

celebrate our accomplishments, we must never forget our roots, our past, because only through a serious discussion of slavery and its legacy will we truly be able to heal our nation.”

In his remarks, Freeholder Rufus Johnson stressed how important it is for elected officials and others in leadership positions to help raise up the community during these difficult times, and to communicate the message, especially to the young, that it’s time for them to “*strive*, not just survive.”

Jeremiah W. Birkett of Montclair was born and raised in Harlem, New York City, the youngest of twelve children. He attended Seward Park High School and then went on to study Mechanical Machine Design at the City College of New York, from which he earned his B.S. degree in Mechanical Design. While attending CCNY, he worked for one of his brothers who was a mechanical engineer, and who had his own engineering company, Birkett Automation in Manhattan, one of the only African American-owned engineering companies at the time and the first company to design and manufacture automatic pen assembly machines for the ballpoint pen industry. This machinery, which is still being used to this day and requires only one operator to produce 15,000 ballpoint pens a day, replaced what was once an assembly line of five workers.

After working with his brother for at least twelve years, Mr. Birkett joined A&L Pen Company of Brooklyn, NY, one of the largest wholesale pen companies on the East Coast, where he was employed for twenty-three years as a General Plant Manager and Machine Designer. About six years ago, he started his own company, Birkett Pens and Promotions of Montclair, which has thrived as a direct result of his more than thirty years of experience in the industry and enjoys an A+ rating by the Better Business Bureau. Jeremiah Birkett is the proud father of Ronie, Jeremiah and Regene, and the loving grandfather of Ayanna.



Freeholder President Blonnie R. Watson presents Jeremiah W. Birkett of Montclair with his Commendation and award from the Board. (Photo by Glen Frieson)

Introducing her honoree, Freeholder President Watson said, “I am delighted to present my honoree, Mr. Jeremiah Birkett, a man whose intelligence and hard work have enabled him to be an innovative and very, very successful businessman, as well as a role model to aspiring young entrepreneurs in our community.”

Birkett thanked the freeholders saying, “Truly, this a very exciting experience for me, because this is the first time I have been honored for anything. It’s been a long journey, and I’ve done a lot never expecting anything, so this is very, very special. Thank you!”

Henry Daniels was born in Camden in 1930, one of two children born to the late Arthur and Priscilla Daniels. He attended the Manual Training Industrial School in Bordentown before going on to attend West Virginia State University where he earned his Bachelor’s degree in Education in 1948. Thereafter, he served as a 1st Lieutenant in the 24th Division of the U. S. Army during the Korean War for three years. Following his military service, Mr. Daniels began his long and distinguished career as an educator at Oak Tree Elementary School in Edison, during which time he also earned his M.A. degree in Administration and Supervision from Rutgers University. He next taught 6th Grade at Rand Middle School in Montclair for eight years before becoming the Principal of Lord Sterling Elementary School in New Brunswick for six years. Mr. Daniels concluded his outstanding 30-year career in education by serving as Principal of East Orange’s Columbian School from 1973 until his retirement in 1983, and during those many years he nurtured, educated and challenged thousands of children to learn and to grow into productive members of society.

Mr. Daniels has resided in East Orange for the last forty years with his dear wife of fifty-eight years, Gwendolyn, and they are the proud parents of Keith, Kevin, Kenneth and Kyle, and the loving grandparents of eight.



Henry Daniels of East Orange receives his Commendation from Freeholder Carol Y. Clark, also of East Orange. (Photo by Glen Frieson)

Freeholder Carol Clark introduced her honor, Henry Daniels, as “a principal and educator par excellence in the East Orange School District”, noted his attendance at the historic Manual Training Industrial School, and stated how thrilled she was to recognize him for his 30 years in education. Mr. Daniels spoke of the many wonderful teachers and professors who motivated him over the years to enter the field

of education and to accomplish so much, far from the dangerous streets of his boyhood home in Camden. “So as I’ve talked to youngsters in the cities, I’ve told them, ‘It’s not where you grow up, it’s what you’re going to become, and that depends on you; you can make it if you try.’”

Nathaniel Drisker, Jr., was born in 1929 to Minnie and Nathaniel Drisker, Sr., in Tuskegee, Alabama.

He graduated from Tuskegee H.S. and then attended Benedict College in Columbia, S.C., where he met his future wife, the late Corrine E. Jackson, and earned his B.A. degree in Physical Education in 1956. They were married in 1957 and moved to Newark where he worked for twelve years as a lab technician at the VA Hospital in East Orange, a period of time interrupted by his service in the U. S. Army during the Korean War. After leaving the VA Hospital, he moved on to enjoy a 20-year career as a pharmaceutical salesman for Wyeth Laboratories in New York City until his retirement in 1995.

Upon his retirement, Mr. Drisker pursued a new avocation with vigor, that of a community activist in the vicinity of Newark's Irvine Turner Boulevard in the shadow of Rt. 78, where he is affectionately known as "Mr. D" and acknowledged as the unofficial mayor of the neighborhood. Through his efforts, city workers have cleaned up debris dumped on the streets and in empty lots, and the NJDOT has cut overgrown grass along Rt. 78. He also waged a fight to prevent the opening of a halfway house and chased prostitutes and their johns and drug dealers and their customers from the neighborhood. Mr. Drisker has influenced the lives of many young people and his selfless efforts were the subject of an article in *The Star-Ledger* in November of 2011, in which he was described as the "conscience" of his neighborhood. Nathaniel Drisker, Jr., is a devoted member of the Calvary Baptist Church in Vauxhall (Union), the proud father of Dale, Bernard and the late Judy, the loving grandfather of four and great-grandfather of two.



Freeholders Rufus I. Johnson of Newark (back row, left) and Gerald W. Owens of South Orange (back row, right) present the Board's Commendation to Bernard and Dale Drisker, the children of honoree Nathaniel Drisker, Jr. (Photo by Glen Frieson)

Freeholders Gerald Owens and Rufus Johnson sponsored the recognition of Nathaniel Drisker, Jr., and welcomed his children, Bernard and Dale, who accepted the Board's honors on their father's behalf. Freeholder Owens recalled having known Mr. Drisker many years ago, when they were young men, and then of reading a *Star-Ledger* article about him many years later that not-so-surprisingly highlighted his community activism. Bernard Drisker thanked the Board for honoring his father, and thanked his father for having taken "ownership" of his role as a husband and father, as a neighbor and friend, in his job and in his community, "and in everything he did."

Akbar Salaam of Newark is an entrepreneur, community organizer and social activist. He is the owner and operator of Unity Beef Sausage Company, a well-known establishment that has been a landmark in

Newark for the past 44 years. He not only provides quality Halal meat to his customers, but has helped develop the “Manner and Condition” for slaughtering and processing Halal meats and poultry with the State of New Jersey and the USDA.

Through his business, Salaam has also provided social services to the community through his collaboration with Volunteers for America, which provides “halfway” houses for inmates awaiting parole, working to make their transitions easier by providing them with jobs and community services such as job training and mentoring while also giving them marketable skills. He also works with Newark high school students, providing them with job training and career mentoring. Mr. Salaam has been lauded for his contributions to the community, including being named “Businessman of the Year” over the years by the City of Newark, The Women in Support of the Million Man March, and Imam Mohammed and Mosque Cares. He is also a member of numerous organizations, including: President of the New Jersey Muslim Business Association; Member of the League of Muslim Voters; Consultant to the Imams Council; and a Board Member for the World Peace Project, Frontier Media Group, Amnesty International and Tortured Children of the World. He is also a member of the Newark Athletic Hall of Fame.



Freeholder D. Bilal Beasley of Irvington (left) presented the Board’s award to Akbar Salaam of Newark. (Photo by Glen Frieson)

Freeholder Beasley commented that his life has been intertwined with that of his honoree, Akbar Salaam, for many years. “This year, I wanted to honor someone who I’ve been working with since we were high school age, a friendship that has lasted 50 years...he is a pillar in the community and a successful businessman who has always demonstrated an ability not only to do for himself, but to look out for others.” Mr. Salaam spoke about the difficulties of adhering to a pork-free and religious diet back in the 1960’s, long before the advent of beef or turkey sausages. “So I got together with six other guys and we started Unity Beef Sausage Company. We put in a little South Carolina, Georgia, New Orleans and a little Florida, our African-American culture, to formulate the first African-American sausage, which we registered with the USDA 45 years ago this past February.” “So now,” he joked, “we’ve got African-American sausage right up there with Italian sausage, Polish sausage and Hebrew National!”

The program also included the offering of the Invocation by Reverend Dr. Gloria J. Harris of Beth El International Church Ministry of Newark and the Benediction by Imam W. Deen Shareef of the Waris

Cultural Research and Development Center of Irvington, as well as vocal performances by Valarie Adams and a poetry reading by Betty Neals

At the conclusion of the program, guests were invited to a Reception on the 5th Floor of the Hall of Records.

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