

Bernetta B. Lanier
Alderwoman, District 1
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1. Who were some of your personal mentors or heroes/heroines?

Of course, my first personal mentors, who were heroes and heroines to me, were my parents. I saw them not only take care of our family, but they helped provide for relatives and members of our community. As a 5th grader, it was Dr. Pricilla Thomas, my school Principal at Bartow Elementary School, that taught me how to preside over a meeting as the President of the Student Council, and President of Chatham County's Interscholar Council.

2. Are there any Savannah women (historical figures or current leaders) that inspire you?

It amazes me of the bravery, fortitude, and tenacity it took for women such as Susie King Taylor to accomplish all she did and change history, at a time when her Black skin should have made her work impossible. She accomplished seemingly impossible fetes for the love of her people and of God. When I read about her, I am inspired and intrigued that a local Black woman during the Reconstruction period was able to start a school for freed African children, and that she documented her Civil War experiences. When all odds were stacked against her, she prevailed anyway.

3. When did you become interested in serving your community?

I do not remember a time when I was not serving my community, or at least present in the room. My parents were labor, union, and community organizers. I was the child being taken to all the meetings and events. I guess you can say its in my blood. They were instrumental in organizing the first neighborhood organization in the City of Savannah, in the Hudson Hill Community; at least that is what the Elders in the room professed.

4. What inspired you to become involved in local government or to become an Alderwoman?

As a leader in my community and neighborhood President, I became a watchdog of the Local governing body. Our low-wealth community still lacked resources and services. The generational disparities we lived with was visibly apparent. Education was always stressed in my household and after graduate school, and having years of experience working in local government, I returned prepared to champion issues, organizing from a theoretical, sociological, and political point of view. Historical and systemic biases towards my community inspired me to step into local government to impact policy changes for more equitable outcomes for people of the Westside of Savannah.

5. What does it mean to you to be part of Savannah's first majority female City Council?

Some of my most accomplished group endeavors have been with groups of women, such as the Port City Business and Professional Women. I have known women who were great organizers. Becoming a part of Savannah's first majority female City Council, I thought, was now going to provide Savannah with that caring, bold, and daring spirit that it took for women like Susie K. Taylor. Nevertheless, although we are not actually in control of the agenda, we do have a powerful voice, and we are at the table where little girls of Savannah can see us and aspire to achieve their leadership dreams.

6. What does it mean to you to serve the people of Savannah?

It is an honor and a privilege to serve the people of Savannah. I take this opportunity to heart in my desire to move the needle and change the trajectory of the least, the lost, and the left out. I aspire to help lessen the wealth gap and create equitable outcomes and solutions for all of Savannah's citizens. I want to help usher in policy initiatives that will elevate Savannah into world class city status.

7. Do you have a piece of wisdom that you would like to share with the women or young girls of Savannah?

To the young girls and women of Savannah I say, don't get ready, be ready. Stay ready, God, self, family, then community, in that order.

8. If you have a prepared bio, please also include that for our alderperson reference files.

See my short bio attached.