

MIDDLESEX COUNTY NAACP

*78th Annual
Freedom Fund Awards And
Membership Dinner*

We're All In!

CASA MIA AT THE HAWTHORNE

**Sept.
19th**

6 PM • SOCIAL HOUR
7 PM • DINNER

2421 Berlin Tpke, Berlin, CT 06037

NAACP

MIDDLESEXCTNAACP.ORG

Congratulations to this year's
Freedom Fund award winners
for doing the hard work of building freedom
in their communities — each and every day.



We are proud to support the Middlesex County NAACP and proud to work alongside Habitat for Humanity for the betterment of Middlesex County.

EVERSOURCE

For more, visit Eversource.com/DEI



Branch History

In 1946 the Portland/Middletown NAACP Branch was formed by a group of concerned African Americans from both towns. Mr. Roosevelt Steele, a Portland resident, became the first president. The Branch thrived for several years taking a stand for the rights of African Americans during the early days of the civil rights movement. Early presidents were Mr. Charles Ghent, Mr. Roosevelt Steele, Sr., Rev. William Davage, and Captain Edward Jackson.

It was years later, when Captain Edward B. Jackson, retired member of the Middletown Police Force and Mrs. Reba Moses, a community activist, met with Mr. Willie Walton to talk about forming a branch of the NAACP in Middletown. After meetings with Mr. Benjamin Andrews, President of the CT State Conference of NAACP Branches and nearly 100 community members, the branch was re-established. Mr. Willie Walton became the first president, serving three years. In its earlier days, the branch published a "Watchdog" weekly paper. James "Cup" Moody served as its' first editor. The branch was responsible for the establishment of the Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration and formation of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Committee of Greater Middletown, Inc. The Committee eventually became a separate 501(c)3 entity.

One of the branch's earliest issues, uniting the city residents, stemmed from the death of a homeless man who froze to death. Both Black and white citizens came together and marched in protest over the lack of housing. The group demonstrated for three days. In the end, the Eddy Shelter and other shelters were opened in Middlesex County, and they remain to this day.

The work of the Branch, encompassing 16 towns county-wide, continues to be rooted in racial equity, civic engagement, and supportive policies and institutions for all marginalized people. We advocate and serve as a resource for women and children during difficult times, stand for students' right to equitable education experiences, and seek solutions to health disparities that plague our community.

The following individuals have served as President of the Middlesex County Branch since its e-establishment: Willie Walton, James Moore, Roland Cockfield, Debra Hopkins, David Roane, Timothy Franklin, Roxanne Aaron-Selph, Rosa Browne, and Faith Jackson, with Ms. Jackson serving multiple nonconsecutive terms), and Anita Ford Saunders, APR, currently president for the 2023 – 2025 term.

NAACP.

Middlesex County Branch

September 19, 2024

On behalf of the Freedom Fund Team, Executive Committee, and members of the Middlesex County Branch of the NAACP, I welcome you to the 78th Annual Freedom Fund Awards & Membership Dinner.



Three months ago, thousands gathered for the 115th National NAACP Convention in sweltering hot Las Vegas. We received clear direction from our national leadership, that we must be “All In” to save the soul of our nation. Chairman Leon W. Russell reminded us, “Elections have consequences. Elections matter.”

The NAACP is nonpartisan. Yet in the words of NAACP National President and CEO, Derrick Johnson, “We are nonpartisan, but political as hell!”

Traditionally and especially this year, our focus is on national elections. Pay more attention to what happens right outside your back door.

Get involved. Attend local commission meetings or lobby to sit on one. There are commissions that have unlimited power to change the make-up of a neighborhood or prevent your children from educational opportunities available to other students. Make sure you know the actions of your legislators before you give them your vote. Run away from the ones that are only there for the “photo op.” And don’t be afraid to cross party lines when what you are hearing does not “give “with how you, your family, and this community should thrive. Where we stand isn’t as important as standing in our truths.

In author Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.’s book, *We Are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For*, I believe he gives context to “now” and our aspirations once we are able to exhale after this election cycle.

“Democracy, in the end, is much more than a body of laws and procedures; it entails the kind of persons we are to be in community with others.”

Social justice does not take a vacation. The people we honor tonight have demonstrated that, most times without even thinking. That’s how it should be. They have used their imaginations to envision a righteous community where diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is not just a catch phrase. It is the aspiration of “now.”

We are the leaders we have been looking for. It’s time to live up to that challenge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anita Ford Saunders". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anita Ford Saunders, President
Middlesex County NAACP

Lift Every Voice and Sing
James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.



NAACP

Derrick Johnson

*President and
Chief Executive Officer*

September 19, 2024

Greetings:

With great pleasure, I congratulate you all and offer my sincerest appreciation to the NAACP Middlesex County Branch on your 78th Annual Freedom Fund Awards and Membership Dinner. Serving at the helm of the nation's leading civil rights organization is the highlight of my career. At this pivotal moment in history, it is my continued privilege to stand alongside every branch and state conference as we unite in our mission for meaningful and equitable change across this country.



We are dedicated to eliminating racial hatred and racial discrimination. And though we face renewed challenges from adversaries at the state, federal, and judicial levels; the NAACP remains All In on our commitment to Black equity, refusing to be marginalized in a country we helped to build. Our story matters, and you—our leaders, volunteers, and members—are its champions. You are the cornerstone of our work, and because of you, we have the momentum necessary to carry us forward into a brighter future.

Our vision for the United States includes building a more inclusive economy, reinforcing equity in education, advancing voting rights, making accessible and affordable healthcare a reality, and ending environmental and climate injustices. We are leading the nation's most extensive data-driven Black civic engagement initiative, and you are the key players, extending our reach into communities nationwide. Our resolve has never been stronger.

Our legal and policy teams are advancing voting rights and justice in places like South Carolina, and Mississippi, and this is just the beginning. We will persist until student debt relief is achieved and ensure high voter turnout in November to build a representative body that aligns with our priorities and not those from Project 2025.

We are shifting from a posture of reaction to one that allows us to go boldly forward. We are not just surviving, we are leveraging our rich culture to reach new heights as a community. We possess everything necessary to achieve our goals and the power to effect the changes we seek, and we are harnessing that power. We will remain committed and energized in our mission to build a more perfect union, regardless of obstacles along the way.

We will fight for policies that will advance, not undermine our progress. We will fight for our community, standing as a united front as we head to the ballot box to defeat fascism, defend democracy, and determine our futures. We will fight to demand the change we need in order to achieve the equity we deserve.

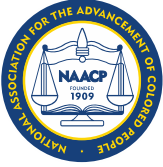
Let us remain All In on making the dreams of our ancestors a reality. Thank you.

Peace and Power,

Derrick Johnson

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

4805 Mt Hope Drive • Baltimore MD 21215-3297 • 410.580.5777 • 877.622.2798 • naacp.org



NAACP

Leon W. Russell

*Chairman
National Board of Directors*

September 19, 2024

NAACP MIDDLESEX COUNTY BRANCH

Greetings:

Congratulations to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Middlesex County Branch as you come together for your 78th Annual Freedom Fund Awards and Membership Dinner. Thank you for your commitment as members and leaders of this nation's premier civil rights and social justice advocacy organization.

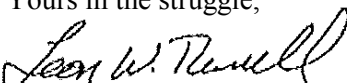


Our NAACP 115th National Convention was aptly themed, “ALL IN,” because it is the requirement to ensure the very survival of this nation as it was founded. We are charged with taking this message into our communities and making it clear: elections are about choices; elections have consequences; and elections count toward a more perfect, diverse, and inclusive union. Every promise of this nation is on the ballot, and it is imperative that in every election, every eligible voter casts an unfettered ballot for a more just future.

I sincerely appreciate the many unsung heroes of this Association – some leading and working in the remotest of communities to advocate for our rights. We must never disengage in this battle that is for the soul of our nation. Our participation is critical not just in presidential elections but in all elections, understanding that the threat comes at the state and local levels. State legislatures, school boards, city councils, and county commissions must be a focal point. We must look at judicial races and understand that the people we put into positions where public policy is made and implemented require our attention and scrutiny. The Supreme Court requires our scrutiny. To honor our predecessors, many of whom made the ultimate sacrifice to protect our history and secure our rights, we must continue the work of the NAACP, which includes showing up for every election.

If we are ALL IN, we can defeat hate and bigotry and ensure equal opportunity and social justice for our nation's total health and wellbeing. If we are ALL IN, we can ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are the hallmarks of an economy that works for all humankind. If we are ALL IN, we will champion the truth that we were indeed all created as equals endowed with certain inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If we are ALL IN, the soul of our nation will prevail. Thank you NAACP members, leaders, and friends for continuing the daily work, casting your ballot, and taking ownership of what it means to be ALL IN.

Yours in the struggle,


Leon W. Russell

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

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Scot X. Esdaile
State President
NAACP National Board Member

September 19, 2024

Dear Members and Friends,

On behalf of the Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches, I am thrilled to welcome you to the annual Freedom Fund Dinner. As we approach the upcoming presidential election, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of civic engagement and voting. This election is pivotal for the NAACP and the communities we serve across the state of Connecticut. The theme for this year, "We Are All In", highlights the unity and determination needed to create positive change in our society.

The Middlesex County exemplifies our organization's mission and vision by actively challenging the inequalities facing African Americans nationwide, advocating for equal access to healthcare, reforming the criminal justice system, and promoting quality education for all.

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the honorees for their exceptional contributions. Your dedication to advancing equality and justice is truly commendable. As we celebrate the theme of being "All In", I applaud each of you for your tireless efforts in creating thriving communities where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

Special recognition goes to President Anita Ford Saunders, the Freedom Fund Committee, the executive committee members, Sponsors and all the dedicated individuals who support the NAACP's mission. Remember, as Coretta Scott King wisely stated, "Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation."

Let us stand united in the ongoing struggle for equality and justice. Together, we can make a difference and ensure that every voice is heard. It is imperative that we all get out to vote and make our voices count in the upcoming election.

Sincerely Yours in the Struggle,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scot X. Esdaile". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Scot X. Esdaile, President
CT NAACP State Conference

NAACP National Board Member



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
City of Middletown
CONNECTICUT 06457

Benjamin D. Florsheim
MAYOR

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the City of Middletown, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 78th Annual Middlesex County NAACP Freedom Fund Award Dinner. Your presence and support this evening represents your commitment to our shared mission -- a commitment embodied in action, not just words. Thank you for being here, and for all you do to help us build a just, healthy, and empowered community.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was chartered on February 12, 1909, the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, by a group that included a Black woman, Ida B. Wells, who was born into slavery, and a Black man, W.E.B. Du Bois, who was born into a relatively tolerant community where his family had owned their land for generations. It included as well a German-educated Romanian Jew, Henry Moskowitz, who immigrated to the United States as a child, and a Harvard-educated lawyer, Moorfield Storey, whose Puritan ancestors had been among the first Europeans to settle in New England. And it also included Mary White Ovington, the daughter of Brooklyn Unitarians and granddaughter of Connecticut abolitionists who met Wells and Du Bois after hearing a speech by Frederick Douglass and joining the fight for civil rights, and Lillian Wald, born into a wealthy family in Cincinnati, the daughter and niece of doctors and researchers who would go on to become the founder of community nursing.

The Association's founding members included other names as well, and other stories. The common thread is a recognition of the principle behind this year's Freedom Fund Dinner theme: *We're All In.* It was a recognition that the mission of advancing civil rights for people of color is a mission to which *all* people are called to serve, not just those whose rights have been wrongfully abrogated. It is a mission in which *all* people have a stake. And it is a mission which cannot be complete until *all* people are truly free. The founders' goal to achieve "the Advancement of Colored People" has never implied the regression of other people -- just as "Black Lives Matter" has never meant that "all lives" do not. The fight for civil rights is not a fight between one group of humans and another group; it is the fight for humanity itself.

All of us must be all in for this fight. I am proud to be a member, ally, and friend of the Middlesex County NAACP, and as we continue the unfinished work of building a beloved community that serves all residents in our city, I am proud to say that Middletown is ALL IN!

With congratulations to tonight's honorees, and best wishes for a wonderful evening,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Florsheim", written over a horizontal line.

Benjamin D. Florsheim

Mayor

Municipal Building: 245 deKoven Drive, Middletown, CT 06457
TEL: (860) 638-4801 FAX: (860) 638-1901 Email: mayor@middletownct.gov

Keith Kountz

ANCHOR - WTNH News 8



Keith Kountz has been a fixture at News 8 for more than two decades. He currently anchors “Good Morning Connecticut” and the noon news.

Keith is a recipient of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences ‘Silver Circle’ award for 2010. Silver Circle members are honored for making an enduring contribution to the vitality of the television industry for more than 25 years.

Keith began his career at WTNH as a general assignment reporter in 1987. He has served as morning and weekend anchor during his tenure at News Channel 8. He left WTNH in 1998 to work as an anchor in Jacksonville, Florida, but returned to News 8 two years later. Prior to coming to Connecticut, Keith worked as a reporter and anchor at television stations in South Carolina, Georgia, and New York.

Keith and his wife Dawn are the proud parents of two daughters. Keith has been actively involved in a number of community service organizations in the New Haven area and has received more than 50 professional and community service awards.



Program

Call to Order & Introduction of Master of Ceremonies

Anita Ford Saunders, President

Master of Ceremonies: Welcome & Recognitions

Keith Kountz, Anchor, WTNH News 8

Invocation & Black National Anthem

Rev. Barbara Roane

Zion First Baptist Church, Middletown, CT

Greetings

Mayor Benjamin Florsheim, City of Middletown

Virginia Monteiro, First Vice President

Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches

*** * * Dinner is served * * ***

Presentation of Awards

Freedom Fund Committee Members

Membership and Scholarship

Acknowledgements

Closing Remarks

Anita Ford Saunders

Charge to the Membership

Benediction

Rev. Dr. Kim L. Cotten, CoPastor

Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, Middletown, CT

Our 2024 Honorees



Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce Northern Middlesex YMCA

The Northern Middlesex YMCA has been a fixture in the Middletown community for over 100 years. Whether it be serving our youth through before & after school care or summer camps, offering teen programming allowing them to build self-confidence and friendships, offering healthy living programs, providing mental health programs, and much more, the YMCA works to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, age or cultural background has the opportunity to reach their full potential with dignity.



Education Innovation

Dr. Jada Waters

Dr. Jada Waters became the Inaugural Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in 2021. Her experience, expertise and sheer fortitude gave energy to transformative, research-based policies with incredible detail. Her work with staff and students provided a space for oftentimes uncomfortable conversations that addressed implicit biases embedded within intrapersonal and interpersonal relations and institutional and societal structures. The policies developed user-friendly tools that could provide a roadmap for a system to reach unprecedented success in DEIB.



Dr. Waters was instrumental in working with the Middlesex County Branch of the NAACP bringing students to the **2023 Great Debate** between Howard and Yale Universities. She was integral in the strategic planning of the first HBCU Tour involving students in Middletown School System.

Rashida Edens, MSW

Rashida Edens, MSW is the K-12 Open Choice Liaison and Family Engagement Specialist. Rashida has been with Cromwell for a short time but has made a remarkable impact on the students and their families. She is particularly committed to developing leadership skills in students, even as early as elementary school, by providing them practical experience.



The importance of community connection is not lost on her that's why finding opportunities for students to engage with organizations and citizens outside of school is critical to their growth. She is a voice and an effective advocate for her students.

For the last three years she has served as the Cromwell DEI District Coordinator. A problem solver who is committed to coaching several DEI Teams with a focus on success. In addition to her role as DEI District Coordinator, she has also assumed the role as mentor to the Cromwell Open Choice Program.

Our 2024 Honorees



Race and Justice

Two Wrasslin' Cats Coffee House and Café

On the outside, Two Wrasslin' Cats gives off the vibe of fun, joy, and light...not to mention ...but when you park your car and move in closer their spirit and mission are spelled out across the entire façade. "We are an Anti-Racism Business."

12 years ago, Mark Thiede opened Two Wrasslin' Cats with the goal of serving good food and conversation. Today, the goal has deepened to provide a safe space for those who are marginalized, improve relations in his community, and to stand up and with people who often stand alone.

Mark, his friends and staff do not shy away from proclaiming boldly, "All are Welcome"



Environmental and Climate Justice

Middletown United Fathers

Born out of the realization that there were not enough male role models in our community for young men, Middletown United Fathers answered a calling and a need.

Their mission, to provide support to young men who lack mentors in health, finance, education, and community responsibility is as relevant today as it was when they were founded. They have stayed true to their mission and expanded the how and why of their purpose.

Their outreach started at the grassroots level and grew to regular visits to schools to speak to young men, college visits, even Father's Day fundraising events. Several years later, on the corner of Long Lane and Long Hill Road lay two plus acres that became some of the fruit of their labor. Justice reveals itself in many ways. These gardens are dedicated to growing food, community, and confidence.



There is a cleansing that happens when you till the soil with the purpose of providing sustenance for your family and your neighbors. It is a reminder that we are all in this together and we prosper with each other's help.

CONGRATULATIONS
to the
Middlesex County
NAACP!

Thank You
for your continued
partnership and dedication
to the improvement of community
health and well-being.

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Congratulations
May God Continue to Bless You



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**IDA M. MASSELLI
MIDDLESEX COUNTY NAACP
SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS**

NAACP
Middlesex County Branch

2024 Award Recipients

- ❖ Ayesha Aftab, University of Hartford
- ❖ Mia Annino, University of New Haven
- ❖ Vanessa Carson, University of Connecticut
- ❖ Saibryal Garner, Albertus Magnus College
- ❖ Jason Huang, University of Connecticut
- ❖ De'Mia Rose-Daniels, Delaware State University
- ❖ Shalyn Smith, Rhode Island College
- ❖ Nia Watson, University of Hartford

Thank you to Mark Masselli, the Masselli Family, and the Ida M. Masselli Scholarship Fund for your continued support to the NAACP and the students who exhibit outstanding commitment to their academic success.





CAPITAL PREPARATORY
MIDDLETOWN
CHARTER SCHOOL

It has been over two years since we started this journey of bringing another public school option to students of Middletown and our region.

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WE NEED ANSWERS

To date, a small group of the state and local leaders who removed our funding have not answered the question WHY?

We believe that every child has the right to have access to a quality education regardless of where they live. The community has spoken: we want Capital Prep funded in Middletown!



Capital Prep Middletown congratulates the Middlesex County NAACP on its 78th Annual Freedom Dinner and expresses our deepest gratitude for your steadfast commitment and partnership to making Capital Prep Middletown a reality.

Educational Equity: Unity is Strength

Together, we will make
Capital Prep Middletown a reality.



TAKE ACTION!

Scan the QR code to let your elected officials know you want Capital Prep Middletown funded in our State's biennial budget. They have asked to hear from you!

Follow along and share our story. Your voice has the power to inspire others to join our cause.

 @capitalprepmiddletown

 @cprepmiddletown

 Capital Prep Middletown

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Award Recipients!



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The Middlesex Chamber
congratulates the Middlesex County
branch of the NAACP on their 78th
Annual Freedom Fund Awards &
Membership Dinner!



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Middlesex YMCA!

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City of Middletown-Council Chamber

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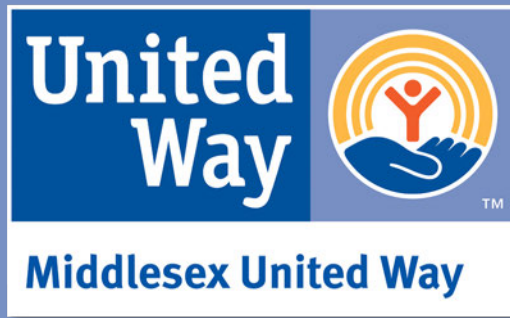
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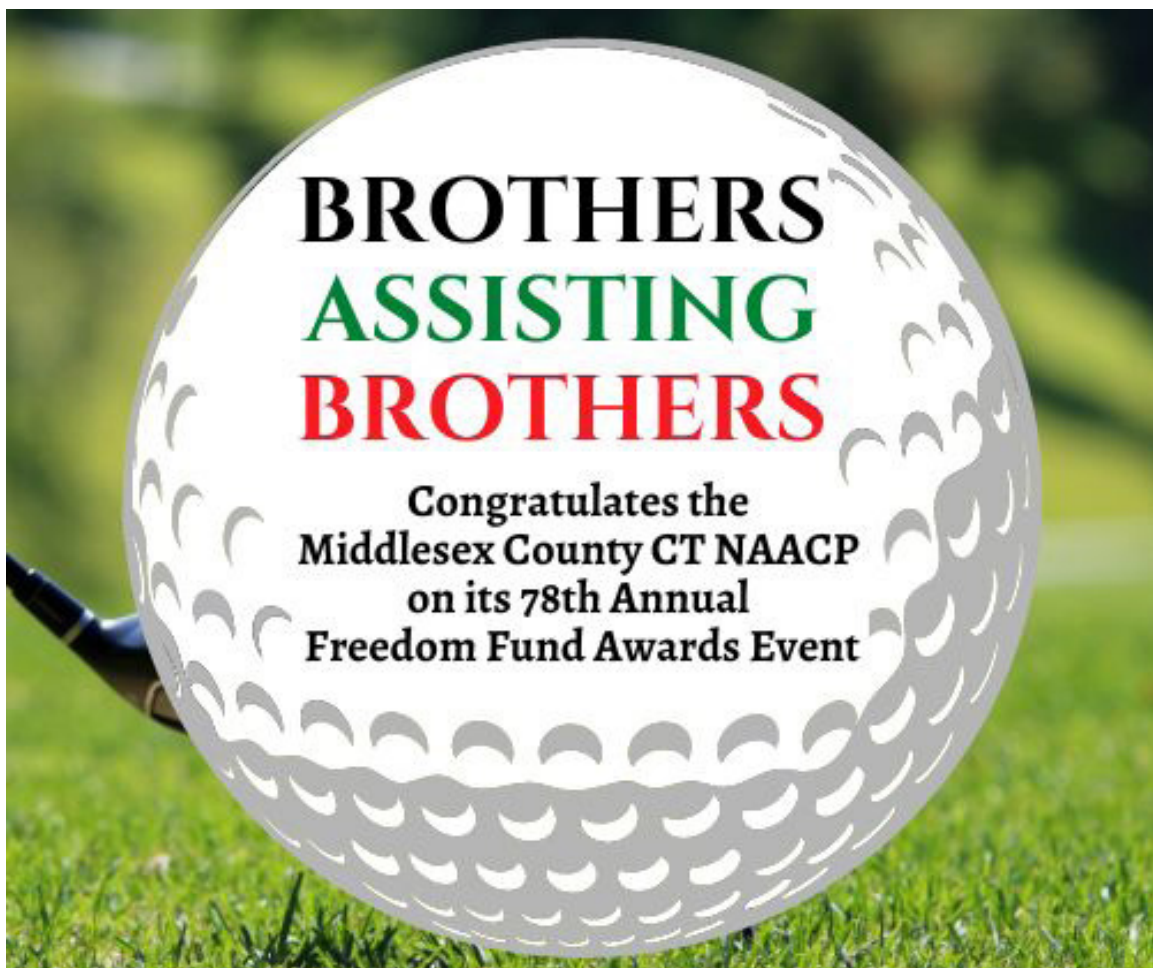
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TO OUR MEMBERS...

**PROTECT OUR
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3 classes: Mondays, September 23, 30, October 7, 4:00-6:00 pm (\$105)

Saturday, OCTOBER 5TH (FREE)

In these Times—

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The Craftsmen Club of George W. Crawford Lodge No. 21 F. & A. M., Inc. Prince Hall Affiliation

We, The members of the Craftsmen Club, wish to share the following words of appreciation,

CONGRATULATIONS and BEST WISHES! 78th ANNUAL

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www.middletownct.gov

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FAITH M. JACKSON
Director of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management,
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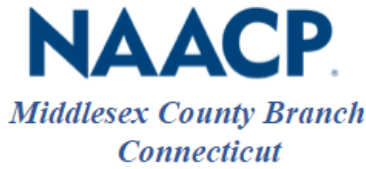
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NAACP

Middlesex County Branch





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Gary Wallace, Armed Services & Veteran Affairs

General Body meetings: Third Wednesday of each month at 6:00 pm.

For more information, visit our website at www.middlesexctnaacp.org

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Wesleyan University Office for Equity and Inclusion provides leadership and guidance addressing systemic inequities for members of our on-campus community.

We are honored to be a proud sponsor of Middlesex County's NAACP 78th Annual Freedom Fund Award Dinner. Congratulations to this year's honorees.

We proudly partner with the NAACP to build thriving communities predicated on respect, value, and inclusion of every member.



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