

Pay Tribute to Our Town's outstanding, leading women

Nominations are being sought now by the YWCA for its annual Tribute awards, salutes to six women in Our Town who have demonstrated leadership, influence and visibility in the community in tackling problems and coming up with solutions.

One each will be named in the following categories: arts; advocacy; business, management and industry; community service; the professions; and the outstanding high school female student.

Anyone in the community may make a nomination. Forms are available at the YWCA Center for Women, 25 Sheldon Blvd. SE. Deadline to return entries is Sept. 14. Call the YW if more information is needed, 459-4681.

Tribute winners are picked by a special committee and the honorees will be presented their awards Nov. 15 at a banquet at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel.

Last year's winners were Betsy Dole; Jane M. Ross; Margaret Sellers; Julie Christianson Stivers; Sister Agnes Thiel, O.P. and student Valerie Trasky.

Nominees also are being sought for the prestigious Jefferson Award for an outstanding volunteer in public or community service and for the equally important Youth Service Award which honors a top volunteer from among the younger set. Deadline for submitting names is Sept. 15.

Nominating forms are available through the West Michigan Shores Council of the Boy Scouts of America and Michigan Trails Girl Scout Council, sponsors of the awards. Forms also may be picked up at the studios of WOOD/Channel 8, 120 College Ave. SE.

The award winners here will represent West Michigan next summer at ceremonies at Washington, D.C.

Several service organizations are seeking volunteers.

Area branches of the Kent District Library System are looking for girls and boys, ages 11 and older, to be youth advisers for the Bright Ideas Program this fall. Specifically, they would help plan library activities including next summer's reading fair.

There will be a minimum of three meetings — this fall, in winter and early spring, according to Gail Haebich, assistant manager at the East Grand Rapids branch. For full details, contact



PETE DEMAAGD

the Youth Services Department, 336-3253.

Adult volunteers are needed to serve as mentors and role models by Homeless Youth Services, the agency that deals with more than 400 homeless young people a year in Kent County. Orientation programs for these caring adults will be held Sept. 7, 13, 21 and 26 at 7 p.m. at HYS headquarters, 1695 Service Road NE. For more information, call 456-7775.

Metropolitan Hospital has openings for male and female volunteers to serve in a variety of capacities — greet and direct patients, deliver mail and supplies, clean wheelchairs, prepare treatment areas and perform general office tasks. Volunteers typically donate one morning or one afternoon a week. Get more information by calling Barb Wingard-Terpstra daytime, 247-7009.

John Ball Zoo has openings for adult volunteers who would work at the zoo on special events, greeting visitors and assisting with scheduling. Training classes begin Sept. 24. Call Karen King, 336-4310, to register for the class.

More singers are wanted by the Schubert Male Chorus, the oldest continuously performing male chorus in the country, according to William E. Decker. Rehearsals begin Sept. 12, 7:30 p.m., at St. Cecilia Music Society, 24 Ransom Ave. NE. The chorus has a new director, Paul Caldwell. To learn more about the chorus call St. Cecilia, 459-2224.

American Intercultural Student Exchange is seeking host families in Our Town for international students from Europe, Asia, South America and Australia. The students, ages 15 through 18, would attend local high schools and would return home next June. All are fluent in English, have their own spending money and medical insurance. They arrive the end of the month. To find out more, call 1-800-SIBLING or Michigan's coordinator, Eileen Palmer, (517) 875-4074.

FLAIR

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS



Community eagerly honors its women who lead the way

By Terri Finch Hamilton
The Grand Rapids Press

Who knew a chicken and rice pilaf lunch could be so popular?

As the YWCA expects another sell-out crowd at its annual Tribute Awards luncheon

Tuesday, it's clear the event showcasing our community's outstanding women has become one of the hottest tickets in town.

The community turns out in droves each year to see six inspirational women receive the prestigious Tribute Awards, given annually by the YWCA of Grand Rapids in the fields of Advocacy, Arts, Business, Community Service and Professions. A student is honored, too, both to recognize her achievements and inspire her to continue to excel.

Nearly 800 are expected to attend the

awards luncheon Tuesday at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, which features The Rev. Margaret Neill of St. Philip's Episcopal Church as keynote speaker.

You can read about the inspiring winners — Mary Alice Williams, Betty Jarman, Virginia Morales, Jean Reed Bahle, Vernis Schad and La Toya Johnson on page J2.

"We've done everything possible to pack as many people in who want to attend," said YWCA executive director Susan Shannon. "We squeeze 11 people in at a table, and so far we haven't had to turn anyone away. If we start having to turn down a great number, we'll have to look at this."

But there really isn't another location that would seat more than last year's 770 people "and still achieve the same ambience," Shannon said. "If we build it,

see **TRIBUTE, J2**



Jean Reed Bahle
Arts Award



Betty Jarman
Business Award



La Toya Johnson
Student Award



Virginia Morales
Professions



Vernis Schad
Community Service



Mary Alice Williams
Advocacy Award

Clinic manager goes beyond simple health care

PROFESSIONS AWARD

Stories by Terri Finch Hamilton

The Grand Rapids Press

When Virginia Morales worked in the Saint Mary's Hospital kitchen in high school, she loved to watch the student nurses in their crisp white uniforms. She dreamed about someday wearing one of those pointy white hats.

As the manager of Clinica Santa Maria, a Saint Mary's Health Services clinic on Hall Street in Grandville, Morales has worn many hats — nurse, counselor, teacher, translator, social worker, trusted friend.

The winner of the Professions Award has made a career of helping the less fortunate, particularly those in the Hispanic community. Members of the latter often forego prenatal care, immunizations for their children and other crucial health care not only because they can't afford it, but because they feel alienated from the health care system, she says.

"No money, no transportation, a language barrier — the obstacles to health care are

enormous," says Morales, 51, who worked in hospitals, in public health and with Ottawa County's Hispanic migrant population before starting as director of Clinica Santa Maria when it opened five years ago.



Virginia Morales

on the table or tires for their car," says the daughter of migrant workers who settled in Grand Rapids. Last winter she realized many

The bright spot is the statistics — when the clinic opened, Morales saw 200 patients a month. Now the staff of six full-time nurses and medical assistants and 24 visiting volunteer physicians serve 1,000 people a month.

At the helm is Morales, a woman with a warm smile and a willingness to meet needs that go beyond sutures and syringes.

"Sometimes what our patients really need is food

Clinica patients had no coats, so Morales recruited Meijer, Inc. to donate 150 new ones.

When gang members were hanging around the clinic, she approached a leader and explained that the young men were scaring mothers, who were too afraid to bring in their sick children. He got the gangs to move away.

One of her favorite roles is of advocate, explaining to Hispanic patients exactly what their health problems are and what kind of treatment they can expect. She shakes her head as she tells stories of patients who had surgery, but had no idea what the surgery was for.

Morales' work has been nationally recognized. She is the 1994 recipient of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses community service award.

"I feel needed in this work," says Morales, who's been married to childhood sweetheart Robert for 30 years and has three grown children. "When I see what people don't have, the kind of suffering they go through, I feel so lucky to be able to use the skills God gave me to help."

In theater, questions touch soul

The Grand Rapids Press

Dessert was William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, and Jean Reed Bahle smiles as she remembers her mother's traditional after-dinner readings around the kitchen table.

"Mom had a flair for the dramatic," Bahle says. "I think that's what planted the seed."

Today when actress, director and playwright Bahle writes a play for children, she knows very well what effect good drama can have on a young mind.

"It's what I feel passionate about," Bahle says of her work. "There's a wonderful immediacy about theater that can really reach people."

The assistant managing director of Actors' Theatre and winner of the Arts Award has a long, impressive resume of acting, writing and directing that includes national recognition for her work in *Top Girls*, a 1993 Actors' Theatre production she directed in 1993. But she chooses not to head off to New York or Chicago, but to try to make a difference here. She lives in the Heritage Hill area with her husband of 21 years, David.

Through a partnership with Actors' Theatre and Grand Rapids

ARTS AWARD

Community College she brings environmental plays to Grand Rapids elementary school children. Bahle's play "The Monster That Ate Itself" uses a character named Kid Wantmore



Jean Reed Bahle

to teach youngsters about the dangers of consumerism.

She wrote "Invisible Journey," a play about four pioneering Grand Rapids women, for Women's History Month last March. It featured one of her

heroines, Emma Cole, a botanist who catalogued flora in the Grand River Basin.

"This woman did amazing things, and she's unsung," Bahle says. "There are so many women out there like that — from the past and still today — quietly doing amazing things that have big implications without making a big splash."

Bahle's contributions aren't so quiet. They typically result in applause.

"Great theater raises questions: Who are We? Why are We Here? What Are We Doing?" Bahle says. "It may not answer them, but it should cause us to think about them."

Student beats the odds by keeping clear goals

The Grand Rapids Press

La Toya Johnson says she knows what many people expect of black teen-agers, and she's determined to prove them wrong.

"It's hard being a teen-ager today, and it's even harder to be a black, female teen-ager — everybody expects us to be bad," says Johnson, 16, an Ottawa Hills High School junior who will receive the Student Award.

"Kids are having kids. There's pressure to be thin so there's lots of bulimia. There's pressure with drugs and alcohol," she says. "I'm just trying to keep my head up and keep focused on my goals."

Her main goal is to go to college, and Johnson works diligently to maintain a 3.5 grade point average. The member of the National Honor Society, pompon squad and girls volleyball team talks brightly of her future as a medical student. She already has overcome many obstacles to get where she is today.

Taken from her biological mother when she was 11 because of neglect and abuse, Johnson has lived with several foster families, says her Bethany Christian Services caseworker Ellen Ashford, who nominated her for the Tribute award.

"I've had my ups and downs," Johnson says. "But I've been

STUDENT AWARD

doing good, staying strong."

She speaks highly of the foster parents she's had, and says she stays in touch with all of them. They've taught her respect and manners, she says, but adds that

the most important decisions young people make are ultimately up to them.

"It's important to me to keep my head clear of alcohol and drugs," she says. "There's a lot of peer pressure out there, but I have a mind of



La Toya Johnson

my own. Everybody has to decide for themselves what to do, and my choice is to abstain."

Despite her rough background, Johnson says she doesn't want people to feel sorry for her.

"When people find out I'm in foster care they assume I have all these emotional problems and special needs," she says. "I just need patience, love and understanding, like any other normal teen-ager."

Hard work, intuition are a winning combination

BUSINESS AWARD

The Grand Rapids Press

When Betty Jarman was 16, working as a clerk in the electrical department of a Detroit Kresge store, she remembers leaving a flashlight on all night and checking it the next morning to see if the battery company's claim of long life was really true.

"The flashlight was dead the next morning," Jarman recalls.

Even then Jarman knew it wasn't very good business sense to sell batteries with a misleading claim. Her intuition has served her well, as Jarman was in on the very beginning of the Ramblewood Apartment Community, which was well ahead of its time when it opened in Wyoming in 1969.

When the same group of developers built the first condominiums in Grand Rapids in 1971, "We had to explain to people what the condo concept was," says Jarman, 64, winner of the Business Award.

"It's a joy to watch something grow from nothing," says Jarman, who manages several apartment and office buildings in Grand Rapids. "I was there when they dug the first

shovel of dirt at Ramblewood. Now it's like a small city."

Jarman had been a full-time homemaker for 13 years when a family friend invited her to work on the Ramblewood project, which she later invested in. She says she learned by doing — laying out ads, devising marketing plans, even working on the interior design of what is now the sprawling 1,702-unit complex.

"I was in the right place at the right time," she says.

"But what you do once you're in is another thing — that's when it's up to you."



Betty Jarman

She worked long hours, and brought work home. Jarman remembers lugging home the heavy adding machine and all the files, and working at the desk in the family room while her husband, Robert, and four children watched TV. She'd occasionally sneak a handful of their popcorn.

"Women in those days weren't working very much," she says. "There was a guilt thing, wondering if I should be home with the kids all the time. But they all went to college, they're all very happy and successful. I feel I was there for them. It was my housework that probably suffered."

Jarman never went to college. Her parents believed it was a waste of money to send girls who would just get end up getting married.

"I always regretted not being able to go, but I always knew I'd do something," Jarman says. "I had a gut feeling Ramblewood was a good idea, that it would work out. People today want more security before they'll launch something big. Sometimes you have to trust your gut instincts."

All dialogue ought to be a chorus

The Grand Rapids Press

She knows when to say "Wait a minute," and it's made a difference.

Mary Alice Williams has spoken out for women, children, troubled teens, the mentally ill, residents of the city's neighborhoods.

"The one thing that allows things to get done is that everyone can add their voice to the fray," says Williams, 51. "But when power is in the hands of a few, it's easy for those voices to get lost. Somebody has to say 'wait a minute - who's being left out of the conversation?'"

Plenty of people are getting left out, believes Williams, executive director of the Advisory Center for Teens and winner of the Advocacy Award. Among them - women and children, two of her causes.

"We live in a society that pretends to be child-centered, but the majority of children who are killed are killed by their parents," says Williams, the mother of two grown daughters with husband Michael. "As a country we're in a state of mass denial, choosing to close our eyes to the idea that child abuse happens in families we know. We have to open our eyes... and do something about it."

As the director of an agency that provides counseling, shelter and care for young people, Williams speaks passionately about the

ADVOCACY

need for parents to be there for their teen-agers.

"Parents want to give up on their teen-agers much too soon," says Williams, a former Grand Rapids City Commissioner. "They're still children - they rely on us."

Her work on women's issues is renowned. The former director of



Mary Alice Williams

the Aquinas College Women's Center is a founding member of the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council and Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women. She's also a past board member of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan and was instrumental in forming Stepping Stones Montessori School.

The granddaughter of proud and determined Irish immigrants who embraced the political system, Williams says she graduated from high school in 1960 "believing the world was my oyster, and there was nothing I couldn't do. I not only believed I could make a difference, I felt I had an obligation to make a difference."

The woman who says she "wouldn't be able to get out of bed in the morning if I wasn't hopeful," says making a difference "isn't in big dramatic moments. It's the everyday grind of deciding which side you're on."

When it rained it poured into a lifetime of service

The Grand Rapids Press

It all started at a rainy football game at Houseman Field.

Vernis Schad was cheering on one of her sons when she realized her husband, George, was invited to watch the game from the press box, "but I could jolly well sit out in the rain."

"Women weren't allowed in the press box," says Schad, 69.

"That's when I started thinking,



Vernis Schad

'Hey - there's a lot of stuff that's wrong.'"

Today Schad, winner of the Community Service award, is well known for her strong commitment to gender equity.

One of the 10 founders of the Women's Resource

Center, Schad has worked diligently toward changing women's and girls' lives through education, self-esteem training and mentoring. The past president of the American Association of University Women is a popular speaker on the subject of gender equity in schools and spearheaded a program to get gender equity training for Grand Rapids Public Schools teachers.

"It's a thrill for me to speak to a

COMMUNITY SERVICE

group of parents about treating girls and boys equally and have them come up to me afterward and ask what they can do about it, instead of shrugging and saying 'That's the way the world is,'"

says Schad, the mother of two grown sons.

Her community involvement began in 1960 when she was the only woman on a 9-member committee to promote the annexation of outlying school districts to the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

She served on the Grand Rapids Public Schools Board of Education for 12 years, four as president. While on the board she was an advocate of alternative programs, including the John Ball Zoo School and Blandford Nature Center Environmental Program.

Schad's community involvement spans a variety of organizations, including the United Way, the American Red Cross, the Grand Rapids PTA Council, the World Affairs Council, the Center for Environmental Study and Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women.

"I have the opportunity to do some things to make the world a bit more comfortable, a better place," says Schad, sipping coffee from a YWCA mug that reads "Our Mission: To Advocate for Equality, To Eliminate Racism; to Empower Women."

"I feel a responsibility to do that."