

# PRESS RELEASE

March 29, 2018

## ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH



Pictured are (from left to right, back row) District 4 Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano of West Caldwell, Freeholder At-Large Patricia Sebold of Livingston, District 1 Freeholder Robert Mercado, (from left to right, front row) Freeholder Vice President and District 2 Freeholder Wayne L. Richardsson of Newark, honoree Nancy Erika Smith, Esq., of Smith Mullin, P.C., honoree Margarita Hernandez-Abeigon, Principal of Wilson Avenue School in Newark, honoree Hakika V. Wise, Owner of Kika Stretch Studios, and Freeholder At-Large Leby C. Jones of Irvington. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – On March 28, 2018, the Essex County Freeholders held their annual Women's History Month Celebration at the Hall of Records. During the event, the Freeholders recognized extraordinary women in Essex County.

Freeholder Vice President Wayne Richardson began the program with remarks that celebrated the honorees for their leadership and steadfast work in Essex County. This year's honorees were **Nancy Erika Smith, Esq.**, of Smith Mullin, P.C., **Margarita Hernandez-Abeigon**, Principal of Wilson Avenue School in Newark, and **Hakika V. Wise**, Owner of Kika Stretch Studios.

**Nancy Erika Smith, Esq.**, graduated from Rutgers Law School in 1980 and has since become an accomplished employment and civil rights attorney and partner at Smith Mullin, P.C., in Montclair, New Jersey. Since 1986, she has been listed as an employment litigation specialist in *Best Lawyers in America*, and some of her most noteworthy cases include *Truax v. Washington Twp.* (1989), *Green v. Carlin* (1989), and *Rathemacher v. I.B.M.*, to



Pictured are (from left to right) Essex County Freeholder At-Large Patricia Sebold, Nancy Erika Smith, Esq., and Freeholder At-Large Lebbby C. Jones. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

name a few. She has also successfully argued before the New Jersey Supreme Court as an amicus attorney on behalf of the New Jersey Association for Justice (NJAJ).

As an accomplished author and a member of the Editorial Board of New Jersey Labor and Employment Law, Nancy has influenced others through her writing. As a former member of organizations like the National Employment Lawyers Association (NELA) and the Labor and Employment Law Section of the New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA), she has certainly made her mark in the field of law. She has

received countless awards, including honors from the New Jersey State Bar Foundation, the Trial Attorneys of New Jersey, and Rutgers Law School, to name a few.

As one of the founders of Wynona's House, Nancy advocates for the rights of children who have been abused and neglected. In 2004 to 2012, she served as the organization's Chair, and for her advocacy, she has received awards from the National Children's Alliance, the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies, and the Shirley Chisholm Award from, then Assemblywoman, Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver.

In 1990, **Margarita B. Hernandez-Abeigon** began her career in education as a Bilingual Middle School Teacher at Dr. E. Alma Flagg School in Newark. After earning a Master's degree in Educational Administration from Kean University, she was appointed Vice Principal of South Street School. Since then, Margarita has served as Vice Principal of Miller Street School (2001-2002), Principal of Clinton Avenue School (2002-2005), and Principal of Dayton Street School (2005-2007). Under her leadership, Clinton Avenue School received a new park/playground with the assistance of a million dollar grant from the Public Land Trust and established relationships with Bank Street and CLI Professional Training. Additionally, the schools under her leadership saw a rise in test scores during her tenure.

In 2007, she became Principal of Wilson Avenue School where she currently leads a team of over 100 staff members, a kindergarten through eighth grade student population of almost 1,200 students, and various exemplary programs. As Principal, she has demonstrated personal responsibility and relentless drive towards high achievement from the staff and students. Her exceptional leadership and collaboration with staff has enhanced the school's literacy, math, and science curriculum, making Wilson Avenue School one of Newark's top ranking public schools.

Margarita has collaborated with the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, St. John's Soup Kitchen, and Fraternity Without Borders to improve her students' lives and the communities they reside in. She is a member of International Reading Association, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National Staff Development Council, to name a few. Margarita is married to John M. Abeigon, President of the Newark Teacher's Union.

**Hakika V. Wise** earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance from Montclair State University. With a mat, ball, and a dream, she started teaching clients how they could use stretching as a tool for freedom. She combined what she learned from her training in dance from Montclair State, her work as a personal trainer, and her creative abilities to help others. Soon after, she opened Kika Stretch Studios in Montclair. Since its inception, she has opened locations in Westfield and New York City.



Freeholder Vice President Wayne L. Richardson (right), presents Hakika V. Wise (left) with the Board's Commendation. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Her revolutionary KIKA Method of assisted stretching has affected the lives of many. The KIKA Method of assisted stretching is a revolutionary technique built upon her own training, the Alexander technique, Laban movement analysis, and advanced anatomy. The method allows participants to thoroughly train and unlock flexibility.

As a dancer, actress, and Chief Executive Officer of Kika Stretch Studios, Hakika has become one of the top female entrepreneurs of 2018 by *The Huffington Post*. She has also been featured in *Shape Magazine*, *U.S. News*, and *Men's Fitness*. At 32 years-old, she is the youngest female entrepreneur to become a franchisor in the United States.

In addition to her business ventures, Hakika volunteered her time as a Big Sister for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex County, Hudson, & Union Counties, as a speaker for students considering careers in business at Felician College and Montclair State University, and as a vision board presenter for Saint Benedict's, Bloomfield College, and several youth groups. Her spouse, Jamar Wise, is an auditor for New Jersey Transit and the owner of Wise Basketball Training that offers specialized training for players from elementary school to pre-NBA tryouts. She is the proud mother of two children, her eight-year-old son Sage and seven-year-old stepdaughter Scarlett.

The audience was graced with musical renditions of "The Star Spangled Banner" and "Rise Up" by Andra Day performed by Jasmine Ramos, and Reverend Maria Crompton, Pastor of Elmwood United Presbyterian Church of East Orange, delivered the opening and closing prayers during the program.

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