Juneteenth Community, Circle Awards honors local pioneers

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This year, the annual Juneteenth festival returned for two days of celebration, live entertainment and honoring of leaders in Rochester's Black community.

Each year the festival is celebrated over the annual Juneteenth holiday. Over 5,000 attendees were anticipated at the 2026 Rochester Juneteenth Festival at Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park in downtown Rochester.

'Beloved Community' was the theme for this year's festival, honoring King's vision of a society based on justice, equal opportunity and love of humanity.

'In this moment of division, we choose connection,' said president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation Simeon Banister in a statement. 'So, if you are with us for this moment, then we encourage you to find a way to get involved.'

Each year, festival organizers honor Rochester's elders and local communities through the Elder's Circle Awards and the Community Awards.

Rochester honors award recipients at the 2026 Juneteenth Festival

On June 19, residents and festivalgoers gathered to honor the recipients of this year's Elder's Circle Awards.

• Luvon Sheppard

• Catherine M. Thomas

• Jackie Dozier

• Jerome H. Underwood

On June 20, festival organizers Rashaad Parker and Wanda Wilson presented awards to local organizations and individuals that contribute to the social justice and well being of Rochester's Black communities. The awardees include:

• **The Up & Rising Youth Award:** Big Brothers Big Sisters program of Greater Rochester, accepted by Colette Muhammad

• **The We Are One Community Empowerment & Service Award:** Community Justice Initiative, Diallo Payne

• **The Fighting for A Cause, Social Justice Award:** Robert Ricks

• **The Art and Activism Pioneer Award:** Reenah Golden

• **The To Whom Much is Given Much is Required Adult Award:** Dwayne Mahoney - Boys & Girls Club

• **Youth Award:** Carl R. Parris, Director of Youth & Engagement & Cultural Relations

• **Health & Wellness Award:** Dr. Tracy R. Webber

• **Ministry Award:** Honorable Melissa Barret

As the recipient of the Art and Activism Pioneer Award, Reenah Golden encourages attendees to support the community and invest in the youth. 'Let's continue to love ourselves, love each other, love on this community, love on our youth,' said Golden.



Honorees at Rochester's Juneteenth Festival wer

e Luvon Sheppard; Catherine Thomas; Jackie Dozier; Jerome Underwood; Big Brothers-Sisters; CJI, Diallo Payne; Robert Ricks; Reenah Golden; Dwayne Mahoney, the Boys and Girls Club; Carl Parris; Dr. Tracy Webber; and Melissa Barrett.

Submitted by Rashaad Parker

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