



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Recognizes Community Leaders in Black History Month Commemoration

PETE HARCKHAM February 22, 2023

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Croton-on-Hudson, NY – In recognition of Black History Month, New York State Senator Pete Harckham honored six individuals for their leadership and commitment at a special ceremony on Saturday, Feb. 18 held at the Croton Free Library.

The honorees, all residents of the 40th Senate District, included Reverend Gary L. Colter, pastor of Mount Lebanon Baptist Church in Peekskill; Joyce Sharrock-Cole, Ossining’s village historian; Jermain Smith and Tamarah Bridgewater, cofounders of ENU Builds; Ken Sargeant, co-director of the Harlem Cultural Archives; and Gwenveria Sargeant, founder and board chair of the Fashion & Arts Xchange group.

“The importance of Black History Month is simply this: it is American history and central to who we are as a nation,” said Harckham, “These Black History Month honorees value the importance of strengthening our communities, empowering residents and proudly celebrating their African American heritage. Despite the significant obstacles and challenges that many Black Americans face, they have dedicated themselves to attain noteworthy achievements that benefit all of us. All together, they deserve our gratitude and appreciation.”

The honorees were presented with New York State Senate Proclamations. To see a video of the ceremony, click [here](#).

Reverend Gary Colter was born and raised in the Bronx. He graduated from Manhattan Bible Institute with a certificate in Evangelism, earned his bachelor’s degree from Capella University and master of divinity from the Alliance Theological Seminary. In 2013, he was named pastor of Mount Lebanon Baptist Church and under his leadership the church has grown and thrived. Rev. Coulter was elected president of the Central Hudson Baptist Association’s Congress of Christian Education in 2019.

Joyce Sharrock-Cole, a lifelong resident of Ossining, earned a bachelor’s in organizational management from Mercy College, and certification as a genealogical researcher from Boston University. She is a founding member and lead researcher of the Little Bertie County Genealogical Society, which facilitates the Ossining Public Library Genealogy Group, and serves as Ossining Village Historian. Sharrock Cole facilitates a genealogical program at Ossining High School that promotes self-discovery through scientific and historical research; and she heads her own research business, JSC Research LLC, where people can employ her service to explore their family roots.

Jermain Smith is a highly regarded information technology professional with over three decades of applied experience. Today, she serves as executive director of Project105 Athletics, an organization offering youth development through sports. He is also director of User Experience for Pace University. Both Smith and fellow Ossining High School graduate Tamarah Bridgewater co-founded ENU Builds with the goal of giving back to the community, working with both youth organizations and local businesses to uplift and create opportunities for people of color.

Tamarah Bridgewater is an artist, community advocate, instructor and professional based in Westchester County. She also creates curriculum and proposals for community-based programming, events, professional workshops and seminars. The owner and operator of ArtinaBox.Co, Bridgewater provides workshops and lessons in the community, collaborating with school districts, community organizers, and businesses concerned with creatively engaging the community at large. She co-founded ENU Builds with Jermain Smith.

Ken Sargeant has been a resident of Croton-on-Hudson for over two decades. He graduated with a bachelor's in economics from Middlebury College and worked for three decades in the photography industry. Equal parts historian, environmentalist and filmmaker, Sargeant has provided content for the Gannett newspaper, HamletHub, Guide Communications, Inc., and a host of other publications. He has had an active role in community affairs, and has lent much of his time and talent to various local boards and agencies, including the Arts & Humanities Advisory Council for the Village of Croton-on-Hudson. In 2008, Sargeant co-founded the Harlem Cultural Archives for the purpose of gathering important oral history from the Harlem Community.

Gwenveria Sargeant, a native of Syracuse, NY, graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology, with a degree in fashion design. In 1994, she founded the Fashion & Arts Xchange Group Inc., a not-for-profit service organization that provides opportunities for networking and exchange among the diverse community of African-American professionals in the fashion and arts industry; she now chairs the organization's board of directors. Previously a professor at Fashion Institute of Technology, she now works as a freelance design consultant for various companies within the garment industry. Along with her husband Ken, she has been active in the Croton-on-Hudson community.

“Black History Month is essential in preserving and sharing the stories of Black experiences, contributions, struggles, and triumphs in the U.S.,” said Sharrock-Cole. “Consequently, the existence of this commemoration is a pertinent reminder that we, as a country, have yet to rectify the sin of failing to incorporate Black contributions fully into the mainstream American Story, as we should.”

Black History Month has its origins in the early twentieth century. The concept was popularized by African American academics to highlight the United States' rich Black cultural heritage.