

Newport *this week*

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NAACP Honors for Community Service

By Brooke Constance White



Randy Butler receiving the Role Model Award from Jimmy Winters. (Photos by Bob Weaver)

Every year, the Newport County Branch of the NAACP recognizes those committed to bettering the community and helping others. Once again, this year's group has an impressive record of volunteer service and dedication to the community and embodies the national NAACP's 2017 conference theme: "steadfast and immovable."

The awards were announced during the branch's 97th-anniversary awards dinner on Nov. 5 at the Atlantic Resort in Middletown. U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) was the event's guest speaker.

James Winters, president of the chapter, said that community members were nominated and then chosen through a committee selection process.

"These folks set an example and are role models for our community and especially for our young people," Winters said in a phone interview. "You can see how dedicated they are to volunteerism and to making our community a better place to live."

Although Winters said the award winners serve the community without the expectation of recognition, he believes it's important to honor them up as role models showing how to serve a community and help our neighbors.

Award Winner Profiles

Joyce Dawson-Watts, of Newport, received the Community Service Award for her tireless work with numerous nonprofit organizations and her 40-plus year career in the healthcare field where she's always taken great pride in caring for her patients on both the physical and emotional level. She's also offered her time and talents to numerous agencies and organizations in the region. And for the last nine years, she's partnered with a variety of churches and organizations to send clothing and supplies to Haiti. She's been recognized with numerous awards and write-ups for her dedication to service. Dawson-Watts' life goals include: outreach missionary work, feeding the hungry, providing clothes to those in need, caring for the elderly and helping single parents.

Randy Butler, of Middletown, received the Role Model Award for his countless years coaching basketball at the Newport Boys and Girls Club, Newport Recreation Center, Newport County YMCA, Florence Gray Center, Gaudet Middle School, and Middletown High School. He founded the Butler Basketball Club in order to provide opportunities for Newport County's youth to play basketball in a safe, educational environment, and build strong character. His life motto is: "strive for greatness."

Victoria Johnson, of Newport, received the Education Award for her lifelong career as a teacher, coach and administrator. She was Rhode Island's first African-American woman to be principal of a secondary school. She's also dedicated her time and talents to a wide range of community organizations. Most recently, Johnson launched the "Newport Middle Passage Port Marker Project" to tell the stories of the enslaved Africans who survived the transatlantic journey and were brought to Newport 350 years ago.

Shirley Ann Hill, of Newport, received the President's Award for her 31-years of active military service. Since retiring, she's been an active volunteer in the local military and civilian communities and has given up countless hours to serve her country. She is committed to organizations dedicated to improving the lives of service personnel, veterans and their families.

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