

Tribute Awards

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Women who are a voice for the voiceless, who contribute to numerous prominent West Michigan projects and who volunteer their time and passion for the betterment of others — these are among the winners of this year's Tribute Awards given by the YWCA

PROFESSIONS AWARD

Helen V. Brinkman

Senior assistant prosecuting attorney at Kent County Prosecutor's office

Nominators said: Over her 25-year career, Brinkman has tried a remarkable number of circuit court felony trials with an even more remarkable success rate. Of her 178 sexual assault trials, a jury has only acquitted 14 defendants. She was asked in 1991 to help in the creation and



implementation of the Children's Assessment Center, which opened in 1993 and has been an unqualified success by providing a "safe haven" for abused children.

She was involved in the initial meetings that explored the possibility of bringing the YWCA Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program to Kent County; the program opened in November 1996. Since that time she has become a strong supporter of the program and has made herself available to speak to prosecutors in other counties where the service is

being considered.

In addition, she has a long history of conducting a portion of the training for YWCA volunteer advocates. She also was a member of the YWCA "Making a Difference" team that received training to help address the needs of victims of "non-stranger" sexual assaults and the prosecution of such cases.

Brinkman has been a member of the Kent County "Child Death Review Team" since its creation. It is tasked with examining all childhood deaths that occur within the county regardless of whether criminal charges are filed.

She said: "I do what I do and am motivated by the command to take up the cause of the widows and orphans. The children and woman who suffer abuse deserve the best representation available. That is my charge; justice for women and children of abuse."

Life lesson: "To quote Lord Chesterfield, 'Know the true value of time; snatch, seize and enjoy every minute of it.'"

of West Central Michigan.

In all, seven area women will be honored Nov. 5 at the YWCA's annual luncheon to highlight their achievements. Here is a look at some of the accomplishments of these women, as cited in nomination letters and their own words about their work.

BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, INDUSTRY AND LABOR AWARD

Linda Vos-Graham, 53

President of Vos Glass, a full-service glass company

Nominators said: Over three decades, Linda has participated in transforming the glass business through innovation, integrity and service. As a second-generation business owner, Linda "represents the ideal blend of traditional values and progressive entrepreneurial spirit." Linda is a leader in a highly competitive construction market dominated by men.

Under her leadership, Vos Glass has contributed to numerous prominent West Michigan projects, including Helen DeVos Children's Hospital and Van Andel Institute, both of which involved glass as a key feature.

In 1991, she helped co-found the Michigan Glass Association, the only statewide trade asso-



ciation for the glazing industry. Three years later, she started a 10-year Journey to get state legislation to ban insurance companies from restricting where customers could go for auto glass and collision repairs. Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed a bill into law opening auto glass replacement to more shops.

In 2014, the construction industry was having trouble attracting new workers. Vos-Graham used her influence to bring three construction industry associations together to work on the problem, resulting in the formation of an alliance called Construction Workforce Development Alliance.

In 2013, Vos-Graham was inducted into the Michigan Construction Hall of buildings throughout the area.

She said: "I enjoy getting things done and being a part of the solution, contributing, pro-

2014 YWCA TRIBUTE AWARDS

When: Noon to 1:30 p.m. Nov. 5
Where: DeVos Place (ballrooms A and B), 303 Monroe Ave. NW
Tickets: Reservations by Nov. 3, call 616-459-7062, ext. 218, or to ywcatribute2014.eventbrite.com

viding and being constructive or beneficial. These are both rewarding and can positively affect what matters to me: family, friends, employees, and community. Community in particular is important to me and my family. ... It seems like common sense to give back to, develop and improve the community that continues to provide for me, my family and our employees."

Life lesson: "The power of teamwork and collaboration. Working with others to do a task and to achieve shared goals is most productive. I think I began learning that lesson in school (by) playing sports and participating in activities. It's just become more and more evident as time passed. My father said, 'You need to work on the solutions or accept the problem.' It's true. Everyone has something to share: ideas, time, knowledge, connections. ... In business, I've come to better understand that good leaders need to balance collaboration with decisive decision making."

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Kimberly A. Coleman

Executive director of the Grand Rapids Bar Association

Nominators said: Coleman has been a leader in local, statewide and national organizations. She has long dedicated herself to removing "obstacles that inhibit people," including barriers faced by women, people of color and people with disabilities.



She has demonstrated leadership in issues affecting women and children and improving the community throughout her professional career, particularly as executive director to the Single-Parent Family Institute (1988-1993) and the Downtown Chapter of the YMCA of Lansing (1993-1999). She also has demonstrated leadership as a member of the Governor's Task Force on Childcare, intended to improve the quality of child care in Michigan.

Coleman has served as board officer and member of the Woodruff Institute on Racism; as a member of the Diversity and

Inclusion Advisory Council of Varnum, providing insight and perspective to the Varnum law firm in its efforts toward diversity and inclusion in its organization and in the community at large; and as a member of the Chamber of Commerce's committee to initiate and develop the Multiracial Association of Professionals (MAP), to provide a setting to welcome young professionals new to Grand Rapids into a diverse community.

She said: "I do what I do because I feel it is my duty to give back. More importantly, I find it personally gratifying to be a part of something that will make a difference in the lives of others. Initially, I saw service as an opportunity to increase skills and experience while becoming familiar with the various organizations in the community. It didn't take long for me to discover my passion for capacity building: helping people help people."

Life lesson: "Don't look away if someone is in need. There are always opportunities to help, and a little goes a long way."

SPORTS, FITNESS AND WELLNESS AWARD

Laura Vander Molen, 46

Medical director at Health Intervention Services

Nominators said: For 13 years, Vander Molen has served at Health Intervention Services, a faith-based nonprofit health clinic for those who do not have access to medical care. She has led the effort providing compassionate, quality and comprehensive care. Over the years, she has provided leadership and oversight to more than 60 volunteer physicians and several hundred nurses. She mentors and supervises medical students, interns and externs each year.

VanderMolen has provided care and oversight of the treatment of nearly 2,000 patients each year. She also partners with the HIS Dental Team for



oral health treatment.

The seeds of Laura's vision originated while she was visiting family in Peru as a child. She witnessed poverty at a level she never saw in the U.S. These early experiences and the Christian teachings from Matthew 25 and the parable of the Good Samaritan lit her desire to work with the poor.

Her vision is access to quality health care for everyone.

She provides care to refugees and the Spanish-speaking community and works to make sure they understand their health conditions and the barriers in the complex health care system. Counseling was added so patients who may be shy will feel more comfortable in the same place they receive medical care. The benefit also reaches women who are experiencing

domestic violence who would not feel safe or be allowed to see a counselor anywhere else.

She said: "My dad was from South America and my mom was from Iowa, from a farm, so we grew up going to Peru and saw poverty that definitely affected me. Some family members struggled for a while; my parents would have us give away one thing that we really liked, and my mom would say, 'This seems hard, but when you give away you won't miss it.' ... My family has always been very active in church. God has given me a lot of grace, and I want to share it with people."

Life lesson: Paul Farmer, author of "Mountains Beyond Mountains," is a physician who has done a lot of work in poor communities. "One thing I took away from his book was when he would run into the answer 'No, we can't do that,' he'd ask, 'Why?' Then, he'd figure it out based on what he was given."

ADVOCACY AWARD

Sister Jarrett DeWyse

Director of Housing Development at Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids

Nominators said: Before working at Dwelling Place, DeWyse served as a teacher and in administrative positions for the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Campus Minister at MSU and established a five-parish adult education center at St. Teresa Parish in Kankakee, Illinois. Her work on several nonprofit boards and organizations over the past several years includes Heartside Ministry, ACCESS, Area Center of Ecumenism and serving on a task force for racial equality in housing.

DeWyse first worked to provide low-income housing



in Grand Rapids at Dwelling Place through the Ferguson Renaissance Center in 1988. First, there was the dream and vision and then the multitude of meetings, planning, revising plans, financing and fundraising. Since then, the pattern has been repeated and expanded to include such projects as the Vision for Division, the Avenue of the Arts and the exploratory committee examining the value and appropriateness of Community Land Trust.

She collaborated with the YWCA in 2007 to renovate three duplexes for the YWCA to use as a temporary housing for domestic violence survivors. This partnership was furthered in 2011 through the development of "Bridge Street Place,"

a permanent supportive housing project for women who are domestic violence survivors.

She said: "Life is short, and our outreach is limited, so we can only touch part of the world that's within our reach. Advocacy is part of who I am. I really believe that God gives gifts to be used for the service of others. I use those to create affordable housing for others. I really am energized for the housing development field to advocate for the people who need housing."

Life lesson: "I think in the work of affordable housing that I'm engaged in, nobody has all the answers. Together, we can do great things. We can help change lives and the community for the better if we work together. I've learned that over and over throughout my life, so we have to encourage the gifts of others. We are not in competition; we are in partnership."

ARTS AWARD

Sarah Scott, 38

Art coordinator, Heartside Ministry

Nominators said: Over the past seven years with Heartside Gallery & Studio, Scott has increased the impact of our program on the 60 artists (marginalized Heartside neighbors who are homeless and/or suffer from significant mental and/or physical health issues) by building the qualities of community among the artists necessary to sustain a meaningful life. She also has increased the impact of the program on the larger community of Heartside and greater



Grand Rapids by demonstrating the amazing gifts present in the good people she works with through art shows, social media, the traditional press and hosting local school, church, civic, business and other groups.

As the leader of the Heartside Gallery & Studio, Scott has taken the program to new heights over the past two years. She has added two part-time staff members, manages 25 volunteers and, last year, worked on a full-length hardcover book celebrating the 20th anniversary of Heartside Gallery & Studio.

Scott is an active leader and presenter at the annual Lady Fest in downtown Grand Rapids. She has helped many women out of abusive situations and helped men to be more respectful. She has helped establish a women's

group focused on addressing street harassment.

She said: "The first time I walked into the art studio in 1999 here, I knew it was what I should be doing: Artists making work that would speak to their soul, creating beautiful paintings on scraps of wood that we found in a dumpster, no pretense, all fierce heart. I've been here ever since. It's easy to be motivated to work here — there is so much unity here."

Life lesson: "A life lesson I deal with every day is just making sure I am not judging a book by its cover. Every day I meet someone new here and I am blown away by the grace, knowledge, creativity, wisdom, patience and persistence of folks who often are overlooked and unheard."

STUDENT AWARD

Claire Salinas, 18

Catholic Central High School senior

Nominator said: Claire Salinas is a gifted clarinetist who has extensive work with children from diverse backgrounds. She played an



important role in the Summer Enrichment program, Beyond the Corners, a program geared to elementary youth to reduce gang participation in children, and she has been a Science Olympiad coach at St. Thomas the Apostle Elementary Schools for several years. Her passion for making the world a brighter place totally reflects the YWCA's values of eliminating racism and promoting peace, justice and dignity for all.

At school, she carries a high grade point average and is taking advanced placement classes in psychology, government and statistics. Claire has participated in the honors band at Grand Valley State University for two years, and this past year was a Youth Arts Festival participant, an honor reserved for the top 5 percent of high school artists in Michigan. Claire plans to attend Grand Valley State University

and major in clarinet and music education. She wishes to use her passion for music and children as a life career.

She said: "My greatest motivation to play the clarinet is the simple fact that I love playing it. It feels incredible to make music on my own and to be good enough to recognize and fix mistakes when I make them. However much I enjoy playing solos, I'll always prefer to play in a group setting, especially in the Grand Rapids Youth Symphony. It's exhilarating playing such complex music with others and making it actually enjoyable to listen to. Beyond just the clarinet, I have a great time conducting my school's marching band for the second year. It's one thing to be a part of the music, and it's entirely different to lead others as they play and it inspires so much pride in me when we put pieces together and on the field."

Life lesson: "Get involved in something you love. Start by trying all sorts of things. I spent the longest time wanting to be a scientist, but recently, I realized my heart was in music, and now I devote my time to that instead. Once you find where your interests lie, dig in deep and don't be easily discouraged. As long as you love what you're doing, you'll find ways to be happy in life."