

Town of West Hartford

50 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107-2431

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

West Hartford celebrates the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monday, January 21, 2019, 10:00-11:30 AM

WEST HARTFORD, CONN. (January 11, 2019) -- Join us for the 23rd annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life on **Monday, January 21, 2019** at the **West Hartford town hall auditorium, 50 South Main Street, 10:00 - 11:30 AM**. Each year the event that pays tribute to Dr. King's ideals and vision grows more popular and inspiring. The event draws nearly 400 people each year.

The celebration is free and open to people of all ages.

This year's keynote speaker is Patricia Wilson Pheanious. She is the first African-American woman to win a rural legislative seat.

Retired after a career of nearly than four decades working for the state, including as Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, and as a teacher at four colleges, Pheanious decided it was time to take action.

"After the 2016 national election, I became increasingly alarmed by the challenges facing my country, state and district. I thought, I could either complain about it or do something," Wilson Pheanious said.

"I decided to return to public service by running for a seat on the Connecticut Legislature," she explained.

"I am proud to have been in elected in November (2018) to represent the quiet corner of Connecticut - the 53rd District - Ashford, Tolland and Willington."

Her primary concerns for her district are the deteriorating infrastructure of homes and public buildings, raising the minimum wage, and maintaining quality education.

The small town of Ashford has been her hometown since the 1950s. She attended E.O. Smith High School in Mansfield and went on to receive a Bachelor's degree from the University of Connecticut, as well as her Master's degree in Social Work and her Juris Doctor degree in Law.

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Over the past 40 years, Wilson Pheanious enjoyed a multi-faceted career in human service. She is an attorney, was a tenured Associate Professor at the University of Saint Joseph for eight years and later served on the Board of Trustees for a decade. She continued to teach law-related to social work courses at the University of Saint Joseph and was adjunct faculty at Eastern Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut.

In addition, Wilson Pheanious served in several capacities in the state Department of Children & Families and the state Department of Social Services from 1988 until her retirement in 2007.

In 2008, she married Robert Pheanious and moved to Denver to head Human Services for the City and County of Denver. In 2011, she returned to Connecticut and led a community action agency in South Norwalk for a couple of years.

Even in retirement, she volunteered on many community boards, including Access Agency in Willimantic, the Democratic Town Committee in Ashford, the Center for Reflection Education and Action, and the Connecticut Children's Law Center.

Wilson Pheanious is the daughter of a Tuskegee Airman who she says shaped dedication to public service. She is proud of ancestry newly discovered through the Witness Stones Project, and of her success as a single parent. Her son, Cheo Hodari Coker, is a noted writer/TV producer living in Seattle with his wife and three children.

Now, with the start of a new legislative year upon us, Rep. Patricia Wilson Pheanious plans to use her experience. She is ready to get to work and to let her voice be heard.

The 2019 celebration also includes a welcome from Mayor Shari Cantor and a prayer by Rabbi James Rosen of Beth El Temple, West Hartford. Henley Solomon, Jr., who was the student speaker at this event from Conard High School in 2014, will serve as master of ceremonies. He is a fundraising and philanthropy chair for the Pi Omega chapter of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity at Sacred Heart University.

Dawna Capp-Evans of the West Hartford African American Social & Cultural Organization, one of the sponsoring organizations, will provide the introduction of the keynote speaker.

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Each year two students from the public high schools are selected to give the student perspectives on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This year Brianna Bobo of Conard High School and Mica Lovell of Hall High School were chosen.

Musical performances will be provided by the Hall High School Jazz Combo, King Philip Middle School Singers and Hall High School Choraliers.

Student artwork, essays and poems from West Hartford elementary schools will also be on display.

The West Hartford African American Social & Cultural Organization, Town of West Hartford, West Hartford Public Schools, and West Hartford Human Rights Commission are annual sponsors of the event. West Hartford Community Television will air the event live on Comcast channel 5 and replay it on Channels 5 and 95. Refreshments are provided by the Elmwood Senior Center.

For more information, contact Renée McCue, public relations specialist, Town of West Hartford at (860) 561-7521 or email Renee@WestHartfordCT.gov.

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