

NYBG

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New York Governor Kathy Hochul Delivers Keynote Address at NYBG's Women's History Month Celebration Honoring Bronx Women Community Leaders

Held in Collaboration This Year with U. S. Representative Ritchie Torres, the Breakfast Event Is a Longstanding Highlight of NYBG's Women's History Month Observance



Pictured during the presentation of a New York State Women's History Month proclamation as part of The New York Botanical Garden's Women's History Month Celebration are (left to right) Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson, U.S. Representative Ritchie Torres, New York Governor Kathy Hochul, NYBG CEO and The William C. Steere Sr. President Jennifer Bernstein, and NYBG Chair Emerita Maureen K. Chilton. (Photo by Jason Green)

Bronx, NY—In celebration of Women's History Month, The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) hosted a breakfast event on Wednesday, March 23, 2022, to honor five Bronx women who are working on behalf of the borough's public housing residents, immigrants, and community groups. The keynote address was delivered by New York Governor Kathy Hochul, the first woman to serve in that office.

Speaking to about 250 guests at NYBG's Garden Terrace Room, Governor Hochul paid tribute to Bronx women, past and present, who had broken barriers in their fields or made important contributions to women's rights, including U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (1954–), the first woman of color and first Latinx member of the court; feminist leader and former U.S. Representative Bella Abzug (1920–98); and Estella Diggs (1916–2013), the first Black woman to represent the Bronx in the New York State Assembly.

"Those names call us to create our own legacy," she said. "Because as we look back and honor them,

people in the future are going to say, 'Well, what did you do? How did you move women forward in your time?'"

The governor also saluted the contributions of women who are not well-known but whose roles as essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic have been vital in sectors such as health care and food service.

"Women, you don't need a month to tell you about women's power," she said. "You own it every single day. This is who you are. Let's rise up. Let's make a difference. Let's continue to make a change."

In her remarks, Governor Hochul called The New York Botanical Garden an "oasis" during the pandemic, a place where New Yorkers could "see nature at its finest and just feel that they're going to be okay." She also noted, however, the role NYBG plays in the Bronx through its educational offerings and other programs for the community.

"I think 'oasis' might be the wrong word," she added, because it implied that NYBG was isolated. "You are so integrated in the neighboring community in a powerful way that is an example to other culturals—to embrace the neighborhood, show how you can teach young people about careers and jobs and opportunities and take them out of their elements and bring them to a place like this where they have a greater opportunity. So I thank everyone who's part of this organization for the incredible, incredible work you do as well."

The annual breakfast, a longstanding highlight of NYBG's observance of Women's History Month, was held this year in collaboration with U.S. Representative Ritchie Torres, who paid tribute to his mother for the role she has played in his life. A single mother, she raised Torres, his twin brother, and a sister in public housing while working a minimum-wage job.

Representative Torres, who at age 25 was the youngest member of the New York City Council when he was elected in 2013, said: "No matter how old I get, I will always be a mother's boy. I would not be where I am today were it not for the sacrifices that my mother made for me."

Reflecting on the role of women during the pandemic, Congressman Torres said: "The greatness of women, I think, came to light powerfully during COVID-19. Right in the peak of the pandemic, we saw essential workers, mostly women, put their lives at risk on the front lines so that the rest of the city could safely shelter in place. And so, we should honor the most essential members, the most essential workers, the most essential leaders of our society."

In welcoming remarks, NYBG Chair Emerita Maureen K. Chilton said that the breakfast event was intended to "celebrate and uplift women who build communities and improve lives."

Noting that New York State was the birthplace of the women's suffrage movement, Chilton said, "While there's a great deal of work to still be done for women's rights, we all know that New York also leads in this way, not only evidenced by the presence of our governor, but by all of the women in the room here today."

During her remarks, NYBG CEO and The William C. Steere Sr. President Jennifer Bernstein highlighted the role women have played in cultural institutions, including The New York Botanical Garden: “There are many pioneering women who have shaped this institution, including one of our co-founders, Elizabeth Britton, the late-19th century botanist; LuEsther T. Mertz, whose philanthropy shaped many aspects of this institution; and the woman who just spoke, Maureen Chilton, who was our first female board chair.”

Honored during the event were Adama Bah, immigration activist; Mirtha Colón, Garifuna rights advocate; Terry Lawson, Executive Director, UnLocal; Nilka Martell, Founder, Loving the Bronx; and Norma Saunders, Tenant Association President, NYCHA Bronx River Houses.

The celebration included a spoken word recitation by Meera Dasgupta, the 2020 National Youth Poet Laureate, and an *a capella* performance of three songs by the Bella Voce Choir of the Celia Cruz Bronx High School, led by choir director Jacqueline Bergland.

After the breakfast celebration, guests were welcome to view *The Orchid Show: Jeff Leatham’s Kaleidoscope* in the Botanical Garden’s Enid A. Haupt Conservatory.

About The New York Botanical Garden

Founded in 1891, The New York Botanical Garden is the most comprehensive botanical garden in the world and an integral part of the cultural fabric of New York City, anchored in the Bronx. Visitors come to the Garden to connect with nature for joy, beauty, and respite, and for renowned plant-based exhibitions, music and dance, and poetry and lectures. Innovative children’s education programs promote environmental sustainability and nutrition awareness, graduate programs educate the next generation of botanists, while engaging classes inspire adults to remain lifelong learners. The 250-acre verdant landscape—which includes a 50-acre, old-growth forest—and the landmark Enid A. Haupt Conservatory support living collections of more than one million plants. Unparalleled resources are also held in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library, the world’s most important botanical and horticultural library with 11 million archival items spanning ten centuries, and William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, the largest in the Western Hemisphere with 7.8 million plant and fungal specimens. Committed to protecting the planet’s biodiversity and natural resources, Garden scientists work on-site in cutting-edge molecular labs and in areas worldwide where biodiversity is most at risk.

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The New York Botanical Garden is located at 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458. For more information, visit nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden’s general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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