

## PROFILE

# A Push For Kids To Reconnect With Roots

BY RODNEY GANTT

After witnessing first hand the corruption in government while serving as a central staff Attorney for the New York State legislature, Kerryanne Burke from Queens Village established the African Diaspora Birthright Organization, Inc., helping young people connect to their roots and seek greater opportunities.

Founded in August 2016, Burke started the organization knowing the hardships African Americans faced. Because of her passion for advocacy and policy making, Burke said she wanted to make things "a little more equal." After her time in Albany, she viewed the corruption as a form of "maintaining the status quo" versus producing innovation.

"I realized with everything that was going on with police brutality and the education system right now was the best time to deal with a non profit because I would have the independence to do an innovative thing and provide some type of equality and happiness to the African American population," said Burke.

As a woman of Afro-Caribbean American descent, Burke created the nonprofit to "empower, educate and connect African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-South American and Afro-Central American individuals with the African continent, its culture and citizens." Burke described the lack of knowledge many people have about their roots as the "missing piece of the puzzle."

"It's very important to have that



Kerryanne Burke

connection to your homeland, just to have an understanding of your identity if nothing," said Burke. "Even knowledge of the economic structure that exists in the continent could ignite certain business ideas or cultural studies."

African Americans across the country face unique issues, social ills and concerns, according to Burke. She believed that in order to change these issues, the "ultimate issue" of slavery must be addressed to help the community unify and heal.

"Some of the social ills we all know is first being poverty and that comes from a lack of access to both information and opportunity," said Burke. "Whether it's the opportunity to own a business or obtain a job, we have a very limited access point right now."

Rather than just dealing with the social, economic and political aspects, Burke said she hopes to ad-

dress the mental aspects of slavery that have affected modern day issues like poverty, police brutality and lack of economic opportunities. Addressing the mental aspect, Burke said begins with internal conversation.

"I think the first thing is for us to have a dialogue with ourselves," said Burke.

Recalling an instance in high school where her class read aloud "Huckleberry Finn" and some other books that had the "N-word" in them and she was never asked if it was offensive or was ever offered the opportunity to leave the class. However, when reading Anne Frank, a book on the Holocaust, Jewish students were given that choice to skip out on reading the novel. Burke said that it is these sorts of micro aggressions that have effects on young African-Americans when learning about slavery in schools.

"It's that mental trauma that I think we as Black people in this hemisphere have to deal with," she said. "I'm hoping that this organization bridges that gap and opens up that world of talking about slavery in a manner that is healthy."

As part of the healing process and in its goal to connect young men and women with the African culture and their ancestry, the Diaspora organization will offer trips to a number of African countries like Ghana and Nigeria. Burke said that the trips

would be a weeklong "educational exploration" available to people ages 18 to 25 who are descendants of the Transatlantic slave trade. The trips are designed to help those individuals discover their "African identities" and "promote the unification and positive relationships between the Africans living in the continent and African descendants living in the Americas."

Burke said she has been in contact with different museums in Africa and those going on the trip would be able to visit several slave museums on the Badagry Coast where they can see where and how the people lived before going across the Atlantic to be sold as slaves.

In addition, Burke has collaborated with a nonprofit in Africa, UR4 Africa, a social enterprise that focuses on coordinating safe spaces for creative learning. People will be able to donate their time working

with children helping them to develop creative ways of expressing their issues and things in their lives.

"By volunteering with this organization you're not only learning about yourself but about the issues and social concerns of your brothers and sisters," said Burke.

Those interested in taking part of the program or helping the cause is encouraged to go to [africandiasporabirthright.org](http://africandiasporabirthright.org) for more information.



The African Diaspora  
Birthright Organization

## PEOPLE

**Junior Jessica Glaz** (Rockaway Beach, NY/Scholars Academy) of the RIT women's basketball team, was named Liberty League Women's Basketball Player of the Week on Monday, for the week ending Nov. 20. It is the first time this season Glaz has been honored by the league.

Glaz helped lead RIT to a 3-0 record last week. The guard averaged 18.3 points per game, shooting 60.3 percent from floor. Glaz averaged 3.3 rebounds, 2.0 assists and 1.0 rebounds. Glaz scored 16 points, grabbed six rebounds and had four assists in a 64-56 win over The College at Brockport in the season opener last Tuesday. Saturday, she scored 14 points in a 60-58 win over Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Sunday, Glaz scored a season-high 25 points in a 91-47 win over Whittier College at Occidental.

Faculty at the **Holliswood Center for Rehabilitation** in Hollis participated in a pie giveaway for both nurses and residents last Friday. "Every Thanksgiving we try to give away something," Ari Steinberg, administrator of Holliswood told the *PRESS of Southeast Queens*. The last two years we've done pies. Before that we would do turkeys."

Steinberg said that the reason for that is to make sure everyone that is a part of the Holliswood family is happy and ready to bring in the holidays. In total, more than 300 apple



Photos by Tracee Dowd

**Holliswood Center for Rehabilitation Pie giveaway is one of many annual traditions.**

pies were given out.

This won't be the end of the holiday festivities for Holliswood. Next

month, the faculty will be holding their annual holiday party just before Christmas.