

2011 TRIBUTE AWARD

WINNERS

Thank You

Our community is a better place because of these women and what they've inspired others to become.

The YWCA is proud to announce its 2011 Tribute Award Honorees:

ADVOCACY

Michelle Cook

ARTS

Debra Smith-Hole

BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, INDUSTRY & LABOR

Debra Smith-Hole

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Debra Smith-Hole

PROFESSIONS

Michelle Cook

SPORTS, FITNESS & WELLNESS

Patty Sallner

STUDENT HONOREE

Kacie Gee

ONLINE COVERAGE:

For a full look at the Tribute videos and profiles, visit mlive.com/grexta

The Grand Rapids Press joins the YWCA of West Central Michigan in saluting Tribute Award recipients and their commitment to our community.

This year's winners join more than 150 leaders and trailblazers the YWCA has recognized with Tribute Awards since 1977.



ADVOCACY: LORI COOK, AKA MARANDA



PRESS PHOTO/REX LARSON

Job/profession: Cook, 47, is child and family services manager at WOOD-TV 8. She created her Maranda character more than two decades ago as a way to communicate positive messages to West Michigan children and families. Her many community service projects encourage kids to read, help teachers with classroom needs and provide clothing and shoes for kids in need.

Inspiration: I get my inspiration from many things in life — my kids, my husband, my family, my friends and my faith. I also get inspired by the people I meet every day — a teacher stepping outside the box to bring learning to life for his or her students; a group of kids doing something incredible to help someone in need; a family working together to overcome difficult circumstances; a business leader generously giving to help the less fortunate in our community. Every day I'm blessed to encounter inspiring people

Life lesson: Treat others the way you want to be treated. Find your strengths, empower those around you to do what they are good at and celebrate differences, creativity

“Every day I'm blessed to encounter inspiring people and goodness.”

— Lori Cook

and goodness.

Vision: I want to live my life in a way that inspires others to be their best.

Rules to live by: A proverb that often guides me: “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is within your power to act.”

Personal challenge: Staying on top of what's happening in the world of kids, teens and young families. Technology has accelerated life for our kids and families, and we're chasing to keep up. It's changed relationships, peer pressure and parenting, just to name a few things. It's exciting, frightening and challenging all at the same time. It's a personal challenge I have for myself to stay relevant, engaged and connected to what kids, teens and families are facing. Another challenge is the constant balancing act of

being a mom, a wife, an employee, a co-worker, a friend, a daughter. ... Life moves, and our roles change and shift, but I want to live in the moment, enjoy each role for what it is and have no regrets.

People, living or dead, you most admire: I admired both of my grandmothers because they were strong, simple, hard-working women. I also admire my parents for living their faith and giving me good roots. I admire my husband for being there for me — always. I admire my daughters for their courage to live boldly and their ability to keep me humble. I admire my friends who challenge me, inspire me and make me laugh. And I admire the people in this community that never give up, believe in a brighter future and invest in the lives of others.

— Terri Finch Hamilton

SPORTS, FITNESS AND WELLNESS:

PATTY SELLNER



PRESS PHOTO/EMILY ZOLADZ

Job/profession: Sellner is an athletic trainer for Center For Physical Rehabilitation and Forest Hills Northern High School. As former head athletic trainer at Lowell High School and director of Lowell's Community Wellness program, Sellner, 48, pioneered the successful “10,000 Steps A Day” program there. Renamed “Healthy Husky” at Forest Hills, the annual effort has raised funds for the YMCA's Healthy U program and the pediatric oncology research team at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital. Sellner was instrumental in bringing to Lowell a Gilda's Club cancer support facility and getting Saint Mary's Health Care involved. At the Center For Physical Rehabilitation, she works during the summer with student athletes from Forest Hills Northern, Forest Hills Central and Byron Center high schools. She also mentors college student athletic trainers, and she helped build a sports medicine network in the OK Conference.

Inspiration: I was an overweight middle-school kid who had battled weight my entire life. I played high-school sports and was fortunate enough to have some real positive people to help make inroads with the weight issues. In college in the 1980s, I ran track and field, suffered an injury and was helped by an athletic trainer (Today) I am inspired by a lot of the student athletes I helped overcome adversity or patients I work with in the clinic. They work hard, they get better and become such cool people. The success stories never cease to amaze me. That's the kind of job you want to have, where you helped someone with a few simple tools and, in turn, they inspire you.

Life Lesson: I have learned that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent. Don't give people that power. Also, take time to be still and listen to your heart. Do what you feel in your heart to be right, and you'll always be happy.

Vision: What has always made me

“I have learned

with love and compassion, that the only way to truly change the world is to change ourselves.”

— Patty Sellner

happy is to build partnerships with business, educational institutions and nonprofits. Those projects for me are a joy because it's easy to find good, strong partners who want to do what's right. Also, teaching young women how to embrace leadership and explore challenging careers, and instilling confidence in them as an important first step

Rule to live by: Help people every day if you can, and a random act of kindness is very powerful. It will help people have a great day, and those who helped have a great day, too. For me, taking flowers to someone is something I love to do.

Personal challenge: (Sellner, who can't talk about leaving Lowell without tears, says) your true friends don't care where you're working today. Change is a good thing that can enable us to grow in so many ways. You've got to have the courage to take the step, but it's so dang scary.

What makes you laugh: I have a group of friends, some of them are a little crazy, and we talk probably every couple weeks and end up laughing so hard. It recharges us.

— Morgan Jarema

PROFESSIONS: ANA ALEMAN-PUTMAN

Job/profession: Aleman-Putman, 45, is principal of Burton Elementary and Middle School, one of the biggest campuses in Grand Rapids Public Schools, with 1,000 students and 50 staff members.

Inspiration: Hands down, my parents. I always felt lucky to have had great parents, but it wasn't until I had my own children — the first at 40, the second at 42 — that I truly realized just how lucky I was. All the work, energy, love it takes to raise kind, caring, generous children. All 14 of my siblings are, in the depths of their souls, good and compassionate people. As a parent — (instilling) that is not an easy thing to do. My parents had little to no education, yet knew the power of an education could be life-changing. They knew that children need rules and boundaries. They knew that your heart must be open and your mind ready to see what needs to happen next. They taught us how to look for situations where we could make the world a little better through acts of kindness.

Life lesson: Life is precious, don't waste time. In the past two years, I have lost to cancer my brother, my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law and a dear, dear friend. Last year, I had another brother diagnosed with throat cancer (he is in remission). Eleven years ago, my father died from brain cancer. As difficult as it is, I need to have balance in my life and spend time with those I love so I can have peace in my soul and no regrets if anything happens. Hold your dear ones close and tight.

Vision: A society where education and health care are equitable. Where it doesn't matter where you live or how much money you have, but you can attain a rewarding and rigorous education and receive the best health care. A society where children are going to college and changing multi-generational poverty and illiteracy. A society where we are our brother's keeper, where we help before we judge.

Rules to live by: 1. What you do unto the least of me, you do unto me. I was raised in a very Catholic,

“My parents had little to no education, yet knew the power of an education could be life changing. ... They taught us how to look for situations where we could make the world a little better through acts of kindness.”

— Ana Aleman-Putman

community service-oriented, always help, never wait to be asked for help, family. God presents himself in multiple ways. My parents would always say, you never know when the person who you see that needs help is an angel sent by God to see what you will do. It could be a test. Because of that, I am not kidding, whenever I see a person that looks like they need help — from one who seems desolate or despondent to one who is maybe just stuck in the snow — I stop to help. I can remember a time when I was coming home from school at about 11:30 at night. I was driving up Cherry (Street) when I saw a very obviously homeless man crawling up the sidewalk, trying to stand and pull himself into a doorway. I pulled over and asked him if he needed help. He was not responding coherently. I got out of the car to see if he was bleeding. He was not. Well, I knew I would not be able to pick him up myself, plus my father always said, “Do good, but be smart about it,” i.e. don't endanger yourself or your family (he always picked up hitchhikers with us in the car, but right next to his seat he had a bat — just in case) I called my brother-in-law and sister to come help. I waited next to the man until they got there, and (we) got him to the homeless shelter.



PRESS PHOTO/CORY OLSON

2. At any point in a child's life, their future can be changed, their path redirected. It takes one person to make that change, to have that belief, to have that conversation with a child, to make that life-changing connection/change. Be the change you want to see.
3. Take the time to listen to people who want to talk — your neighbors, the gas station clerk, the barista, strangers. It could change their day and yours as well.
4. The lazy man works twice as hard — do things right the first time.

Personal challenge: Finding time to exercise. My day starts at 7 a.m. and depending on parent workshops or meetings, doesn't end until, at the earliest, 6 p.m. I have two little ones at home and a great husband, who need their mommy and their

wife. With these long days, if I go to exercise, it would be 7 or 8 p.m. before I got home. The girls go to bed at 8:30 p.m., so I would only spend an hour with them. I can't do that. It is not fair to them or to my husband who stays at home with them or to me. I don't want to miss these precious years with them

People, living or dead, you most admire: My husband, single parents, my 5-year-old. My husband is a stay-at-home dad. He makes it possible for me to do what I do and for our daughters to have rich, rewarding lives. He is my calming logical voice and energy when I feel overwhelmed. He gives our girls such a different perspective. He makes them strong and brave. I so admire single parents because, even with my husband and a good job and a good home, parenting

is really hard and emotionally exhausting. I admire all the single parents who, day after day, parent their children the best they can — get them to school on time, feed them, clothe them, provide for them. Love them — it is honorable and right. My 5-year-old daughter, Stellaluna (pictured with Aleman-Putman, above), was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at 18 months of age. Every day, she endures shots, blood checks, late night/early morning wake-ups to fix (glucose level) lows. The other day, she wanted an apple but her blood glucose was kind of high, so she said, “I know, I will run to burn it off!” So, she ran really fast three times around the house. All that for one apple. Type 1 diabetes has changed her childhood from a carefree one to a careful one.

— Terri Finch Hamilton

ARTS: DIANE MCELFISH HELLE

Job/profession: First violinist for Grand Rapids Symphony, second violinist for Perugino String Quartet and violin teacher.

Inspiration: It flows out of the orchestra and especially through the members of my string quartet. Music is a very collaborative art form. I find being around such experts spurs me on for excellence.

Life lesson: Being on a lot of committees has taught me that no one person ever has the complete story. Even when someone seems to have all the facts, I've found there is always someone else with an important piece that I need to hear if I want to understand a given situation. Even when someone would bring me 95 percent of a situation, that last 5 percent, even if it didn't change an action or an outcome, might change a little bit how you deal with it.

Vision: I want people of every age and background to experience live orchestral music. That's my artistic vision for being here. For my life, it's a little bit related to that. Just being a musician for my community, being invested in a lot of different ways for my community, whether at church, for friends in schools, in the committees I serve on — all those different ways are part of that big vision of the community experiencing live music. I'm passionate about having a relationship between our musicians and the community.

Rule to live by: Search for the truth in any situation and be fair. Being fair can mean



PRESS PHOTO/EMILY ZOLADZ

a lot of things acknowledge the strong points of a person you disagree with and admit the weaknesses in your own positions. That's what I mean by meaning fair.

Personal challenge: When I think of a challenge, I always think of what it means to go forward. I think it's important to keep growing. I make a point to do new projects on a regular basis, of making challenges artistically and just in terms of doing different kinds of things.

People, living or dead, you most admire: My parents. My mom's still alive. My dad died five years ago. They integrated their faith into their lives, always looking forward and really invested in the community. They were not professional musicians, but avid amateur musicians. I think I picked up the musical gifts from them. I've looked at them and found meaning, and it looked like a good life, and I sort of have tried to follow in their footsteps.

— Paul R. Kopenkoskey

I think it's important

— Diane McElfish Helle

COMMUNITY SERVICE: JACQUELINE 'JACKIE' TAYLOR

Job/profession: Consultant/executive coach for Pondera Advisors. Former vice president of Davenport University; president of Fulton-Montgomery Community College; vice president Lansing Community College; vice president and campus executive for Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Inspiration: Inspiration comes from being involved and being an engaged person. It means connecting with other people and being inspired by helping other people, and watching and observing other people as they grow and as they achieve. That's my external inspiration. My internal inspiration comes from being a very centered person who really lives to help others. I have a great and strong faith in a higher being. I'm a very enthusiastic and a very high-energy person, and that all adds up to being inspired about life.

Life lesson: The opportunities to succeed in school and to attend Aquinas College and Michigan State University and overcome any barrier that was out there. That includes working full time, going to college and raising kids. I didn't look at them as barriers but as life lessons that teach you to rise above and learn from that. I had to overcome people who thought a female in the 1980s wasn't going to be a top leader in a college or university. But yes, we could do that. We had to really work hard to raise the number of female presidents and vice presidents. We worked nationally with women in colleges and universities throughout the nation to demonstrate that we have the ability to also be top leaders in colleges and universities.

Vision: I really truly believe in the Athena tenets of leadership: being very authentic, being true to one's self and giving back always. For me, that includes the YWCA, my church (St.



PRESS PHOTO/EMILY ZOLADZ

Building for the future

...the future...
...the future...
...the future...

— Jacqueline 'Jackie' Taylor

Mark's), the Michigan Women's Foundation and the Michigan Habitat for Humanity. I'm not afraid of being an advocate for what's right.

Rule to live by: If we live by the golden rule, we can't do any better than that. I also live by my own rule to rise above and move forward. Always move forward; always keep learning.

Personal challenge: Finding a pathway that helped me create a life of educational leadership. One of the toughest decisions I had to make was to move from being a secretary type to become a controller of a

school district. Then, taking the right steps all the way through to get to the positions I wanted as a leader in higher education. That truly was a challenge, and, as I look back, I think God helped me to make the right steps to achieve the roles where I felt I could make the most impact on the younger generation. Building for the future is still a dream in my life, to help people be the best they can be.

People, living or dead, you most admire: Bishop Tutu, when he was here in Grand Rapids. We brought him in as a part of the World Council and had 5,000 people in Van Andel Arena to see him. It was powerful the way he touched our souls, the way he demonstrated what it truly is to give of yourself, to provide better pathways for others. It's a service above self that he truly epitomized. Bishop Tutu provided service above self with a spiritual connection, and that spiritual connection truly makes it meaningful to be connected to God.

— Paul R. Kopenkoskey

BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, INDUSTRY & LABOR: CAROL LOPUCKI



PRESS PHOTO/EMILY ZOLADZ

Job/profession: State director for the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center, a partnership of the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Michigan Economic Development Corp., hosted and managed by Grand Valley State University's Seidman College of Business.

Inspiration: I have had a long career working in concert with people, with peers, state and national leaders and multiple universities. I have had the opportunity to learn from the best practices of others around the state. There are small business owners that we work with that start small and get big very fast, and it's inspiring to see how they harness what they need to grow a small business. In the difficult times we're in now, it takes a supportive network to ride the entrepreneurial wave of starting or operating a small business. I am inspired

Everything that matters

...the future...
...the future...
...the future...

— Carol Lopucki

by their dedication.

Life lesson: I made a very big career shift from working in the nonprofit arena to working in the small-business sector. My rich nonprofit background provided a tremendous foundation to reach my current level of career success. My life lesson is that a major career leap means tapping and applying the accumulation of prior skills.

Vision: On the professional side, I am probably at the peak of my career right now, and I would like to very much make sure I've built something

that is sustainable beyond my engagement. On the personal side, I want to continue to have fun doing the work that I'm doing, to be challenged, to find solutions to issues and to be relevant to what Michigan needs right now.

Rule to live by: No matter what job you're in, the best way to succeed in it is to meaningfully interface with people. I think that is true with the people you report to, the people who report to you and your peer group. Everything that matters revolves around people.

Personal challenge: I was 10 when my mom died; (she had) multiple sclerosis. That's when I found out the importance of good mentors. That was probably one of the biggest challenges in my life, but it turned out to be an opportunity. I saw what I wanted to be and surrounded myself, even at a very young

age, with good mentors. I still stay in touch with many of them — and I commit time to mentoring others in return.

People, living or dead, you most admire: There was a neighbor woman who influenced me immensely, who had tremendous confidence in me that I could go far. She said, when I was 11 years old: "You're going to go to college, you're going to wear a three-piece suit, and you're going to have matching towels." I had no idea what she meant. No one in my family had a higher education degree, and the matching towel thing made me laugh. I left at 17 for Michigan State University and I still have one last towel of that stack of matching yellow towels she gave me long ago. She took me many places; I learned from her early on how to strive for the things that are important.

— Paul R. Kopenkoskey

JUDY LLOYD STUDENT LEADERSHIP: KACIE GEE

Job/profession: Senior at Sparta High School. She's got a near-perfect grade-point average, volunteers at Grand Rapids Home for Veterans and Meadowlark Retirement Village and is an intern at Saint Mary's Health Care who hopes to someday work in neonatal medicine. But the 17-year-old concedes she wasn't always as driven as she is today. Overwhelmed and insecure growing up with an alcoholic father, she made some not-so-good decisions during her first two years of high school, including drugs, alcohol, self-injury and an eating disorder. But her past makes her who she is today, she said. "I'm not ashamed of it. If I don't tell my story, other people will be afraid to tell theirs."

Inspiration: I wanted to break the cycle, because I didn't want my kids to go through the same thing I went through. My inspiration was to look forward to giving my kids the life I never had. My inspiration is to not

If you think

...the future...
...the future...
...the future...

— Kacie Gee

feel like I felt before, to never be at that point again.

Life Lesson: To not be a follower, and know that whatever label anyone puts on you it's not set in stone. You can put yourself in motion; you don't need anyone else to do it for you.

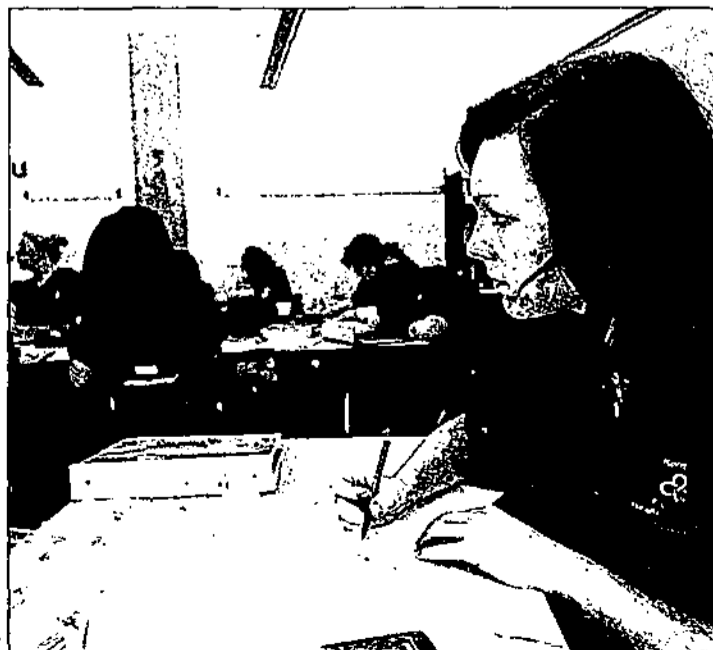
Vision: To be able to relate and be more personable to people. To be able to say, "Hey, I was dealt these cards at a very early age, I was forced to grow up a lot faster than I should have," and show them that I got past it, and they can, too.

Rule to live by: Life is what you make it. If you think you've been dealt the wrong cards, then throw them away and open your own deck. You don't have to be stuck.

Personal challenge: Lots of school, and hopefully getting enough scholarships and grants to do it.

What makes you laugh: Old people make me laugh. They have such an old humor, and everything is so old-fashioned. An old guy who cracks a joke is 10 times more funny than if someone else tells it.

—By Morgan Jarema



PRESS PHOTO/KATIE BATDORFF