

# Williamsburg area groups form organization to commemorate Juneteenth holiday

There are several events on the peninsula to celebrate the end of slavery in Williamsburg, Hampton and Newport News.

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WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — More than a dozen groups in the Greater Williamsburg area are coming together to celebrate Juneteenth. "It's not a Black holiday. This is an American holiday," said Connie Matthews Harshaw, of Let Freedom Ring Foundation. "It's to celebrate the end of slavery."

Juneteenth, acknowledged on June 19, marks the day in 1865 when federal forces told enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, that they'd been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation more than two years earlier. This is the second year Juneteenth is being celebrated as a federal holiday. But Black communities have honored the occasion for more than a century.

This year, a group of organizations in Williamsburg, James City County and York County formed the Juneteenth Community Consortium. The first-of-its-kind collaboration aims to educate people on the holiday's meaning through a series of events over the course of four days.

"We are hoping that the community is going to come together and this will become part of the fabric of this place called Colonial Williamsburg, as we celebrate this experience called America," said Harshaw.

The [Juneteenth Community Consortium](#) consists of the City of Williamsburg, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Coming to the Table - Historic Triangle, Historic Area Religions Together, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, League of Women's Voters of Williamsburg Area, Let Freedom Ring Foundation, The Village Initiative for Equity in Education, Virginia Arts Festival-Williamsburg Live, Visit Williamsburg, William & Mary, Williamsburg Action and York-James City-Williamsburg NAACP.

The consortium is hosting free events including a Juneteenth art exhibit, highlighting the work of African American artists at the Stryker Center. In the art gallery, Janice Canaday experienced a full-circle moment. The exhibit features artwork by her nephew and reminds her of her ancestors. "My great-great-great-grandfather, Anthony Brown and Rachel Brown, they were freed by William Ludwell Lee in 1806," said Canaday, of Williamsburg. Her ancestors are also featured on the Memorial for the Enslaved at William & Mary. Their legacy of fortitude is part of what makes Juneteenth special to her.

"They've seen a lot. They've done a lot. They've been through a lot," she said. "Juneteenth, it's a time to remember, and in remembrance, there's hope." Sunday is also Canaday's birthday, and she said she can't help but think about the journey of her ancestors and the Williamsburg community. "We are at the top of the mountain, but we are at the bottom of the next mountain," said Canaday.