

NCNW New York State Coalition Honors Legacy at 52nd Annual Bethune/Height Recognition Program Luncheon

More than 500 guests from 18 sections across New York State gathered at Leonard's Palazzo in Great Neck on May 16, 2026, to celebrate 52 years of the Bethune/Height Recognition Program.



Great Neck, New York May 17, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - When the doors of Leonard's Palazzo opened on a bright Saturday afternoon in Great Neck, New York, more than 500 guests walked into a room that had been fifty-two years in the making. The National Council of Negro Women New York State Coalition marked its 52nd Annual Bethune/Height Recognition Program Luncheon and Awards on May 16, 2026, with an afternoon of recognition, remembrance, and forward-looking purpose, gathering members from 18 sections of the NCNW New York State Coalition under one roof for the first time since the program's previous gathering.

The theme of the day — "Raise Our Voices and Act with Purpose" — set the tone from the first moments. A history of the Bethune/Height Recognition Program narrated on video by Emmy Award-winning actress Sheryl Lee Ralph opened the program, tracing the BHRP's founding in 1974 by NCNW women from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The Negro National Anthem was performed by the 105 Voices of History National HBCU Choir. Every element of the program's design reflected the gravity of the occasion: a 52-year tradition rooted in the legacies of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, who founded the NCNW in 1935, and Dr. Dorothy Irene Height, who served as the organization's national president for decades and whose name was formally added to the program title in 2009.

The afternoon's keynote address was delivered by Dawna Michelle Fields, National BHRP Co-Chair and longtime NCNW Legacy Life Member, who most recently served for 28 years as Senior Director of North America's "Bright Smiles, Bright Futures" initiative at Colgate-Palmolive. Fields, who serves on the NCNW executive board, delivered her address the day following her retirement from corporate life, a transition that underscored the message she carried to the podium: that commitment to community does not end when a career does.

Cheryl A. Pemberton-Graves, Chief Volunteer Officer at the Lighthouse Guild, received the program's individual honoree recognition. A nonprofit executive with more than three decades of experience spanning the legislative arena, philanthropic work, and community development, Pemberton-Graves holds degrees from SUNY Albany and Baruch College and an executive certificate from Cornell University. She is a 40-year member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and a Silver Life Member of the NAACP.

Three organizations were named NCNW Affiliate Honorees. New York Chapter CHUMS, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1956, has served youth and families across New York City, Nassau County, and Suffolk County for nearly seven decades under the motto "Listen to the Children... Enrich Their Lives." Jack and Jill of America, Inc. Eastern Region — the organization's largest region, uniting 61 chapters across New York, the District of Columbia, and seven additional states and representing more than 11,000 family members — was recognized under its 2025-2027 regional theme "Rooted in Heritage, Rising in Purpose." Mocha Moms, Inc., a national 501(c)(3) organization with more than 60 chapters across 21 states and an online community of more than 100,000 members, was honored for its sustained commitment to uplifting mothers of color and its ongoing national campaign "We Are Not OK!"

The program was chaired by Tina M. Thompson, NYS BHRP Chair, with co-chairs Eleanor McKay and Janice Brown. National BHRP Co-Chairs Dawna Michelle Fields and Johnnie M. Walker presided alongside New York State Conveners Lynda F. Bagley and Evelyn Harris Kinsey. Arion Jamerson served as Co-Program Coordinator and Mistress of Ceremonies, with Diamond Butler as Program Coordinator. More than 120 NCNW members were recognized as 2026 BHRP Achievers, Life Members, and Legacy Life Members for their individual annual financial contributions to the organization's national mission. Achiever and Life Member presentations were coordinated by Marie Davis and Lisa Dawson.

Letters of congratulation were received from Dr. A. Lois Keith, NCNW Board Chair, Rev. Shavon Arline-Bradley, NCNW President and CEO, and the Honorable Dorothy L. Goosby, Deputy Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead. Musical entertainment was provided throughout the afternoon by The Legendary Chris Washington. The program closed with a candlelight ceremony in which all NCNW members present gathered to sing "This Little Light of Mine."

The NCNW New York State Coalition has hosted the Bethune/Height Recognition Program for 52 consecutive years. Founded by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune in 1935, the National Council of Negro Women is a 501(c)(3) organization with 32 national affiliates and 330 campus and community-based sections whose mission is to lead, empower, and advocate for women of African descent, their families, and communities.

Follow the NCNW New York State BHRP on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/ncnwnysbhrp/>.



Media Contact

NCNW New York State BHRP

*****@gmail.com

5163872227

2684 Hansen Plc., Baldwin, NY. 11510

<https://linktr.ee/ncnwnysbhrp>

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