

PRESS RELEASE

February 22, 2018

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



Pictured are (from left to right, back row) Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano of District 4, Freeholder Vice President Wayne L. Richardson of District 2, Freeholder At-Large Rufus I. Johnson, Freeholder Robert Mercado of District 1, (from left to right, front row) President of the Board Freeholder At-Large Brendan W. Gill, Freeholder At-Large Leby C. Jones, Sandra Marie Mordecai of West Orange, Abdullah S. Holmes of Newark, and Freeholder At-Large Patricia Sebold. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders held its 2018 African-American History Month Celebration on Wednesday, February 21, 2018, at the Hall of Records in Newark, New Jersey. The ceremony commemorated the heritage, culture, resilience, and spirit of the African-American community.

President of the Board and Freeholder At-Large Brendan W. Gill began the program with opening remarks and acknowledged African-American contributions, both past and present, in Essex County.

This year, the Board recognized two outstanding Essex County residents for their leadership: West Orange Board of Education Member **Sandra Marie Mordecai** and Essex County Sheriff Officer **Detective Abdullah S. Holmes**.

Ms. Sandra Marie Mordecai began her career as an advocate for special education, a member of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Parents Advocating for Special Services in Education (PASSE), New Jersey’s Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, and the Special Education Leadership Council. In 2010, she was elected to the West Orange Board of Education and re-elected in 2013 and 2016. In 2014 and 2017, she also served as Board President.



Freeholder At-Large Patrica Sebold (left) and Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano (right) present the Board's Commendation and plaque to Sandra Marie Mordecai of West Orange (center). Photo by Glen Frieson

During her tenure, she worked to strengthen public education and served as a member of the Board's Diversity, Sustainability, Public Relations, Professional Development, and Small Learning and Legislative committees. She also served as the Board's liaison to the West Orange Township Council and is currently a member of the Board's Negotiations and Policy committees.

In 2017, Ms. Mordecai became a Certified Board Leader after successfully completing over 60 credits in the Board Member Academy in addition to achieving the ranks of Master Board Member (2015), and Certificated Board Member (2013). In conjunction with her work as a member

of the Board of Education, she serves as President of the Essex County School Boards Association (ECSBA) and as a member of the County Association Leadership, the Board of Directors of the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), and the Nominating and Strategic Planning Committees of the NJSBA. She is a member of the West Orange African Heritage Organization and former Co-Chair of Membership. She previously served as the Legislative Co-Chair and Delegate to the ECSBA and the NJSBA and as a member of the West Orange Human Relations and Public Relations Commissions.

Ms. Mordecai is a member of several organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the League of Women Voters, New Jersey Citizen Action, and Blue Wave New Jersey, to name a few. She has also participated in the West Orange and Montclair Conversations on Race. In addition to being awarded by the Freeholder Board this year, Ms. Mordecai has received the Kwanzaa Award of Excellence, the Women's History Month Award for Outstanding Service to West Orange Public Schools and the West Orange Community, and the BONJ Leadership Award (2014).

Ms. Mordecai is a long-time resident of West Orange and the mother of two sons, Nigel and Nicholas, who attended West Orange Schools. She is also an active member and former Vestry Board Member of St. Luke's Church in Montclair.

Detective Abdullah S. Holmes was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey, and began his career as a police officer with the Newark Police Department nearly 10 years ago. In August 2012, he joined the Essex County Sheriff's Department and was later promoted to the rank of Detective. As a detective, he has been assigned to several task forces where he was responsible for an array of duties, including apprehending violent offenders, enforcing weapons and narcotics violations, and more. He is currently detailed to the Newark Police Department's Major Crimes Task Force.

Detective Holmes has received numerous citations for his leadership, and in 2016, he was named "Officer of the Year." In 2016 and 2017, he also received a Valor Award from the 200 Club of Essex County, an organization that honors heroic acts by Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Service personnel.

In addition to his service in law enforcement, Detective Holmes has served as a mentor for Leaders for Life, a program that allows mentors to connect with troubled young men between the ages of ten and sixteen and enable them to build character and become positive contributors to society.



Freeholder At-Large Rufus I. Johnson (left) and Freeholder Robert Mercado (right) present the Board's Commendation and plaque to Detective Abdullah S. Holmes (center) Photo by Glen Frieson

Additionally, he has volunteered as a coach for several basketball teams at the Northward Center and the Boys & Girls Clubs. Detective Holmes is a devoted husband and father to three children, ages thirteen, eleven, and seven.

Reverend Doctor Bernadette Glover, the Senior Pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church in Montclair, delivered prayers during the occasion and graced the audience with her powerful words. The audience was also captivated by the musical talents of Sir Joshua Nelson, a vocalist who brings forth kosher gospel music and melodies that commemorate the memory of renowned gospel singer Mahalia Jackson.

For Additional Information:
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