



STATE OF NEW YORK
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NEW YORK STATE HONORS FOUR AT AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS

New York State Office of General Services Commissioner RoAnn M. Destito announced the recipients of the New York State African American Public Service Awards at a ceremony to be held today at the New York State Museum. The event is part of a month-long observance coordinated by a number of state agencies to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans in New York State and the country. In addition to the awards, the event featured a photographic exhibition and performances by capitol region organizations.

New York State Deputy Secretary for Civil Rights Alphonso David said, "On behalf of Governor Cuomo, we applaud the hard work of those being honored at this year's New York State African American Public Service Awards. The spirit of altruism demonstrated through their actions is truly something worth celebrating during Black History Month."

"This celebration is a wonderful opportunity for the state agencies involved to work collaboratively in a truly worthwhile effort," Commissioner Destito said. "I join Governor Cuomo in recognizing the important role African Americans have played in New York state history and continue to play in shaping its future, especially through selfless acts that benefit the public."

State Health Commissioner Nirav R. Shah M.D., M.P.H., said, "In honor of Black History Month, I join Governor Cuomo in saluting these individuals who have worked tirelessly to contribute their knowledge and skills to benefit others."

DOCCS Commissioner Brian Fischer said, "It is an honor to co-sponsor such an important event and I congratulate this year's recipients for their remarkable contributions. As we reflect on historic and important events such as the 1963 March on Washington and the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, let us continue to work tirelessly each and every day to promote our commitment to diversity and justice in New York."

“The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is a world class treasure all New Yorkers can be proud of,” said New York State Education Commissioner John B. King Jr. “The Schomburg has long been a focal point of Harlem’s cultural and artistic life, providing free access to its over 10 million item research collection and engaging the community through a wide range of free programs, exhibitions and events illuminating the richness of black history and culture. This year the Schomburg collaborated with the New York State Museum on The First Step to Freedom, an acclaimed statewide traveling exhibition, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Lincoln’s Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.”

The African American Public Service Awards pay tribute to New Yorkers and organizations that have made major contributions to and on behalf of the public through their knowledge, skills, and services. The awards honor those whose acts have significantly benefitted special populations, such as those with disabilities, the disadvantaged or underprivileged, or to underrepresented ethnic and cultural groups. Awards are given in four categories: youth, adult, senior, and organization.

This year’s senior honoree is Linda C. James, a mother of two daughters, one of whom was brutally murdered in 1991, making James the caregiver of two of her five grandchildren. She has devoted more than 15 years to the Family Resource Center, collaborating with the University of Rochester Medical Center — Strong Memorial Hospital to develop an outcome-based training manual/handbook and 15-week mentor training curriculum designed to educate grandparents/kinship caregivers to mentor other grandparents/kinship caregivers in the community. The program is being used in the Rochester area. James serves on the boards of multiple organizations, including the National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights, and has won several awards for her work in kinship advocacy.

The youth honoree is Cydney E. Betton who used a \$2,000 ANNPower grant (ANNPower is a program sponsored by ANN INC., parent company of Ann Taylor and LOFT, to empower young women from across the country to “affect global progress, invest in their communities, and begin their journey as the next generation of leaders.”) awarded to her in 2012 to create an initiative called “There’s No Cost to Service.” With the idea that our country needs leaders and that everyone can be a leader, she targeted inner-city girls and organized weekly workshops to reinforce with them their potential to be leaders no matter where they come from. Betton is also a volunteer with the Ronald McDonald House in Buffalo and is an Ackers Scholar at the University of Buffalo. A former Guilderland High School student, she serves as the teen vice president in the Greater Albany Chapter of Jack and Jill of America Inc., which focuses on successful child development and leadership skills.

The adult honoree is J. David Brown, president and CEO of the Capital District YMCA. An advocate for the underserved, Brown has dedicated much of his time and effort toward helping children and teenagers realize their potential as students and members of their communities. Brown has worked to secure higher education grants for inner city youth and promote initiatives to support healthy living. He was a founding member of the committee to establish the Capital District YMCA Black and Latino Achievers Program and served on the Albany City School District’s Shared Decision Making Committee.

The organization honoree is The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Created in 1925, The Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints at the 135th Street Public Library in Harlem was the forerunner to the current Shomburg Center. From its inception, the center has provided a platform for the dissemination of scholarly information about black culture. The center has served as the home of the American Negro Theater. It now serves as a research library of the New York Public Library and attracts scholars from around the world, as well as members of the general public. The Schomburg Center contains more than 10 million objects housed in five collections: arts and artifacts; general research and reference; manuscripts, archives, and rare books; moving images – recorded sound; and photographs and prints.

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