



Mayor Spotlight: Mayor Brenda Porter of Tollette, Arkansas

As cities across the country celebrated Mayor's Month, Mayor Brenda Porter of Tollette, Arkansas, reflects on her journey,

accomplishments, and vision for the small but proud community she leads. Elected in 2018, Mayor Porter has been a driving force behind key improvements in Tollette. "It's been about keeping things running and fighting for resources," she said. Among her proudest achievements like the annual Tollette Homecoming, that remains a beloved tradition, drawing hundreds of visitors each year, the \$40,000 grant that brought new playground equipment and a water station to the city park, and a \$300,000 grant to upgrade the town's aging lift stations and manholes. Beyond infrastructure, she's focused on future development and is actively working with the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission and Arkansas Economic Development Commission to fund more upgrades.

Mayor Porter's connection to Tollette is personal. The current city hall was once her elementary school. In a full circle moment, she shared that her father, former president of the Saratoga School Board, sold the building to the city for \$10 after the school closed during integration. "Who would have thought I'd become mayor of the town my dad helped shape?" she said. With a population that has dropped from over 500 to just 185, Mayor Porter is passionate about revitalization. She encourages former residents and out-of-state property owners to make land available for returning families.

Mayor Porter remains committed to moving her community forward while honoring the rich spirit and legacy of Tollette. The Arkansas Black Mayors Association proudly celebrates her dedication to service and her unwavering leadership.

Frank Bateman: Named 2025 Inductee into PQC National Letterman Club Hall of Fame

Congratulations to our very own Executive Director, Frank Bateman, on his induction into the Paul Quinn College National Letterman Club Hall of Fame, Class of 2025!

This prestigious honor recognizes alumni who have made outstanding contributions both on and off the field—and Frank is a shining example of that legacy. During his collegiate basketball career,

he averaged over 16 points per game, was named to the All-Tournament Team multiple years, earned All-Conference honors as a junior, and helped lead his team to both I.A.C. Conference and Tournament Championships with a 30-13 record.

Beyond the court, Frank has continued to lead with purpose, most notably spearheading a \$96 million watershed initiative that improved water systems across Arkansas, while also championing community service and development efforts statewide.

We at ABMA are incredibly proud of his leadership, vision, and the transformative impact he continues to make throughout Arkansas!

ABMA Receives \$250,000 Forestry Grant to plant \$1,200 Trees Across Five Delta Counties

Funding has resumed for the Arkansas Delta Community Forestry Grant, a \$250,000 initiative awarded to the Arkansas Black Mayors Association (ABMA) through the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Forestry Division and the USDA Forest Service, following a 90-day pause. This grant will support the planting of 1,200 trees at public schools and community spaces across Arkansas. The goal is to reduce the impact of extreme heat, lower local temperatures, and create more accessible green spaces for outdoor learning, recreation, and community gathering. The initiative aligns with ABMA's commitment to building climate resilience and promoting environmental equity in historically underserved areas. Local leadership will play a key role in implementation.

Participating mayors include Mayor Butler (Eudora), Mayor Boney (Dumas), Mayor Thomas (Haynes), Mayor Stevens (Marianna), Mayor Cunningham (Clarendon), Mayor Harston (Cotton Plant), Mayor Stokes (Holly Grove), Mayor Gilbert (Elaine), and Mayor Franklin (Helena). This project marks a meaningful investment in the health and future of Arkansas communities, creating greener neighborhoods while helping residents better withstand rising temperatures.



Watershed Projects Resume Following Federal Funding

After a 90-day pause, federal funding has been restored for critical watershed projects in Arkansas, bringing much needed momentum back to communities vulnerable to flooding. Design firms have now been selected, and work will soon begin in Camden, Pine Bluff, Helena-West Helena, Forrest City, Marianna, and Haynes. Of the remaining nine communities still in the planning phase, five are expected to move into design by late summer.

This initiative was originally funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, which allocated \$96 million to improve watershed infrastructure across 14 Arkansas communities. However, progress stalled in January 2025 after President Donald Trump signed the "Unleashing American Energy" executive order, which paused funding connected to the Inflation Reduction Act and required agencies to reassess all disbursements.

The urgency of the work was brought to light by recent severe storms, which caused heavy flooding in Camden and Forrest City, both of which are included in the project. Due to many financial factors, many residents cannot afford the damage or even qualify for flood insurance despite the setbacks, ABMA has remained steadfast in its efforts to move the initiative forward. With design work underway and planning nearing completion, the association continues to push for long-term solutions that will reduce flood risks, protect property, and improve quality of life in historically underserved communities.

Mayor Derrick Ratliffe: Building a Stronger Newport, One Connection at a Time

After more than 20 years working in health inspection and community outreach, Mayor Derrick Ratliffe didn't just spot problems, he stepped up to solve them. His passion for people and firsthand knowledge of Newport's needs, inspired him to run for mayor and keep the city moving forward. "What's the heart of Newport's charm? "The people," Ratliffe says. "We're a small town, but we take care of each other." Whether it's chatting over a shared meal or cheering at packed school sports events, the town's warmth and unity make visitors feel right at home and often want to stay.

One of Mayor Ratliffe's proudest accomplishments is breaking ground on an 80 plus home subdivision, a vision four years in the making. "With support from the P3 Group and the community, this is becoming a reality,"

he says. With Newport's growing economy and educational hubs like the local college and high school, the city desperately needed new housing and now, it's finally here. Mayor Ratliffe's open-door policy and deep community ties ensure residents have a voice. Whether he's joining local clean-up efforts, or answering tough questions at City Hall, he's always within reach.

Looking ahead, homeownership and smart growth are top priorities for the Mayor. Like any small city, Newport faces its share of challenges, but Mayor Ratliffe believes that by investing in housing, supporting local businesses, and strengthening education, Newport can create lasting opportunities for its residents.



Juneteenth: A Legacy of Freedom and Our Call to Action



Juneteenth marks the day enslaved African Americans in Texas learned of their freedom, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. For the Arkansas Black Mayors Association (ABMA), this isn't just a celebration, it's a powerful reflection of the legacy we uphold. Our mayors, leading predominantly Black communities, stand as living proof of progress, resilience, and the journey we continue together.

Each year, Juneteenth gives ABMA mayors a chance to reconnect with their communities. These moments of celebration also serve as platforms for civic engagement, encouraging voter registration, youth mentorship, and open dialogue about the work ahead. Challenges remain with underfunded schools, limited healthcare, and systemic inequities.

As we honor Juneteenth, ABMA stands united in the continued fight, not just for freedom, but for the right to truly thrive.

Google's \$10 Billion investment in West Memphis

We are thrilled to share the incredible progress we have made in our watershed planning initiative, which spans 14 projects, including The Big 5: Pine Bluff, West Helena, Camden, and the Forrest City/Haynes/Marianna region. These communities are central to our mission, and we are committed to sustainable water infrastructure improvements.

Designed to correct flooding issues, this effort ensures residents and businesses are better protected. With the planning phase complete, we are advancing into design, backed by \$10 million in funding. Engineers will now develop specific recommendations addressing priorities identified through community input. Community engagement has been vital. **Through statewide workshops, passionate residents shared their concerns and vision for a more sustainable future. Their voices have driven this initiative forward.**

A special thanks to our dedicated mayors for mobilizing their communities and ensuring widespread participation. Their leadership is paving the way for equitable, lasting water solutions. We look forward to the impact ahead.

** UPCOMING EVENTS **

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO THE

Arkansas Black Mayors Association

Annual Gala

SAVE THE DATE

SEPT. 20, 2025

STARTS 7 PM | VIP COCKTAIL MIXER: 5:30 PM

THE VENUE AT WESTWIND
7318 WINDSONG DRIVE
NORTH LITTLE ROCK, AR

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