



Branch Newsletter

June 2022

By the Communication, Press & Publicity Committee

NEXT MEMBERSHIP MEETING: We are continuing to hold meetings via Zoom because of the pandemic. But maybe in July. Anyway, the next meeting will be at 7 p.m. Thursday, June 23. Here's the link for the Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84995648174?pwd=QlAyaHZkWlJXZWk1T3FWcHNFVnJlOQT09>

Meeting ID: 849 9564 8174 Passcode: 937480

A TEMPORARY CHANGE OF COMMAND

Branch President Johnny Corson will out for a while because of a medical issue. Vice President Larry Cohen will take over until Johnny returns. His email is chickenhill99@hotmail.com But Johnny says to copy him at pottstownnaacp.president@gmail.com and Branch Secretary Olivia Coleman at pottstownnaacp.2288@gmail.com as well.

JUNETEENTH! BE THERE!

Those of you who attended the Earth Day event in April may have overheard a conversation among several branch members about what we should do to celebrate Juneteenth. We wanted something big, something meaningful. But what? How? Who could do it?

"I will," said Marlene Hedgepeth. And she did.

On Sunday, June 19, the fun starts at 3 p.m. and will continue until 6 p.m. at the Ricketts Center. Rain or shine.

Marlene and her committee have managed to fit a LOT in! We're talking The Red Royal Diamond youth dancers performing an Afro-centric dance, praise dancers, a psalmist, a face painter. And speakers, including pastors, community leaders, oldsters, youngsters and what Marlene calls "keenagers. They have aged, but they have aged keenly." (Don't worry; only five minutes each.)

"It's a good mix," said Marlene. They'll be speaking on the theme, "Teach, learn, share, and serve." The idea is for people to leave knowing more about the people in their community and how they can work together to make Pottstown a better place. "We want to raise the bar for Pottstown. What do you want us to know so we can come together as a community?"

Our own Bobby Watson will emcee the event, although it is not yet clear whether he will wear his pink hat.

If all this makes you hungry, here's the menu: Fried fish, pulled pork, corn on the cob, hamburgers, hot dogs, cornbread, baked beans, cole slaw, cucumber-tomato salad, watermelon, lemon pound cake, sweet potato pie.

Everything, even the food, will be free. The event is being funded by the NAACP and a \$1,000 grant from Genesis Housing Corp. Numerous other people donated time, resources and their services, Hedgepeth said.

The Pottstown Library bought books about Juneteenth and will have some at the event.

A reminder: Juneteenth marks the day in 1865 when Union soldiers arrived in Texas to announce the end of slavery. Two years after the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed.

"Juneteenth allows us to remember how far Black people have come," said President Johnny Corson. "It's a reminder of the strength we have within us. It's a reminder of what we have overcome over the years, from slavery to Jim Crow to being denied the right to vote, equal housing, equal education. The things we have overcome."

He also praised Marlene for stepping up. "It's important to not just buy a membership to the NAACP, but also to get involved," Johnny said. "The more people get involved, the more we can do as a branch."

MORE JUNETEENTH EVENTS

On Saturday, two more Juneteenth events will be held at Pottsgrove Manor, 100 King St. From 10 a.m. to noon, a book club discussion will focus on "The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of America," by author and Cornell University professor Edward E. Baptist. The

book explores the history of Black labor. Dr. Robert Hewitt, professor emeritus from Shippensburg University, will lead the discussion. Copies of the book are available for purchase at the manor's museum shop. Registration is required, and can be done [here](#).

At 1 p.m., Hewitt will be the featured speaker at a "Together in History" lecture, focusing on the labor of exploited people. No registration is required.

For information about other Juneteenth events in Montgomery County, [click here](#).

MEETING WITH POTTSTOWN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

President Johnny Corson and Executive Committee members Paula Corson, Bob Bauers and Sandy Bauers and State Police Lt. William Slaton, Commander of the Heritage Affairs Section, recently met with Pottstown School Superintendent Stephen Rodriguez and other district officials to ask that the district adopt a policy to call an ambulance whenever a student is knocked unconscious. This is in response to a recent incident where a special needs student was knocked unconscious, but an ambulance was not called. Rodriguez denied the request. He said the district adheres to a state policy on such incidents, although that did not happen in this case. Stay tuned.

TRAGEDY ON HALE STREET

Branch President Johnny Corson and numerous members -- including Emanuel Wilkerson, Shawn Morris, Mayor Stephanie Henrick, John Armato -- were on the scene for days running after an explosion killed five people, including four children on May 26 near the intersection of Hale and Butler streets. The parents were critically injured, and numerous houses were damaged. The investigation into the cause is continuing.

The Branch, aided by branch member and Red Cross volunteer Shawn Morris, worked to get breakfast to those affected on the day after. She also secured gift cards from Petco to give to families whose pets were affected. Member Pastor Valentine booked two hotel rooms for people who had no homes to stay in. "It was just so much," said Corson.

Later, several of our pastors and others participated in a vigil, and many members attended. At its recent meeting, the Executive Committee voted to donate \$1,000 to the Tri-County Network's initiative to help the families.

We are exploring how to work with Montgomery County officials to bring more services to the families.

FINAL AMEN

Branch members Carter Lester and his wife, Kerry Pidcock-Lester, co-pasters of the First Presbyterian Church, have retired after 28 years. Their last service was June 5. President Johnny Corson, who attended, along with Emanuel Wilkerson, praised their commitment to the community. "They became members of the NAACP years ago," Corson said. "They were the first church that invited me to speak about racism in America. They have been so supportive of the branch. They are very special to me." We wish them well, and we do NOT consider that this is a good-bye.

ANOTHER FOND FAREWELL

Another Branch member is reaching a similar milestone: After 42-plus years as a career (paid) firefighter, Mark Gibson is retiring from the Pottstown Fire Department. He became a junior volunteer with Empire Hook and Ladder at age 16. He was the first Black career firefighter with Pottstown. His last 24-hour shift with Pottstown ended at 7 a.m. June 12.

Here's part of what he wrote to friends and family: "It has been a long journey, with ups and down, good and bad, but God has allowed me to make it through these past 24 years without serious injury. Some of the things I've seen over these years, I wouldn't want to wish on anyone. But I know without a doubt everything that I did, I did with 100% -- including saving life and property. Whether be a fire alarm, or a four-alarm fire, I gave it my all.

"To the ones that believed in me from the start to the end, I truly want to thank you. To my haters, that didn't believe in me at all, I want to thank you, too. Because out of all this, you made me a stronger and better man in life."

"We want to thank him for his years of service and for answering the call to serve by being a firefighter," said Branch President Johnny Corson. "He has saved many lives in the line of duty."

And, as with the Lesters, we still expect to see plenty of him in the community. We do NOT consider that this is a good-bye.

ANOTHER MOVE FORWARD FOR THE BRIGHT HOPE PLAYGROUND

The Montgomery County Housing Authority is hosting a brain-storming session on the design at 6 p.m., June 21, at the Bright Hope Community Room, 467 W. King Street. The purpose is to get input from residents and others about what they would like to see as part of the new playground. Special play equipment? Amenities? A walking trail? A spray park? Addressing the ancient equipment at the current playground has been in the works for a long time. Come out and have your say. Pizza, ice cream and other refreshments will be served.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR FRIENDS AT THE YMCA

The YMCA is hosting a blood drive on Thursday, June 23, from 2 to 7 p.m. Sign-ups are available! Please support the Y and all those who need blood – especially those suffering from sickle cell disease, which affects mostly people of color. A reminder: The branch will hold its own blood drives, in partnership with the American Red Cross and the Ricketts Center, Oct. 13 and Dec. 6 at the Center. (Note: If you give on June 23, you'll be eligible again on Oct. 13.)

To schedule a donation and perhaps save a life, go to www.RedCrossBlood.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

JULY 4, PARADE: As usual, we'll be marching in the Pottstown July 4 parade. Participants should assemble at 9:15 p.m. on High Street at Adams Street near the Post Office. We'll march at 10:15, heading west to Manatawny Street. Immediately afterwards is the GoFourth! Street Fest on High Street. Wear your yellow NAACP t-shirts – or any other festive attire – and join us!

JULY 4, DUCK RACE: We're still selling tickets for the Rotary Club's annual July 4 Duck Race. We get proceeds from the tickets we sell. If you'd like to buy or sell tickets, please email Pottstownnaacp.2288@gmail.com.