



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## MWRD celebrates Black History Month the entire month of February under the leadership of Vice President Barbara McGowan

*Montford Point Marines, Harriet Tubman, department heads, state leaders recognized for groundbreaking contributions as the MWRD waves the flag*



*MWRD commissioners and elected officials gathered to raise the Pan-African flag on Feb. 4, waving proudly in front of the MWRD headquarters for the first time. A short time later, other government institutions and leaders followed with flag raisings of their own throughout the state.*

African American history makers celebrated during February at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD). Besides serving as a leader in protecting the regional water environment and encouraging diversity in the workplace, the MWRD blazed a trail

of its own by raising the Pan-African flag for the first time while recognizing the notable contributions of many African American icons, like the Montford Point Marines and Harriet Tubman. *(continued)*



## MWRD celebrates Black History Month, *cont.*



The accomplishments of the many local African American history makers were celebrated throughout Black History Month at the MWRD headquarters, 100 E. Erie St. in Chicago. Events coordinated by MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan included speakers and panel discussions that also recognized African American state leaders and the first African American department heads at the MWRD. The discussions offered overviews in advancing diversity while also acknowledging the challenges and rewards related to their achievements.

“This has been an excellent opportunity for us to shine a light on African American history makers and thank them for their contributions,” said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan. “I thank my fellow commissioners and staff for taking a break from their busy schedules to make this celebration a priority and recognizing the many values that Black History Month instills in all of us today, this month and throughout the entire year.”

To kick off festivities, the MWRD held a flag raising ceremony on Feb. 4 for the first time and welcomed key figures in the African American community, including: Secretary of State Jesse White; Illinois Supreme Court Justice P. Scott Neville, Jr.; Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; Cook County Clerk Karen Yarbrough; Ald. Derrick Curtis (18th Ward); Ald. Jeanette Taylor (20th Ward); Ald. Michael Scott, Jr. (24th Ward); Ald. Walter Burnett (27th Ward); Ald. Chris Taliaferro (29th Ward); Ald. Emma Mitts (37th Ward); and Karl Brinson, President, Westside NAACP. Local African American historian Dr. Conrad Worrill also spoke about the history and symbolism behind the flag and the African American men and women who created a path for others to follow. The flag was lowered on March 3.

“These African History Makers events bring together and enlighten all ages to remind us of the importance of Black History Month and the contributions of so many of our important local and national pioneers,” said President Steele. “We thank our many guests for their contributions and in-



*In the photo (L-R): Commissioner Josina Morita, Commissioner Kim Du Buclet, Secretary of State Jesse White, former U.S. Sen. Roland Burris, Attorney General Kwame Raoul, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, Commissioner Debra Shore and Commissioner Frank Avila.*

spiring us all to give our best.”

On February 11, African American state leaders participated in a panel discussion that covered their roles in government and beyond. Writing their own chapters in African American history and legacy, Secretary White, Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul and former U.S. Sen. Roland Burris were all recognized for having made their mark improving the quality of life for Illinois residents while creating a path for future leaders.

The MWRD recognized instrumental leaders who blazed a trail in the workplace at the MWRD on February 18. A panel was held with first African American Department heads, including current Director of Human Resources Beverly K. Sanders and former Director of Information Technology Keith D. Smith. Also honored were Vice President Barbara McGowan, the late former President Thomas Fuller, the late Commissioner John W. Rogers, former Research and Development Director Cecil Lue-Hing, former Chief of Police Clifton Thomas and former Director of Finance/Clerk Mary West.

The abolitionist Harriet Tubman, known for her heroics behind the Underground Railroad, was brought to life on Feb. 25 by Springfield resident Kathryn Harris. After a lengthy and impressive career in library services, Harris worked at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum and developed the one-woman show that she (*continued*)



## MWRD celebrates Black History Month, *cont.*



(L-R): Former IT Director Keith Smith, Vice President Barbara McGowan and Human Resources Director Beverly Sanders.



Kathryn Harris, also known as Harriet Tubman, answers a Dett Elementary School student's question.



performed for staff and students from Dett Elementary School. The students' visit was coordinated through the office of MWRD President Kari K. Steele.



Students from Dett Elementary joined MWRD staff to watch Harriet Tubman talk about her journey along the Underground Railroad.

"I was honored and humbled to participate in this year's African American History Makers celebration at the MWRD and thrilled to educate young students and water professionals on the life and legacy of Harriet Tubman," said Harris, who served as the first woman and first African American president of the Springfield-based Abraham Lincoln Association.

The month-long schedule of events concluded with a celebration on Feb. 27 honoring the Montford Point Marine Association (MPMA), a local veterans' organization whose founding members were part of the first segregated unit of Marines during WWII. The MPMA's organization and bravery led the charge in the desegregation of the United States Marine Corps. MPMA's mission is to assist veterans and continue service to the community.



Front Row (L-R): Montford Point Marines Staff Sergeant James Reynolds Jr., Sergeant Frank Thrasher and Montford Point Marine Association Exec. Director Sharon Stokes Parry. Back Row (L-R) Diversity Administrator Regina Berry, Vice President Barbara McGowan, Exec. Director Brian Perkovich.

### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwrld.org](http://www.mwrld.org)) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*