

# Neighborhood UPDATE



MARCH 2023

## THE MUNICIPAL HOUSING AUTHORITY FOR THE CITY OF YONKERS

### A Letter from Wilson Kimball



March is women's history month, so we decided to focus on some important firsts here in Yonkers. For instance, I am the first female head of the Yonkers housing

Authority ("YHA"). Being first makes me very aware of the tone and model I need to and want to set for others who come after me. Often women are judged on superficial things like their hair, make-up and clothes. I would like to be judged on the improvements I made to the properties, how responsive I was to tenant concerns and how I worked to bring the YHA into the greater Yonkers' community. You can't be the first at something without acknowledging that you didn't do it alone. I stand on the shoulders of the many women who came before me, trailblazers. One woman, Joan Magoolaghan has served as the YHA's general counsel for years. She is retiring this year, but her mark is firmly on the Authority. I have never seen a person so committed to tenants' rights, a better senior advocate or compassionate human being with a brilliant mind than Joan.

(Continued on page 2)

### Celebrate Women's History Month

International Women's Day has been commemorated across the world on March 8th since 1911. In 1980 President Jimmy Carter declared March 2-8 as National Women's History Week. In 1987, the commemoration was expanded, and Congress passed a law proclaiming March as Women's History Month.

During Women's History Month, we celebrate the countless women who have fought tirelessly and courageously for equality, justice, and opportunity in our Nation. We also reaffirm our commitment to advancing rights and opportunities for women and girls in the United States and around the world.

This month, we take a look at women who have made their contributions closer to home.

**Andrea Stewart-Cousins** // *New York State's First Woman Majority Leader*



Andrea Stewart-Cousins grew up in public housing on the upper west side of Manhattan and the Bronx. She moved to Westchester in the 1980s, settling with her late husband and three children in Southwest Yonkers.

In her early career, Andrea Stewart-Cousins worked as a journalist, a public-school teacher and for 13 years as a customer service and sales & marketing professional for New York Telephone/ AT&T. She entered government in 1992 when she was appointed by former Yonkers Mayor Terry Zaleski as the city's Director of Community Affairs, the first African American woman to hold that position.

In 1996, Andrea Stewart-Cousins was elected to the Westchester County Board of Legislators where she served for a decade. Senator Stewart-Cousins first ran for the State Senate in 2004. She lost that election by just 18 votes. Two years later, she ran again and won by

(Continued on page 2)

## A Letter from Wilson Kimball

(Continued from page 1)

We will miss her when she retires. It's a loss to the YHA but we recognize she has earned her retirement. Another amazing woman who has been a trailblazer at YHA for years is Dr. Denise Wesley. She runs the YHA compliance and is responsible for our resident coordinators and tenant activities. Dr. Denise is a dedicated professional who has been at the authority for decades and has brought a level of expertise to the YHA that is the envy of other housing authorities across the country. We are so lucky to have her on our team. Our counsel, your City Council President Lakisha Collins Bellamy, is another woman for whom affordable housing has been a lifelong commitment. She rose through the ranks here at YHA while putting herself through law school and being a single mother. I turn to her for good advice and counsel about our policies and procedures all of the time. My praise of these women is not to say there are not many more women, and men, behind the scenes who make my life easier and make your housing their priority. It is only to point out that no one does their job alone. No one smashes a glass ceiling or breaks a record or hits a milestone without a team of people there helping them, supporting them and encouraging them. I am lucky to have a great team, men and women who have helped me reach the goal of being the first female head of YHA. I take that responsibility seriously. I know I owe it to the next generation to pass it on and pay it forward.

### Wilson Kimball

*President & CEO*

Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers

## Celebrate Women's History Month

(Continued from page 1)

over 1,800 votes.

In 2012, Senator Stewart-Cousins was elected as the leader of the Senate Democratic Conference, the first woman in the history of New York to hold a legislative leadership position. She eventually became New York State's first ever woman Majority Leader and has advocated housing, education, women's rights and a host of statewide issues, but continues to be extremely active in her home district and a major supporter of the Yonkers Housing Authority and its residents.

### Wilson Kimball // First Woman to Serve as President and CEO of Yonkers Housing Authority



Wilson Kimball was appointed as the first woman President and CEO of the Yonkers Housing Authority in April of 2020.

In addition to overseeing a multi-million-dollar renovation of its more than 1,700 units of affordable housing in Yonkers, Kimball has made structural changes in the agency that have brought it into the modern world. She has improved communications with residents, bringing in more services from lending libraries, mural projects, anti-flooding and environmental beautification projects throughout

the housing authority. In partnership with Groundwork Hudson Valley, Wilson put together more than \$2 million from New York State, Bank of America and the Bezos Earth Fund to finance an environmental justice project to reverse heat islands and flooding at housing authority properties. Under her leadership, Yonkers recently broke ground on a 200 unit- plus Senior Housing project with sustainable features. It is one of the first Passive House affordable housing projects in the state.

Before heading the Yonkers Housing Authority, Wilson Kimball served as Commissioner of Planning and Development for the City of Yonkers and prior to that was Senior Vice President of Operations for the Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority in New York City. She has also served as Counsel to First Lady Libby Pataki advising her on policy issues including economic development, women and children's health and tourism.

(Continued on page 2)

## Celebrate Women's History Month

(Continued from page 2)

### **Lakisha Collins Bellamy** // *First Woman of Color to Serve as Yonkers City Council President*



Lakisha Collins-Bellamy, Esq., an attorney and lifelong resident of Yonkers, is the first African-American woman to be elected President of the Yonkers City Council. As a girl, Lakisha Collins-Bellamy lived at Cottage Place Gardens and had her first summer job with the Yonkers Housing Authority. Presently, she still works as an attorney for the housing authority. She

also maintains her own law practice, The Collins Firm, LLC, where her legal team focuses on family law and real estate.

Lakisha Collins-Bellamy is a homegrown success by any account. An attorney who was admitted to the New York State Bar in June of 2019, she was appointed to serve on the Yonkers School Board and was elected to the City Council. She holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in political science.

Lakisha Collins-Bellamy is a graduate of Roosevelt H.S. She holds a B.A. in Political Science from the State University of New York at New Paltz, a Master's degree in Public Administration from Marist College and a Juris Doctor degree from New York Law School.

"It was fate that I came to work for the Housing Authority," said Lakisha. "And it has been rewarding ever since."

### **Liz Owens** // *Inducted into the Westchester County Senior Hall of Fame*



Liz Owens loves to "serve" and make a difference in her community. Although retired, she has been an active contributor and volunteer at the Yonkers Housing Authority for over 40 years as a Resident Leader. She has served on the Screening Committee, Welcoming Committee, Resident Advisory Board (RAB), Palisade Towers (formerly Schlobohm Homes)

Tenant Council, Voter Registration and as a Democratic District Leader.

Liz has also served as President of her individual Tenant Councils to including Mulford Gardens and Palisade

Towers for over 25 years and also served as a City-Wide representative for READY, the National Tenant Council organization for over 15 years.

Liz was recently inducted into the Westchester County Senior Hall of Fame.

Liz says she wants to help ensure all residents are treated with dignity and respect and works to educate residents on the benefits they have within their communities.

### **Rita Gross Nelson** // *First African-American Woman to Serve as Yonkers Police Officer*

Rita Gross Nelson was the first African-American woman to



serve as a Yonkers Police Officer. Last year, a street in Yonkers, Rita Gross Nelson Way, was dedicated in her name.

Born in Harlem in 1937, she grew up in Yonkers and graduated from Roosevelt High

School. She then joined the U.S. Air Force and graduated from Paul Quinn College in Waco Texas and Fordham University.

Rita Gross Nelson joined the Yonkers Police Force as a Parking Enforcement Officer and was appointed the first Permanent African American Female Police Officer, and the first Woman to walk "patrol" in the State of New York in 1964. After 23 years of service, she retired and became the first African American Director of Security for the Hudson River Museum. She also served as security for VIP's such as Coretta Scott King, Shirley Chisholm and Robin Givens.

She was also the first woman member of the Westchester and Rockland Guardians Association. Rita served in, as well as supported, many local organizations, including: serving as Past Matron of Terrace City Chapter #26; Yonkers Prince Hall Order of Eastern Stars; Life Member of the Yonkers Branch NAACP; and Board Member of the Nepperhan Community Center, serving as Secretary until her illness and passing. Rita was a Life Member of Runyon Heights Improvement Association, the neighborhood she resided in until her death in 2015.

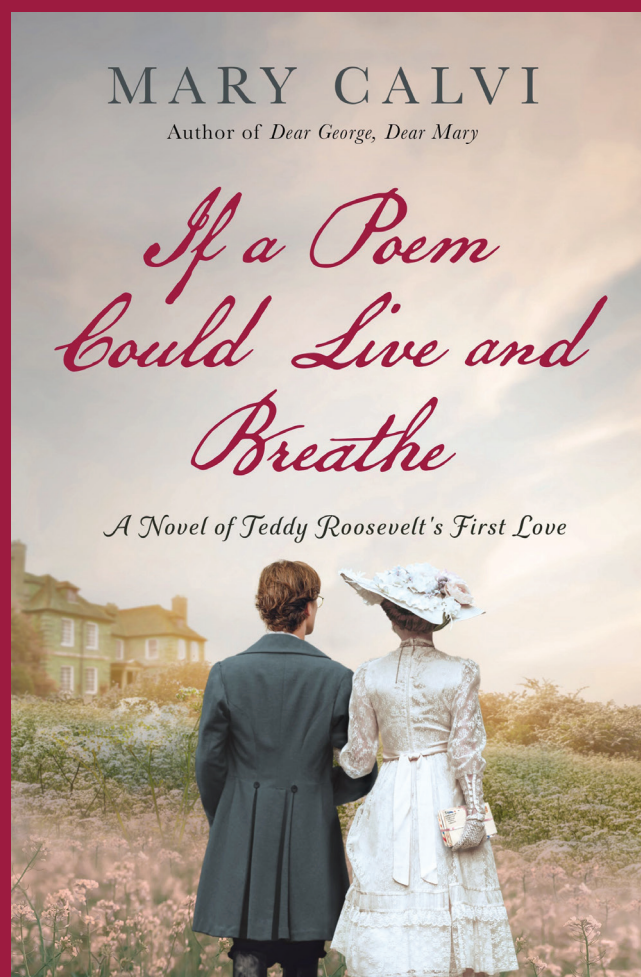


## Yonkers First Lady and WCBS-TV Anchor Mary Calvi Publishes New Book

Yonkers First Lady and WCBS-TV Anchor Mary Calvi said that the inspiration for her two best-selling novels have been the same: to tell the story of a woman in history who had up until now been overlooked.

Calvi's newest book *If a Poem Could Live and Breathe* was published by St. Martin's Press and released on Valentine's Day. It tells the story of the relationship between President Theodore Roosevelt and his first wife Alice who died in childbirth. It's based on love letters the two wrote to each other during their courtship. Her first book was *Dear George, Dear Mary: A Novel of George Washington's First Love*, about the love affair between George Washington and Mary Philipse, one of the richest women in Colonial America. Just as she did in her debut novel, Calvi focuses on telling the women's story apart from the roles they played in the lives of their famous husbands.

"I was inspired to tell the story of these women," said Calvi. "They were fascinating, complex women whose stories deserved to be told."



## Looking to Advance Your Education: Apply for NLHA Scholarships

The National Leased Housing Association Education Fund is calling all residents of The City of Yonkers to apply for its resident scholarship program. Community members are eligible for awards from \$500 – \$3,000 from four different categories. Applications are due by March 24, 2023.

To learn more and apply, go here:

<https://hudnlha.com/education-fund/>

## Let the Yonkers Police Know How They Are Doing

The City of Yonkers and Yonkers Police Department invite you to take a "Community Survey on Public Safety and Law Enforcement. Your opinion and participation will help the Yonkers Police Department improve its services, processes and reputation. The survey is completely confidential, and it will take about 5 minutes of your time.

Take the survey here:

<https://www.yonkersny.gov/live/public-safety/police-department/community-outreach/yonkers-police-survey>