

Sonya M. Toler

Gov. Edward G. Rendell named Sonya M. Toler executive director of the Governor's Commission on African American Affairs on January 16, 2006. Prior to this appointment, Mrs. Toler was director of communications for the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, a nonprofit organization that, in conjunction with its affiliates — Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce and Pennsylvania Economy League — works to stimulate growth in southwestern Pennsylvania's economy and improve its quality of life.

A proud graduate of Taylor Allderdice High School, part of the Pittsburgh Public School District, she has been a professional journalist since 1991. Mrs. Toler studied journalism and psychology at Prairie View A&M University in Texas for two years before completing her studies at Point Park College in Pittsburgh, from where she graduated with honors.

While at Point Park, she was hired as a part-time education writer for the New Pittsburgh Courier, southwestern Pennsylvania's premier African-American publication, in March of 1994. Within six months, she was hired to a full-time position.

She left the paper to work with the Pittsburgh Business Times where she covered law, banking and finance, only to return to the Courier for a position as city editor/columnist, which she maintained for nearly four years until the lure of entrepreneurship drew her away from the Courier one more time. She joined a three-person team that started up the Pittsburgh International Airport Magazine, which published its first edition shortly after Sept. 11, 2001. The economic climate was not ideal for a start up magazine focusing on business travelers, and Mrs. Toler returned to the Courier in 2002 as news editor and columnist.

Having received numerous awards for her news and feature story writing, Mrs. Toler has also won several honors for her weekly opinion column, "Center City," which she started writing in 1996. Her awards include **Best Print Reporter of the Year**, given by WAMO Radio, 1995; **Community Service Award**, given by Allstate Insurance Company, 1997; **Woman of Distinction**, given by Pittsburgh City Council, 1998; **Best Single News Story**, given by the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation, 1999; **40 Under 40**, given by Pittsburgh Magazine, 2000; **Golden Quill Award, Best Column**, given by the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania, 2002; and **Best News Story, 3rd place**, given by the National Newspaper Publishers Association, 2004.

Ms. Toler spent the earlier part of her childhood living on a small farm in Cambridge Springs, Pa. with her late great grandparents, Annabell and Calvin Carlisle Sr. She currently lives outside of Harrisburg, and is the proud mother of James Franklin Haynes, who recently enlisted in the U.S. Navy.