



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham Honors Five Outstanding Residents in Commemoration of Black History Month

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Sen. Harckham with Rev. Shaun Ellison Jones and Rev. Teneé A. H. Jones

*Albany, NY* – In commemoration of Black History Month, New York State Senator Pete honored four residents of the 40th Senate District at events in Westchester and Rockland counties during the past few weeks, and then offered remarks today as part of a Memorial Resolution for the late Mary Rainey at the State Capitol.

“Black history is American history,” said Harckham. “The struggles and successes of Black Americans are integral to our nation’s story. Every February, we remember this legacy and draw inspiration. As the new federal administration seeks to force us to forget our history, it is more important than ever that we tell these stories and celebrate our heroes.”

Harckham presented Senate Proclamations to Virginia “Ginny” Norfleet in Stony Point, NY, and to Peekskill Middle School Principal Donald Peters before the annual Peekskill Black History Month youth basketball tournament, where he was honored by his students as well.

Harckham also conferred New York State Commendation Awards to Reverend Shaun Ellison Jones and Reverend Teneé A. H. Jones, a husband and a wife both of the Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Ossining at the church’s annual Black History Heritage Service.

A successful real estate entrepreneur, Norfleet found the cornerstone of what was the first African American church in Rockland during renovation of a property about 20 years ago, which inspired her to research the history of the local African American community dating back to enslavement in the 1600s.

Since then, Norfleet has launched the nonprofit Haverstraw African American Connection, which supports research, cultural events and educational programs that celebrate the rich African American cultural heritage of Haverstraw and Rockland. Norfleet also spearheaded the creation of the Haverstraw African American Memorial Park on the riverfront, and forged a partnership with the Rockland Holocaust Museum & Center for Tolerance and Education to create the "Better Together" initiative that fosters public engagement to fight racism and antisemitism. Additionally, she created an exhibit at the museum on the history of slavery in Rockland.

Donald Peters received his bachelor's degree from George Washington University, a master's degree in education from Mercy College (now University) and another master's in School Building Leadership from CUNY. He began his career in education two decades ago, and has worked as a special education teacher at both the middle school and high school levels. Later, he served as an assistant principal at a public middle school in the Bronx.

In 2021, Peters began serving as the assistant principal at Peekskill Middle School. After being selected to serve as interim principal in 2022, he was appointed school principal in 2023. In presenting him with a Senate Proclamation, Harckham noted that Peters works tirelessly to create a safe and supportive learning environment by developing innovative programs to address critical issues like mental health and bullying.

Reverend Shaun Ellison Jones was raised in Saint Louis, Missouri, and later earned a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and a Master of Divinity from Virginia Union University. He is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry from the Payne Theological Seminary. He began serving in ministry for the Baptist General Convention of Virginia, before becoming an Assistant Pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Saint Louis. Following the tragic killing of Michael Brown in 2014, he took on a pivotal role as a community organizer in Saint Louis with local coalitions of clergy members.

Since 2016, Rev. Jones has been the pastor at Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Ossining. Under his leadership, the church has experienced significant growth in membership, incorporated new technologies and raised over \$325,000 for property improvements. The church has become a vital force in the Ossining community, offering services that include a food ministry, overflow homeless shelter, and a back-to-school sneaker giveaway.

Additionally, Rev. Jones serves as a clergy leader for Community Voices Heard, a state-wide grassroots organization advocating for low-income New Yorkers, and sits on the board of the

IFCA Housing Agency in Ossining, which provides affordable housing in the local community. He is a leader within the Briarcliff Ossining Ministerial Alliance, and chairs the Religious Affairs Committee for the Ossining Branch of the NAACP.

Reverend Teneé A. H. Jones obtained her Bachelor's in Psychology from Temple University, a Master's in Nonprofit Management from The New School, plus master's degrees in Youth Ministry and Divinity from the New York Theological Seminary. She has spent her career in youth development and education, working in operations at nonprofits and schools in Brooklyn, Harlem and the South Bronx with students ranging from elementary school to college.

A member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc, where she has served as chair of the Dr. Jeanne L. Noble Delta G.E.M.S. Program for teen girls, Rev. Jones later developed a mentoring program for high school girls and has provided book scholarships for graduating high school seniors. She worked in Ministry at St. Luke Baptist Church, before marrying the Rev. Shaun Ellison Jones in 2021, and now serves alongside him at Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church as an Associate Minister and Director of the Rising Stars Youth Ministry, while also managing the church's social media.

Born in Petersburg, Tennessee at the end of World War II, Mary Rainey moved as a young child with her family to New York as part of the Great Migration of Black Americans from the South to the North. She graduated from Peekskill High School in 1963 and then received an Associate's degree in Social Work from Pace University, by which time she had already started a family with her husband Russell Rainey.

Rainey worked first as a teacher at Aunt Bessie's Open Door, a Head Start daycare facility in Peekskill, before spending nine years working at WestCOP (Westchester Community Opportunity Program) in Valhalla. In 1976, at the age of 32 she became Director at the

Westchester Community Action Program at the Kiley Youth Center in Peekskill, where she spent the next 40 years overseeing community initiatives. A congregant at Mount Lebanon Baptist Church in Peekskill, Rainey held several leadership roles at the church over the years.

To view Harckham's remarks on Rainey in the State Senate, click [here](#).