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THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

FEMME PHENOMS

Annual YWCA event a tribute to exceptional local women

The Grand Rapids Press

In their 21st year, the YWCA's annual Tribute Awards continue to honor a diverse group of phenomenal women. A capacity crowd of about 800 is expected to attend the luncheon Wednesday at the Ambassador Ballroom of the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel. As in years past, the seven winners of the 1998 Awards will be the focus of attention and the luncheon will raise funds for the YWCA.

What changes from year to year are the names of the women who offer inspiration to hundreds of other area women.

"Each year there is a different chemistry and composition of amazing women," said Diane Martin, YWCA director of development.

For example, winners in the profession category have been

attorneys. This year, the professions category winner is Doretha Ardoin, area Realtor with Westdale Better Homes and Gardens.

The advocacy award honors Lee Nelson Weber, who helps ensure fair housing for all people.

And a woman who really set a standard for non-traditional careers is business, management category winner, Christina de la Garza, owner of MiCo Industries Inc., a steel stamping company.

Other honorees, selected from about 100 nominees include Patti Butcher, sports and fitness;

Donnae Holton, community service; Jennifer Johnson, student, and Marjorie Kuipers, arts and communication. Read their stories here and on Page J5.

Tribute actually honors women twice, said Martin. "Once at the luncheon and afterwards by providing services" to more women through the money raised.

Ardoin committed to fair, diverse housing

Professional
By Pat Shellenbarger
The Grand Rapids Press

Standing along Jefferson Avenue, Doretha Ardoin pointed to a block of new homes.

"This is probably the most diverse community in Grand Rapids right now," she said.

Where once litter and weeds predominated, dozens of new homes have sprouted and are occupied by Asians, Hispanics, whites, blacks, single parents, couples, middle- and low-income families — thanks in no small part to Ardoin.

In her 20 years in real estate, she has broken down barriers, recruiting many minorities into the business and alerting her fellow agents to the subtleties of housing discrimination.

"She has made not only her own progress, but she has cut a door into that industry for a lot of others to follow her," said Fair Housing Center Director Lee Nelson Weber, who nominated Ardoin for the Tribute Award.

Ardoin, now with Westdale Better Homes and Gardens, has taught fair housing and civil rights classes for the Grand Rapids Association of Realtors.

"I think I've been pretty good at breaking down barriers and eliminating myths and stereotypes that exist in this industry," she said. For example, a well-meaning real estate agent can unintentionally discriminate by assuming a white

couple would be more comfortable buying a home in one neighborhood and a black couple would be more comfortable in another, she said.

"I try to teach others that we all make those mistakes," Ardoin said. "Sometimes they tease me and call me the 'fair housing police,' because they know how much of an advocate for that I am."

While Ardoin has sold her share of expensive houses, she takes great pleasure in helping those who think they cannot afford a home.

"Sometimes they're really surprised that their rent is higher than what their mortgage payment is going to be," said Ardoin.

"The first-time home buyers appreciated what I did. They tend to improve everything about their lives."

Ardoin is president of the Fair Housing Center board of directors, just completed a term on the Home Repair Services board and in 1989 was named Realtor of the Year by the Grand Rapids Association of Realtors.

Despite her best efforts, she conceded, "I was so frustrated with the people I couldn't help," so she joined Habitat for Humanity, the nonprofit organization that helps low-income families build and purchase their own homes.

"For me, it was great to help people get a home who otherwise wouldn't and see them come out of some place that was not so nice to a nice, safe, affordable home," she said.



PRESS PHOTO: WENDE ALEXANDER CLARK

Marjorie Kuipers helped raise a new home for the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts.

Community art center becomes a reality

Arts & Communication
By Lisa Ann Williamson
The Grand Rapids Press

Marjorie Kuipers walks proudly as she shows off the new home of Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts at 41 Sheldon Blvd. SE.

First, there's the event space, which can be hosted for community events and to rent art exhibits. Then there's the main gallery, which might hold artwork by local or national artists. Some subjects, like the current one by artist Cory Peeke about views on sex and sexuality, might be offensive to some, Kuipers admits.

"If the subject matter offends some people, we're awful sorry, but we feel it needs to be shown. We look at the quality of the work," said Kuipers, 43, UICA's executive director.

She continues the tour, pausing to let her guests take in the wonder and color of it all.

On to the education center, with its comfy chairs and couches. That's her favorite — the 169-seat theater for movies and dance.

Downstairs is the creativity center with artists' studios. A community darkroom eventually will be added. The possibilities here are endless, she says, for people who will be connected through arts.

Kuipers is quick to explain that this \$2.75 million UICA home belongs to the community. It houses paintings, dance programs, music, literature, sculpture — all arts. And while she helped raise funds,

write grants, produce shows and increase awareness of the arts, she says she was not alone.

"I was part of a very important team," said Kuipers. "A team that saw a vision of what UICA could be and worked to make that vision a reality."

Kuipers' loyalty, diligence, tenacity, compassion, vision, leadership and idealism are among the traits that prompted Julie Christianson Stivers to nominate her for Tribute on behalf of artists, volunteers and audiences of UICA.

Kuipers started her work with UICA, a volunteer arts organization, in 1989 while pursuing a master's degree in sociology from Western Michigan University. That was when UICA rented space on Race Street.

In 1992, UICA needed a new director and a new home. Kuipers stepped in temporarily and after six months became permanent. She managed volunteers and programs, found a temporary home, raised money for renovations and made plans for a forever home. She plans to leave the post, but will stay until a replacement can be found and said she doesn't know what she'll do in the future.

Until then, she'll just enjoy the relaxed atmosphere, saying she is most comfortable in jeans and a blazer, which make pushing up sleeves and working much easier.

"We must work together to make a better world," she said.



PRESS PHOTO: DOUG LARSON

Doretha Ardoin assists home-buyers in realizing their dreams.

No job too small for this hospital volunteer

Community Service
By Terri Finch Hamilton
The Grand Rapids Press

Donnae Holton always seems to have her hands full. Dr. James Fahner, M.D., remembers the day he walked into work at DeVos Children's Hospital and held the door for Holton, a hospital volunteer for 27 years.

Holton was balancing a book for a friend in the gift shop, freshly baked cookies for the emergency room staff, a bundle of toys and games for the waiting area of the children's emergency room and a new stash of Beanie Babies for her little friends getting chemotherapy in the kids' cancer clinic.

Holton, 64, is as comfortable in the board room as she is in the emergency room. She's served on a number of Butterworth Hospital boards and school boards, including 10 years on the Northview Board of Education and 12 years on the Kent Intermediate School District Board, and she's currently on the Grand

Valley State University Board of Control. As chair of the Grand Rapids Symphony's government relations committee, she worked to get greater state funding for the organization.

Fahner tells of her showing up at hospital board meetings still in her volunteer smock, between a shift holding hands of frightened relatives in the emergency room and a shift working the coffee shop.

Holton's passion is for education and health care, especially health care for children. She and husband Earl co-chaired the first two Children's Miracle Network telethons. She was instrumental in the creation of DeVos Children's Hospital. She lobbied for seatbelt laws in Michigan after seeing so many injured children in the emergency room.

"My heavens, there's so much work to be done," Holton says. "Boards may initiate a project, but it's people who get it done. When you see a need, you don't take it to someone else — you take care of it yourself."



Donnae Holton raised money for the playground for young patients through her work with the Butterworth Auxiliary Guilds.

More than 25 years ago she noticed the emergency room staff at Butterworth — now Spectrum Health Downtown — didn't get coffee breaks because they weren't allowed to leave. So every Wednesday for the past 25 years she's brought them home-baked chocolate chip cookies.

"Something can make such a tiny

difference to you, but make such a big difference to someone else," says Holton, the mother of four grown children and nine grandchildren.

She remembers helping her mother roll gauze for the Red Cross during World War II.

"It wasn't called volunteering back then," Holton says. "Helping others was a way of life."

1998 YWCA TRIBUTE AWARDS

Golf, fund raising go hand in hand, says honoree

By Pat Shellenbarger
The Grand Rapids Press

When Patti Butcher was 3, her sister hit her in the head with a golf club.

"I tell people it implanted golf in my brain," she said.

In truth, Butcher has been playing golf for 30 of her 36 years, the last decade as a professional. She played on her high school team in Big Rapids and on her college teams at Penn State, the University of South Florida and Florida Atlantic University. She was director of instruction at Grand Valley State University's Meadows Golf Course the past six years.

In August, she left that job to pursue a dream, founding Patti Butcher Golf Enterprises, which she described as "a comprehensive golf services firm."

Her decision to leave Grand Valley, where she also was head women's golf coach, was "gut wrenching," she said. "The hardest part was leaving the kids on the team. I love teaching. Don't get me wrong. But I wanted to have some time to do some other things."

She will serve as a consultant

to the Meadows while pursuing her new business venture. Through Patti Butcher Golf Enterprises, she will teach golf, manage golf professionals all over the country and organize corporate programs using golf to build teams, establish client relationships and motivate employees.

"I love the relationship part of golf," she said. "A lot of the people in my life I met because of golf."

She arranged for the Meadows to host the 1995 and 1997 NCAA Division II and III Women's National Championships. She was a sponsor and instructor in a golf lesson marathon with proceeds going to Gilda's Club, an organization that helps people living with cancer. She also has twice co-chaired the YWCA's annual fund-raiser, Run, Jane, Run.

"Really, what was important to me was to make a difference," Butcher said. "Golf is integrated at so many levels of business and fund raising."

She approaches golf not as a purely physical game, but a sport requiring proper equipment, the

correct technique and mental readiness.

"It's really a combination of all three," she said. "What people expect is to come and learn technique, when that doesn't always improve their scores. I don't think you can separate the mental and the physical."

To improve at golf, "you better know yourself," your personality type, and be willing to strengthen your weaknesses, Butcher said. For example, someone who is very controlling might need to loosen up a little on the golf course. Someone who is intuitive might need to take a more organized approach to the game.

"Once you've reached that point where you've plateaued, the next step is to go counter to what comes natural to you," said Butcher, who is certified in Golfpsych, a program that applies psychological techniques to golf.

She hopes to "help people develop their own dream, whatever it is," she said. "Anything they do that makes their golf game better tends to make their lives better. And anything they do that makes their lives better tends to make their golf game better. That's what it's about for me."



Christina de la Garza, president of MiCo Industries, loves being on the floor of her metal stamping plant.

No glass ceiling when you're the boss, even in man's world

By Terri Finch Hamilton
The Grand Rapids Press

The stamping presses at MiCo Industries go ka-chung, ka-chung, ka-chung as Christina de la Garza strolls through the metal stamping plant, smiling beneath her plastic safety goggles.

"Back in my office, that's not where it's at," she says. "Out here on the floor is where it's at."

Of course, she had to start her own company to have free rein in such a place. When de la Garza couldn't follow her passion of working in a metal stamping plant, she started her own company, MiCo Industries, a Wyoming plant that provides parts to the Big Three automakers and seat components to Steelcase.

She traces her determination to her parents. When her father was laid off from his welding job at Chrysler, he used his \$1,000 in savings to start a grocery store. Mom made tortillas. They worked hard seven days a week. Now their daughter does, too.

"I was always my father's helper," de la Garza says. "If he was fixing a lamp, my fingers were thin enough to get in there and grab wires. When he built a

picnic table for my mother, I was there helping."

By the time de la Garza was in high school, her parents' grocery store was flourishing. Her parents sent her to the University of Detroit. But despite her passion for things mechanical, her father insisted she not go into engineering.

"He didn't want me working around men all the time," she says. "He wanted me to be in a nice job environment where I would be respected."

So she followed her dad's wishes and got a degree in business administration. She got a job at the Budd Company, an automotive stamping firm, and worked all over the country on nearly every capacity of the metal stamping business — except in the pressroom, where women weren't allowed.

"I loved the pressroom," she says with a smile. "Those gigantic presses, with people pulling out hoods and roofs of cars. I was mesmerized the first time I saw it. I had to be around it. So I decided I'd better start my own stamping plant."

In 1983 she founded MiCo, an acronym for "mi compania" —

Spanish for "my company."

"I think I ran into every obstacle there is, and then some," says de la Garza, 49. "When you're a woman in a man's environment, it's difficult to get stamping jobs. It's like taking your flat tire to the gas station. Who are you going to ask to fix it, a man or a woman?"

But MiCo became a thriving marriage of de la Garza's administrative skills and engineering dream. The company has 75 employees, has won awards for quality and does more than \$10 million in sales each year.

Her son, Terry, 28, is plant manager. Daughter Tina, 26, works for de la Garza's sister's engineering firm in Detroit. De la Garza recently started a sewing company, too, and has dreams of opening a bed and breakfast geared to corporate clients. And her dad needn't worry about his daughter not getting respect.

"I could be feeling really blue, and all I have to do is walk out into my plant and start saying hello to people, and realize I wouldn't want to trade my life with anybody's," de la Garza says. "I love these people, and when I'm with them, I can feel their respect."



Patti Butcher integrates the game of golf and helping others.

City High school student gives more than 100 percent

By Lisa Ann Williamson
The Grand Rapids Press

Jennifer Johnson wasn't old enough to vote in last week's election, but she was working hard on the political front, volunteering for 78th District State Representative candidate Steven Pestka.

She helped moderate a candidates forum at City High School where she's a senior.

Who knows? One day she might be a candidate herself, Johnson said.

"I don't like to put a limit on things I can do," Johnson, 17, said. "I tend to look at things realistically and then make a choice."

She has other irons to tend in the fire of career choices and life goals.

She'll more than likely end up teaching history at a high school in Chicago — one of her favorite cities.

"I have a little plan," she says with a half giggle teamed with intense seriousness. "I'll start teaching high school and eventually I'd love to be a college history professor."

Her career plans have changed slightly since she was younger and wanted to be a doctor, lawyer, doctor, comedian and editorial writer, but her enthusiasm never wavered.

"She's a gem," said Jane Vanderleest, counselor at City.



Jennifer Johnson sets standards and then over-achieves them.

"She's one of those really upbeat students. Rarely do you find she doesn't have a smile on her face or something positive to say."

The daughter of DeMonts and Susan Johnson has a simple strategy for success, which she

defines simply as "setting a standard and reaching it."

"I do what I'm asked and then a little bit more," she said.

She inspired others to do a bit more, also. When she exhausted all the history classes offered, she talked her teacher into offering an advanced placement history course which now has four students.

Being a Tribute Award winner came as a shock and left her overwhelmed, Johnson said.

"I looked at all the things from past winners and thought, 'I haven't done enough,'" she said.

Since the seventh grade, Johnson has put in more than 150 volunteer hours tutoring third- and fourth-graders at Fountain Elementary School, hosting the seventh-grade ice cream social, raising money at the AIDS Walk and spending time at the Kent County Humane Society.

She is president of the Student Council at City High and most recently spent her time organizing school-wide events like Field Day and the Halloween dance.

Johnson rounds out her time racking up a 4.0 grade point average, singing with the choir at Westminster Presbyterian Church, watching college football, taking college-level French, playing soccer and hanging with friends.

Most of her friends, like her, are highly motivated, though she admits to being "a little more worried, stressed and focused" than most.

"It works out good because they tell me when I'm doing the overstressed thing," Johnson said.

Lee Weber seeks to root out discrimination

By Pat Shellenbarger
The Grand Rapids Press

When Lee Nelson Weber looks at rising crime rates, falling property values and despair in decaying neighborhoods, she sees a common cause.

"It's a downward spiral that's pushed by housing segregation," she said.

As executive director of the Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids since 1988, Weber has made it her mission to root out housing discrimination in its many forms.

Her office investigates complaints throughout Kent County and conducts educational programs for landlords, real estate agents and mortgage lenders on how to avoid unfair housing practices.

Housing discrimination still is a serious problem, but "if you employ this two-prong tactic of education and enforcement, you can change that," Weber said.

In the dozen years she has headed the nonprofit organization, she has seen

housing discrimination become more subtle, though no less harmful.

"It's not that blatant," she said, but added: "Being subtle does not mean it's not effective. I think for the individual or the household it's as bad as it ever was."

Some landlords still refuse to rent to people purely because of race. But the Fair Housing Center also is concerned about lenders who set unmanageably high interest rates for certain home buyers, landlords who refuse to rent to the disabled or to families with children, and real estate agents who make assumptions about where clients should live.

"What we tell people is that despite their best intentions, these things can be illegal," Weber said. "What we're talking about is choice. People should be able to exercise their choice in housing."

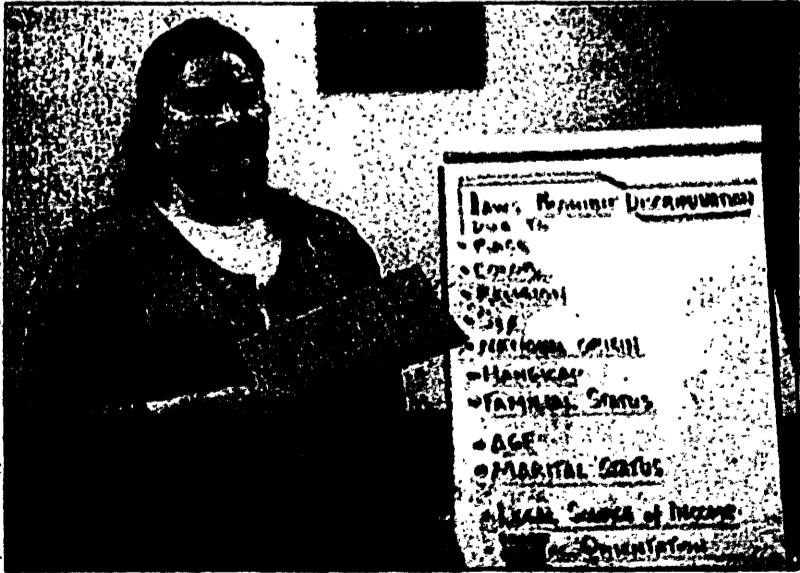
Weber chooses to live in the integrated neighborhood of Eastown, not far from where she grew up. She attended Grand Rapids' Catholic schools, where her commitment to social justice was formed.

She is president of the West Michigan Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, was

executive director of the Eastown Community Association and a founding board member of the Council of Neighborhood Associations.

The Fair Housing Center receives an average of 180 housing discrimination complaints a year. Weber's small staff investigates as many complaints as possible, typically sending out "testers" to determine if people of all ethnic, social and marital status are treated equally.

The agency refers some complaints to private attorneys and others to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S.



Lee Nelson Weber presides over a HUD meeting at the Grand Rapids Urban League offices.

Justice Department or the Michigan Civil Rights Department.

Over the years, mortgage lenders, real estate agents and landlords have become more receptive to the center's

educational sessions, Weber said.

"You can see we've made a real attempt to get people from the industries we're working with. We have people from what you might call the other side of the fence."



PRESS PHOTOS/WENDE ALEXANDER C

INSPIRING MINDS



About 800 people packed the Ambassador Ballroom of the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel Wednesday to celebrate the YWCA's 1998 Tribute Awards. Above, Helen Claytor, past Tribute Award winner, center, congratulates some of this year's recipients, from left, Lee Nelson Weber and Doretha Ardoin. At left, City High School senior Jennifer Johnson is all smiles after receiving the Tribute student award. Other winners include: Marjorie Kuipers, Christina de la Garza, Patti Butcher and Donnalee Holton. In addition to honoring the accomplishments of seven women in the community and inspiring the hundreds of people in attendance, the 21st annual awards earned nearly \$50,000 for programs offered by YWCA. The money will help fund programs like Project HEAL (Housing Employment Advocacy and Legal Assistance) and the Nurse Examiner program.