

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **WESTCHESTER COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO HONOR OUTSTANDING ADVOCATES AT ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY BREAKFAST Student winners of the Commission's Moot Court Competition will also be honored**

County Executive Andrew J. Spano and the Westchester County Board of Legislators will again join the Westchester County Human Rights Commission to celebrate International Human Rights Day at the Commission's Annual Human Rights Day Breakfast and Awards Ceremony. The Breakfast will be held on Tuesday, December 11, 2007 and will honor three outstanding Westchester residents for their commitment and dedication to promoting human rights and equality for all people.

Richard Laster, Chair and President of the Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center will receive the Commission's distinguished *Ossie Davis Human Rights Lifetime Achievement Award* for his long-standing dedication and commitment to promoting education, knowledge and awareness about the Holocaust, racism and other inhumane indignities. However, Mr. Laster does not stop there – he then determines and directs those resolutions that will foster, encourage, and support long term diversity initiatives, peace and equality.

State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins will receive the Commission's *Champion of Human Rights Award*. During her tenure as a County Legislator, Senator Cousins is credited with having drafted and developed the Westchester County Human Rights Law which established the County's Human Rights Commission. Despite opposition and difficult issues surrounding this legislation at the time, she persevered and championed the efforts that led to the law being passed. Now, as the commission celebrates seven years of existence, and enjoys a record of having received and processed more than two thousand claims, obtained monetary settlements of over a half million dollars, as well as significant equitable relief, it is clear that her leadership in this effort was of significant value in the fight for human rights, equality and fairness for all citizens. Senator Cousins has also recently spearheaded public forums on combating the inequities of predatory lending.

Each year the Commission honors a local school that recognized the need for including in its educational curriculum, awareness and education about human and civil rights issues and creating and encouraging in our young people an understanding of diversity and acceptance.

Dr. Donald Antoneccia, Superintendent of Schools for Pleasantville will receive the Commission's *Human Rights Meritorious Service Award*. When faced with issues of discriminatory conduct by students in his school district which involved using racial slurs, drawing swastikas and not only using the N word, but spray painting it on someone's home, Dr. Antoneccia did not hesitate to take proactive measures that led to an extensive educational forum in which he encouraged his neighboring school districts to participate. The forum, attended by teachers, educators, elected officials, community leaders and the public, addressed the issues of discrimination. More than 800 people attended this forum.

"Once again, our honorees are role models who really exemplify the importance of preserving and protecting the dignity of all human beings" said Delores Scott Brathwaite, executive director of the Commission. "They are being honored by our commission because they have been effective, proactive, outspoken advocates for human rights. There are many who talk, but not all 'walk the talk' as they have" she said.

In addition to these honorees, the Commission held its *First Annual Donald N. Silverman Moot Court Competition* for high school students and will acknowledge and honor the students who were winners of the Moot Court Competition. Seven high schools participated in the competition which was held at the Supreme Court in White Plains – Ardsley, Bronxville, Gorton, Harrison, Pleasantville, Rye Neck and Sleepy Hollow -- three of the schools entering two teams in the competition. However, in the end, Ardsley High School took home the trophy as the winning team, with Rye Neck High School as the first runner-up. Gorton High School won the award for *Best Written Brief for Complainant* and Sleepy Hollow High School won for *Best Written Brief for Respondent*. Mrinmayee Patil Patel of Rye Neck High School won the *Outstanding Oral Advocate Award*. "We were pleased to see so many young people participating in this event, which already promises to be even larger next year" said Mayo Bartlett, chair of the commission. "These students and schools have to be commended for taking on this extra curricular activity and doing it so well. More important, it gave them the opportunity to learn about human rights issues" he said.

Michelle Paige-Patterson, wife of New York State Lieutenant Governor David Patterson, and a business executive in her own right, will be the *Mistress of Ceremonies* for the Breakfast. An advocate of human rights as well, Mrs. Patterson, said she is "honored to join with the commission in celebrating International Human Rights Day and honoring these individuals".

The Breakfast will be held at the Crowne Plaza in White Plains. Registration opens at 7:30 am and Breakfast will begin at 8:00 am. The cost of the breakfast is \$25.00 per person.

