

# PRESS RELEASE

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**CONTACT: Minister Elorm Ocansey**

📞 640-203-9318 ✉️ [whitesborohistoricpreservation@gmail.com](mailto:whitesborohistoricpreservation@gmail.com)

## **2ND ANNUAL WHITESBORO BLACK HISTORY GALA RETURNS AS A STATEWIDE CALL TO LEGACY, INVESTMENT, AND CULTURAL POWER**

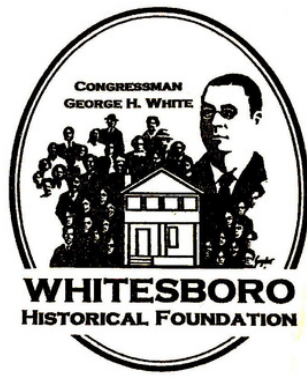
Whitesboro, NJ — The Whitesboro Historical Foundation and Whitesboro Historic Preservation Project proudly present the 2nd Annual Whitesboro Black History Gala, taking place on Saturday, April 18, 2026, at the Cape May Convention Hall.

Building upon the historic momentum of its inaugural year, the 2026 Gala emerges not merely as an event, but as a declaration. A declaration that the story of Whitesboro is not confined to the past, but is actively being written in the present.

At the heart of this year's gala stands what organizers are calling the most extensive historical presentation on Whitesboro ever assembled, a sweeping, immersive exhibition chronicling the depth, brilliance, and enduring legacy of one of America's most significant Black-founded communities.

In a groundbreaking expansion, Whitesboro is also welcoming exhibitors from Black communities across New Jersey, creating a collective tapestry of Black history that stretches far beyond municipal lines, uniting stories of struggle, triumph, migration, faith, and institution-building across the state.

"This year, we are not simply remembering history; we are presenting it in its fullness, its dignity, and its global significance," said Shirley Green, Executive Director of the Whitesboro Historical Foundation.



“What will be experienced at this gala is the most comprehensive historical exhibition on Whitesboro that the world has ever seen. And by inviting our sister communities across New Jersey, we are declaring that our stories are interconnected, powerful, and worthy of preservation at the highest level.”

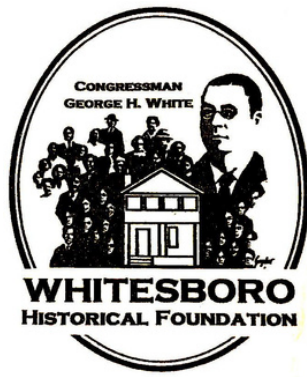
This year’s gala also takes a bold step forward, positioning Whitesboro not only as a site of remembrance but as a statewide opportunity for investment, development, and generational transformation.

“This gala is not merely a celebration; it is a divine summons, a clarion call echoing across generations,” declared Minister Elorm Ocansey, a supporting partner of the project. “We beckon leaders, visionaries, and architects of destiny from every corner of this state to come and sow into what we proclaim as the greatest revitalization of Black History since Kemet. We are outside, exercising all our rights and privileges as citizens of this great nation and residents of New Jersey, Cape May County, Middle Township, and Whitesboro.”

The 2026 Gala will honor an extraordinary class of leaders in faith, labor, civil rights, arts, preservation, and community development. Yet beyond recognition, many of this year’s honorees are actively shaping the work on the ground, demonstrating that legacy is not only inherited, but built in real time.

Among the voices guiding this movement are past and present award recipients who now serve as lead organizers:

“The strength of Whitesboro has always been its people,” said Michelle Brown, longtime steward of the Whitesboro Historical Foundation. “And what you will witness at this gala is a community that refuses to let its story fade, one that continues to rise, organize, and lead.”



“We don’t just celebrate this work, we live it,” said Felicia Simmons, recipient of the 2026 Samuel H. Vick Award and a leading force behind the initiative. “This gala reflects the labor, the vision, and the sacrifice of people committed to seeing Whitesboro not only preserved, but fully realized.”

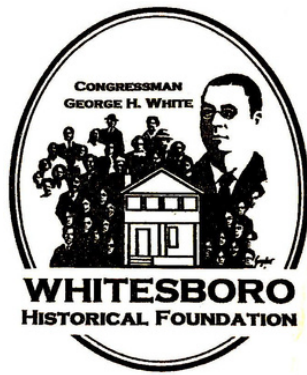
“This is what it means to invest in community,” added Oriana Holmes-Price, 2026 Noah Cherry Award recipient. “We are building something that honors our past while creating a future rooted in justice, liberation, and collective power.”

As the heartbeat of the evening, Whitesboro will uplift a distinguished class of honorees and institutions whose lives bear witness to the enduring power of faith, justice, culture, and community. Each award carries the name of a legacy, and each recipient proves that legacy still lives.

The **2026 Aletha Gibbs Award** is presented to **Caring 4 Kids New Jersey, accepted by Anita Shelton**, a beloved daughter of Whitesboro, whose life’s work reflects compassion in motion. Through her tireless advocacy for families and children, she nurtures not only lives but futures, planting seeds of hope that will bloom for generations.

The **2026 Booker T. Washington Award** is conferred upon **Mayor Ras J. Baraka**, a visionary whose leadership transcends city limits and speaks to the conscience of a nation. A poet, activist, and architect of justice, he governs with courage, creativity, and an unrelenting commitment to the liberation of his people.

Also receiving the **2026 Booker T. Washington Award**, the **People’s Organization for Progress** stands as a pillar of resistance and righteousness. For over four decades, they have marched, organized, and spoken truth to power, carrying forward the sacred charge that all power, indeed, belongs to the people.



The **2026 Congressman George H. White Award** honors **Anthony Abrantes**, a national force at the intersection of labor and civil rights. Through his leadership, pathways once closed have been opened, voices once silenced have been amplified, and dignity has been restored to the work of countless men and women across this nation.

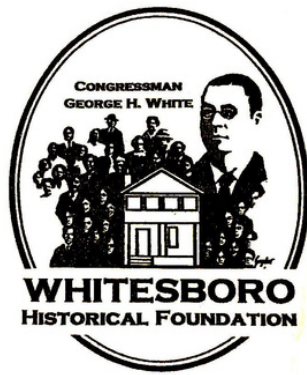
The **2026 Reverend J.W. Fishburn Award** is bestowed upon the **African Methodist Episcopal Church**, accepted by **Reverend Andrea Davis**, a radiant vessel of faith, intellect, and prophetic leadership. In her sacred charge as shepherd of souls and teacher of truth, she embodies a ministry that liberates, uplifts, and calls a people forward into purpose.

The **2026 Ernest Cherry Award** honors **Sharon Spencer**, a matriarch in the truest sense, whose quiet strength, steady presence, and unwavering care have built spaces of belonging for generations. Her life is a testimony that true leadership is not always loud, but always lasting.

The **2026 Noah Cherry Award** is awarded to **Oriana Holmes-Price**, a rising voice of environmental justice and community empowerment. Rooted in love for her people and driven by a vision for equity, she represents a generation unwilling to inherit injustice and determined to transform it.

The **2026 Outstanding Historic Preservation Award** is bestowed upon **Curtis Bashaw**, whose visionary leadership has safeguarded the architectural soul of Cape May. Through his work, history is not frozen in time; it is restored, reimagined, and made alive for generations to encounter.

Also receiving the **2026 Outstanding Historic Preservation Award**, **Kay Harris** stands as a devoted steward of history, art, and truth. Through her tireless work, the story of Asbury Park is not only preserved but honored with the depth, dignity, and brilliance it deserves.



The **2026 Paul Lawrence Dunbar Award** is awarded to **Lynda Anderson-Towns**, a guardian of memory and a keeper of story. Through her work as an educator and historian, she ensures that the voices of the past are not lost, but live on, guiding, teaching, and inspiring those yet to come.

Also receiving the **2026 Paul Lawrence Dunbar Award**, **Dahshauyn Green-Staton** stands as a living bridge between culture and community. Through artistry, music, and service, he transforms history into movement, reminding us that legacy is not only preserved, but performed, felt, and lived.

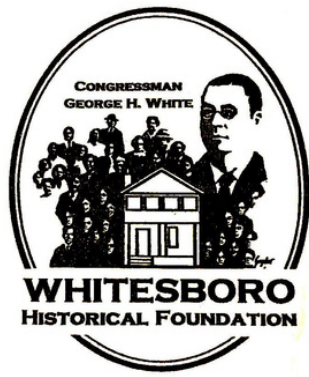
The **2026 Samuel H. Vick Award** is presented to **Felicia Simmons**, a builder of communities and a force for transformation. With vision in her mind and service in her hands, she labors at the intersection of preservation and progress, proving that what we inherit, we are also called to rebuild.

The **2026 Wiley H. Bates Award** honors **Assatta Mann-Colon**, a fearless advocate whose work echoes across the state as a call to justice. With clarity, conviction, and courage, she challenges systems, uplifts communities, and reminds us that the fight for equity demands both voice and action.

The evening will also offer a locally sourced, rich, and dynamic cultural experience, blending history, artistry, and culinary excellence:

- Featured Chef: Monique Freeman of Tiffany's Greens Beans N Birds
- Dessert Experience: Dawn Robinson of Dawn's Delights
- Host MC & Feature Musical Performer: Dahshauyn Green-Staton (2026 Paul Lawrence Dunbar Award Honoree)
- Featured Musical Band: South Jersey's own ZOAY' JAZZ

Together, all these elements will create an undeniable atmosphere of elegance and celebration.



**For more information on tickets, sponsorship opportunities, or how you can support the Whitesboro Historical Foundation and Whitesboro Historic Preservation Project, please visit [preservewhitesboro.org](http://preservewhitesboro.org).**

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