

**YWCA TRIBUTE AWARDS**

# 7 women making a difference

**G**RAND RAPIDS — Six women and a high school student who have been trail blazers for others will be honored Tuesday with YWCA Tribute Awards at an annual luncheon ceremony at DeVos Place.

The honorees were nominated by colleagues, fellow board members, friends and members of the community who wanted to shine a spotlight on the courageous work of these women, who have made life better for others in West Michigan.

Here, we meet the winners and learn the reasons they were nominated.

**IF YOU GO**

**YWCA Tribute! Award Celebration**

When: Noon to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday  
Where: DeVos Place, 303 Monroe Ave. NW  
Cost: \$60 per person  
Details: All are welcome. Reservations required. Deadline to register is noon Monday. Call 616-459-4681 or go to [ywcawcmi.org](http://ywcawcmi.org)

**2012 YWCA TRIBUTE AWARD RECIPIENTS**

**Maria Besta**, of Belmont  
Work: Manager of Wheelchair and Adaptive Sports, Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital  
Award category: Sports, Fitness & Wellness

**Kathy Crosby**, of Grand Rapids  
Work: President and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids  
Award category: Business, Management, Industry & Labor

**Elaine Dalcher**, of Grand Rapids  
Work: Artist, Educator, Co-Creator of Tanglefoot Studios  
Award category: Arts

**Senita Leneer**, of Grand Rapids  
Work: President, Grand Rapids Public Schools Board of Education  
Award category: Community Service

**Lucero Miranda-Hernandez**, of Wyoming  
Work: Wyoming High School student  
Award category: Student Honoree and Recipient of the YWCA's Judy Lloyd Student Leadership Award Scholarship

**Marge Palmerlee**, of Grand Rapids  
Work: Executive Director, Degage Ministries  
Award category: Professions

**Mary Seeger**, of Caledonia  
Work: Former Dean, Grand Valley State University  
Award category: Advocacy

**Professions Award**

**Marge Palmerlee**  
Executive director, Degage Ministries, a service for the homeless, unemployed, mentally ill or physically disabled.

**Highlights of nomination:** Since starting as executive director of Degage 15 years ago, Marge Palmerlee has grown the organization to unprecedented levels — the staff, budget and programs have expanded in size four-fold.

Degage now serves 400 to 500 individuals daily, has 30 employees and a \$1 million

budget. In 2003, an extensive community study determined there was a gap in services for adult women in crisis during overnight hours. Palmerlee accepted the challenge of expanding Degage to launch the Open Door, an overnight center for women in crisis that has helped more than 1,900 women.

At first, the center was open for several hours three nights a week. It now operates seven nights a week and offers case management services during the day.

The center provides a safe and welcoming place for women experiencing trauma, fleeing domestic violence or struggling with mental illness. An average of 30 women are served each evening. Palmerlee is in the process

of raising funds to expand the center to serve 15 more women daily.

**Her vision:** "I, knew I had been richly blessed and I felt called and compelled to reach out to those in need. Having been led to work in areas of compassion, mercy and justice, my desire is to treat each person with dignity and respect. Through working with others, I've found I am the one who has received the greatest blessing."

**Important life lesson:** "I've learned never to judge someone else. I can't imagine dealing with some of the hardships and heartaches that others have endured. They are strong individuals who have my admiration and appreciation. I thank God for the gifts and talents he gives to each of us."



**Arts Award**

**Elaine Dalcher**  
Artist, Educator, Co-Creator of Tanglefoot Studios

**Highlights from nomination:** Elaine Dalcher's paintings are in public and private collections throughout West Michigan, the United States and beyond.

During her 34 years as an art teacher in Grand Rapids Public Schools, her primary focus has been providing opportunities for creative expression for students who are marginalized and vulnerable.

For more than 10 years, she worked with some of the most developmentally and physically challenged students in Kent County,

at Lincoln Developmental Center, Lincoln School and Kent Vocational Options.

Dalcher is the co-creator of Tanglefoot Studios in Grand Rapids, a home to many artist studios that has received recognition for popular open studio shows held annually for 21 years. She also has worked with Grand Valley State University on projects related to ArtPrize.

In 1998, she was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. During a year of intensive therapy at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, she set up a small art studio in her room and continued to paint. She created 15 powerful paintings documenting her journey from diagnosis to recovery. She donated them to GVSU where they hang in the Cook DeVos Center for Health Sciences Building.

The paintings have informed and comforted many individuals.

**Her vision:** "My motivation is to do the best I can in all that I set out to do, whether in my studio as a student, as a teacher in the classroom, as a friend, a colleague, neighbor or life partner. In addition, I find great joy in painting and in helping others succeed through the creative experience."

**Important life lesson:** "Love, trust and respect for one another form a powerful springboard for success at any level. Teaching and learning go hand-in-hand. I find the more I know, the more I want to learn. For me, there is no retirement. Each day brings a new opportunity to explore, grow and share with others."

**Sports, Fitness and Wellness Award**

**Maria Besta**  
Manager of Wheelchair and Adaptive Sports Program, Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital and Certified Therapeutic Recreation specialist

**Highlights of nomination:** Maria Besta makes it possible for people with disabilities to return to sports. For nine years, she was director of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association. During that time, the program doubled the number of sports offered to eight, adding teams in quad rugby, hand cycling, adult sled hockey and wheelchair softball. It became the biggest program of its kind in Michigan and one of the largest in the United States. She has recruited new players, and raised funds to keep GRWSA

viable, including hosting Italian dinners at her home with proceeds going to the association. Her fundraising also enables teams to travel to regional, national and international competitions. For many, these are their first trips since becoming disabled.

Her vision for GRWSA was to become part of Mary Free Bed where it would grow and prosper. In May, she became the first manager of the Wheelchair and Adapted Sports Program there.

She also has been camp director since 1998 of the Junior Wheelchair Sports Camp and oversees the Mary Free Bed Guild program Bikes for the Rest of Us. Each spring, disabled children are given grants for specially outfitted bikes. She has increased therapists and volunteers to serve 90 children.

She also started a group for women older than 40 called The Next Chapter to tackle new challenges — completing a 25K run, climbing sand dunes, hula hoop aerobics or

flying yoga. **Her vision:** "My vision has always been to provide sport and leisure opportunities for children and adults with all types of disabilities. Mary Free Bed has made it possible to complete the vision of providing more options of wheelchair and adaptive sports to all kinds of athletes and to make them feel they have the same opportunities as their family and friends. I want our athletes to feel they can do anything and most of all feel a part of a group that understands and lifts them up."

**Important life lesson:** "One person can make a difference to someone else. All it takes is one person to make an impact to empower another and, in return, they will pay it forward and touch another life. I have also learned that compassion for others is so important. Just sit back and listen to someone else and try to understand — have compassion. You don't know a person's story, which is actually a window into who they are"



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**Community Service Award**

**Senita R. Lenear**  
President, Grand Rapids Board of Education and consulting business owner

**Highlights of nomination:** Grand Rapids Public Schools has faced difficult years with challenges such as student loss, state funding reductions, leadership turnover and the impact of charter schools and schools-of-choice. Senita Lenear helped guide the system from some very dark days toward a hope-filled future.

In her role as board president for the past two years, she has navigated difficult terrain. She works hard to assure all voices are heard and that members understand their role in working with the administrative team. She encourages the board and the administration to ensure the community is engaged in all decisions that shape the district's future.

"She did a masterful job of unifying the board, listening to the community and its needs and creating a process that led to the section of a superintendent who is absolutely the right person for the job," said Kevin Konarska, Kent

Intermediate School District superintendent.

Lenear also is president of Kent Intermediate Association of School Boards and facilitator for the Kent County Black Elected Officials.

**Her vision:** "Nelson Mandela has a quote that reads, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' Mandela's story is one of overcoming economic and political oppression through the power of education. I want to connect as a conduit that connects all children to the indomitable power of a quality education."

**Important life lesson:** "You can learn from the

mistakes of others. I try to share this with young people whenever I have an opportunity to speak to them.

"When your parents, educators and mentors give sound advice about saying no to drugs and alcohol, abstaining from sex, not texting while driving, and (avoiding) friends of negative influence etc., ... listen! These are the lessons you can learn by hearing the testimonies and tragedies they've caused for others.

"Trust me, there will be enough bumps and experiences that will develop you into the person you'll become without doing the things you know you shouldn't do!"



**Business, Management, Industry and Labor Award**

**Kathy Crosby**  
President and CEO, Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids

**Highlights of nomination:** Kathy Crosby was a classroom aide and clerk in a rural school district when she received a layoff notice. The married mother of two was overweight, and insecure about finding another job. Goodwill of Greater Detroit hired her as a clerk and her new supervisor became a mentor. Crosby completed an associate's degree, earned a bachelor's in business administration and was promoted into management. She lost 165

pounds along the way. Today, she holds a master's of arts and a master's of business administration degree and has spent 32 years with Goodwill.

In Grand Rapids, she is CEO of a \$30.1 million organization serving eight West and central Michigan counties. She led the organization through approval and sale of \$7.75 million in bonds for retail business development, acquired property for three new stores, including the first LEED-certified Goodwill store in Michigan, opened five leased stores and two boutiques and established a 10-year business model.

Goodwill of Greater Grand Rapids now employs 560 people on a long-term

basis and 200 transitional "trainees." In 2011, it provided vocational services to 3,353 people and placed 978 people in community development. She also provides leadership opportunities for women and has been a mentor to many, including graduates of Goodwill Industries International's executive development program and through the Jandernoa Entrepreneurial Mentoring program and the Hauenstein Center Mentorship Program.

**Her vision:** "I believe in giving all people the support to achieve their dreams. Many unemployed and under-employed people have never had a mentor, a supportive work environment, a cheerleader.

"Becoming a strong

business leader has opened doors of opportunity (for me) to support the dreams, development and achievement of others.

"My vision is to give every person seeking to learn, build a career and develop as a person the environment and support to pursue their goals."

**Important life lesson:** "My mother taught me early on you can never be too kind or too generous. It's not just about money. It is about thoughts and deeds.

"Mother led by example, and she taught us to give others the best of what we had. To think kindly of others' behavior, choices and deeds. To assume good intentions. It has served me well to follow her lead."



**Advocacy Award**

**Mary Anderson Seeger**  
Grand Valley State University professor and dean, retired

**Highlights from nomination:** Mary Seeger joined Grand Valley College in 1965 as a German professor. She was one of the few faculty members at the new college and quickly rose to leadership positions as the first chair of the All-College Senate, first coordinator of the Honors Program and first head of the Graduate Program

in Education, among others. She went on to become GVSU dean of Special Programs.

She chaired the first Women's Climate Study committee, the results of which changed the university in significant ways, including adding an on-site day care center and a university women's commission that addressed salary equity issues. It also resulted in more effective ways to deal with sexual harassment and gay and lesbian issues.

In 1983, she created the Faculty Staff Campaign to develop scholarship and program support for students and she remains active with

the campaign. On the eve of GVSU's 50th anniversary, her support led to more than 1,200 donors. She has mentored many women students and has overseen the school's TRIO program to help students with financial difficulties or support first generation college students. She also has been active in many community groups.

**Her vision:** "I grew up in a family and in a small-town community (Mahtomedi, Minn.) in which participation and volunteerism were valued. ... The idea that much is expected of those to whom much is given is Biblical, of course, but also found in

the writings of authors and philosophers as well. I try to live that principle."

**Important life lesson:** "It's always been my style to look at the overview of any project in which I'm involved, no matter how tiny or large my part is. That leads me to see possible connections between and among my many varied interests and organizations and keeps me motivated and involved.

"I brought a well-known mystery writer to appear at a women's fundraiser, for example, and connected local Girl Scouts with the Michigan Women's Museum and Hall of Fame."



**Student Award and recipient of the YWCA's Judy Lloyd Student Leadership Award Scholarship**

**Lucero Miranda-Hernandez**  
Wyoming High School senior, age 17

**Highlights from nomination:** A natural-born leader with a desire to serve others, Lucero is ambitious and achieves her goals through her continuous hard work. For more than two years, she has been involved in the Supporting Our

Leaders Youth Program at the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan. The program's mission is to shape and develop youth into leaders. She has been an inspiring speaker at Center programs and volunteers to set up and clean up for the center's community events.

Lucero's family moved from Guatemala to the United States in search of a better life. At age 14, she became a mother. Her child's father moved back to Guatemala

while she was still pregnant. She decided the best way to be a good mother was to provide her son with a bright future. She is now focusing on graduating from high school and attending college.

She inspires others by bravely sharing her story. Currently, she is planning a nonprofit center for teen mothers, to create a welcoming environment for teen moms so they can get support, supplies and advice. **Her vision:** "I have a

vision that, one day, I will make a big difference. I will be a big someone's life. I'm a people person and I want to be the type of person that, with a small action, I can make a big difference."

**Important life lesson:** "Being only 14 when I had my little boy made me see things in a different way and, to keep it simple, it made me realize that it's difficult, but not impossible, and everything I will do is for others and for my son."

