



Culture in brief: National Council of Negro Women holds luncheon



Britnee N. Timberlake is the keynote speaker at the National Council of Negro Women, Montclair section, annual luncheon. COURTESY NCNW

[The National Council of Negro Women, Montclair Section](#) will host its Annual Luncheon on Saturday, March 23, 12-4 p.m., at the Wilshire Grand Banquet Center, 350 Pleasant Valley Way, West Orange

NCNW writes that “this year is extra special as the Montclair Section celebrates a significant anniversary milestone of 65 years and enjoys the distinction of being one of the first sections formed in New Jersey. As such, it is part of a powerful network of nearly three million women nationwide with headquarters in Washington DC.”

[READ: MISS BLACK AMERICA TO SPEAK AT NCNW LUNCHEON \(2018\)](#)

The theme of the luncheon is “Phenomenal and Fierce.” The keynote speaker at the NCNW luncheon will be 34th District Assemblywoman, Britnee N. Timberlake. Those honored for



VICTORIA PRATT

their outstanding leadership, achievements and devotion to community service are:

The Honorable Victoria Pratt — Humanitarian Award

Dr. Albert J. Lewis, Jr. — Community Service

Adenah Bayoh — Business Award

Ursula S. Derios — Education Award

Vanessa McKenzie Newton — In-Service Award



CHASE CHRISTMAS

Chase Christmas — Youth Award

Donation for the luncheon is \$75. Tickets are available at <https://phenomal-and-fierce.eventbrite.com> or through luncheon chairperson, Gloria Matthews, 973-568-4932 or email: gamatt35@aol.com. For membership inquiries, contact Sandra Cook-McKnight, VP Membership at smckni7035@aol.com or Diane Brown Spencer, President at askdianenow@gmail.com.



Miss Black America to speak at NCNW awards luncheon

 *National Council of Negro Women Awards*
The Wilshire Grand Banquet Center

350 Pleasant Valley Way, West Orange

*For tickets, contact Luncheon Chairperson Gloria Matthews,
973-783-3715, gmatt35@aol.com*

By GWEN OREL

orel@montclairlocal.news

“When one of your babysitters and your mother says you should show up, you don’t do that much additional research,” said former gubernatorial candidate Jim Johnson with a laugh about attending the National Council of Negro Women Montclair Section Annual Awards luncheon on Saturday, March 24.

Johnson, a board member of Montclair Film Festival and an advisor to Jazz House Kids, is special counsel to Gov. Phil Murphy. And, he is one of seven Montclairites being honored by the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) for achievements and community service.

His babysitter Agnes Brantley is a sponsor of the event, and his mother, Byerte Johnson had been honored by the organization in the past.

Miss Black America, Brittany Lewis, will be the keynote speaker at this year’s event.

Johnson will receive the Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune Award, an award named for the founder of NCNW.

The National Council of Negro Women was founded in 1935 by Mary McLeod Bethune, who was the daughter of slaves. She became an advisor to F.D.R. in what was known as the “Black Cabinet.” The East Coast alone has more than 20 chapters, now called sections, of NCNW. The Montclair chapter dates to 1954.

This prestigious honor is not given very year, only when a candidate seems truly exceptional, said NCNW acting president Diane Spencer.

Others being honored on March 24 are:

- Cynthia Walker, founder of S.O.F.I.A., a domestic violence advocacy group
- Assemblyman Thomas P. Giblin, Humanitarian Award

- Gayl Shepard, Education Award
- Jefferson's Café and Food Market, Business Award
- Betty McCann, In-Service Award
- Trinity Fowlin, Youth Award



DIANE SPENCER

Spencer, who has been a member of the Montclair Section for 25 years and is a life member of the organization, said that Johnson was awarded the Bethune award for his community activism.

The main function of NCNW is “to provide opportunities, and advocate for and empower women,” Spencer said. A popular program in Montclair is a kinship caregivers support groups, which provides workshops and advisory groups for relatives who support children.

“My passion is to help homelessness, joblessness, anyone who’s in need,” said Spencer. She works as a career coach and resume writer, and has a company, Distinctive Marketing, in Montclair. “What keeps me motivated is to help young women through all the trials and issues they have. I think most of the women involved [in NCNW] have a passion like that.”

While “negro” and “women” are in the title, NCNW includes male associate members, and women who are not of color, she said.

Spencer reached out to Brittany Lewis after hearing about Lewis’ platform on domestic violence.

CELEBRATING CULTURE

Lewis, 27, who is pursuing a doctorate in history at George Washington University, said domestic violence awareness is something she will always advocate.

“I lost my sister at the hands of her fiancé when I was an undergraduate,” Lewis said.



BRITTANY LEWIS

As Miss Delaware in the Miss America pageant in 2014, she advocated for domestic violence awareness throughout the tri-state area.

The Miss America pageant, she pointed out, is still the largest provider of scholarships for women and she was awarded more than \$30,000 in scholarships as Miss Delaware.

Patriarchy, is not going away: it's connected to capitalism, white supremacy, and structures created over 500 years, she said. Being in a pageant is a choice that gives her power. "Some women feel power, some women don't," Lewis said about pageants.

The history of Miss Black America, is itself a commentary on race in America. It was founded in 1968 as a form of protest against an infamous rule in the Miss America pageant from the 1930s, that contestants had to be "in good health and of the white race," Lewis said. While the rule was gone by the 1950s, in 1968, a black contestant still had not walked across the stage. Miss Black America was a place where women could celebrate black identity and black beauty.

Lewis discovered in her research that Oprah was Miss Tennessee in 1971, and the Jackson 5 got their start on the Miss Black America Stage.

In 2014, at the height of the unrest in Ferguson following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson, some Miss America board members felt uneasy about some of the articles Lewis was putting on social media.

"Speaking so frankly about race can make others uncomfortable. You don't have to have those discussions in an all black space. It's OK for us to celebrate our black culture, our identity, in spaces created by us, she said."



*Jim Johnson will receive the Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune Award at the NCNW awards luncheon.
COURTESY NCNW*

'SHOW THAT YOU CARE'

When Mary McLeod Bethune died, in her last will and testament she wrote, "My worldly possessions are few. I leave you love. Love builds. It is positive and helpful; it is more beneficial than hate."

Her words inspire Johnson, who said that leaders should not be afraid to talk about love in the world.

When Johnson was newly appointed as co-chair of the National Church Arson Task Force, President Bill Clinton told him not to be afraid to verbalize how much he cared. The task force had been formed to investigate a rash of fires in African American churches in the South. The task force would find out what was going on with investigations and possible copycats, the president told him, "but I want it to be clear to people that you care about what's happening in their communities."

"To me, it resonated," Johnson said.

For Johnson, receiving an award named for a person whose legacy is love and hope is a high honor.

NCNW, he said, is “part of the bedrock of the community.”