

# Rebecca Seawright



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## Assemblymember Seawright Honors "Women of Distinction" During Women's History Month

March 24, 2021 --- To commemorate 2021 Women's History Month, Assemblymember Rebecca Seawright last evening honored women leaders of distinction for their achievements, noteworthy contributions, and outstanding work on behalf of the community on the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island.

"We celebrate women today who are exemplary change-makers and influencers and the pioneers of the past upon whose shoulders we stand," Assemblymember Seawright said. "They all inspire us to resist and keep up the fight. To the Women of Distinction, we say congratulations! You are an enduring inspiration to our entire community, our beloved city, and our great state of New York!"

The distinguished honorees hail from public service, neighborhood businesses, volunteer and non-profit institutions, publishing, medical institutions, civic organizations, and labor unions.

Honorees receive a New York State Assembly citation recognizing "outstanding work on behalf of the community...worthy of esteem for her civic dedication and service, essential to the advancement of the residents of the 76th Assembly District and the State of New York."

Included in the 2021 celebration are honorees announced in 2020 but unable to receive recognition due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2021 "Women of Distinction" Honorees**

**Cynthia McCollum**, Women of Distinction 2021 keynote speaker, is Senior Vice President, Hospital Administration at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where she has served for more than three decades. Before coming to MSKCC, she worked at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine and the John A. Hartford Foundation.

**Jeanne Straus** is president of Straus News, publisher of Our Town, and 16 newspapers in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. She took Straus News from four to 19 community publications in print and online. Under her superb leadership, the publications have won numerous awards for reporting, advertising, and design excellence.

**Dorian Colucci Mecir** is the proud owner of Dorian's Seafood Market, located at 1580 York Avenue. Dorian began her career in the seafood industry at the Rosedale Fish Market and was inspired to continue the decades-old tradition of providing quality catch and excellent customer service to the neighborhood. Dorian is a sponsor of the Carl Schurz Park Conservatory, Candlelighters NYC, Small Business Mentors NYC, City of Hope, Mt. Sinai Hospital, and the American Cancer Society.

**Gayle Baron** has devoted her life to community and public service. She recently completed three years as First Vice-Chair of Community Board 8. She also serves as president of the NYC Academies Foundation and managing partner of Trinary Group LLC. Mrs. Baron served as executive director of the New York Women's Agenda (NYWA), a coalition of 100 diverse NYC women's organizations representing 155,000 women. Initiatives included financial literacy programs for NYC's youth, women's entrepreneurship programs, and access to quality health care.

**Saundrea I. Coleman** is a 2020 graduate of Alliance Theological Seminary, where she received a Master's of Divinity degree. She is a consecrated deaconess of the A.M.E. Zion church, and she serves at Isabella Nursing home in the Pastoral Services Department. She co-founded and co-hosts the OneNYCHA podcast on public housing issues and an organizer of the UES4BLM Vigil at Carl Schurz Park each evening since the June 2020 murder of George Floyd.

Deputy Inspector **Melissa Eger** is the commanding officer of the NYPD's 19th Precinct. Eger recently led the 122nd Precinct, which covers the South Shore of Staten Island. She began her NYPD career as an officer in Central Brooklyn, later being promoted to sergeant while working in Northern Brooklyn.

**Aiesha Eleusizov** is the Manhattan Association Chair for Girl Scouts of Greater New York and a troop leader for Troop 3001 and Troop 3244. Over the past eight years, Aiesha, with co-leader Yitza Martinez and the girls of their troops, have spent countless hours making Roosevelt Island a better place. In her professional life, Aiesha is a Senior Program Officer in education leadership at The Wallace Foundation, where she works to foster equity and improvements in learning and enrichment for young people.

**Betsy Feist** is executive director of the East River Democratic Club dedicated to sustaining our neighborhood as a place where all thrive through advocacy, by helping others, solving problems, and organizing fora to hear from and question our representatives. She is well-known for her longstanding and

dedicated community activism.

**Dr. Katherine Teets Grimm** is a physician who specializes in pediatrics and child abuse. In addition to her private practice on Roosevelt Island, she serves as a child abuse pediatrician for the Mount Sinai Medical System and the New York Center for Children.

**Wendy Machaver** has worked on the American Stock Exchange's trading floor, advocated for the educational rights of children with disabilities, advised teachers about including different types of learners in the mainstream classroom, and served as a caregiver to beloved family members. Wendy champions measures to reverse climate change pollution and is currently a public member on Manhattan Community Board 8's Social Justice Committee. Under a nom de plume, she has written and published three romance novellas.

**Josephine Napolitano**, a daughter of immigrants, is the owner of highly regarded Arturo's Restaurant on York Avenue. She is honored to serve the community and considers Yorkville and its residents an extension of her home and family.

**Margaret Price** is a journalist, editor, author, and past president of the New York Financial Writers' Association. As a community activist, she promotes women's issues through her role as co-chair of the Women & Families Committee of Community Board 8-Manhattan.

**Gabrielle Ross** is a programmer and app developer, proficient in multiple coding languages, and a High School sophomore at The Brearley School. Gabrielle is part of a three-person team that enters coding competitions and hackathons nationally and created Volunteer Cloud, a website for volunteers to find opportunities.

**Shirley Zussman** is a sex therapist based in New York City. Zussman was supervised through her graduate dissertation by Margaret Mead, and in the 1960s, studied sex therapy under Masters and Johnson, the inspiration for the Showtime series Masters of Sex. She is 106 years young and is an activist in the East 79 Street Neighborhood Association.

**Serena Sabet**, a senior at the Spence School, has worked on community service projects that benefit homeless people and underprivileged children. As a daughter of two immigrants and a mixed woman of Persian, Macanese, and English descent, she has also been the head of her school's multiracial affinity group for the past two years.

**Shari Weiner** is the former Mayor and Township Attorney of Livingston, NJ. She is a member of CB8, where she serves as co-chair of the Voting Reform Task Force. Shari is currently a member of the Executive Committees of LPAC, Tri-State Maxed Out Women's PAC, and the Women's Political Caucus of NJ. Shari is passionate about getting more women involved in the political process and getting more women into elective office.

**Julia Wischnevsky** is a civic-minded student dedicated to advocating for social justice and effecting positive change. For the past three and a half years, she has addressed teen mental health issues and eliminated the stigma surrounding mental illness. She led a team of peers in drafting legislation to

provide all New York City public schools with full-time, DOE-funded social workers and integrate mental health into the pre-existing health curriculum. Julia is currently a junior at Eleanor Roosevelt High School. She furthers her leadership, and civic efforts through dedicated participation in her school's Law Team, School Leadership Team, Equity Team, Spanish Club, and Girls Lead Our World Club.

## 2020 "Women of Distinction" Honorees

As a lifelong advocate for gender equality, **Julia Fan's** career has focused on women and girls' empowerment issues globally. Educated at Vassar College and Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, she has worked at Human Rights in China, the Clinton Foundation, UNFPA (Beijing), and The Hunger Project.

Chief Medical Epidemiologist, Infection Control at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center **Dr. Mini Kamboj** is a board-certified infectious disease physician and Chief of the Medical Epidemiology Service. Members of this program work to prevent healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) from developing and spreading among patients and staff and are also actively engaged in several research projects on various aspects of epidemiology and prevention of HAIs.

**Lisa Spedalle**, a registered nurse for the Visiting Nurse Service, cares with great dedication for patients on the Upper East Side who are recovering in their own homes. Her patients are the best part of nursing, she says.

**Janette Gautier** served for three decades on the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists' national and local boards. She started volunteering at Church of the Epiphany's Dinner for the Homeless in 1988 and became its Volunteer Coordinator in 1995. What began as a supper for 35 women from the Lenox Hill shelter became a full sit-down three-course meal served to around 100 food-insecure men and women each Wednesday evening.

**Ruth Halberg** represented the 76th Assembly District on the New York Democratic State Committee for over 30 years. She was elected to the State Committee from The Democratic Club of Yorkville--where she also served as president--and continued in this position at the Lenox Hill Democratic Club. A long-time resident of the Upper East Side, Ruth's history of community activism began five decades ago when Hunter College threatened to eliminate their famous Elementary and High School Campus Schools. Ruth was instrumental in identifying an alternate site.

**Zena Kaufman** serves on the Board of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom and chair of the Fundraising Development Committee. The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom's mission is to build trust, respect, and relationships between Muslim and Jewish women and teenage girls. Standing together, committed to stand up for one another, educate one another about our faith and cultural practices, engage in social action, and work to end acts of hate for all human beings.

**Louise Merriman** is Administrative Director of Clinical Nutrition at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Her team of Registered Dietitians at New York-Presbyterian are recognized nationally for significant contributions in improving awareness and treatment of malnutrition in hospitalized patients.

**Ann Meschery** directs in-park events with New York City's Carl Schurz Park Conservancy. She is responsible for producing the Summer Sounds Concert Series, Sunset Film Festival, Gracie Square Art Show, and the Holiday Tree Lighting and Caroling Celebration. She served two terms on Manhattan's Community Board es resources and mentoring to opera company volunteers.

**Andrea Jackson** is a talent management and acquisition professional. In our community on Roosevelt Island, she is the Vice President of the Roosevelt Island Senior Association.

**Bobbie Slonevsky** is vice president of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society and writes and edits the digital publication, which is now in its sixth year. She has unearthed and developed dozens of previously overlooked topics of Roosevelt Island's history. She hopes to expand their reach by compiling them into a widely available book of "Roosevelt Island Vignettes."

After working for 40 years in an Advertising/Media company, **Lynda Smith** retired in July 2018. During her retirement, she has spent her time volunteering at a nursing home and in Assembly Member Rebecca Seawright's office. She finds enjoyment in getting to interact with some interesting people. One of her passions is traveling, which she continues to pursue during her retirement.

SIXTH ANNUAL



# Women OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

**Keynote Speaker & Woman of Special Distinction Senior Vice President Cynthia McCollum, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC)**

Cynthia McCollum, Senior Vice President, Hospital Administration, has been at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for over 30 years.



## 2020 Honorees



***Julia Fan***  
Advocate for Gender  
Equality



***Janette Gautier***  
Director of the Dinner  
program at the Church of  
the Epiphany



***Ruth Halberg***  
Former Democratic State  
Committeewoman for the  
76th Assembly District



***Andrea Jackson***  
Vice President of the  
Roosevelt Island Senior  
Association



***Dr. Mini Kamboj***  
Chief Medical  
Epidemiologist, Infection  
Control at Memorial Sloan  
Kettering Cancer Center



***Zena Kaufman***  
League of Women Voters



***Louise Merriman, RD***  
Retired Administrative  
Director of Clinical Nutrition



***Ann Meschery***  
Director of In-Park Events  
with New York City's Carl  
Schurz Park Conservancy



***Lisa Spedalle***  
A home care nurse with the  
Visiting Nurse Service



***Bobbie Slonevsky***  
Vice President of the Roosevelt Island  
Historical Society



***Lynda Smith***  
Dedicated district office volunteer  
Office of Assembly Member Rebecca  
Seawright

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## 2021 Honorees



***Saundra Coleman***  
Co-founder of the Holmes-  
Isaacs Coalition and Co-chair  
of the Social Justice  
Committee, Community  
Board 8



***Gayle Baron***  
Co-chair of the Women and  
Families Committee,  
Community Board 8



***Betsy Feist***  
Community Activist and  
freelance writer and editor



***Deputy Inspector  
Melissa Eger***  
NYPD 19th Precinct



***Aiesha Eleusizov***  
Roosevelt Island Girl Scout  
Troop 3001 Leader



***Dr. Katherine Teets Grimm***  
Child abuse pediatrician for  
Mount Sinai Medical System  
and the New York Center for  
Children



**Wendy Machaver**  
Community Activist,  
educational rights activist,  
and public member of  
Community Board 8



**Dorian Mecir**  
President  
Dorian's Seafood Market



**Josephine Napolitano**  
Owner  
Arturo's Restaurant



**Margaret Price**  
Journalist, editor, author  
and community activist



**Gabrielle Ross**  
Programmer and app  
developer, proficient in  
multiple coding languages,  
and a High School  
sophomore at The Brearley  
School



**Serena Sabet**  
A passionate and dedicated  
eighteen-year-old, who is  
currently a senior at the  
Spence School



**Jeanne Straus**  
President of Straus News,  
publisher Our Town and of  
16 other local newspapers in  
New York, New Jersey and  
Pennsylvania



**Shari Weiner**  
Co-chair of the Voting  
Reform Task Force,  
Community Board 8



**Julia Wischnevsky**  
Social justice and mental  
health advocate



*Dr. Shirley Zussman*  
Therapist and neighborhood activist

## *Past Women of Distinction Honorees*

**2015**

*Judy Berdy, Barbara Chocky, Winnie Cudjoe, Helaine Eisenberg, Jill Eisner, Yvonne Fitzer, Monica Iken-Murphy, Patricia Sanders, Judy Schneider, Betty Wallerstein*

**2016**

*Loraine Brown, Alice Heyman, Zoe Markowitz, Ellen Polivy, Margie Smith, Eileen Toback*

**2017**

*Michele Birnbaum, Eva Bosbach, Judy Buck, Mary Coleman, Maureen Fairlie, Linda Heimer, Sherie Helstien, Wendy Hersh, Jean Kim, Dara Lamb, Jacqueline Ludorf, Valerie Mason, Marilyn Mehr, Sonia Ossorio, Liz Patrick, Barbara Parker, Lynn Shinozaki, Joyce Short, Louella Streitz, Betty Walker, Elaine Walsh*

**2018**

*Erlinda S. Brent, Reverend Beverly Dempsey, Joan Falcetta, Lisa Fernandez, Nikki Leopold, Rachel Levy, Marie Luarca-Reyes, Truly L. Mason, Madelaine D. Piel, Jennifer Ratner, Naomi Semeniuk, Mallory Spain, Carol Tweedy, Inspector Kathleen Walsh, Sharon Williams*

**2019**

*J. Khadijah Abdurahman, Alexandria Abenshon, Ruth Berghammer, Lori Bores, Jennilie Brewster, Alida Camp, Rossana Ceruzzi, Christine Crowther, Julia Ferguson, Faith S. Fraser, Helene Goldfarb, Shakima Grant, Ruth A. Gutman, Officer Lori Murray, Officer Ashley Pappas, Jovemay Santos, Officer Lorraine Wade, Arlene Williams*

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