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## YWCA honors 3 women with Tribute Awards for leadership

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI -- The YWCA West Central Michigan is honoring three women for their work in the community through its annual Tribute Awards.

A business owner, community advocate and a college student are the 2020 award winners.

Since 1977, the YWCA has honored more than 250 women through its annual awards.

The YWCA is designed to help with leadership programs for girls, prevention classes, and has comprehensive services to address domestic and dating abuse, sexual assault, child abuse and stalking against all people in the Grand Rapids area.

The luncheon will be from 11 a.m. to noon Wednesday, Nov. 11 with a 10:45 a.m. pre-show. Registration is available at [ywcawcmi.org](http://ywcawcmi.org).

Mlive/The Grand Rapids Press reached out to the winners to ask their inspirations, hobbies, and how they felt about being selected for the Tribute Awards. Here is what each of them had to say:



### TRIBUTE AWARD

Shannon Cohen. Owner. Shannon Cohen, Inc.  
Age:42

**Nominator said:** Shannon Cohen is a mogul. She worked her way from non-profit leader, consultant to become a brand and business. One of key sayings is that she works to help leaders find the intersection of joy and purpose. She is the definition of empowerment, hard work and love. I have known Shannon since our days at Grand Valley State

University. Shannon is full of positivity and is open and honest when discussing the challenges of being a Woman of Color. In the two years Shannon launched a book, "Tough Skin, Soft Heart." A reminder for women, especially of color that we are enough, that we can take breaks and that we will not be defined in one way. She also ran a successful event. the Sisters Who Lead conference. This conference occurred over three years and each year became more successful. In this event she not only highlighted her work but also brought in other women to share their experiences with the attendees. There is a bond that was created by all the women of color that attended. My biggest regret is never attending, I was in school at the time, and women on my team attended and still talk about how impactful the event was.

Last year Shannon launched a podcast at her RockStar Women brunch. In one day she hosted an event and also launched another way for women to connect with and get motivated for the week. This brunch

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was an opportunity for women to join their friends, celebrate all the good and challenges in their lives. I was in the middle of a difficult campaign and her event was instrumental in helping me in the final month of campaigning.

Shannon is also known for her inspirational card, posters and stickers. She has built this business by understanding the gift and card market. She has been to national events to show her work. Through all of this she has continued to help other women entrepreneurs. She often connects with other business leaders and they produce events, product boxes and learning sessions together.

Shannon is the living example of the YWCA mission. She is empowering, ever evolving and always has a focus on serving and providing space for Women of Color. I ask that she be considered for the prestigious Tribute award.

**She said:** I firmly believe strength is for service ... not status. The YWCA Tribute Award is a salute to difference makers who have committed to using their lives to lead, love, and serve in transformational ways. To be included in the beautiful mosaic of voices that have been honored with this award is a gift. To be viewed as a difference maker of this caliber by my community is an honor.

**Favorite quote:** "If you've come here to help me you are wasting your time. but if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine ... let us begin." -Lilly Walker

**Guilty pleasure:** Going for long walks in my Third Ward neighborhood and taking photos of everyday things that inspire me



#### **RISING TRIBUTE AWARD**

LaDonna Norman. Organizer, Together We Are Safe  
Age:42

**Nominator said:** It is my pleasure to recommend LaDonna Norman for the 2020 Rising Tribute Award for her work as a community advocate, relationship builder, and resource connector among the Black community. I believe her work on housing justice and policing has made a real impact in our Greater Grand Rapids community in eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting justice.

Upon meeting LaDonna, people are quickly charmed by her high energy, her "tell-it-like-it-is" attitude, and her genuine friendliness and good humor. {"How are you, LaDonna?" "Blacktastic, and how about you?") And that's important, because LaDonna Norman meets a lot of people! She is a dynamo in the community, curious and willing to meet just about anybody in order to build connections and advocate for justice. Her work is fluid and organic. With her generous attitude she has helped build supportive linked networks among (a) families facing crises like homelessness, addiction, or domestic violence, (b) Black-owned and other businesses that will support, and (c) non-profits such as The Red Project that

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prioritize marginalized and criminalized communities such as people who use drugs and those living with HIV.

LaDonna is not employed by any non-profit or service agency. She is a low-income Black and Potawatomi woman who has her own cleaning business and takes care of her children, grandchildren, and grandfather. She lives with a chronic illness as well and must get outpatient treatment regularly. She is sometimes housing insecure or targeted by police herself. Yet on her own time, and often with her own money, La Donna reaches out within her community to: share non-profit resources, do direct giving of cash, groceries, diapers, and other needs; and to advocate for issues related to housing, policing, and racism.

**She said:** This award means a lot to me because someone thought enough of me to nominate me. I don't think I do much but whatever I do takes a community effort and that is how communities should work as a unit. I hope Black and brown girls/Women know that their community involvement doesn't go unrecognized and when they're not looking somebody else is.

**Favorite quote:** "Be the change that's needed" and "it takes a village" and I'm a part of that village.

**Guilty pleasure:** I really don't have any guilty pleasures. I volunteer a lot of my time in my community.



#### **STUDENT TRIBUTE AND JUDY LLOYD SCHOLARSHIP**

Olivia Grover, 2020 Graduate, City High Middle School

Age: 18

**She said:** Receiving this award means a lot to me. It's helping me pay for college which is so incredible. Going to college and pursuing journalism is really important to me because I want to be able to help people and spread the truth. I'm so grateful to the YWCA and honored to receive this scholarship because it's helping me achieve this dream.

**Favorite quote:** "I have chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femininity. And I want to be respected in all my femaleness. Because I deserve to be." - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

**Guilty pleasure:** I love to curl up with tea or hot chocolate and watch either the Great British Baking Show or if I have the time, Pride and Prejudice.