

Dear Evanston/North Shore,

On behalf of the Evanston/North Shore Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, I want to thank you for your support in our recent, Annual Freedom Fund Banquet. Your unwavering support and belief in our branch helped make the night a success.

We prepared for 275 attendees. However, just a few days before the event we had stretched to 325 attendees and a waiting list. But numbers were not the only measure of success our branch experienced that night. We were also very grateful for our sponsors who supported the occasion with the purchase of ads and tickets. But our sponsors were not the only measure of success our branch experienced that night. We were grateful to see the intergenerational attendance at the Freedom Fund Banquet who ranged from late teens to over one hundred years! This is the best of the Black historical experience in the United States and deep into our African heritage. But our intergenerational presence was not the only measure of success our branch experienced that night.

There were a few challenges and as president of the branch, I want to apologize to our attendees regarding the very loud music being played in the ballroom that was next door. As I mentioned at the banquet, the occasion was a bar mitzvah and the attendees were children and youth. Our consternation was not with the party, since they had booked the room, just like we booked our ballroom. But it was with the staff who should have known the nature of our evening, particularly since we have been a customer for several years. We apologize that the roar of the music next door made it nearly impossible to hear our amazing guest speaker, Audra Wilson and other presentations. We also apologize for those who may have been served cold entrees.

Yet with all of these concerns, the most impacting part of the Freedom Fund Banquet was the incredible show of Beloved Community, gathered together to celebrate this year's trailblazer awardees. The awardees' tireless work and service to our north shore community could not be diminished by the concerns that occurred during our banquet. They represent the very best in Evanston and the North Shore as it relates to leading the way in community engagement, education, religion, economic development and activism.

Pastor Carlis L. Moody, Jr. of Faith Temple Church of God in Christ received the Trailblazer Religious Award. Pastor Moody and Faith Temple have been pillars in the 5th Ward of Evanston where the church was established in 1957. A prolific singer, director and songwriter, Pastor Moody's "I'm Available to You" has become a mainstay in the Black Sacred Music songbook.

Dr. Javier A. Viera is president of Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and received the Trailblazer Education Award. The seminary was founded in 1851 as a Methodist Biblical Institute, the first in the midwest. Dr. Viera was named president in 2021, marking the first time a person of color and a Latino has held the position.

Carolyn Ruff received the Trailblazer Community Service Award. Ms. Ruff has been a long time civil rights activist both locally and nationally. Carolyn is retired from Evanston Township High School where she served as a computer specialist. She is a freedom fighter for justice and respect for women. She is also the founder of Black Lives Matter Women of Faith.

Olivia Ohlson is a high school junior at Evanston Township High School and received the Trailblazer Youth Award. Olivia has been active at ETHS and has a strong voice on issues of civil and human rights in the Evanston community. She has been the recipient of several awards and is a ray of hope for the future of African Americans, the nation and world.

Jacqui White, Tosha Wilson and Tiffani Holmes are co-developers of The Evanston Aux and received the Trailblazer Business Award. Their vision of finding a venue to place and support Black and women owned businesses in Evanston has become a reality. Through their diligence and tireless effort, they have brought a blazing spotlight on Black women entrepreneurship and excellence in economic development.

Eva Coley is the treasurer of the Evanston/North Shore NAACP. She is also a dedicated member of Bethel AME Church and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Eva's focus and skills have helped many organizations achieve a high level of excellence.

Finally, our Youth Council issued awards to five young men for their dedicated work in the Evanston community. In September alone, twenty-eight young people became members of our Evanston/North Shore branch. What a powerful statement that we are moving in the right direction.

The Evanston and North Shore community is grateful for this year's Trailblazer awardees. They exemplify the best in our community. As we prepare to move into a new year, let us remember and rely on the talent, skills and amazing gifts that are in our midst. We also believe that 2024 will yield an even greater harvest as we strive to end all forms of injustice and inequality, and work together to achieve a more just Evanston and North Shore.

Warmly,

Rev. Dr. Michael Nabors