bond rating grew from "AA" to "AAA" and is



Mayor Robert D. Jackson (left) stands alongside Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro as she reads the Commendation honoring him by acclamation. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

now one of the few municipalities in New Jersey with this prestigious designation and the only one in Essex County. In addition to his contributions in Montclair, Mayor Jackson also serves as the Acting Director of Human Resources and Acting Deputy County Administrator for Essex County. In his role as Acting Deputy County Administrator, he assists in the day-to-day operations of county government and serves as the liaison between the County Executive and the Board of Chosen Freeholders. As the Acting Director of Human Resources, he is responsible for managing the maintenance and processing of personnel records, pensions, and health benefits for the County. Mayor Jackson has been a board member for the Montclair Public Library, Montclair Planning Board, New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing, and other organizations. He is married to the former Cheryl Stephenson, and together they have four children: Danielle, Taylor, Carter, and Chase. He and his family are members of the Fountain Baptist Church in Summit, New Jersey.

The Essex County Freeholders honored Irvington **Mayor Tony Vauss** attended Irvington High School, has a certificate in Business Management from Berkeley Career School, and is currently enrolled in the University of Phoenix to attain a degree in Business Management. Formerly the Assistant to the Director in the Township's Department of Neighborhood Services, he was elected Mayor of the Township of Irvington on May 13, 2014. His campaign focused on attracting new business to Irvington as a way to raise revenue and the profile of the Township. He is the founder of the Tony Vauss Civic Association, an organization that offers a plethora of community activities. Mayor Vauss also ran for public office as a member of the Irvington Board of Education in April 2006, and was elected District Leader for Northward district 2 in June 2006. Under the leadership of the late Honorable D. Bilal Beasley and Essex County Freeholder Lebbby C. Jones, he has successfully run campaigns on the State, County, and local levels and advocated for improvements in Irvington schools. He is currently serving his third term on the Irvington Board of Education with honor and distinction. He has an unwavering passion and love for the community and is a committed resident of Irvington, as well as Essex County.



Mayor Tony Vauss of Irvington (left) stands alongside Freeholder At-Large Lebbby C. Jones (right) as she presents him with the Board's plaque. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

The Honorable William D. Payne graduated from Rutgers University and began his professional career as a caseworker for the Essex County Welfare Board. He served in the New Jersey General Assembly from 1998 to 2008. During his tenure, he sponsored and co-sponsored many bills that were signed into law, including bills that: enabled the Newark Boys Chorus to travel to South Africa; established school-based mentoring programs for at-risk students in Abbot school districts; established the Amistad Commission; criminalized racial profiling; advocated for the Slavery Apology Resolution encouraging New Jersey to express profound regret for the State's role in slavery, and more. Mr. Payne has also served as Commissioner and Chairman of the Newark Housing Authority, Vice Chairman of the Essex County Improvement Authority, and is the Vice Chairman of the Board of the Black Youth Organization/The Chad Foundation, an education improvement agency. He also established and managed Urban Data Systems, Inc.,



The Honorable William D. Payne accepts the Board's plaque during the Freeholders 2017 African American History Month Celebration. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(a computer forms manufacturing company), from 1969 to the mid-1980's. Mr. Payne chaired the Payne Congressional Campaign and managed the campaign that resulted in the election of his late brother, Congressman Donald M. Payne, Sr., as New Jersey's first African American member of the United States House of

Representatives. In 2006, he also was the campaign manager for Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr., his nephew, who served as the Newark Municipal Council President until his election in November 2012, succeeding his late father. He is currently serving as the Essex County Deputy Chief of Staff and continues to be a leader in the community.

Don Viapree received a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He also received an Honorary Doctoral degree in Human Letters from the President of Essex County College in 2013. Mr. Viapree is a recognized leader in the Telecommunications Industry, and as a trusted advisor to many individuals and leaders of various organizations, he is responsible for overseeing franchise negotiations in more than 80 municipalities throughout the State of New Jersey. With a network that spans the globe, he has fostered alliances in federal, state, and municipal government, as well as, schools, colleges, non-profit organizations, and faith-based organizations. Mr. Viapree is also a dedicated mentor to countless professionals and students. He inspires people to pursue knowledge, gain wisdom, and seek opportunities for advancement in the global economy. He openly shares his knowledge while facilitating keynote addresses, lectures, and workshops on technology, social issues, and global conditions at institutions nationally and internationally. He has received numerous accolades from various organizations, including The Newark Arts Council, VH-1 Save The Music, and F.O.C.U.S. Newark, Inc., to name a few.



Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson (left) presents Don Viapree (right) with the Board's plaque during the celebration. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Lawrence Hamm is the Chairman of the People's Organization for Progress (POP), a statewide, independent, grass roots organization that works to gain racial, social, economic justice and peace. As Chairman, he has consistently worked toward building unity among community organizations.



Freeholder Wayne L. Richardson (left) stands alongside honoree Lawrence Hamm (right). PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Under his leadership, POP conducted a 381-day campaign of daily protests for jobs, peace, equality, and justice. At the age of 17, he was appointed to the Newark Board of Education, making him the youngest school board member in the United States. A Princeton University graduate, while there he also organized the anti-Apartheid movement, daily student protests, and a sit-in of more than 200 students calling attention to Princeton's financial investment in apartheid South Africa. These protests, and the rising tide of public indignation, resulted in Princeton University's divestment in the Apartheid South African economy. His impact as a student activist at Princeton is chronicled in the documentary film, *Blacks At Princeton*. He was given the

honor of Addressing the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid, and upon graduation, he received various awards at Princeton for his activism and humanitarian efforts. Mr. Hamm also has a Master's degree in Business Administration. He has been active in the struggle for human and civil rights for more than 30 years, serving in many capacities, including: President of the 24th District Assembly, founder and Director of the People's Energy Cooperative (a community fuel oil cooperative), Director of the Community Organization Program of the United Church of Christ, Commission for Racial Justice, leader in the New Jersey Anti-Apartheid Coalition, and more.

Theodore “Ted” R. Green is East Orange’s Third Ward Councilman. Early on, Councilman Green recognized the need for positive programs and activities for youth in East Orange. In response, he founded the Greens School of Marital Arts where he provides instruction and discipline of martial arts, offers enrichment and mentoring programs, and hosts cultural activities for his students. He also devotes a great deal of his time serving as a volunteer in a



Freeholder President Britnee Timberlake (center) presents the Board’s plaques to Reverend Arnold Fox (left) and East Orange Councilman Ted Green (right). PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

variety of youth oriented activities, including, the East Orange School District’s Black Male Institute and the Rites of Passage Youth Program. Councilman Green has also been a distinguished professional in the field of Property Maintenance and Housing Revitalization over the past 16 years. From 1990 to 1997, he served as the Compliance Officer of Irvington Township’s Housing Division and is currently the Director of the Housing and Building Department in Irvington where he oversees a budget of \$533,000. Councilman Green has been active in East Orange political and civic affairs for over 17 years. He is a member of the Third Ward Democratic Municipal County Committee and is active in block associations and civic groups. He is currently serving his second year as City Council Chairman for the City of East Orange where he oversees a budget of \$135 Million and is the former Chairman of Business and Development for the City. Prior to his election, he served as an appointed member of the East Orange Housing Authority and now sits as the Council liaison to that body. As an elected official,



Reverend Arnold Fox giving remarks during the Board’s African American History Month Celebration. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Mr. Green has expanded his scope of involvement and has implemented community outreach initiatives and several pieces of legislation, including: legislation to protect homeowners from foreclosure through the City’s Moratorium Act; sponsoring a resolution through the Law and Legislative Committee to provide tax abatement assistance to East Orange residents, and more. Ted Green is married to June Green and the father of two sons, Eric and Salahuddin, as well as, the grandfather of four grandchildren.

Reverend Arnold Fox graduated from Montclair High School and excelled in English and Mathematics. After submitting several poetry manuscripts to national publishing

houses, his works were published in *Golden Harvest-Best Contemporary Poetry* and *American Poetry-Old New*. Rev. Fox attended Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio, where he graduated with a Bachelor’s of Arts degree in English, and his Doctorate of Divinity degree was conferred in 2012. After graduating college, he gained experience and sharpened his skills as an award winning Dale Carnegie Corporate Speech Instructor. As one of the first minorities to be given this responsibility, he traveled throughout the tristate area excelling in this position despite racial barriers and restrictive social climate. After 2 years, he was promoted to East Coast Sales Manager where he was responsible for generating \$9,000,000 in sales. After being diagnosed with kidney disease, Rev. Fox spent a year in the hospital and was called to ministry. He was ordained in the Montclair Church and accepted the office of Pastor of the First Baptist Chapel of East Orange. He has amassed 30 years of experience as a pastor and leader and shepherded 3 turn-around churches through major change. As a result of his life altering experience as a patient, he believes that the infirmed are his “special flock.” He joined East Orange General Hospital in 1974 as a volunteer and worked 6 days a week in the Hemodialysis Unit. His responsibilities soon spread to other areas of the hospital, and in 1985, he became the Director of Chaplaincy Services where he provides counseling to patients, families, and employees. He also conducts workshops, performs crisis management, and is available for spiritual guidance at all times. He is one of few hospital chaplains

in the country to be recognized by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. For the past 10 years, Rev. Fox has also served as the Community Regional Vice-President of Career Works, Inc., a vocational training and employment placement service. He was also a Multifaith service participant at Massachusetts General Hospital, guest speaker at Harvard Medical School's Program (The Art and Science of Palliative and Pastoral Care), member of the



Mark Beckett performing during the Freeholders 2017 African American History Month Celebration PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Bioethics Committee, and Board Member and Marking Programs Consultant for East Orange Senior Citizen Corporation and Association. He was appointed by the Mayor and the City of East Orange to serve as a member of the East Orange Senior Citizen Corporation and Association in 2014.

During the event Reverend Doctor Joseph Oniyama from Calvary Baptist Church in East Orange presented the opening and closing prayers. In addition, Jamilex Calle, Shayla Lopez, and Antonella Rodriguez from the Essex County West Caldwell Technical Vocational Vocal Ensemble performed under the direction of Performing Arts Teacher Mr. Mark Beckett. Mater Kazier Thomas, a student at Abbington Avenue School in Newark, gave an oral presentation the audience was favored with that won him 1st place at the Alpha Phi Alpha, Fraternity, Incorporated (Alpha Alpha Lambda Chapter), Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Oratorical Contest. In honor of the celebration, he spoke about the fulfillment of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream in 2017.

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