

Tribute Awards

By Danielle Favorite
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Women who lead diversity lecture series, who passionately lead and create new programs in education and help more than 100 nonprofit organizations build successful fundraising mechanisms — these are among the winners of this year's Tribute Awards given by the YWCA of West Central Michigan.

In all, seven area women will be honored Nov. 17 during the YWCA's annual luncheon held at the DeVos Place to highlight their achievements. Here is a look at these women, some of their accomplishments as cited in nomination letters and their own words about their work.

ADVOCACY AWARD

Christina Guajardo Arnold, 53

Director of Bob & Alecia Woodruff Diversity Learning Center at Grand Rapids Community College

Nominators said: Chris has a significant leadership responsibility for providing pathways to learning for faculty, staff, students and the community to better understand, embrace and learn from the perspective of human differences. Her dedication and work has served as a liaison between GRCC and community organizations.

The ways in which her leadership influences a respect for diversity are demonstrated through specific annual programs such as the Diversity Lecture Series, Giants Awards & Banquet, Institute for Healing Racism, Latino Youth Conference, Martin Luther King Jr. Celebrations and Salute to Women. She also chairs the Diversity Team.

Chris personifies the values of YWCA — eliminating racism through her community leadership role and through the Diversity Learning Center, empowering women and girls

through her work with Young Women for Change; as a Latina who has succeeded and as a Latina who ensures integration of diversity and inclusion training throughout one of the largest colleges in the state of Michigan and throughout the West Michigan area and beyond

She said: "I feel fortunate to be able to be involved in work that really is personally meaningful. My family history is filled with experiences that parallel those of people in our community who may live outside of the mainstream.

"I am very familiar with the challenges inherent in our current social systems and love working toward solutions. I love this community, meeting people and hearing and sharing their stories. Working with students on a daily basis keeps me energized and gives me hope for the future."

Life lesson: "Work to accept challenges and new experiences. Take time to meet new people. Travel if you can, but more importantly always observe and listen to those who may have very different life stories than yours."

PROFESSIONS AWARD

Teresa Weatherall Neal, 56

Superintendent of Grand Rapids Public Schools

Nominators said: Teresa's position as superintendent of the largest school district in Kent County and the fifth largest in Michigan is evident enough

that she's a leader in education. She is one of the few females and the only African American superintendent in the county

Earlier, as assistant superintendent of schools, Teresa spent many years overseeing the Title I budget (federal monies allocated to serving students in poverty). Because of this experience, she is very aware of the needs of the students within the district who are faced with challenges. Her division was instrumental in creating a program for homeless students and families. The program was such a success, it was duplicated in districts throughout West Michigan.

She is always encouraging her staff to treat students and their parents with dignity and respect. She enhanced the customer service experience of office secretaries to encourage fair and equi-

table treatment no matter what school you enter. She brought in consultants to grapple with the racial inequities that students were experiencing.

She said: "I took the job as superintendent of the Grand Rapids Public Schools due to my love for this community, these children, and the staff that I proudly serve. My passion is education and it has been my life's work. It also embodies my other passion and that is for social good. When children in a community are provided with the highest level of learning possible, this creates social good. An educated community brings value to the entire region, our state and it lifts up everyone. Children are truly the future. ... We need to show them that we believe in them and encourage them so that they will have the confidence to achieve their dreams as well as dare to dream."

Life lesson: "Be authentic. Be true to yourself. Find balance and happiness. Never let anyone tell you that 'you can't achieve.' You can achieve! As women we are teachers. We have will, grit, and determination."

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Andrea Haidle, 68

School board secretary of Kent Intermediate School District

Nominators said: Haidle is nearing the quarter-century mark in her community service work advocating for children as a school board member, first at East Grand Rapids Schools and now with the Kent ISD School Board. She has held all leadership positions on each, including as a leader of leaders on the local school boards' association.

She is perennially their choice to carry their concerns to the state Capitol and Congress for more than two decades on issues ranging from equity in funding, early childhood education and equal opportunities for all.

Her leadership at Kent ISD led to the creation of new science, technology, engineering and math opportunities, the Innovation High laboratory school to bring more project-based and engaging instruction

and communities to learn about the fort online.

Hayley's goal is to become a business law attorney.

She said: "In the beginning of my freshman year, I was not the same person I am today. My mind was not set on being successful but was more set on fitting in. I wanted to fit in with my friends even though I knew I was made to stand out. While I was trying to fit in I noticed that my friends were going down a path that I did not want to follow in. ... I wanted to leave a legacy behind when I leave high school. I decided in order for me to do so I had to be the leader and follow my own path to success."

Life lesson: "God made everyone different, and no one will ever be the same. That is why you try to fit in and yet you only see them at school. You were made to stand out. Be your own person and pave your own path."

BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, INDUSTRY AND LABOR AWARD

Sandi Frost Steensma, 46

President and principal consultant at Kennari Consulting

Nominators said: She started Kennari Consulting (formerly Parrish Consulting) in 2007 with, as she says, "just me and a flip phone."

Today, the firm has eight staff members and serves more than 50 nonprofit organizations with fundraising consulting each year.

In just eight years, Kennari Consulting has grown to be the largest, full-service fundraising consulting firm in West Michigan. The ripple effects of this meteoric growth impacts this entire community. Many local organizations would not have survived the economic cri-

sis of 2008-2011 without her help.

Each nonprofit she coaches touches a vast number of people. They provide food, clothing, shelter, music, dance, art, theater, health care, counseling and a list of other services literally too vast to mention. She also has helped legitimize and professionalize fundraising as a career choice.

She said: "I have been serving the nonprofit and public sectors in a variety of roles since 1993. At that time, it occurred to me that it was volunteer work that was keeping me happy and fulfilled. So what better than to do that work full time? It took me a little while to determine how sales, marketing and management skills best translated to the nonprofit environment,

but it was clear that sales skills trumped over management skills when I found I liked fundraising the best of the various nonprofit opportunities. And fundraising became fundamental to what drives me each day. It's really pretty simple. If nonprofits can raise more money to fulfill their missions, they can serve more people and have more impact."

Life lesson: "Do the right thing, and the right things happen" is my mantra. Especially in my 15 years of elected office, saying this to myself daily when I woke up helped me to deal with the trials and tribulations of dealing with the politics of public service. It probably also helped me gain a reputation for bipartisanship, because if you are doing the right thing, you value everyone's talents and try to use them to advance the public good."

2001. My husband and I had three kids, and I was eager to contribute to the dance scene in Grand Rapids. My husband Erin Wilson is the director of Wealthy Theatre, and we both were interested in having dance be a part of the Theatre again. ... We began Dance in the Annex to foster an appreciation for dance in Grand Rapids and provide educational and performance opportunities to dancers throughout West Michigan.

I think most artists do what they do because they have to, there just isn't any other way of life. Dance is part of who I am."

Life lesson: "Finding something that I love so dearly and believing in that passion has gotten me through some rough times. I hope that everyone can find that one thing and do it forever. As conventional as that sounds, it is the truest advice I can give."

I moved to Grand Rapids in

SPORTS, FITNESS AND WELLNESS AWARD

Doreen Bolhuis, 53

President and founder of Gymco Inc.

Nominators said: In 1980, Doreen became a pioneer in her field when, as a physical education teacher with no business experience, she

envisioned and created her business.

Despite the absence of role models, mentors and business loans for women, she has reached a level of success that most male entrepreneurs have not been able to achieve. Gymco Inc. employs more than 25 employees and maintains a client base of over 1,000 students.

Approximately 80 percent of Gymco's students are girls, and Gymco's programs chal-

lenge girls to develop courage and confidence while providing them with the support to reach their goals.

In 2009, Doreen co-founded Motion Evolution LLC, which provides comprehensive programs of fitness and physical literacy for children of all ages. She is also co-founder of Fismart Productions LLC, a company that produces a series of DVDs to teach physical literacy skills to young children.

Doreen is only the second female mentor to be appointed to the Jandemoa Entrepreneurial Mentoring Program for companies positioned for second stage growth. She sits on the Governor's Council for Physical Fitness, Health and Sports and is a member of the West Michigan

Policy Forum Board of Directors and the Michigan Fitness Foundation. She is also a current member of the Honorary Council of Inforum of West Michigan.

She said: "My passion for helping others to develop courage and confidence runs deep and long as a thread throughout my life. My earliest memory of this is teaching other kids gymnastics and sports skills in my backyard in about fourth grade. I discovered the joy of helping people — especially girls — overcome fear to become more confident and strong and be more than they thought they could."

Life lesson: "I'd like to share two of my favorite quotes: 'Fear is the raw material from which courage is manufactured' (author unknown), and 'You must do the thing which you think you cannot do' (Eleanor Roosevelt)."

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STUDENT AWARD

Hayley Lee, 17

Wyoming High School senior

Nominator said: Hayley serves on the Principal's Leadership team of three high schools, tutors algebra, is the youth department secretary at her church and has planned fundraisers for Kids Food Basket, recognition for World War II veterans and welcome

ceremonies for newly arrived refugees.

She also participates in the Grand Rapids Police Department Explorer program, performed community service in Louisville, Kentucky and Lansing and teaches sign language for youth worship services.

She is the 2015-16 Michigan

IF YOU GO

2015 YWCA TRIBUTE AWARDS

When: Noon to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday.
Where: DeVos Place (ballrooms A and B), 303 Monroe Ave. NW in downtown Grand Rapids.
Tickets: Reservations by Nov. 16; call 616-426-3716 or visit ywcatribute2015.eventbrite.com