Aesha Ash is the first African American woman hired as permanent faculty at the School of American Ballet in the institution’s 86-year history.

Born and raised in Rochester, NY, Aesha was accepted into the prestigious School of American Ballet (SAB) in New York City at 13 years old, where she was one of the only African American students. At 18, she joined the New York City Ballet corps de ballet, where she performed numerous soloist and principal roles. Even as a young professional dancer, she sought to defy and overcome stereotypes about women of color on and off stage. Throughout her career as a student at SAB and then at New York City Ballet, she experienced an overwhelming sense of isolation as the only woman of color in both organizations during her time there.

In 2008, Aesha retired from ballet. After years of freelancing and teaching, she founded the Swan Dreams Project, which uses imagery to convey the message that beauty and talent are not constrained by race or socioeconomic status. Aesha said, “I want our youth to know that they are not limited by stereotypes nor by their environment, but only by their dreams.”

As a bilingual Community Connector & Arts Educator, Annette Ramos is committed to ensuring and promoting equitable artistic opportunities through her creative and lively work.

Master storyteller and theater artist. Arts educator. Cultural curator and connector. Through her dynamic bilingual approach to all of her work, Latina storyteller Annette Ramos exudes cultura y arte (culture and art). Originally from NYC by way of Los Angeles, California, she has been living, working (and playing!) in Rochester for over 20 years. Her ensemble approach to folklore and performance contributes to her re-telling of indigenous stories of the Caribbean.

As Executive Director of the Rochester Latino Theater Company, she has produced, directed and written over 30 productions, and has even played the role of María López (another Changemaker)! Ms. Ramos says, “The satisfaction of paving the path of Latinx art fills my spirit and propels me to fearlessly forge ahead!”
Almeta Whitis has impacted audiences around the globe by creating inclusive spaces for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect through her performances.

From an early age, Almeta recognized the need for greater inclusion in the arts. “I never knew that my dream of being on stage would really be how I would make a living. My 1st grade teacher had us perform a play about immigrants in early America. I don’t think she wanted me to play The Statue of Liberty lead role, because I was one of a few Black kids in the class. She had to give me the lead only because of my learning the lines quickly... I can still recall the chorus: The Melting Pot where all the hearts are blended in the brew. Today, I know the truth - America is not a melting pot - it’s not even a salad bowl. While taking a dramatic pause, the white teacher standing in the wings shouted out my lines, thinking I’d forgotten them. I was so angry that I threw her a ‘dirty look.’ Even the white parents in the audience were appreciative of my performance.” One of the original Principal Dancers in Bottom Of The Bucket, But! - the original Garth Fagan Dance company - Almeta continues to use her talents as a storyteller, actor, and singer to create shared experiences that transcend cultural differences.

From Crystal Springs, Mississippi, to Rochester, NY, Dr. Ruby Belton’s passion to care, give, love, learn, and teach has enabled her to blaze new paths as the first African American woman graduate of University of Rochester Medical School, a physician, and a Breast Cancer Imaging Specialist.

Ruby grew up in Mississippi with her parents and eight siblings in a loving, disciplined four-room home that housed ten people. Her father valued education, and he sent Ruby and two of her siblings to a well-respected African American boarding school for a short time. A good student, Ruby later excelled in biology at Jackson State University. When her father could not afford to pay college after the first year, Ruby’s professor kept his top student in the program by getting her a job as a lab assistant. The Macy Foundation came to Mississippi and recruited her in 1967. Ruby attended Oberlin College in Ohio as a Macy Foundation Fellow, and in 1968 the University of Rochester accepted Ruby into their medical program. She became the first African American woman to graduate from the Medical School. Dr. Ruby and her son, Dr. Doug, founded a unique non-profit organization called Physician and Laypersons Educational Associates of Greater Rochester New York (PLEA of GRNY). PLEA was founded for laypeople and in honor of laypeople with the goal of “education for all regardless.” The organization facilitates information-sharing among doctors and community members to improve health outcomes for people with chronic diseases like cancer.
Katsi Cook’s work spans many worlds and disciplines, and demonstrates a lifelong career of advancing the superlatives of Indigenous Knowledge.

Katsi draws from a Haudenosaunee traditionalist perspective the idea of Woman as the First Environment. Her groundbreaking environmental research of Mohawk mothers’ milk revealed the harmful generational impact of toxic pollutants within the St. Lawrence River. She established Canada’s National Aboriginal Council of Midwives and currently serves as Executive Director of the Spirit Aligned Leadership Program. Of her practice as an aboriginal midwife, Katsi explains, “it’s not just the baby coming into the world, but the ability to raise that baby in a world where it too can reproduce, and reproduce the culture, language, ceremonies, what it means to be Onkwehonwe (Haudenosaunee). It became a practice of recovering culture, of recovering families that are the basis of the culture and the women who are the stalk of the corn that hold it up.”

“Ideas come to me, whispering to me and I need to figure out how to get that whisper out.”

Award-winning filmmaker and visual artist from the Six Nations community in Ontario, Shelley Niro addresses themes of Indigenous erasure, genocide, women narratives, the significance of land, and Haudenosaunee oral traditions while being careful to avoid Native American stereotypes and clichés.

Shelley works in multiple mediums to create the vision she perceives in her mind. Whether it’s beadwork, film, photography, painting or sculpture, she sees art and creativity as a process of creating a different world to be brought to us and our eyes. For Shelley, film especially has the ability to change and make one feel different about themselves.
Librada Paz

Once a migrant farm laborer, Librada Paz tirelessly advocates for improvements to farmworker rights and working conditions.

Born in Oaxaca, Mexico, Librada Paz came to the U.S. with her sister as an undocumented 15-year-old immigrant, chasing her dream of an education. What she found was exploitation and abuse. Despite the conditions she faced, Librada pursued her education while still working as a farm laborer and gained legal residency as a U.S. citizen in 1998. She earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Rochester Institute of Technology and became a leading voice in the fight for farmworkers’ rights.

Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez

She founded Borinquen Dance Theatre so that youth could learn the beauty of their Taíno, African, and European heritages and be proud of who they are.

Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez had pride in her Puerto Rican heritage when she joined Garth Fagan Dance at 16 years old. She credits the discipline she learned for her academic successes - earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in college. In 1981, when she founded Borinquen Dance Theatre, Rochester’s first Latino dance company, she wanted youth to have more confidence and take the kind of risks which lead to achievement. Over the years, hundreds of members of Borinquen Dance Theatre have thrived as accomplished professionals and dance artists, outperforming their peers in Rochester.
Surviving a difficult childhood in Puerto Rico, Hilda Rosario-Escher draws on her own experiences to help others in her Rochester community.

Born in Puerto Rico and the youngest of seven siblings, Hilda Rosario-Escher had a difficult childhood growing up in the 1950s in a poor family. Some days she wouldn’t have enough to eat, but one of her fondest memories was of her elementary school principal taking her into her office to teach her how to read. Eventually, Rosario-Escher received a scholarship to attend the University of Puerto Rico, after which she moved to Rochester because she had a brother who lived here. She started taking English classes at Ibero, where she later began working first as a coordinator for a secretarial program, and then as Foster Care Director. After that she became Vice President for Developmental Disabilities, and ultimately she worked as CEO of Ibero for 13 years. During her extensive community work, her philosophy has always been ‘taking programs and communities and looking at them at how to make them better.’ She currently works as Head of Government Relations for All American Home Care in Rochester.

Jikonsoseh’s actions brought peace and reinforced Haudenosaunee women’s important responsibilities.

According to oral tradition, nearly 1,000 years ago, along a wooded ridge east of Lewiston, NY at Fort Kienaka, Jikonsoseh, a Neutral woman leader, held considerable skill in diplomacy, controlling the warriors who traveled along a nearby path. Within this leadership role where her decisions could create war, she was approached by the Peacemaker who brought a message of peace. As the first to accept this message and one who also bravely faced the formidable Onondaga leader, Tadodaho, her decision helped to unite the original five nations (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk; Tuscarora later joined as the sixth nation) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, bringing peace and stability. In this act of alliance, the Peacemaker instilled in her the title of ‘Mother of Nations’ and with it the responsibility of deciding the chiefs’ and clan mothers’ roles within the Confederacy. Clan mothers hold a great role as leaders and have the ability to choose the chiefs, give babies their names, and decide whether or not to go to war among many other essential responsibilities. Haudenosaunee traditions continue to uphold these practices and respect the women as leaders in a matrilineal society.
ALEXIS
VOGT, PH.D

Helping Others OPT IN to Careers in Optics

THE CHANGEMAKERS
ROCHESTER WOMEN
REACHING FOR THE STARS

THE CHANGEMAKERS
ROCHESTER WOMEN
THE WORLD

PAMELA
MELROY

Reach for the Stars

Dr. Alexis Vogt creates new opportunities for high school and college students to pursue careers in the optics industry.

Alexis is the Endowed Chair & Professor of Optics at Monroe Community College (MCC). She has over six million dollars in funding for her successful career with Bauch + Lomb and Melles Griot to become an educator in order to address the worldwide shortage of technicians across the optics industry. Her OPT IN program has built collaborations that allow high school students to continue studies toward an associate degree. She has created a pipeline for students to move directly into the workforce.

As a child in 1989, Pamela Melroy saw the moon landing and knew that moment, she knew she wanted to be a pilot. When she was in high school, the United States Air Force opened pilot training to women, and later in college, Sally Ride became the first American woman to go into space. These events inspired Pam’s dreams and she went on to the U.S. Air Force Academy with her sights set on being a fighter pilot. Pam served as a pilot on three shuttle missions, two as a pilot and one as commander. She went on to Command the Space Station, becoming the first woman to lead an international crew.

Pamela Melroy served as a United States Air Force test pilot and NASA astronaut on three shuttle missions, two as a pilot and one as commander.
Tonya Noel Stevens and Kristen R. Walker, advocates and activists, dedicate themselves to creating safe spaces for women of color.

Tonya Noel Stevens and Kristen R. Walker are co-founders of Flower City Noire Collective Inc, an intergenerational safe space for girls and women of color to have joy, build community, and reimagine their world. Following Tonya’s return from the Ferguson uprising, Tonya and Kristen met at a protest in downtown Rochester shortly after the shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Their friendship grew, and their mutual interest in serving their community resulted in Flower City Noire Collective Inc. Tonya used her expertise in farming and agriculture to create CauseN’ FX greenspace and urban farm, a space where the local community, in particular youth and children, can learn where their food comes from and how to sustain themselves. Kristen adds the love of literacy to the work by organizing a book club that centers the works of Black Women authors to build community and facilitate critical conversations that engage the mind and spirit. Together they provide free service trips to educate young Black women to experience a world beyond Rochester and help others. Tonya and Kristen fight for what they believe in and advocate for others as a part of the Black Lives Matter Movement and as activists for social change and environmental justice. A collective project that they are currently working on is Naire House, NOIRE (Neighbors Organized with Imagination for Resilient Emergence) House is a co-operative housing community, providing supportive housing for adolescence, women, families, and LGBTQIA+ folks.

Chandra Maracle inspires and leads the way in Indigenous foods, language, arts, and education.

Chandra Maracle, mother of five, has been raising children for 22 years of her life. Along the way, she has been a dynamic force, planting seeds amongst the communities she has called home, starting projects in the Buffalo-Six Nations community corridor. She co-founded the Skaronhyase’kwa/Everlasting Tree School with curriculum rooted in Haudenosaunee culture and language using holistic and experiential teaching methods. She has been instrumental in building community projects with Native American Community Services, Indigenous Women’s Initiatives, and many more initiatives, inspiring others to take on the cause. Chandra is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at York University and continues to inspire and lead the way in Indigenous foods, language, arts, and education.
Helen Stone Reinhard (1915-2011) saved and preserved 14,000 Rochester images by donating them to the RMSC.

Helen’s grandfather was Albert R. Stone, Rochester’s first newspaper photographer. She thought his photographs were so important that she gave them all to the museum in 1943. She and her brother lowered over 3 tons of glass plate negatives from an attic, bundle by bundle. By sharing her grandfather’s legacy, Helen gave the world access to a treasure trove of early 1900s Rochester images. Presidential visits, parades, winter storms, and women voting for the first time are just some of the photographs she preserved.

Despite an early dislike for school, Alice Holloway Young devoted her life to education as a means to empower others.

After graduating from Bennett College for Women in North Carolina, the American Baptist Home Missionary Society recruited Alice to work in western New York’s migrant camps. She noticed that the laborers did not know how to sign their names, so she taught them, and she started a daycare for farm laborers’ children. Inspired by these experiences, Alice committed her work life to the Rochester City School District over the next 40 years. In 1952, she was one of the District’s first African American teachers and the only African American reading specialist. She became the first African American vice principal of School 19 in 1957. In 1962, Alice became principal of School 24. Due to racism, Alice waited six years to become principal, while some of her white peers became principals after waiting only one year. Her biggest obstacle came from parents that objected to an African American principal.
Nancy Gong

Breaking barriers in glass art

The Changemakers
Rochester Women in the World

Nancy Gong has not been bound by traditional approaches to her work, and has pushed her field forward through bold innovation.

Nancy Gong found success in a field that has historically had minimal opportunities for women. Through her commissioned work, Nancy has the opportunity to connect with people and create pieces that challenge her and allow for new ways of thinking about glass. Utilizing different tools and processes, she has been able to create and share works of public art that inspire meaningful experiences for people throughout the Rochester community.

Alice Mathis

Sharing Her Story Through the Things She Owned

The Changemakers
Rochester Women in the World

Alice Mathis’s gift of her personal belongings gave insight into the life of an African American woman who was more than what she did for a living.

Alice Mathis, or “Miss Alice,” to her friends, was a farm laborer who lived and worked between Sanford, FL, and Rochester, NY throughout her life. Her legacy, still felt in Rochester today, is a collection of materials from her life donated to the museum to tell the story of more than 40,000 African Americans who came to the city in the 1950s.

Her gift gives context not only to her experiences, but that of other African Americans forced to journey from the South to find work.
Yvonne Thomas Kanhochtontkwaws of the Seneca Nation, Snake Clan) opens the door for indigenous knowledge.

The First Latina to Win an Election in Rochester

Nancy Padilla

Her Onkwehonwe name means “it opens the door” in Mohawk language, and her cultural advocacy work carries the meaning of that name.

She has dedicated herself to sharing Haudenosaunee Indigenous knowledge, honoring the legacy that she and her late husband, Chief Jacob Thomas (Cayuga Nation, Sandpiper Clan) created since the 1970s. In 1993, the couple established the Jake Thomas Learning Centre in Ohsweken, Ontario, a resource for the community to learn about Mohawk culture. The Centre holds a precious, vast archive of materials including handmade wampum belt replicas, books, audio/video recordings, oral histories, and other cultural objects. She is currently digitizing over 90,000 documents for community use.

Yvonne is a philanthropist as well as a caretaker of cultural knowledge who makes sure resources and materials are accessible and support education. A fluent speaker of Mohawk, she preserves the language by teaching it to students. She also instructs workshops on traditional beadwork, wampum bead making, and corn husk work.

Nancy Padilla paved the way for Latinos as the first Hispanic to be elected to several pivotal seats in Rochester politics - The Board of Education and Rochester City Council - before vying for Mayor as the first Hispanic in 1993.

One of 11 siblings, including fellow Changemaker, Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez, Nancy started her career in community service at the YWCA as a youth program director in the 1970s. She worked at Ibero-American Action League, a human-services agency focused on local Latinx families, for a decade from 1975-85 and led bilingual efforts for crisis intervention. She received numerous awards for her service including the City of New York Women’s History Month Award in 1991.
After working as a maid for 25 years, immigrant Martha Matilda Harper innovated organic only products and equipment that changed the beauty industry and launched modern retail franchising to enable poor women to gain financial independence, pioneering the franchise method and social entrepreneurship for women’s empowerment.

Bound into servitude by her father at the age of seven, Martha Matilda Harper left Canada for Rochester in 1882 when she was 25. She continued to work as a domestic servant in Rochester while refining a special hair tonic formula. With her lifetime savings of $360 and the help of lawyer John Van Voorhis, Martha opened Rochester’s first beauty salon for women in 1888. Her shop in the fashionable Powers Building became a celebrated local showplace for women and their visitors to experience the Harper Method. Susan B. Anthony and other key Rochesterians played a supportive role in her success. With the encouragement of Bertha Palmer from Chicago, Martha created what today we know as the retail franchise when her sister opened the first Harper Method branch office in 1891 in Buffalo. Within 40 years, there were more than 500 Harper Method shops around the world and multiple training centers. Martha fired former maids like herself and working-class women to work in her shop and to become Harper shop owners. She controlled business locations, product lines, services, target markets, and held annual reunions of Harperites here in Rochester.

Independent thinker, social entrepreneur, inquisitive, worldly and a seeker of truth, Joan Coles Howard has shared her love of African heritage and culture throughout her life.

The only child of one of 20th century Rochester’s most prominent African American activist and intellectual couples, Howard and Alma Coles, Joan grew up proud of being Black and well-informed about her African roots. Early on she realized that “We have a heritage and a history we don’t know a lot about, and an obligation to tell our story and look out for each other,” and that belief guided her future efforts. In the 1960s and 70s, Joan opened the Uhuru stores to make African heritage more accessible to Rochester’s Black community and won the Business Woman of the Year Award from the Rochester Genesee Valley Club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, Inc.
Mercedes Vázquez-Simmons won the 2014 Person of the Year award from the Bare Knuckle Boxing Hall of Fame.

Mercedes reigned as Miss Puerto Rico of Rochester in the late 1980s; nearly three decades later she earned recognition for her work as the first Latina boxing promoter in New York State as well as in North Carolina and Puerto Rico. She also has been honored by the Ring 8 Hall of Fame, Women in Boxing, World Boxing Council (WBC) and the Rochester Boxing Hall of Fame and has developed a safety and skills program to help boxers inside and outside the ring.

Mercedes gleaned her own leadership style from her mother, Belen Colón, a longtime activist for bilingual education and social justice. Mercedes went on to receive an MBA and earn the title of Hispanic Business Person of the Year in Rochester in 2016. Outside the ring, Mercedes is a community activist with a special interest in Latinx Voting rights.

Nearly 100 years ago, Kate Gleason built concrete houses in East Rochester to provide working people with safe, affordable housing just one railway stop away from Rochester.

As a young woman working in her father’s machine shop at Brown’s Race, Kate witnessed a horrific factory fire that claimed many lives. She never wanted to see such traumatic things happen again. After helping to grow the family business, Gleason Works, into a global enterprise, she went on to pursue a career in construction. She created a method for building affordable, fireproof houses for working families. Her innovative use of poured concrete earned her widespread recognition in this male-dominated field. Kate’s building legacy spans from East Rochester’s Concrest development to neighborhoods throughout the country and in France.
Driven by an awareness of gendered violence, trauma and the need for healing, Dr. Beverly Jacobs has advocated tirelessly for Indigenous rights, land rights, and justice for Indigenous women.

Dr. Jacobs is from the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. Recently appointed the Associate Dean (Academic) at the Faculty of Law, University at Windsor, she has been working, since graduating from Windsor Law in 1994, to educate the public about the impact of colonization and to end violence against Indigenous women. Her work is rooted in an understanding of the direct connection of genocide and Eurocentric law, leading to higher rates of incarceration, human rights violations, gendered violence, and lack of access to justice for Indigenous peoples. Dr. Jacobs is well known for her advocacy work for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls since 2002, which began with Amnesty International’s Stolen Sisters Report and as elected President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada from 2004-2009. Sadly, Beverly was personally struck with tragedy in 2008 and experienced tremendous loss when her pregnant cousin was viciously murdered.

Theresa Lou Bowick is a registered professional nurse whose own health journey has made her an advocate for the health of her community.

Theresa has become a major champion for the wellness of her community. Her life has had its share of struggles, from childhood obesity to domestic violence, all of which have made her stronger and more determined to make a difference in the fields of health and fitness. As valedictorian of her nursing class, author of Collard Green Curves: A Fat Girl’s Journey from Childhood Obesity to Healthy Living, host of Health Beats on local radio station WDKK, and founder of neighborhood Bicycle-to-Better-Health Club bicycling program Conkey Cruisers, Theresa has dedicated her life to improving the lives of others. She realized that outdoor exercise was not perceived to be the norm and nearly non-existent in her neighborhood. She wanted to change perceptions and provide her neighbors with free access to fitness education and activities. Conkey Cruisers has since expanded to address emergent needs, including teaching tennis to Rochester’s youth and providing feminine products to women during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Susan B. Anthony was a social reformer and leader in the women’s suffrage movement.

While advocating for the temperance (anti-alcohol) movement, Susan was denied the right to speak at a convention due to her gender. This inspired her to organize, along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Women’s State Temperance Society of New York in 1852. Along with her family, Susan was also active in the abolitionist movement. She worked as an agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1856 despite threats. In 1869, she and Stanton had a contentious split with Frederick Douglass on their support for the 15th Amendment since it only referenced the right of Black men to vote. Focusing more intensely on women’s suffrage, Susan worked with Elizabeth Cady Stanton to form the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869 and to edit and publish The Revolution women’s rights newspaper from 1868-1870. In 1873, the courts tried and convicted Susan for voting illegally in Rochester in the 1872 Presidential election. She also lectured on the international stage and played a key role in creating the International Council of Women. In 1878, Susan co-authored an amendment that would give women the right to vote. It failed, and it wasn’t until ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920 that a women’s suffrage law—nicknamed the Anthony Amendment—was adopted as part of the Constitution.

Mary Anthony was a staunch advocate for women’s rights throughout her life, despite receiving less credit than her famous sister.

Mary Anthony’s role in the women’s suffrage movement was often considered to be apolitical and domestic one, as she maintained the house where they lived so that her elder sister, Susan, could travel and lead. However, Mary’s role in supporting the cause was also important. She attended the Rochester Women’s Rights Convention in 1848 and voted illegally in the 1872 Presidential election alongside Susan and other Rochester women. As a school teacher, when she was asked to take on the responsibilities of principal, she demanded, and received, pay equal to her male counterparts. After retiring, she founded the Women’s Political Club in 1885, later known as the Rochester Political Equality Club, and assisted women in other local communities to establish similar clubs. This resulted in an organized network of suffragists that strengthened the New York State Woman Suffrage Association. She continued to support the cause for the rest of her life and submitted annual protests against taxation without representation when she paid her taxes each year.
Wanda E. Martinez-Johncox is a tenacious and fearless advocate in her work for LGBTQ rights.

Born in Puerto Rico, Wanda distinguished herself as a National Chess Champion and was awarded a Roberto Clemente Scholarship to study law. Her life took a different turn when her grandmother found a love letter she had written to the Miss Universe contestant from Puerto Rico. She was sent to live in the United States to try and “fix” what was “wrong” with her. Wanda struggled at times, but through Rochester’s LGBTQ Resource, the Gay Alliance (now known as the Out Alliance), she was able to understand and accept who she was. With this new confidence she has helped others who struggle with similar issues find acceptance and has begun a LGBTQ Resource Group for Veterans in Canandaigua, New York.

Luticha André Doucette advocates in her professional and personal life to create change as she brings awareness to the intersections of race, poverty, and disability.

Luticha has learned to be a self-advocate as well as an advocate for others. As a disabled, Black, queer woman, Luticha has a clear perspective on the ways different identities and social movements can relate and connect. She has experienced discrimination in many forms throughout her life and fights to make sure others do not experience similar treatment. Luticha is the owner of Catalyst Consulting in Rochester. In this position she works to influence policy and inform decision-makers on her own terms, addressing issues like Rochester’s high poverty rates for minorities and people with disabilities. She engages with leaders and helps them hone their equity lenses by providing coaching and tools to be successful. Luticha understands the value in using all platforms available to create change on multiple fronts. She participated in and won the 2011 Ms. Wheelchair New York Pageant, and finished 2nd Runner Up at the 40th Annual Ms. Wheelchair America Pageant. Though she was reluctant to take part at first, she recognized that the pageant was an opportunity to be a voice that combats ableism for the benefit of herself and others.
Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry helped provide better access to health care, social services, and education for African American youth. Fredericka came from a long line of activists. Her family, both the Douglasses and the Spragues, were involved in the racial equality, women’s rights, and anti-slavery movements. Fredericka graduated from the Mechanics Institute in Rochester (now RIT) and majored in Home Economics. After moving to Missouri with her husband, Dr. John Perry, she started the Home Economics Department at Lincoln University and introduced and taught Home Economics classes at a night school for African Americans at Lincoln High School in Missouri. Fredericka was concerned with the lack of services and harsh treatment of African American children and youth, especially the lack of foster homes. She used her voice to raise concerns and advocate for change. In 1934, she founded the Colored Big Sister Home for Girls and in 1923 the Missouri State Association of Colored Girls, both in Kansas City, Missouri. She served as the National Chairman of the National Association of Colored Girls. Her work with many different organizations is an example of collaborative activism in the African American community to create greater equity for all. Fredericka also stayed informed on Rochester issues and uplifted and inspired local activists like Howard W. Coles.

KaeLyn Elizabeth Lee Rich uses her voice to teach about activism, intersectionality, and LGBTQ issues, empowering others to make positive change in their community. An adoptee from South Korea, KaeLyn always knew she was different from others in her community. She and her sister were the only Asian children in the small town of Sheridan, NY. The feeling of empathy she developed for others from being an outsider herself, paired with growing up in an active union family and finding feminism in college, led her down a path to becoming an activist. Her voice, expressed through the power of her words, teaches others inside and outside the classroom, about intersectionality, activism and organizing, and LGBTQ issues. Her book, Girls Resist!: A Guide to Activism, Leadership, and Starting a Revolution, gives young women who want to make positive change in their communities and the world, a basic recipe to guide them. Her message to young people is, “You don’t have to wait to start working toward the change you want to see in the world. You have all the tools you need right now. You don’t need to wait for permission.”
**Harriet Tubman**

Harriet Tubman was a conductor on the Underground Railroad who led over 60 freedom seekers on approximately 13 trips to freedom in the North.

With heritage tracing back to the matrilineal Asante people of West Africa, Harriet Tubman, originally named Araminta Harriet Ross, was born into slavery in Maryland around 1822. Harriet sustained a head injury from an overseer at the age of 12 that would cause headaches, seizures, and moments of lost consciousness for the rest of her life. Harriet escaped enslavement in order to secure freedom for her family. She continually left the safety of the North to help other freedom seekers escape from the border state of Maryland, using her excellent memory to recall the many paths north to freedom. She continued her humanitarian work in Auburn, New York, where she settled in 1859 and later opened the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged. During the Civil War, Harriet was a spy and scout for the Union Army, passing along information to military commanders. Considered the first African American woman to serve in the military, she led an armed raid with Union forces that destroyed Confederate supplies and liberated over 700 slaves. Harriet also provided nursing care to African American soldiers and newly freed slaves in the Union camps. She was also a suffragist, appearing at local and national conventions until the early 1900s.

“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say – I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

-Harriet Tubman at a suffrage convention, NY, 1896

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**Abby Wambach**

Abby Wambach is one of the greatest soccer players to have ever played the sport. After retiring from the game, she continues her activism for equality and inclusion.

Having scored 184 goals in 256 appearances for the United States Women’s National Soccer Team, Abby Wambach has put the ball in the net more times than almost any other player on the international stage, man or woman. Following her retirement from professional soccer, she has focused her work on something just as important: women's rights and the gender pay gap. She is outspoken about the difference in pay between the Men and Women's National teams, despite the international success the women have earned compared to their male counterparts. Though the women have won four World Cups, while the men have not done better than 3rd place in 1930, male players continue to be compensated to a far greater degree. Abby has taken the leadership skills she displayed on the field, and now uses them as a leading voice in the call for equality.
Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an American suffragist, social activist, abolitionist, leading figure of the early women’s rights movement, and mother of seven children.

While in London in 1840, Elizabeth attended a World’s Slavery Conference where she met Lucretia Mott. Elizabeth and Lucretia shared their frustration in the exclusion of women at the event. Keeping a promise to Lucretia, Elizabeth co-organized the first women’s rights national convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. She was also the primary author of the Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the U.S. Declaration of Independence, to identify key social, political, and religious rights for women. The Declaration was signed by 68 women and 32 men at the convention out of more than 300 attendees. Elizabeth opposed the 15th Amendment because it extended voting rights to African American men but not to women. This stance found her at odds with African American activists, including Frederick Douglass, and other suffragists. This prompted Elizabeth, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Susan B. Anthony to organize the National Women’s Suffrage Association. Elizabeth advocated for gender equality in education, politics, employment, and property ownership, but only for middle-class white women.

“Sojourner was a pioneer fighter for human equality and dignity.”
- Mildred Johnson

Sojourner Truth was born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree in Swartekill, New York. She endured abuse and harsh physical labor until she took her freedom in 1826 by fleeing with her infant daughter to the home of a nearby abolitionist family, who purchased her freedom. Isabella worked for a minister and took part in the religious revivals of the 1830s, becoming a charismatic speaker. In 1843, she asked God for a name that would connect with her deep felt calling. Sensing that God wanted her to be called “Sojourner,” as she was to travel the land, and “Truth,” because she was to preach the truth, Isabella renamed herself Sojourner Truth. As a traveling preacher, she met well-known abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Amy Post. In 1851, Sojourner traveled to Rochester and stayed with Amy Post for several months while on an antislavery lecture tour of western NY. Sojourner began a national lecture tour and challenged notions of racial and gender inferiority. She passionately called for the right of African American women to vote and told her audience to “take their rights” rather than beg for them. She was the first African American to win a court case against a white man and the first to test legal desegregation on Washington street cars.
Making "Radical" Discoveries About The Physiology of Aging

DR. REBECA GERSCHMAN

Dr. Rebeca Gerschman was a Nobel Prize nominated scientist who first discovered the damaging effects of free radicals while studying at the University of Rochester in the 1950s.

In 1954, while working at the Department of Physiology at the University of Rochester, Argentine scientist Dr. Rebeca Gerschman made a major discovery that would lead to a Nobel Prize nomination. In her research, Rebeca found a connection between the damaging effects of oxygen and that of X-rays on the aging of cells. Her work directly led to the Free Radical Theory of Aging proposed by Denham Harman in the mid-1950s. Rebeca’s important discovery led to her nomination for the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, but she died before she could be considered (the Nobel Prize is only awarded to the living).

IDA PÉREZ
A Childcare Leader Becomes Community Activist

Ida Pérez walks in the footsteps of her pioneering family who were among the first residents from Puerto Rico to call Rochester home.

The youngest of nine siblings, Ida is best recognized as an advocate for Rochester’s North Clinton Avenue - calling for redevelopment and leading protests to declare “No Más (No More)” to the opioid use that has plagued her neighborhood in recent years. Her commitment to community service was honored in 2017 with four awards from the Latino Rotary Club, City of Rochester, YWCA and the Rochester City School District. Ida sponsors the Miss Puerto Rico of Rochester Academic Award and served as President of the Puerto Rican Festival Board (2004-08). She was appointed to the inaugural Police Accountability Board in Rochester in 2019 and concurrently hosts a bilingual show for Ibero’s radio station, “Su Hora Informativa (Your Informative Hour).” Recognized for career achievement in 2004 by Latinas Unidas, a local organization that supports Latina women and girls, Ida has worked more than two decades in early childhood as a preschool teacher, literacy specialist, and the current director of Ibero-American Action League’s Early Childhood Services. She is an executive committee member for Rochester’s Early Childhood Education Quality Council and has served as an Early Childhood Committee member and instructor at the Rochester Educational Opportunity Center.
Dr. G. Juanita Pitts was the first African American woman to have a private practice in Rochester, and leaves a legacy of community activism that continues today.

Dr. Juanita had many personal professional accomplishments in the medical field, but she was equally celebrated for her work and activism in the community. Moving to Rochester in 1954, she and her husband would open a private practice in the city. Criticized for her desire to be both a doctor and a mother, it was her efforts in raising 7 children, and working at the same time that made her aware of the lack of community day care for working parents. She raised a call in her community to found the Community Child Care Center in 1963. Family, friends and small businesses financed the Center that remains in operation today. While in Rochester her professional focus was on community health and pediatrics, where she volunteered for community concerns, and performed physical examinations for a number of Rochester and Monroe county organizations. Having face adversity and racial discrimination in health care industry, Dr. Juanita’s career never easy. Despite this, she overcame these obstacles and not only had an extraordinary professional career, but changed the lives of the people in her community.

Mayor Lovely A. Warren, who first took office on January 1, 2014, is the first woman and only the second African American to be elected Mayor of the City of Rochester. She is also the city’s youngest elected mayor in modern history.

As a child, Lovely dreamed of becoming a lawyer after her grandfather was shot while working as a security guard. Thankfully he survived, but the impact of racism, violence and drug addiction on both her family and her community left a deep wound that she was determined to heal. While attending law school, she earned an internship in the office of the late NYS Assemblyman David F. Gantt - an opportunity that would change her perspective and propel her into a life of public service. A lawyer and proponent for social change, Lovely has never let any obstacles keep her from achieving her goals. Her political journey began long before her role as Mayor, when she was elected to the Rochester City Council, ultimately becoming its youngest President in Council history in 2010. Born in Rochester’s 19th Ward, Lovely feels that her story illustrates what can be achieved with personal resolve and the desire to seek out opportunities that exist in the city. Her mission remains to improve the quality of life for her constituents by creating more jobs, safer and more vibrant neighborhoods, and better educational opportunities for all residents.

'Across our city, other families are building upon the sacrifices of the people that came before them. I want every child in our city to know that they can... and should... dare to dream.'

-Maya Lovely Warren
Sarah Rutherford not only adorns Rochester with beautiful murals, her work empowers her community and inspires change. Though originally a native of Boston, Massachusetts, Sarah has created many of her public works as a “love letter to Rochester.” As a muralist, illustrator, and multi-dimensional artist, Sarah recognizes that she is a storyteller for the community, and not solely a visual artist. Her work is meant to connect to the people who will view these pieces every day as they walk by. It was this effort to communicate with those engaged by her work that led her to launch a visionary social action project, “Her Voice Carries.” This award-winning series of murals pays tribute to five local women and inspired a film produced by Blue Sky Project, Inc. and a national network of storytelling that lifts the voices of others through their work. In Rochester, NY, each mural is painted in a different quadrant of the city and the city center. The murals are set in areas other than where the women lived or worked so their contributions can be honored outside of their sphere of influence and considered as part of a larger narrative encouraging visitors to travel the sections of the city. Sarah’s national tour is under way and her portraits can be seen in Massachusetts, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.
Isabella Dorsey and her husband, Thomas, opened the only home in New York State for Black orphan children outside of New York City in the early 1900s.

Around 1910, Isabella Dorsey transformed her home on Bronson Street in Rochester, NY, into the Dorsey Home for Dependent Colored Children. Determined to provide a good life for orphaned Black children with few options, Isabella supported their needs by washing clothes and performing domestic labor while her husband worked as a chauffeur. At Isabella’s request and with the help of a newspaper reporter and the police chief, the community formed a diverse board to support the Home’s operations. The need for a safe space for orphaned Black children led Isabella to expand and relocate the Dorsey Home to a farm in the Sea Breeze area with the assistance of the board. There, racist white neighbors forced Isabella to move the Home again, and she acquired a larger farm in Brighton, allowing her to care for 35 children with the help of her husband, a teacher, and a few laborers. Isabella ensured that the children were formally educated and learned farm and life skills. Though the Dorsey Home did not survive the Great Depression, the love and support that Isabella and Thomas Dorsey gave the children in their care provided them with opportunities for the future.

Eunice Foote was the first person to discover how carbon dioxide can affect climate change, but her contributions are so unrecognized that there is not even a single verified likeness of her.

In 1836, Eunice Foote was educated at Troy Female Seminary where she developed an interest in science. She moved to Seneca Falls, New York, after marrying and, despite the extreme biases against women scientists at the time, she persisted in her scientific inquiry. Eunice had multiple papers accepted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and received several patents over the years. Her 1856 paper, “Circumstances affecting the Heat of the Sun’s Rays,” documented experiments she conducted that caused her to theorize that changing amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would affect the Earth’s temperature. This concept is the basis of the greenhouse effect, which is one of the drivers of climate change. While Irish physicist John Tyndall is often credited for laying the foundations of climate change, Eunice’s paper supporting the greenhouse effect was in fact published three years earlier than his, establishing her as the first person to bring critical attention to this global issue. Eunice also advocated for women’s rights, attending the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls in 1848 and signing the Declaration of Sentiments.
Championing Women’s Voices Across Cultures

Geraldine Sid-Tah Green

Geraldine Sid-Tah Green was a traditional Seneca spiritual leader who taught others about the leadership role of women in Haudenosaunee culture. Sid-Tah was known for her willingness to share Seneca language and culture with others. As head women’s faithkeeper for the animal clans in the Newtown Longhouse, she played an important role in maintaining traditions. Recognized on a global scale for her leadership, she met with First Lady Hillary Clinton to discuss women’s issues and other matters important to the Seneca Nation. Today, Sid-Tah is one of three pioneering women honored through The Trailblazing Women of Western New York’s Monument Project. Across the United States, less than 10% of public statues depict women. The project addresses this issue by creating women’s monuments in Buffalo’s public spaces.

Combating Prejudice Through Charity Work and Community Conversations

Samiha Islam

“Helping the community is a path to learning who you are as a person.”

- Samiha Islam

Samiha Islam is Bangladeshi American, born and raised in Rochester. While president of Brighton High School’s Muslim Student Association in 2019 and 2020, Samiha promoted World Hijab Day. She hosted informational events on the hijab and the status of women in Islam. These events worked to combat the stereotype that modestly dressed women are oppressed, that feminism and empowerment are rooted in a woman’s ability to choose how they dress. In 2018, she organized the “From Strangers to Neighbors” event that highlights the value that refugees and immigrants bring to American society and culture, in response to the 2017 executive order travel ban. Samiha feels it is empowering to meet with other young people to discuss labels, stereotypes, and biases. She wants to continue to have these conversations to create more opportunities to inspire change and give others a voice to advocate for change.
**Ineabelle Geena Cruz**

Has dedicated herself to helping others through her advocacy and involvement with numerous community and faith organizations. In addition to the more than 20 years she has worked in the Human Services and medical field, Ineabelle, fondly known as Geena, has participated in and founded change-focused organizations as she fights to end poverty, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Her groundbreaking work with groups such as Latinas Unidas, National Father’s Day Pledge, Project URGE (Urban Revitalization God Experienced) and SAFER (Survivors Advocating for Effective Reform) transcends boundaries and brings victims/survivors together regardless of gender, race or religious denomination. She has received recognition for her ongoing work in response to the positive change she has inspired, with her 2018 Voices Rising Award nominator saying, “We are a better place directly because of her.” Geena recently founded an organization called Heels of Greatness, LLC, where she continues her efforts to effect change through consulting, training in activism, and her faith in God.

**Reverend Myra Brown**

Uses her calling as a spiritual leader in the Catholic Church to advocate for an anti-racist Rochester. Reverend Myra Brown has always felt the call to serve, preach, and be with God. She has been involved in the Catholic Church for over 30 years and served in many capacities at Spiritus Christi, an independent Catholic Church in Rochester’s Center City. In 2017, she was ordained a priest, becoming the third African American woman to serve in that role in the United States. Rev. Myra established the Spiritus Anti-Racism Coalition (SPARC) to bring her parishioners and community together in tough conversations to undo racism. She has recently taken on a visible role to find peaceful resolutions between the police and Black Lives Matter activists. In this photo, Rev. Myra protects protestors by standing up to a line of police in riot gear and explaining how their approach to policing follows a slave patrol blueprint designed “to control Black and Brown bodies and to protect and attend to white anxiety, white wealth and white property…”
Anna Murray Douglass was a key stationmaster on Rochester’s Underground Railroad and made Frederick Douglass’s work possible. Anna was a resourceful woman. She worked hard as a domestic servant and saved enough so that by the time she met Frederick Douglass, she was able to help fund his escape from slavery. After they started a family, she continued to support them financially, as his lectures and appearances could not provide enough income. In Rochester, Anna established her home as a stop on the Underground Railroad. She provided food, lodging, and clean linens for freedom seekers. She was called on at all hours of the night to help. Anna was a member of the Anti-Slavery Societies in Massachusetts and Rochester. It was Anna who inspired her husband and kept the household running smoothly, the children cared for, and the money saved and managed while his fame and obligations grew.

In her role as stationmaster on the Underground Railroad, Amy Post sheltered more freedom seekers than anyone else in Rochester. Amy and her husband, Isaac, came to Rochester in 1836, where they fought for equality for African Americans and women. Amy was a very active member of the abolitionist movement. She used her home as a station on the Underground Railroad and played a key role in founding the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society (RLASS) and the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society (WNYASS). Too radical for even the Hicksite Quakers, the Posts withdrew from that fellowship in 1845 to devote more time to anti-slavery campaigns. Amy attended the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention and signed the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848. After the Civil War and abolishment of slavery, she continued to fight against racial and gender discrimination.
At an early age, Rosetta Douglass Sprague learned about racism and activism from her parents, Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass. She continued their legacy of racial equality work throughout her lifetime.

In 1848 at the age of nine, Rosetta attended the prestigious Seward Seminary after the Douglass family moved to Rochester. Rosetta’s teacher separated her from the rest of her class, citing objections from the board of trustees, then later asked the parents of students if they minded having a Black child in the school. When Horatio G. Warner, the parent of another child, said he did, Frederick Douglass publicly took him to task in his abolitionist newspaper. Rosetta was also unable to attend the public white school nearby, which might have influenced Frederick Douglass to campaign for public school integration in Rochester. As a young woman, Rosetta learned from her parents the value of building bridges across racial lines as the family welcomed friends and fellow activists like John Brown and Susan B. Anthony into their home. Rosetta went on to attend Oberlin College and Salem’s Normal School. Rosetta worked with like-minded leaders in the African American community and women in the Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion church to help meet the needs of families. She wrote the book, My Mother as I Recall Her, to acknowledge the impactful work of her mother and authored What Role is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of Her Race. As a teacher and activist in her own right, Rosetta lectured alongside famous speakers, like Sojourner Truth, for antislavery, social justice, and women’s rights. Rosetta, with Harriet Tubman and Ida B. Wells, founded the National Association for Colored Women.

While some see Rachel DeGuzman as “Spreading the magic elixir of all the arts,” she sees herself as a disruptor and changemaker through art and justice.

Rachel Y. DeGuzman, an extraordinary entrepreneur, uses any means necessary to promote the arts and create greater access for Black art, Black artists, and the Black community. A Detroit native, she arrived in Rochester in 1991. While raising three children, Rachel became known for her passionate work on Diversity in the Arts: A Call to Action Symposium, host of the “21st Century Arts” (formerly “Up Close and Culture”) radio show; founder of the WOC Art Collaborative for women of color artists; creator of the Long Table Conversations—fostering difficult dialogs; and her “At the Crossroads: Art + Justice” programming. She intersects Art + Social Justice, and simultaneously disrupts, provokes, and creates new spaces for Black American culture and centering Black creativity. This links her to a family tradition of women of her family. Rachel is undeterred by COVID-19 and afterwards. Her response to the problem is transforming her for profit into a nonprofit. She has also launched ‘The Black House Narratives’ as the next Art + Justice disruption.
After receiving a spiritual message from an eagle’s appearance while traveling in the Mohawk Valley, her ancestral homelands, Degonwadonti Beth Brant was moved to write and share her “sacred words” to celebrate her own Two-Spirit lesbian identity.

At the time of her death at 74, Beth, whose name means “Many Opposed to One,” had published three books of poetry, essays, stories and edited three anthologies. This was a remarkable feat for a woman who had not finished high school or attended college. Born to a Mohawk father and Irish-Scots mother, Beth grew up in Detroit where she learned to embrace her identity as a Tyendinaga Mohawk woman. At 17, Beth left high school, became pregnant, and was married at 18. She had three children and divorced after 14 years of an abusive marriage. In her mid-life, Beth embraced her identity as a Two-Spirit, lesbian Mohawk woman. Despite her late start writing, Beth was a prolific poet, essayist, and teacher, winning numerous awards, honors, and recognition. She was a fierce feminist and activist as well as a devoted mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Described as “one of the first lesbian-identifying Native American writers in North America,” Beth recognized the power of writing and used it to advocate for 2SLGBTQ rights and Mohawk culture.

Despite being arrested 139 times for her advocacy efforts, Anita Cameron is a relentless voice for change.

As a Black woman, Anita feels that the sacrifices of those who fought for her right to vote obligates her to continue that work. Anita has been involved in social change activism and community organizing for more than 39 years and is a legend among disability rights activists. Through her work with the grassroots organization ADAPT, she has engaged with local, state, and federal governments to create change. She continues her work as the Director of Minority Outreach for Not Dead, a national disability rights group opposed to disability discrimination, medical rationing, and doctor assisted suicide. Anita has been particularly fierce in her advocacy of voting rights and accessibility for those with disabilities.
Harriet Jacobs, writing under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, was the first enslaved woman to publish an autobiography revealing the sexual and physical trauma African American women faced in slavery.

Harriet Jacobs was born into slavery. As a teenager, she suffered intolerable physical and sexual abuse from her master. Determined to change her destiny, in 1835, Harriet took her freedom and hid for seven years in her grandmother’s attic, living in constant fear of capture. With the help of her grandmother, who was a free woman, Harriet survived the claustrophobic conditions undetected and made her way north in 1842. It was here, in Rochester, that Harriet and her brother started the Anti-Slavery Office and Reading Room. Her autobiography, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, penned under the name Linda Brent, was the first slave narrative written by and from a woman’s point of view. Her narrative exposed the atrocities that enslaved girls and women experienced. Harriet also did relief work for African American refugees during the Civil War and opened a school for freed slaves.

Sady Fischer (she/her) is an out and proud Queer Latina Changemaker. Her message to others: “Never underestimate your own power to create change. Your voice, your story, your experience can inspire someone else to live their truth.”

Sady is a dynamic, highly sought-after, award-winning Queer, feminist, Latinx speaker who is known for her energy and passion around social justice issues. She uses her voice and talent to challenge societal expectations and assumptions around sexuality, identity, and expression. As the Corporate Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, she is entrusted with challenging the status quo and creating a welcoming, equitable and affirming work environment. In her role, she has led company-wide changes to raise awareness, affirm culturally responsive care, change policies to eliminate bias, and address the root causes that lead to inequitable access and outcomes for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. As a result of her own intersecting identities, her love of community, and her drive for positive change, she has founded and supported many community initiatives, including Ambush Rochester, FAM Rochester, PRIDE Leadership Development Program, the LGBTQ+ Academy, Latinas Unidas Soy Unica Soy Latina Rally, La Cumbre, among many others.
The first woman to be appointed Major General, Mary Clarke testified before Congress, giving a voice to the importance of women’s rights and fair treatment in the military and leading to the recognition of women as full soldiers in the United States Army.

Mary enlisted in the Women’s Army Corps as a private in 1945. She planned on leaving after World War II, but when a male commander told her she would likely never make it through officers training, she decided to stay. Her 36-year career in uniform included helping bring supplies over Soviet blockades during the Berlin Airlift in 1948, serving as the first woman commandant of an Army Post, and the first woman to lead the U.S. Military Army Police. She was the last Director of the Women’s Army Corps before its dissolution in 1978 when the U.S Army finally recognized women as full soldiers after she testified before Congress on her views of women in the military and sexual harassment.

At the age of 18, Ida Breiman became a symbol of heroism for labor activists when she was killed during the 1913 garment workers strike.

Like many immigrant girls her age, Ida worked in a clothing factory, where the hours were long and the pay was low. Believing that employers should treat their employees better, she joined a labor strike and refused to work until conditions improved. Ida died trying to convince other workers to stand up for their rights. She was protesting outside a factory when the factory owner fired into the crowd, killing her. Ida’s death generated support for the workers and their struggle and inspired them to continue the fight for better treatment.
OLIVIA KIM

MODELING POSITIVE BEACONS FOR CHANGE

Olivia's expressive sculptural representations of Frederick Douglass capture his deep sense of love and compassion for our human family. Born into three different Asian cultures and raised in a predominantly African American neighborhood in Rochester, Olivia felt compelled to identify universal human qualities across all cultures and social practices. Her innovations in capturing nuances of body language through sculpture and painting led to her commission by Carvin Eison, Executive Director of Rochester Community Television (RCTV) to support the Re-Energizing the Legacy of Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Sculpture Project in celebration of Douglass' birth. With help from over 150 volunteers, she made 13 lifesize sculptures of Douglass in 6 1/2 months.

In 2018 and 2020, two of the statues suffered vandalism. The stories of this damage have become part of a national discussion of monuments in America and Restorative Justice used by the judicial system. The re-installations brought about feelings of renewal, solidarity and redemption—inspiring community discussions and programs to promote healing and resolution through emotional and intellectual exchange.

Danielle 'Dee' Ponder is a defense attorney, speaker, and local social justice activist who has dedicated over 15 years to organizing and advocating for marginalized communities.

For the Love of Justice

Danielle’s goal has been to increase the percentage of lawyers who are people of color. In 2017, she created the multimedia show For the Love of Justice, where she shines a light on our criminal justice system through powerful lyrics and thought provoking visuals. Her songs advocate for racial equality, women's empowerment, and love.

DANIELLE PONDER ESQ.

For the Love of Justice

In 2018 and 2020, two of the statues suffered vandalism. The stories of this damage have become part of a national discussion of monuments in America and Restorative Justice used by the judicial system. The re-installations brought about feelings of renewal, solidarity and redemption—inspiring community discussions and programs to promote healing and resolution through emotional and intellectual exchange.
Dr. Ruth Holland Scott’s words and actions have long inspired change across communities.

Ruth rallied for social justice early on. When teachers denied her equal access, she and a classmate gave each other rigorous assignments and held each other to task. Ruth carried that passion into her career as an educator and an RCSD school administrator. She advised U.S. Presidents Carter and Reagan and NY governors on urban issues and, beginning in the 1970s, filled key roles: first woman President of the 19th Ward Community Association; founding member of the Martin Luther King Commission; first African American woman Chair of the Rochester Area Community Foundation; first African American woman electee and first President of the Rochester City Council; and President of National Neighbors. In *The Circles God Draws: A Memoir*, Ruth shared insights into growing up Black in 20th Century America, her parents’ struggles, and racial discrimination. A trustee emeritus of Memorial Art Gallery and more, her book *Raising Confident Children in Challenging Times* is due out in 2021.

Ngo Hna Sangaichho manages the Advancing Refugee Student Educational Opportunities (ARSEO) for Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services (RRRS), a program that she also created.

A refugee herself, Ngo came to the United States with almost no English and completed high school in Rochester City schools before going on to earn an M.P.A. at Binghamton University, and then returning to work with the local Rochester refugee community and others. While she faced many challenges adapting to a new culture and new life, Ngo always dedicated her time and energy to advocate for and to help others in the community. Her passion became to give back to others after so many had helped her. She created tutoring opportunities and developed important linkages between agencies and the refugee community. Later, she created a program to help young refugee high school students prepare to apply for college and explore career opportunities. She believes strongly that the best way to help others is to advocate for them while providing tools for them to move forward. Ngo believes that we must not only give people a fish or teach them how to fish, we must also give them a net.
Audrey Shenandoah created positive change as a clan mother, the Recording Secretary of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council, a teacher and writer, and an adviser to the United Nations.

Audrey, or Goñwayeñnih in her Onondaga name, received a traditional cultural and language education from her grandparents that prepared her for her roles as clan mother and Recording Secretary of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council. In Turtle Island Quarterly’s feature, “Circle of Unity” by Millie Knapp, Audrey described the rights and responsibilities of clan mothers in Haudenosaunee society. She said, “Each clan has a clan mother who has the duty to select the leadership of our nations. In English they call them chiefs; these are the leaders of our nations. Each clan has its own leader and the clan mother is, again, responsible for selecting a candidate to lead her people. To be a person worthy of that trust, I believe, to be a person who is given all of this responsibility is a very honorable position within our society.” A powerful educator, she believed that learning about other people and their ways is a path to peace.

Nancy Lorraine-Dupree challenged traditional ways of teaching children about music, giving them the chance to sing in their own voice.

After moving to Rochester from South Carolina in 1964, Nancy taught music at Rochester’s Elementary School No.4 for 5 years before she was fired for not wearing high heels to work. Immediately, she noticed that the traditional white curriculum was not connecting with her predominantly Black students. She introduced the children to Black history and African American role models, and encouraged them to create songs based on their own experiences and perspectives. By 1969 the class had enough songs to perform for audiences and to record an album, which was eventually released as a record titled Ghetto Reality.
Hester C. Jeffrey was an organizer who broke racial barriers and busted gender stereotypes to improve the conditions of women. After years of organizing Women's Clubs in Boston, Massachusetts, Hester moved to Rochester in 1891. She worked to educate fellow African American women on voting as a means of empowerment. Hester served as the President of the New York Federation of Colored Women and the National American Women’s Suffrage Association. She formed the Susan B. Anthony Club, which taught African American women about voting. She worked with the Anthony sisters, and other predominantly white women, to get women admitted as fully matriculated students at the University of Rochester in 1900. She also founded the Hester C. Jeffrey Club which raised funds to send young African American women to the Mechanics Institute, now known as the Rochester Institute of Technology. As a close friend of Susan B. Anthony, Hester was the only layperson to speak at Susan’s funeral in 1906.

Constance Mitchell was the first African American woman elected to public office in Monroe County. Connie could be powerfully persuasive, but she also listened. She held leadership roles with the Urban League and the United Way of Rochester. Connie did not win her first run for office in 1959. She told a reporter covering the campaign, “First thing, I’m gonna send a telegram to my opponent, congratulating him on his win, but I’m letting him know that I’m starting my election tomorrow, for two years from now.” She did win in 1961, becoming the first African American woman elected to public office in Monroe County. Connie marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Alabama. She hosted many national figures in her home, such as Malcolm X, Dick Gregory, and Robert F. Kennedy, to name a few. In the 1960s, to keep people of color from voting, a literacy test was a requirement to vote. Connie and her husband started a school in their living room to teach people how to pass the test. She developed the Favor Street, Cady Street, and Champlain Street Block associations to address the living conditions of the neighborhoods, and these groups later expanded to also address local politics and education. She said, “You address the issues that are at their front door and back door, before you go out into the broader community.”
Rozetta Darby McDowell was the first African American woman to practice law in Rochester.

After graduating from RIT in 1970, Rosetta Darby McDowell worked for the New York State Commission on Human Rights before attending law school at Columbia University. Rozetta became a lawyer because she thought it was the best way she could improve conditions for African Americans. She practiced with the firm Hurst and Davis that later became Hurst, King, and McDowell. Her partner, Roy King, said that she "helped lay the groundwork for African American lawyers today, especially women." To that end, she started Delta Ressic, a program aimed at inspiring young African Americans to take part in the community and join in civil rights activities. She co-founded the Rochester Black Bar Association, worked with the Urban League of Rochester and the United Way, and served on the boards of many community organizations.

Matilda Joslyn Gage was a suffragist, Native American rights activist, abolitionist, and author.

Imagine being considered a radical free thinker because you supported the end of slavery, a woman’s right to vote, and the rights of Native Americans. That was Matilda Joslyn Gage. Matilda’s vision for gender equity was inspired by the rights and responsibilities of women in Haudenosaunee society, saying, “Never was justice more perfect. Never was civilization higher” because both men and women have balanced voices in government. She was a founding member of the National Woman’s Suffrage Association with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, organizing suffrage groups in both New York and Virginia. She tried unsuccessfully to vote in 1871, motivating her to organize and lead 102 women to the Fayetteville, NY polls in 1880 after New York granted women the right to vote in school districts where they paid their taxes. Matilda also publicly opposed the unfair and brutal treatment of Native Americans. Her advocacy led to her adoption by the Wolf Clan of the Mohawk Nation where she was named Karonienhá:wi, which means “she carries the sky.”
Tonya Noel Stevens is an advocate and activist dedicated to environmental justice and the creation of a safe space for women of color.

Tonya Noel Stevens co-founded the Flower City Noire Collective alongside Kristen Walker as a safe space for women of color to gather, building an open and honest community. Tonya's mother, for whom she was named, was shot and killed while holding a 3-month old Tonya in her living room. This loss and the shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, shaped and catapulted Tonya's activism. She is active in the Black Lives Matter movement, environmental justice advocacy, and the mission of the collective. The Causing Effects garden, established as a part of the collective, is where Tonya found healing. She used her expertise in farming and agriculture to create a space where the local community, in particular kids, could learn where their food comes from and how to sustain themselves.

Roxie Ann Sinkler spent over 25 years working to better the lives of her community’s young people.

Roxie Ann Sinkler was a community icon, Roxie partnered with the Department of Recreation and Youth Services and other local organizations on activities and projects that connected Rochester’s youth to social services, education, work prospects, and mentorship. Roxie was a dedicated community force who worked to keep the Gardiner Recreation Center on Grover St. in Rochester open so that Rochester’s youth would have a safe place to play, learn, and develop into leaders. As a community organizer, she recruited and engaged partners in important initiatives such as the Chili Avenue corridor revitalization, the Chili Avenue Business Alliance, and the award-winning Peacemakers Community Garden at the corner of Chili Avenue and Thurston Road. Her tireless efforts are a reminder of the difference one person can make through determination, persistence and love for her community. In 2011, Members of the Rochester City Council held a ceremony to re-name the Gardiner Recreation Center in honor of the late Roxie Ann Sinkler.
**Practicing and Representing Through Fairness and Firsts**

**RUBY LOCKHART**

Ruby Lockhart’s guiding vision for her career has been to use whatever position she is in to be an example of the excellence that Blacks have contributed.

Ruby’s career is replete with firsts. She was the first woman on the troubleshooting team at AT&T in Albany, first African American and woman president of Midtown’s Tenant Association, and owned one of the first renowned African American retail stores in Rochester, All Day Sunday. She was also the first Executive Director of Garth Fagan Dance, and the first Black chair of Dance USA. Ruby commits to lifting up the ‘can do’ attitude in other women, especially African American women. She worked for 23 years as a labor specialist, where she felt she had the greatest impact. She saw firsthand how employers give the people she represented unfair sexist and racist performance reviews, a practice that derailed careers and motivated her to make a positive difference. Ruby represented women whose rights were violated, threatening their salaries and career goals.

**Illuminating Untold Stories Through Film**

**MARA AHMED**

Mara Ahmed is a multimedia artist and activist filmmaker whose work breaks boundaries, shifts assumptions, and inspires dialogue.

Mara was born in Pakistan and grew up in Belgium. She moved to the United States in 1993 and began a career in finance. She resigned from her corporate job in 2004 to follow her passion for the arts. Many things changed in America in the aftermath of 9/11, including the socio-political climate and attitude toward people from the Middle East and South Asia, particularly those who practice Islam. For Mara, a Pakistani American Muslim, it was frustrating to constantly hear about her culture on the news while seeing voices like hers actively excluded from the conversation. Through her art, she hoped to change that.

Mara attended Nazareth College and took classes at the Visual Studies Workshop and RIT as she worked on her first film, The Muslims I Know. It opened to a full house at the Dryden Theatre in 2008. Mara has been working as an independent filmmaker since then, engaging international audiences on subjects as diverse as the partition of India and racism in contemporary America. Her documentaries focus on personal narratives invisibilized by mainstream media.
Dorothy Layne McIntyre was the first African American woman to receive a pilot’s license under the United States Civil Aeronautics Authority. Born in Le Roy, New York in 1917, Dorothy grew up attending the local airshows, and even had the opportunity to fly in a plane when she was 12. She would later be accepted into the Civilian Pilot Training Program at West Virginia State College. This was a rare opportunity for Dorothy as the program accepted one woman for every ten male candidates. Though she received her private pilot’s license in 1940, her application to serve as a Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) was denied due to her race despite meeting all of the qualifications. Dorothy’s story in flight may not be well-known to the general public, but she received multiple honors for her achievements. She is a member of the Tuskegee Airman’s Alumni Association and is profiled in the book Distinguished African Americans in Aviation and Space Science.

Nadia Reiman’s work in radio has led to a Pulitzer Prize and a Peabody Award. A graduate of Brighton High School in Rochester, Nadia has worked in radio journalism since 2005. In the past, Nadia worked for the nationally broadcasted radio programs StoryCorps on NPR (National Public Radio) and Latino USA. Reiman worked for StoryCorps for nearly a decade, and her work there on 9/11 stories was part of a collection that earned a Peabody Award. She currently works on This American Life. Earlier in 2020, one of the shows she conceptualized, co-reported, and produced for This American Life won the first ever audio Pulitzer Prize. She has taught workshops on audio editing and judged for audio storytelling competitions.
Throughout her lifetime, Bessie Hamm’s work centered on providing opportunities for children in her community.

Bessie Hamm moved from Baltimore, Maryland, to Rochester in the 1920s. Though they had no children of their own, Bessie and her husband, James, committed themselves to helping urban children in Rochester. While neither Bessie nor James were college graduates, they recognized the value of education and helped create the Ralph Bunche Scholarship Fund and the “Parents and Students Want to Know” group to provide the community with opportunities and information. In 1971, President Richard Nixon recognized Bessie’s work with a citation noting her “outstanding activities” to establish the scholarship fund and her “dedication to the young people of our nation.”

The Public Universal Friend was the first American-born person to found a religious community.

At the age of 24, The Public Universal Friend, then known as Jemima Wilkinson, became deathly ill with a fever. The experience transformed them, and when they recovered, they no longer identified as Jemima. Now a genderless entity, they renamed themselves the Public Universal Friend and traveled throughout southern New England preaching free will, anti-slavery, and abstinence. The Public Universal Friend believed that women should obey God and not men. The Public Universal Friend’s followers called themselves the Society of Universal Friends and allowed both women and men to preach and own property. When the Public Universal Friend’s progressive ideas met with violent resistance, the group determined to remove themselves from the surrounding world. They settled on land close to Keuka Lake and created the community of Jerusalem. Though the movement dissolved in the 1860s after the death of the Public Universal Friend in 1819, Jerusalem is still the name of the town near Penn Yan, NY.
Fighting for her right to vote, Maria Lopez protected the rights of citizens who speak a language other than that of the majority.

Maria moved to Rochester in early 1964. She came from Puerto Rico to find employment so she could send money back to her sick parents. In her words, Maria wanted to vote because "every American citizen should vote and I am an American citizen. I would like to help decide who is going to represent me in government." New York State election laws required only a sixth grade level to register, and she had completed nine years of education in Puerto Rico. In September 1965, the Monroe County Board of Elections refused Maria the right to register to vote because she could not read or write English. The New York State Supreme Court agreed with the Monroe County Board of Elections. When Maria’s case moved to the federal level, three federal judges ruled that any American citizen who did not attend English speaking schools may register to vote under section 4(a) of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In 1973, Maria used that ruling to secure assistance in Spanish at the polls, which included printing the ballots in Spanish.