

# FLAIR

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS



Ruth Jones is surrounded by her students at Henry Park Paideia Academy. Jones won the YWCA professions award.

PRESS PHOTO/PAUL L. NEWBY II

## TOO BUILT

### YWCA honors local women

The Grand Rapids Press

By the time 1,400 elbows jockey for space in the Ambassador Ballroom, it's surprising there's much room left for awe.

But each November, as the YWCA honors a few outstanding local women, the opulent room at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel buzzes with wonder and enthusiasm.

More than 700 people are expected to gather from noon to 1:30 p.m. Wednesday for the annual YWCA Tribute! Awards luncheon.

In the spotlight will be six worldly women and one impressive teen-ager, all honored for who they are and what they do. Behind the scenes, proceeds from the event go toward the YWCA's programs, including the Domestic Crisis Center, sexual assault programs, child sexual abuse treatment services, child care and fitness programs.

Cost is \$45 per person. Advance reservations are required. For reservations, call 459-4681.

The honored women are examples of leadership and fortitude, tenderness and tenacity, skill and artistry. This year's winners are Mary T. Copeland in advocacy; Margaret K. Vega in arts; Carrol Cook in business, management, industry and labor; Carol Moore in community service; Ruth Jones in professions; Susan J. Barthold in sports and fitness. Lisa Walker is the student winner.

Read more about the women, their accomplishments and philosophies here and on pages J2 and J3.



PRESS PHOTO/JON M. BROUWER

Artist Margaret Vega, shown in her studio, pushes her students and often donates her works for charities.

### Artist inspires and challenges others

By Lisa Ann Williamson  
The Grand Rapids Press

At first glance, there is nothing about Margaret Vega that screams artist.

No dried paint splatters cover her black leather shoes or khaki pants.

But there is something in her eyes, a softness. Eyes that have seen things in special ways.

And upon entering her art studio attached to her home, the cans of turpentine, tubes of paint and canvases in varying stages of completeness give her away.

Human figures seem to float. Some

are quietly pensive; others express mischievousness.

Sometimes she paints on metal and transfers the work to canvas. Other times she starts and ends on fabric.

The paintings are "just an extension of who I am," said Vega, 44, a Grand Rapids native. "Sometimes you find something where everything fits."

Painting fits Vega. It allows expressiveness, creativity and reflection.

Balancing her artwork is Vega's

see ARTIST, J2

### She shatters myths about inner-city kids

PROFESSIONS

By Terri Finch Hamilton  
The Grand Rapids Press

Ruth Jones heals children's souls. She moves mountains. She feels what she does so deeply, it moves her to tears — along with anyone else in the room with her.

Six years ago, Grand Rapids Public Schools teacher Jones was approached by a school administrator and asked if she'd consider taking over the helm of the worst elementary school in the city.

Henry Park Elementary was scraping the bottom in student achievement, attendance, parent involvement, teacher turnover, staff morale. It sat in one of Grand Rapids' worst neighborhoods, neglected and scarred by vandalism. Many of its fifth-graders couldn't read.

Jones, a former welfare mother raising two children alone, had never been an administrator. Nor did she care to be.

"I was a teacher who loved being a teacher," she says. But her reputation for excellence was known area-wide. Even her son told her he couldn't imagine anyone else meeting the challenge.

The first year was unbearable. Her task was so overwhelming she cried.

Look at Henry Park Paideia Academy now. The staff is young and invigorated. Parents are involved — Henry is the only Grand Rapids Public School that can boast 100 percent

see JONES, J2

## YWCA TRIBUTE AWARDS

*Knowing what it is to be down, Cook works to lift others*

## BUSINESS

By Pat Shellenbarger  
The Grand Rapids Press

When she was a senior at Comstock Park High School, Carrol Cook's class voted her "least likely to succeed."

She can smile about it now, having built a successful printing business and a reputation as a leader in many charitable causes.

"I know what it's like to be absolutely broke, to not know where your next meal is coming from," said Cook, 54, walking through her shop at 3409 Plainfield Ave. NE.

That's why she pays her dozen employees well, provides health insurance, a 401K plan and even has a masseuse come in once a week.

"Everybody works hard," she said, "and they should get what I get. I have to make good decisions, because I'm responsible for everybody else's paycheck."

As a child, Cook lived with her grandparents in Comstock Park, since her mother was unable to raise her. "It was either my grandparents or the orphanage," she said.

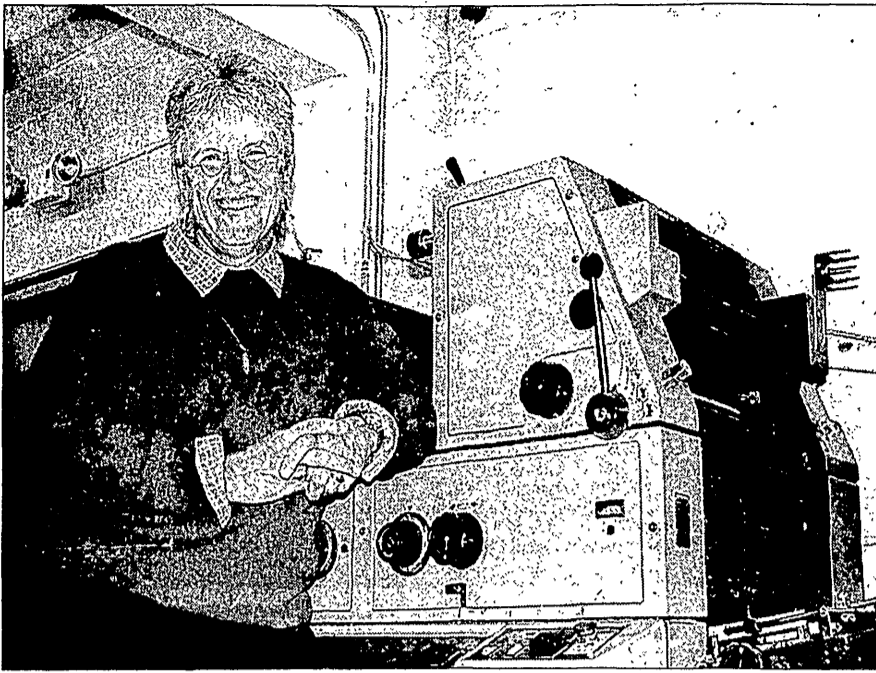
College? "That wasn't even something that was ever brought up," she said, so she picked apples in Wisconsin and once was so broke she traded her watch for \$2 worth of gasoline.

"I was bumming around and was out in Abilene, Texas," she said, where she got a job in a print shop.

"They asked if I wanted to learn to print. I remember thinking it could be a career for me."

She came back to Grand Rapids in 1972 and worked for a couple of printing businesses.

She loved printing, but after a while "I was really bored. I was just running a printing press and



Carrol Cook, co-owner of Presto-Print, who received the YWCA's business award, has been a leader for many charitable causes.

making an hourly wage. I needed to do something more."

With a \$4,000 loan from her mother, she opened a print shop in the Creston neighborhood. "I was either going to make it or go bankrupt," she said.

That first year, the shop had total sales of \$48,000. Sixteen or so years ago, Presto Print moved into larger quarters farther out Plainfield and last year had total sales of \$1.1 million, printing newsletters, pamphlets, envelopes, stationery, business cards and other materials.

"That's a lot of paper in and out

of here," said Cook, who became the first journeywoman printer in West Michigan.

"I can take a job in at that counter. I can shoot a plate. I can take it back to that press, and I can bring it back to that counter, and somebody's going to give me money, and I can do that all in one day."

The business has changed a great deal over the years from a largely mechanical to a highly computerized operation. Pam Olsen, who joined Presto Print as a partner six months after it started, credits Cook's foresight

with the business's success.

"Carol has insisted that we keep up," she said. "She's always thought 10 years down the road."

But Cook said Olsen brings a different kind of business savvy. "We make a very good balance," she said. "I'd give the shop away. Pam makes me accountable for what I do."

Winning the Tribute business award is "like winning the Academy Award," Cook said. "I don't know how I could win anything that would mean as much, to have started where I did and be where I am now."

*Teacher-coach has helped girls' sports come a long way*

## SPORTS AND FITNESS

By Pat Shellenbarger  
The Grand Rapids Press

When Susan Barthold began teaching at East Kentwood High School 31 years ago, there were no sports for girls. She was asked to coach cheerleading.

"Shoot, I'm as far away from cheerleading as you can get," said Barthold, who was captain of the women's swim team at Michigan State University. "I said, 'OK, I'll do it.' It was the only thing there was for girls."

She called upon her gymnastics background in coaching the cheerleaders, and, gradually, opportunities began opening up for the young women athletes.

Federal legislation — commonly known as Title IX — required that women be offered the same opportunities in school sports as the boys. In 1975, the school's athletic director asked Barthold to coach the girls' junior varsity basketball team, pleading, she recalled, "If you don't coach, we don't have a team."

So she took on that job, then coached the varsity girls' basketball team for 11 years, winning 75 percent of the games. In the spring of 1976, she began coaching girls' softball, which is her only current coaching assignment. She also officiates at swim meets, is senior class adviser, student council adviser and teaches history and sociology.

Women athletes have come a long way since the day she started teaching, Barthold said, though they still don't enjoy the same level of public support as their male counterparts.

"Oh, we've come a long ways," said Barthold, 52. "I do think girls have gotten a lot more coverage, a lot more respect around the building. Girls used to dress up on game days so they didn't have that jock image. They



Susan Barthold has worked more than three decades as teacher and coach at East Kentwood High School.

don't have to do that now, because they are respected as athletes. The girls are known for being feminine and for being good athletes. They can be both."

Barthold became only the second woman president of the Michigan High School Coaches Association and in September was inducted into the Michigan High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

“Girls (play sports) for a different reason (than boys). They do it for the fun of it and the camaraderie. The team they're playing against isn't their enemy. It's their opponent.”

SUSAN BARTHOLD

"I call it 'the good old boys club,' she said. "There's 430 members. I'm only the 12th woman. We've got to make sure women stay in coaching, give them the respect that they deserve. We've got to encourage the kids that are now in athletics to stay involved, to get into coaching."

For her long-standing support of women's athletics, Barthold will receive the Tribute sports and fitness award.

"It's really been kind of a whirlwind," she said. "Coaches don't always get the glory. It's the kids who win, but, whoops, it's the coach who loses."

While boys are more driven to win, "Girls do it for a different reason," Barthold said. "They do it for the fun of it and the camaraderie. The team they're playing against isn't their enemy. It's their opponent."

Still, even in girl's sports she's noticed more pressure from parents, coaches and even the athletes to win, more drive to practice, and to attend summer camps.

"When are we going to allow the kids to be kids?" she asked. "When it isn't fun, then I get out. I've seen teams that can't have fun in winning, because they're so afraid of losing. Winning's not No. 1. Fun is."

*Confident, young leader shows others how to do the right things*

## STUDENT

By Lisa Ann Williamson  
The Grand Rapids Press

As a rule, Lisa Walker is not afraid to stand up for what's right or stand up for the underdog.

Even in junior high and elementary school, she'd be the one telling people to nix the comments about kids who were not in the "A" group.

Now she talks to her girlfriends and other teens about making their own sound decisions and not letting a boyfriend or a peer group dictate their lives.

Lisa will tell you, she speaks from experience.

"I know what it's like to be picked on, it happened to me a few times," says Lisa, 17, and a Wyoming resident.

And she knows how it feels to date someone who squelched her decisions, abused her and berated her as a person.

It was a very difficult yearlong experience, but one she's overcome. And in the overcoming, she emerged confident and focused.

"I think I lost a lot that year," she recalls of being 15 and dating the wrong 18-year-old. "I lost dignity, self-respect and self-esteem. I felt stuck. I didn't know how to escape him."

She would blast friends and family who said she shouldn't be with him.

After several attempts at calling it quits, "I left and didn't go back," she recalls.

That decision freed her to focus on the things she wanted to do, like helping other people, improving her grades and pursuing her dream career as a firefighter and paramedic.

Since she was a young girl, Lisa would join her mother on walks to raise money for multiple sclerosis and cancer research.

As a high school student, she added Meals on Wheels to her growing list of volunteer activities. On a Saturday, Lisa took time out



Lisa Walker was nominated by her high school counselor for her courage in escaping an unhealthy relationship.

from hanging out with friends and circulated petitions to help keep the Grand Rapids Area Transit Authority buses running in Wyoming.

Her high school counselor, Teriena Schwartz, nominated Lisa because of her strength and courage in leaving the unhealthy relationship, significantly improving her grades and being an inspiration to her teachers and fellow students.

When she was notified at school of her award, she was stunned.

"I don't think it's so much winning the award, it's doing good stuff for people," Lisa said. "But it's nice to be recognized."

She smiles easily and is confident. She works part-time at Valvoline greeting customers and answering questions. She hopes to learn to change oil.

Her friends describe her as very responsible and a leader.

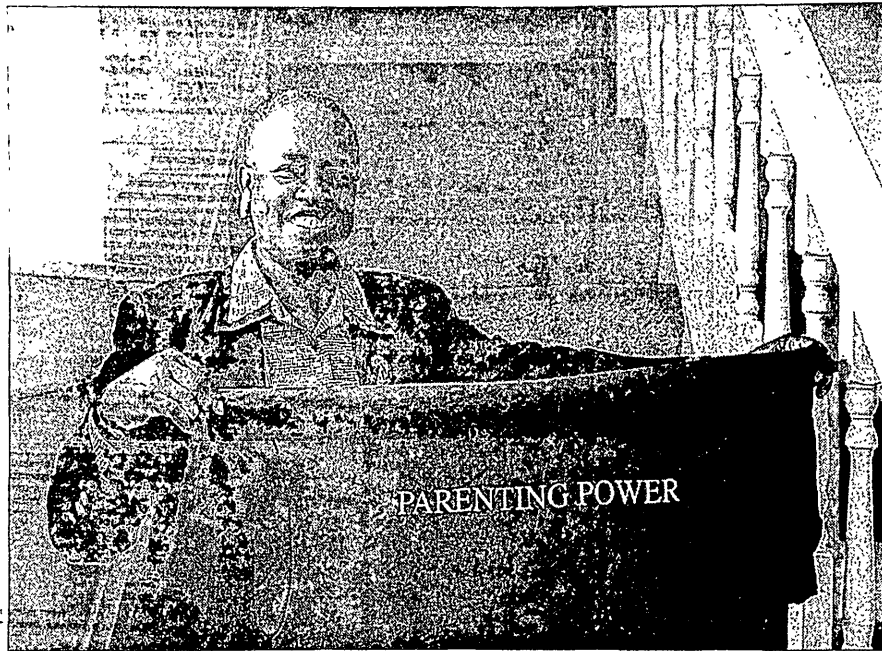
She is part of the judicial board at Horizons Community High School where she will graduate later this month, ahead of schedule. That board helps decide what action to take when students break rules.

"I don't tolerate violence," Lisa said sternly. She's outgoing and enjoys dirt-bike riding, driving around with friends and spending time with her new boyfriend, who she says is a very kind person.

Next semester, Lisa will attend classes at Grand Rapids Community College and begin her training to become a firefighter.

There are no women on the force in Wyoming she was told on a recent visit. "Count on me being there," she said.

# YWCA TRIBUTE AWARDS



Mary Copeland poses with her "Parenting Power" T-shirt. Copeland won the YWCA advocacy award.

PRESS PHOTO/DIANNE CARROLL BURDICK

## Advocate says tangible changes begin with parents

By Terri Finch Hamilton  
The Grand Rapids Press

When Mary Copeland feels really strongly about something, she often says it twice.

"What a child brings to school is as important as what they get there," she says. And she isn't talking about what they bring for lunch.

"My mom had just a fifth-grade education, but she moved us to a house a block away from the school then told us 'Now you have no excuse,'" Copeland says. "The value was there. What a child brings to school is as important as what they get there."

Copeland, 51, has been a social worker for Grand Rapids Public Schools since 1987, and an outspoken and tireless advocate for children for more than 25 years.

She is the founder of the Black Educational Excellence Program, which supports African-American students in maintaining a B average, and rewarding them with scholarships.

She started Creating Equity — Changing the Odds, a program to prepare students of color for the SAT and ACT.

When she was a social worker at Ottawa Hills High School, she met several teens who were homeless. They earned good grades, weren't in trouble with the law.

## JONES She makes them believe in a bright future

CONTINUED FROM J1

parent attendance at conferences. Test scores leaped from zero percent to as high as 80 percent.

"I love breaking every myth people have about inner-city kids," Jones says with a smile.

She calls each student "precious" and greets each one at the door every morning with a hug. She holds little girls' faces in her hands and tells them they're beautiful.

Each day during lunch, as soft music plays, Jones visits with "her babies," as she calls them, and tells them about their bright futures.

**ADVOCACY**

**“You can buy your child every toy in the world, but computers and Play Stations do not a human being make. We have to get back to the business of parenting.”**

MARY COPELAND

But their drug and alcohol-addicted parents made home life unbearable.

So Copeland and friend Bessie Ward founded Shelter of Safety, a shelter for teen-age girls who aren't safe at home and have nowhere else to go.

But people in Grand Rapids don't think the community has such problems, Copeland says. Outsiders are misinformed, too. Copeland tells of a meeting she had with Michigan Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfield to tell her of the problems she's seen as a school social worker.

"She said, 'We thought everything was all right in Kent

County,'" Copeland recalls, shaking her head.

Every foundation in town knows Copeland. She's always raising money for projects that help kids. She's also an on-call medical social worker for Metropolitan Hospital.

Is she ever home? "Just to sleep," Copeland laughs.

In the last several years, Copeland's attention has focused on parents. In 1993, she began the Parents Empowering Network, a groundbreaking program that offers parent support at the workplace. Parents share their tips and frustrations with each other during their lunch hour.

"You can't hope to make tangible changes unless you start with the parents," she says. "We have the mistaken impression that education begins with school. It begins with day one.

"You can buy your child every toy in the world, but computers and Play Stations do not a human being make," Copeland says. "We have to get back to the business of parenting."

When she says "we," you should know she means you.

"I'm just one," Copeland says, "and I don't want to be just one. Imagine what it would be like if all those people at the Tribute Awards weren't applauding for me, but we were all applauding each other because we're all doing a good job for children."

professionals. We know better."

She recalls a long day that ended at nearly 8 p.m. As she trudged to her car, she heard a boy's voice call out, "Hey, Ms. Jones!" She could tell it was Troy, a small silhouette atop the jungle gym. She knew his voice.

"I love you," Troy called to her. Jones' face crumpled as she tells it, her eyes spilling over with tears.

"That's what it's all about," she says, dabbing her eyes. "They're just so precious. This is what God wants me to do. I can feel Him, pinching my cheeks, telling me 'I'm precious, too, because I'm taking care of His children.'"

## She renovates homes, revitalizes relationships

COMMUNITY SERVICE

By Pat Shellenbarger  
The Grand Rapids Press

From the outside, the old house on Wealthy Street looks pretty good, largely because Carol Moore has spent countless hours replacing rotten siding, painting it yellow and trimming it in white. Inside, it's a mess of broken windows, cracked plaster and worn carpet.

Decades ago, it was a home with a produce business on the front, but then the large, plate glass windows were boarded over, and for eight years it stood empty.

"I'll finish the outside by winter," Moore said. "I'll work on the inside this winter and have it ready by spring."

The plywood will come off the front windows, and someday Moore hopes to rent the place to a business, part of her effort to revitalize the inner-city neighborhood she calls home.

"That's what happened to the street: They boarded up the fronts because they were fearful, and with good reason," said Moore, who has restored seven other houses and businesses in the area. "But it's time to take the boards off again and establish relationships."

"Look at that," she said, motioning to the traffic speeding past on Wealthy. "Thirteen thousand cars a day go by here. I see dollar bills. What I've found is as soon as you open them up, somebody wants to move into them."

Moore, 52, came to Grand Rapids 28 years ago, taught in the public schools, earned a doctorate from the University of Michigan and became dean of instruction at Davenport College. She bought a house in her southeast Grand Rapids neighborhood 21 years ago. Laid off from Davenport 15 years ago, she now lists her occupation as "community redeveloper."

"There's so much beauty and character in these old places," she said, "and they're so forgiving. They've been here 100 years, and they could be here another 100 years."

For her efforts to save the neighborhood around Wealthy Street and Diamond Avenue, Moore will receive this year's Tribute community service award.

She's perhaps best known for leading the effort to restore the Wealthy Theatre, once condemned to the wrecking ball. When she first walked into the old theater some years ago — broke into it, she now admits — the lobby floor had fallen into the basement, the projection booth was in danger of collapse, and she could hear water trickling down the walls.

Were it not for the efforts of herself and others, the theater "would be an empty lot with a lot of junk in it," Moore said, standing in the restored auditorium. "We never imagined we could actually pull this off. This is an act of love by a lot of people. It says, 'There's a future here.' When you've written off a neighborhood as long as this one's been written off, this is a shining gem."

Her goal is convincing the city commission to



Carol Moore has worked to spruce up her inner-city neighborhood.

PRESS PHOTO/ANNA MOORE BUTZNER

**“This is my little 'hood here. One-by-one these houses are coming back. I really believe in doing visible public projects, because I think it's contagious.”**

CAROL MOORE

designate her Fairmount Square neighborhood a historic district, an effort that would grant tax breaks to property owners but is opposed by some, who contend it would violate their private property rights.

"This is what private property rights have done," Moore said, indicating the burned-out house next to the one she's now restoring. But she's optimistic.

"This is my little 'hood here," she said. "One-by-one these houses are coming back. I really believe in doing visible public projects, because I think it's contagious."

## ARTIST Vega uses her art as inspiration for others

CONTINUED FROM J1

conviction as a professor of art at Kendall College of Art and Design, where she's worked for the past 14 years. She admits to constantly pushing and challenging her students.

Vega preaches the importance of travel as artistic inspiration, raising scholarships for students to study in Italy each year since 1996 and sponsoring trips to archeological sites in Mexico. Many of the colors she uses in paintings are inspired by rituals of other cultures.

**Forming friendships**

She's formed friendships that have led to professor exchanges between Perugia, Italy, and an exhibit of the Massari Print Exhibit, in its American premiere at Kendall.

And in addition to shows of her paintings locally and in competitions, Vega has donated her work to raise funds for arts groups or for cancer and AIDS research.

It's all just part of fulfilling her life's work and her parent's wish: To make a difference.

Vega would be the one to choose whether that difference would come through the stories and plays she wrote, ballet she studied for a decade or the drawings that intrigued her since she was a child.

She chose painting as "the vehicle I best fit in," said Vega, who started her college career at Michigan State University studying architecture and then switching to fine art. "Painting is my way to provoke provocative thought. I'd like to think that in some small way, things are different than they were before, because of my work."

Her studio is bright, with light streaming in from the wall of windows facing the Thornapple River.

During an interview, she pauses mid-sentence to appreciate a swan flying over the water.

Part of making a difference for Vega is working with children.

She worked as an art consultant for Grand Rapids Public Schools and recently won a state art grant to work with a group of children in the Heartside area. They will produce a show at the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts next fall.

**A child's reality**

"When you stay close to children, you have your hands awfully close to what's real," she said. "That keeps my life in check."

A supportive family, including her husband, is crucial to her progression as an artist.

Her parents have never missed a show of her work.

Vega tends to work in themes. For example, recent paintings focus on adolescence. Her 14-year-old son is often the muse.

"I take a look at the struggle of adolescence, that place where we have one foot in what we know and one foot searching," she said. "I use that image of adolescence to express a range of experiences none of us ever really outgrows."



## PAYING TRIBUTE

Five of the seven winners of the YWCA's annual Tribute awards luncheon gather on stage at the conclusion of Wednesday's ceremony at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel. The winners and categories for which they were honored included, from left: Carrol Cook, business; Carol Moore, community service; Mary Copeland, advocacy; Lisa Walker, student winner; and Margaret Vega, arts. Also honored were Ruth Jones, education, and Susan Barthold, sports and fitness. About 700 people attended the ceremony.

PRESS PHOTO/LANCE WYNN