



Dennis Powell

Pittsfield, MA

Dennis Powell trained as a chef at the Culinary Institute of America following his service in the military. His training launched a long career as a chef, restaurant owner, and caterer in New York City and here in the Berkshires until, in 2008, he “found himself retired.”

In the beginning, Powell experimented with traditional retirement activities - gardening, hosting cookouts for family and friends - but he felt the need for deeper community engagement. When the opportunity to help reactivate the local branch of the NAACP presented itself, Dennis was ready to step up. At the time the Pittsfield community was trending toward less diversity. The NAACP’s early mission was to reverse that trend and to make affirmative action the law in Pittsfield. In 2015 these efforts were successful but the work to promote diversity continues. At the present time, Dennis serves as president of the local NAACP branch and is a celebrated local activist for civil rights.

With an eye to the future, his energy and activism now focus more on the youth in our community. Powell serves as an elected member of the Pittsfield School Committee and is on the board of the Railroad Street Youth Project in Great Barrington. He is vice chairman of the Clinton Church Restoration project, which is dedicated to preserving and renovating the historic Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church in Great Barrington and interpreting the life and legacy of native son W.E.B. Du Bois. He also serves as a member of the DuBois Lecture Series Committee at Monument Valley High School in Great Barrington, and was appointed by Mayor Linda Tyer to serve on the licensing board in Pittsfield.

Finally, and importantly, his devotion to his children and grandchildren is at the heart of all his endeavors, not to change minds but to shape minds.

Photography: Lucy Kennedy

Words: Greta Phinney