

Atlantic County Commission on *Women*



"CELEBRATING WOMEN WHO TELL OUR STORIES"

Hello and welcome to the newsletter of the Atlantic County Advisory Commission on Women! First, a little about us... Our commission was founded in 1994. Our 15-member volunteer non-profit organization is meant to represent "women with disabilities, labor, health care, women in the professions, women in government employment, providers of women's services, clients of women's services, education, business, women's service organizations, and women in the home." Together we serve to do a number of things relevant to the welfare of women such as gathering and providing information about the welfare of women, informing policy, and providing avenues for greater interaction among community organizations working toward improving the lives of women and girls in Atlantic County.

In line with our mission and in the spirit of Women's History Month, we dedicate this newsletter to highlighting impactful women in our community. This year the Women's History Month Theme is "Celebrating Women Who Share Our Stories." We are grateful to those women who are active in the media and help all of us to see and appreciate the amazing contributions made by women every day.

We hope that by highlighting the accomplishments of these successful women, you will be encouraged to reflect on your own stories of the women who have been meaningful in your lives.

Happy Women's History Month!

**Lori Vermeulen, Chairperson
Atlantic County Advisory Commission on Women**



Atlantic County Executive
Dennis Levinson



Atlantic County Board of County Commissioners
John W. Risley, Jr., Chairman

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"CELEBRATING WOMEN WHO TELL OUR STORIES" CONT.

Laura Powers Batchelor is the Chief Marketing Officer for Atlantic Cape Community College and serves on the President's Cabinet. In this role, she is responsible for the college's marketing, advertising, and public relations efforts.

Laura graduated with her Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Florida and a Master's degree in Integrated Marketing Communications from West Virginia University. Her career has taken her from southern Florida to Los Angeles, where she worked in advertising for the hospitality and movie industries.

Laura came to Atlantic Cape Community College in 2017 and since then, she has spearheaded a student-centric marketing strategy. In addition to updating marketing materials and overseeing a website redesign that included becoming ADA-accessible, Laura has overseen the college's rebranding, resulting in increased exposure. She pushed for a technology overhaul in the department both in equipment and in the ways the college was reaching its current and potential students.



Laura Powers Batchelor

Laura's dedication to the college's mission and goals, and her constant enthusiasm for new ideas and technology is the main driver of the creativity within the Marketing and College Relations team.

Laura and her husband Ron have two children and live in Mays Landing. She has been Girl Scout Leader for her daughter's Troop since 2013. She enjoys reading, genealogy and planning her next family trip to Disney World in her spare time.



Elaine M. Hawkes

Elaine M. Hawkes is the Co-Founder of Hawkes Janitorial Contractors and Moving Services that has been providing janitorial services for businesses over the past thirty years. She is the Co-Founder of WEHA-Gospel 88.7 & 100.3 FM a Stellar Award winning radio station broadcasting in an Urban Gospel format.

Elaine holds an Associate's of Arts degree in Biblical Studies and is currently pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in Communication with Lancaster Bible College. Elaine was awarded an honorary Doctorate degree from the City of Hope Bible College.

Elaine believes in including ministry principles' in all of her business endeavors. She believes in the principles of giving to those who are less fortunate. She has patterned her life after Ecclesiastes 9:10 "Whatever your hands find to do, do it." Elaine and her husband can be found handing out gifts to the entire student body of North Main Street School in Pleasantville, NJ during the Christmas holiday. Giving back to the community is a labor of love for the Hawkes.

Elaine seeks to demonstrate actions that will leave a strong and stable legacy for her children, grandchildren and future generations.

Elaine and her husband, William H. Hawkes Jr. have been married for over forty years. They have three children, seven grandsons and one granddaughter.

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"CELEBRATING WOMEN WHO TELL OUR STORIES" CONT.

Michelle Washington Wilson is a writer, performer, and storyteller from rural Newtonville, New Jersey. Michelle has been writing and telling stories for more than 30 years. She earned a bachelor's degree in Speech and Theater Education from Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey. She has traveled throughout North America and the Caribbean sharing stories from around the world. Michelle is an active member of NJ Storytelling Network and The National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS).



**Michelle Washington
Wilson**

Ms. Wilson has to her credit a two-act play "Dusty Days Gone, the story of the people who harvest the crops." It is the story of migrant workers on farms during the 1950's. Michelle, a Certified Life Skills Instructor, has presented at several conferences on Women's Studies, Family Literacy and Adult Education including the prestigious East Tennessee University Conference on Early Childhood Education in Johnson City, Tennessee. She is featured in two books including *Legendary Locals of The Pine Barrens of New Jersey*, by the late Karen Riley and *Small Towns Black Lives* by Professor Wendel White.

Chef Michelle Wilson is also a chef, having earned an Associates in Applied Science in Culinary Arts from the Academy of Culinary Arts in Mays Landing NJ. Michelle has connected her culinary skills with theatrics and delivered a humorous punch line to The Gospel Brunch at the House of Blues where she entertained as the Church Lady announcer.

Professionally Ms. Wilson contributes to the quality of Federally funded Afterschool Programs as a Monitor and Evaluator of 21st Century Community Learning Center Programs throughout the South Jersey region. Ms. Wilson served as an Atlantic County Library Commissioner for 18 years. Upon her retirement as an Adjunct Professor at Atlantic Cape Community College in the Social Sciences Department. Michelle continues to keep the tradition of storytelling alive, "Because everybody has something that they do well."



Cindy Christy Fertsch

Cindy Christy Fertsch is the co-founder and editor of Shore Local Newsmagazine, a community publication, available both in print and online, that highlights the people, places and events that make Atlantic County a great place to live and visit. Cindy manages production of the publication with the support of a team of columnists, graphic designers, photographers and videographers. She uploads daily content to the website, shorelocalnews.com and shares community happenings on Shore Local's social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and TikTok.

Cindy is a graduate of Bloomsburg University and a long-time resident of Egg Harbor Township.

She is the co-founder and Executive Director of Hearts of Surfing, a 501c3 nonprofit organization that offers free surfing and recreation opportunities for families with autism. Hearts of Surfing is 100 percent volunteer driven and has grown significantly since its inception in 2014. It has been featured on NBC, ABC and FOX news, the Dr. Oz Show, The Press of Atlantic City, The Current, The Sentinel and NJ.com. Hearts of Surfing was awarded the Donald J Sykes award in 2014 and the Best Nonprofit Award by the City of Ocean City in 2021.

Cindy raised three children. Her oldest son, James Robert ("Jamie"), had significant challenges, including autism. Cindy advocated wholeheartedly for her son and for other families touched by autism. Jamie passed suddenly in March of 2020 and by June of that year Cindy and her husband, Bob presented the first annual Jamie Fertsch Memorial Scholarship to a graduating high school senior.

Cindy is passionate about her family, community and dogs. When she is not working, you can usually find her in the park or on dog beach with her golden retriever and lab mix dogs.