

CHESTER N.A.A.C.P. NEWS

Newsletter of the Chester Branch of NAACP

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Summer 2007

For a Few Hours Old Differences Melt Away at Annual Awards Dinner

Charter school proponents and opponents, who only a couple of days previous have been engaged in a noisy exchange before the Education Empowerment Board, greet each other as old friends. People who in the coming months will be locked in a fierce election battle renew old ties. Differences of race and religion are irrelevant. And high school students and their parents cheer for their fellow students' triumphs. For a brief time at least, Chesterites and many outsiders who care about Chester remind themselves that, underneath it all, they are united in their devotion to this city and faith in its future.

It happened again on the evening of April 20, as it has year after year, at NAACP's Annual Awards Dinner. The dinner drew more than 600 attendees. As usual there were the unexpected bonuses, like the appearance of first-term Congressman Joe Sestak (whose district lies somewhere else for the most part) to add his congratulations.

A Reminder of a Different Time

Some honorees recalled a different Chester in the 1930s and 1940s, when they were not allowed to attend whites-only schools in their own neighborhoods but had to go out of their way to attend "colored" schools. It was the same story with regard to where you sat in the movie theaters and which restaurants would serve you.

It was a reminder to those of us who sometimes reminisce about the good old days in Old Chester that they weren't always so good. But April 20 was not about looking backward but rather for looking forward to a better future. And what better way to do that than to celebrate the achievements of some of our most promising high school seniors?

Youth Honorees

Nalia S. Carter, the Delores R. Shelton Youth Award, the Barbara Jackson-Williams Edmiston Award, and the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Delaware County Award.

Jameel Cleveland, the Willie Mae James Leake Memorial Award, the Quaker Scholarship (Chester Friends Meeting), and the Newlin P. Palmer Scholarship (Kiwanis Club of Chester).

Ommar Gonzalez-Nunez, the James E. Cottrell Youth Award; awards from Hardware & Supply of Chester, Inc., and Comcast.

Taahira Herring, the Cora Lee Dixon Youth Award and an award from the Technology Research Foundation.

Timothy L. Hudson, the Gwendolyn J. Foster Youth Award and awards from PECO and Kimberly Clark.

Donald Thomas, Jr., the John Lee Mathis Youth Award, the Anna M. Miller Youth Award, and awards from Comcast and the Technology Research Foundation.

Other Honorees

The Education Law Center (accepted on their behalf by Attorney Baruch Kintisch), the Judge Robert A. Wright Freedom Award.

Steven A. Fischer, Executive Director, Chester Housing Authority, the Androw Herman Webb Freedom Award.



U.S. Rep. Joe Sestak gets a warm welcome from Master of Ceremonies Elton Jolly at the 2007 Annual Awards Dinner

Ms. Kenya Harris, youth/community activist and entrepreneur, the George T. Raymond Freedom Award.

Ms. Hattie Bailey, retired educator and recruiter for Bennett College, the Louis Brown Freedom Award.

Ms. June D. Gaines, Chester-Upland Teacher of the Year, and **Pastor Curtis D. Morris**, Bethany Baptist Church, President's Awards.

Ms. Marguerite Watson, President, Jeffrey Manor Civic Association, the Ceil W. Bond Freedom Award.

James P. Balk, community activist, the John Shelton, Sr., Freedom Award.

Other honored guests, in addition to Congressman Joe Sestak, included Mayor Wendell Butler, State Representative Thaddeus Kirkland, Judge Norma L. Shapiro of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and Chester-Upland School District CEO Dr. Gloria Grantham.

Officers and Committee Chairs Chester Branch, NAACP

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**Congratulations to Executive Committee member
Irma Jacobs for receiving her Master's
in Education from Lincoln University!**

Education Notes

Dr. Grantham's Departure Jolts Beleaguered School District

NAACP Branch President **Darrell V. Jones** and others have called for major community input in the selection of a successor to Dr. Gloria Grantham, outgoing Superintendent and CEO of the Chester-Upland School District. Jones, a member of the search committee that helped in the selection of Dr. Grantham, noted that the last time around, the two finalists appeared at a community meeting before the final choice was made by the former Board of Control.

Dr. Grantham's resignation, a year before her three-year contract was due to end, has come just as the District was seeking to recover from a history of problems that kept it at the bottom among school districts in Pennsylvania. Her replacement will be named by the new state-appointed Education Empowerment Board.

Jones, on behalf of Chester NAACP, and **Charlie L. Warren II**, as head of Chester-Upland Parents, Students, and Community on the Move, have sent a letter to the Empowerment Board, urging that four at-large community representatives be on the Search Advisory Committee, instead of the single one the Board says it wants. There would also be a parent and a teacher representative on the committee. They proposed the following names for consideration: Willie DeJarnette, Program Director, Boys' and Girls' Club of Chester, and former elementary school principal; Darrell V. Jones, President, Chester Branch, NAACP, and former member, Superintendent Search Committee; Will Richan, Professor Emeritus, Temple University; and Rev. Bernice Warren, Pastor/Director, Chester Eastside Ministries.

As of this writing, the Empowerment Board has not responded. Board members have stressed the need for speedy action, ahead of the opening of the fall term, and their responsibility to make the final decision.

'Education and Employability' Is Theme of United Way Summit

The Chester Branch NAACP is among a wide range of organizations and interests to be represented at a "summit" meeting on education and employability, scheduled June 21-23. The project, focused specifically on the City of Chester, is being organized by the United Way of Southeast Delaware County.

Noting "the fact that our youth are not being prepared to compete effectively for job opportunities being created," the invitation letter goes on to say, "What is needed is for everyone to take a step back and seek a fresh approach that will lead to a long-term solution, not a quick fix."

Branch Vice President Ella McFarland will represent NAACP at the summit meeting.

Conference Speakers Stress Importance of Parental Role

Again and again during the day-long Conference on the State of Education in Pennsylvania, held June 2 on the campus of Cheyney University, speakers told of the need for strong parental support as a key to their children's educational success.

The conference was co-sponsored by the Media Branch NAACP and Cheyney University Chapter NAACP, in cooperation with the Delaware Valley Affiliate of the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

Jameel Cleveland and **Donald Thomas**, 2007 youth honorees at the Chester Branch's Annual Dinner Meeting (see Page 1), were panelists in the opening session. Both emphasized the important role their parents played in their success, as did other student speakers.

That theme was echoed throughout the day. More important than a child's economic and cultural background is parental involvement, said Julia Parker, a 30-year veteran teacher, who conducted one of the many workshops with her teacher daughter, Dr. Jill Parker-Clark.

It is not just a matter of parents' showing interest in their children's education, said several speakers. They must have high expectations and hold their children to them. And it is also important for parents to let the school know they are concerned - and not just when there are problems.

Education System's Responsibility

Not that anybody was ready to let the schools off the hook. The school system's responsibility was also stressed throughout the day. Instead of blaming each other for students' problems, schools and parents need to work together.

As one speaker ticked off qualities of a good school system - every child getting needed textbooks, books that are up-to-date, a staffed library, buildings with no leaks, no acoustical ceiling tiles missing, working bathrooms - participants had to ask themselves whether their own schools measured up. In many cases, as for example in Chester-Upland, the answer was no.

Act I, the tax proposal that was defeated in most school districts throughout the state, came in for criticism. "Switching to an income tax would have done nothing for poor school districts," said one speaker.

Strong membership support is what makes Chester NAACP a vital force in the community.

Have you renewed your membership?

Have you thought about becoming a life member? You can do it in annual installments over several years.

Call the Office today at 610-872-3664.