

Dutchess County

WOMEN TO KNOW



2024 Women's History Month



Mayor Yvonne D. Flowers
City of Poughkeepsie

Pamela Gunther
*Founder & CEO,
Fit and Fun Playscapes*

Janice Green
*Owner & CEO,
Jancare Private Health Services*

Christa Hines
*President & CEO,
Hudson River Housing, Inc.*

Laura Kiesbye
*Executive Director,
Mid-Hudson Works*

Sarah Elisabeth
Director, A Farm For All

Mayor Yvonne D. Flowers

City of Poughkeepsie

Yvonne D. Flowers, a lifelong resident of the City of Poughkeepsie, is a dedicated community leader and the first African American Mayor of the City of Poughkeepsie. With over 33 years of service at Dutchess Community College, she excelled as the Grants and Contracts Finance Officer while actively participating in various committees and boards, earning her the esteemed SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence.

Beyond her professional achievements, Mayor Flowers's commitment to her community is evident through her extensive involvement in local boards and committees. As a former four-term 5th Ward City Councilwoman, she spearheaded initiatives to improve community-police relations, enhance park facilities, and provide vital COVID-19 resources.

Mayor Flowers's passion for community service is deeply rooted in her family's legacy of promoting unity and hope. Continuing her father, John Flowers's impactful work, she co-organizes numerous community events, including holiday dinners and celebrations, exemplifying her dedication to fostering a stronger, more connected Poughkeepsie.

When not serving her community, she cherishes time with her family, including her seven grandchildren. Mayor Flowers loves the beautiful parks within the City of Poughkeepsie and across Dutchess County. Additionally, she is passionate about collaborating with various organizations in the City of Poughkeepsie. Her unwavering dedication and tireless efforts have made her a respected leader and advocate for positive change in Poughkeepsie.



“My motivation is the residents of the City of Poughkeepsie.

They put me in the position to make decisions that make a positive difference in their lives.”

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Pamela Gunther

Founder & CEO, Fit and Fun Playscapes

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Pamela Gunther is the Founder & CEO of Fit and Fun Playscapes, a company helping communities thrive through activity-based products that provide physical, social, mental, and academic benefits. Founded in 2011, the idea of Fit and Fun Playscapes was born from Pam's personal experiences. She wanted to be able to help people of all ages move after seeing her children's challenges in school, volunteering to improve the school playground and watching her own mother age and struggle with her health and wellness. With a background in architecture specializing in materials and construction, Pam excels in breaking down complex matters into smaller, understandable and solvable parts. This has helped propel her business as she scales, creates new products, improves processes and expands to new markets.

Fast forward to 2024, Fit and Fun Playscapes is now located in Dutchess County. There are many reasons why Pam moved her business to Dutchess County including a more diverse employee pool, real estate options and a strong Chamber of Commerce. But above all, her favorite part is the community support that neighbors have shown. The community has opened doors to impactful opportunities to help people of all ages and abilities move more at local schools, early education centers, parks, homes for children, programs for those with special needs and even an installation at the Poughkeepsie Galleria.

Pam has found a strong network in women in both leadership and business in Dutchess County. Many have toured her facility to learn about Fit and Fun Playscapes' mission, becoming quickly interested in the manufacturing and production of the products. As a result Pam has received numerous emails recommending other organizations and resources to reach out to and has connected with local county representatives who continue to support her mission. This network has also helped Pam become more involved in the community herself, including recently attending a Women in STEM event at Arlington High School and hosting a tour with the Youth Entrepreneurship Program, run by the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce.

“There are many strong women in positions of leadership here and I think the women of Dutchess County provide great support to each other. We are incredibly authentic, enthusiastically supporting and networking for each other. “

Janice Green

Owner & CEO, Jancare Private Health Services

Janice's path from nursing to entrepreneurship highlights her dedication to compassionate care and innovative solutions.

With over two decades of nursing experience, Janice noticed a gap in the home healthcare industry—a lack of personalized, compassionate care that families could trust. Drawing from her own experiences as a nurse and caregiver, she embarked on a mission to redefine home care with a focus on safety, compassion, and dignity to truly go "beyond caring."

In 2014, by encouragement from a client's husband, Janice founded JanCare Private Health Services. Janice envisioned a company that not only provided exceptional medical and non-medical care but also prioritized the emotional well-being of both clients and caregivers.

Janice's hands-on approach as a clinical nurse care coordinator and care manager ensures that every individual receives personalized attention and support, whether they require medical assistance, companionship or advocacy. Through Jancare, she has led the way in delivering exceptional care personalized to the individual needs of clients across Dutchess, Putnam, and Westchester Counties.

But Janice's passion extends beyond the confines of her business. Actively engaging with the community at local health events, being part of the Women's Leadership Alliance and serving on the Dutchess Chamber Foundation Board of Directors, she exemplifies a commitment to not only her business but also to the wider community's well-being.

Yet, Janice's journey hasn't been without its hurdles. Like many female entrepreneurs, she encountered challenges in accessing funding and mentorship opportunities. Today, Janice advocates for increased support for women in business, recognizing the transformative impact of mentorship and access to capital.

Her story serves as an inspiration to women in business, proving that with passion, resilience, and community support, any dream is achievable.

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Christa Hines

President & CEO, Hudson River Housing, Inc.

Christa Hines is the President and CEO of Hudson River Housing (HRH) – a not for profit organization dedicated to building strong, sustainable communities and affordable housing opportunities for all. As a CPA, Christa held the role of CFO at HRH for 18 years prior to becoming CEO in 2017. With her support and leadership, HRH has grown to a staff of 195 and has developed over 1,500 units of housing from emergency shelter for homeless individuals and families to homeownership opportunities for first time homebuyers. HRH creates pathways out of homelessness and poverty for thousands annually and offers a multitude of programs including those for youth, families, veterans, seniors and those with special needs. In addition to managing and creating new homes, HRH provides extensive support services and job skills training to help people achieve greater personal and economic stability.

When Christa joined the HRH team, she immediately knew that she had found what she was looking for; a place where she could use her strengths in finance and management to make a positive impact. Christa is truly dedicated to the mission of Hudson River Housing, delivering compassionate services aimed at improving communities and the lives of those they serve. This philosophy carries over to all aspects of her life. She works tirelessly to support the staff of HRH and to create partnerships with others to address the complex housing and social challenges facing the region. She serves on five local boards including those aimed at educating and serving children as well as those in the financial sector. Christa has been inspired by many elected officials and business leaders that share HRH's vision for a stronger, more vibrant community. These Dutchess County partnerships and business relationships have paved the way for much of the success that HRH has experienced.

As a lifelong resident of the Hudson Valley and through her experiences on her family's dairy farm in Rhinebeck, Christa has a deep appreciation for the agricultural richness and bucolic characteristics that make Dutchess County and the Hudson Valley such a beautiful place to live, work and play.

"I think the best way for women to support other women is to share your experiences and strive to be supportive and positive. You'll be faced with many competing priorities and expectations to change who you are. Get to know yourself and stay true to who you are. That doesn't mean to not grow or evolve but stay grounded in your beliefs, no matter the pressure. You will look back and be grateful you did."

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Laura Kiesbye

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Executive Director, Mid-Hudson Works

Laura is the Executive Director at Mid-Hudson Works – a 501c3 nonprofit organization that has been serving Veterans and people with disabilities with workforce development and reintegration opportunities since 1948. The organization partners with small businesses all over the world to provide work and training opportunities for the clients they serve. Mid-Hudson Works is proud to work very closely with many other Dutchess County organizations that focus on Veteran well-being, disability awareness, and workforce development. Training opportunities have traditionally focused on advancing skillsets in the following fields: manufacturing/trades, dry food co-packing, order fulfillment and warehousing, and assembly. In 2022, the organization received a donation, North River Roasters Coffee Roastery, and has utilized this wonderful gift to promote and teach entrepreneurial learning opportunities.



Laura left the corporate world in 2020 to pursue a new career in the nonprofit sector. She wanted to give back to her community, help people in need, and learn more about the nonprofit sector and how it fills important societal needs. Working in Dutchess County was a big change from her previous corporate roles that required a lot of travel, but the change to work locally was positive. It gave her the opportunity to help those in need in her hometown and in surrounding communities in Dutchess County. Laura will tell you that she received the gift of giving to others from her mother and received the gift of fighting for others from her father. Being raised with a strong work ethic and a thirst for knowledge has helped her fight for others and she gives credit to her parents for raising her to be a strong, independent woman. Continuing professional development is something Laura also feels very passionate about, so in September 2023, she returned to school and is now working towards her second master's degree. She plans to graduate from Marist College in May 2025 with a Master of Public Administration (MPA) concentrating in nonprofit management.

Dutchess County has always represented strong community values, and helping others in need turned into a passion that Laura respects and values. Nonprofit work has been a very humbling experience, and she truly feels that the small steps we take in creating change do eventually create a larger impact. Laura is a huge supporter of women in the workforce and continues to empower women in her life, both personally and professionally, and she won't stop until she empowers as many women as possible. Mid-Hudson Works continues to receive love and support from local Dutchess County constituents, working hard to support the services of the workshop and promote the importance of community collaborations. For Laura, the Dutchess County community is truly an amazing support system and she is proud to be the leader of an organization that has the ability to positively change the lives of others.

“Women have a place in the workforce. They should feel valued, empowered, and always have a sense of belonging - without constantly having to prove their worth and value.”



Sarah Elisabeth

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Director, A Farm For All

Sarah Elisabeth is Sage Herbalz, an apothecary, a consultant, an edible landscaper and a teacher. She has taught at Beacon Institute, African Roots Library and Rock Steady Farm's Pride event. As Director of A Farm For All in the town of Dover, Sarah leads the organization's mission to provide land access to under-served communities. In addition, Sarah operates a community garden and herb garden in Beacon as well as an herb garden in Millerton.

Sarah has worked in the nonprofit world most of her adult life. She studied at Brooklyn and New York Botanic Gardens and transitioned to farming at Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture. She worked for Pete Seeger for four years where they republished his book *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*. She was Secretary for the NAACP and Treasurer for the Beacon Sloop Club for seven years. Sarah considers herself a Community Servant and the service that is possible through a non-profit resonates with her deeply.

Immersing herself in the community, Sarah has been able to develop her business skills through connections in Dutchess County. In 2021 she helped create a Network of Black Women Farmers and their Allies that has yielded deep connections and access to land for farmers. In 2024 she is working with her network to develop a Black Women's Business Collective to support their entrepreneurial work. Sarah has also spent the last two years installing a Medicine Mandala at her teaching space, Wildseed Community Farm & Healing Village.

“I appreciate the business partnerships that I have made in the Hudson Valley. Dutchess County is particularly vibrant and offers so many diverse opportunities.”