

## Executive Director Jean Howard

Jean Howard has served as Executive Director of Wilson Commencement Park (WCP) since its opening in 1990. WCP has been on the forefront to empower low-income, single-parent families to become economically self-sufficient and spirit-rich in the quest to break the cycle of welfare dependency. Jean was responsible for completion and oversight of WCP's construction, program design and management of a welfare reform and LifeSkills organization which has provided services through several business units (Housing, Case Management, Mentoring, Employment, Literacy, Community Outreach and Early Childhood Services) to over 2,000 single-parent families and children annually who seek increasing self-sufficiency and alternatives to welfare dependency. Over \$10 million has been raised for facilities development and start-up program operations through grants, donations and campaigns.



Under Jean's leadership, WCP has grown from a small, community-based program to now serving as a model for community collaboration and a benchmark for welfare reform, both locally and nationally. Jean is frequently called upon by news media for statements regarding issues of concern to low-income, single-parent families and minority Americans. Jean has lectured at numerous forums. Her opinions have challenged traditional wisdom regarding America's "underclass" welfare recipients.

As an extension of her outreach, Jean was appointed by Monroe County Executive John Doyle as Chair of the Day Care Consortium. Under Jean's leadership, Consortium recommendations created 630 new day care slots for poor, single-parent families.

Jean's social activism dates back to the late 1960s. As a young civil rights activist in her high school and college days in Greensboro, North Carolina, she participated in local, regional and national initiatives in community empowerment and human rights. Jean's leadership skills were reinforced when she was elected as Senior Class President at Bennett College. Jean's family ties connect her very deeply with the civil rights sit-in movement. Her brother, Ezell Blair, was one of four students at North Carolina A&T College who began the civil rights sit-in movement on Feb. 1, 1960 in Greensboro.

For more than 20 years, Jean has been a source of guidance and support for pioneer empowerment programs in New York State and nationwide. She served under Governor Cuomo for six years on the Executive Committee of the New York State Office on Mental Retardation and Development Disabilities Advisory Council. She was an advisor to the Governor's office in the implementation of the Willowbrook Consent Decree. The Decree was created to eventually de-institutionalize individuals with developmental disabilities in all New York State Development Centers. Jean currently serves in an appointed position by Governor George Pataki as an Advisor to the New York State Office of Temporary and Needy Assistance.