

Celebrating Port Chester's black history and influence

By Casey Watts

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The Carver Center honored three people of color who have made significant impacts on the Village of Port Chester during the organization's Black History Celebration on Saturday, Feb. 11.

Carver Center's logistics coordinator Michael Williams explained that he had the idea about three years ago to begin thanking those who make significant impacts on Port Chester during the center's annual Black History Celebration to make the ceremony more personal to the village. This year, the center honored Michael Arterberry, the executive director of Youth Voices Center, Apostle Robert Girtman of Girtman Memorial Church of the Living God and Nina Jones, a longtime volunteer and member of the Port Chester Unity Committee.

Girtman did not respond to numerous attempts to contact him for an interview before deadline on Wednesday, Feb. 15, so he is not featured in this article.

Nina Jones

A lifelong Port Chester resident, Jones has been volunteering at St. Peter's Church, has been a part of the Port Chester Unity Committee for the annual Unity Day at Columbus Park, and recently retired from Ericsson as an administrative assistant. Having known Williams since he was born, Jones was an obvious choice to receive a plaque for community service, but it took some pushing for Williams to convince her to accept it.

"When he called to ask if I would be willing to take on the honor, I didn't really think I had to be honored outward," Jones said. "You do what you do to help people and God will continue to bless you. And he has blessed me."

A few days prior to accepting the honor, she had to undergo surgery. But the 55-year-old prevailed and came to the ceremony, only to be greeted by her family and friends.

"When people show they love you and you can feel it, it's a different thing," Jones said, as compared to when people just say they care. "I definitely felt the love on Saturday. It just feels good. This is what I've been taught my whole life? you give people what you want to get back from other people."

Michael Arterberry

Arterberry founded the Youth Voices Center (YVC) in 2008 in hopes of helping high schoolers get to know themselves and to build a community among ethnic groups. But his ties to the Port Chester community go beyond those he mentored through YVC – he worked with a contracting guidance agency within the schools, and from there, he was able to take in surrogate sons and daughters such as Williams.

Growing up in New Rochelle in a dysfunctional home and living in poverty gave Arterberry a different perspective on life. But because he had a couple of mentors helping him along the way, he was able to discover his gift for helping people, he explained. He brought that gift to the Port Chester community and to Williams.

"I've pretty much raised him and his two younger brothers," Arterberry recalled. "I played an integral part in his family."

"I've known Mickey a very long time," he continued. "When I met him, he had just graduated high school. Watching him really impresses me. He always had it in him."

So seeing Williams' success, as well as the success of his other mentees, really makes it all worthwhile for Arterberry.

"There's never a time that I do something and in the back of my mind, I say 'this is going to be a nice highlight to receive a reward.' No, it's humbling," he said.

In addition to receiving recognition at the Carver Center, the North Haven, Conn. resident has been selected to receive numerous awards, including the USA Network Characters Unite Award in 2010, the 2014 100 Men of Color Award and in 2016, he was named Educator of the Year by the Youth Community Outreach Program in Mount Vernon.



Lifelong Port Chester resident and longtime volunteer Nina Jones stands with Pastor Greg and Pastor Taylor after accepting her award.



Youth Voices Center Executive Director Michael Arterberry stands with his wife Rachel and his two children after accepting his award for service to the community during the Black History Celebration at the Carver Center on Saturday, Feb. 11.



Apostle Robert Girtman of Girtman Memorial Church of the Living God accepts his award for service to the community from Tammy Thacker.