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FEATURED TOP STORY

Longport woman to receive Hughes Center honor

NANETTE LoBIONDO GALLOWAY Staff Writer

Brigid Callahan Harrison



Brigid Callahan Harrison speaks with David Lacks, son of Henrietta Lacks, subject of the "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks."

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LONGPORT — After years educating young minds about politics, borough resident Brigid Callahan Harrison will be one of six New Jersey leaders to receive Hughes Center honors.

Harrison, a professor of political science and law at Montclair State University, political commentator and author, will receive the Hughes Center for Public Policy's Distinctive Alumni Leadership award Nov. 9 at Stockton Seaview Hotel and Golf Club in Galloway Township.



Hughes Center Honors Nov. 9 at Stockton Seaview

It's an honor to be recognized along with friends such as Ambassador William J. Hughes and the late state Sen. Jim Whelan, Harrison said.

"Bill Hughes was a dear friend of mine who I admire and respect. It's great to be sharing the stage with him," she said.

Former Vice President Joe Biden will present Hughes with his award.

"They were Amtrak buddies," she said, adding more politicians need to emulate Hughes' style of bipartisanship.

"It's important for everyone to encourage bipartisanship in politics and recognize politicians who work for good causes in a bipartisan way," she said.

Longport adds art exhibits to library offerings

State Sen. Diane Allen and U.S. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman will also be recognized, along with Stockton Student Senate President Maryann Sarhan.

Harrison is a 1988 graduate of Stockton. She received a master's degree at Rutgers University and her Ph.D. at Temple University in Philadelphia.

She learned she would be receiving the alumni award when Stockton President Harvey Kesselman called her.

"I've known Harvey since I was 18 when I was attending Stockton. He was my algebra instructor," she said.

Harrison is a member of the Stockton University Foundation Board, where she helps raise money for scholarships.

"What is really nice is that the center and Bill's career are both based on a model of politics that is very civil and embodies reaching across the aisle to get things accomplished. In this political climate, that's more important than ever," she said.

Harrison started teaching at Montclair in 1994 and began political commentary in 2005.

Joe Biden keynote speaker at Hughes awards event

"At that time, the American Political Science Association was talking about why so few women were getting into politics, more specifically in elected offices. The research showed there were not that many women on television talking about politics and girls didn't look at it as something to aspire to. We needed more role modeling, which hit home with me," she said.

Her political commentary career started when she began talking with reporters. Then came election night coverage for New Jersey public television.

On Monday, Oct. 16, Harrison was on NJTV offering political analysis for the lieutenant gubernatorial debate between Democrat Phil Murphy's running mate, Sheila Oliver, and Republican Kim Guadagno's second in command, Carlos Rendo.

"I worked a lot at Fox and Fox Business News, WPIX and ABC," she said. "I take an independent, moderate stance, which is consistent with my worldview. I know I'm doing well when both sides are upset with me."

Harrison teaches American government, campaign politics and runs the Congressional Internship Program for the university. She has authored four books on American democracy and women in politics, including a textbook she uses in class.

"Students today are often criticized, but they are a politically engaged population. They make many of their purchasing decisions based on their worldviews and are much more likely to participate in some type of activism," Harrison said. "Technology and the internet play a big role in their lives, but it's a great way for them to be politically active."

As far as deciphering fake news from the real stuff, Harrison said people need to verify information before they share it on Facebook or Twitter.

Her own writings have been taken out of context by a prominent conservative news source, turning facts into fake news, she said.

"As good citizens, we need to be wary of that," she said.

She ran for the Atlantic County Board of Chosen Freeholders when she was 26 and lost by a narrow margin.

"Then my children started coming, and I was commuting to Montclair," she said.

She would not rule out another try at political office — someday.

As for now, Harrison, 52, is content to continue her career, and live in Longport.

"It's a perfect community," she said.

She has lived in Longport since 2010. After her modest shore cottage was destroyed during Hurricane Sandy, she rebuilt it.

Two years ago, she married Paul Meilak, a retired New York City police detective.