For Information Contact :
Jacqueline E. Baptiste
African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey
Media@aaccnj.com
www.aaccnj.com
609-571-1620

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The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ)
Announces the Keynote Speaker and the Honorees
for the Seventeenth Annual Circle of Achievement Awards Gala.

TRENTON, NJ — October 27, 2026. The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) announces the Keynote Speaker & Honorees for the 17th Annual Circle of Achievement Awards Gala, which will be held on **February 18, 2027, from 6 pm – 11 pm at the Venetian in Garfield, NJ. The theme for the 2027 Black History Month Gala is "Celebrating Legacy, Cultural Excellence and Impact"**.

The **Keynote Speaker** for the **2027 Gala is** Jeanette J. Epps, Ph.D., Retired NASA Astronaut & Aerospace Engineer.

"We are pleased to bestow the "**Presidential Award of Excellence for Exceptional Performance & Innovation" upon Dr. Jeannette Epps** for 16 years of service with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and her expertise as a flight engineer on NASA's SpaceX Crew-8 science mission and crew rotation to the International Space Station (ISS)", said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.,** Founder, President & CEO, AACCNJ.

Each year during **Black History Month**, the AACCNJ recognizes a distinguished group of African Americans that have attained a significant level of **personal accomplishment and/or recognition in business, education, public service, sports, entrepreneurship, entertainment or culture**. "**Having the opportunity to honor these amazing individuals fills the organization with immense pride. Each year the support for our black-tie gala continues to grow; we are looking forward to another phenomenal evening,"** said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr**. "The AACCNJ will be celebrating **our twentieth anniversary** on **June 7th, 2027**, and our Black History Month Gala will kick off a year of celebration and continued impact, said **Harmon**.

Grand Master Jimmy Barnes
Chief Executive Officer
Prince Hall Masonic
Charity Foundation of New Jersey (PHMCF)

"**Grand Master Barnes** is worthy of great recognition; in addition to his masonic journey, he has been an active servant leader in the community, as the founder of the Tracey C. Barnes Scholarship Fund, Inc, whose mission is to educate African American women and families of color with breast health awareness and early detection, and to empower our youth by assisting with exploring opportunities for higher education," said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr**. "His influence extends well beyond the walls of the lodge room, and we welcome the opportunity to honor him for a lifetime of service, with the **"Excellence in Community Service Award,"** said **Harmon**.

Doug Crawley
Chief Executive Officer
Shirley Crawley
Chief Financial Officer
Synergies Companies

"The AACCNJ will bestow the **"Operational Excellence in Business Award"** to **Doug and Shirley Crawley** for their excellent stewardship of three dynamic divisions of Synergies Companies - Staffing Synergies, Synasha and Diversified Synergies," said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr**. "The Crawleys' focus on forging meaningful collaborative partnerships drive success and creates lasting impact," said **Harmon**.

Natasha Durant, MPA
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey

"The AACCNJ will bestow the **"Excellence in Leadership & Community Service Award" to Natasha Durant**, as the CEO of the Girl Scouts Heart of NJ and the first African American woman in the council's history to lead the organization, and for her passion for community service with a focus on women, girls, diversity, equity, and inclusivity," said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.**

David S. Kountz, MD, MBA, MACP
Chief Academic Officer
Hackensack Meridian Health
Professor of Medicine &
Sr. Associate Dean for GME
Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine

"Dr. Kountz is worthy of great recognition, as the Chief Academic Officer for Hackensack Meridian Health, and the over 18 hospital network in NJ, as well as his mission to advance the quality and innovation of health care and education, and to promote health equity and social justice in our communities, as the Professor of Medicine & Sr. Associate Dean for GME at Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine", **said Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr**. "We are pleased to present D. Kountz with the **"Excellence in Community Service Award," said Harmon.**

The evening will begin with a "**Black Carpet Experience**" and **VIP Reception**, for the honorees and select sponsors in the **Club Room**. Guests will also enjoy a **Cocktail Reception** in the **Grand Ballroom**

and will move to the **Palazzo Ballroom** for dinner, dancing, and the Awards Ceremony. The Master of Ceremonies for the evening is **Dr. John E Harmon, Sr.**

The annual Black History Month, black-tie, awards gala is widely known as the **premier Black History Month event in the state of NJ**. The Awards Gala provides the platform, on behalf of the **88,000 Black owned businesses in New Jersey,** to increase the visibility of its members and their businesses.

"**This is a phenomenal event with unlimited opportunities to network with decision makers and potential partners,"** said **Gary Mann**, AACCNJ, Chairman of the Board, & CEO, Jasfel Analytics. "If you are a business owner in NJ and you do not attend this event, you are at least six months behind our members and attendees in building a pipeline for your business," said **Mann**.

More information can be found at https://www.aaccnj.com/2027-gala

About the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey

The AACCNJ performs an essential role in the economic viability of New Jersey. While providing a platform for New Jersey's African American business leaders, to speak with a collective voice, the AACCNJ advocates and promotes economic diversity fostering a climate of business growth through major initiatives centering on education and public policy. The Chamber serves as a proactive advocacy group with a 501(c) 3 tax exemption, which is shared by the National Black Chamber of Commerce.