



*Women of*  
**DISTINCTION**

HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK



TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026



PRESENTED BY THE  
NEW YORK STATE SENATE





Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins



Senator Robert G. Ort



Dear Friends,

The New York State Senate welcomes all in celebrating the women of the Empire State. This year marks our 28<sup>th</sup> Women of Distinction event in which we highlight extraordinary women and their contributions. It brings us great pleasure to again adorn the halls of power with the names, faces, and deeds of exemplary women from across New York State.

Like those before them, this year's honorees have made a lasting impact on their communities. While their professional or personal achievements should be admired, it is their dedication and resilience that merits special recognition. These women exemplify the spirit of New York and serve as an enduring reminder of the contributions women make to our collective endeavor.

Congratulations to the 2026 Women of Distinction! It is our honor to add you to this living monument. May your legacies continue to shape our Great State and inspire the generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea Stewart-Cousins".

**Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins**

President Pro Tempore and  
NYS Senate Majority Leader

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robt. G. Ort".

**Senator Robert G. Ort**

Minority Leader

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LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING THE  
2026 NEW YORK STATE SENATE WOMEN OF DISTINCTION

**WHEREAS**, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to acknowledge and celebrate Women of Distinction who significantly add inspiration and encouragement to the people of this great Empire State; and

**WHEREAS**, The New York State Senate Women of Distinction program was created in 1998 as part of our State celebration of Women's History Month to honor exemplary women from across New York State whose professional or personal achievements, commitment to excellence, and accomplishments merit special recognition; honorees are selected from nominations submitted from across the State; and

**WHEREAS**, Women of every economic, ethnic, and religious background have made significant contributions that are reflected across all aspects of society; and

**WHEREAS**, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to individuals of remarkable character who have shown initiative and commitment in constantly pursuing higher goals for themselves, as well as acting as role models to all women in their community; and

**WHEREAS**, On behalf of the New York State Senate, I take this opportunity to congratulate Tina Abrams, Barbara Baruch, Martha Bell, Kathryn Biel, DPT, Vanessa Braxton, Bronwyn Breitner, Cali Brooks, Marina Marangelli Cassiliano, Daphnee Champagne, Krystle Charlemagne, Reverend Karen A. Chávez, Lisa M. Chimera, Ayana K. Cole-Price, MD, Donna Coppola, Maria Cristalli, Carrie Cuthbertson, Sheila Dion, Stephanie Draine, Linda Ebani, Dana G. Elden, Shirley Fearon, Maegan Fox, Megan Freida, Reverend Renee F. Washington Gardner, Janine Gentile, Joanne Gerow, Joanne Haefner, Mona Hassanein, Karen Hochhauser, Jamel Holder, Naomi Hopkins, Greta Hunter, Cynthia B. Knox, Esq., Maryanne Koeppe, Angie Davis Leveritte, Florence Lorenz, Joyce Love, Stephanie Marquesano, Esq., Valerie S. Mason, Esq., Fabayo McIntosh, Jennifer McNamara, Esq., Ngozèka Onwualu, Debbie-Ann Paige, Carla Palumbo, Heather Perkins, Tara Pfohl, Jennifer Rodriguez, Dorothy Siegel, Andrea Smith, Kelly Smith, Linda Smith, Susan Stetzer, Patricia Still, Zeldy Stillerman, Junko Takeda, PhD, Linda Tarrant-Reid, Luz Torres, Whitney Toussaint, Dawn Vavala, Randi Weingarten, and Jennifer Carbone Zuccaro, MD, as 2026 New York State Senate Women of Distinction; and

**WHEREAS**, Women have become part of New York State's lasting heritage by fighting against stereotypes, prejudice, and seemingly insurmountable obstacles; and

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**WHEREAS**, From the women's suffrage movement just over 150 years ago to the present day, women have played and continue to play a crucial role in adding strength, understanding, and inspiration to the diversity and quality of life of the people of the State of New York; and

**WHEREAS**, New York State has been, and continues to be, the home to many distinguished women who have made their mark in history as pioneers in their field, therefore laying the foundation for women after them to succeed; and

**WHEREAS**, This Legislative Body recognizes that New York State is the home to countless women who are strong and colorful threads, vital to the fabric of our rich heritage, who have contributed and continue to add to the advancement of our culture through their traditional and nontraditional roles in society; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that those who enhance the well-being and vitality of their community and have shown a long and sustained commitment to excellence certainly have earned the recognition and applause of all the citizens of this great Empire State; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the aforementioned Women of Distinction.





# Women of DISTINCTION

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NEW YORK STATE SENATE

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The New York State Senate  
is taking special note of the enormous  
contributions that women have  
made throughout the State and Nation.

The women honored in this program  
have enriched the quality of life in the  
Empire State and beyond.

Their achievements should be  
a source of pride and inspiration  
to all New Yorkers.







# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Tina Abrams*

Tina Abrams has spent decades as a powerful voice for her people, her community, and the broader cause of Native American rights, building a legacy of leadership within the Seneca Nation and beyond.

Ms. Abrams's path into public service was inspired by family, especially her grandparents and parents, whose work within the Seneca Nation demonstrated the power of civic engagement. Her grandfather and father were among those who advocated for Seneca Nation women's right to vote, secured in 1964 after a petition was brought forward. That milestone helped shape her belief that advocacy, perseverance, and the courage to speak out can create meaningful change.

Ms. Abrams proved to be a trailblazer early in her career. Elected to the Seneca Nation Council in 2001, she made history in 2012 as the first woman appointed as Co-Chair. In her role as a Councilor, she has overseen Nation enterprises, built relationships with other Native organizations, and championed legislation affecting tribal lands.

Ms. Abrams's leadership has also been recognized beyond Seneca Territory. In 2025, she was honored by the Erie County Commission on the Status of Women as one of the "Living Trailblazing Women." Ms. Abrams was one of 11 women honored and one of just two enrolled Seneca women recognized.

Her commitment to community runs deep. She serves as Chairperson of the Seneca Nation's annual Veterans Powwow and is a member of the Remember the Removal Committee, which commemorates the forced displacement of Seneca families for the construction of the Kinzua Dam in 1966.

A member of the Seneca Nation's Wolf Clan, Ms. Abrams was raised on the Cattaraugus Territory and has lived on the Allegany Territory for more than 40 years. She and her husband, John, have three children and 10 grandchildren.

Ms. Abrams believes deeply in the responsibility carried by Haudenosaunee women: to act today with the next seven generations in mind. As a grandmother, aunt, sister, and daughter, she shares stories with her family so those stories can travel forward — guiding and inspiring the advocates yet to come. She reminds us that there is always more work to be done and that storytelling itself is a powerful form of leadership. "When we speak our truths," she says, "we begin the journey of trailblazing."

***Tina Abrams was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator George M. Borrello***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Barbara Baruch*

Barbara Baruch was born on August 8, 1943, in the Bronx, New York to Clara and Isidor Leo Fields. The younger of two children, she grew up with her older brother, Stephen. At age nine, her family moved to Far Rockaway, Queens, a neighborhood she remembers as a vibrant and welcoming community filled with close friendships.

Ms. Baruch attended New York City public schools, including PS 104 in the Bronx, PS 106 in Edgemere, and PS 215 in Far Rockaway, before continuing to JHS 198 and Far Rockaway High School. She later attended Brooklyn College.

Ms. Baruch initially dreamed of becoming a research librarian. Instead, she followed her father's advice to pursue teaching for its stability. She went on to spend 33 years in the New York City public school system. In the final five years of her career, Ms. Baruch returned to her original interest by serving as a school librarian. She was also an active member of her school's leadership team and served for 13 years as a delegate to the United Federation of Teachers General Assembly.

After retiring from teaching, Ms. Baruch became involved in public service following a chance encounter with John C. Liu, who knocked on her door while gathering campaign signatures. Inspired by his dedication, she joined his campaign and went on to work with him for more than a decade, supporting his roles as New York City Councilmember, Comptroller, and State Senator. She retired for a second time in June 2020.

Ms. Baruch enjoys traveling and remains active in civic life, including involvement with the Queens Lesbian & Gay Pride Committee and the Queens Lesbian & Gay Democratic Club. She has also served as Corresponding Secretary of the Bowne Park Civic Association, supported the 109th Precinct Community Council, and served on her co-op board.

Ms. Baruch is the proud mother of two daughters, Dina and Caryn, whose talents in music, writing, and the arts she deeply values. She has been an active member in her community and takes great pride in the success of her former students. Seeing them thrive and achieve their dreams remains one of the most rewarding aspects of her life.

***Barbara Baruch was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator John C. Liu***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Martha Bell*

Martha Bell has dedicated her life to service, and she has made significant contributions in her community and beyond.

Born and raised in Tuskegee, Alabama, Ms. Bell was the fifth of seven children raised by a single mother who instilled in her a strong work ethic and a deep sense of community, faith, and service. A graduate of Tuskegee Institute High School in 1963, she earned a Certificate in Nursing at John Andrew Hospital. In 1965, Ms. Bell joined her older sister in Port Chester, and by 1968, she started what would grow into a 36-year career at United Hospital. Ms. Bell went on to spend another 12 years at Greenwich Hospital, where she worked as a Food Service Supervisor and Nutrition Technician.

Since 1994, Ms. Bell has been a devoted member of St. Francis AME Zion Church, serving in multiple capacities and leadership roles, including the Women Home & Overseas Mission, Soup Kitchen, the Planning Committee for the Church Anniversary Celebrations, and as Chair of the Life Members Council, the Church State Rally Fundraiser, and the Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration. She was a delegate representing St. Francis at the AME Zion annual conference.

For over 30 years, Ms. Bell has been a member of the Executive Board of the NAACP Port Chester-Rye. She has been deeply engaged in nonpartisan voter registration, education, and engagement efforts. Ms. Bell has served on the NAACP Legal Redress Committee, which investigates complaints of racial discrimination and police misconduct, ensuring that residents' rights are being protected and that they are represented properly in court.

For 25 years, Ms. Bell served as a Rye Town District Leader and has been actively involved with voter engagement and education efforts. She has driven numerous individuals to the polls to ensure they have the opportunity to vote, holding her elected officials accountable and working to ensure they show up to support her community.

Ms. Bell is an active member of her community and loves people. She is especially fond of seniors and has dedicated her life to ensuring they are treated with dignity and that their voices and concerns are heard and addressed.

Ms. Bell is a loving mother to her cherished son.

***Martha Bell was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Shelley B. Mayer***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Kathryn Biel, DPT*

Kathryn Biel, DPT, is a compassionate physical therapist, successful novelist, and steadfast community advocate.

A physical therapist with the East Greenbush Central School District, Dr. Biel is an expert clinician who helps her students increase their mobility, improve motor function, and learn skills that enhance every aspect of their lives, including their academic performance. Her thoughtful, comprehensive approach empowers and inspires. She is relentless in fighting for her students to receive the support, resources, and equipment they need and deserve.

When one of her students had to wait months for basic wheelchair repairs, Dr. Biel reached out to her elected representative — certainly not something in her job description. She then became a trusted technical advisor on Senator Ashby's bipartisan legislation to reform and expedite the wheelchair repair process called Killian's Law, named for Killian Polarolo. She has been a fierce advocate alongside Killian's mom in generating awareness and public support for the bill. Dr. Biel believes that access to a working wheelchair is a civil right.

She also fights for her fellow educational professionals as a member of the East Greenbush Teachers Association and is an active parent within the North Colonie Central School District.

Dr. Biel is a uniquely multitalented individual. After constantly writing letters to insurance companies and medical products manufacturers on behalf of her students, she decided to give a more artistic approach to composition a try. The results speak for themselves. Dr. Biel is also a USA Today bestselling author who has written over 20 acclaimed novels about resilient women who take on the world — much like herself. Her blend of romance, humor, and vivid characterizations of strong female characters has won her awards and a dedicated fanbase.

An avid dancer, Dr. Biel also volunteers to support her daughter's dance studio and even puts her talents as a seamstress to good use altering special recital outfits.

Dr. Biel completed her undergraduate studies at Boston University and earned her doctorate from Russell Sage College. She lives in Colonie with her husband, Patrick, and their two children.

***Kathryn Biel, DPT, was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jacob C. Ashby***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Vanessa Braxton*

Vanessa Braxton is the Chief Executive Officer and President of Black Momma Vodka & Brands and the founder of Gravesande Braxton Distillers.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Ms. Braxton brings a distinguished background to both the corporate and government sectors. Prior to retiring from the engineering and construction sector, she managed industry contracts exceeding \$350 million for New York State government projects.

Throughout her career, Ms. Braxton worked with a range of prestigious clients, including the Marine Corps Morale, Welfare and Recreation program and the United States Embassies in Moscow, Colombia, Libya, and Lomé, among others.

Ms. Braxton made history as the first African American woman Master Distiller and Master Blender in the United States, an achievement recognized by a New York State proclamation issued by the Legislator of the 16th District. She is the sole owner of her distillery, manufacturing facility, and a 15-acre farm grow house, demonstrating her commitment to ownership and legacy in the spirits industry.

Ms. Braxton's company, Gravesande Braxton Distillers, reflects both her maiden and married family heritage. She is a direct descendant of Laurens Storm van's Gravesande, the former Dutch Governor of Essequibo and Demerara (present-day Guyana). The Gravesande lineage traces roots to the Netherlands and Scotland, with a legacy of government leaders, scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs—including ancestors involved in Scotch production in Renfrewshire, Scotland in the late 1800s.

Ms. Braxton also proudly carries the Braxton family name, which she has held for more than 27 years as a wife and mother. The Braxton family lineage extends more than 400 years in the United States, with deep roots among African American descendants of enslaved people who helped build the Nation. The family is known for producing influential figures in innovation, entertainment, education, and faith leadership.

By combining both family names, Gravesande Braxton Distillers symbolizes Ms. Braxton's dedication to honoring her heritage while building a powerful legacy for future generations to come.

Also known as Vanessa Gravesande Braxton, Ms. Braxton continues to lead as a trailblazing entrepreneur and industry pioneer.

***Vanessa Braxton was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Monica R. Martinez***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Bronwyn Breitner*

Bronwyn Breitner, a 20-year resident of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, is an architect, educator, small business owner, activist, spouse, and mother.

In May 2021, a beloved teacher from local public school P.S. 110 was tragically killed in a hit-and-run crash on McGuinness Boulevard, a dangerous arterial highway carved through the neighborhood in the 1950s to prioritize vehicular traffic over community safety. The loss devastated students, families, and educators, and it galvanized the neighborhood.

As a public member of her community board's Transportation Committee, Ms. Breitner transformed her grief into action. She mobilized parents, neighbors, advocates, and elected officials to cofound Make McGuinness Safe, a grassroots coalition dedicated to securing a comprehensive redesign of the boulevard. Despite broad community support, the effort faced years of political setbacks, shifting City proposals, and corporate opposition. Throughout these challenges, Ms. Breitner provided steady leadership, sustaining momentum and refusing to abandon the fight for safer streets.

The coalition's persistence ultimately led to the partial implementation of a long-advocated safety plan. The significance of this victory was underscored when, months later and only three days into his administration, Mayor Mamdani held a press conference on McGuinness Boulevard to announce the completion of the safety plan, signaling a renewed commitment to street safety and community-driven planning in New York City.

Ms. Breitner's advocacy is deeply informed by her professional and personal ties to North Brooklyn. As an architect working within a complex urban landscape — where industrial zones, dense residential areas, a rapidly developing waterfront, and environmental challenges converge — she has consistently championed a more equitable and resilient public realm. Now recognized as a community leader, Ms. Breitner continues to guide the Make McGuinness Safe campaign while supporting broader efforts to advance safe streets, accessible open space, improved air quality, and climate resilience for her neighbors.

Ms. Breitner is a Founding Principal of Breitner Ciaccia — Office of Architecture, a practice dedicated to bringing accessible design to the restoration of public buildings across New York City. She has been an active member of the P.S. 110 PTA, where she helped establish the City's first PTA Safe Streets Committee, and she is deeply involved in fundraising and events for Emily's Entourage, a nonprofit organization driving breakthroughs in cystic fibrosis research. Ms. Breitner holds a Master of Architecture from Parsons School of Design.

***Bronwyn Breitner was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Kristen Gonzalez***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Cali Brooks*

Cali Brooks is the President and CEO of Adirondack Community Foundation (ACF) in Lake Placid, New York. She also serves on the North Country Regional Economic Development Council and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Community Advisory Group.

Born and raised in Lake Placid, Ms. Brooks returned to the Adirondacks after working with nonprofit organizations in Southeast Asia, Central America, and the United States. She joined the staff of the HKH Foundation, where she conducted a survey to assess the economic, social, cultural, and environmental strengths of the Adirondack region.

Ms. Brooks went on to join the Public Affairs office of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and co-founded the Wildlife Conservation Society's Adirondack Communities and Conservation Program.

She began her work at ACF, then known as Adirondack Community Trust, in 1998 as its first full-time employee. Since then, Ms. Brooks has been the driving force behind the tremendous positive change the Foundation has generated in the Adirondack region.

ACF is composed of a group of compassionate problem-solvers and community connectors working to enhance the lives of people in the Adirondacks through philanthropy. It works to connect generous donors with the causes they care about in the places they love. ACF is the largest private grant maker and the only community foundation serving the entire Adirondack region.

Ms. Brooks works alongside others to proudly steward a family of funds pooled and invested together for maximum impact. Investing these funds collectively has allowed ACF to grant out millions of dollars alongside many generous supporters since it was founded in 1997. During her tenure, the Foundation's assets have grown from \$2 million to over \$130 million, supporting hundreds of regional nonprofits with over \$90 million in grants and scholarships.

Ms. Brooks is dedicated to ensuring that her work within the Adirondack region will have a positive impact now and for future generations to come.

***Cali Brooks was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Daniel G. Stec***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Marina Marangelli Cassiliano*

Marina Marangelli Cassiliano is a dedicated humanitarian and community leader recognized for her unwavering commitment to service, compassion, and civic engagement.

With a deep passion for supporting children, families, and seniors, Ms. Cassiliano has devoted years to advancing charitable initiatives that provide critical resources, educational support, and hope to vulnerable members of the community.

Ms. Cassiliano has been an active and valued supporter of the New York Police Department's community outreach programs. She has worked tirelessly to strengthen relationships between residents and local law enforcement through public service initiatives, youth engagement efforts, and neighborhood events. Her involvement has helped foster unity, trust, and a stronger sense of community connection.

Ms. Cassiliano's leadership extends beyond traditional volunteerism. She has organized and supported impactful fundraising campaigns and service projects that directly benefit children's education and well-being.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Cassiliano stepped forward to assist elderly and at-risk residents by coordinating essential shopping needs, offering guidance and reassurance, and helping combat isolation during an uncertain time.

Following Hurricane Sandy, Ms. Cassiliano played a vital role in disaster relief efforts, mobilizing support to collect, organize, and distribute essential supplies to affected families. Her ability to respond quickly and effectively in times of crisis reflects both her organizational strength and her compassionate heart.

Known for her ability to inspire others, Ms. Cassiliano brings people together around a shared purpose, creating a ripple effect of generosity and service. She embodies integrity, empathy, and community-driven leadership, serving as a powerful role model and advocate for humanitarian causes.

***Marina Marangelli Cassiliano was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Stephen T. Chan***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Daphnee Champagne*

Daphnee Champagne is a dynamic public health leader, advocate, and community connector whose work has made a lasting impact on the residents of her community and beyond.

As Vice President of Government Affairs and Community Relations at LaSante Health Center, a Brooklyn-based multispecialty healthcare practice, she plays a pivotal role in advancing access to high-quality, culturally responsive care for diverse communities, including many Caribbean immigrant families.

A proud Brooklynite and the daughter of Haitian parents, Ms. Champagne's passion for service has guided her career from an early age. After graduating from the State University of New York at Albany, she began her professional journey with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and received specialized training from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Her dedication and leadership quickly earned her a promotion to a public affairs role, where she served as a hospital liaison monitoring health code compliance, collaborating with hospital leadership, and serving on various hospital boards.

Ms. Champagne's career spans a wide range of influential roles across New York City's healthcare landscape. She has shared her expertise with various institutions, including NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Roosevelt Hospital, and Preferred Health Partners/AdvantageCare Physicians, where she served as Director of Marketing overseeing 12 locations throughout Brooklyn. She later continued her service at NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County as Associate Director of Community Affairs, further deepening her commitment to community-centered care.

In her current role at LaSante Health Center, Ms. Champagne has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to expanding access to essential health services. Her leadership has been instrumental in bringing vital health programs directly into the community, ensuring that care is both accessible and responsive to residents' needs.

Ms. Champagne is a respected voice in public health education and outreach and underserved populations. She has published articles in health journals and hospital platforms and has been featured on numerous media outlets.

A dedicated advocate for the Caribbean community, Ms. Champagne is known for her compassion, generosity, and willingness to help those in need. She continues to uplift her community through education, engagement, and service. She resides in Brooklyn with her son, David.

Ms. Champagne's work exemplifies the spirit of this award and continues to inspire healthier, stronger communities.

***Daphnee Champagne was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Zellnor Y. Myrie***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Krystle Charlemagne*

Krystle Charlemagne is an accomplished Principal whose leadership reflects a deep commitment to educational equity, community empowerment, and student success.

Serving in New York City public schools, she has dedicated her career to strengthening school systems, improving student outcomes, and expanding opportunities for families across her community.

Grounded in her personal experience as a resident of District 18, Ms. Charlemagne understands firsthand the transformative power of education. Her professional journey spans multiple roles within the New York City public school system, including Special Education Teacher and STEM Educator specializing in mathematics and computer science. These experiences have shaped her holistic approach to leadership, centered on instructional coherence, data-informed decision-making, and long-term capacity building.

Over the past several years, Ms. Charlemagne has led measurable academic gains and reversed multiyear trends by implementing sustainable instructional systems rather than short-term solutions. Her leadership emphasizes curriculum fidelity, coaching cycles, and accountability structures that support both educators and students.

Beyond academics, Ms. Charlemagne has prioritized student wellness, family engagement, and community partnership. She has helped establish a school-based food pantry to address food insecurity, launched a mindfulness room to support student mental health, and expanded social-emotional learning initiatives that include student leadership, peer mediation, and family-centered programming.

Ms. Charlemagne's dedication and intentional collaboration with community-based organizations and City agencies have had an impact in strengthening the school's role as a trusted hub of support.

Through hard work and perseverance, Ms. Charlemagne has secured over one million dollars in public funding to expand academic programs, student wellness programs, enrichment opportunities, and school infrastructure for her community. Her leadership has also extended beyond her school through advisory roles, professional learning facilitation, and instructional showcases for district and City leaders.

In addition to her work in education, Ms. Charlemagne is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of SpeakAssist™ and Tasklyn™, innovative platforms at the intersection of education, leadership, and technology designed to strengthen communication, accountability, and execution.

Ms. Charlemagne is a proud Canarsie native whose work reflects an enduring investment in public service, educational excellence, and the future of her community.

***Krystle Charlemagne was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Roxanne J. Persaud***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Reverend Karen A. Chávez*

Reverend Karen A. Chávez is a respected community advocate and outreach leader whose work has impacted countless individuals and families across New York State and beyond.

Reverend Chávez has been widely recognized, including being named Community Advocate of the Year by the Long Island Chamber of Commerce and recently being honored with the Humanitarian of the Year Award by the Long Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

For more than two decades, she has devoted her life to ministry, humanitarian service, and the empowerment of underserved communities through faith-based leadership, education, mentorship, and practical support.

Reverend Chávez has served as the Director of Outreach Programs for the New York Race Track Chaplaincy since 2005 alongside her husband, Reverend Humberto Chávez, the Chaplaincy's Executive Director. In this role, she has developed and led transformative initiatives supporting the backstretch community, the workers and families who care for the horses at New York's racetracks. Her programs include a food pantry and free boutique serving over 1,000 people per month, the Summer Enrichment Program at Belmont and Saratoga Race Tracks, women's enrichment initiatives, teen mentoring programs, educational support services, and major community events such as Breast Cancer Awareness Night and International Women's Day celebrations.

In addition to her outreach leadership, Reverend Chávez is an ordained minister at The Bridge Church in Malverne, New York, where she has served since 2013 through preaching, discipleship, pastoral care, and leadership development.

Her leadership extends beyond local work. Reverend Chávez has served three terms as the Women's Representative on the Racetrack Chaplaincy of America National Board and currently serves on the District Advisory Board for the Metro New York District of the Church of the Nazarene, which oversees the governance and ministry of more than 120 churches across New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. She also serves on the Board of Ministries and as a chaplain with Baseball Chapel, providing spiritual care for the wives of the New York Mets players.

Born in Venezuela and raised in New York, Reverend Chávez remains committed to serving others with compassion, faith, and unwavering dedication.

***Reverend Karen A. Chávez was selected as a 2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Patricia M. Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Lisa M. Chimera*

Lisa M. Chimera serves as Deputy County Executive following three years of service as a Legislator in Erie County's Third Legislative District.

As Deputy County Executive, Ms. Chimera has focused her attention on several mental health initiatives. These include developing the Erie Path smartphone app, bringing together local school districts and nonprofits to create the Supporting Mental Health by Advocating for Resources Together (SMART) Collaborative, and fighting to address persistent challenges in the behavioral health crisis response system as a member of the leadership team for the Crisis to Care Collaborative (CTC). She also co-chairs Live Well Erie (LWE), a broad-based, data-driven initiative involving numerous partners in the public, private, and non-profit sectors who collaborate to achieve greater health outcomes and improved quality of life for residents.

During her time as a Legislator, Ms. Chimera chaired both the Health and Human Services Committee and the Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) Committee. She also served on the Finance & Management and Energy & Environment Committees. Among her legislative achievements, Ms. Chimera spearheaded initiatives such as instituting Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in the Erie County Holding Center and creating the "bookmobile" outreach van with the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. She was also instrumental in the formation of the Erie County Emergency Childcare Task Force.

Ms. Chimera previously served as a Councilmember on the Tonawanda Town Board for 14 years and was the first female Democrat elected in the Town's history. She served on numerous committees and was instrumental in governmental reform that saved taxpayers money while preserving important services, including the preservation of public libraries and the enhancement of Town parks.

In her professional career, Ms. Chimera worked for the Kenmore-Tonawanda School District, teaching at Hoover Middle School for 34 years. Ms. Chimera was a Curriculum Learning Specialist, teaching Special Education in grades 6-8 until her retirement in 2021. She played a foundational role in the establishment of the co-teaching model and assisted in the training of all teachers and administrators.

Ms. Chimera completed her studies at Buffalo State University, earning both a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Special Education and a Master of Science in Reading.

***Lisa M. Chimera was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jeremy J. Zellner***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Ayana K. Cole-Price, MD*

Ayana K. Cole-Price, MD, completed a dedicated research fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, where her work focused on perioperative outcomes following head and neck cancer reconstruction. Dr. Cole-Price's research has been presented at multiple national meetings, including the American Association of Plastic Surgeons, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, and the Northeastern Society of Plastic Surgeons. Her academic interests span reconstructive and aesthetic surgery, with plans to pursue a career in aesthetic surgery following residency.

In addition to her clinical and research work, Dr. Cole-Price is deeply committed to mentorship and advocacy. She serves as Chairwoman of the annual Plastic Surgery Research and Education Preparation Program, a structured initiative focused on mentorship, research exposure, and career guidance for underrepresented and under-supported medical students interested in plastic and reconstructive surgery. Dr. Cole-Price is also the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Empower My Hood, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding access to educational resources, career development, and college preparedness for underserved communities through initiatives such as the Southeast Queens College Fair and annual Scholarship Gala.

Dr. Cole-Price is an Executive Producer of the documentary "United in Healing," which highlights the journeys of five Black physicians from New York City and explores themes of resilience, purpose, and community within medicine. Her work reflects a commitment to advancing surgical excellence while amplifying diverse voices and fostering the next generation of physicians.

Currently, Dr. Cole-Price is a Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Resident at the University of Michigan and is in her fifth year of training. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Science from the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education and earned both her Medical Doctorate and a Master of Science in Clinical Investigation and Translational Research from the New York University Grossman School of Medicine.

***Ayana K. Cole-Price, MD, was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Leroy Comrie***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Donna Coppola*

Donna Coppola spent 18 years as a science, SAVE Room (Safe Schools Against Violence in Education), and common branch teacher, with 10 of those years serving in Staten Island's P.S. 14.

Ms. Coppola's activism was initially fueled by her passion for creating safe environments for students and a deep belief in the value of elevating educator and parent voices in school decision-making. Ms. Coppola became an activist with her union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), first as a school-based chapter leader, followed by a part-time position. She became a full-time employee of the union in 2011.

Today, Ms. Coppola serves as a Special Representative of the UFT, supporting middle and high schools on Staten Island. She is also the Political Action Coordinator for the Borough. She has been elected to the Executive Board, is a delegate for the State and national teachers unions (NYSUT and AFT), and is a delegate for the NYC Central Labor Council.

Whether leading teams of volunteers in phone banking, marshaling colleagues to lobby City and State legislators, or canvassing her neighbors by going door-to-door, Ms. Coppola's advocacy is felt far and wide. She has been recognized and honored by the UFT with multiple awards for her fierce trade unionism and political activism at its Teacher Union Day Awards.

Ms. Coppola's hands-on approach extends to being an active participant in her community. When Hurricane Sandy devastated parts of Staten Island, she rolled up her sleeves, reached out, and assisted in the cleanup efforts. Additionally, she actively participates in charity events, including the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Walk, prom boutique drives for middle school and high school seniors, and clothing and toy drives for the Coalition for the Homeless.

A Brooklyn native, Ms. Coppola came to Staten Island 40 years ago as a teenager. Married for 25 years to her husband, Chris, they are longtime residents of the Great Kills community, where they raised three daughters and recently became grandparents to a beautiful baby boy.

Through every chapter of her journey, Ms. Coppola has remained guided by a simple, but powerful principle: when you show up for your community, you can make a lasting difference.

***Donna Coppola was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Andrew J. Lanza***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Maria Cristalli*

Maria Cristalli is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Hillside, a leading provider of youth and family services with a long-standing history of supporting children and families across New York and beyond.

A dedicated and visionary leader, Ms. Cristalli has spent more than three decades at Hillside, beginning her career in 1991 and rising through the organization to lead it as CEO in 2018.

Over the course of her tenure, Ms. Cristalli has played a pivotal role in shaping Hillside into a comprehensive, community-centered organization that serves thousands of young people and families each year. Under her leadership, Hillside has expanded its reach and deepened its impact, offering a wide range of services, including mental and behavioral health care, education, residential treatment, and community-based support for youth who have experienced trauma.

Ms. Cristalli is known for her thoughtful, data-informed leadership and her unwavering commitment to strengthening the systems that serve vulnerable populations. She has led major initiatives to invest in Hillside's workforce, improve access to care, and develop innovative programs that respond to the complex and evolving needs of children and families. Her work emphasizes prevention, early intervention, and meeting families where they are, ensuring that care is both accessible and effective.

Ms. Cristalli has also championed partnerships across sectors, working closely with schools, health care providers, and government agencies to create more coordinated and responsive systems of care. Through her leadership, Hillside continues to be a trusted and essential resource for communities, delivering services that are rooted in compassion, dignity, and respect.

Ms. Cristalli's impact extends far beyond the walls of any one organization. It lives in the young people who feel seen, supported, and safe, in the families who find stability in moments of crisis, and in the communities that are stronger because of her leadership. Her work is a reflection of a deep belief that every child deserves care, opportunity, and hope, and she has dedicated her life to making that belief a reality.

***Maria Cristalli was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Samra G. Brouk***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Carrie Cuthbertson*

Carrie Cuthbertson is a lifelong Bronx resident who has dedicated her time and efforts to serving the community in numerous roles, most notably as the steward of the Bean Morris Community Garden.

Established in loving memory of Ms. Cuthbertson's son, whom she tragically lost due to gun violence in 2019, the garden serves as a peaceful, reflective gathering place for residents of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, fostering unity, healing, and connection. The Bean Morris Community Garden stands as both a memorial and a symbol of resilience.

Under Ms. Cuthbertson's leadership, the garden has flourished into a true community anchor that allows residents to gather and have access to an open, green space for meaningful programming and mutual aid efforts. Ms. Cuthbertson hosts food distributions, community cookouts, and large-scale seasonal celebrations such as annual Halloween events, turkey giveaways, and Easter egg hunts that draw hundreds of attendees each year. These events not only bring joy to families, but also unify the community and strengthen bonds across generations and cultures within the neighborhood.

A dedicated advocate for improving community infrastructure, Ms. Cuthbertson has also secured significant funding from the New York City Council for community projects. Beyond her stewardship of the garden, Ms. Cuthbertson has devoted much of her life to violence prevention and community safety. As a violence interrupter, she has mediated and resolved intra-community conflicts, helped curb gun violence, and worked to mitigate its devastating and ongoing impact. She has also established strong employment referral pathways, connecting young people to long-term, seasonal, and summer job opportunities that promote stability and positive engagement.

In addition, Ms. Cuthbertson has partnered closely with the office of New York State Senator Gustavo Rivera to advance the Know Your Rights initiative. Through outreach, education, and trusted community leadership, she has played a key role in making sure Bronx residents remain safe, informed, and prepared in the face of growing immigration enforcement by the federal government.

Ms. Cuthbertson's unwavering commitment to service, safety, and community empowerment is leaving a lasting and meaningful impact on Senate District 33 and the broader Bronx community.

***Carrie Cuthbertson was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Gustavo Rivera***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Sheila Dion*

Sheila Dion is a dedicated philanthropist and passionate advocate for children's food security in Central New York.

A resident of Baldwinsville, Ms. Dion founded Erin's Angels CNY in 2017 after witnessing many students face food insecurity while working as a food service worker in the Phoenix Central School District. When Ms. Dion learned that Phoenix was the only district in Oswego County without a weekend backpack program to provide food to students outside of school hours, she decided to create one.

Ms. Dion named Erin's Angels after Erin Maxwell, an 11-year-old girl from Oswego County who died in 2008 after suffering prolonged abuse and malnutrition. To Ms. Dion, Erin Maxwell's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of protecting and caring for children in our communities. In her memory, Ms. Dion and her network of volunteers now provide more than 40,000 meals to hundreds of children across Central New York during the school year through the organization's weekend backpack program.

Recognizing that food insecurity continues beyond the school year, Ms. Dion expanded Erin's Angels in 2023 to include a summer meal program. Through a partnership with United Way's "Ride United" initiative, the organization is able to provide free meals to students even when school is not in session, helping to ensure that children have reliable access to food year-round.

The tagline for Erin's Angels is "Feeding the Future of CNY." In addition to providing meals, Ms. Dion has developed programs that support the long-term success of young people in the region. To help combat cycles of poverty, Erin's Angels awards annual scholarships to four graduating seniors in Oswego County.

Ms. Dion is also committed to strengthening the broader nonprofit and business community in Central New York. She founded Oswego Women Lead, which connects and supports female professionals, entrepreneurs, and changemakers across Oswego County. Erin's Angels also partners with local businesses and nonprofits, including the Food Bank of CNY, to operate its programs and expand its impact.

Today, in addition to leading Erin's Angels, Ms. Dion serves on the Advisory Council for the Oswego County Community Foundation and owns a consulting company that works exclusively with small businesses and nonprofit organizations.

***Sheila Dion was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Christopher J. Ryan***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Stephanie Draine*

Stephanie Draine is the Founder and Executive Director of Life After Loss A.N.D.R.E. (Ability-Navigate-Depression-Recovery-Empowerment), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting families and communities impacted by violence.

Following the tragic loss of her son, Andre Graydon, to gun violence in 2014, Ms. Draine transformed her grief into purpose, emerging as a compassionate leader and powerful advocate for healing and change.

She leads trauma-informed grief support services, youth empowerment workshops, and community-based initiatives that provide safe and supportive spaces for individuals and families navigating loss.

Through her work, Ms. Draine offers advocacy, guidance, and emotional support to those facing some of life's most difficult challenges.

Ms. Draine actively collaborates and engages with community leaders, local agencies, and service providers to strengthen support systems and expand access to critical resources for grieving families.

Her ability to build meaningful partnerships has enhanced community response efforts and fostered a network of care rooted in compassion and resilience.

A respected voice in the community, Ms. Draine is steadfast in her efforts to raise awareness about the lasting impact of violence while uplifting survivor voices and promoting unity. Her unwavering commitment to service, leadership, and advocacy continues to inspire hope, healing, and transformation across Long Island and beyond.

***Stephanie Draine was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Siela A. Bynoe***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Linda Ebani*

Linda Ebani is a distinguished civic leader, community advocate, and lifelong resident of Brooklyn whose unwavering commitment to public service has left a lasting impact on the borough she proudly calls home. Born and raised in Brooklyn, she embodies the resilience, civic pride, and grassroots spirit that define her community.

As the Founder of the Kings Highway Beautification Association, Ms. Ebani established a transformative civic organization dedicated to strengthening neighborhood vitality, fostering collaboration among residents and businesses, and enhancing public spaces. Under her leadership, the Association has become a respected and influential voice, advancing initiatives that improve the quality of life and promote civic responsibility.

A steadfast champion of democratic participation, Ms. Ebani has led large-scale voter registration initiatives to empower historically underrepresented and unregistered residents. As Chair of a 52-member volunteer committee, she mobilized a dynamic grassroots network that successfully registered more than 20,000 new voters. This extraordinary achievement has significantly strengthened civic engagement and ensured broader representation within her community.

Her advocacy extends beyond voter engagement to meaningful neighborhood development. Through strong and collaborative relationships with local elected officials, Ms. Ebani helped secure critical funding for the McDonald Avenue Playground, transforming it into a safe, welcoming, and vibrant space for families and children. This accomplishment reflects her enduring belief that thriving public spaces are essential to strong and united communities.

Ms. Ebani's nomination as a Woman of Distinction is a fitting tribute to her decades of visionary leadership, tireless service, and unwavering dedication to the people of Brooklyn. Her legacy of empowerment, civic engagement, and community stewardship continues to inspire others and exemplifies the profound impact of committed grassroots leadership.

***Linda Ebani was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Sam Sutton***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Dana G. Elden*

Dana G. Elden has dedicated her life to faith, family, and service to the South Bronx community.

After moving to the Bronx in 1965, she was introduced to community involvement through organizations such as the Girl Scouts and the Junior Tau Gamma Delta Sorority. Inspired by her parents and grandmother, who instilled in her a deep sense of responsibility to serve others, Ms. Elden carried those values with her throughout her life.

Although she initially worked in the private sector, Ms. Elden remained committed to community leadership. Since 1988, she has served in various roles, including leadership positions in parent/teacher and tenant associations. In the mid-1990s, she began working in community development, holding long-term contracts with East Side House, where she helped administer South Bronx after-school programs and designed parent workshops.

Later, Ms. Elden worked with Nos Quedamos/We Stay, contributing to grant writing efforts that supported the revitalization of Melrose Commons, a redevelopment effort spanning 156th to 163rd Streets between Courtlandt and Teller Avenues. These projects helped bring new housing and community development to the neighborhood, including the construction of Boricua College.

Ms. Elden's life took another meaningful turn when she became the guardian of her two special needs grandsons, Joshua and Alexander, whom she lovingly raised while continuing to serve her community.

In 2018, she became President of the St. Mary's Park Houses Tenant Association, deepening her leadership in public housing advocacy. Ms. Elden is also a founding member of Residents to Preserve Public Housing, an organization formed in 2019 and incorporated in 2023 with the support of TakeRoot Justice to ensure long-term advocacy and unity among residents.

A devoted woman of faith, Ms. Elden serves as a chaplain with the NYS Christian Community Chaplains Workforce and is an active member of St. Luke Baptist Church in Harlem. Today, she continues to serve the residents of St. Mary's Park Houses and the surrounding South Bronx community with compassion, faith, and a commitment to uplifting others.

Through decades of service, Ms. Elden has remained guided by her belief that helping others and strengthening community is part of God's purpose for her life.

***Dana G. Elden was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator José M. Serrano***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Shirley Fearon*

Shirley Fearon is a committed community activist taking part in education, political action, voter registration, community empowerment, and fundraising activities, just to name a few!

Ms. Fearon is the Secretary and a Subscribing Diamond Life Member of the NAACP Williamsbridge Branch and a Legacy Life Member of the North Bronx Section of the National Council of Negro Women.

A member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Zeta Nu Omega Chapter, Ms. Fearon has held numerous positions. She is a former Democratic State Committeewoman and the current Female District Leader for the 83rd Assembly District in the Northeast Bronx. Ms. Fearon is the Co-Chairperson of the Northeast Bronx Community Coalition, having advocated since 2009 for the state-of-the-art Northeast Bronx YMCA located on East 229th Street, which hosted its grand opening on September 9, 2021.

A devoted parishioner of Saints Philip and James Roman Catholic Church, Ms. Fearon served as a religious instructor for 10 years and is currently the Parish Council President, lector, and choir member.

As President of the NAACP Williamsbridge Branch for 10 years, Ms. Fearon has garnered numerous awards for programmatic and membership activities on the national, regional, and State levels. She has been recognized by New York State Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie, the NAACP Williamsbridge Branch, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, East of Laconia Community Association, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and Retirees of Dreiser Loop.

Ms. Fearon was born in New York City and has lived in the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx since childhood. She attended PS/MS 113 and graduated from Evander Childs High School. Ms. Fearon received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Elementary Education from Hunter College and two Masters of Science in Elementary and Special Education from Herbert Lehman College.

After retiring from the New York City Department of Education, Ms. Fearon taught General and Special Education students and worked as an Educational Evaluator. She is the proud mother of Brian, a graduate of St. John's University, and Jasmine, a graduate of Syracuse University, holding Master's degrees from Fordham University and Fuller Theological Seminary. Ms. Fearon has two grandchildren: Brooke, a 2026 graduate from Spelman College, and Ryan, who attends Syracuse University.

Ms. Fearon firmly believes that to whom much is given, much is required.

***Shirley Fearon was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jamaal T. Bailey***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Maegan Fox*

Maegan Fox is a proud small business owner who built a successful pet grooming business, learning the tools of the trade from the ground up.

In 2020, when anti-police sentiment was at its peak and the COVID-19 pandemic had a grip on our daily lives, Ms. Fox chose to make a difference by sending a basket of snacks to a New York Police Department precinct in Brooklyn. After receiving a few pictures of the drop-off, she posted it on social media under a group she created called Project Thank A Cop (PTAC). Six years later, PTAC has grown into an amazing organization with almost 16,000 followers and an office in Merrick, Long Island. PTAC and its network of civilian volunteers are established in their area, along with numerous communities across the United States. Ms. Fox's acts of kindness and support to law enforcement and first responders have strengthened the bonds between those who serve and the communities they work and live in.

Ms. Fox and her organization have been featured on media outlets annually, highlighting the PTAC's Shop With A Cop event. They support up to 200 children in need through an all-inclusive shopping spree with each child accompanied by someone in uniform. The children are treated to snacks, gifts, music, and their choice of toys.

Through the desire to make a difference, Ms. Fox established a close-knit group of local women who volunteer their time to support and build relationships with those who serve. She is an active member of the local Chamber of Commerce and has been recognized by officials, numerous police departments, and the unions who support them as a resource they can turn to for those in need.

Ms. Fox has been recognized by numerous organizations and groups for her hard work and dedication to her community and beyond. She has taken the initiative to stand out from the crowd to show support for those who serve.

A proud mom to her amazing son, Robert, Ms. Fox is leading by example as Robert is expressing a sense of duty to help people in the community, empathy toward others, and a natural ability to be a leader and mentor.

***Maegan Fox was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Steven Rhoads***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Megan Freida*

Megan Freida believes that helping families facing breast cancer is not simply important work. It is also deeply personal. Her mother is a two-time breast cancer survivor. Watching that battle unfold left a lasting impression on Ms. Freida and inspired her to dedicate herself to supporting others walking the same difficult path.

Today, Ms. Freida serves as President of Embrace Your Sisters (EYS), a nonprofit organization that provides short-term emergency financial assistance to individuals battling breast cancer. Alongside a passionate and dedicated network of volunteers, she works to ensure that families facing one of life's most frightening diagnoses are met with compassion, dignity, and hope.

What began years ago as neighbors rallying around a single woman in need has grown into something extraordinary. Under Ms. Freida's leadership, Embrace Your Sisters has become a respected 501(c)(3) organization serving families across a wide region of New York State.

The organization's mission is simple, but powerful: when someone is fighting breast cancer, they should not have to face financial hardship alone. For many patients, treatment means missed work, rising medical bills, and mounting household expenses. Ms. Freida's goal is to relieve that burden by providing emergency assistance for medical co-pays, treatment costs, rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and other essential household bills. This support allows families to focus on what matters most: healing and recovery.

Just as meaningful as the financial assistance is the sense of community the organization creates. Through Embrace Your Sisters, patients and their families are reminded they are not alone and that an entire community stands beside them.

Today, the organization serves residents across Allegany, Cayuga, Chemung, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne, and Yates counties. Thanks to the generosity of donors and the dedication of volunteers, Embrace Your Sisters has provided more than \$700,000 in financial assistance to families facing breast cancer. This year also marks the organization's 20th anniversary.

Ms. Freida is deeply committed to her community and regularly volunteers her time and leadership to support initiatives that lift others up. In addition to her volunteer leadership, she has built a nearly 30-year career with Wegmans Food Markets, where she currently serves as a District Manager and is widely respected for her leadership and strong work ethic.

Ms. Freida lives in Victor, New York with her significant other, Seth, and their dogs, Helen and Marla.

***Megan Freida was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Pamela A. Helming***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Reverend  
Renee F. Washington Gardner*

Reverend Renee F. Washington Gardner is a skilled preacher, teacher, counselor, and administrator.

A lifelong resident of Harlem popularly known as “Rev. Renee,” she was elected as Senior Pastor of the Memorial Baptist Church in 2004. She became the 16th Moderator of the United Missionary Baptist Association of New York City and Vicinity in 2024, the first woman to be elected to both positions. In this trailblazing role, she proudly followed in the footsteps of her parents, who served as evangelists, pastors, and congregational leaders, actively nurturing her faith and facilitating much of her spiritual growth.

Reverend Gardner is a dedicated member and leader of her community. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, she expanded access to testing and vaccination for underserved communities.

Steadfast in her commitment to serve her local community and spread the gospel, Reverend Gardner served as a credentialed Chaplain, both in the Veterans Administration and the New York Transit Authority, providing spiritual and emotional support for all individuals across diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

Reverend Gardner was nationally selected for Lott Carey’s “Striving and Thriving” program, a podcast series offering insights and wisdom from prominent Black pastoral leaders across the Nation. Organizations such as the National Action Network, the Balm in Gilead, and the NAACP have lauded Reverend Gardner for her leadership and contributions to the local community.

She has received honors and proclamations from former President Joe Biden, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer, and the late Congressman Charles Rangel, signifying the far-reaching impact of her ministry, leadership, and commitment to uplifting communities.

Reverend Gardner is a graduate of the New York Theological Seminary/Eastern Baptist Extension Program in Urban Ministry and received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from the St. Thomas Christian College.

Reverend Gardner has guided countless individuals in their spiritual journeys, mentoring emerging faith leaders and strengthening communities through service, advocacy, and compassionate leadership. She continues to be an embodiment of faith, resilience, and unity throughout New York and beyond.

***Reverend Renee F. Washington Gardner was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Cordell Cleare***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Janine Gentile*

Janine Gentile began her teaching career in the Massapequa School District. She ultimately found her home in the Herricks Union Free School District, where she has proudly taught at Center Street School for the past 28 years.

Ms. Gentile has also served as the advisor to the school's Community Service Club, where she works with students to promote empathy, kindness, and civic responsibility. Through her guidance, the students have supported numerous organizations, including Make-A-Wish Foundation, North Shore Animal League, St. Mary's Hospital, SIBS Place, St. Aidan's Food Pantry, Island Harvest, the Mary Brennan Inn, and the Winthrop Hospital Child Life Program. The club also hosts annual in-school Kindness Weeks that encourage students to spread compassion throughout the school community.

One of the club's most meaningful initiatives has been building connections with local senior citizens. Students regularly spend time with seniors that meet at the Herricks Community Center, sharing music, playing games, and teaching them about technology. This partnership inspired the creation of an annual "Senior Citizen Prom" held at Center Street School each June.

Beyond the classroom, Ms. Gentile is involved in community service, which is equally meaningful to her. She is an active member of the PTA at her sons' school, volunteers with the St. Aidan's CYO Swim Team, supports the Williston Park Little League Challenger Program, and serves as a mentor to students through the Brentwood High School Alumni group.

Born in Bay Shore, Ms. Gentile was raised in a close-knit Italian Catholic family and is the youngest of three children. From an early age, she learned the importance of service and community through the example set by her parents, who dedicated countless hours volunteering.

Ms. Gentile earned a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education and her Master's degree in Special Education.

As a teacher, advisor, parent, and community member, Ms. Gentile strives to carry forward the values of service that her parents instilled in her and to pass those same ideals on to her sons, her students, and the broader Herricks community.

Ms. Gentile resides in New Hyde Park with her husband, Joseph, and her two sons, Vincent and Michael.

***Janine Gentile was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jack M. Martins***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Joanne Gerow*

Joanne Gerow has devoted her life to protecting the most vulnerable members of our community — animals in need. A lifelong resident of Sullivan County, she has spent decades serving as a tireless advocate for animal welfare and humane treatment. Her work reflects not only a deep compassion for animals, but also an unwavering commitment to improving the safety and well-being of the community as a whole.

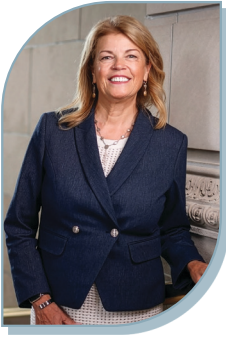
As a Dog Control Officer for multiple towns and jurisdictions throughout Sullivan County, Ms. Gerow has played a critical role in safeguarding animals and supporting local residents. She has worked closely with law enforcement agencies to investigate cases of animal cruelty, respond to reports of neglect, and ensure that animals are treated with care and respect. Her role often places her in challenging and emotionally difficult situations, yet she consistently approaches her work with professionalism, determination, and empathy. Time and again, her efforts have led to meaningful interventions that protect animals and hold individuals accountable.

In addition to her public service, Ms. Gerow is the Founder and Director of Catskill Animal Rescue, a nonprofit organization dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating, and rehoming animals across the region. Through this organization, she has helped save hundreds of animals, giving them a second chance at life in safe and loving homes. She has also built a strong network of volunteers, fosters, and supporters who share her passion and help extend the reach of her mission.

Over the course of her career, Ms. Gerow has demonstrated that one person's dedication can truly transform a community. Her advocacy has raised awareness, strengthened protections for animals, and inspired others to act. Her impact extends far beyond the animals she has saved, touching the lives of countless families and community members.

***Joanne Gerow was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Peter Oberacker***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Joanne Haefner*

Joanne Haefner, FNP, is President and Chief Executive Officer for Neighborhood Health Center of Western New York, the region's longest tenured Federally Qualified Health Center.

Under Ms. Haefner's leadership, Neighborhood is experiencing significant growth and now has six locations — in addition to a mobile unit — with a seventh location opening this year. Neighborhood is the primary care home to more than 34,000 residents and offers adult and pediatric medicine, OB-GYN, dentistry, behavioral health, psychiatry, nutrition, podiatry, vision care, and pharmacy services.

Her healthcare career spans more than 30 years, and over the last 20 years, Ms. Haefner has proudly provided care as a nurse practitioner working her way up through the ranks. Now as President and CEO, she prioritizes strengths-based leadership to drive employee engagement and create career opportunities so all people feel valued.

Additionally, she has molded Neighborhood Health Center into one of Western New York's Best Places to Work as the organization achieved the distinction of Finalist in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 through the Buffalo Business First "Best Places to Work" competition, which measures employee satisfaction. Neighborhood has also consistently been the highest-ranked health center in Western New York for quality and among the highest ranked in the State.

Ms. Haefner grew up in the Buffalo area and graduated from Riverside High School. She attended D'Youville University, earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and later returned to obtain a Master's degree and a Family Nurse Practitioner degree. D'Youville University honored her with its Delta Sigma Award, and she earned induction into the Marguerite D'Youville Honor Society.

She resides in Lake View and is active in the community, serving in a number of volunteer roles, including on the Board of the Community Health Care Association of New York State. Ms. Haefner is Chair of the CHCANYS HCCN Board, on the Board of Trustees for D'Youville University, and on the Univera Healthcare Regional Advisory Board. She is the Vice President of Western New York's Safety Net IPA and Safety Net Association of Primary Care Providers (SNAPCAP).

Ms. Haefner is a role model and activist for fairness, community capacity building, and social justice.

***Joanne Haefner was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Patrick M. Gallivan***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Mona Hassanein*

Mona Hassanein emigrated from Egypt to the United States 14 years ago with a deep commitment to building a better future for her family while giving back to the community that welcomed her.

Ms. Hassanein has a strong belief in service and empowerment, and she has dedicated much of her professional and personal life to helping others access opportunities and thrive.

In 2012, Ms. Hassanein joined the Queens Public Library system, where her passion for community engagement and leadership quickly distinguished her. Within just one year, she earned two promotions in recognition of her dedication, work ethic, and ability to connect with the diverse communities she serves. Today, she serves as an Assistant Manager, where she plays a key role in supporting residents across Queens by ensuring access to critical educational and community resources.

Through her work at the library, Ms. Hassanein has become a trusted guide for many immigrants navigating life in a new country. She connects individuals and families with programs that help them learn English, prepare for and obtain their high school diploma, pursue higher education, and access employment opportunities. Her work has helped many community members take meaningful steps toward economic stability and personal growth.

Ms. Hassanein is particularly passionate about empowering women. She regularly organizes and supports workshops within the Arab community in Queens that focus on women's rights, leadership, and personal development. These initiatives encourage women to build confidence, gain new skills, and actively participate in their children's education and development. She is also one of the organizers of the annual Arab American Heritage Month celebration at the Queens Public Library, an event that highlights cultural pride and community connection.

Ms. Hassanein holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, reflecting her long-standing commitment to understanding social structures and supporting communities in meaningful ways.

As a single mother, she raised two sons who both went on to become software engineers — an accomplishment she considers one of her proudest achievements. Ms. Hassanein's journey reflects resilience, determination, and an unwavering belief in the power of opportunity. She continues to inspire others through her service, leadership, and dedication to uplifting those around her.

***Mona Hassanein was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jessica Ramos***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Karen Hochhauser*

Karen Hochhauser is the Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Dutchess County.

Ms. Hochhauser assumed her role at the Federation after returning from nearly two decades of living in Asia, where she raised her three children, which she considers her greatest accomplishment. Her global experience and cross-cultural perspective continue to shape her approach to leadership and community building.

Ms. Hochhauser's professional background spans five industries and includes leadership roles across the Asia-Pacific region. Her work has included positions with the Fulbright Program, computer software companies, relocation services, and human resources consulting. Throughout her career, she has led training, sales and marketing, and leadership development initiatives for multinational corporations, with a consistent focus on supporting and advancing women as clients, colleagues, and staff.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a concentration in East Asian Studies from Binghamton University, which included studying Mandarin, and a Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Management from New York University.

Most recently, Ms. Hochhauser earned her Executive Leadership Coaching certification through the International Coaching Federation, achieving the Professional Certified Coach credential. Through this work, she is committed to ensuring that women have the tools, support, and strategies needed to thrive in leadership.

A lifelong member of the Dutchess County community, Ms. Hochhauser's family roots in the area date back to 1941, when her maternal grandparents moved to Poughkeepsie from New York City. Growing up surrounded by strong female role models, including her grandmother, aunt, and especially her mother, she developed a deep appreciation for community and the importance of supporting others, values that continue to guide her leadership today.

While Ms. Hochhauser knows she cannot solve every challenge facing the world today, she is deeply committed to strengthening her local community. She works tirelessly to build connections, foster resilience, and remind others that when people come together in community, they are stronger.

***Karen Hochhauser was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Robert G. Rolison***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Jamel Holder*

Jamel Holder is a dedicated community leader, nonprofit advocate, entrepreneur, and servant-hearted Orange County resident. Her life's work centers on strengthening families, uplifting vulnerable populations, and building sustainable systems of support throughout New York State.

For over a decade, Ms. Holder worked at the Salvation Army homeless shelter in Queens, where she directly assisted more than 91 families in securing stability, resources, and pathways to permanent housing. Her work was rooted in compassion, advocacy, and hands-on case management, helping families navigate difficult transitions in their lives.

After relocating to Middletown, Ms. Holder continued her commitment to service by becoming a recruiter and trainer of foster parents. She organized and facilitated support groups, ensuring families received encouragement, guidance, and community connection needed to care for children in crisis. In recognition of her dedication and impact, she received the Spirit of the Community Award from the North American Family Institute.

Ms. Holder currently serves as the Office Administrator and Social Services Coordinator at the Salvation Army in Middletown, where she works daily to connect individuals and families with food assistance, emergency support, youth programming, and critical community resources. She remains actively engaged in regional coalitions focused on food security, youth empowerment, and community wellness.

This past year, Ms. Holder served as an integral leader of the Feeding Orange County Coalition, where she hosted a Thanksgiving turkey and food drive in collaboration with Senator Skoufis, which, in concert with local pantries, distributed meals to over 200 families. Ms. Holder worked tirelessly to set up the Salvation Army community space as a walk-through "grocery store" where attendees were able to select from canned goods, protein, and fresh vegetables.

In 2025, Ms. Holder co-founded SwiftAid Transport, a non-emergency medical transportation company created to ensure safe, reliable, and transparent access to medical care for those in need. SwiftAid Transport was born from her firsthand experiences witnessing service gaps and her determination to ensure that no individual is left behind due to transportation barriers.

Ms. Holder is a devoted wife and mother who leads with integrity, faith, and purpose. She is passionate about serving her community and believes that service is not just a role; it is a calling.

***Jamel Holder was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator James Skoufis***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Naomi Hopkins*

Naomi Hopkins is a distinguished civic and corporate leader dedicated to public service, voting advocacy, and community empowerment. Her career spans government, nonprofit leadership, and corporate strategy, all rooted in expanding opportunity and strengthening communities.

Previously, Ms. Hopkins served as Chief of Staff in both the New York State Assembly and the New York City Council, where she played a key role in advancing impactful legislation and budget initiatives.

Currently, she serves as Vice President of Government Relations, Northeast Region at First American Financial Corporation, a Fortune 500 company, where she leverages public policy and corporate engagement to drive meaningful community impact.

Ms. Hopkins is the Chair of Brooklyn Community Board 18, making history as the first woman to hold the position. Her leadership extends to advancing development efforts for The Campaign Against Hunger and serving on the board of Big Apple Leadership Arts Academy.

A proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, Ms. Hopkins serves as Social Action Co-Chair of the Brooklyn Alumnae Chapter. She is also a member of the Cathedral of the Greater Free Gift Baptist Church, where her faith anchors her commitment to service and leadership.

Through every role, Ms. Hopkins exemplifies excellence, purpose, and a deep dedication to uplifting the community she serves.

***Naomi Hopkins was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Kevin S. Parker***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Greta Hunter*

Greta Hunter is a dedicated member of the community who has consistently volunteered her time toward caring for others. From starting her own record company to working as a 911 operator to her current position as Treasurer of the 90th Precinct Community Board, Ms. Hunter has always bettered the lives of those around her.

Ms. Hunter credits her parents for teaching her the values that guide her life. Her father was the Commander of the Disabled American Veterans Chapter at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn and was often in Washington, D.C. fighting for veterans' rights.

Ms. Hunter's volunteering record is extraordinary. Some of the local organizations she regularly partners with include CABS, Brooklyn Hospital, Los Sures, Wick, Esperanza, and the YMCA.

During Hurricane Sandy, Ms. Hunter helped impacted residents gather clothes and personal belongings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she coordinated food giveaways with the YMCA, delivering food directly to New Yorkers who were unable to leave their apartments. On Sundays during the pandemic, Ms. Hunter was often distributing rolls from Grandma's Hands to Southside Williamsburg residents.

With compassion and a desire to help, Ms. Hunter has assisted countless families and seniors, whether it be signing them up for Section 8 and SCRIE, helping them access free phone plans, or ensuring they receive critical home health aide services.

In addition, Ms. Hunter worked with Access-A-Ride, both as a driver and a cashier. Through her advocacy with Senator Salazar's office, she helped residents connect with the MTA to address any issues with Access-A-Ride services.

In Lindsay Park in particular, Ms. Hunter has been a constant presence. She has arranged community seminars, protested against Asian hate crimes, and served on the Board of Directors of the Lindsay Park Community Council. For many years, during the holiday season, she helped distribute toys to families in Lindsay Park Houses, as well as in Bushwick and Williamsburg Houses.

Ms. Hunter currently resides in Williamsburg and believes that the community you build, the people you serve, and the examples you set define who you truly are.

***Greta Hunter was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Julia Salazar***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Cynthia B. Knox, Esq.*

Cynthia B. Knox, Esq., is the Chief Executive Officer of Caring for the Hungry and Homeless of Peekskill (CHHOP). CHHOP works to alleviate hunger and homelessness in Peekskill, New York and its surrounding areas.

As CHHOP's leader, Ms. Knox successfully increased the organization's revenue by over 225%, private revenue by over 17%, and program staffing by 280% within five years. She has also developed additional programs in response to community needs, including a collaborative RISE Program for domestic violence survivors and a short-term rental and utility arrears program, Tierra Solida/Solid Ground. Ms. Knox has transformed CHHOP's food pantry into a "farm to pantry" model with a rigorous focus on health equity.

Ms. Knox's social justice work spans more than three decades, with 20-plus years of nonprofit executive experience working on behalf of low-income individuals. She has developed programs and funding for specialized populations, advanced strategic partnerships, and led performance management processes in her leadership roles.

Ms. Knox's leadership has garnered recognition for her dedication to helping those in need, including from The Loft, which recognized her as an LGBTQ+ Trailblazer, and from the City of Peekskill, which named her as an LGBTQ+ leader in the community, both in 2024. Additional accolades include the 914 Inc. Women in Business Leaders in 2023, Crain's 2023 New York Notable LGBTQIA+ Leaders, the 2022 New York State Empire Award, the 2022 Peekskill NAACP Distinguished Service Award, and the 2022 Feeding Westchester Neighbor Service Award.

She has served on numerous boards, committees, and commissions. Currently, Ms. Knox serves on the Executive Committee of the Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce and the Westchester County Community Development Advisory Group. She is a member of the Policy Advisory Committee for "Welcome Home Westchester!" and is on the NewYork-Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital Community Advisory Board.

Ms. Knox holds a Juris Doctor from CUNY Law School and a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Sarah Lawrence College.

***Cynthia B. Knox, Esq., was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Pete Harckham***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Maryanne Koepper*

Maryanne Koepper is a lifelong Long Island resident, public servant, and community leader whose life reflects resilience, compassion, and commitment to others.

Born to immigrant parents, Ms. Koepper is a proud first-generation Italian American, raised in a hardworking family rooted in their local restaurant business. At just 16 years old, Ms. Koepper faced the devastating loss of her father to aggressive brain cancer. As the eldest of three children, she became a pillar of strength, helping her mother sustain their household and family business during an extraordinarily difficult time.

Ms. Koepper was the first in her family to attend college, earning a Bachelor of Science from St. Joseph's University in Patchogue, where she met her husband of 27 years. Inspired by her family's entrepreneurial spirit, she opened and successfully operated a full-service catering facility throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. After selling the business, Ms. Koepper continued her professional journey at Stony Brook University as a Quad Operations Manager.

Following the birth of her daughter, Ms. Koepper chose to dedicate herself to raising her family before returning to public service with the Town of Brookhaven's Planning Department. Her dedication led to her promotion to the Senior Citizen Division's Nutrition Center, where she served as a Senior Citizen Aide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Koepper was an essential worker, ensuring vulnerable seniors received meals, support, and connection during isolation and uncertainty.

Recognizing her leadership and compassion, the Town of Brookhaven later recruited Ms. Koepper to rebuild and lead the in-person nutrition program at the Rose Caracappa Center in Mount Sinai. Under her leadership, the congregate program now serves more than 100 seniors daily, and the Meals on Wheels program delivers vital services to over 90 homebound residents weekly. Ms. Koepper treats every senior with dignity and care, viewing them as extended family.

A 26-year resident of Mount Sinai, she is an active civic leader, serving in the Mount Sinai Civic Association and the Mount Sinai Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary and supporting local schools and arts programs.

Ms. Koepper's lifelong dedication to family, community, and service makes her a truly deserving nominee for the Women of Distinction honor.

***Maryanne Koepper was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Anthony H. Palumbo***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Angie Davis Leveritte*

Angie Davis Leveritte is a recently retired New York State Court Officer - Sergeant, with a distinguished career spanning over 35 years in law enforcement.

A native of Western New York, Ms. Leveritte spent the last 18 years of her career assigned to Judicial Security in Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Lockport.

In 2017, Ms. Leveritte became the first African American female Court Officer promoted to the rank of Sergeant in the City of Buffalo and Western New York. Until her retirement in 2025, she remained the only woman of color in a court security supervisory role in the 8th Judicial District.

A dedicated public servant, Ms. Leveritte spent her career protecting and serving others. She was the first Court Officer to be appointed as a Co-Chair for the 8th Judicial District Local Gender Fairness Committee, and she served on the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission - Advisory Group. She was a member of the 8th Judicial District community outreach team, speaking at job fairs, churches, schools, and social events. Ms. Leveritte led the recruitment team for the 2020 Court Officer Exam and mentored criminal justice students, inspiring the next generation of law enforcement professionals.

In her community, she continues to serve as President of the Norfolk Ave. Block Club #1 and Vice President of the Metro CDC Delavan Grider Community Center board. She advocates for safe infrastructure and for a better quality of life in the Delavan Grider community and on Buffalo's East Side.

Of the many accolades Ms. Leveritte has received, she is most proud of the 2020 Women in Law Award. Her name is now engraved on a plaque at the Dolores Denman Court House, Appellate Division, Fourth Department in Rochester, New York, a permanent testament to her life's work.

Ms. Leveritte is married and has two children.

***Angie Davis Leveritte was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator April N.M. Baskin***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Florence Lorenz*

Florence Lorenz has exemplified compassion and a genuine willingness to help those in need. As Executive Director of Community Action of Greene County for the past quarter-century, Ms. Lorenz has dedicated herself to alleviating the suffering of her neighbors, improving their lives, helping them achieve their full potential, and setting them on the path to self-sufficiency.

A lifelong resident of Greene County, Ms. Lorenz has spent her career serving those who lack some of life's necessities, including food, shelter, and safety. Instead of turning away, Ms. Lorenz has consistently stepped forward to help, and in doing so, she has fostered a culture of dignity and respect for individuals seeking assistance.

Under Ms. Lorenz's skilled leadership, Community Action of Greene County offers programs that address housing instability and food insecurity, provide energy assistance and emergency services, and support victims of domestic violence. Because of the organization Ms. Lorenz leads, a family struggling to keep food on the table can turn to Community Action of Greene County's food pantry, a woman living in fear of her abuser can find support and protection, and an individual without permanent housing can achieve stability.

Beyond her efforts at Community Action of Greene County, Ms. Lorenz goes above and beyond as she works to strengthen the larger community. She is Vice Chair of the Greene County Rural Health Network, which advances public health efforts, awareness campaigns, and youth programming.

Ms. Lorenz serves on the Columbia-Greene Workforce Development Board, contributing to regional workforce strategy. For all she has done for Greene County, Ms. Lorenz was recently named the 2026 Suzanne Oldakowski Women of Excellence Award recipient by the Greene County Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Lorenz is a true humanitarian whose influence in Greene County over the past 25 years is immeasurable. Because of her ethical and caring leadership, thousands of people are living safer, healthier, and more secure lives.

***Florence Lorenz was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Michelle Hinchey***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Joyce Love*

Joyce Love has spent her life serving the people of Albany, particularly the neighborhood where she was born and raised. A lifelong resident of Arbor Hill, she has long been known as a steady, familiar presence in the community.

Much like her late mother, Grace, and her late father, Jewel Love, she grew up understanding the importance of community, responsibility, and looking out for your neighbors.

As Councilwoman for the Third Ward on the Albany Common Council, Ms. Love became known for her tireless work on behalf of the residents she represented. Her approach to public service has always been hands-on. Whether it meant helping residents navigate City services, advocating for neighborhood resources, or simply being present at community events and meetings, she made it a point to stay closely connected to the people she served.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Love worked to help ensure residents in her community were able to access vaccines and reliable health information at a time when many were struggling to find both. Much of Ms. Love's impact, however, has come through the everyday acts of service that rarely make headlines. Over the years, she has organized and participated in drives to distribute coats, school supplies, and holiday toys to neighborhood children. Because of this constant presence, many people in Albany know her simply as someone who never stops working for her community.

Even after retirement, Ms. Love remained active, working with the Arbor Hill Community Center and later serving as a school bus driver for Durham School Services. She also worked with the Albany County Department of Social Services.

Her involvement in local civic life extends back decades. Ms. Love served for more than 40 years as an Albany County Democratic Committee member and served as a Democratic State Committeewoman, helping strengthen grassroots participation in the political process.

Outside of her public roles, Ms. Love is known for the personal touches that make her memorable to so many people. She is a proud mother and grandmother, an excellent cook whose meals are well-known among friends and neighbors, and someone with a distinctive sense of style that reflects her vibrant personality. She is truly one-of-a-kind.

In recognition of her decades of service and unwavering commitment to the Albany community, Ms. Love is being honored for a lifetime spent giving back to the City she has always called home.

***Joyce Love was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Patricia A. Fahy***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Stephanie Marquesano, Esq.*

Stephanie Marquesano, Esq., an Ardsley, New York resident, is an advocate, educator, and innovator in the field of co-occurring disorders (COD), the intersection of mental health challenges and substance misuse.

After the death of her 19-year-old son, Harris, due to an accidental overdose in 2013, Ms. Marquesano founded The Harris Project Inc., the only nonprofit in the United States dedicated to developing a system of care to better serve individuals with or at risk of developing COD. Through her work, she advances evidence-based, integrated treatment models like Encompass. She also created CODA (Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness), a peer-led prevention initiative that educates, empowers and connects youth, families and communities to critical resources.

Ms. Marquesano co-chairs the Westchester County Co-Occurring System of Care Committee and previously served on the New York State Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board, where she championed innovative funding strategies to address COD. She helped create the first COD prevention curriculum in collaboration with the Partnership to End Addiction, Westchester County, key coalitions, school districts and faith leaders supported by local opioid settlement funds. She also helps coordinate a multiyear federal Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant that expands access to integrated treatment for young people and their families using Encompass and the Invitation to Change approach.

Ms. Marquesano consults with states and communities nationwide, including as a SAMHSA-designated consultant for the Opioid Response Network, providing technical assistance and training to expand access to integrated care.

Through federal and State grants, Ms. Marquesano's work has expanded access to evidence-based, integrated treatment and family support in Westchester County. The Harris Project's award-winning campaign continues to shift public perception and inspire changes nationwide.

Her work includes groundbreaking public awareness efforts, such as the award-winning "You Don't Know The Half Of It" campaign developed with Havas New York, which has received more than 40 national and international awards for its impactful messaging.

A graduate of Brooklyn College with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Public Communication and a Juris Doctor from New York University School of Law, Ms. Marquesano's leadership continues to reshape prevention, treatment and recovery across the continuum.

***Stephanie Marquesano, Esq., was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins,  
President Pro Tempore and NYS Senate Majority Leader***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Valerie S. Mason, Esq.*

Valerie S. Mason, Esq., has dedicated her time and talents to supporting institutions that strengthen the lives of women, families, and communities across New York City.

A native New Yorker born and raised in Astoria, Queens, Ms. Mason's leadership has always been rooted in service — to her profession, her community, and the city she has proudly called home her entire life.

A graduate of New York City public schools, Ms. Mason earned her undergraduate degree from Barnard College and her law degree from Duke University. She is a wife, mother, and longtime Upper East Side resident who is actively engaged in neighborhood and faith-based organizations, including service as a founding member and current President of the East 72nd Street Neighborhood Association and a former Trustee of The Brick Presbyterian Church. Ms. Mason is also a member of the Women's Committee of the Central Park Conservancy and New York Junior League.

Ms. Mason is a partner in the Banking and Finance Department at Otterbourg P.C., where she serves as Chair of the firm's Lender Finance group. In this role, she advises some of the Nation's largest financial institutions in complex financing transactions. While Ms. Mason's professional accomplishments are significant, her commitment to civic engagement and nonprofit leadership is equally profound.

For over two decades, she has been deeply involved in criminal justice reform through her service with the Women's Prison Association, one of the Nation's oldest organizations dedicated to supporting women impacted by the criminal justice system and their families. Ms. Mason previously served as President of the organization's Board of Directors and currently serves as Chair of its Development Committee.

Through this work, Ms. Mason has developed a deep appreciation for the role of thoughtful governance in driving meaningful community change — a perspective she brings to her civic leadership. She is currently serving her third successive term as Chairperson of Manhattan Community Board 8, which encompasses the Upper East Side of Manhattan and Roosevelt Island, guiding the Board through complex policy issues with clarity and care.

Ms. Mason lives her values: civic responsibility, dedication to mentoring women, unwavering commitment to service, and meaningful impact.

***Valerie S. Mason, Esq., was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Liz Krueger***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Fabayo McIntosh*

Fabayo McIntosh is the Superintendent of Community School District 16 in Brooklyn, where she leads with a deep commitment to equity, excellence, and community.

A proud product of the community she now serves, Ms. McIntosh has returned to District 16 as a former student, teacher, Founding Principal, Deputy Superintendent, and now Superintendent, bringing a full-circle perspective grounded in both lived experience and instructional leadership.

As Superintendent, Ms. McIntosh is focused on strengthening teaching and learning across the district, with a strong emphasis on literacy, student engagement, and college and career readiness. She leads the implementation of NYC Reads and advances a coherent instructional vision through the district's ROOTS framework: Real-Time Assessment, Organized Teacher Teams, Ongoing MTSS, Targeted SEL + Professional Development, and Strategic Instructional Leadership. Her work centers on ensuring that every classroom delivers rigorous, high-quality instruction and that all students are prepared for success beyond graduation.

Ms. McIntosh is known for her ability to build strong systems while keeping people at the center of the work. She prioritizes developing leaders, supporting teachers, and creating the conditions for schools to thrive.

Under Ms. McIntosh's leadership, District 16 is strengthening instructional coherence, deepening data-driven practices, and fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Grounded in her roots in Bedford–Stuyvesant, Ms. McIntosh leads with authenticity, purpose, and a deep belief in the potential of every child. She is committed to working in partnership with families, educators, and the community to ensure that all students have access to opportunity, excellence, and a future full of possibility.

Ms. McIntosh leads with pride, built in Bed-Stuy and rooted in excellence.

***Fabayo McIntosh was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jabari Brisport***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Jennifer McNamara, Esq.*

In 2012, Jennifer McNamara, Esq., was appointed as the first female Director of Labor Relations for Suffolk County. Currently, she serves in the County Executive's Office, where she supervises Labor Relations, County Executive Payroll, and Human Resources.

Ms. McNamara spent her early career working for New York City as Advisory Counsel to the New York City Ethics Board and then as Managing Attorney for the Law Enforcement Bureau for the New York City Commission on Human Rights. She briefly worked in private practice prior to joining the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office in June 2004, where she focused mainly on discrimination defense litigation in federal courts.

Ms. McNamara met her husband, John McNamara, a New York City firefighter, in September 2000. In September 2001, John responded to the attacks on the World Trade Center, spending over 500 hours digging through the pile. In 2006, when Ms. McNamara was four months pregnant with her son, Jack, John was diagnosed with 9/11-related cancer. Ms. McNamara continued to work and take care of John as his illness progressed. The Blue Point community rallied to support them until his passing in August 2009.

In 2010, Ms. McNamara formed the FDNY Johnny Mac Foundation in memory of her husband to fulfill his wish of having a community center in Blue Point and support 9/11 first responders. Since its creation, the Foundation has raised thousands of dollars to assist those in need. The Foundation has donated to cancer-related individuals and causes, other FDNY family foundations, and local charities. In partnership with the Bayport-Blue Point Library, the Foundation, along with Ms. McNamara and her son, was able to open the Johnny Mac Teen Room in John's memory.

Ms. McNamara has been a longtime advocate for 9/11 first responders since her husband's passing and continues to keep her promise to never let anyone forget who he was or how he died. One of her proudest accomplishments was aiding in the passage of a bill to provide "legacy credits" on the FDNY exam to children of deceased 9/11 first responders.

Ms. McNamara represents the best of our community, and it is an honor to recognize her professional, personal, and charitable achievements.

***Jennifer McNamara, Esq., was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Dean Murray***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Ngozëka Onwualu*

Ngozëka Onwualu is an Agent and Financial Professional with New York Life Insurance Company, where she focuses on financial literacy and mentorship.

She is passionate about empowering individuals and encouraging young people to recognize their strengths as they pursue higher education and career opportunities.

A dedicated humanitarian and community leader, Ms. Onwualu serves as President of the Rosedale Lions Club. Throughout her tenure, her leadership roles have included Secretary, Treasurer, and Media Director. She has led numerous community-based initiatives, including health fairs at Roy Wilkins and Brookville Parks and the "Super (7) Symposium Series," addressing important public health issues such as diabetes awareness, cancer screenings, mental health, and heart disease.

Ms. Onwualu was born in Brooklyn, New York and raised in New York City by her loving parents, who instilled in her a strong cultural and faith-based foundation rooted in Catholicism. She attended private Catholic schools in Nigeria, including a private boarding high school in West Africa, where she was exposed to diverse cultures and ethnicities. These experiences helped shape her curiosity about the world and inspired her lifelong passion for education, travel, and community engagement.

During her time in Nigeria, Ms. Onwualu developed an appreciation for leadership, debate, and the performing arts. As Social Director at her high school, she successfully encouraged administrators to fund a trip for 25 students to participate in a regional debate and cultural enrichment competition nearly 520 miles away, helping her team bring home a victory for their school.

Ms. Onwualu returned to the United States to pursue higher education at York College of the City University of New York, where she went on to earn a Bachelor's degree in Human Relations in 1997.

In 1999, Ms. Onwualu graduated from the New York City Department of Correction Academy and began serving as a Correctional Officer in the capacity of a Control Room Officer. Her professionalism and sound judgment earned recognition from the City of New York in 2002.

While working in corrections, Ms. Onwualu felt a strong calling toward ministry and she became actively involved with Empowerment Temple A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, Maryland, where she later served as a Worship Leader.

Through her lifelong leadership, service, and commitment to empowering others, Ms. Onwualu continues to uplift and strengthen the communities she serves and beyond.

***Ngozëka Onwualu was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator James Sanders Jr.***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Debbie-Ann Paige*

Debbie-Ann Paige is a public historian, genealogist, and educator specializing in local African American history.

Ms. Paige co-founded the Staten Island Chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) and the Northeast Corridor Freedom Network (NECFN), and she is an adjunct lecturer at the College of Staten Island.

She actively serves on various committees and projects, such as the Strategic Planning and Program Committees of AAHGS, the NY & NJ Middle Passage Port Markers Project, and Collections Committees for both the Staten Island Museum and Historic Richmond Town.

Ms. Paige is working on several local history projects, including "American Graveyard" and documentary films "Declaration of Independence, Civics, and Staten Island" and "Witness My Hand" with Historic Richmond Town. She has also worked on "Taking Care: The Black Angels of Sea View Hospital," the Access, Collaboration and Equity in Genealogy (ACEGen) initiative, "Women of the Nation Arise!" and "Farm to City" with the Staten Island Museum, and "In Pursuit of Freedom" with the Center for Brooklyn History.

Ms. Paige established the Louis Napoleon House as a site with the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom on behalf of the Sandy Ground Historical Society.

She created the Staten Island African American Heritage Tour app, a digital trail of people and places significant to Black history on Staten Island. It is currently being expanded as a web portal with the Staten Island Museum.

Ms. Paige has showcased her skills as a historical interpreter on various acclaimed television programs such as "Secrets of New York," WITF "Toward Racial Justice: Tracing Family History," and the PBS shows "Metrofocus: Juneteenth" and "Treasures of New York: Snug Harbor."

Additionally, she has been featured as a guest on popular podcasts, including "Speak on It," "Reality Check," "Site Unseen," "Talk Ain't Cheap," and "All Things Considered."

Ms. Paige holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Studies from Southern New Hampshire University and both a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts in History from the College of Staten Island, CUNY. She is currently working toward a Doctor of Education in Community-Based Leadership at the College of Staten Island.

***Debbie-Ann Paige was selected as a 2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Carla Palumbo*

Carla Palumbo has worked tirelessly to ensure the availability of competent civil legal services to the poor and disenfranchised. For over four decades, her staunch advocacy and drive have had a considerable impact in her community.

In 2014, after 30 years of service with The Legal Aid Society of Rochester (LASROC), Ms. Palumbo was elevated to President and Chief Executive Officer. Prior to that, she served in numerous positions, including Chief Operating Officer, Director, Civil Division, Program Director, and Civil Program Staff Attorney. She was responsible for developing and managing the innovative Domestic Violence Program, which was at the forefront of raising awareness and providing representation for survivors.

Ms. Palumbo was instrumental in developing other LASROC programs, including the Housing Unit, Elder Law Unit, Limited Means Program, Immigration Program, Child Support/Domestic Relations Program, and the Hispanic Outreach Program. She has trained and supervised attorneys along with staff, and she provided direct representation of clients in matrimonial and other family law matters.

She was a key collaborator in the creation of The Telesca Center for Justice, a revolutionary model that unites LASROC, Empire Justice Center, JustCause, and Legal Assistance of Western NY in one building and continues to develop ongoing collaborations to ensure increased access to justice in the community.

Ms. Palumbo has devoted her time and talents to serving in other leadership positions. She was a member of the Rochester City Council from 2007 to 2015, serving as Chair of the Neighborhood and Business Development Committee. She was a member of the Monroe County Legislature from 2001 to 2007 and served as Minority Leader. Currently, Ms. Palumbo is Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of Monroe Community College.

A long-standing member of the New York State and Monroe County Bar Associations, Ms. Palumbo is the immediate Past President of the New York Bar Foundation. She also served as the Co-Chair of the Board of Directors of the New York Legal Services Coalition, a not-for-profit collaboration of civil legal services providers ensuring fairness for all in the judicial system.

While Ms. Palumbo plans to retire at the end of 2026, she continues to remain strong with passion and dedication in the pursuit of justice for her community and beyond.

***Carla Palumbo was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jeremy A. Cooney***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Heather Perkins*

Heather Perkins is a dedicated leader, community advocate, and proud resident of Andover, New York whose impact is felt across Allegany and into Steuben County. She has built both a meaningful career and a life centered on service, compassion, and leadership.

Currently, Ms. Perkins serves as Chief Operations Officer at The Arc Allegany-Steuben, where she is widely respected for her hands-on leadership style and unwavering commitment to those she serves. Beginning her career with Allegany Arc in 2003 as a Medicaid Service Coordinator, she steadily advanced through roles including Behavior Technician, Behavior Specialist, and Director for Behavioral Services before assuming her current position in 2023.

Ms. Perkins holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Master's degrees in both Psychology and Clinical Mental Health Counseling, specializing in crisis and trauma, equipping her with both the expertise and empathy that define her leadership. She also is a graduate of the Leadership Allegany program in the 2019 cohort.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Ms. Perkins is deeply engaged in her community. She serves as Vice President of the Andover Chamber of Commerce and holds multiple roles supporting the Andover Fire Department, including Secretary and active member. Ms. Perkins serves as Secretary for the Ladies Auxiliary, where she has received Member of the Year awards in 2019 and 2022. She is also involved in the Andover Sports Boosters, Fourth of July Committee, and previously contributed to the Andover Bicentennial Celebration Committee. Her volunteer efforts extend to supporting veterans, delivering meals to families in need, participating in community fundraisers, and assisting first responders through the Allegany County Critical Incident Stress Team.

Ms. Perkins's compassion is also reflected in her personal life. Together with her husband, Brian, she is raising two sons, Derek and Rogan, who are already following her example of service and generosity. Following the loss of her mother, she has become an advocate for organ donation, continuing to educate and inspire others.

An avid runner, Ms. Perkins frequently participates in races that benefit charitable causes. Whether in her career, her volunteerism, or her family life, she consistently leads with humility, kindness, and a genuine desire to make a difference.

***Heather Perkins was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Thomas F. O'Mara***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Tara Pfohl*

Tara Pfohl is an educator at Starpoint Central School District who has been battling breast cancer since 2013, but hasn't let it slow her down. She is described by many as generous, loyal, fierce, brave, courageous, and a force to be reckoned with.

The American Cancer Society recognized Ms. Pfohl as the 2025 Nationwide Spirit of Strides Strider of the Year for her continued dedication to Making Strides Against Breast Cancer of Buffalo. Since 2021, she has raised more than \$48,000 for the organization, earning the distinction of top individual fundraiser for three consecutive years. She has used her platform to promote, educate, inspire, and remind others that research, early detection, and community support are proven to save lives.

A release from the American Cancer Society stated, "Even while undergoing weekly chemotherapy, Tara continues to advocate for others, share ACS resources, and ensure no one facing breast cancer feels alone. Ms. Pfohl embodies what Making Strides is all about — turning her story into action and inspiring hundreds of others to join the fight to end breast cancer as we know it, for everyone."

Ms. Pfohl's battle with cancer has been a long one, and although she did go into remission following surgery and treatment early on, it did return as stage 4 metastatic breast cancer. Despite the diagnosis, she is still a highly dedicated first grade teacher at the Fricano Primary School in the Starpoint Central School District. Her colleagues will tell you that even if she has to be out for a day to receive chemotherapy or other treatments, she's back the next day, giving 110% to her students.

Throughout her battle with breast cancer, Ms. Pfohl's family and friends are the support network she has relied on. Her sister, Christa, has been a huge partner, consoling her and taking her to many appointments and treatments.

Ms. Pfohl grew up in Pendleton and is a graduate of Starpoint High School. She went on to attend the University at Buffalo, then Niagara University.

In her free time, Ms. Pfohl enjoys traveling with friends, listening to music (where her favorite quote, "No dress rehearsal. This is our life," by The Tragically Hip comes from), watching the Buffalo Bills, and getting lost in a good book.

She lives in Lockport with her dog, Willa.

***Tara Pfohl was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Robert G. Ort***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Jennifer Rodriguez*

Jennifer Rodriguez is a proud Queens native and the owner of Sweet Lil Sweets, a community-centered café and dessert shop.

As the owner of a small independent business, located at 102-12 101st Avenue in Ozone Park, Queens, Ms. Rodriguez was driven by her passion for baking and her love for her neighborhood. Eventually, she was able to turn her dream into reality by creating a welcoming space where residents can gather, connect, and enjoy freshly made desserts and coffee.

In her youth, Ms. Rodriguez had set her sights on a storefront, which was a pasta store across the street from her current location. It was so beautiful that, as a child, Ms. Rodriguez had looked upon that location for her future dream.

As time passed, Ms. Rodriguez became a mom and no longer thought about owning her own business as she navigated the joys and challenges of motherhood. Before opening her current storefront, Ms. Rodriguez baked from home for approximately 10 years, only taking it seriously after her divorce and realizing it was time to make money by applying her true talent.

Through hard work, perseverance, and a deep commitment to her community, Ms. Rodriguez has grown Sweet Lil Sweets into a cherished local destination known not only for its handcrafted sweets, but also for its warm and inviting atmosphere. As a small business owner, she takes pride in uplifting her neighborhood by supporting locals and creating opportunities for others to grow, connect, and feel safe.

Ms. Rodriguez's journey reflects the strength, resilience, and determination of women who lead with both heart and purpose, making a lasting impact in the very community she calls home.

***Jennifer Rodriguez was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr.***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Dorothy Siegel*

Dorothy Siegel's vocation — working for special education reform, especially inclusion — and her avocation — fighting for economic, political, and social justice — are two sides of the same equity coin.

Her political activism was sparked by her correspondence as a teenager in 1961 with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King suggested in a personal letter how she might organize people in her hometown on Long Island around civil rights issues. In college and graduate school, Ms. Siegel worked for various progressive candidates and civil rights causes. Her political activism crystallized in 1998 with the founding of the New York Working Families Party (WFP), to which she devoted considerable time and energy, and she was the WFP Treasurer from 2009 through 2020. The WFP organized people across the State and won many important issues, including higher minimum wage, paid family leave, criminal justice reforms, and ballot access.

After her 1989 election to a Brooklyn community school board, Ms. Siegel crafted a career in education research and advocacy. At New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy, she directed policy studies and evaluations such as school-based budgeting, advocated for special education reforms, and supported parent engagement efforts.

Her major focus over the years has been inclusion — bringing children with and without “disabilities” into the same classroom to learn together. Now, in part because of her work, most New York City schools “do” inclusion to some extent. Starting in 2000, Ms. Siegel collaborated with Professor Shirley Cohen of Hunter College and New York City Public Schools to establish a program featuring true inclusion for autistic students. Today, the ASD Nest Program serves about 2,500 autistic students at every grade level from K to 12 in 90 public schools across New York City. The Nest program is popular and successful, boasting a 97% high school graduation rate. The program is well-known across the Nation and is an international leader in education, with Denmark adopting it across the country.

Ms. Siegel is a graduate of Smith College, Yale School of Music, and New York University's Wagner School of Public Service. She has presented widely and has been published in various education journals.

*Dorothy Siegel was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Andrew S. Gounardes*





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Andrea Smith*

Andrea Smith is a passionate community advocate and North Country native dedicated to grassroots revitalization and resilient, people-centered community development.

Based in Morristown, New York, Ms. Smith works in the utility sector as an External Affairs Manager for National Grid. She partners with local leaders and residents to support community priorities and strengthen engagement around infrastructure and long-term planning.

Previously, Ms. Smith served the City of Ogdensburg as Director of Planning and Community Development and as Interim City Manager, helping advance local initiatives that improved day-to-day quality of life while positioning the community for sustainable growth.

A committed civic leader, Ms. Smith recently completed a nine-year term on the New York Planning Federation Board of Directors, contributing to statewide dialogue on planning practice, community stewardship, and local capacity-building. Her work centers on practical, locally driven solutions that mitigate climate impacts, preserve resources for future generations, and make communities healthier and more equitable.

Ms. Smith holds a Bachelor of Arts in Landscape Architecture and Master's degrees in Landscape Architecture and Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Tech — training that informs her collaborative approach to placemaking, public service, and long-term community resilience.

***Andrea Smith was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Mark Walczyk***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Kelly Smith*

Kelly Smith is the Director of Member Services for the Huntington Township Chamber of Commerce. She has been a driving force in bridging the gap between strategic resources and genuine human connection since 2020.

A lifelong resident of Huntington Station, Ms. Smith's work is fueled by a profound, deep-rooted passion for her hometown. She views her role not merely as an administrative position, but as a calling to help local businesses and professionals flourish through thoughtful, relationship-based networking and advocacy.

Ms. Smith's commitment to the Chamber is a natural evolution of a journey she began as a proactive member in 2015. Her dedication was recognized early on when she was honored as a recipient of the Celebrate Long Island's Young Professionals 30 Under 30 Award in 2017, a milestone that led to her appointment as Co-Chair of the Young Professionals Committee in 2019.

Ms. Smith's professional foundation is built on 15 years of service within the Aquatics Department at the Huntington YMCA. Rising to the role of Aquatic Director, she developed a lifelong commitment to accountability and community well-being that continues to guide her today. This background, paired with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Communications from the New York Institute of Technology, allows her to blend technical leadership with a unique ability to narrate local stories and engage meaningfully with diverse audiences.

A graduate of the Leadership Huntington Class of 2019, Ms. Smith currently channels her energy into several vital community pillars. She serves as President of the Rotary Club of Huntington and as Secretary of the Huntington Station Business Improvement District, while also working to ensure equity as a member of the Town of Huntington's Anti-Bias Task Force and the NAACP Huntington Branch. Her influence extends into regional development and education through her roles as the Co-Chair of the Millennial Leadership Coalition Long Island Chapter, Director of the Huntington Township Housing Coalition, an Advisory Council Member for Western Suffolk BOCES, and a dedicated member of 100 Women Who Care About Huntington.

Recently celebrated as a 2024 Suffolk County Irish American of Distinction and as a 2026 Tri-CYA Hall of Honor inductee, Ms. Smith finds her deepest fulfillment in the quiet, lasting impact of her work. Above all, her greatest joy is raising her daughter in the same Huntington community she is so proud to serve.

***Kelly Smith was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Mario R. Mattera***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Linda Smith*

Linda Smith began working at Pall Trinity in Cortland in 1987, where production workers were represented by UAW Local 1326. She quickly became active in the union, and during her 13 years there, she served in several leadership roles, including Union Steward, Chair of the Health and Safety Committee and Women's Committee, Union President, and member of the Negotiating Committee. Ms. Smith was a strong advocate for educating workers about workplace hazards and for improving safety conditions.

Through organizing around health and safety issues, the union successfully pushed for important changes. OSHA inspections resulted in significant safety improvements, and outside experts were brought in to evaluate indoor air quality and silica exposure. The union also worked with the CNY Occupational Health Clinical Center to help workers pursue compensation for illnesses caused by chemical exposure.

In 1995, Ms. Smith and leaders from two other UAW locals helped establish the Cortland Workers' Rights Board. Until it closed in 2004, the organization assisted hundreds of mostly low-wage, nonunion workers with issues such as wrongful termination, wage theft, discrimination, and workers' compensation claims while also providing free health and safety training.

Ms. Smith later worked with the Central New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health and Midstate COSH providing workplace safety training throughout the region. She also served as President of the Midstate Central Labor Council.

In 2004, Ms. Smith joined Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton's office and served as Chief of Staff until her retirement in 2017. Since 2019, she has also worked as a substitute teacher at Marathon Central High School. Today, Ms. Smith remains active in the Cortland County Democratic Committee, volunteers on political campaigns, and participates in Indivisible Cortland.

Ms. Smith grew up in Upstate New York as the oldest of nine children. Her upbringing in the 1960s and 1970s helped shape her strong sense of community and commitment to working families.

From her mother, Ms. Smith developed a love of cooking, sewing, and gardening. Her father, a dedicated union member, instilled in her the importance of having a voice in the workplace and using that voice to advocate for workers.

She graduated as valedictorian from Deposit Central School in 1970 and later attended SUNY Cortland, earning a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry in 1982.

In her spare time, Ms. Smith enjoys yoga, gardening, cooking, and preserving the food she grows.

***Linda Smith was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Lea Webb***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Susan Stetzer*

Susan Stetzer is a longtime public servant, a thoughtful leader, and a champion for the many diverse neighborhoods and communities on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Ms. Stetzer was born in Cleveland, Ohio and moved to New York after college to start her career in educational publishing. Soon after arriving, she became active locally in social justice and environmental issues. She was a founding member of the Coalition for a District Alternative, a Lower East Side political organization that became her home for activism. Ms. Stetzer felt that getting involved and taking action hyper-locally was the best way to make impactful change in her community that could be seen and felt by the residents. She also made a transition to the nonprofit world, working for Citizen Action and, later, political campaigns.

Ms. Stetzer was appointed to Manhattan Community Board 3 in 2000 and served as Chair of the Public Safety and Environment Committee. Following the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, Ms. Stetzer led the Board in the aftermath to organize the community and address environmental concerns.

As Chair of the Con Edison Subcommittee, Ms. Stetzer provided input on the closing of the Con Edison plant on East 38th Street and the relocation to 14th Street. As a result of her and the Community Board's advocacy, they successfully won \$3.75 million that they were able to award to local groups for environmental mitigation.

In 2004, Ms. Stetzer transitioned from Community Board member to Community Board District Manager. As District Manager, she has remained steadfast in her commitment to working for the most vulnerable, as she has done throughout her entire career.

Ms. Stetzer has received recognition from Asian Americans for Equality for her contributions to New York's immigrant communities, a Civilian Commendation Award from the New York Police Department, and recognition from the New York City Office of Emergency Management for her leadership in response to the 2015 Second Avenue explosion.

Ms. Stetzer's tremendous devotion, persistence, and fierce advocacy are widely known and admired throughout her community. Her work has left an indelible mark on the Lower East Side and beyond.

***Susan Stetzer was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Brian Kavanagh***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Patricia Still*

Patricia Still is a lifelong New Yorker whose extraordinary resilience, compassion, and decades of fearless leadership have made her a powerful force for advocacy, caregiving, and community service.

Ms. Still's activism has spanned generations and movements. Since the Vietnam War era, she has stood on the front lines of history, marching for civil rights, women's reproductive freedom, LGBTQ+ equality, peace, and humanitarian justice.

Her life changed forever in 1984 when, as a young mother, her husband suffered a devastating stroke, leaving her to raise their child while serving as a full-time caregiver to her chronically ill spouse. Faced with unimaginable hardship, Ms. Still met adversity not with retreat, but with strength, grace, and determination, transforming personal struggle into a lifelong mission to uplift others.

In 1988, Ms. Still became involved with the newly formed Well Spouse Foundation, now the Well Spouse Association, an organization dedicated to supporting partners of the chronically ill. She helped lead the organization's first New York support group for more than 20 years, offering guidance and solidarity to countless families in crisis. She later served on its board and, following her husband's passing in 1993, as Executive Director for four years, helping shape the organization into a national lifeline for caregivers across the country.

Ms. Still's advocacy soon expanded onto the national stage. She served on the boards of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers and the Families and Health Care Project of the United Hospital Fund, where she championed recognition, dignity, and resources for caregivers everywhere.

Ms. Still served as President of the Women's Organization of Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, held a seat on the national board of Women of Reform Judaism, and served as Executive Director of the Debbie Friedman Renewal of Spirit Foundation. Through each role, she inspired others with her vision, compassion, and unwavering commitment to service.

A proud Upper West Sider for more than 50 years, Ms. Still has also been a tireless advocate for tenants' rights and housing justice. Through her work with Tenants & Neighbors and the Rent Control Steering Committee, she partnered with Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal to advance reforms that made rent control laws fairer and more equitable for vulnerable New Yorkers.

Educated in drama at Ithaca College and Hofstra University, and later earning a certificate in Non-Profit Management from Columbia Business School, Ms. Still has devoted her life to lifting others, building community, and fighting for a more compassionate and just world.

Ms. Still's life is a testament to the power of perseverance, the strength of service, and the extraordinary impact one person can have when they dedicate themselves to others.

***Patricia Still was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Erik Bottcher***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Zeldy Stillerman*

Zeldy Stillerman serves as Co-Director of Chabad of Islip Township and is a true community leader. She has dedicated her life as an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, strengthening Jewish life through compassion, responsibility, and purposeful action.

Ms. Stillerman approaches service as a personal mission, guided by the principle of loving one's fellow as oneself and honoring the inherent dignity of every individual.

A leader of the South Shore Jewish Women's Circle, Ms. Stillerman creates spaces of meaningful learning, connection, and empowerment for women of all backgrounds and fosters a sense of shared purpose and belonging within the community.

Ms. Stillerman is the Founder and Director of JUDA Hebrew School, where she is loved by students and staff alike for her warmth, commitment, and hands-on leadership. She leads by example, investing personally in the growth and well-being of each child.

As a trusted guide to many, Ms. Stillerman provides steady support to families and individuals, translating care into consistent action. She personally prepares and provides meals each week to community members with care and dignity, reflecting a belief that service should strengthen, uplift, and connect.

Ms. Stillerman's work embodies the Lubavitcher Rebbe's vision of leadership rooted in unconditional love, personal responsibility, and unwavering dedication to building a stronger, more compassionate community — one Mitzvah at a time.

*Zeldy Stillerman was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Alexis Weik*





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Junko Takeda, PhD*

Junko Takeda, PhD, is a professor and Department Chair of History at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, where she has taught for 20 years.

In 2021, Professor Takeda became the first Asian American woman and woman of color to be promoted to the position of full-time professor in the Syracuse University History Department. She is also its first Asian American Chair.

Born to a Korean and Japanese mother, Professor Takeda is of Zainichi Korean and Japanese heritage. In 1979, she moved to the United States with her parents at the age of three. Both of her parents served as daycare teachers.

Professor Takeda grew up as an undocumented immigrant in the United States before gaining legal status. She and her family had to go through obstacles for over a decade, until 1986, when they were able to file for amnesty under President Ronald Reagan's new Immigration Reform Act. She became the first in her family to attend college and went on to achieve a Ph.D. at Stanford University, later becoming a prominent historian and professor.

Professor Takeda's research is focused on citizenship, globalization, revolutions, migration, displacement and disease in the early modern world. Currently, she is working on her third scholarly book and a memoir.

Much of Professor Takeda's time is spent on research, writing books, giving lectures and sharing her personal story with others. She also mentors and advocates for underrepresented students, particularly first-generation and undocumented students who, like she once did decades ago, need advice and encouragement.

Professor Takeda is a vocal advocate for Asian diasporic and Asian American students, staff, and faculty. She also advocates for first-generation, undocumented, DACA, DREAMER, visa-insecure, BIPOC, and other underrepresented and marginalized students.

In her spare time, Professor Takeda serves on the board of Hiscock Legal Aid, cares for her elderly father, and enjoys making mixed media art.

***Junko Takeda, PhD, was selected as  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Rachel May***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Linda Tarrant-Reid*

Linda Tarrant-Reid is an author, historian, freelance journalist, photographer and community advocate.

In 2024, Ms. Tarrant-Reid was appointed to the nine-member New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedies by President Pro Tempore and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. In 2022, Ms. Tarrant-Reid was appointed by Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and confirmed by the New York State Senate as Commissioner of the New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Commission for the Taconic Region. The region includes State parks and historic sites in Westchester, Dutchess, Putnam and Columbia counties.

Ms. Tarrant-Reid's advocacy work with New York State has elevated her commitment to preserving the history of those who have been erased and those who have been unheard. Although for most of her career, Ms. Tarrant-Reid focused on literary pursuits, she has turned her attention to urban farming, food justice and food insecurity. Ms. Tarrant-Reid has been the Garden Administrator for grow! Lincoln Park Community Garden since 2011. The garden was created to memorialize the 50th anniversary of the struggle by the parents and students to desegregate Lincoln Elementary School in 1961. The 10,000-square-foot urban farm is located on the former campus of the elementary school at Lincoln Park in the heart of the historic African American community in the Lincoln Avenue Corridor.

Ms. Tarrant-Reid's current project is The Lincoln Park Conservancy, Inc. The Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) with a mission to preserve, educate and celebrate the rich history of the Black community in New Rochelle and address food insecurity in marginalized and disadvantaged communities. She is the Executive Director of the Conservancy and has established The Lincoln Park Conservancy History & Culture Center in a community benefit space located in the Arts District in downtown New Rochelle.

Ms. Tarrant-Reid launched grow! Eat, a program that feeds the food-insecure in New Rochelle, in 2023. Currently, she is expanding the growing space for the grow! Eat program from 10,000 square feet to 22,000 square feet, with the addition of an 8,000-square-foot rooftop farm atop an 11-story apartment building and a 4,000-square-foot farm at the local Boys & Girls Club in New Rochelle.

***Linda Tarrant-Reid was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Nathalia Fernandez***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Luz Torres*

Luz Torres is a dedicated Community Health Advocate in the Outreach and Enrollment Department at Urban Health Plan (UHP), where she has proudly served the Bronx community for more than 25 years.

For the past 10 years, Ms. Torres has worked as a Consumer Health Assistance (CHA) advocate, helping patients understand and navigate complex health insurance systems. Throughout her career at UHP, she has also served as an Outreach Worker and a Facilitated Enroller. In these roles, Ms. Torres strengthened her commitment to ensuring community members have access to the healthcare coverage and resources they need. Prior to joining Urban Health Plan, she served as an Auxiliary Police Officer in the 41st Precinct, demonstrating her long-standing dedication to public service and community protection.

In her current role, Ms. Torres specializes in health insurance consumer advocacy, health insurance navigation and case assistance, community outreach, and education. She works one-on-one with patients to resolve health insurance issues, including billing disputes, denied claims, and coverage concerns. Ms. Torres advocates on behalf of patients to ensure they understand their rights within the healthcare system and have access to the care they deserve. She also educates community members about their health insurance benefits, cost-sharing protections, and the resources available through programs such as Medicaid, Managed Care, and Marketplace coverage. Through outreach efforts and direct patient support, Ms. Torres helps individuals and families feel confident navigating the healthcare system.

Ms. Torres has received specialized training through UHP. She is certified as a Navigator through the New York State of Health Marketplace and has completed Consumer Health Assistance program training. Her work has helped community members save over \$2 million in healthcare-related costs in the past year alone.

Born in Puerto Rico, Ms. Torres lives in the same community she serves and takes great pride in helping her neighbors access healthcare and support. As she often says, "I treat every patient the way I would treat my own mother — with compassion, patience, and a commitment to making sure they receive the care they deserve."

***Luz Torres was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Luis R. Sepúlveda***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Whitney Toussaint*

Whitney Toussaint currently serves as President of Community Education Council 30 (CEC30).

After moving to New York City in 2020, Ms. Toussaint quickly became involved in the community. She became President of CEC30 in August 2022, the first time a Black woman has served in the role.

During her tenure, Ms. Toussaint has supported educators, administrative staff, and the United Federation of Teachers. She has worked to ensure that CEC30 continues to involve the entire community, including marginalized voices, and cultivates an inclusive atmosphere for all families.

As President, Ms. Toussaint is a strong leader who has worked with principals to advocate for school needs and funding, including getting the Chancellor's office to visit Louis Armstrong Middle School to jump-start much-needed cafeteria improvements. She has advocated for policies that protect families detained by ICE and educational resources that support students with disabilities.

She has vowed to use her position to uplift the diverse community of Western Queens, advocate for non-English-speaking families, and elevate anti-racism best practices.

Ms. Toussaint's unwavering dedication to education, professional growth, and equality embodies the spirit of our community. She serves as an inspiration to countless New Yorkers and as an indelible part of the fabric of our State and City, and she is worthy of special distinction.

Ms. Toussaint is a proud alumna of HBCU Clark Atlanta University and is an active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

A proud parent, Ms. Toussaint has two sons who attend District 30 schools.

***Whitney Toussaint was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Michael Gianaris***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Dawn Valala*

Dawn Valala of Halfmoon is a successful small business owner who has dedicated her time to giving back to the community and making the Capital Region a better place by living the Rotary mission of “service above self.”

Ms. Valala has been a leader in the Capital Region business community and a small business owner for over 25 years. As the owner of Nite Owl Marketing in Clifton Park, Ms. Valala specializes in custom clothing and branded promotional products.

Previously, she owned and operated TuxeGo of Clifton Park.

Ms. Valala grew up in Schenectady and is a graduate of the former Mont Pleasant High School.

She enjoys being involved in the community and has been an active leader with the Schenectady City School District Educational Foundation, which raises funds for educational enrichment opportunities not otherwise available for students in the district.

Ms. Valala is a charter member and past President of Twin Bridges Rotary Club, a Paul Harris Fellow, and a member of its Gift of Life board, which provides lifesaving surgery for children in developing countries. She recently helped bring a child from Mongolia to the Capital Region for lifesaving surgery that they would not have been able to receive in their home country.

Ms. Valala was named to the prestigious Albany Business Review’s “40 Under 40” list.

Ms. Valala graduated from Siena College with a degree in finance and was honored with being placed on the Siena College Maddalone Wall of Success for graduates who have become successful entrepreneurs. She is a proud supporter of the Siena Saints basketball team.

Ms. Valala is a board member of the Mother Teresa Academy in Halfmoon and a member of the Southern Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, Saratoga Convention Bureau, and the Schenectady Ole Timers Baseball Club.

When asked why she is so dedicated to volunteering, Ms. Valala states, “I don’t really think about it. I just do it. Shouldn’t we try and help people!”

***Dawn Valala was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator James N. Tedisco***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Randi Weingarten*

Randi Weingarten is President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a union of 1.8 million members that includes teachers, paraprofessionals and school staff, higher education faculty and employees, nurses and healthcare professionals, early childhood educators, and local, State, and federal public employees. Since assuming the presidency in 2008, Ms. Weingarten has focused on strengthening public education, advancing professional respect for educators, and advocating for policies that support students, families, and working people.

Before leading the AFT, Ms. Weingarten served for 11 years as President of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), representing roughly 200,000 educators in the New York City public school system, as well as home childcare providers and workers in health, law, and education. During her tenure, she worked to improve teaching and learning conditions while expanding the union's role in shaping education policy.

At the national level, Ms. Weingarten has championed initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges facing public education and the teaching profession. She has mobilized educators and community partners across the country to advocate for stronger investment in public schools. She also promoted reforms focused on collaboration and continuous improvement.

Ms. Weingarten advanced the AFT's Quality Education Agenda, which emphasizes evidence-based policy, equity, sustainability, and scalability. Central to her approach is what she calls "solution-driven unionism," a philosophy that seeks practical solutions benefiting educators, students, and communities alike.

Under her leadership, the AFT has expanded its work in healthcare and higher education, representing 230,000 higher education faculty, staff, and graduate employees and becoming one of the Nation's largest unions of nurses and healthcare professionals.

Ms. Weingarten supported initiatives such as Share My Lesson, a free national resource of educator-created teaching materials, providing millions of free and low-cost books to children.

A graduate of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Ms. Weingarten began her career as a lawyer before entering education and union leadership. Born in 1957 and raised in Rockland County, New York, she now lives in the Inwood neighborhood of New York City.

***Randi Weingarten was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Robert Jackson***





# Women of DISTINCTION

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## HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Jennifer Carbone Zuccaro, MD*

Jennifer Carbone Zuccaro, MD, is an accomplished and highly successful medical professional.

A respected children's and cardiovascular health advocate, Dr. Zuccaro is a well-regarded community leader who strives to make Central New York and the Mohawk Valley a better place for all.

Dr. Zuccaro is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Golisano Children's Hospital at SUNY Upstate. She is board-certified in Pediatrics, Pediatric Critical Care and Pediatric Cardiology. Dr. Zuccaro is a recipient of the Pediatric Faculty Award, a recognition given to full-time faculty who represent the most positive attributes of a teacher and role model to medical residents.

A 1993 graduate of the University of Georgia, Dr. Zuccaro was also a college gymnast, as well as a leader and competitor on four SEC Championship teams and the record-breaking 1993 NCAA National Championship team.

Later, Dr. Zuccaro attended Emory University Medical School and served as Chief Resident at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas before earning a dual fellowship in Pediatric Cardiology and Pediatric Critical Care at UCLA Medical Center.

After the birth of her two daughters, Danielle and Sienna, Dr. Zuccaro and her husband, Rick, returned home to Oneida County.

Since then, Dr. Zuccaro has had a direct and positive impact and has supported a variety of charitable organizations and causes, including the American Heart Association, where she is the current President of the Mohawk Valley organization's Board of Directors; America's Greatest Heart Run and Walk; the Ride for Missing Children; Upstate Cancer Center; the Neighborhood Center, which offers a variety of community services; and The House of the Good Shepherd, a leading provider of treatment, education, and support services to the children and families.

Dr. Zuccaro and her husband, a very talented musician, have also donated instruments to local schools for their music programs.

Dr. Zuccaro resides in New Hartford with her husband and two daughters.

***Jennifer Carbone Zuccaro, MD, was selected as a  
2026 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Joseph A. Griffo***





## PREVIOUS HONOREES 1998

Belinda Alvarez-Groneman  
Mary Anderson  
Lois Andrascik  
Chris Bailey  
Susan Barbash  
Geri Barish  
Joan Barkley  
Sister Mairead Barrett  
Jeanine Bondi-Steinman  
Susan K. Brustmann  
Marie Burghard  
Joan Cashon  
Carol Cassell  
Sister Dolores Castellano  
Charlotte Conable  
Carol L. Constantino  
Margaret Dadd  
Jane D'Amico  
Aline Euler  
Ilene Flaum  
Mary Jane Fox  
Janice W. Gay  
Eileen Gentilcore  
Gloria Richardson Griffin  
Jane Hamburger  
Elizabeth Harvey  
Patricia A. Hickey  
Pamela C. Johnston  
Loretta Jones  
Katherine E. Keough

Natsue Kobayashi  
Joy Levy  
Barbara A. Manwaring  
Nancy Mariano  
Margaret McCaughey  
Carmen Montanez  
Dianne Sackett Nannery  
Sr. George Aquin O'Connor  
Lorraine Pace  
Mary Jane Pauling  
Mary Anne Pietrzykowski  
Jeanie D. Roberts  
Marie A. Russo  
Theresa Santmann  
Christine Conniff Sheahan  
Jean Sherlock  
Muriel Siebert  
Beverly Sills  
Laura Spalter  
Leontina Stern  
Maria A. Thomson  
Stephanie Edith VanAuken  
Mary Ann Varvaro  
Janet Walsh  
Frederica Warner  
Charlotte Watson  
Elaine Wick  
Patricia Willsea  
Doris Buckley Wolf



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 1999

Nan Ackerman  
Eileen Almquist  
Jean Argetsinger  
Juanita Lorraine Bass  
Dorothy Bavaro  
Sabina Rosemary Cardali  
Mary Ann Carey  
Maureen Clancy  
Sheila Cohen  
Gayle Cratty  
Ava Dorfman  
Nancy Duff  
Barbara Edwardsen  
Josie Fernandez  
Geri Fessler  
Jo Ann Fiorentino  
Carolyn Fish  
Connell Frazer  
Betty Slavicek Gastelua  
Regina Keller Gil  
Jane Golub  
Kathleen Granchelli  
Sister Audrey Harsen  
Eileen McKenna Hickey  
Roni Horowitz  
Donna DiSunno Iorio  
Joan Johnson  
Vicki Joshpe  
Frances Kayne  
Dr. Christine G. Khanna  
Naima Kradjian  
Nina Larrabee

Dr. Linda Leest  
Joan Hope MacNaughton  
Margaret Magnus  
Takako J. Michii  
Deborah Naybor  
Chloe Ann R. O'Neil  
Elizabeth Osborne  
Francis McMillan Parks  
Donna deLuca Periconi  
Irene M. Prazak  
Dorothy Reister  
Anne Reyen  
Ann Marie Rossi  
Deborah Running  
Carolyn Rush  
Lisa Marsh Ryerson  
Sandy Scaccia  
Mildred Scharf-Ehrenfeld  
Therese Schoeneck  
Charlotte Smallwood-Cook  
Shari Hall Smith  
Frances Sodrick  
Geraldine Spinella  
Sheila Strassburg  
Alana Sweeny  
Terry Troia  
Mary Kathleen Tucker  
Betty Cooper Wallerstein  
Lynn Westbrook  
Patricia Hill Williams  
Joanne Wisor  
Carolyn Wittreich



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2000

Laura Ahearn	Melissa Lahtinen-Penfield
Joie Anderson	Thelma P. Lally
Betty Angelino	Louise Levine
Lillian Barbash	Marlene Markoe-Boyd
Sarah Jane Bernhardt-Clifford	Eleanor McDonald
Judith S. Bloch	Karen Joy Miller
Patricia Brown	Marian Mullet
Melina Carnicelli	Anne Paolucci
Tammy Carnrike	Madeline Patterson
Jacqueline Carway	Tillie Peck
Sister Marie R. Castagnaro	Elizabeth Potts
Donna Chittenden	Frances Pratt
Nellie Coakley	Captain Priscilla
Dr. Mary DeRose	Ramirez-Lynch
Tamara Denysenko	Gertrude Rieur
Carol Sue Detweiler	Jean Robbins
Lynda Distler	Wilma Rogalin
Noel Donohue	Lynn Rosen
Eve Fertig	Sharon Saunders
Sister M. Bethany Fitzgerald	Lisa Savyon
Angela Forte	Joan Schumaker
Florence B. Fuller	Paula Sharf
Geraldine Futrell	Linnea Shaver
Ruth Finnegan Garner	Claire Shulman
Norma Gorman	Arlene Sitterly
Barbara Hadel	Mary Jane Smith
Joy Hansen	Dawn Sullivan
Lucille Helfat	Alyson Sweetser
Nikki Henkin	Cathryn Thomas
Sister Elizabeth Hill	Amy Torrey
Anne Humphrey	The Honorable Sandra L. Townes
Ann Irvin	Ellen Tuohey
Lisa Israel	Kathy Urschel
Arlene Johnston	Joanne VanZandt
Barbara Kearns	Georgia Verdier
Clara B. Kellner	Reba White Williams
Helen Kelly	Delores Cooper Kershaw



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2001

Crystal A. Abers  
A. Trudy Adell  
Heather Ross Benedict  
Phyllis Besch  
Dr. Helen Illick Breed  
Margaret Burch  
Buhrmaster (Coolman)  
Margaret Buzzell  
Elizabeth Cochrane  
Lucy F. Codella  
Dr. Vivian Cody  
Barbara Cohen  
Wendy Csoka  
Victoria DeVantier  
Patricia C. Donnelly  
Pat Finnerty  
Amy Fischetti  
Miriam M. E. Garcia  
Sister Rose Vincent Gleason  
Dr. Lois Goldsmith  
Betsy Harrison  
Susan Helsinger  
Pat Hieronymus  
Doris Hunter  
Deborah S. Johnson  
Jacqueline Keller  
Abby Kenigsberg  
Renee Krieger  
Carole LaPlante  
Margaret A. Leahy  
Patricia Lindi Linekin  
Catherine Linfoot  
Hon. Gaetan B. Lozito

Dottie MacVean  
Lucinda Sloan Mallen  
Susan Marino, RN  
Sister Theresa Martel  
Rev. Colette Matthews  
Claire McIntee  
Carol Naylor  
Angie Miller  
Gertrude Hess Parker  
Ann Petrus  
Frances Pizzola  
Wendy Powers  
Annie Rabbitt  
Chandler M. Ralph  
Victoria Rosenberg  
Helene Donlan Sacco  
Irene Scheid  
Roberta C. Schofield  
Carol Silva  
Bobbi Smith  
Cathy Stewart  
Vivian Street  
Dolores Thompson  
Dr. Mary Ridgway Tinker  
Belina Venuti  
Dr. Nora Volkow  
Nancy Wackstein  
Ethel L. Walker  
Shirley Waters  
Jill Way  
Harriet Weber  
Sister Martha Winum



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2002

Kathleen Barton  
Debbie Basile  
Nancy Bernheim  
Marilyn Bitterman  
Patricia Bodnar  
Andrea Clark Brown  
Prudence Carabine  
Margaret Carroll  
Fredrika Conway  
Judy Dagostino  
Margaret Requa DeFrancisco  
Rita DiMartino  
Kathryn R. Doolittle  
Anne DuPrey  
Laura Elliot-Engel  
Peg Ellsworth  
Madeleine Fitzgibbon  
Marguerite Flood  
Maude Frank  
Michelle Fratti  
Dr. Anne DuVal Frost  
Mimi Galgano  
Roberta Giordano  
Carol Gresser  
Rosemary Gunning  
Mary Pat Hancock  
Dr. Debra Handel  
Dr. Ruby Elinor Hare  
Violet Haufsk  
Dr. Evelyn Blöse Holman  
Donna A. Holt  
Mary Ellen Jones  
Patricia Knapp

Angela Koenig  
Lorraine Krup  
Mary Anne Krupsak  
Ursula LaMotte  
Gloria Lettow  
Carol Mahoney  
Nancy Manfredonia  
Marlene Marciniak  
Doreen Marks  
Ligia Mendoza  
Mary Holt Moore  
Nancy Naples  
Rosemary Nesbitt  
Theresa Pagano  
Eve Pawelski  
Judith Peckham  
Dr. Jana Pulkrabek  
Dr. Greta Rainsford  
Jean Raymond  
Zakia Robana  
Jill Rooney  
Dr. Stella Pandell Russell  
Janice L. Schaefer  
Joanne Shenandoah  
Susan Sherwood  
Rachel Spivey  
Dr. Susan Swain  
Barbara Wilcox Thuesen  
Linda Laursen Toscano  
Fanny Villarreal de Canavan  
Sister Vincent Marie Wilson  
Elizabeth L. Young



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2003

Beverly Anania  
Sheila Appel  
Dr. Asma Barlas  
Amalia V. Betanzo  
Cynthia Bianco  
Maggie Brooks  
Francine Brown  
Janet Madonia Calano  
Minerva Chinea  
Francine Cieri  
Karen Coleman  
Delaine Cook-Greene  
Joan Correale  
Carol Crews  
Melissa A. Croke  
Elizabeth Currier  
Lucille Cuttler  
Eva de La O  
Dr. Donna Denier  
Lee Gridley Dibble  
Maxine Dowler  
The Hon. Sandra J. Feuerstein  
The Hon. Patricia M. Filiberto  
Annette S. Foley  
Jane Fox  
Sister Monica Galligan  
Georgiana Gehret  
Barbara L. Germain  
Ann Marie Gianni  
Bertha Governale  
Priscilla Halagao  
Grace Hausmann  
Nancy Henry

Harlene Holzschuh  
Paula S. Howk  
Dolores Marie Hutton  
Cindy Intschert  
Carolyn James  
Stephanie Joyce Kahn  
Jean Kelly  
Susan Lacerte  
Gay Lenhard  
Elizabeth Letterese  
The Hon. Carol MacKenzie  
Nancy Marr  
Milagros Martinez  
Virginia E. Maurer  
Barbara B. Melvin  
Lynn Millane  
Rose V. Moroney  
Sister Margaret Murphy  
May Newburger  
Sister Kathleen Osbelt  
Janet Ottman  
Raquel Pachas  
Edith Palmer  
Vivian Papson  
Elizabeth Sanchez  
Gladys Serrano  
Leslie Stolzenfels  
Marianne Teta  
Cynthia Theiss  
Terri Thomson  
Sister Marguerite Torre  
Colleen Tyll  
Vivian Warren  
Fran Weisberg



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2004

Margaret Pataki  
Nancy L. E. Andrews  
Sarah Anker  
Joan Bachert  
Kathy Ballesteros  
Margaret C. Bandy  
Frances Barbieri  
Lisa Barile  
Marcella Beigel  
Rochelle Berger  
Judi Bosworth  
Mildred Browne  
Sheila Burrell  
Jaqueline P. Cady  
Brigitte Castellano  
Sister Anne P. Clancy  
Mary Ellen Clausen  
Elizabeth Colon  
Desiree M. Croteau  
Edith Davey  
Dr. Tammie Lee Demler  
Nora Detweiler  
June Douglas  
The Hon. Karen A. Drago  
Marcia Dugan  
Sherry Eaton  
Barbara Ellenberger  
Denise Frangipane  
Pearl Gentile  
Roberta A. Gerold  
Gladys Goesch  
Yvonne Goodhill  
Katherine Heaviside

Maud Haggstrom Kramer  
Deborah Kueber  
Judith Lang  
Ronnie W. Lawrence  
Marion Leonardo  
Mary E. Luckern  
Jacquelyn Maher-Brucia  
Sister Regina McAuley  
Joanne Meyer-Jendra  
Joyce E. Mulleedy  
Susan Murray-Tetz  
Marlene Norfolk  
RoseMarie Panio  
Barbara Picard  
The Hon. Maxine Postal  
Barbara Ernst Prey  
Dawn Rafalski-VanName  
Patti Call Riner  
Marcia Rocco  
Althea O. Roll  
The Hon. Lea Ruskin  
Gladys Santiago  
Anita Saunders  
Nancy Schwartz  
Eleanor Scott  
Carolyn Gifford Seymour  
Aileen Ortlip Shea  
Carolyn Short  
Louise K. Sira  
Beth Strong  
Ann Toglia  
Barbara N. Webber  
Gwendolyn Webber-McLeod



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2005

The Honorable Patricia K. McGee  
Catherine T. Andrews  
Mary Angerame  
Jolene Bender  
Dr. Helen Blanchard  
Sister Elaine Bohrer  
Diane Brown  
Angie M. Carpenter  
Eleanor Charwat  
Judith J. Chin  
Marilyn Ciancio  
R. Carol Coltrain  
Alice T. Cone  
Phyllis Connelly  
Mary L. Cotter  
Elizabeth W. Cree  
Angie M. Cullen  
Debrah A. DeLuke  
Carol L. Dunn  
Elizabeth Fipps  
Roseann Gentile  
Sandra Gerry  
Roberta A. Goldenberg  
Jo Greene  
Rosalyn Haber  
Sara Jean Hammel  
Susan R. Holliday  
Edith Hunter  
Roberta Keller  
Kate Kelly  
Ruth Kempisty  
Marianne Laine

Henrietta Magner  
Donna Matteson  
Dorothy M. McCloskey  
Virginia M. Greene Meehan  
Helen Meittinis  
Mary Beth Murphy  
Maxine Neal  
Arlene O'Dell  
Dr. Karen A. Oates  
Diana W. Petrosky  
Melissa Quimby  
Jennifer Rimmer  
Helen Woodward Rivas  
Francine Roland-King  
Rosemary E. Rose  
Susan Gordon Ryan  
Ruth Sayer  
Mary Schilb  
Dr. Ruth H. Scott  
Constance Wilmsen Stafford  
Patricia Standish  
Nada Tannen  
Marie N. Taver  
Deborah Tascone  
Sharen Trembath  
Peggy Vergis  
Donna M. Vitagliano  
Gail Volk  
Frances M. Walton  
Mary Ellen Whitney  
Karen B. Wolfson



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2006

Kathleen M. Balus  
Stacey Branchini  
Gertrude A. Butera  
Rita Cleary  
Shirley Connolly  
Andria De Lisle-Heath  
Benita "Be" Denmark  
Leah S. Dunaief  
Patricia Duo  
Denise Ford  
Joanna S. Fowler, Ph.D.  
Janice Grieshaber  
Lisa M. Heath  
Audrey Jacullo  
Carolina Minetto Lazzari  
Judith Limpert  
Maureen Lodes  
Amy J. Maniscalco  
Molly McMaster  
Alyse Middendorf

Ann Muro  
Marlene R. Papa  
Dr. Regina S. Peruggi  
Joyce Peisker Ratushny  
Mary Holmes Reid  
Cheryl Rogowski  
Susan C. Rounds  
Sister Ann Sakac  
Jill Salerno  
Michele Sedor  
Deborah F. Stanley  
Carolyn Stiffler  
Barbara J. Stuchinski  
Lana J. Taylor  
Linda G. Toohey  
Beverly Towers  
Joan Vogt  
Dorothy A. Wentland  
Gale E. Wolfe



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2007

Renee J. Abdou-Malta  
Neme Alperstein  
Stephanie Bail  
Corinne Brown  
Linda L. Cellini  
Maureen W. Chisholm  
Mary Lou Cummins  
Corinne DiSomma  
Nancy Donohue  
Irene Farley  
Judge Polly A. Hoye  
Rebecca P. Isseroff  
Elise Johnson-Schmidt  
Jessie Marvin Lazeroff  
Mary McDonald Mascott  
Karen Dawn McGuire  
Colonel Tracey E. Nicholson  
Edna Northrup  
Christine Pendergast  
Patrice Prusmack  
Nancy Timm-Bowen  
Gladys Walker

Shirley Abigail Adams  
Patricia Anthony  
Barbara Bedell  
Eleanor Brown  
Mary Chapin  
Katherine M. Clark  
Ruth Del Col  
Sr. Diana Dolce  
Nancy Duffy  
Betti Ford  
Paula Huntsman  
Dr. Charlene Jaffie  
Margaret Kiesel  
Linda Manfredi  
Donna M. McGregor  
Florence Meiselbach  
Angeline N. Joy Nielsen  
Mary Beth Palo  
Debbie Preston  
Jane Shaffer  
Suzanne Tingley



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2008

Ladan Alomar  
Jamie E. Bogenschutz  
Donna Boyle  
Pamela Carroad  
Lucinda Collier  
Helen Crosson  
Jeanne Donalty  
Marie E. Ficano, Ed.D.  
Linda M. Janczak  
Dr. Debra Karnasiewicz  
Dorine Kenney  
Donna Long  
Maureen Torrey Marshall  
Lillian Vitanza Ney, M.D.  
Mary Ellen Odell  
Kathleen M. Reilly  
Nancy Robbins  
Brenda Siegal  
Marcia White

Mary Lou Arangio  
Maureen Borzacchiello  
Patricia Burkhart  
Pauline Chu  
Delores S. Cross  
Cheryl Dinolfo  
Audrey Edelman  
Margaret Finnerty  
Dorothy Jennings  
Catherine Kelly  
Marion Blumenthal Lazan  
Susan Lucci  
Sandra Hays Mies  
Aida Y. Nicolaou  
Dr. Celine R. Paquette  
Sandra Rich  
Kathleen Roche  
Judy Driscoll Skillen  
Kristina M. Young



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2009

Inge Auerbacher  
Maclain Berhaupt  
Betty Braton  
Cindy Campbell  
Janice L. Charles  
The Hon. Una S.T. Clarke  
Betty Cooper Wallerstein  
Julie Dent  
Annette Esposito  
Sister Marcella Marie Garus  
Kathleen M. Jimino  
Eileen Kavanagh  
Victoria Langling  
Flora B. Leamer  
Joanne M. Mahoney  
Maria Markovics  
Valerie Muratori  
Laurel Parker West  
Barbara A. Poldino  
Elder Vanessa Scott  
Lois Taplin Bronz  
Carmen R. Velasquez  
Debbie Virga

Susan Barry Roden  
Elenora P. Bernard  
Connie Bruno  
Lucy Cecere  
Annie Chwiecko  
Joanne Conrad  
Gloria D'Amico  
Joanne Dicob  
Elizabeth Flynn  
Jackie Hinckley  
Ann Jones  
Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly  
Eileen La Ruffa  
Jill Levine  
Janet Malone  
Charlotte Miles  
Rosalie Norton  
Roseann Pignatelli Carotenuto  
Mary Rodgers Guettel  
Joyce E. Skinner  
Jacquiline Touba, Ph.D.  
Catherine Videtto  
Thomasina White



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2010

Muriel Allerton  
JoAnn T. Atlas  
The Hon. Jacqueline Grace Boyce  
Edie Carbone  
Mary Carroll Clavin  
Ilene Corina  
Rachel Lee Davis  
Katherine M. Doherty  
Alice J. Fiacco  
Eileen Frey  
Ada Grabowski, Ph.D.  
Dedra Grant-Wade  
Tricia Haggerty Wenz  
Helen Ann Henkel  
Dafny Joy Irizarry  
Mimi Pierre Johnson  
Lynn Kennison  
Anna Maria Lusins-McLachlan  
Mary-Howell Martens  
Ann Chambers Meagher  
Margaret B. Moore  
Peg Overdorf  
Jean Phelps, Ph.D.  
Terri Pouymari  
Chandler M. Ralph  
Lillian Rodriguez-Lopez  
Carol Ruane  
Victoria Schneps-Yunis  
Carol G. Simon  
Helen R. Worth

Diane Armeth  
Mary Walsh Boatfield  
Dolores Patterson Caldwell  
Linda Chiarenza  
Susan M. Cohen  
Joy Cousminer  
Andrea L. DeMeo  
Dr. Janice Emanuel-Bunn  
Rena Finkelstein  
Lisa A. Frisch  
Corinna Grant  
Aurelia Greene  
Cheryl Anne Hall  
Catherine McVay Hughes  
Paloma Izquierdo-Hernandez  
Carrie Kahn  
Peggy Liuzzi  
Kathy Marchione  
Kathleen Kilcommons McGowan  
Stephanie A. Miner  
Aissatou Ndao  
Jodie A. Perry  
Magaly Polo  
Carol Quirk  
Dr. Julie Ratner  
Olga Rovt  
Dr. Eileen Santiago  
Mary Silver  
Dee G. Vandenburg



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2011

Lori Bahnik  
Nicole Behrens  
Susan Boudreau  
Christa Caldwell  
Debbie Cuevas  
Elaine Delaney  
Ann E. Ellsworth  
Dr. Susan Fox  
Virginia Gallagher  
Mary Herlihy Gearan  
Karen Gordon  
Phyllis E. Gunther  
Grace Johnson  
Dr. Anne M. Kress  
Fredericka G. Mabon  
Barbara Medina  
Janet Miller  
Elissa Montanti  
Jeanne Mullgrav  
Mary Nelson  
Christine P'Simer  
Karen Y. Richmond  
Rossana Rosado  
Vicki Simons  
Gretchen Hurley Sprock  
Maria A. Thomson  
Karen Washington  
Kathleen Wojtaszek-Gariano

Helen Baran  
Carol Berry  
Wanda Jean Burris  
Virginia Clark  
Bonnie Daggett  
Gloria M. Dixon  
Lindsay Farrell  
Mathylde Frontus  
Diane C. Ganz  
Deirdre Glenn  
Elizabeth Gulotta  
Mary E. Holtz  
Debra Markell Kleinert  
Frances-Ann Lightsy  
Dr. Martha MacGuffie  
Elizabeth Miller  
Kate Miller  
Mary Morse  
Kelly Myers  
Judy Pepenella  
JoAnn Pushkin  
Beverly Roberts  
Indi L. Shelby  
Mary Spink  
Leslyn Stewart  
Millie Tomidy-Pepper  
Judi Whittaker



## PREVIOUS HONOREES 2012

LaVonne E. Ansari  
Angela Augugliaro  
Erin Bentivegna  
Debra Brawley  
Randi Bregman  
Serena Brothers-Mohamed  
Jane Brown  
Patricia T. Cataldi  
Dr. Mary Lane Cobb  
Marie Colvin  
The Honorable Ann C. Crowell  
Norma Cummings  
Ida D'Angelo  
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