



Accredited State Chamber
of Commerce with Distinction
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 28, 2025

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

TRENTON, NJ — October 28, 2025. The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) announces the Keynote Speaker and the Honorees for the 16th Annual Circle of Achievement Awards Gala, which will be held on **February 19, 2026, from 6 pm – 11 pm at the Venetian in Garfield, NJ.**

The **Keynote Speaker** for the **2026 gala, themed “Forging Ahead”**, is **Michael J. Garner, MBA, CCA** Chief Business Diversity Officer, City-Wide Mayor’s Office of M/WBEs, New York City.

“**Michael Garner’s** illustrious tenure at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) from 2009 - through 2023 is responsible for **more than \$20 billion in payments** to New York State/City Minority and Women-owned Businesses”, said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr., Founder, President & CEO, AACCNJ.** “With this history of impact, he is well equipped to deliver on the mission of the Mayor's Office of Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises' (M/WBEs): **to address historic disparities in City contracting and to provide minority and women entrepreneurs increased opportunities to do business with New York City.** Lastly, his leadership as a member of the Steering Committee of the New York State Business Alliance (NYSBBA) has enabled us to make tremendous progress as a new business entity in the region,” said **Harmon.**

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 **Harmon.**

**Stedman Graham
CEO
S. Graham & Associates**

“As the **CEO of S. Graham and Associates, a management and marketing firm, the author of 12 books**, including two New York Times bestsellers and one Wall Street Journal bestseller, and lastly as an educator and speaker, we are pleased to present **Stedman Graham with the “Excellence in Business Award”**, said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.** “Stedman’s **global training programs for corporations and educational organizations worldwide on the topic of Identity Leadership**, based on the philosophy that one cannot lead anyone else until you first lead yourself, have been transformational,” said **Harmon**.

**Floyd A.B. Rance III
Stephanie Tavares-Rance
Founders
Run&Shoot Filmworks**

“We are pleased to be able to honor **Stephanie & Floyd Rance, with the Cultural Award in Excellence**, their **vision of creating a film festival to focus on Black stories**, began 24 years ago, and has evolved into an annual event, with global presence and recognition. As the **Co-Founders of the Academy accredited Martha’s Vineyard African American Film Festival (MVAAFF)**, they are a true power couple, worthy of great recognition,” said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.** We were honored to co-host an event “**Filming in the Garden State**,” at this year’s festival . We were proud to support the exceptional talent that was on display, as people from around the world traveled to Martha’s Vineyard to witness black excellence, at what is also known as “**The Summer’s Finest Film Festival**,” said **Harmon**.

**Karine Apollon
Chief Diversity Officer
NYC Department of Education**

“We are pleased to bestow upon **Karine Apollon the Excellence in Education Award**. In Karine’s role as Chief Diversity Officer, in the New York City Department of Education, she **serves as a transformational senior leader with a proven record of excellence**,” said. **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.** “Karine has led successful initiatives with integrity and impact in both **non-profit and corporate organizations**. We applaud her **long standing commitment to improving PreK-12 academic achievement, ensuring college completion and career success**, said **Harmon**.

**Adenah Bayoh
CEO
Adenah Bayoh and Companies**

“As a local giant in her industry, we are excited to have the opportunity to honor **Adenah Bayoh** with the “**Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Real Estate Development Award**,” for her contributions to New Jersey as an **entrepreneur, real estate developer, and as one of the youngest IHOP franchisees in the U.S.**,” said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.** “Adenah’s personal story, including **immigration to the U.S. at age 13 after the family fled the civil war, is one of courage**, what an incredible journey, said **Harmon**.

Tanya L. Freeman, Esq.
Managing Partner
Callagy Law, P.C.

“We are pleased to honor **Tanya Freeman with the Excellence in Public Service Award**. Tanya is part of a **global honorary society of attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars whose public and private careers have demonstrated outstanding dedication to the highest principles of the legal profession and to the welfare of their communities**; a membership that is limited to one percent of lawyers licensed to practice in each jurisdiction, said **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr.** “Tanya’s leadership as the **Chair of the New York State Black Business Alliance (NYSBBA)** has been instrumental in increasing the visibility and impact of the organization in the region, " said **Harmon**.

The evening will begin with a “**Black Carpet Experience**” and **VIP Reception**, featuring Stedman Graham, for the honorees and sponsors. Guests will also enjoy a **Cocktail Reception** in the newly renovated **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**. There will be a **Meet and Greet – with Stedman Graham**, for a select number of sponsors at the Gala, Graham will make remarks to the attendees, during the Cocktail Hour in the **Club Room**. Attendees will also be able to pre-order copies of Stedman Graham’s books: ***Identity Leadership Book, Identity Leadership Planner, Identity Leadership Passport to Freedom.***

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 members of the AACCNJ and the over **124,000 Black-owned businesses in the state of NJ**, 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.”

More information can be found at <https://www.aaccnj.com/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.

In March of 2019, The United States Chamber of Commerce (USCC) awarded the AACCNJ with three stars Accreditation for its sound policies, effective organizational procedures, and positive impact on the community. The Chamber joins the top 3 percent of all chambers in the nation who are Accredited as both the only accredited Chamber in New Jersey and the only African American Chamber in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce federation to hold this distinction. With approximately 7,000 chambers in the U.S., Accreditation with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a prestigious honor that distinguishes the high quality, expertise, and strong leadership displayed by Accredited state and local chambers of commerce. In November of 2022, the USCC granted the AACCNJ a reaccreditation status with " Statewide Chamber with Distinction ". In October of 2025, the AACCNJ remained NJ 's only Accredited Chamber or Business Organization, as declared by the largest business federation in the world, the USCC.