

# City Council At-Large Candidate – Jan Baptist



*The New Bedford municipal elections will be held on November 8th, 2011. A list of the candidates can be found [here](#). New Bedford Guide does not endorse candidates and we offer our site for any candidate to publish articles. Here is an article submitted by Jan Baptist who is running for City Council At-large.*

As campaign activities heat up just before Election Day I hope that voters will hear my message. My candidacy for Councilor-at-Large is inspired by my life story and my desire to serve our community and impact the quality of life in our neighborhoods. I am dedicated to involving citizens from all sectors of the city.

Born and raised in New Bedford's north-end, today I am a west-end resident. My grandparents were born in St Michael, Azores and came to New Bedford in the early 1900s. My father came to America when he was two and was never enrolled in the school system. My mother was born in New Bedford and completed the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I remember teaching my father how to write his name

and helping him to study for his citizenship test. Both of my parents worked in New Bedford textile mills.

I attended Ottiwell elementary school, Normandin and New Bedford High School dropping out of at 16. I returned to school after working a year in a pajama factory and did finally graduate. I had begun to see the value of education and wanted to attend college, but my quest for higher education was an ongoing struggle.

I began to work full time at low income levels and as a full time wage earner, I was un-eligible for financial aid. Making little money, I fell just above the income level. I enrolled as a paying, part-time student and over the span of 20 years, earned an Associate Degree in Liberal Arts from Bristol Community College, and a Bachelor in Humanities and Social Sciences from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. I also studied at Smith College as an Ada-Comstock Scholar, finally earning a Master in Education from Cambridge College. Through my philosophy of life-long-learning, I continue to participate in educational opportunities and I am a 2006 graduate of Leadership SouthCoast.

I began my career in education as a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher aid at the DeValles School for the New Bedford Model Cities Program, later participating in the New Careers Program at Bristol Community College. Through this program I worked in the Reading Lab at Bristol Community College, first as a Reading Aid, advancing to Educational Assistant, then Teaching Assistant, as she earned her Associate Degree. Upon completion of my Bachelor Degree I was promoted as Liaison to the Disabilities Office, then Assistant Coordinator of Tutoring, progressing to College -Wide Retention Coordinator and Assistant Director of the TRIO QUEST Program. As a MCCC union member in these state positions I was very aware of the importance of union representation for educators.

Upon earning my Master Degree I was appointed as the Director

of Disability Services for the now three campus college. This management position provided the challenge of working within limited budgets, while honoring the rights of workers and delivering mandated services for students with disabilities.

I am the recipient of Bristol Community College's Silver Shield Service Award, the Scepter and Scroll Award for Exceptional Leadership and Honorable Mention, as an Outstanding Advisor. I have also received the Phi Theta Kappa, Honor Society, Recognition Award, for Outstanding Contributions to Student Success. These awards were earned for my ability to bring people together to solve problems, my mediation skills and my ability to connect people with the proper resources.

My long-time commitment to the YWCA of Southeastern Massachusetts connects me to the community and has made me aware of the needs of both business and industry. During my involvement with the YWCA, I first served as Assistant Treasurer for several years and was elected as president of the Board in 2006, where I currently sit. I have instituted an annual board orientation and retreat, and I serve on numerous YWCA committees. I have also been a



leader in the development and implementation of the YWCA's 2008-2011 Strategic Plan. I am passionate and dedicated to the YWCA Mission of eliminating racism and empowering women, leading the \$4.6 million capital fund building campaign to consolidate YWCA services and programs Under One Roof. With the completion of the campaign, the YWCA will be transformed as a first class vehicle for the empowerment of women and girls and families in the community.

I also serve on the city's Human Relations Commission, where I

was first appointed Commissioner and then elected as Chair, serving from 2006 to the present. Under my leadership the Commission continues to grow and become more responsive to the needs of the community.

Other volunteer work includes: membership in the Bristol Community College, Alumni Board of Directors, Friends Academy Multicultural Awareness and Diversity Advisory Board, and the New Bedford 20/20 Planning Committee. I am also a member of the Women's Fund Advisory Committee.

During the past 10 years, I have developed an understanding of the workings of our city, my connections with local educators, city leaders and business resources will prove to be an asset in the position of Councilor-at-Large. I will strive to build consensus and provide platforms for effective communication that will benefit all walks of life here in the City of New Bedford. I often quote Marian Wright Edelman, who said "service is the rent we pay for living"; I believe anyone who knows me will testify that I live this value.

My dedication to the city is not my only asset for the position of Councilor-at-Large. My working class Portuguese background serves as an example of the importance of opportunity for all members of our community. My teaching and volunteer work with the YWCA and the HRC has put me in touch with people of all cultures and I am dedicated to helping everyone. I am familiar with Cape Verdean culture and have traveled extensively in Cape Verde.

It is my objective, when elected to bring all voices to the table and respect varying perspectives to address the interrelated issues of education, jobs and neighborhoods.

First, education: our children, our teenagers, our young adults, all have the right to ongoing quality education. To meet this objective our educational system must be transformed. I am concerned when I read the newspaper, and, I

know about the disparity in our school system from my own experience as a parent and educator. It is everyone's responsibility to remedy this. We can't stay in our solitary silos, with each group thinking it's the other's responsibility, nor can we tolerate professional turf wars. Transformation requires not just the mayor and the school committee or interest groups' participation, but the entire community, the city council as well. Education for the future requires a community coming together.

The quality of life in many of our neighborhoods is another concern. Though proud of many elements of our city, when I drive through some of our neighborhoods I see a different picture in contrast to the beautiful and energized downtown environment. I am worried about an un-equal society; a growing problem in our nation, and something that is happening here and must be addressed here.

Not being a career politician, but someone who has worked hard in the community, I will bring a much needed fresh perspective as well as the 21<sup>st</sup> century management, technology and budget skills I have practiced in my professional life; the necessary skills to move this city forward.

In January, along with a newly elected mayor the city council has an opportunity to carry out major community goals: such as the NB 20/20 Master Plan and such long-term considerations as job development, public transportation, capital improvement and improved financing. These things must be addressed more effectively. I will encourage inclusion and build consensus among diverse interests: those of elected officials, the business community and all of our citizens, focusing on the entire community rather than the centralized interests of individuals or interest groups. A top priority will be to develop a positive working relationship between the council and the mayor.

I will bring new levels of professionalism, sound judgment,

logical and creative problem solving and an attitude of respect for the office and my colleagues. Above all I will be visible, approachable, and responsive to our citizens.