



A nearly full house of around 150 attendees came together for this year's Thirty-Sixth Annual Oconee County Branch NAACP Freedom Fund Awards Dinner. The banquet was held on Saturday, October 15, 2022, at the Seneca River Institute Family Life Center in Seneca, S.C. This was the first in-person Freedom Fund Awards Dinner held since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Freedom Fund Awards Dinner is Oconee County Branch NAACP's primary fundraiser designed to support programming, activism and outreach, branch student awards, as well as voter education and advocacy throughout the year. Banquet funds also assists the branch's mission to address issues in the community related to education, equity, labor and economic disparities, voting rights, housing opportunity, access to health care, and environmental and criminal justice. The bottom-line goal is to ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected.

Mr. Dexter Robinson served as Master of Ceremonies. Invocation was provided by Reverend WC Honeycutt. Greetings from the City of Seneca were provided by Mayor Pro Tem Ronnie O'Kelly and Police Chief Casey Bowling. The Occasion was presented by Mr. Willie Jenkins; membership appeal by Mrs. Renea Rice; and the blessing of the meal was provided by Reverend Ray Jones. Miss Ann Marie Butler, from our youth and young adult chapter, sang the musical selections, while Mr. David Walker provided music for the event.

The guest speaker was the Reverend Dr. James Blassingame, pastor of the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Sumter, S.C., and a resident of Seneca. He was introduced by his sister, Minister Paula Henderson of Westminster, S.C.

An informative and inspirational message was presented by Dr. Blassingame that reminded guests of the importance of voting in the upcoming mid-term elections. Voting is especially critical this year to help protect the individual and collective rights of citizens that so many state and federal legislators are actively working to abolish. Ultimately, citizens must understand that each vote counts and will help determine who will be making decisions on their behalf.

Dr. Blassingame's message further encouraged attendees to develop and enhance relationships with local office holders since these officials also have impacts on the daily lives of residents. Every vote matter and must be counted; no voter should be denied the opportunity to cast a vote since so much depends on the hard-fought-for right to vote.

Oconee County Branch NAACP President George Anderson and Mrs. Gloria Wright awarded this year's education student awards to Mr. Triston Dawkins, Miss Destiny Hawthorne, and Mr. Tilan Earle, all whom are current college students.

Additionally, Silver Life Membership plaques were presented to Dr. Paul Thompson, Mrs. Lillie Johnson, Mrs. Lannie Mulwee-Grant, Mr. Kenneth Carter and Mrs. Gloria Washington. It was good to see these additional silver life members recognized since membership is the life blood of the NAACP.

Mrs. Beverly Jenkins received a special award and recognition for her long years of dedicated service – 29 years and counting as Branch President- to the Oconee County Branch NAACP. She is also the immediate past president of the branch.

Special thanks to our Gold and Bronze sponsors: Oconee Federal; Seneca Light & Water; Clemson University Office of Diversity; Valu Teachers; City of Seneca Department of Arts, History, and Culture; Blue Ridge Electric; and Community First Bank; and to all those who supported by putting an ad in our souvenir journal.

On behalf of our Freedom Fund Committee members and Chairperson Mrs. Kathy Jenkins, the Oconee Branch NAACP also thanks all guests and attendees for making the event such a success.