

FLAIR

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS



PRESS PHOTO/DIANNE CARROLL BURDICK

The Rev. Peggy Lawrence Burns is this year's recipient of the YWCA's Tribute! Professions Award.

Paying Tribute to Leadership

PEGGY LAWRENCE BURNS

PROFESSIONS AWARD

She never gave up on her vision of Traveling Grannies

By Pat Shellenbarger
The Grand Rapids Press

It's an event that makes you want to finish your dessert and do something important. Expect an elbow-to-elbow crowd again Wednesday when the YWCA honors amazing local women at its annual Tribute! Awards Luncheon. More than 700 people are expected to gather at the Amway Grand Plaza's Ambassador Ballroom to munch salad, pass the bread and butter around and say "wow."

In the spotlight at noon Wednesday will be five impressive women and one awe-inspiring teen-ager. These people are leaders and advocates, volunteers and go-getters. More than 50 area businesses and organizations support the event financially, making it the YWCA's most successful fund-raising event. Last year's Tribute! raised more than \$63,000. Proceeds go toward the YWCA's programs, including the Domestic Crisis Center, sexual assault programs, child sexual abuse treatment services, child care, counseling and fitness programs.

The YWCA started Tribute! in 1977 to publicly honor women who otherwise might go unrecognized. A committee of community leaders picks the winners, culled from nominations made by the public. Cost is \$50 per person. Some seats still may be available. Advance reservations are required: call 459-4681. This year's winners are Dollie Grant in advocacy; Monique Salinas-Stauffer in arts and communication; Lana Boldi in business, management, industry and labor; Betsy Borre in community service and The Rev. Peggy Lawrence Burns in professions. Noorain Khan is the student winner. Read more about the women, their accomplishments and philosophies here and on pages J 4-5.

Some years ago, The Rev. Peggy Lawrence Burns heard federal money was available to deal with teen pregnancy. She knew it was a serious problem — 1,438 Kent County teens between the ages of 15 and 19 had become pregnant in 1992, according to the county health department. But Burns already had plenty to do as director of the Foster Grandparents program for the nonprofit Gerontology Network. She was reluctant to take on another cause and put aside the invitation to apply for federal money.

Then a phrase came unbidden into her mind: Traveling Grannies. Burns, who recently became an ordained minister in the Universal Church of the Risen Christ, later described it as "divine intervention."

The Foster Grandparents program placed senior citizens in elementary schools, daycare centers and Head Start programs to work with needy children, but a program dealing specifically with teen pregnancy was needed.

Burns took up her pen and began writing

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Dollie Grant



Lana Boldi



Monique Salinas-Stauffer



Noorain Khan



Betsy Borre

BETSY BORRE

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Fund-raiser planted the seed for Frederik Meijer Gardens

By Pat Shellenbarger
The Grand Rapids Press

Surrounded by mums and other autumn flowers in the botanical gardens she helped create, Betsy Borre offered a surprising confession.

"I'm not much of a gardener," she said.

Her true talent, it turns out, is not in floriculture but in fulfilling dreams, bringing together the people, the money and the materials to make them happen.

Although her name does not appear above the entrance, Frederik Meijer Gardens likely would not exist were it not for Betsy Borre.

Her role in what has become a cultural centerpiece in Grand Rapids began one cold February day in 1981 when she read about a meeting that evening of the West Michigan Horticultural Society and its plans for a conservatory. It sounded like a great idea, particularly on a cold winter's night, so she put on her coat, drove to the meeting and joined the group, unaware the dream already was faltering.

By May, most of the society's dozen or so members were ready to give up, but three — Ruth Esler, Walter McVeigh and Borre — vowed to carry on. Borre became president of the West Michigan Horticultural Society and began putting together a strategy.

"These places happen," she said. "They were real, and it could happen here, too."

Borre and other society members visited botanical gardens around the country and studied how they did it. Having little money to start with, they began seeking a gift of land and a lead donor to put up enough money to entice additional support.

"To hook a concept together — the people, the time, the money, the materials — it's a big undertaking," she said. "My whole philosophy is you reach out to people, and people paddle together."

Borre, now 63, soon found

herself working more than 40 hours a week as an unpaid volunteer, speaking to civic groups, doing whatever necessary. For her, it was imperative the botanical gardens be accessible to everyone, "that it would be a place for people and a place where they could experience what they had not," she said.

In October 1990, Borre met with Fred Meijer, the retired head of his family's retail chain and one of those high on her list of potential lead donors. She had been told Meijer would hear her out, but would not make a commitment.

"At some point in the meeting, he said, 'I'll do it,'" Borre recalled. "I was a little numb."

The dream that nearly died finally had the support to become reality. Meijer showed Borre photos of several large, outdoor sculptures he had been collecting, hoping to find a suitable place to display them.

"We embraced the idea very quickly," Borre said, "because it was a perfect fit, and it doubled the attraction of the facility."

Meijer later donated a large parcel of land on the East Beltline north of I-96, and in the spring of 1995, Frederik Meijer Gardens opened. In the six years since, its reputation as a leading botanical garden and sculpture park has grown.

"The 100-year plan was to have it become a world-class garden," said Borre, whose only connection with the gardens now is as a member. "I had hoped to live long enough to see it evolve. We jokingly say the 100-year plan will be accomplished in 10 years."

A group of elementary school children wandered through the conservatory where she sat reminiscing about how it all began.

"My favorite time is seeing those yellow school buses out in the parking lot or encountering kids," said Borre, now a fund-raising consultant for other groups. "It's magic."



Betsy Borre, a founder of Frederik Meijer Gardens and winner of this year's YWCA Tribute! award for Community Service, is good at raising money and support — but not plants.

PROFESSIONS

Grannies, Grandpas work with kids between 6 and 19

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a grant proposal, describing a program to deal with teen pregnancy. Traveling Grannies, she wrote, would pair low-income senior citizens with pregnant teens, teaching them parenting skills, proper nutrition and budgeting and encouraging them to go back to school or find jobs.

The federal grant was denied. Burns, though disappointed, was not discouraged.

"I never doubted one time that one day this program would be something," she said. "It was going to happen."

She applied for other grants, received more rejections, but continued believing in the program.

Then one day in 1992, Bessie Goines walked into the Gerontology Network office. Burns took one look at her "and I knew this was Granny."

Granny Bessie became the prototype, the first Traveling Granny, proving the program could work. The Detroit-based Carls Foundation agreed to fund the program, and Traveling Grannies was up and running.

More senior citizen volunteers were trained in conflict resolution and drug and alcohol abuse prevention, then assigned to pregnant teens. In 1998, Burns added Traveling Grandpas to the program.

In 1999, as the teen pregnancy rate declined, the program shifted its focus. Traveling Grannies and Grandpas were assigned to schools, working with kids between the ages of 6 and 19 to prevent pregnancies.

The program now includes 27 grannies and grandpas assigned to 34 schools in Grand Rapids and Cedar Springs.

"I think the kids found out they really needed someone to talk to, somebody who was not judgmental," Burns said. "They could talk to them about anything."

The grannies and grandpas receive a \$2.55-an-hour stipend, transportation, meals and the satisfaction of knowing they made a difference in a child's life.

"It's not about money," Burns said. "They see a need to give back to the community. Many of our grannies and grandpas said it's a second chance to raise their kids. They have the time, and they have learned a lot over the years."

Traveling Grannies and Grandpas has received national recognition, and Catholic Social Services in Detroit and a school in Indiana are talking about starting similar programs.

The recognition is nice, Burns said, but "when I hear my volunteers talk about their kids, where a child came from and where they are now, I don't think anything makes me happier."



Dollie Grant, the recipient of this year's YWCA Tribute! Award for Advocacy, worked her way through various departments before going into fund-raising work for the Red Cross about seven years ago.

Passion, profession mix for Red Cross worker

By Juanita Westaby
The Grand Rapids Press

A person has to look hard to see where the worker leaves off and the volunteer takes over in Dollie Grant.

Since she started working at the American Red Cross in 1977, as a secretary for youth and community services, she's plunged into after-hours volunteer work for the same organization.

"It was easy to recognize the need out in the community, and here I had this organization with these great, wonderful educational programs," she said. "I thought, 'I'm going to get involved in this.'"

"She's become an advocate not just for the Red Cross but for the community, responding to community needs using the Red Cross as a springboard," said Jon Bachelder, Red Cross executive director.

She discovered a gift for speaking on behalf of the Red Cross and the United Way in a way that made audiences eager to send money back with her. "I just tell everyday stories,"

she said. As a volunteer CPR instructor, lifesaving skills teacher, AIDS-HIV educator and diversity trainer, she has plenty of stories to tell. There's the little girl who knew how to dial 911 when her house was firebombed, another child who saved a baby brother who was choking and the church community that learned to embrace its HIV-positive members.

Grant, a 40-something mother of three, worked her way through various departments before going into fund-raising work for the Red Cross about seven years ago.

"Dollie is a relationship builder," Bachelder said. "That's her strength — the ability to create new supporters for the organization."

She's not the kind of person to hog the limelight. After she found herself in demand at

African-American churches as an AIDS educator, she worked with the Delta Sigma Theta sorority to train 15 professional black women as AIDS instructors in order to multiply her efforts.

As a diversity trainer, she's brought her message of equality and sensitivity to more than 2,500 people in Grand Rapids corporations, health care facilities and educational institutions.

"There's an African proverb, 'When the spiders unite they can tie up a lion,'" she said.

She believes her calling is to unite people.

There isn't a moment in her work at the Red Cross that can be singled out as a life-changing moment. Just like there is no line between worker and volunteer.

"Just knowing that I was able to touch a life," she said, "that is life-changing in a way."

High school senior reaches out to preteen girls

By Terri Finch Hamilton
The Grand Rapids Press

Noorain Khan can tell you about a lot of things — if you can find her.

The nonstop senior at Forest Hills Central High School competes in debate and forensics and participates in the Model United Nations. She's on the varsity tennis team. As co-chair of Young Women for Change, she helps distribute \$30,000 in grants through the Michigan Women's Foundation to help women and girls.

She's the president and founder of the Islamic Youth Group of Grand Rapids, a 35-member group of teens from throughout West Michigan. She organizes a weeklong camp for Muslim youth.

Noorain is a leader in the local Girl Scouts of Michigan Trails Council. She's earned several scouting honors, including the prestigious Gold Award, and is the youth representative on the agency's board of directors.

Once a week, she visits girls at area schools as part of Face It, a Girl Scout program that teaches girls things they need to know, with topics ranging from eating disorders to discrimination to teen pregnancy. She maintains a 4.0 grade point average.

Occasionally, fast-talking Noorain takes a breath.

"I don't want to miss out on any opportunities," 17-year-old Noorain says cheerfully. "There's pressure from my parents to slow down and relax a little, but I don't want to miss out on any chances to help someone or to grow myself. The rewards are worth the tired nights."

One of her greatest rewards is working with preteen girls as part of Face It, she says.

"When I talk to these girls, I see their eyes light up," she says. "That sounds so corny — I'm such a corny person. But they really do. I can tell they really look up to me. When I leave, they hug me. I've had young girls come up to me after I talk about eating disorders, crying, telling me they finally understand why



Noorain Khan, a senior at Forest Hills Central High School, hopes to be a role model and to change the world. She is the recipient of this year's YWCA Tribute! Student Award.

NOORAIN KHAN

STUDENT AWARD

they feel like they have to throw up."

Fiercely proud of her faith, Noorain, who is Pakistani, wears the traditional Muslim attire that covers her arms and legs, as well as the black scarf, called a hijab. It's part of who she is, and she's happy to explain it to anyone.

By now, the kids at school know all about why Noorain dresses the way she does. But she knows her attire has never made her as conspicuous as she is now, after the terrorist attacks on America.

Shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks, Noorain was fueling her car after school at a gas station when a woman looked at her attire and said, "Go home."

The incident made her cautious.

"Initially, I decided to lay low," she says. "I didn't want to put myself out there."

But in typical Noorain style, she soon realized she should

seize every opportunity to educate people about the true peaceful character of Islam.

She routinely speaks to her school's world studies classes to correct popular misconceptions that Islam is a fanatical faith that condones terrorism.

"I try to make myself accessible," she says. "People know they can ask me questions."

The big question — her career plans — remains unanswered. Dentistry, maybe, or broadcast journalism.

She plans to stay involved in Girl Scouts, women's organizations such as the Michigan Women's Foundation, Islamic organizations ...

"And whatever I can get my hands on," Noorain says with a smile. "I know I want to continue to help people grow and be more open-minded. I know it sounds trite, but I really do want to change the world."

“I try to make myself accessible. People know they can ask me questions.”

NOORAIN KHAN

LANA BOLDI

BUSINESS AWARD

Feminist, labor leader is eager to work for working people

By Juanita Westaby
The Grand Rapids Press

When history looks back on women who shattered labor's glass ceiling, they'll find Lana Boldi shaking the shards out of her former-model hair.

Boldi was one of the first women to work on an auto assembly line, to graduate from a skilled trades program and to be appointed an international representative of the United Auto Workers three decades ago.

In 1972, when she first doggedly went after a job on the Fisher Body assembly line in Kalamazoo, a lot of men accused her of trying to make a feminist point.

No, she told them, she just wanted decent wages and benefits to help raise her then 3- and 4-year-old sons after her divorce.

"Because I was the first in a lot of the things I did, it was important that I did them well," Boldi, 60, said. "I didn't want people to say, 'Well, there. We let a woman do it and she couldn't.'"

While she wasn't crazy about factory work — it took weeks for the oil to come out from under her fingernails after she left the line — she did come to love the union.

She'd been a blackjack dealer, a secretary and a model, but nothing paid as well as a union job.

"I had valued (union values) before I went to work there, things like job security and human dignity, because I'd kicked around in nonunion jobs so long before that," she said.

As she gradually took on more responsibility in the union, she became a valued board member of places such as Western Michigan University, Michigan League for Human Services, Grand Rapids Urban League and Alliance for Health. She also was active in the Kent County



Lana Boldi, the winner of this year's YWCA Tribute! Award for Business, tries to unionize places wherever she goes in West Michigan.

Democratic Party.

And, yes, she tries to unionize places wherever she goes in West Michigan.

"I've fought employment at will on every board I've been on," she said. "Workers need representation, and that includes administrative people. They're workers, too."

When she became an international representative 23 years ago, she was in charge of education, politics and community involvement. It's been a beloved job that she retired from Nov. 1. Owen Bieber, the former UAW president who appointed her as a representative to Region 1-D, will speak at her retirement dinner.

Oh, and that thing about being a feminist that Boldi down-played? She no longer demurs.

"A lot of people today are afraid to say that they're a feminist. I'm a strong feminist," she said. "If it had not been for the women's movement in the '60s and '70s, I wouldn't have been able to do the things I did, even being hired by General Motors."

"I've never forgotten that."



Monique Salinas-Stauffer, winner of this year's YWCA Tribute! Award for Arts, is surrounded by her choir girls. Front left is Yuliana Ortega; front right is Miriam Jimenez. In the back row are, from left, Emily Mejias, Ana Santillanes, Vanessa Romero and Eliana Gutierrez.

Music teacher is the role model she never had

By Terri Finch Hamilton
The Grand Rapids Press

MONIQUE SALINAS-STAUFFER

ARTS AWARD

Monique Salinas-Stauffer keeps a folder full of love notes. It's an automatic mood booster on those days she wonders if all the work is worth it.

But deep down, Salinas-Stauffer knows her musical work with young girls is worth the effort, as well as she knows the words to "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore." Not only can she read it in the girls' loving notes, she can see it in their faces, hear it in their voices and feel it in their hugs.

Salinas-Stauffer is the founder of the West Michigan Academy of Music for Girls, which she formed in 1997 with 21 girls. Today, the tuition-based program has more than 200 girls in five choirs. Last spring the organization's Chorale placed first in a national competition at Walt Disney World in Florida. They beat out junior high choirs, even though half of the Chorale members are in elementary school.

"Girls were crying, they were so excited," she says. "It was really, really cool."

A music educator and conductor for more than 20 years, Salinas-Stauffer has a doctorate in music education from Michigan State University. Directing the music academy is her career, and she's good at it. But a more personal mission is her Grandville Avenue Girls Choir, a group of close to 100 elementary school girls from Kensington and Hall elementary schools in Grand Rapids. Eighty-five percent are Latinas.

Salinas-Stauffer is Latina, too, the granddaughter of

Mexican migrant workers. Growing up in Grand Rapids in the 1960s and '70s, she was embarrassed about her heritage. When people asked her about her background, she told them she was Spanish.

"That sounded more exotic," says Salinas-Stauffer, 45. "When you said you were Mexican, people thought of illegal immigrants and cherry pickers. There were no strong, vibrant young Hispanic women role models. In the movies, they were either prostitutes or old ladies. I had nobody to look up to."

But by the time she reached her 20s, she was proud of her heritage.

"I thought maybe someday I'd go back home and help young Hispanic girls," she says. "I thought, why not do it through music? You can reach kids through music. Girls love music. You can convey so many strong messages through music."

Salinas-Stauffer, who teaches songs of sisterhood and peace, wrinkles her nose at most of the music kids listen to today, filled with messages of sex and violence. She cringes at the girls' role models.

"Jennifer Lopez and Christina Aguilera," sighs the mother of three. "And Christina Aguilera doesn't even look Hispanic. I hope I can make them aim higher."

She can tell she's making a difference.

"I see girls gain confidence in themselves, believe in themselves, have more pride in themselves," she says. "It's tough being a girl these days. There are so many expectations society puts on girls — they have to look good, be thin, wear the right clothes, belong to the right group."

And girls aren't always nice to each other, she says. She's working on that.

"Sometimes girls can be very catty," Salinas-Stauffer says. "I try to have a real atmosphere of sisterhood. We support each other. We don't laugh at each other. It's OK to make mistakes here. They have to leave that catty stuff at the door."

She roams through the halls of Kensington and Hall schools, complimenting the girls, telling them they're special, calling them "Sweetie" and giving hugs.

At the after-school rehearsals, she points out the good, reprimands the bad and makes it clear she expects the girls to be their best. The idea for the academy's choirs is to help girls grow not just musically, but creatively, socially and in leadership skills.

"I get a real high from this," Salinas-Stauffer says. "A tired high. It's a lot of work. But I know those little girls love me, and I love them. They're like daughters. And through them, I feel like I'm making a difference in the world."



PRESS PHOTOS/LORI NIEDENFUER COOL

TRIBUTE to the STARS

The leadership and community contributions of six West Michigan women were celebrated by about 700 people Wednesday at the Amway Grand Plaza. During the 24th annual YWCA Tribute! Awards, the women were honored for the efforts. Above, Noorain Khan, right, a Forest Hills Central High School senior, accepts her award from Judy Lloyd, chairwoman of YWCA of Grand Rapids. At right, Monique Salinas-Stauffer, founder of the West Michigan Academy of Music for Girls, waves to friends while accepting her award. Other honorees included: Dollie Grant, of the American Red Cross; Lana Boldi, international representative of the UAW; Betsy Borre, community volunteer; and the Rev. Peggy Lawrence Burns, director of Traveling Grannies/Grandpas.

