

## **Freedom to Celebrate: Honoring Our Community**

Westerly ARC to Celebrate Juneteenth, Sunday, June 16, 2024

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Bandstand and Greenery area in Wilcox Park

The Westerly Anti-Racism Coalition will hold a Juneteenth celebration with remarks by Kevin Lowther and Christine Martone, musical performances by local musicians, dance performance by Blooming into Greatness, poetry reading, history presentation, presentation of Community Spirit Awards, and a choral finale of "Lift Every Voice." There will be activities for children and adults, refreshments, and a voter registration table.

The nation's newest federal holiday will be celebrated Wednesday, June 19, 2024. Juneteenth memorializes the day in 1865 when enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas, first learned of their freedom, which the Emancipation Proclamation had declared almost three years earlier, in 1863. The day is dedicated to liberty and justice and honors the journey of enslaved persons in the United States. Juneteenth combines the month and day (June + nineteenth).

ARC's celebration starts at 11 a.m. with welcoming remarks by Westerly Town Council Member Kevin J. Lowther and a Native American land acknowledgment. The festivities include musical performances by three local musicians, a dance performance by youth group Blooming into Greatness, poetry reading, a history presentation, remarks by League of Women Voters of South County President Christine Martone, and a choral finale of "Lift Every Voice."

The two-hour celebration will feature ongoing refreshments, crafts, and activities for children and adults, including handprint activity for display, games, posters, a picture frame photo station, a League of Women Voters Registration Table, and others.

This year, ARC adds a new feature to Juneteenth. As ARC continues to pursue its mission of embracing multiculturalism to address racism and to educate, engage, and empower our community on its journey to equity, inclusion, and belonging for all, this Juneteenth, it presents its inaugural Westerly ARC "Community Spirit Awards." These awards honor individuals (past and present) who have made and will continue to make valuable contributions to Westerly's diversity, inclusion, equity, and excellence, based on their demonstrated commitment, leadership, and advocacy.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the individuals being honored with the "Westerly ARC Community Spirit" awards. Their leadership, advocacy, and commitment have not only elevated Westerly but also allowed us to co-exist in our ever-evolving community. We are privileged to recognize their invaluable contributions. Westerly ARC's "Community Spirit Award" recognizes our recipients' effect upon our town's social climate. Their leadership and talent demonstrate a spirit of inclusivity and enthusiasm in Westerly. They are role models for others in Westerly, and their example extends well beyond our town. Their work inspires and encourages others to champion social justice.

This year, ARC honors three recipients:

**Anna Thornton Williams**, Kentucky-born former slave, of 21 Newton Avenue was the first woman in Westerly's history to vote in a national election.

**Rev. Joshua A. McLure** served 27 years as the pastor of the Pleasant St. Baptist Church, Westerly, honored with two doctoral degrees from The Evangelical Theological College of Africa, Nigeria: educator, theologian, award-winning author, and community organizer.

**Na'Veilah Njie**, a high school honors student whose dedication to community service extends beyond the halls of Westerly High School to include her church youth group. She is an exemplary student with a bright future ahead of her.

The public—family, friends, neighbors—are invited to honor these three individuals and to see them receive this award and celebrate Juneteenth. All are welcome.

The Westerly Anti-Racism Coalition (ARC) is a community of individuals who advocate embracing multiculturalism to address racism. ARC meets on the steps of the Westerly Post Office each Sunday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. All are welcome. Learn more and subscribe to ARC's newsletter at [westerlyarc.weebly.com](http://westerlyarc.weebly.com)