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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – February 6, 2026

**The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ)
Announces that the Honorable Dr. Dale Caldwell,
Lieutenant Governor for the State of NJ, will make remarks at the
Sixteenth Annual Circle of Achievement Awards Gala, on February 19th.**

TRENTON, NJ — February 6, 2026. The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) announces that the Honorable Dr. Dale Caldwell, Lieutenant Governor for the State of NJ, will make remarks at the 16th Annual Circle of Achievements Awards Gala, which will be held on February 19, 2026, from 6 pm – 11 pm at the Venetian in Garfield, NJ.

"We are excited to have the Lieutenant Governor join us for our Black History Month Gala," said John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM, Founder, President & CEO, AACCNJ. "The Lieutenant Governor's presence is significant and appreciated and we look forward to working with the new administration to improve the social economic standing of Black New Jerseyans," said Harmon.

The annual black-tie, awards gala, themed for 2026, "Forging Ahead" is widely known as the premier Black History Month event in the state of NJ. The Gala provides the platform, on behalf of the members of the AACCNJ and the over 124,000 Black-owned businesses in the state of NJ, to increase the visibility of its members and their businesses.

The Premiere and Lead Gala Sponsor for the third consecutive year is Truist. Hackensack Meridian Health also returns as the Platinum Sponsor for the third consecutive year. Gold Sponsors include New Jersey Redevelopment Authority (NJRA), United, New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA), New Jersey American Water, Tanya L. Freeman Law Group, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ, Johnson & Johnson, Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health, PSEG, and Provident Bank.

2026 Circle of Achievement Awards Gala Honorees

Excellence in Business Award

Stedman Graham, CEO of S. Graham and Associates, the renowned management and marketing consulting firm, the author of 12 books, including two New York Times bestsellers and one Wall Street Journal bestseller, educator and speaker.

Cultural Award in Excellence

Stephanie & Floyd Rance, Co-Founders of the Academy accredited Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival (MVAAFF). People from around the world traveled to Martha's Vineyard to witness black excellence, at what is also known as "The Summer's Finest Film Festival."

Excellence in Education Award

Karine Apollon, Chief Diversity Officer, in the New York City Department of Education, serves as a transformational senior leader with a proven record of excellence, and her long standing commitment to improving PreK-12 academic achievement, ensuring college completion and career success.

Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Real Estate Development Award

Adenah Bayoh, entrepreneur, real estate developer, and one of the youngest IHOP franchisees in the U.S. Adenah's personal story, including immigration to the U.S. at age 13 after the family fled the civil war, is one of courage, what an incredible journey.

Excellence in Public Service Award

Tanya Freeman, Esq., Tanya Freeman Law, LLC, is part of a global honorary society of attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars whose public and private careers have demonstrated outstanding dedication to the highest principles of the legal profession and to the welfare of their communities; a membership that is limited to one percent of lawyers licensed to practice in each jurisdiction.

Keynote Speaker

Michael J. Garner, MBA, CCA, Chief Business Diversity Officer, City-Wide Mayor's Office of M/WBEs, New York City.

The evening will begin with a "Black Carpet Experience" and VIP Reception, featuring Stedman Graham, for the honorees, dignitaries and leading sponsors. Guests will also enjoy a Cocktail Reception in the Grand Ballroom and will move to the Palazzo Ballroom for dinner, dancing, and the Awards Ceremony. The Master of Ceremonies for the evening is Dr. John E Harmon.

More information can be found at: https://www.aaccnj.com/gala

About the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey

The AACCNJ performs an essential role in the economic viability of New Jersey. While providing a platform for New Jersey's African American business leaders, to speak with a collective voice, the AACCNJ advocates and promotes economic diversity fostering a climate of business growth through major initiatives centering on education and public policy. The Chamber serves as a proactive advocacy group with a 501(c) 3 tax exemption, which is shared by the National Black Chamber of Commerce.