

FLAIR

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Tribute Awards 2002



DIANE MADSEN
SPORTS



DEB BAILEY
COMMUNITY SERVICE



DALE ANN IVERSON
PROFESSIONS



NORMA BRINK
ARTS



LUPE RAMOS-MONTIGNY
ADVOCACY



KIMBERLY HORN
BUSINESS



PRECIOUS THREATS
STUDENT

Photographers:
Chris Clark, Rex D. Larsen and Paul L. Newby II

Nothing against the chicken, but lunch isn't the reason 750 people pack the Ambassador Ballroom every year on a November Wednesday. The annual YWCA Tribute Awards Luncheon is one of the hottest tickets in town because of the inspiration it serves, with rolls and butter on the side.

Another packed house is expected at noon Wednesday when the YWCA of Grand Rapids honors six amazing women and a go-getting student at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel.

Luncheon-goers walk out inspired by the passion and contributions of the honored women, plus there's a bonus. They made a difference, too, because Tribute is the YWCA's biggest fund-raising event of the year.

Last year it raised \$65,000 for YWCA programs, including the Domestic Crisis Center, sexual assault programs, child sexual abuse treatment services, child care and health programs. Cost is \$50 per person. Some seats still may be available. Advance reservations are required. Call 459-4681.

This year's winners, nominated by the public and selected by community leaders, are funny and thoughtful, creative and determined. They are Lupe Ramos-Montigny in advocacy; Norma Brink in arts; Kimberly Horn in business, management, industry and labor; Deb Bailey in community service; Dale Ann Iverson in professions; Diane Madsen in sports and fitness. Precious Threats is the student winner.

How do they do what they do? Find out on pages J4 and J5.

2002 TRIBUTE WINNERS

Deb Bailey

Community Service Award

Gilda's Club is bustling, as 100 people mill about after a fund-raising lunch, hugging and laughing. Deb Bailey is right in the thick of it, leading tours and handing out Gilda Radner mugs.

This hospitable haven for people with cancer and those who love them is a warm and lively place in large part due to Bailey, an effervescent go-getter who founded the club with two friends and took hold of the reins as the first board president.

Bailey figured the club would serve 200 folks a month, with free classes and social gatherings. The first month, 800 people showed up for yoga and soup suppers. Now, less than two years later, it's up to 2,000 a month, a mind-boggling outcome that has the board scrambling.

"We never once thought it wouldn't work," says Bailey, 52, a breast cancer survivor. "How could it not work in this community? If you have a good idea and are willing to work, you can make anything happen."

Gilda's Club is the latest and largest example of this dynamo's efforts. There's hardly a place around town that hasn't felt her energy and commitment: Junior Achievement of Grand Rapids, Junior League of Grand Rapids, the YWCA, Aquinas College, Leadership Grand Rapids, the Nokemis Foundation, the Michigan Women's Foundation, The Women's Resource Center, The Grand Rapids Art Museum, St. Cecilia Music Society.

"I was born across the street," Bailey says, pointing through the wooded yard of Gilda's Club on Bridge Street NW. "I was just a little girl from the West Side who had never been anywhere or done anything."

Then, after graduating from Western Michigan University, Bailey got a job offer to teach at a school in Kuwait. It would change everything.

"It was an incredible experience for me," says Bailey, director of corporate communication at Steelcase Inc. "I got to be a minority in race, gender, religion. I learned about war and peace, justice and



“If you have a good idea and are willing to work, you can make anything happen.”

DEB BAILEY

injustice, the importance of community and commitment to change."

She even got that job by being helpful. Bailey saw a guy on campus who looked lost and offered to help him find his way to the college recruiting office. Turns out he was superintendent of schools in Kuwait, there to recruit teachers.

Then the extrovert who likes to get her hands dirty came back to Grand Rapids and started raising money, planning programs and leading organizations from one end of town to the other.

Professionally, she's worked at the Women's Resource Center, Davenport University, Aquinas College and several area furniture companies. Bailey can't seem to ever really leave a place, though, always hanging on as a volunteer.

"I don't golf," she says. "I don't exercise. I don't watch sports on TV. So I have time to volunteer."

But the single mother of 13-year-old Alix, who Bailey adopted as an infant from Paraguay, has scaled back her commitments, she says, focusing on her board role at Gilda's Club. She never leaves an organization without passing on a few names of people who might replace her. She's also active at Aquinas College, on the board and chair of the enrollment committee. Friends joke the only role she hasn't had at Aquinas is as a nun.

When Bailey has a meeting at Gilda's Club, Alix comes and volunteers in its Noogie Land play area.

"I know people who say they can't do community service until their kids are older," Bailey says. "Pick something your kids can do with you. I love what my involvement has done for Alix."

Gilda's Club opened a year and a half ago with a well-planned press conference. Alix announced she was going to attend. No, her mother told her. You're going to school. Alix stood firm.

"She said, 'Mother, I have worked on this project for a third of my life,'" Bailey says. "It's my biggest contribution so far."

Alix went. Her mother smiled.

— By Terri Finch Hamilton

Dale Ann Iverson

Professions Award



As a trial lawyer, Dale Ann Iverson aggressively represented her clients, or, in her words, "I was nasty."

Not that nasty comes naturally to the affable attorney, but that is standard procedure for many attorneys facing off in a lawsuit.

"That's not me," Iverson said, but, of necessity, "I was bombastic, forceful" in seeking the best outcome for her clients, usually defendants in product liability, personal injury and other civil lawsuits.

More often than not, she won, yet, she noticed, her clients frequently went away feeling dissatisfied.

"There were so many times that I represented clients, and we'd go through a trial and we would prevail," she said, "but they still were not sure justice had been done."

The reason, she concluded, was the clients had little say in the outcome, usually imposed by a judge or a jury.

"You know how when you were growing up and you had a dispute with someone on the playground, what did you do?" she said. "You went to an adult and asked them to settle it. We're used to handing it over to a third party to tell us how to settle it."

"What does it take for people to feel like they were treated fairly?" she wondered.

Most lawsuits already were settled out of court, frequently the night before trial.

"I wanted to start those conversations earlier," Iverson said.

In the mid-1990s, she concluded a better way was a form of mediated negotiation giving each party a say in the outcome — alternative dispute resolution, the lawyers call it.

As a partner in the Smith, Haughey, Rice & Roegge law firm, Iverson began serving as an impartial mediator, helping lawyers and their clients reach a settlement acceptable to both sides.

She was appointed to a state Supreme Court committee drafting rules to encourage more alternative dispute resolution. She has served on numerous other boards and committees for the bar and the community.

Last year, she became the third woman president of the Grand Rapids Bar Association, a term that ended in June.

In August, after 19 years with the law firm, Iverson, 46, left to start her own business, JustMediation PLC, helping mediate disputes.

She called herself "a negotiation coach. I don't take a side. What I'm trying to do is help them have a hard conversation."

"Conflict is miserable to go through," she said. "It feels terrible. I enjoy helping people make that conflict a more productive experience. It's important to me for people to feel like the world is a more just place. That's what I'm about. I'm a lawyer. I'm here to help people find justice."

— By Pat Shellenbarger

Precious Threats

Student Award



At least once a day, Precious Threats' mother tells her: "God has a program and a plan for you, and you have to fulfill it."

That's why her typical day is like this: Wake up by 6 a.m.

Begin classes at Creston High School at 8:20. Study pre-calculus, advanced placement English and other difficult subjects over lunch.

After school, attend National Honor Society meeting (she's the treasurer), Student Council (again, she's the treasurer), track practice in the spring or powder puff football in the fall.

In the evening, attend youth choir practice (Tuesdays) or Bible study group (Thursdays) at church.

Arrive home 9:30 or 10 p.m.

Study until midnight or 1 a.m.

Somehow, the 17-year-old senior finds time to baby-sit, organize blood drives at her school, perform praise dancing at her church, play the clarinet in the church ensemble, volunteer for other causes and maintain an exceptionally high grade point average.

"Being so busy, it kind of makes me do well in school," she said.

Her father, Louis, a welder at Irwin Seating, taught her the value of hard work, and her older brother, Louis III, now a pre-med student at Grand Rapids Community College, set a high standard for her at Creston.

"Because he did so well, I didn't want him to outdo me," Precious said.

She plans to attend Michigan State University next fall, majoring in pre-dentistry and eventually hopes to become an orthodontist. Dentistry has been her career goal since elementary school, when some of her classmates were talking about becoming lawyers and doctors.

"I wanted to be different than what everybody else was saying," Precious said, "so I just started saying 'dentist.'"

She doesn't mind being a little different, if different means studying, rather than watching a lot of television and playing video games.

"I don't want to be like everybody else," she said. "I like being the group leader, not the follower."

"I'm sure there are so many students in this city who are doing equally well or better than I am," she said, but not all of them "have parents to tell them that they're proud of them."

She's been known to slip a few dollars of her baby-sitting money to struggling college students, because "I always remember, people help me, and I should help them," she said. "You reap what you sow."

Her mother, Rene, has encouraged that charitable spirit.

"She's the one who taught me to be nice to people and live the way God wants me to live and to do well in school," Precious said.

She recalled another of her mother's oft-repeated expressions: "Out of all the daughters in the world, God gave me the best one."

— By Pat Shellenbarger

Lupe Ramos-Montigny

Advocacy Award



“God has given me the gift of ... leading people.”

LUPE RAMOS-MONTIGNY

The idea came to her at 2 a.m. on the long drive home from a Southeast Michigan dinner in memory of farm union organizer Cesar Chavez.

"We've got to go back and do something very visible for Cesar Chavez," Lupe Ramos-Montigny said. The two men in the car, Levi Rickert and Marshall Chavez (no relation to Cesar Chavez) agreed, and the three began brainstorming. They wanted something that would make Grand Rapids' Hispanics proud of their heritage and would remind others of Chavez's contributions.

"And then it became reality," Ramos-Montigny said. Actually, much work transpired between the idea and reality — three years of meetings, legislative hearings and political lobbying.

On the wall in her Westwood Middle School classroom, Ramos-Montigny has a street sign that reads, "Cesar E. Chavez Way." It's identical to the signs designating Grandville Avenue from Wealthy to Clyde Park in honor of Chavez, who died in 1993.

Ramos-Montigny, a veteran political activist, was a co-founder and chair of the Committee to Honor Cesar E. Chavez.

"Everybody saw the need of something like this being done," she said, but progress came in slow increments.

Last year, the city gave its stretch of Grandville Avenue from Wealthy and Franklin streets, the commemorative designation of "Cesar E. Chavez Way." Persuading the state to do likewise for the rest of the avenue, a state trunkline from Franklin to Clyde Park, proved more difficult, requiring an act

of the state legislature

Last May, Gov. John Engler signed the bill, and in September, new blue signs went up along Grandville Avenue, each bearing the late union leader's name, the logo of the United Farm Workers and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded to Chavez after his death.

Ramos-Montigny was hesitant when she, along with Rickert, Francisco Vega and Ed Sosa, was asked to serve as a grand marshal in a parade inaugurating the commemorative name.

"I wanted to be humble," she said, but she added, "Man, it feels terrific. It feels like you've accomplished your goal."

Ramos-Montigny was born in West Texas and first came to Michigan as a migrant worker, hoeing beets in the Thumb Area, picking cherries near Traverse City and tomatoes in Indiana.

As an adult, she came back to Michigan, obtained a master's degree from Grand Valley State College (now University) and has been teaching in the Grand Rapids Public Schools for 24 years. She's held numerous offices with the Michigan Education Association and is chair of the Michigan Democratic Hispanic/Latino Caucus.

In the latter position, she has organized voter registration drives and pushed for the election of Hispanic candidates.

"It's a slow process," she said, "but I think we have made progress. God has given me the gift of organizing, of motivating, of leading people. I love politics. I think everybody needs to be involved, because that's the future of our state."

— By Terri Finch Hamilton



PRESS PHOTOS/LORI NIEDENFUER COOL



Tribute to women Above left, Dale Ann Iverson, right, this year's YWCA Tribute award winner in Professions, is congratulated by former winner Mary Alice Williams after the annual luncheon at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel. Right, Diane Madsen, who won this year's award winner in Sports, Fitness & Wellness, receives a hug while accepting her award. Other recipients included: Community Service Award winner Deb Bailey, Student Award winner Precious Threats, Advocacy Award winner Lupe Ramos-Montigny, Business Award winner Kimberly Horn and Arts Award winner Norma Brink.