



PRESS RELEASE

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New Jersey NAACP Centennial Gala Honors Diverse and Amazing Civil Rights Advocates

The New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP will hold its 2009 Annual State Convention from Friday, September 18 through Sunday, September 20, 2009, at the Somerset Double Tree Hotel in Somerset, New Jersey. Celebrating the NAACP Centennial (1909 – 2009) and its theme, “NAACP 100 YEARS: BOLD DREAMS – BIG VICTORIES” the New Jersey Unit of America’s oldest and largest civil rights organization will host an Awards Gala on Saturday, September 19, 2009, at 7:30 PM. Tickets for the Centennial Gala are \$75.00 in advance, and \$100.00 at the door.

On the occasion of the NAACP Centennial, a large number of awards will be given to a diverse and amazing group of civil rights advocates in New Jersey. Recommended by NAACP Branches throughout the State, sixteen Centennial Civil Rights Awards will be presented to: Paul C. Harris, Sr. (posthumously); Rev. H. William Rutherford, Jr.; Dr. Sandra M. Butts; Colandrus “Kelly” Francis; Carolyn J. Holmes; Sandra “Sandy” Ousley; Tracey S. Cosby, Esq.; Reno O. Smith; Violet B. and McRistch Chappell, Sr.; Mayolyn Saunders; Eddiemae Livingston; Frankie Nicholson; Patricia Ann Sadler; Marguerite L. Brown Chambers; Emily Washington. A New Jersey NAACP Freedom Medal will be given to Trina Byrd. Many in the vanguard of New Jersey’s civil rights progress were invited to receive Centennial Community Leadership Awards. At press time, Rev. Dr. Gerald Lamont Thomas, Dr. George A. Pruitt, and Rev. Ralph McKinley Branch, Jr. had confirmed acceptance of their awards.

To obtain more extensive biographical narratives with photos, contact Janice Harris Jackson at 908-753-3920, or obeah125@aol.com. To purchase Gala tickets and to get more information about the Convention, contact the NJ State NAACP Planning Committee, Hon. Sharon Robinson-Briggs, Chair and A. Raiford Daniels, Co-chair, 908-753-7073 (voice), 908-753-7179 (fax), smr0905@aol.com, or 908-464-2697 (voice), rdaniels28@yahoo.com.

Trina Byrd, of Pleasantville, is receiving a *2009 Freedom Medal* from the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP for her service in bringing technology training programs to the community, as well as providing access to a variety of human services for families in Atlantic County. Her “T. Byrd Tech-mobile” was a school bus converted into a computer class room. In

2004, she received a charter for Tri-County Score which brings free business development counseling to Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland Counties. In 2000 and 2008, Ms. Byrd was the first woman and the first African American woman to run for Mayor in the City of Pleasantville.

Rev. Dr. Gerald Lamont Thomas is receiving a *Centennial Community Leadership Award* from the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP. Rev. Dr. Thomas is the Pastor of the Shiloh Baptist Church in Plainfield, N J. He was called to Shiloh in March 1997, becoming the eighth pastor at the church. In March of 2005, the Shiloh Baptist Church Family held its first worship service in their new \$13.2 million state of the art church edifice – a miracle achieved within two years and five months. Pastor Thomas’ leadership and vision for education and learning exist through SIBLE -- Shiloh Institute for Biblical Learning and Education – which serves as the Christian Education Ministry of the Church. Also, the doors of The Union County TEAMS Charter School opened in September 2005 to serve 180 students in grades K-8.

Dr. George A. Pruitt, President of Thomas Edison State College since 1982, will receive a Centennial Community Leadership Award. Non-traditionally aged African American students have benefitted greatly from the College’s innovative options for pursuing college degrees. Under Dr. Pruitt’s leadership, in 1997, Thomas Edison’s John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy was dedicated to the late N.J. Assemblyman’s outstanding record of public service. He was the nation's first African American chairman of an appropriations committee. Thomas Edison State College is headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey with other learning communities throughout the state.

Reverend Ralph McKinley Branch, Jr. is receiving one of the New Jersey State Conference of NAACP Centennial Community Leadership Awards. This young Pastor of Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church is continuing the Church’s tradition of providing God-centered leadership for the greater Newark community, as well as embarking on new relationships of faith with Africans in Diaspora.

Paul C. Harris, Sr. will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award* (posthumously). He was the Founding President of the Camden County East Branch from 1989 to 2000. A visionary civil rights leader, he helped found the Cherry Hill Minorities Civic Association, and he established the Branch’s summer youth leadership program that employs high school teens in both political and professional arenas. He was Chairman of the Deacon Board at Bethany Baptist Church in Lindenwold, New Jersey. The Camden County East NAACP gives an annual “Paul C. Harris, Sr. President’s Freedom Fighter Award,” and after his death in November 2008, the Branch also renamed its scholarship for him.

Rev. H. William Rutherford, Jr., will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. Rev. Rutherford is Past President of the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP, and he served as President of the Irvington NAACP for eighteen years. He has served as Pastor of the Greater New Point Baptist Church in Irvington, New Jersey for twenty-eight years. Continuing to provide courageous and highly principled leadership for the civil rights of all people, he led the NAACP to address issues of bias in hiring, as well as brutality with state and local law enforcement. Rev. Rutherford serves on the Governor's Disparity Commission on Discrimination in Employment and Contracting. A strong advocate for education, he was instrumental in getting the first African American Superintendent of Schools for the Irvington District.

Dr. Sandra M. Butts, from the Gloucester County Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. Dr. Butts is a distinguished educator, mentor and community activist in South Jersey. Dr. Butts has enhanced her professional service as both a classroom teacher and a guidance counselor with extraordinary community-strengthening activities, such as Secretary of both the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) at Gloucester County College and of the INROADS Parent Support Organization in Philadelphia. Dr. Butts has demonstrated that education is the most important civil right.

Colandus "Kelly" Francis, long-serving President of the Camden County NAACP Branch, will receive one of the *Centennial Civil Rights Awards*. Celebrating its 68th anniversary of continuous operation under their charter which was granted in 1941, Camden County was prominent among New Jersey's NAACP Branches in a coalition with several other organizations to lead the campaign that resulted in the abolition of the death penalty in the State of New Jersey. The Camden County NAACP has historically been a vigorous advocate for the Mount Laurel Doctrine which provides access to affordable housing beyond the urban centers.

Mrs. Carolyn J. Holmes, from the Vineland Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. Mrs. Holmes continues to struggle for civil rights and social justice for all as a champion of workers' rights. Carolyn J. Holmes first got involved with unionism during her employment in the garment industry. She joined AFSCME, becoming President of Local 2215, and was elected Executive Director/ President of AFSCME Council 71, which represents more than 6,000 state, county and municipal employees in South Jersey.

Sandra "Sandy" Ousley, from the Perth Amboy Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. The NAACP's centennial theme "Bold Dreams & Big Victories" describes perfectly both Sandy Ousley's tenacity and her undeniable passion for the fight to secure civil rights and social justice. She is the Perth Amboy Branch's strong advocate at meetings of the City Council and Caucus, and she hasn't missed a meeting in ten years. The resourceful Ms. Ousley has worked on many local and State NAACP Committees and Projects.

Tracey S. Cosby, Esq., from the Oranges and Maplewood Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. An attorney and a Municipal Court Judge in the Township of Irvington, Ms. Cosby is a Past- President of the Oranges and Maplewood Branch (1998-2002). One of the NAACP's oldest Branches, under Ms. Cosby's leadership, the Oranges and Maplewood NAACP involved the local community in the *Get Out The Vote Project*, and she initiated the Branch's first ACT-SO Team. Chair of the State NAACP Legal Redress Committee from 2002-2004, Ms. Cosby's civil rights work spans almost two decades.

Mrs. Emily Washington is a legendary civil rights pioneer in Plainfield, New Jersey. Mrs. Washington is a Past President of the Plainfield Branch NAACP, which she joined in 1939. A resident of Plainfield for 73-years, she continues her work for the community as President of the American Legion Auxiliary 219 and with the Mohawk Temple 191. Emily Washington founded the Harold G. Washington Scholarship Foundation as a tribute to her late husband's memory.

Marguerite L. Brown Chambers is Dean of the Branch Presidents in the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP having served as President of the Tri-City Branch since the early 1970's. Mrs. Chambers has been a member of the NAACP since her childhood. The Tri-City Branch of the NAACP provides civil rights advocacy for the communities of Summit, Vauxhall (Union), and Springfield. Very recently widowed by the loss of her partner in civil rights, the late Carlton C. Chambers, Marguerite L. Brown Chambers perseveres in a struggle for social justice that has developed leadership for her beloved NAACP beyond the Branch to the State and National levels.

Reno O. Smith, President of the Morris County Branch NAACP from 1983 – 2004, will receive one of the *Centennial Civil Rights Awards*. A distinguished educator, during her Presidency, the Branch confronted the Morris County School District about racial segregation, the over-classification of minorities, and the misuse of state funds intended for special education students. Many successful solutions for educational problems were found because of Reno's tireless efforts to protect our children's rights. She has also been among the civil rights vanguard in law enforcement, economic development, and the establishment of community-based scholarship programs. During decades of dedicated NAACP leadership, Reno Smith has maintained a progressive rapport with Morris County's corporate community.

Violet B. Chappell & McRistch Chappell, Sr., from the Mainland Pleasantville Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. Violet was President of the Branch from 2000- 2002, and McRistch was President from 2002 – 2006. During their years of leadership, the Mainland Pleasantville Branch reinvigorated its membership, and began to engage the community in many areas of civil rights. Violet and McRistch are members of the Pleasantville Civic Club, and they have served on the Executive Committee of the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP. They are very active in the South Jersey community.

Eddiemae Livingston, from the Newark Branch NAACP, is receiving a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. For more than five decades, Ms. Livingston has served the Newark Branch NAACP. A "Can Do Woman" is how Congressman Donald M. Payne described the beloved Eddiemae Livingston before the House in 1996. Ms. Livingston went to work for the City of Newark in 1947, and her tenure spanned 45-years in a variety of jobs. The community was pleased when the Mayor of Newark declared July 13, 2004, *Eddiemae Livingston Day*. In recent years, Ms. Livingston has been an active leader in her Tenants Association. In December 2008, at the NJ PAC Annual Kwanzaa Celebration, Eddiemae Livingston was honored for her commitment and continued service to the Newark Community during "A Tribute to the Elders: Honoring a Heritage."

Ms. Frankie Nicholson, from the Asbury Park/ Neptune Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. An active member of her NAACP Branch, Ms. Nicholson is a committed and dedicated educator in the Public Schools of Asbury Park, New Jersey. She provides dynamic leadership and coordination in the development of technology, social studies, and library curriculum for the District. Responsive to and involved in the needs of the community, Ms. Nicholson coaches and mentors new teachers.

Mayolyn Saunders, a 94-year-old member of the Trenton Branch NAACP, will receive a *Centennial Civil Rights Award*. Beginning her work as a civil rights activist in the late forties, this stalwart and dedicated member of the NAACP, led the fight to remove racial barriers from local department stores, hotels, and RKO Movie Theatres. She fought for Blacks to be hired by the downtown Trenton department stores and to be welcomed in the local hotels. A talented Millinery Designer, she eventually opened her own business, Doret Hats, the first Black business on West State Street in Trenton. Mayolyn Saunders -- in her quest to raise the awareness within the Black community about the talents and products of its own artists, designers, and musicians - - founded the Community Cultural Club in 1964. Over the years, she participated in many organizations dedicated to the development and growth of the cultural life within the community.

Patricia Ann Sadler, a Past-President of the New Brunswick Area Branch NAACP (2001 – 2006), will receive one of the *Centennial Civil Rights Awards*. A native of Mississippi and Texas, Patricia Sadler has been a New Jersey resident for over 29 years, during which time she has assisted seniors and many others with housing issues, and has provided tutoring and been instrumental in getting scholarship funding for high school students. She worked as a mediator to address issues between the inmates and the officers at the North Brunswick Workhouse correctional facility. She continues to work with the NAACP on the local and state level.

The New Jersey NAACP Youth and College Division will be meeting simultaneously with the adult group. Their 2009 Convention theme is, "Celebrating the Centennial- Developing the Next Generation of Civil Rights Leadership" They will feature several guest speakers including the Honorable Cory Booker, Mayor of Newark and Stefanie Brown, NAACP National Youth & College Director.