

# Neighborhood UPDATE



**MHACY**  
Municipal Housing Authority  
for the City of Yonkers

FEBRUARY 2023

## THE MUNICIPAL HOUSING AUTHORITY FOR THE CITY OF YONKERS

### A Letter from Wilson Kimball



I just received the most amazing call from Fran Morris Rosman, the Executive Director of the Ella Fitzgerald Foundation! She read about the new Yonkers Housing Authority

(“YHA”) mural featuring Ella in the gym at Calcagno Homes on School Street and wanted to reach out to us. Ella started her Foundation back in 1993 with the goal of helping children and families. Our main areas of focus are literacy, music education and community health. I told Ms. Rosman about YHA’s piano drive through Mayor Spano’s office, our partnership with the Yonkers Public Library and our vaccination drives. She was interesting and engaged and we hope to have a lot more conversations. I think this month our conversation, between you and me, should be about Ella. Who was she and what is her legacy?

Dubbed “The First Lady of Song,” Ella Fitzgerald was the most popular female jazz singer in the United States for more than half a century. In her lifetime, she won 13 Grammy awards and sold over 40 million albums. Ella

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*“It isn’t where you came from, it’s where you’re going that counts.”*

— Ella Fitzgerald



From left to right: Ray Wilcox, executive director Yonkers Arts; artist Katori Walker; Yonkers City Council Member and Majority Leader Tasha Diaz; Yonkers City Council President Lakisha Collins Bellamy; Artist Robin Alcantara; Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano; Yonkers Housing Authority CEO Wilson Kimball and artist Evan Bishop.



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## A Letter from Wilson Kimball

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Jane Fitzgerald was born in Newport News, Va. on April 25, 1917. Her father, William, and mother, Temperance (Tempie), parted ways shortly after her birth. Together, Tempie and Ella went to Yonkers, N.Y, where they eventually moved in with Tempie's longtime boyfriend Joseph Da Silva. Ella's half-sister, Frances, was born in 1923 and soon she began referring to Joe as her stepfather. To support the family, Joe dug ditches and was a part-time chauffeur, while Tempie worked at a laundromat and did some catering. Occasionally, Ella took on small jobs to contribute money as well. Perhaps naïve to the circumstances, Ella worked as a runner for local gamblers, picking up their bets and dropping off money. Their apartment was in a mixed neighborhood, where Ella made friends easily. She considered herself more of a tomboy, and often joined in the neighborhood games of baseball. Sports aside, she enjoyed dancing and singing with her friends, and some evenings they would take the train into Harlem and watch various acts at the Apollo Theater.

In 1932, Tempie died from serious injuries that she received in a car accident. Ella took the loss very hard. After staying with Joe for a short time, Tempie's sister Virginia took Ella home. Shortly afterward Joe suffered a heart attack and died, and her little sister Frances joined them. Unable to adjust to the new circumstances, Ella became increasingly unhappy and entered into a difficult period of her life. Her grades dropped dramatically, and she frequently skipped school. After getting into trouble with the police, she was taken into custody and sent to a reform school. Living there was even more unbearable, as she suffered beatings at the hands of her caretakers. Eventually Ella escaped from the reformatory. The 15-year-old found herself broke and alone during the Great Depression and strove to endure. Never one to complain, Ella later reflected on her most difficult years with an appreciation for how they helped her to mature. She used the memories from these times to help gather emotions for performances, and felt she was more grateful for her success because she knew what it was like to struggle in life.

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## Wilson Kimball and Carlos LaBoy appointed to HAI Group Committee

Congratulations to Yonkers Housing Authority President and CEO Wilson Kimball and COO Carlos Laboy on their appointment to the HAI Group's board committee.

The two were welcomed for their expertise in the housing arena. The appointment was announced by Trevor Horn, ARM, GRCP | Manager of Corporate Governance, ERM, and Enterprise Support for the HAI Group.

HAI is a national non-profit association incorporated in 1987 that advocates and supports legislative and regulatory issues that help to improve the public and affordable housing industries. HAI sponsors programs for its membership, including insurance and risk management programs, scholarship and internship programs, and charitable activities.

Both appointments are effective January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023.



## A Letter from Wilson Kimball

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In 1934 Ella's name was pulled in a weekly drawing at the Apollo and she won the opportunity to compete in Amateur Night. Ella went to the theater that night planning to dance, but when the frenzied Edwards Sisters closed the main show, Ella changed her mind. "They were the dancingest sisters around," Ella said, and she felt her act would not compare. Once on stage, faced with boos and murmurs of "What's she going to do?" from the rowdy crowd, a scared and disheveled Ella made the last-minute decision to sing. She asked the band to play Hoagy Carmichael's "Judy," a song she knew well because Connee Boswell's rendition of it was among Tempie's favorites. Ella quickly quieted the audience, and by the song's end they were demanding an encore. She obliged and sang the flip side of the Boswell Sister's record, "The Object of My Affections."

Off stage, and away from people she knew well, Ella was shy and reserved. She was self-conscious about her appearance, and for a while even doubted the extent of her abilities. On stage, however, Ella was surprised to find she had no fear. She felt at home in the spotlight. "Once up there, I felt the acceptance and love from my audience," Ella said. "I knew I wanted to sing before people the rest of my life."

To learn more about Ella Fitzgerald visit [ellafitzgerald.com](http://ellafitzgerald.com) and also check out Samara Joy McLendon, a 2020 Ella Fitzgerald Memorial Scholar and winner of the 2023 Grammy for best New Artist and Jazz Vocal Album!

### Wilson Kimball

*President & CEO*

Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers

## Wilson Kimball Named to BCW Hall of Fame

Congratulations to Yonkers Housing Authority President and CEO Wilson Kimball who was recently named to the Business Council of Westchester's Hall of Fame.

Kimball will receive the Woman in Business Success Award on April 25 at Glen Island Harbour Club in New Rochelle.

"The quality of this year's honorees is truly outstanding. This illustrious group of winners joins more than 100 past winners which include some of the most prestigious business leaders and organizations. We are proud to continue this time-honored tradition in Westchester," said BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon.





## Artist Shanequa Benitez Exhibit Opens for Black History Month

Yonkers Arts' Artist in Residence Shanequa Benitez debuted her solo exhibition "But It's Ours: The Redline Between Poverty & Wealth" at Yonkers Arts' Gallery on February 2.

Benitez of Yonkers, a mix medium artist, explores redlining and its effects in Yonkers. Redlining is defined as a discriminatory practice that consists of the systemic denial of services that has negatively impacted the lives of people of color. In preparation, Benitez said she researched this topic to fully understand the issue.

"When I start new work my first question is: 'How do I feel?' The process usually starts with reference materials. I like using books, magazines, tv, current events, and real-life experiences. I consider my work multidisciplinary. I reject the traditional standards of composition and design while conveying emotion and meaning rather than reality," says Benitez.

"I couldn't think of a better way to kick-off Black History Month than to feature this exhibition shedding light on a stain of our past," said Ray Wilcox, executive director of Yonkers Arts. "It's just amazing to witness the research, work, and passion Shanequa put into this project."

This body of work shines the light on gentrification, mass incarceration, inequality for women, police brutality, mental health, hope, and pain. Each piece uses different methods to reflect the effects of the practice of redlining these undesirable areas known as "ghettoes".

"But It's Ours: The Redline Between Poverty and Wealth" will be on exhibit at the Yonkers Arts Project space until April 7th, 2023.

The Artist in Residence program is in partnership with the Yonkers Housing Authority and is supported by the Mulford Corporation.



Left to right: Shatika Parker and artist Shanequa Benitez at preview, Feb. 2