



Women of DISTINCTION

HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Midge Thomas

Midge Thomas is a staunch advocate and active member of her Rochester community. To commemorate her late husband, civil rights activist Freddie Thomas, she established the Freddie Thomas Foundation to honor his legacy and passion to build a center for the people and community he loved. The Foundation is housed in a former Jewish Community Center, and the building is open and free for any community organizations to use.

Ms. Thomas is responsible for the idea behind and creation of the Jane Pittman Drinking Fountain. Her desire to do so came from a personal experience of being charged ten cents by a server in a nearby restaurant for water that should have been free; she was charged for the cup. In response to this prejudice, Ms. Thomas realized that there should be a place where everyone could obtain free water, so she and the Foundation discussed a plan to raise the money to build a fountain. In 1987, the Jane Pittman Drinking Fountain was born!

Community response was tremendous, with more than 7,000 people in attendance for the unveiling and dedication. The fountain is situated at the center of the city within the Liberty Pole Plaza. Today, anyone can see and drink from the fountain and recognize what it represents: humanity, liberty, and equality.

Throughout the year, Ms. Thomas has jazz musicians play outside her house, with the money collected during these performances donated to programs helping young musicians purchase their own instruments. She has hosted ballroom dance parties at the Lutheran Church for people to enjoy; guests dress up and enjoy great food, drinks and good music.

Ms. Thomas has received numerous awards and recognitions, including the National Jefferson Award and a recognition at the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Her advice for those who want to help their community is as follows: "Stop and listen to yourself to discover what your passion is...what really makes you happy, turns you on? If you stop and listen to yourself, you'll find out what makes you tick and what you're supposed to do."

***Midge Thomas was selected as a
2023 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Jeremy A. Cooney***

