

Bed-Stuy Inaugural Women Security Conference

Women gather to engage, educate and empower each other



Yonnette Fleming, Hattie Carthan Women Security Conference founder and Vice-President of the Hattie Carthan Community Garden (seated in white) listened intently as State Senator Velmanette Montgomery (standing with hat) addressed importance of women's advocacy regarding their health and community issues.

EDITED BY AGNES E. GREEN

As the smell of fresh baked bread wafted through the Hattie Carthan Community Garden (HCCG) in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant community, the open green space invited all to remember women's work.

On Saturday, May 8, women received a red-carpet welcome and

were invited to set aside their burdens at the garden's welcome tent while attending the first ever Hattie Carthan Women Security Conference. Held in honor of women, the conference emphasized the importance of women's good health and that of children, communities and the planet at the groundbreaking event.

The daylong conference was initiated by Yonnette Fleming, Vice-

President of the Hattie Carthan Community Garden, who inspired women leaders – vision holders – to create an occasion that would help to educate and empower women.

The conference began with a ceremony "Remembering our ForeMothers" in honor of the women who made a path for others to follow in the world. A women's timeline encircled a ceremonial ancestors' hut.

Fleming said, "Our goal was to gather women working in government, working in non-profits that advance issues which

concern women and the people they love. Through building relationships with each other, we develop the new knowledge, practices, courage, and commitment that lead to broad-based change. Our theme was "fostering critical connections which bring about positive Change for women."

Women leaders such as State Senator Velmanette Montgomery (D-NY), Edie Stone, Director of NYC

Green Thumb, Aletha Maybank, Assistant Commissioner NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Christina Grace, NYS Dept of Agriculture and Markets brought messages of policy and advocacy.

During the conference, young girls expressed themselves through making music and art. Women gathered in groups to exchange ideas based on respect and mutuality. And everyone's participation was nourished by the beauty of HCCG's grounds, feminine art pieces that guarded secret groves in the space and a photography exhibit by nature artist and vision holder Solita Stephens.

Speaking councils addressed a host of women's issues and helped to begin the development of a diverse network of Brooklyn women. It also included a variety of interactive workshops such as a women's drumming circle, an elder circle, moon sign gardening class, Emotional Freedom therapy, herb walks, womb work, honoring the inner wild woman, cooking demonstrations, healing with gem stones, reflexology, composting and more.

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