



# *Women of* **DISTINCTION**

HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

*Melody R. Smith Johnson*

Melody R. Smith Johnson is an entrepreneur, ordained minister, servant leader, social activist, mentor, and a dedicated wife, mother, and grandmother.

In 2016, Ms. Johnson founded the Beverly L. Smith Empowerment Initiative, Inc. ("The Initiative") to honor her beloved mother's legacy. The Initiative provides mentorship, scholarships, and entrepreneurial coaching for young Black and Brown women all across the United States. To date, The Initiative has awarded \$80,000 in college scholarships and stewarded dozens of impactful mentorship connections.

In 2021, The Initiative launched the Affirmed Melanated Princess program (AMP) to "AMPup" the inherent beauty in our girls via Reading Hours for elementary-aged girls, a Rites of Passage series for middle and high school-aged girls, and a Graduation is the Goal college tour program. In 2020, Divine Coverings partnered with the Schweinfurth Art Center's Artisans to execute Ms. Johnson's vision for the community project, "My Hands Warm Your Heart - By Women, For Women"; blinged-up knitted scarves and outerwear were donated to the women served at the Auburn Rescue Mission. In 2021, The Initiative experienced a successful second year, and will expand to Syracuse, New York for a Central New York partnership to benefit their respective rescue missions and women's shelters.

Ms. Johnson sits on numerous boards and associations, including the Auburn Public Theater, the Harriet Tubman Center for Justice and Peace, the Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce, and the Minority Professional Association. She holds memberships with the NAACP, Black Wall Street, Cayuga County Democratic Committee, and The Society for Human Resources Management, and supports several local and national initiatives designed to create and increase access and equity for Black and Brown people.

Currently residing in Central New York, Ms. Johnson has chosen Auburn - like Harriet Tubman did - as the place she calls home. She is a graduate of Vassar College with a Bachelor's in Political Science, and Anchor Theological Seminary and Bible Institute (Th.M.), and is a member of the Class of 2023, Master of Science in Leadership and Management, at Keuka College.

For her outstanding service to her community, the Cayuga County Legislature proclaimed July 28, "Melody Smith Johnson Day."

***Melody R. Smith Johnson was selected as a  
2023 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Rachel May***

