



Audrey J. Bernard

Peggy Shepard awarded France's National Order of Merit Medal



The Knight of the National Order of Merit Medal was presented to Peggy Shepard by the Consul General of France in New York, Jérémie Robert



Peggy Shepard gives inspirational acceptance speech



New Knight of the National Order of Merit Peggy Shepard poses with presenter Consul General of France in New York, Jérémie Robert



Peggy Shepard is congratulated by WE ACT Board Members

Peggy Shepard, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Harlem-based WE ACT for Environmental Justice — whose mantra is “empowering communities to power change” — was made Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite, one of the French Republic's highest honors, for her pioneering role in the fight for environmental justice by the Consul General of France in New York, Jérémie Robert, on Thursday, September 30, 2021 at the beautiful French New York office.

The Knight of the National Order of Merit medal was presented to Shepard “For her contributions to the protection of New York City's urban environment and her pioneering role in the fight for environmental equality, which echoes France's commitment to the environment and social equality.”

Shepard has always been a high achiever dating back to her journalistic career as the first African-American field reporter at the Indianapolis News. She moved to New York City in 1971, and took on several successive jobs at the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal. In 1988, disturbed by the foul odors emitted by the Hudson River sewage treatment plant, she helped organize acts of civil disobedience. Together with six other organizers, the “sewage seven,” she distributed gas masks and blocked traffic near the plant. Her activist group was quickly arrested by the police.

The tenacious fair environment activist continued to mobilize civil society support by co-founding WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) in 1988. The group's mission is to ensure that ethnic and economic minorities participate in creating a healthy and fair environment through education, research, and political engagement.

In 1988, WE ACT sued New York City over its sewage treatment, leading to an unprecedented victory four years later. In 1992, the Mayor of New York City created a \$55 million odor control system for the West Harlem community.



Attendees at the 'knighting' of Peggy Shepard

Shepard turned this small group of committed volunteers into a professional environmental organization, whose influence extended from northern Manhattan to the professional level. She enlisted the support of political leaders and the Transit Workers Union to lead an information campaign encouraging the city to make its energy transition in the transportation sector.

In 2006, the consummate environmental influencer and WE ACT gallantly supported legislation to ban cars from Central Park and Prospect Park in New York City. She is present on all fronts in the arena of environmental activism.

To improve the environmental health of children in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx, Shepard partners with the academic community through Columbia

University's Center for Children's Conservation Health, where she conducts primary research. She serves on the board of the New York League of Conservation Voters and oversees a project sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency to monitor fine particulate matter in northern Manhattan.

WE ACT has grown from an abandoned Harlem building to a center for modern ecology, implementing community-based environmental health programs and research projects, environmental education, and youth outreach. The organization collaborates with scientists, labor leaders, and environmental and public health organizations.

A knight in shining armor, Shepard's activism and commitment to the environment have earned her numerous

awards and honors. In 2007, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded WE ACT a \$100,000 grant for its work to protect the environment at the local level. This program supports local communities in their efforts to identify sources of pollution. In 2007, the Governor of the State of New York presented her with the New York State Women of Excellence Award for her contributions to local communities in New York City.

On March 29, 2021, Shepard was appointed to the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council (WHEJAC), which was established by President Biden's Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad to fulfill his and Vice President Harris's commitment to confronting longstanding environmental

injustices and to ensuring that historically marginalized and polluted, overburdened communities have greater input on federal policies and decisions.

The advisory council will provide advice and recommendations to the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council on how to address current and historic environmental injustices, including recommendations for updating Executive Order 12898.

In addition to her organization WE ACT, Shepard is actively involved in a number of nonprofit organizations, including the Environmental Defense Fund, Earth Day NY, the NYC Mayor's Sustainability Advisory Board, the NYC Waterfront Management Advisory Board, and the National Children's Study Advisory Committee to the National Institutes of Health.

Among America's renowned and influential activists, the priorities of Shepard and her organization, WE ACT, align closely with France's political and environmental priorities.

France's recognition of Shepard's role in the fight for environmental protection and environmental equality comes as a reward for her exemplary actions in support of their shared priorities. This recognition also contributes to strengthening and developing Franco-American ties in what are now global struggles. (Photos Courtesy of Florine Taupin of the Consulate General of France in New York)



Peggy Shepard and her husband Dr. Charles Loveday (center) are pictured with Consul General of France in New York, Jérémie Robert, and WE ACT Board Members and Staff