

Debi Rose

Deborah "Debi" Rose is a 2nd generation Staten Island native, from West Brighton, who has devoted the last twenty-eight years to improving the North Shore community. In 2009, after losing two consecutive and tight races, Rose was elected to represent the 49th District of the NYC Council, on Staten Island's North Shore, becoming the boroughs first African American elected official. Having lost two successive campaigns by narrow margins, Rose went against all expert advice – which told her that if she lost a third time her political career would be over. Debi Rose's commitment to community leadership and her spirit of tenacity can be found in her family history. Her grandparents, Kenneth and Luella Billup, owned *Billups Funeral Home in West Brighton* – what was then, one of two African-American owned funeral homes. Black funeral home directors played an important role in the black community. They were skilled professionals who often provided services to the community that went beyond burials. They were often looked to for leadership.

My grandmother could've closed the business when my grandfather died. But instead, my grandmother went on for thirty-seven years, in that business, and it was a thriving successful business. My mom, who had polio from the age of three, never let that stop her from doing anything. You know, how could I give up when I hadn't accomplished my goal and my community was still in need?

–Debi Rose



Debi Rose
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010

Ruby Dailey

Born in the early twentieth century, Ruby Dailey was raised on a farm in Alabama, worked hard and made the most of what she had. Like so many others, she came North with her husband. They settled on Staten Island to establish roots from which her family could grow and prosper. Her story of sacrifice, stability, and strength is the embodiment of so many uncelebrated African-American ancestors who created community and opportunity through adversity. Throughout, Ruby Dailey has found inspiration through the power of music. In church, Ruby's song kept the faith, while the steady rhythm kept her moving and guided her hands while working the farm and raising her family. The call and response, found in the African-American work songs, is a reminder that the work of the individual is directly linked to the larger community.

The voices in this exhibit, and the entrepreneurial spirit they radiate, are a response to the legacy of those that came before. Their collective voices are a call to the next generation of social entrepreneurs on Staten Island.



Ruby Dailey
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010

**PORTRAITS OF LEADERSHIP:
AFRICAN AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURS ON STATEN ISLAND
February 12, 2011- November 1, 2011
Tuesday - Saturday, 1-4pm
Staten Island History Center
Building H, Snug Harbor Campus**

For information about booking exhibit tours, lessons, or receiving a copy of the video call the museum's education department at 718-727-1135

A collection of Staten Island African American stories whose wisdom, wit, and positive entrepreneurial spirit illustrate the roots of Black social history on Staten Island. Curated by Jeannine Otis, video by George/Chu Media, direction & photography by Willie Chu, with an essay by Folklorist Christopher Mulé.

The Museum thanks the many individuals and organizations who made this project a reality: Virginia Allen, Amelia Anderson, Cynthia Copeland, Sylvia D' Alessandro, Robin George, Nell Gibson, Lorna Harris, the Houston Family, Ronald Jackson, Lana Johnson, the Jones Family, Macy Jones, Ed Josey, Evelyn King, Jane Morgan Lyons, Larry Marshall, Sajda Musawir Ladner, Adrienne Amos, Cleve Overton, Andrea Phillips, Jesse Primeau, Toni Donegan, Rita Reynolds, Sheila Rohan, Anthony Turner, Ronald Washington, Lori Weintrob, Steve Zaffarano, The African-American Political Association, Clove Lakes Nursing Home, Sandy Ground Historical Society, The Staten Island Advance, Staten Island National Council of Negro Women, Staten Island NAACP, Universal Temple of the Arts.

Upcoming Museum Events:

Staten Island African Americans: A Community Panel Discussion
Tuesday, February 15, 6-9pm
Spiro Hall II, Wagner College Campus
Featuring distinguished African American community members & Wagner College Department of History.

Oral History and Portraits of Leadership
Selected Saturdays TBA – monthly through October 2011
Staten Island Museum History Center
Building H, Snug Harbor Campus
Meet exhibit participants as they present their experiences and perspectives

Lunch & Learn: African American Positive Spirit
Wednesday, February 23, 12pm
R. H. Tugs Restaurant, 1115 Richmond Terrace
Ms. Jeannine Otis sings - followed by a tour of the exhibit at the History Center at Snug Harbor.

Black History on Staten Island
September 21, 4pm
Staten Island Museum History Center
Building H, Snug Harbor Campus
with the Museum's Curator of History Pat Salmon

Killa Hill's Gerald Barclay: The Film Business
February 24, 6-8pm
Staten Island Museum History Center
Building H, Snug Harbor Campus

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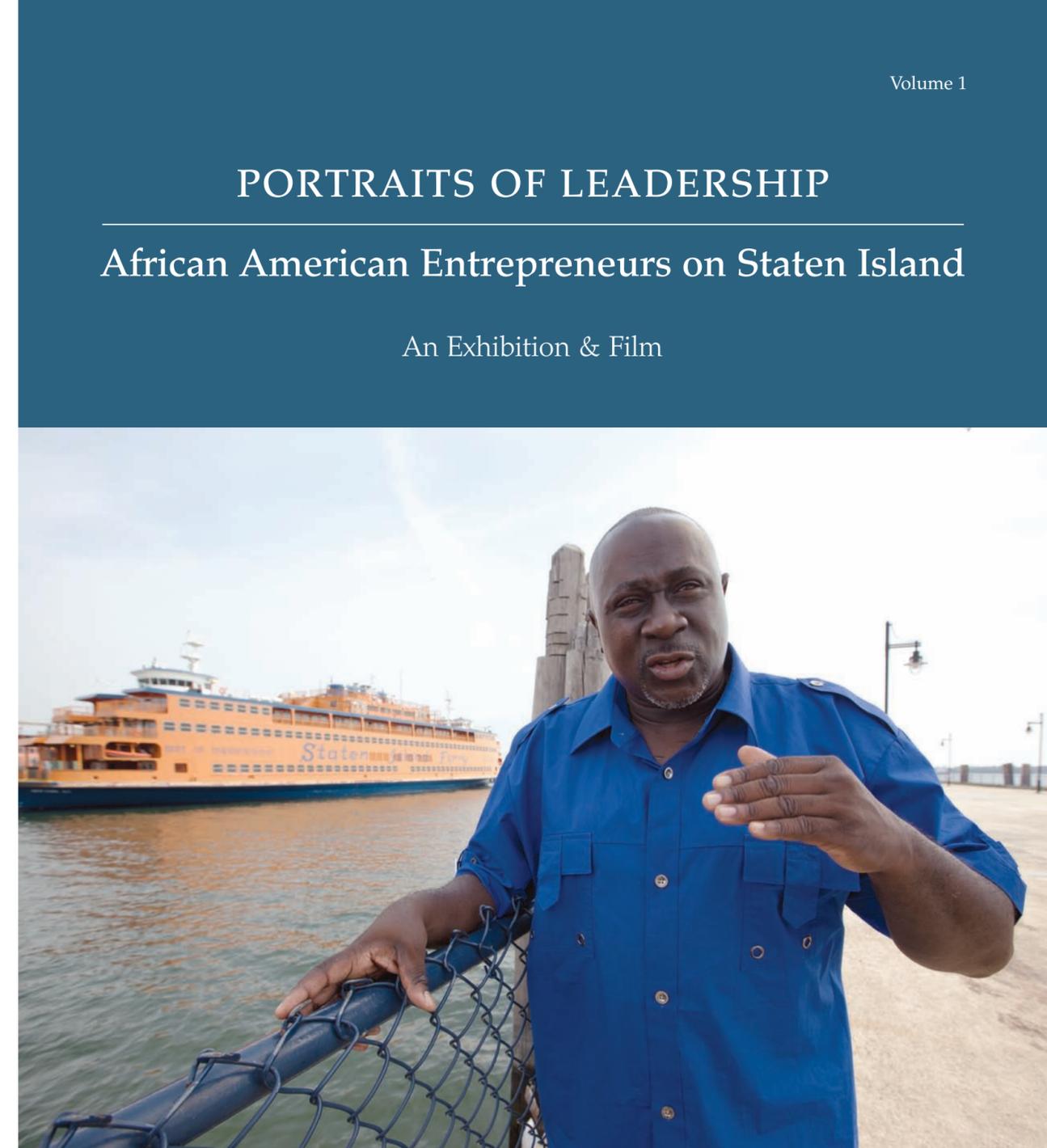
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Cover image:
Kevin Buford
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010



PORTRAITS OF LEADERSHIP

African American Entrepreneurs on Staten Island

An Exhibition & Film

STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King

Welcome to the first volume of the **Staten Island Museum's** PORTRAITS OF LEADERSHIP Series! *African-American Entrepreneurs on Staten Island* uses photographs and oral history interviews to explore our history and imagine our future. The eight individuals presented here are fascinating people who are leaders in different ways, connected because they serve as inspiration, make a difference in the community, and - in this case - serve to change negative racial perceptions.

In approaching this project I looked to my own family roots in 1960s Detroit, Michigan. I have strong memories of my mother, Adrienne Otis, whose work with progressive organizations for "Negroes" used her entrepreneurial resources & spirit to elevate our community. A talented accountant, my mother became widely recognized for her work organizing efforts, and received accolades for promoting great art as a tool for education. I recall an interracial performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony she directed, at a time when such events were considered too challenging.

As a result of my mother's work, Detroit's historic Symphony Hall has a seat in her honor, I met Dr. Martin Luther King, and I have had a successful career as a performer and creative teaching artist. Most importantly, she exemplified what an individual could accomplish, and she embodied the unwritten law - or expectation - that **one must use their acquired resources and talents to help the community in a significant way.** Our folklorist, Chris Mulé, labels this 'social entrepreneurship.'

I hope this exhibit, the video, and the related events will likewise remind a new generation of the accomplishments of the past, grow recognition of the African American community on Staten Island, and inspire new leaders to strive to reach their full potential. There is much more to explore, collect, and confront - and the challenge before us is to continue to embrace our island history in all its diverse colors, languages, and shared humanity.

Jeannine Otis

Staten Island Museum Project Leader, Arts Education Professional & Performer

THE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR ON STATEN ISLAND

By Christopher Mulé, Folklorist

Since the 18th century, economists have attributed the role of the entrepreneur as a source of change, development, and progress - whose main function is to "overcome the difficulties engendered by uncertainty." The word *entrepreneur* is associated with an individual, one that acquires great wealth. On Staten Island, the history and spirit of the African-American entrepreneur goes beyond the profiting individual, reaching into the welfare of the community. The wealth that is created is *social wealth*. Therefore, the leadership on exhibit is that of the "social entrepreneur."

Influences & Mentors

Dolores A. Morris and Family

Dolores A. Morris, a fifth generation Staten Islander, produced and developed educational programming as vice president of HBO Family and Documentary Programming. She supervised productions that have won more than 30 Emmy Awards, five of which she received personally. In 2010, she accepted a President's Medal at the College of Staten Island, "On behalf of my parents, grandparents, great grandparents, upon whose shoulders I stand, and have always stood." Her words echo scientist Isaac Newton who



Norcie, Dolores, & William Morris II
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010

humbly stated "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants." High upon the shoulders of her ancestors, Dolores Morris was able to see - and show others - a new future. She was also able to look back and view the long and arduous paths from which her family came.

On the shoulders of her grandfather, William A. Morris, she saw an eleven year old child forced from his home in North Carolina because he corrected a white shop owner who was cheating his family. She witnessed his resilience when he came to Staten Island at the turn of the century and founded the largest moving company on the Eastern seaboard - *Morris Moving and Storage Company*. She watched him respond to the harassment of an African-American family moving into Castleton Corners by establishing the first Staten Island chapter of the NAACP in 1924. She watched as her grandfather's name became synonymous with education and community service, chiseled into history through the NAACP's William A. Morris Humanitarian Award, and the Intermediate School 61 in Brighton Heights. She could watch her father, also named William, build the family business with her grandfather, and find familiarity in the friendship they shared as they watched Staten Island's landscape change.

He wasn't only a father; he was a pal and a buddy. My father had Parkinson's disease so he couldn't get around too well. He was my road buddy. We would ride around Staten Island and I'd show him the changes that were being made. I'd show him the streets, new houses and things like that.

—William Morris II



Amanda Johnson
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010

Dolores also looked into the past and saw her father carry on a commitment to serve as he volunteered for military service in 1938 with the esteemed 369th Coast Artillery. This all black unit sought to disprove negative racial myths by continuing the legacy of the heroic African-American 369th unit in World War I. While her father led men in war, she watched her grandmother raise her family and take over the business - perhaps one of, if not the only, active businesswomen on Staten Island at that time. And finally she watched her mother, Norcie Morris become the glue for her immediate family.

Amanda Johnson

Amanda Johnson is the owner and creative director of Sweet Rain Productions, which provides multimedia services for film, television and the performing arts. A young and passionate entrepreneur, Amanda was inspired by an antecedent leader, Sajda Musawir Ladner, Director of the Universal Temple of the Arts in West Brighton. As a teenager, Amanda began documenting the U.T.A.'s Annual Jazz Festival, and witnessed how the arts brought the community together. Like Ms. Musawir Ladner, Ms. Johnson is dedicated to using her talents in positive ways.

I want to be able to give back what I have learned, to the community - the creative community, young people, old people, people who just do not have opportunities to get what they want out of life for themselves due to financial constraints, due to lack of vision or opportunities...

—Amanda Johnson

Griots and Guardians

Patricia Ann Taylor

The entrepreneur on Staten Island also takes the form of guardians of culture, justice and equality. As Grandma Morris took the role of business leader, there are also those entrepreneurs, who are committed to protecting the community, particularly those whose voices are not heard. As president of the *Staten Island Women's Bar Association* (SIWBA), Ms. Taylor's work seeks to improve the status of women attorneys and women in general. Her approach to her work is that of a guardian dedicated to creating a unified voice among women, and the community at large, in order to ensure that their rights are guarded, protected, and secured. By strengthening the community of women she enables them to serve the community at large.



Patricia Ann Taylor
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010

As president of the Staten Island Women's Bar Association, I work with women who are looking towards the future. We have a number of young women attorneys who are making the state of New York become the kind of place in which we all want to live, grow, work and raise our families.

—Patricia Ann Taylor

Entrepreneurs on Staten Island also serve as guardians of culture. Their role is reminiscent of the African tribal storyteller, the Griot. Griots preserved the oral traditions, history and culture of their tribes. They recited poems or told stories of warriors, and drew on their own personal sources of inspiration.

Gerald Barclay

As a writer, director, and producer, Gerald Barclay is a storyteller who uses film and video. His voice as a film maker was shaped by childhood experiences. At the age of 12 his family was forced to flee their homeland of Liberia after a violent *coup d'état* in 1980. His new life as an immigrant in the Park Hill projects on Staten Island was deeply affected by the drug violence that killed two childhood friends. Their deaths made Gerald consider his own mortality and the preciousness of life. He formed his own production company, *Gee-Bee Productions*, and has produced and directed over seventy-five music videos for artists such as the Wu-tang Clan and Snoop Dogg. Recently, he shifted his focus towards socially conscious film stories—*Killa Hill* profiled Park Hill in the 1980's, and in 2005 he returned to Liberia and captured stories of survival in *Liberia: The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here*. Gerald is following his dreams and desires for those who could not, and is compelled to tell their story, passing them down to future generations.



Gerald Barclay
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2010

So I formed GB productions to say "wow" at least I did something. Their death kind of catapulted me to be a business person.

—Gerald Barclay

Kevin Buford (Cover)

Kevin Buford is a Staten Island street poet who is reminiscent of the West African Griot. He weaves words together to convey a message, attract attention, and preserve history. A "fixture" on the Staten Island ferry during the 1980's and 90's, Kevin is particularly remembered for his

rhyiming patter that helped him sell merchandise such as batteries, umbrellas, and other commuter necessities. Through the years, his rhyiming became an outlet for self-expression as well as a platform to talk about history, injustice and discrimination. Through poetry and rhyme, Mr. Buford is a beloved guardian of African-American history and culture. His poem, *Black Innovations That Built this Nation*, highlights one hundred inventions that black people have contributed to the world.

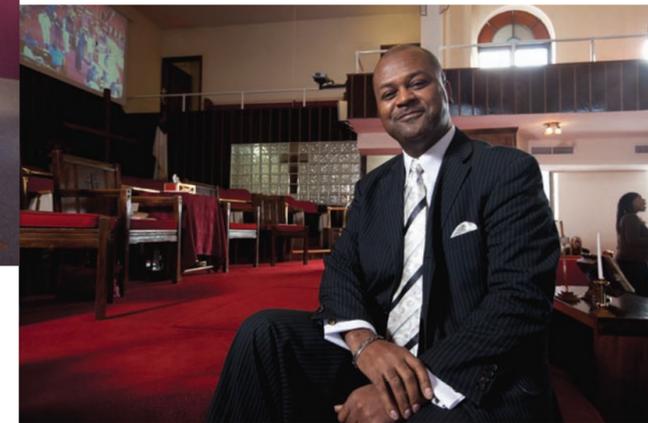
For over 21 years I walked up and down the aisles making rhymes, selling merchandise to people. And you wanna' know? It became more than just a business.

—Kevin Buford

Faith and Resilience

Reverend Dr. Demetrius S. Carolina Sr.

Because the entrepreneur encounters risks and difficulties on their journey, faith and optimism can be essential. Reverend Dr. Carolina, Senior Pastor at the *First Central Baptist Church* on Staten Island answered the call to ministry at age 16. Today he serves as the Executive Director of the *Central Family Life Center*. As a pastor, he nurtures trust and faith throughout the Staten Island community, while raising awareness of community needs. His optimism and enthusiasm shines through as the Reverend instructs his community to accept of what God wants us to do, and go out and do it, despite risk, barriers, or fear.



Reverend Dr. Demetrius S. Carolina Sr.
Photograph by Willie Chu, 2011

Even amongst the present economic constraints we are excited that people are collaborating and growing together in Staten Island.

—Reverend Dr. Demetrius S. Carolina Sr.