



OHIO'S BLACK NEWS LEADER

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History in Maple Heights First Black Mayor Annette McMillian-Blackwell Sworn-in

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Maple Heights High School 11th grade student Kayla Thompson quietly sang Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes 'Wake Up Everybody' as hundreds of people from as far as Alabama joined in the historical swearing-in of Annette McMillian-Blackwell as the city's first Black Mayor on Jan.6 at Maple Heights High School auditorium.

The song served as a perfect backdrop on a crisp clear evening as Maple Heights City Council held swearing-in ceremonies for its seven council members and the first Black elected mayor in the 100 year history of the city.

After each council member took the oath of office, the moment of history finally arrived as an emotional Blackwell fought back tears as she stood on the auditorium stage in front of family, friends, new colleagues, elected officials and citizens of Maple Heights.

The capacity crowd over more than 500 people stood to their feet and gave Blackwell a rousing round of applause before she was officially sworn-in Mayor Annette Blackwell.

Blackwell, 53, dressed tastefully regal for the occasion wearing a cardinal two-piece skirt suit with a black paisley print, and while gripped with emotion requiring tissue to damp the tears from rolling down her face, she was in complete control.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you for sticking with us," she began in appreciation.

"This is a new day in Maple Heights. Jesus! Jesus! Thanks be to God that I am your newly elected Mayor."

The city of Maple Heights is a city that Blackwell has called home for many years now, and it's a city that she said, "I am now proud to serve."

Maple Heights is a Northeast Ohio city of 20,000 residents nestled between Warrensville Heights, Garfield Heights, Bedford Heights and Bedford among others. It also boasts five neighboring schools, mostly as newly modern as Maple Heights High School.

"Many of us have chose to raise our children here, walk our dogs. Maple Heights looks like a full moon hanging from the sky, it's a clean crisp morning, maple tree lined streets, seven districts and parks, first name neighbors, kindergarden through senior friendships, our first homes, our childhood homes," Blackwell explained.

However, the city is also in the state of a fiscal emergency.

Blackwell, a property tax analyst who has never held public office and has worked with the city schools, but is now charged with the difficult task of turning the city around.

She pledged to research and seek funding and better outcomes for the seniors of the city, develop the children, pursue progressive and thriving small business for economic development, work for a brighter future and change the public relations of the city and to encourage prospective homeowners.

She hailed the moment as a prideful one, but left the stage with her councilmembers ready to go to work on behalf of the city, one for the first time in its long and divided history will be governed by a woman of African American decent.

Honorable Judge Shirley Strickland Saffold reminded the audience of the journey it took for Blackwell's historical journey.

"Many of you didn't witness the times when she was on the campaign trail and Blackwell would say to them how wonderful they looked, but to be told, thank you, but I'm not voting for you. You don't see the times that she had to go and knock on somebody's door and they said, get away from here, I don't want you here!"

Ironically, as we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. this week, racial division, bigotry and hatred is still alive in America, and while a small city such as Maple Heights is not exempt, its sends a powerful message to the region and the nation with the election of Annette Blackwell as the city's first Black mayor that change is necessary, even if it takes a century to get there.

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