

## 2026 Local Black Excellence Honorees



Jason C. Pina

Jason C. Pina is an accomplished executive with over 20 years of leadership experience in real estate, affordable housing, HR, and IT operations. He has built a reputation for driving compliance, asset management excellence, and organizational growth across complex, mission-driven environments. His professional journey includes overseeing portfolio management, executive operations, and strategic planning, and he will complete his MBA in Finance and Human Resources in December 2025, further enhancing his expertise. Equally important to Jason is his role as a devoted father to four young children, which continues to shape his leadership style with empathy, balance, and resilience. A passionate sports enthusiast, he brings the same teamwork, strategy, and competitive spirit that fuel his love of athletics into his professional career, inspiring those around him to achieve at the highest level.



Kabria Baumgartner

A native of Los Angeles, Kabria Baumgartner has lived in Essex County for nearly a decade. As a public historian, she has worked with numerous local historical organizations. In 2021, she co-founded the award-winning Newburyport Black History Initiative (NBHI), an organization that highlights and incorporates Black history into the public landscape in downtown Newburyport. In 2019, she published her first academic book, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, which tells the story of African American girls and women who fought to democratize public education in the nineteenth-century Northeast. She is Dean's Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies at Northeastern University.



Jordan Avery

Jordan T. Avery is a dynamic Lynn-born community leader, entrepreneur, and public servant who founded Massachusetts Green Retail, the city's first and only Black-owned cannabis dispensary, creating jobs and economic opportunity in Ward 7. He also owns a local restaurant and supports small-business development for entrepreneurs of color. Jordan serves as Chair of the Lynn Human Rights Commission, mentors youth through Big Brothers Big Sisters, and actively supports numerous community organizations. Elected as the Ward 7 City Councilor in 2025, he is known for his hands-on leadership, emergency response efforts, and commitment to residents. Through annual turkey distributions, youth sports involvement, and sponsorship of local cultural events, Jordan embodies Black excellence and uses his platform to build a more equitable and empowered Lynn.



James Runner III

James Runner III began coaching football at Lynn Tech in 2010 after eight years as Defensive Coordinator at Dean College, later serving the school community as a teaching assistant and monitor. As head football coach, he has led the Tigers to four conference titles and two state vocational championships while helping many players advance to college football. Runner also coaches indoor and outdoor track, guiding both teams to multiple conference championships and a state vocational title. Over his 15 years at Lynn Tech, he has earned Coach of the Year honors in football, indoor track, and outdoor track. Beyond athletics, Runner founded **In the Mak'n (ITM)**, now in its 26th year, empowering young dancers to celebrate culture, stay safe, and perform across the region and country.





Jefferson Musanda

Jefferson Musanda, the Membership Director at the Demakes Family YMCA in Lynn, leads the effort to grow and engage a vibrant member community. With many years of membership experience, he has successfully developed strategies to enhance retention, increase acquisition, and strengthen the overall member experience. In his role, Jefferson oversees recruitment, renewal campaigns, and communication efforts to ensure members receive exceptional value. He collaborates with internal and external teams to design programs and initiatives that align with member needs and interests. His work focuses on creating meaningful engagement and fostering a strong sense of belonging. In addition to his membership leadership, Jefferson uses his degree in fashion design to teach children how to sew, inspiring creative play and circling back to his love of creativity and community.



Wangari Fahari

Wangari Fahari is the Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and ADA Coordinator for the City of Beverly, advancing racial equity, digital access, and ADA compliance. She serves on the Board of Trustees for the Beverly School for the Deaf, championing accessibility and building an inclusive community. Wangari has been nominated for CWE's Andrea C. Silbert Rising Star Award and recognized by the Massachusetts Senate for her impact in bringing diverse arts and music to the Commonwealth through Fahari Records, where she fosters inclusion and equitable creative spaces. Through volunteer initiatives like the Along The Way Music Series, she creates meaningful community connections and opportunities. She also serves as president of SSBI.org, supporting collaboration and engagement across the North Shore and beyond.



Natasha Megie-Maddrey Esq.

Natasha Megie-Maddrey Esq. Ward 4 City Councilor

As the daughter of Haitian/Dominican immigrants, Natasha knows the importance of hard work and giving back. Natasha was the first in her family to go to college. She earned her B.A. from Regis College in Western MA with a Major in Political Science and a Minor in Sociology. She then continued her education by earning her J.D from New England School of Law. Natasha is excited to be elected as the first Afro-Latina Ward 4 City Councilor. She has lived with her husband Tarik in Lynn for over 26 years and is the proud mother of five children and 2 grandchildren. Natasha would like to continue to be an advocate in the community and will do her best to bring your voice to the Lynn City Council so together we can improve the lives of everyone that lives in Ward 4.



Ryan A. Robinson

Ryan A. Robinson is a Forbes Under 30 innovator, quantum engineer, and one of the youngest professors in the world. He began his academic journey at Harvard University at just 15 years old and went on to design his own major at MIT, becoming the world's first *quantum engineer*. Recognized by Forbes at age 21 for his pioneering work across **dark matter, artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, medical devices, and quantum physics**, Ryan has continued to push the boundaries of science and innovation. By 24, he was collaborating with the White House on efforts to find a treatment for COVID-19, and at 27, as a professor at MIT, he created the world's first *quantum consumer product*. His work bridges technology, humanity, and imagination—embodying the spirit of excellence and limitless possibility.





Star Mahlatini Kahari

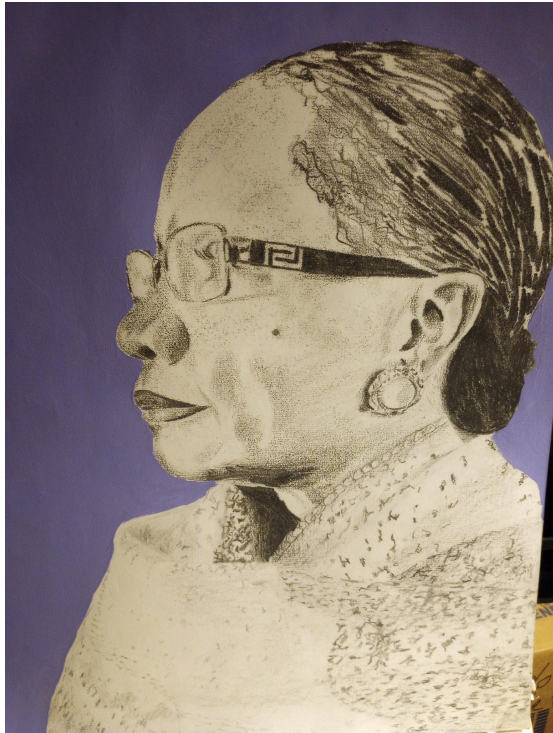
Star Mahlatini Kahari, trailblazing hairstylist from Harare, Zimbabwe, is the first Black woman to own salon suites in Peabody, Massachusetts. Founder of Starkcreations Salon Suites and Starkreationssalon, she specializes in hair extensions, weave and wig installations, and comprehensive hair care. Her mission is simple: help women feel as beautiful as they look

by delivering expert service with empowerment at the core. Star's journey—from first-generation business owner to a trusted name in the beauty industry—illustrates her

unwavering commitment to excellence, beauty, haircare, mentorship, and the

transformative power of superb extensions.

With 27 years in the field, Star is a devoted mom of two and a seasoned extensionist who has operated both a traditional salon and a suite-based studio. Her client roster spans working moms to celebrities, all receiving the same premium care.



Lucinda McClain

Lucinda “Ms. Lu” McClain is a quiet yet powerful force of compassion in the City of Lynn, known for her unwavering commitment to serving vulnerable neighbors with dignity and grace. A survivor of domestic violence, she is deeply affiliated with HAWC (Healing Abuse Working for Change), using her artwork and exhibits to support healing and raise awareness across the North Shore. She has spent many years serving at My Brother’s Table, in addition to her weekly work at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church food pantry and her steady presence at organizations such as the Haven Project, Ruth’s Way, and the Lynn Home for Women. Guided by her philosophy, “I am we,” Ms. Lu offers help with profound empathy—feeding the hungry, comforting the sick, intervening in crises, and inspiring others to join her in quiet acts of humanity. Her greatest accomplishments are her three extraordinary adult children—proud graduates of Lynn Public Schools—and her five beloved grandchildren, who reflect the love and strength she pours into others every day. She credits every step of her journey to the people who have walked beside her, believing that the true heroes are those who have survived life’s hardest challenges.



Lashaunda Hogan

Lashaunda Hogan is a dedicated public servant and community advocate from Lynn, Massachusetts. As a Patrolman with the Lynn Police Department, she is known for her integrity, empathy, and commitment to community policing. In July 2025, she was honored as Officer of the Month for her outstanding work in youth advocacy and building trust between police and residents.

Beyond law enforcement, Lashaunda actively supports local youth. As Head of the Fundraising Committee for the Lynn Rams Youth Football and Cheer Program, she volunteers her time to organize community events and fundraisers for families and athlete's. Lashaunda is also the JV girls basketball coach at St. Mary's High School here in Lynn. She also serves on the Stop the Violence Committee, helping lead initiatives that reduce crime and empower at-risk youth. Across every role, Lashaunda embodies courage, compassion, and a commitment to uplifting her community.



Christy Merryman

Christy Merryman is a proud Lynner and entrepreneur, community builder, and youth advocate who has created a welcoming, empowerment-focused space at her business on Lynnfield Street. She is best known for her annual Costume Swap, providing hundreds of free Halloween costumes to children, and her free Prom Dress and Accessories Giveaway, ensuring students can attend prom with confidence. Christy also supports youth sports through a free Summer Nights Basketball Clinic and JV League, run with her husband, offering young people a safe and encouraging environment to grow. Her nomination for Black Excellence reflects her compassionate leadership and her commitment to uplifting families across Lynn. In all she does, Christy embodies true excellence through generosity, opportunity, and community impact.