

CAPITAL STYLE

Here are three things to know about Toni Strong Pratt of Annapolis

By Rachael Pacella
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Toni Pratt poses in the doorway of her home on Juliana Circle in Annapolis. Pratt is a community activist, cancer survivor and Christian. (Rachael Pacella / Capital Gazette)

Toni Strong Pratt is a member of Anne Arundel Connecting Together, a group with 26 faith-based member organizations in the county and an affiliation with the national Industrial Areas Foundation.

Pratt, a long-time community advocate, said ACT has identified six areas to focus on after hearing from more than 2,000 residents: mental health and addiction, transportation, immigration, affordable housing, education and gun violence.

Last November Pratt and her husband and high school sweetheart, William Pratt, hosted a screening of the Harriet Tubman biopic, "Harriet" for 200 children and their parents from various Annapolis public housing properties. The goal was to educate and unite, she said.

Here are three other things that you may not know about Pratt.

A Cancer Survivor

In 2001, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She had a hysterectomy and did not require additional treatment such as chemotherapy.

“It was a sigh of relief for me. But it also was a sadness because I thought about all those other women,” she said. “When the doctor came and they didn’t get that [good] report and their families were left to deal with, how do we move on?”

All About Faith

Another thing driving her in to live with purpose is her Christian faith, she said. Pratt is a deaconess at First Christian Community Church of Annapolis, where she has worshipped for more than 20 years.

“I think a lot of people ask me how do I keep going, how I never really get discouraged. And it is definitely because of my faith,” she said.

Growing up in Annapolis

Pratt said folks might be surprised to know is that she grew up in some of the same public housing communities where she serves as an advocate. She said she longs for the sense of community she felt decades ago growing up in Annapolis Gardens and Bloomsbury Square, but said gentrification and a lack of investment have hurt that feeling. That is another reason she works with ACT, she said, which also offers leadership training. “I want them to know that they have voices, that they are better than what the system says they are,” she said. “And like me, they too can overcome.”