



## Iris Banister

### "A Launch of Destiny"

Geneseo Alum, Chair of the MLK Greater Rochester Commission, and Executive Director of Wilson Commencement Park

**Friday, January 25, 4pm, Newton 201**

This presentation marks the beginning of a semester long project involving SUNY Geneseo and Wilson Commencement Park, a transitional housing and support services program in Rochester. In the months following Dr. Banister's address, Geneseo students will be volunteering at Wilson Commencement Park, reading to young children, tutoring older children, helping with housing projects, etc. Anyone interested in joining this project should contact Kay Fly, Coordinator of Student Volunteerism and Service Learning, by emailing [fly@geneseo.edu](mailto:fly@geneseo.edu).

**Iris Banister**, a 38 year resident of Rochester, NY, is a native of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Her devotion to her community has been recognized through the awarding of numerous citations and awards that include: the City of Rochester Pioneer Award, Mayor's Renaissance Award- Outstanding Educator; MLK Achievement Award for Civic Engagement; listed in the National Women's Hall Of Fame-Book Of Legends ; The Howard Coles Society Award, the International F.C.D.-Hall of Fame Award; the New York State Humanitarian Award; 2001, and the Rochester Mayor's Unsung Heroes Award.

Prior to retirement, Banister was employed by the Rochester City School District for thirty-two years as an elementary teacher, reading specialist, guidance counselor, transition facilitator, House Administrator, and Program Administrator for the Senior High Alternative Program of Education (SHAPE) a behavior modification educational program for at-risk middle school students. She came out of retirement to become Principal of the Charter School of Science and Technology. She was an adjunct professor of Religion and African American Studies at St. John Fisher College and an education consultant. She is the founder and Chief Facilitator of NAMOW (woman spelled backwards) a counseling, support, and referral service for women and their children.

Banister is a doctoral student at the University of Rochester in Human Development-Counseling, an accomplished author, and a much sought after motivational speaker and workshop presenter. She has three publications to her credit, *Lasso Your Whirlwind*, *Empowerment: Walking the Walk and Talking the Talk*, and *The Fifth Ace*. She has dedicated the vast portion of her work to parent-child relations and Christian counseling and leadership development.

**Wilson Commencement Park (WCP)** is a transitional housing and support services program. Located on Joseph Avenue in Rochester, Wilson Commencement Park provides comprehensive, quality resources and services to low-income, single parents and their children so that they can improve their family stability, increase their economic independence, and strengthen the community.

Since its opening in 1991, Wilson Commencement Park has grown from a community-based program serving 50 resident families to one that now serves over 600 resident and community families annually.

When single parents find themselves homeless or escaping from a domestic violence situation, Wilson Commencement Park (WCP) empowers them to redirect their lives. Upon acceptance into the program, residents of Wilson Commencement Park (WCP), enter a comprehensive program not just housing.

**Housing** -- The housing program provides 50 two and three bedroom townhouses for single parent families, who may reside at the Park for up to two years.

**Support Services** -- WCP's Family Support Services requires residents to work full time, attend school full time, or work and go to school, as well as pay rent, meet with their family life coach at least twice a month and attend town meetings. They must also attend a minimum of 24 life skills programs annually focused on parenting, financial independence, housing mobility, child development, employment, stress management and nutrition. They are held accountable for following all program requirements and policies. Each resident's family life coach helps him/her develop an Individual Program Plan - a road map for achieving improved financial stability, family wellness, and next- step housing. Each plan is customized to meet the individual's unique needs. WCP provides a stable environment where residents can deal with deep-rooted issues with the support of a family life coach. The program empowers residents to set and achieve personal goals while developing healthy, supportive relationships with their family and within the community.

**Early Learning** -- While the residents and families in the surrounding community are working and



**Our Location**



attending classes, their children participate in WCP's accredited early learning program. WCP's Early Learning Center enriches children's lives and helps break the vicious cycle of poverty and despair. Our on-site childcare program, the Early Learning Center, offers an innovative 12 month curriculum, is accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children and is a Universal Pre-K facility. Wilson Commencement Park's philosophy embodies the fundamental values of work, personal responsibility and community. Wilson Commencement Park believes that dignity and self-esteem arise from working and supporting one's family. The WCP mission is fulfilled each time a family becomes self-sufficient, saving public dollars from being expended on future welfare and other government assistance programs and restoring the pride that results from becoming economically independent and socially confident.

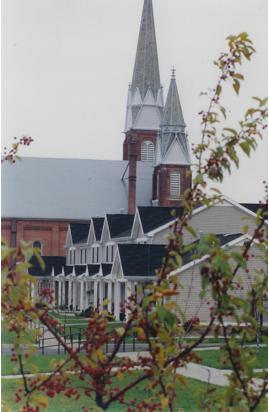
Wilson Commencement Park has been selected three times for national recognition in the Enterprise Foundation's "Beyond Housing" as one of the top-performing service-enriched housing programs in the US worthy of replication and The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI) has recognized WCP as one of the three top performing "transformational" housing programs in the country. In addition, Wilson Commencement Park received the 2006 Metropolitan Award for Excellence in Affordable Housing.



Photos from <http://www.wilsoncommencementpark.org/>

## Destiny

Wilson Commencement Park's new building, Destiny, consists of 18 additional apartments of transitional housing on the corner of Kelly Street and Joseph Avenue. Destiny is an expansion of Wilson Commencement Park's mission, serving the needs of single parent families who need more mental health support while working to change the destiny of their lives. This additional housing allows WCP to help 68 families in all.



<http://www.wilsoncommencementpark.org/>



The **Greater Rochester Martin Luther King Commission** promotes the principals exposed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the development of quality life experiences for those in need.

**The organization's mission:**

To educate the community to the ideals and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., including his efforts to secure human and civil rights through non-violent social change; and the promotion of racial harmony and social justice

To encourage the translation of those ideals into actions which enhance the quality of life of everyone within the Greater Rochester Community.

To celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

To act as a catalyst to a cross-section of community institutions and groups in their sponsorship of activities, particularly in the month of January; and

To inspire our diverse citizenship to be participants, volunteers, and audiences in sponsored activities and the work of the Commission