

Claire Haider speaks at the Empowerment Summit of Passaic County Women

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Claire Haider, Chairwoman of the Paterson, New Jersey Chapter of WFWP, was honored to give the keynote address at the Annual Empowerment Summit of the "Passaic County African American Women, Inc." Of course the WFWP headquarters staff wanted to support her. Our Vice President Katarina Connery came and honored the organization with a certificate for their outstanding work to empower women and collaboration with other local groups in Paterson for the past 20 years. WFWP New Jersey Chairwoman Denneze Nelson and nine other WFWP supporters attended as well to celebrate their 20th Anniversary with them.



We all were so very impressed with the first part of the program, a processional or a "cat walk," of the organization's officers and members. As each lady was entering the room she stopped and posed to get their photo taken. Each was introduced by name and a brief description of their role in the organization by their President, Ms. Bettye Peterson. Everyone was praised and thanked for their special contribution. \

Our WFWP group was then invited to join them for a group photo. To conclude this portion of the program, Mr. Bernard Hill sang "You are the wind beneath my wings," facing the front of the room where all the members of "Passaic County African American Women, Inc." had gathered around their president at the podium along with the WFWP contingent. As we returned to our seats, Hackensack, New Jersey Chairwoman Cynthia Nakai commented, "This was classy."

This year marks the 20th Anniversary Summit of "Passaic County African American Women, Inc. Three ladies who had made a difference in Patterson were given "Women of Distinction" awards which was the theme of this year's event. Claire had told us that each year "Passaic County African American Women, Inc." honors three people from the community for the work they do to improve the quality of the life in Patterson.

First, Mrs. Brenda Ionie McKoy was honored for her contribution in many different civic functions. Her focus is on assisting the elderly to secure benefits that are often hard to receive because of the complicated required application process. Her other focus is children, and it stems from her passion for education and student engagement. Even though she is retired she continues to ensure that many children have the opportunity for the best education possible, performing early assessment of the educational needs of the children in her community. She also offers her leadership skills to train and mentor young ladies in her church to be better prepared for life's demands.

Next, Mrs. Sharonda Roberts was chosen to receive the Women of Distinction award because of her passion to enrich and build the lives of women and lift up their self-worth. Her heart goes out especially to the homeless population and women recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. This is seen in her work as the founder of "Mature Sistah's" and collaborating with other local organizations to distribute everyday necessities, providing showers and clean clothes as well as counselling.



And finally, Mrs. Yvette Roland received the award for her excellent leadership working as the Chief of Staff for several Assembly men and women for more than 18 years. She is well known as someone who will go "the extra mile" to help her community to find solutions and support for urgent needs. She was introduced to us as a living testimony of her motto: "All things are possible if you put your faith and trust in God."

Another tradition at these annual events is to give scholarships to students from the community. This year a young man and young lady were chosen. When they were called to the front and introduced, I noticed that the organization had also reached out to local government officials to collect additional certificates of recognition for the awardees. So in addition to receiving the award from "Passaic County African American Women, Inc.", they also were honored by the mayor of Paterson and several local council members. This was done for everyone they had honored at this event including the mistress of ceremony, Minister Onekia Grier, and the keynote speaker, our own Claire Haider.

"Passaic County African American Women, Inc." 20th anniversary was celebrated in an elegant setting at Macaluso's in Hawthorne. The atmosphere was enhanced by the colors red and black. These are the signature colors of their organization, chosen because they represent strength, as their president Bettye Peterson explained to us.

Bettye also told us the reason Claire was invited this year as the keynote speaker. For 16 years Claire has served the city of Paterson, has regularly participated in activities like interfaith programs, donating and

organizing clothing drives, donated blankets, school supplies, and many other various items needed by many local people.

We are so proud of Claire Haider. She gave a passionate and poignant address highlighting ladies like Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, recent SunHak Peace Prize Laureate; Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who are well-known for their instrumental work as Mathematicians at NACA and NASA in the movie "Hidden Figures"; and WFWP Cofounder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon for her tremendous work for world peace. It was a wonderful evening of celebrating the many Women of Distinction internationally, in the United States and in our own backyards in New Jersey.

