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**Social Justice Matters Turns to Novel Way of Marking Juneteenth,
National African American Celebration of Freedom**

Local officials, community members unite to triumph over Covid-19 restrictions

SCOTCH PLAINS, NJ – June 10, 2020 – In these Covid-19 times, the nonprofit Social Justice Matters (SJM) has come up with a unique way to mark Juneteenth, the African American celebration of freedom: airing a video featuring local officials, community leaders and students.

The 40-minute video will be available on local access television and social media on June 19.

The video will feature insights on the significance of Juneteenth by Scotch Plains Mayor Al Smith, Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr, Scotch Plains Deputy Mayor Josh Losardo, Scotch Plains Police Chief Theodore Conley, Fanwood Police Chief Richard Trigo, Scotch Plains-Fanwood Schools Superintendent Joan Mast, Union County Freeholder Chair Alexander Mirabella, SJM co-founder Leland McGee, historian Linda Caldwell Epps, and Kramer Manor (Fanwood) neighborhood historian Elwood Green Sr., among others.

In a particularly moving segment, high school students will describe what freedom means to them.

And the school district's elementary students have been invited to send in submissions for a freedom quilt.

Juneteenth, short for “June Nineteenth,” marks the date in 1865 when Texas became the last state to announce the Emancipation Proclamation, which President Abraham Lincoln had issued two-and-a-half years earlier.

“Juneteenth underscores that you have a voice that matters and that you are free to be empowered,” said Tashira B. Wheeler, co-chair of SJM’s Juneteenth 2020 Committee. “This year’s celebration is all the more important as a result of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other recent events across the country.”

Jill Jackson-Jones, co-chair of SJM’s Juneteenth 2020 Committee and of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Club Inc., Union County Club (NANBPWC), agrees.

“It’s critical to remember the reasons for celebrating this day, for this generation and for generations to come. The celebration remains an inspiration, to this day,” she said.

Added SJM President Joan Peters, “SJM has run Juneteenth celebrations in previous years and did not want the Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings to jeopardize the chance to mark it in 2020. The community’s deep interest and support in this event has been especially meaningful.”

The video will be shown on Scotch Plains TV: Fios Channel 22 and Comcast Channel 34; Fanwood TV: Fios Channel 24 and Comcast Channel 35. It also will be available on Raider News on YouTube and at noon on June 19 on socialjusticematters.org.

The Juneteenth 2020 Committee sees the video as a new way of reaching out to a wide range of people in the community and informing them of Juneteenth’s meaning and value. As helpful as in-person programs are, the video format provides viewing-time flexibility and allows more people to learn of Juneteenth, the committee said.

SJM of Scotch Plains is an 11-year-old local grassroots nonprofit organization. Its members are committed to active inquiry into matters of race and creation of equitable communities. SJM serves as a resource for community concerns, and facilitates meaningful discussions and action about race and related topics. For additional information, please go to socialjusticematters.org. v

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