



August 17, 2026

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Emancipation Day Parade Family

Dear Emancipation Day Parade Participants, Volunteers, Committee Members, Sponsors, Partners, Community Leaders and future parade participants:

On behalf of the Emancipation Association, Inc., I extend my heartfelt appreciation and sincere thanks to each of you who helped make the **January 1, 2026, City of Charleston Emancipation Day Parade** a tremendous success.

Our theme, “**The Signing of the Emancipation Was Our Bridge Over Troubled Waters,**” reminded us of the courage, sacrifice, perseverance, and faith of those who paved the way for us. As we gathered together to honor that history, we were reminded that the bridges built by previous generations continue to carry us toward a brighter future.

The January cold weather could not have been more perfect for the occasion. Our Grand Marshals, **Dr. Thaddeus Bell and Mrs. Cynthia Bell**, led the parade in stylish fashion and represented the spirit and dignity of this celebration beautifully.

We were also blessed by the powerful and eloquent words of our Orator, **Rev. Eric S. C. Manning**, who delivered a very positive and inspiring message. His words encouraged us to continue moving forward in 2026, recognizing that we stand today because of the hard work, courage, and determination of so many who came before us.

Our **Emancipation King, Legend Whiteside**, and **Emancipation Queen, Savannah Benning**, looked magnificent as they represented our celebration. Most importantly, our young people truly set the tone throughout the parade and at the finale. Their energy, enthusiasm, and participation reminded us that the future of our Emancipation Day celebration is in good hands.

We were especially proud to present our **Inaugural Presidential Award to Mrs. Darlene Dunmeyer Roberson** in recognition of her courageous work and dedicated service on the Charleston School Board. Her commitment to our children and our community is worthy of recognition and appreciation.

Several other awards were presented throughout the day to recognize individuals, organizations, sponsors, and community partners whose support continues to make this celebration possible. We are especially grateful for our partnership with the **International African American Museum**, as well as the many sponsors, organizations, volunteers, and supporters who contributed their time, resources, and talents.

A celebration of this magnitude does not happen without teamwork. To every parade participant, volunteer, committee member, sponsor, community leader, partner, family, and friend: **thank**



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you. Your commitment, presence, and support helped us honor our history while creating an experience that our community can continue to build upon.

As we look toward the future, the Emancipation Association, Inc. proudly asks each of you to **SAVE THE DATE: January 1, 2027**, as we return for another historic Emancipation Day Parade.

Our theme for 2027 will be:

“Rising to the Top.”

Together, let us continue to rise, grow, inspire, and build upon the legacy entrusted to us. With your continued support, we look forward to making the 2027 Emancipation Day Parade **bigger, better, and more meaningful than ever before.**

Thank you once again for helping us celebrate freedom, honor our history, recognize our present, and inspire our future.

Respectfully,

Robert Crawford Sr.