



Wendell Edwards
News Anchor, WFSB
Master of Ceremonies



77th
**Annual Freedom Fund Awards &
Membership Dinner**

THRIVE
Movement • Culture • Community

SEPTEMBER 28, 2023
Social Hour: 6:00PM ❁ Dinner: 7:00PM
CASA MIA AT THE HAWTHORNE
2421 Berlin Turnpike, Berlin, CT

NAACP
Middlesex County Branch

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.

September 28, 2023

Greetings NAACP Family & Supporters,

On behalf of the Freedom Fund Team, Executive Committee, and members of the Middlesex County Branch of the NAACP, I welcome you to the 77th Annual Freedom Fund Awards & Membership Dinner.



Our theme – *THRIVE* in Movement, Culture, and Community is directly connected to the Middlesex County we envision.

Our members continue to advocate and serve as a resource for women and children during difficult times, stand for students' rights to equitable education experiences, provide and seek solutions to health disparities that plague our community, work to foster respectful political discourse and encourage our community to exercise our most treasured right, the right to vote. And we have only just begun.

The key to a thriving community lives within each of us. It's how we welcome people into unfamiliar spaces. It's how we distribute resources with the understanding that there is enough; and it's how we shift our vision of power as less about dominance and more about building the capacity of communities of color. Ignoring our disparate sides will not bring understanding. Taking the road less traveled is an opportunity to bring about authentic and bold leadership.

The Middlesex County NAACP is leading with boldness. We will advocate with undying energy; and we will mobilize with a dogged commitment to change systems that take away our rights. We envision an inclusive community rooted in liberation where all people can exercise their civil and human rights without discrimination.

This is not Florida nor Texas, yet we can't be lulled into a false sense of security that just because Middlesex County Connecticut is above the Mason Dixon Line, that issues of racial intolerance and injustice do not exist. Equity should be part of our DNA. We have work to do. Standing on the right side of history is the legacy you will leave for this generation and the next.

Being here this evening as a sponsor, honoree, member, or guest has made a statement. You are committed to ensuring our community, our County THRIVES.

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 Branch

NAACP.

NAACP Fallen Member Memorial



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.

Middlesex County NAACP Branch Fallen Unsung Hero 2023

Quentin Soldier Williams, Silver Life Subscribing Member



NAACP

Derrick Johnson
*President and
Chief Executive Officer*

September 28, 2023

Greetings:

It is my great pleasure to congratulate and thank the NAACP Middlesex County Branch on the occasion of your 77th Annual Freedom Fund Awards & Membership Dinner, “*THRIVE*.” I am grateful to serve and privileged to occupy this space as leader of the nation's first and largest grassroots civil rights organization. It is my honor to stand with every branch and state conference in our fight to enact true and equitable change in this nation.

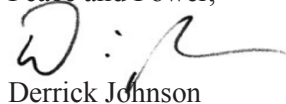


Our commitment to fulfilling the promise of America may be under renewed attack from far-right elements in the states, in Congress, and even in the Supreme Court, but we – the NAACP – will not allow our work to be in vain. We will not be silenced, and the course of our story will not be changed. We have a powerful story to tell, and you – leaders, volunteers, members – are the main characters of our story; the most powerful network of activists and community leaders in this nation and the driving force for good in our communities.

Our vision for the future of America is that of a more inclusive economy, the rights and dignity of every person, voting rights for all, affordable and accessible health care, and an end to environmental and climate injustices. We continue to mobilize the most comprehensive data-driven Black civic engagement campaign in the nation, and you are the boots on the ground reaching far and wide into communities across our country. Our fight has never been stronger, with our lawyers and policy experts securing desegregation, voting rights, and justice for Black communities in places like Charleston, South Carolina, and Mason, Tennessee; and we are just getting started. We will not stop until student debt relief becomes a reality, and we must turn out the vote in every election to have a representative body that reflects our priorities and protects Black women.

We are moving from a deficit mindset. We have everything we need to succeed and the power to bring about the changes we want to see – and we are using it. We will continue to rededicate and reignite ourselves to the work of creating a more perfect union no matter the odds set before us. I am proud to lead the NAACP at this historic moment; coming alongside and thriving together with NAACP champions of equal opportunity and social justice who will write a story of a nation where all its people had equal opportunity to thrive. 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 28, 2023

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 77th Annual Freedom Fund Awards & Membership Dinner, “*THRIVE.*” Thank you for your continued commitment and ongoing efforts toward our 114-year mission to ensure equal rights and eliminate racial hatred and discrimination across our nation.

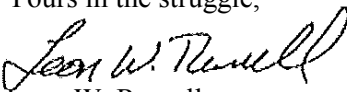


Today, in 2023, we are confronted by policymakers who have based their personal quest for political power on campaigns clearly intended to deny the teaching of our history. They continue to wage a war on education and to create new ways to criminalize our brothers and our sisters. A century of progress is severely under attack and the fruit of our labor challenged by the forces of retrogression, fear, and hate. White supremacy is openly espoused by policymakers and power brokers at all levels of government and many in the private sector. With recent rulings, we see the courts rolling back long-held precedents that protected civil and human rights. Our freedom and democracy are at stake.

We must have a clear understanding of the importance of who is nominated and confirmed to sit in judgement of our nation’s most important questions. When we fail to engage in the electoral process, we deny our power, which is our vote. Every NAACP unit must be a part of the NAACP civic engagement process; much of our work depends upon laws, regulations, funding, and administration. The ability to create and implement public policy will determine the impact of our work on the lives of those who live in the communities we represent. With active Political Action Committees, and in collaboration with partner groups, we must ensure policymakers are put in place who truly believe in government for and by all people. The NAACP is an advocacy organization. Our mission is to be the voice for our community on all issues of public policy; education, healthcare, criminal justice, climate justice, with the next generation of freedom fighters ready and equipped to take up the fight.

We are the NAACP; we are what democracy looks like. This nation belongs to all of us. We only thrive as a nation when each of us has an equitable share of opportunity and when we embrace our shared humanity. When we work and fight together for justice and equity, we thrive together; when we thrive together, we protect the promise of our nation and we win.

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 28, 2023

Dear Members and Friends,

On behalf of the Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches, it is an honor and pleasure to welcome you to your annual Freedom Fund Dinner. As the oldest civil rights organization in the world, we continue to lead the fight for equality and civil rights across the country. The Middlesex County NAACP exemplifies the mission and the vision of the organization in the commitment to challenge the inequality facing African Americans across the nation: from the fight for equal healthcare, to criminal justice, and education.

I would also like to take this time to recognize all of the honorees for their outstanding work. As we reflect on the event theme, "THRIVE: Movement. Culture. Community", we congratulate each of the honorees for their remarkable and paramount contributions in making a world in which our communities don't just survive, but thrive. Wishing you all continued success as you continue to fight for equality and justice with fortitude and diligence.

Congratulations to President Anita Ford Saunders, the Freedom Fund Committee, members of the executive committee and all of the members who work valiantly to support the work of the NAACP. "Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation." – Coretta Scott King

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 77th Annual Middlesex County NAACP Freedom Fund Dinner Tonight, as we honor those whose efforts and actions have contributed to make Middletown and Middlesex County more equitable and just places to live, work and play, we are invited to consider the theme of this year's dinner and to reflect on just what it means to THRIVE—as an individual, and as a community

As individuals, we thrive when our basic needs are met—food, housing, healthcare, the oft-neglected sleep: these are not the only ingredients, but they are essential ones. To thrive as an individual also requires taking risks, working hard, and making oneself vulnerable; we sometimes call this “leaving our comfort zone.” But for that statement to be accurate, a comfort zone has to exist in the first place. For too many of our residents—especially residents of color—no such comfort zone exists, because these basic needs are not being met. People are being forced to work longer hours for less pay, while keeping up with rising costs and dealing with the daily stress and trauma of life in a society that is built on racist and exploitative institutions. People cannot thrive under circumstances where their every effort is required simply to survive.

That is where community comes in. A thriving community is one made up of thriving residents—an achievement that comes not by accident, but only when people work together to intentionally create the conditions for themselves and others to lead safe, healthy and economically secure lives. This is what we are working to achieve in Middletown: from the opening of our brand-new Recreation Center to the just-renovated Veterans Park Pool; from reintroducing neighborhood-based youth programming to funding new mentorship, educational, and athletic opportunities; from developing new and more affordable housing with input from the newly-established Fair Rent Commission, to investing in programs that support Black homeownership to build generational wealth for BIPOC families in Middletown.

This is not the work of one person, one organization, or one city: it is generational, history-making work that requires a little bit from all of us. It is the work that will enable us to thrive. It is my honor to commit to that continued work with you this evening, and I am deeply grateful for all that you do. I wish you a wonderful evening!

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Florsheim", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Benjamin D. Florsheim
Mayor

Wendell Edwards

MORNING ANCHOR WFSB-TV3

Connecticut

Wendell Edwards co-anchors Channel 3's Eyewitness News this morning. Prior to moving to Connecticut, he anchored mornings and reported at ABC 3340 News in Birmingham, Alabama and at KOCO 5 News in Oklahoma City.

He worked as general assignment reporter and fill-in anchor at KHOU-TV in Houston, TX. He also reported and anchored for WOOD-TV News 8 in Grand Rapids, Michigan and WIS News-10 in Columbia, South Carolina.

Edwards earned a bachelor's degree from Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, in 1992 and a master's degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1997.

He loves to read, write and watch movies. He is former track standout in college having qualified for the 1992 Olympic Trials in the 110m hurdles. He's an Emmy-nominated journalist and has won a number of awards for journalistic excellence, including the Oklahoma Broadcasters Association award for outstanding investigative reporting in 2010 and two NABJ Salute to Excellence awards in 2008 and 2011 and an in ABBY in 2020 from the Alabama Broadcasters Association for his "School Patrol" series. He also worked for a series of newspapers in his home state of Texas, including the Burnet Bulletin, near Austin Texas and the Corsicana Daily Sun, near Dallas/Fort Worth.

Wendell is originally from Dallas and grew up in Cayuga and Tennessee Colony, Texas.

He has 2 daughters, Kennedy and Kendall.





Program

Call to Order & Introduction of Master of Ceremonies

Anita Ford Saunders, President

Master of Ceremonies: Welcome & Recognitions

Wendell Edwards, Morning Anchor, WFSB

Invocation & Black National Anthem

Rev. Barbara Roane

Greetings from the City of Middletown

Mayor Benjamin Florsheim

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

Presentation of Awards

Freedom Fund Committee Members

Membership Declaration

Barbara W. Holloman

Closing Remarks

Anita Ford Saunders

Charge to the Membership

Scot X. Esdaile, President

Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches

Benediction

Rev. Alan Marshall

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Our 2023 Honorees:

Larry McHugh Business Award

Wesleyan Jewett Center for Community Partnership

The Jewett Center for Community Partnerships (JCCP) promotes and supports civic engagement across the campus community of Wesleyan University. Guided

by the principles of mutual respect and collective responsibility, the JCCP focuses on developing and maintaining local partnerships with schools, nonprofit organizations, government agencies and the community at large across our three areas of focus: sustainability & environmental justice; education & youth development; and Re-Imagining Justice & Cultivating Justice.



Community Service Award

Raymond E. Townes

Approximately 30+ years ago, Ray started doing something extraordinary. He started to display his collection of articles, posters, books, artifacts, photographs, and programs about famous African, Native and Hispanic Americans in the public schools. Ray's passion is for Black history, but his dream is for a permanent home for this massive and important

collection. Ray Townes remembers his roots and his heritage. He delights in the excited faces of young people learning about their history and contributions to the American way of life, from the past to the present. He is excited about learning more about Black history and shares his enthusiasm for learning with students, teachers, parents, community and religious leaders, and politicians alike.





Our 2023 Honorees:

Civic & Community Engagement Award

Erica Hunter & The Middletown Ujima Alliance

Established in 2021, Middletown Ujima Alliance's mission is to work collaboratively to foster an authentic sense of diversity, equity and inclusion in an effort to uplift, build and restore unification within Middletown. The purpose of Juneteenth is to commemorate the ending of slavery in the United States by celebrating freedom, educating, and engaging members of the community in an arts-themed, weekend long celebration.



***THRIVE* Business Award**

Jacqueline S. Williams

Jacqueline, a lifelong Connecticut resident, has dedicated herself to the Middletown community as a real estate broker and industry leader. For more than 45 years, the name of Jackie Williams has been associated with high production in sales and exceptional professional standards in the real estate industry. Her activity in civic affairs, as well as professional organizations, successfully melded her sphere of influence that developed her reputation and fostered growth in both her business and her civic activities which she has given years of time and commitment.



President's Award

Patti Anne Vassia

Patti has been helping to build a better Middlesex County community since arriving here in 1967 to work at the Northern Middlesex YMCA. In 1978, she became the first female Executive Director of Middlesex United Way. She was also the first female member of the Middletown Rotary, where she continues to be active. She helped to revive the Middlesex County Chapter of the NAACP, served on Middletown 2000, and served as the first woman president of both YMCA Camp Hazen and the YMCA of Connecticut. In 1998, she became the first President of the Community Foundation of Middlesex County.





**IDA M. MASSELLI
MIDDLESEX COUNTY NAACP
SCHOLARSHIP AWARD CEREMONY**

NAACP
Middlesex County Branch

2023 Award Recipients

- ❖ Jessie Baldwin, Business Administration, Johnson & Wales
- ❖ Pilar Brooks, Political Science/Law
Enforcement/Criminology, Spellman College
- ❖ Melanie O'Sullivan, Biomedical Engineer, North Carolina
State University
- ❖ Justin Rogers, Psychology, Johnson & Wales

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.



Larry McHugh Business Award

In 1998, the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce received the Middlesex County NAACP Business Award for the “Side Street to MainStreet Program, which was the first NAACP Business Award given to a Chamber of Commerce in the state. Since then, the Chamber has received numerous awards for the landmark program in the state such as the Connecticut Community Development Association Award, the Governor’s Laurel Award for Responsible Social Involvement, the President’s White House Citation for Private Section Initiatives, the U.S. Department of Labor LIF America Award, and the Connecticut Small Business Advocate Award.

The Creation of the “Larry McHugh Business Award”

In 1997/1998, as part of the Middlesex County NAACP Branch Economic Development Initiative, former Councilman John Robinson and Branch President Faith Jackson approached Larry McHugh with the concept and challenge to develop a quality business skill training program that could assist minorities with acquiring the necessary skills for owning and running a business. From the concept, the Chamber developed a quality business development training program working with The Essex Group and acquiring funding from Aetna for the program, for the “Side Street to Main Street Program,” a year-long entrepreneurial business development training course. From that program came the “Business Know How Program,” a shorter version of the “Side Street to Main Street Program.” Because of its success and notoriety, the course was marketed in St. Louis to assist them with economic development efforts.

Over 400 plus students have gone through and utilized the training program to build success and reduce the risk of failure in both business and personal aspects of their lives. Under the leadership of Larry McHugh, the course was administered by Jim Jackson of The Essex Group, and Jennifer DeKine, Program Coordinator.

In 2006, the local branch renamed its Business Award the Larry McHugh Business Award in honor of his commitment and continued collaborative work with the Middlesex County NAACP Branch in support of its economic development initiatives within the community. Annually, this award is given to a business of Larry McHugh’s selection that best exemplifies his business philosophy and spirit of community engagement.



The Middlesex Chamber
congratulates the Middlesex County
branch of the NAACP on their 77th
Annual Freedom Fund Awards &
Membership Dinner!



We are proud to present the Larry
McHugh Business Award to
Wesleyan University's Jewett Center
for Community Partnerships!

www.middlesexchamber.com

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The cast of *The 12*. Photo by Sam Pickart.

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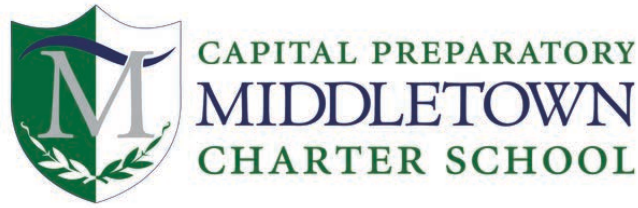
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Congratulates the Middlesex County NAACP on their 77th Annual Freedom Fund Dinner and expresses our deepest gratitude for their steadfast commitment and partnership to making Capital Prep Middletown a reality.

TOGETHER, WE ARE STRONGER!



What's Next?

While we have cleared several milestones, including receiving an initial certificate of approval from the State Board of Education, we still need your help to clear our final hurdle.

Funding from our state is essential to realize our aspirations for Capital Prep Middletown and ensure that every child has access to a quality education, regardless of race, zip code, or socio-economic status.



Scan the QR code above 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.



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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SEIU Local 511

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Congratulations to the honorees of this year's Freedom Fund Awards.



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*We salute the Middlesex County NAACP
for its power to initiate change -
for a more just and equitable community.*

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Sarah H. Shapiro

Deborah D. Shapiro

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

-Howard Thurman

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“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is:

‘What are you doing for others?’

-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Wesleyan University

Office for Equity & Inclusion

congratulates
the Middlesex County NAACP Branch on its
77th Annual Freedom Fund Award Dinner



ON BEHALF OF



UNASHAMED

Planting one seed at a time

CONGRATULATIONS!

to the Freedom Fund Award Honorees

*Jacqueline Williams, Erica Hunter & Ujima Alliance,
Raymond Townes, Patti Anne Vassia, Wesleyan Jewett
Center for Community Partnerships*

*"The greatness of a community is most accurately
measured by the compassionate actions of it's members."*

Coretta Scott King



Sana L. Cotten, CEO/Founder

for more information, visit us at: www.unashamedinc.org



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**The Middlesex County
Branch of the National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**

“77th Annual Freedom Fund Awards & Membership Dinner”

THRIVE
Movement * Culture * Community



**Middlesex United Way
Congratulates the Honorees**

Thank you for your commitment to the community!

UNITED in PURPOSE



CT STATE MIDDLESEX

WISHES
CONGRATULATIONS
TO ALL AWARD
RECIPIENTS!

CT STATE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MIDDLESEX



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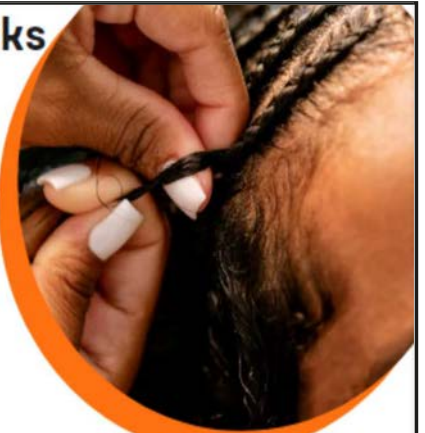
**Congratulations and Best
Wishes!**

George W. Crawford Lodge #21
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Fax (860)638-1955 Middletown, CT 06457



BENJAMIN D. FLORSHEIM
Mayor

mayor@middletownct.gov Municipal Building
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F 860-638-1901 Middletown, CT 06457
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Judge Joseph D. Marino
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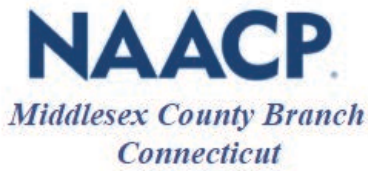
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