



11TH ANNUAL JUNETEENTH FLAG RAISING CEREMONY & WEEKEND CELEBRATION

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter



Haverstraw Mayor Mike Kohut opened the ceremony as he's done over the past years. "I'm quickly going to just say a few words and then announce the elected officials here, so thank you all for coming. It's important because history is important and that's plain and simple. You can't erase history despite what certain people try to do. It is our history. It's American history, and we celebrate it. We celebrate the good and the bad, and that's what history is all about. So, we're happy to raise this flag for the 11th time and then have all the festivities that we're going to have tomorrow down on Clinton Street. But I'm just going to quickly read through our list of elected officials here." Which he did.



ELECTED OFFICIALS AND HAAC MEMBERS

"That being said, I'm handing it over now to Ginny Norfleet for the program."

<https://youtu.be/gSxmPp5xe0Y>

Norfleet Continued, "I have to, I have to say something. As you heard at the, the last, part of that song, it says God of our weary years. I just want to make a point about Haverstraw in the community of faith that was here. All of you first started in Haverstraw, the first Catholic Church, first Presbyterian Church, first Jewish temple, first African American church, all in Haverstraw. It was a community of faith, and that's why love overshadowed everything else, because this community was strong in its faith and it still is. Amen.

Minister David did a fantastic rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner.

"You know, we're going to raise the flag now with, HAAC member Norman Cindy Blackwell, old-time Haverstraw family, Cindy's family, my family, we've all been here over 100 years in this little village."

Kohut commented to Ginny, "You look good for 100. "I walked right into that one, Cindy." Someone else commented, "You don't, you don't look a day over 99."

"The unofficial anthem for the African American community, if you're summertime, especially if you lived in New York, was a song that we called Ain't No Stopping Us Now. It was

part of that.

It was part of our official kickoff for the summer for us, so we'll have that low as the sky goes up. We honor the pride of our people."

<https://youtu.be/MEtT6Xg32D4>

"A few more things before we close. I just want everybody to be aware of, will HAAC members raise their hands? This is the people that are behind the scenes that make it happen with me for me and then we have our youth division, the after-school program and these kids, this is the future right here, you guys. These kids are outstanding. Mike wants you to come up. The people can see, come on guys, come here. Come on up. Jeff, bring your group up. They are a phenomenal group of kids who are participating in all our programs. They formed the choir. They're in different churches. One of our young men, Devin, just graduated his master's in teaching. We believe that they are our future and when I retire, which I hope soon, we will be passing this on to them, so we wanted you to acknowledge them and acknowledge this group and is your legacy." Norfleet stated.

Kohut interjected again, "You're not allowed to retire."

"I have a great granddaughter right there. She's 8 years old. I'm going to pass it to her, but the other thing I want you to know about HAAC, HAAC is unique. Again, I have to give Mike and Howie and Ed a lot of credit, for the support that they gave on a vision that I had, and every one of them stepped in line and helped to bring it to life. None of them said, shut up, don't talk about this. As a matter of fact, Ed sent me somewhere for someone to help me get money, but HAAC is now 20 years old, basically, and we have gotten over 120 awards. We have a youth center; we have a park. We are building a museum, and July 1st we kick off HAAC Charlotte, North Carolina. July 4th, we kick off HAAC Atlanta, Georgia. Somewhere in the, in the fall we will be kicking off HAAC Austin - San Antonio. HAAC Newark, New Jersey, and HAAC Orlando, Florida."

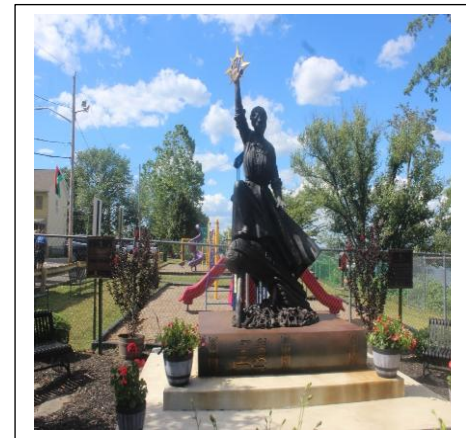
This is not that she has to do it. According to Norfleet, these are people from Haverstraw that have moved to different places and have requested to be a part of them and who come here, and she said, Well, instead of coming here why don't we spread our love, our Haverstraw pride elsewhere so they'll have 5 other states joining them and more to come. "Now if that ain't awesome and all of this happened."

<https://youtu.be/mG-vaS1jw5k>

Kohut took the mike, "I can tell you don't know our county executive who we've spoken about, Ed, would you like to say something to be very, very quick, but very important."

"I want to acknowledge you for making it very clear that people are trying to erase his holiday. Let me make it clear, because of all the people who are here, others from across the nation, that this holiday is never getting erased. I want to thank everybody here for it. This is a piece of history. I look at the crazy things on Facebook, I guess it is, every morning, and we in the elected office have to look at it. We don't really want to look at it, but it's just amazing what you hear, what you're reading there. And again, we're watching some of these comments. If this, if you took away the race from this whole entire issue. And the discovery that was made by the Union Army back in the day happened it will be probably be a motion picture. Anyway, but you know if you take a step back and look at this, look at where we are and what's going on right now. This is an amazing, an amazing holiday, and it deserves to be recognized. It deserves to be celebrated. I want to thank Ginny and all of you here today for bringing that banner forward." Ed Day commented.

Howard Phillips, Haverstraw Town Supervisor was next. "Well, first of all, thank you, Ginny. You know, the one thing Ginny didn't mention, if you haven't seen it, you have to go down and look at the statue of Harriet Tubman. The artist captured her unbelievable strength, fierce strength. It's just an amazing, and it looks out over the Hudson River.



“If you haven't been there, tomorrow, get down there or tonight, get down there and see it. That is really a tribute to the hard work that Ginny did and all the committee members. It's amazing that we have that in our community. You know, this is the 250th anniversary of our nation. We celebrate today because of a horrible original sin that existed back then, and it was the sin of slavery.] a civil war to abolish that. I'm so proud of the fact that the men of Haverstraw, this is why we have such a unique history, the men of Haverstraw came under the ninety-fifth Regiment, and they fought at some of the most critical battles and really especially the defining Battle of Gettysburg. We have that Civil War flag that they carried into the battle to stop this evil at the Haverstraw Town Hall. When Ginny says what rich history we have in Haverstraw, it is unique. What really makes it is the people. We have been a melting pot since the beginning of Haverstraw. We've added more and more. I think it's like a soup, you know, that famous fable you keep putting more and more items in because there, there wasn't any, anybody didn't have any food, so they just kept putting what they had into the soup. That's Haverstraw. We all have contributed.”

Phillips said that it's a family. It's not just a community. It's a family of people together. Let's face it, that's what our founding fathers really wanted one nation under God, indivisible.

Tom Walsh, the Rockland County District Attorney took to the mike with a lot of energy, yelling, JUNETEENTH!
JUNETEENTH!

“Today we celebrate and Haverstraw, Rockland County throughout the country, and I heard Ginny Norfleet give us a message of love, and I want to be able to bring that message of love to the courthouse. I would very much like if we could have a chapter in the courthouse DA's office of HAAC, and the first step should do that. When can we bring the young people? We'll give them a tour of the courthouse. We'll make them honorary ADAs, and we'll make sure the message of Juneteenth.”

Congressman Lawler had some words for the assemblage.

<https://youtu.be/z2hwFZbAnbs>

“Thank you, Congressman. Just so you know, you spoke longer than Howard. That's not, that's not easy to do.” Kohut joked.

The final speaker, Senator Bill Weber, promised not to outdo them. “t's great to be here. Thank you, Mayor. Thank you to the entire village board, the town for continuing this annual tradition of recognizing and really talking about the storied history here in. Some of you may or may not know, Ginny was my woman of distinction last year, and I couldn't think of anyone more worthy of that because you put your heart and soul not only into the museum but telling the stories that need to be told and continue to be told to the young generation so they know that America's history has good stuff and it has bad stuff, and we need to know and learn about all of that so that we can be a better nation for it. Thank you, Ginny, for all that you do and you continue to do. You can't retire. You are going to be everywhere. Someone needs to oversee it because you're a true gem in this community and I appreciate everything you do for us.”

Juneteenth, short for June nineteenth, marks the day in 1865 when Union Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas to announce, through General Order No. 3, that the state's 250,000 enslaved African Americans were free under the Emancipation Proclamation. This moment, coming over two years after



Lincoln's decree, ended slavery's last stronghold in the Confederacy and sparked celebrations of freedom across Texas. Originating in 1866 as community gatherings with prayer, music, and food, it spread nationwide through migration, preserving the joy and resilience of emancipation.

This is exactly what happened in the Village of Haverstraw on June 20, 2026, at the African American Park, after the flag raising ceremony on June 19, 2026, at the Village of Haverstraw Village Hall celebrating 161 years of the event. Many village, town, county, state and federal officials were present to join the party.

Trying to talk over the music, I spoke with Haverstraw Town Councilman Ralph Kirschkel. What does he think about it all?

“It's good to be here today. The weather is beautiful. It's filling up with people. It's an event that brings people together. It puts everybody in a great place on a great day. I've been coming to this event for the past 10 years. It's grown each year. I've seen a lot of younger children coming down, the next generation to carry the tradition on. It's great to see. In other years it was the same people we saw coming down. The history continues on. It's bringing attention to the history as we know in the past, people forget about history. This shows how important it is to show the history of Haverstraw, where we were, where we are and where we have to get. Ginny keeps putting that attention to it.”

County Executive Ed Day was there representing the county's participation in this event and the history behind it.

“I am doing fantastic. We are having a celebration of. Wonderful moment in our history. Americans who were enslaved found out that they were free. I mean that's what the amazing thing is people, some people look and show you how.”

What's so special about it?

Think about this. A student of history when I was in school. Think about a group of people who were freed from slavery, not knowing about it for two years. If you turn around and make the same script into a movie and leave the race out of it, it would be an amazing story. People, 100 strong, actually were free or name your challenge. Nobody told them. Nobody let him know. I mean, yes, it was in the middle of a war. No, it was 1863. Well, it was an Emancipation Proclamation. It freed all the slaves, and yeah, it did take 2 years.

“Of course it was a war, no question about that, but the fact of the matter is, is that there was a war during the Emancipation Proclamation. There was a war during a number of battles. The Civil War, including Antietam, the bloodiest battle of the war. All these things were going on and noticed. They noticed everything. They left this out. I mean that really kind of tells us, tells you the whole story about exactly what. The fact of the matter is because Major General Granger came in with his troops into Galveston, let them folks, and he was stunned that they did not know. Everybody knew in that troop, but it's being celebrated as a day of history, a historical marker, and I, which I'm proud to be a part of.

Kohut was glad to give his view of the celebration:

<https://youtu.be/eKTUie34n8>

Congressman Mike Lawler spoke about his feelings on the event and its history:

<https://youtu.be/Ef6jXUM25lg>

We have Brendell Logan Charles, deputy supervisor for Ramapo, here at the Juneteenth celebration. Tell me about what you're feeling today.

“I'm feeling great. Happy Juneteenth. This is a really important day in history, to let everyone know that we had a situation in 1865 where folks were told that everyone is free, and we understand that freedom is not free. We have to work toward it every single day, but we also have to celebrate the victory, and today is that celebration, so happy Juneteenth.

Kohut got on the stage to officially open the festivities. “Welcome everyone here to our 11th annual Juneteenth celebration. I have first been tasked with recognizing the elected officials in the area and so then I'm going to start with that. First of all, we have our Congressman Mike Lawler here. From the state we have our Senator Bill Weber. From the county, we have our illustrious County Executive Ed Day. Our also illustrious County Clerk Donna Silberman. Legislator Paul Cleary. From the town of Haverstraw, we have Councilman Ralph Kirschkel and Councilman Johnny Ortiz. From the village we have Deputy Mayor Gil Carlivaro, and Rich Senna, and from Ramapo we have Brendell Logan Charles here with us.”

“We thank everybody. More who wander in and if I see them, I'll announce them. Otherwise, oh well. I just want to say a few things. We talked about this yesterday, but we're gonna, we're gonna talk about it because I have a different crowd today, that we're here talking about history, the real history, and how it, how it affected Haverstraw and everywhere else in the world. I think Howard mentioned it yesterday about the original sin of slavery, but it goes beyond that and it transcends that. Although great strides have been made, back steps have happened too, and we see it every day today. Evil only succeeds if good men do nothing, and it's about time for good men to stand up and do something for all the people of this country. I need to introduce the really important person here, Ginny Northfleet, the head of the Haverstraw African American Connection.

https://youtu.be/pvM6aAi_nhk

The rest of the day was filled with music of many kinds.

https://youtu.be/MbqtkgK_DZc

East Ramapo Alumni Drum Corps

<https://youtu.be/EzWk45TI-Is>