

PRESS RELEASE

March 28, 2019

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH



Pictured are (from left to right, front row) Anne Mernin, They Faustin Germain, Cara Di Falco, the Honorable Renee C. Burgess, Freeholder President Brendan Gill. (from left to right, back row) District 1 Freeholder Robert Mercado, Freeholder At-Large Romaine Graham, Freeholder At-Large Patricia Sebold, District 3 Freeholder Tyshammie L. Cooper. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – On March 27, 2019, the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders held their annual Women's History Month Celebration at the South Orange Performing Arts Center (SOPAC). During the event, the Freeholders recognized extraordinary women in Essex County.

Freeholder President Brendan Gill began the program with remarks that celebrated the honorees for their leadership and steadfast work in Essex County. This year's honorees were **Cara Di Falco**, of Cara's Cucina, **They Faustin Germain**, Founder of FamiCare, Inc., **The Honorable Renee C. Burgess**, First Vice President of the Irvington Municipal Council, and **Anne Mernin**, Executive Director of Toni's Kitchen.

Cara Di Falco is a 2006 graduate of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with a degree in Broadcast Journalism and a minor in Italian. After graduating from Rutgers, she worked as an assignment manager at WRNN-TV in West Hartford, Connecticut. She came back to New Jersey and landed a part-time position with News 12 New Jersey before being made the full-time traffic anchor, a position she held for 5 ½ years.

After leaving News 12 New Jersey, Cara started her own company, Cara's Cucina which is now the only Emmy Nominated show on YouTube. The weekly cooking show features family recipes and sharing Italian-American culture through food. The show also provides hands-on cooking classes, one-on-one health coaching, and help in educating people on the best diets and lifestyle for individuals.

Cara services her community by running a children's cooking summer camp, participating as a reader for Read Across America Day and conducting an annual culinary tour of Italy. She has volunteered her time and talents with the American Cancer Society, Groundworks Elizabeth, and often returns to her alma mater, Rutgers University, to speak to students pursuing entrepreneurial and journalism careers.

They Faustine Germain is a graduate of Molloy College in Rockville Center, New York, and has been an advocate of education and social service from an early age. She moved to Irvington in 1989 and immediately began devoting her time and energy to helping people in her new community. She started a multiservice agency offering free workshops in the Irvington Public Library to teach resume writing, tax preparation, and access to community resources.

In 1992, she collaborated with a Nursing Agency to provide Nurse's Aide Training at Irvington General Hospital. She also founded the Literacy Program in Irvington High School in 1993, and established the Irvington Adult School Program, which eventually became the largest Adult School Program in Essex County.

In 1994, she founded FamiCare, Inc., a non-profit agency with the mission to empower and preserve low and moderate income families living in New Jersey. FamiCare is contracted by the Division of Permanency and Child Protection Agency to provide counseling services to victims of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual abuse.

They has served the Township of Irvington in numerous ways including her previous roles as a North Ward District Leader, member of the Irvington Board of Education, member of the Planning Board, and Commissioner of the Housing Authority.

The Honorable Renee C. Burgess is a lifelong resident of the Township of Irvington, New Jersey. She was educated at St. Leo's, Essex Catholic Girls High School and Irvington High School. She attended Norfolk State University and Essex County College, later earning a Business degree from Rutgers University and a Bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership from Pillar College. She is also a Certified Registered Public Purchasing Specialist (RPSS).

Since 2014, she has served all residents of Irvington by way of her election to the Irvington Municipal Council as a Member-At-Large and is currently the First Vice President. She previously served on the Irvington School Board from 2003 to 2014, making her the longest serving member to date.

Her community service involvements and initiatives include: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); the National Forum for Black Public Administrators; the National Action Network (NAN) for which she is the secretary; the

Irvington Progressive Activist Committee; the Gang Prevention Network; and the Essex County Democratic Women Association. She also founded and is the president of the Thurgood Marshall Area Block Association and is the Committee Chair of the Irvington South Ward Democratic Committee.

Anne Mernin, is a product of the Montclair public school system, a PTA member, President of the Bullock School, and a major contributor to the Montclair community. As a School Board Member, she was called “among the most respected residents of our community”. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia; the Executive Training Program at the Kellogg School of Management in Chicago, Illinois and Paris; and is a Master’s in Public Administration (MPA) recipient from New York University.

Since 2011, she has served as Executive Director of the non-profit charitable entity, Toni’s Kitchen. Her insight and foresight contributed to the transformation of the then small soup kitchen, into a multi-faceted hunger prevention and relief organization. Under her auspices, Toni’s Kitchen has grown from an organization that served 7,000 meals per year in 2011 to approximately 180,000 meals per year presently.

She has maintained Toni’s Kitchen’s policy of welcoming and serving all visitors regardless of circumstance. Toni’s Kitchen is named for its first cook, Antoinette “Toni” Green and has been in continuous operation under St. Luke’s Church since its founding in 1982. On-site programs for mental health counseling are provided, as well as health screenings, nutrition education, preventative case management, art workshops and physical fitness.

Anne’s contributions to Montclair and beyond has been lauded by way of her receipt of awards ranging from the 2013 Community Service Award by Montclair Neighborhood Development Corporation, the 2016 Humanitarian Award from Brother to Brother mentoring, and the 2018 Community Impact Award from Partners for Health Foundation.

The audience was graced with musical renditions of “The Star Spangled Banner” and “What About Love” from the Broadway Musical of *The Color Purple* performed by Jacquelyn Graham, and Reverend Dr. Gloria White Allen, of Mt. Zion Baptist Church of Newark, delivered the opening and closing prayers during the program.

For Additional Information:

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