

YWCA honors 7 women with Tribute Awards for leadership

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI -- The YWCA West Central Michigan is honoring seven women for their work in the community through its annual Tribute Awards.

To date, the YWCA has honored more than 250 women through the annual awards since 1977. The Tribute luncheon is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Wednesday Nov. 13 at DeVos Place, 303 Monroe Ave. NW. Tickets are \$65 each and can be purchased at ywcawcmi.org.

Women will be honored in the categories of Advocacy, Arts, Business, Management, Industry and Labor, Community Service, Professions, Sports, Fitness and Wellness and a Student Honoree who is also the recipient of the YWCA Judy Lloyd Scholarship.

The YWCA is designed to help with leadership programs for girls, prevention classes, and has the Grand Rapids community's most comprehensive services to address domestic and dating abuse, sexual assault, child abuse and stalking against all people.

Mlive/The Grand Rapids Press reached out to the winners to ask their inspirations, hobbies, and how they felt about being selected for the Tribute Awards. Here is what each of them had to say:



*Dana Doll, founder of Treetops Collective
(Photo provided to MLive by Jodi L. Jarka)*

ADVOCACY AWARD

Dana Doll, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Treetops Collective
Age: 37

Nominator said: In a time of politicization of refugees and immigrants, Treetops Collective has been a growing voice and force for recognizing the gifts and abilities that refugees bring to West Michigan. Treetops' community programs have impacted the lives of refugee women in

these first few years of

Treetops' existence, but it has also impacted the conversation of immigration and refugees in West Michigan. Dana has a firm belief that although policy solutions around forced migration are global, the real work of welcoming is always designed and delivered in communities, who decide whether or not refugees will continue to survive on the margins or if we will work together and ensure that every member of our community has the chance to set down their roots and flourish here.

When refugees arrive in Grand Rapids they come because they have been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence. Many suffer psychological trauma. The current climate

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surrounding refugees and immigrants also contributes to their fears and concerns. Refugee women, in particular, are often lonely in their new country.

Dana's vision and actions help to allay those fears. They are able to engage with people outside their family, make friends, learn about resources in their new community, and achieve personal goals.

She said: 'The only reason that I would accept this kind of award is if I'm doing it on behalf of our team at Tree Tops, because of all the things in my journey this is the team and the work that I'm most proud of. I'm sure every winner says this, but it really would not be possible without every single person on my team making this what it is ... I think this award is a reminder that regardless of what is happening on a national level, there's always work to be done in our own community of really just creating more understanding between our newest neighbors and people who have been here longer.

I think we're living through one of the worst humanitarian displacement crises of our time ... and yet it's also a time of deep, deep politicization of displaced people. It goes on a local level but also on an international level. It's so important to hear people's stories, otherwise it's too easy for them to become a number."

Favorite quote: "Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid." – Frederick Buechner

Guilty pleasure: Late night snacking and Netflixing with my husband.



*Miranda Krajniak, Executive Director of the UICA
(Photo provided to MLive by John Corriveau)*

ARTS AWARD

Miranda Krajniak, Executive Director, Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts
Age:36

Nominator said: Personally, Krajniak believes in the positive social impact that comes from pushing the boundaries of expression. On an institutional level, Krajniak works with the belief that art acts as both connector and instigator and that it can transform lives in many arenas - from the personal to the political. Under her leadership, UICA operates with the belief that experiencing art can break down institutional barriers, give amplification to voices that have been suppressed, and create change, one viewer/audience member at a time.

Krajniak's work, both professional and volunteer, has demonstrated YWCA's mission values perfectly. Her work has strengthened the position of populations that are traditionally marginalized or underserved, including those with disabilities, people of color, and those of lower socioeconomic status. By centering this vision in all aspects of her leadership, more artists have advanced their careers, and more audience members have had transformative experiences with art that speaks directly to them.

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More vendors from marginalized groups have been hired; more community members have been given a voice and agency in how they're represented; more staff members at local institutions have been trained in equity issues; more people of color have been hired in good-paying, stable jobs.

She said: What gets me up in the morning is something new. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about the past or dwelling on nostalgia. For me, I want to know what's next. I'm constantly halfway in the future, so it's a really good fit for me to be at the UICA.

I come from very little and from nowhere, I'm from a town no one's ever heard of ... For me, really I would just have to work harder.

I have a very clear North star. I know exactly where I'm going and I put in work.

It's really an honor, because if you look back at who's been nominated over the many, many years they've done it, it is a very interesting, worthwhile, important group of people in Grand Rapids who are doing the work.

Favorite quote: "Damn the torpedoes, full straight ahead:" - David Farragut

Guilty pleasure: Star Trek: The Next Generation



Valissa Armstead. Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Spectrum Health.

(Photo provided to MLive by Kawan Mills)

BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, INDUSTRY AND LABOR AWARD

Valissa Armstead, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Spectrum Health

Age:49

Nominator said: In the four years that Valissa has been with Spectrum Health, she has proven to be an innovator, relationship builder, change agent and influencer for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). She is a true expert and continuously seeks to gain knowledge and build her business acumen as she expands DEI efforts across the Spectrum Health System and our community.

Faith, healthy living and improving the well-being of our community are all very important to Valissa. She is a board member of the Kingdom Life Ministries Community Development Corporation and assists with grant writing and program development that supports families with becoming self-sufficient within the community. She facilitates employability skills training through the Deborah Project, a program to facilitate single mother parenting skills, provide support in overcoming the challenges of raising children

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alone, and providing networking channels from professionals in the urban core, and surrounding Grand Rapids community.

Working in the "space" of diversity, equity and inclusion takes an individual who displays courage, resilience and tenacity. Valissa embodies all of these key competencies.

Sha said: This is a passion of mine. Some people say you do work as a requirement. This is my second career and my first career I did engineering for over 14 years and most of the time I was the only female or the only African American and I ran into some barriers myself, so having my own lived experience actually improved my passion and desire to move into the DEI space.

I really am not one for accolades, I like to do the work on the back end and it's a passion of mine, I would do it even if I didn't get paid to do it, but it's great to get paid ... I felt so honored and blessed (to receive the award) because it's an opportunity for me to be able to let my children see the work that I do. They hear about it all the time, but they don't get to see it.

It's exciting to be recognized for the work that we all do at Spectrum Health, not just me, because everybody should own diversity, equity and inclusion in their space.

Favorite quote: "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair:" - Shirley Chisholm

Guilty pleasure: Skinny Pop Popcorn



Misti Stanton, Assistant Vice President Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Mercantile Bank

(Photo provided to Mlive by Zach Roth)

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Misti Stanton, Assistant Vice President Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Mercantile Bank

Age: 53

Nominator said: Without a doubt. Misti has always and continues to exemplify a very strong commitment to promoting and improving the lives of many in the Grand Rapids community as a leader, volunteer, mentor and influencer, particularly the youth of our community.

For 25 years, Misti was a part of the Grand Rapids Public Schools in a number of different roles, which included the H.O.S.T.S. (Help One Student To Succeed) program assistant and coordinator, a title one literacy program for kindergarten through sixth grade. While under her lead, they received a National Exemplary Award for one of the best H.O.S.T.S. sites in the nation.



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Misti also started a co-op program at the bank collaborating with GRPS, allowing high school students the opportunity to get a firsthand look at banking, perhaps turning out a future banker, financier or commercial lender.

Her commitment to the community, the youth community, in and around Grand Rapids, directly reflects that of the YWCA values. As a mother of two young women, promoting women and girls along with eliminating racism has always been a part of Misti's mindset. In addition to her community service work, you see this reflected in the numerous comments/cards she receives from her female interns, thanking her for all she has done to help them advance and grow.

She said: I've always been very passionate about education, literacy, youth development: it's just part of who I am. So any space that I work in, I'm always going to have that as one of the aspects in my role. I was so overjoyed (to find out about the award). I've done a lot of work in the past with the YWCA. Growing up, my mother was very passionate about the work and some of the support groups they had in place for young girls and for women. So I was elated to be the recipient of the community service award because I have a passion for that organization and the work they've done.

That is a part of my makeup, that is who I am. When you understand what your passion is and your calling is, no matter where you work, no matter what you do, that is always part of the foundation.

Personally, and professionally, I think it's important to always teach the next generation how to give back and how important it is. That's something that I try to do in whatever space I'm in, make sure that I talk about that even though I am where I am, I would not be here if it wasn't for my mother or for the women who mentored me, or the folks who mentored me before.

Favorite quote: "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." -Maya Angelou

"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude." -Maya Angelou

"Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud." -Maya Angelou

Guilty pleasure: Any kind of popcorn

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*Michelle Rabideau, President of the Mercy Health St. Mary's Foundation
(Photo provided to MLive by Russell Climie)*

PROFESSIONS AWARD

Michelle Rabideau. President. Mercy Health St. Mary's Foundation
Age: 52

Nominator said: For the last 24 years, Michelle has led development efforts in the healthcare world and has strong experience in fundraising, strategic planning, donor stewardship, board leadership and development and community relations ... In the last 18 years, she has raised over 75 million dollars that has been returned to the community through the work of Mercy Health Saint Mary's Hospital. She has also worked in development at Hospice of Michigan, where she led statewide fundraising efforts and exceeded revenue goals for six years.

She excels in strategic planning, board management, governance and development and staff engagement and development. I have seen firsthand the effort she puts into staff development and have been in awe of the innovation and outcomes. In a field where high turnover is an issue, she has created a very low turnover environment that allows each member to grow in their roles through her encouragement and active investment. Eighteen to 24 months is the typical tenure of fundraising professionals and her team has an average per person tenure of seven years.

One of the programs she designed in her daily work was called Grand Girlfriends. The design of this program was to provide funding for the special needs of women seeking healthcare through Saint Mary's. The members of this group then annually vote on which special programs or initiatives for women they want to fund. She has grown this program to over 350 women investing \$1,000 to help other women during a time of need and vulnerability.

She said: "I've been in the profession of healthcare philanthropy for almost 25 years. As the landscape of healthcare constantly evolves at a rapid speed, philanthropy is critical for organizations to deliver their missions of improving the health of our community. Frankly, philanthropy is no longer a nice to have in health care; it is a strategic revenue source that can be transformational for an organization.

It's all about the people and purpose. In my profession, building trusting relationships to inspire philanthropic giving is so rewarding and seeing how the thoughtful gifts from people directly impact the lives of those we serve is why I come back every day feeling grateful.

To receive this award and to know that I was nominated by Deb Bailey, who has been and continues to be one of the most influential women in my life, is so personally heartwarming. I'm honored to celebrate the triumphs and the journeys that all past and current YWCA Tribute Award winners have experienced ... it's pretty awesome to think of it in that way."

Favorite quote: "Love what you do and do what you love."

Guilty pleasure: "Honestly, I don't feel guilty about anything I enjoy doing!"

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*Jewellynne Richardson, of West Michigan Jewels of Africa and owner of One Stop Culture Shop
(Photo provided to MLive by John Corriveau)*

SPORTS, FITNESS AND WELLNESS AWARD

Jewellynne Richardson, West Michigan Jewels of African and owner, One Stop Culture Shop

Age: 51 "years young"

Nominator said: Jewellynne Richardson or Mama Jewel, as she is known in the community, lives and breathes leadership. On Tuesday nights you will find her at Baxter Community Center teaching African drumming and dance as a form of exercise that also includes storytelling and history. She has volunteered in this capacity at Baxter for nearly a decade. On other days, when she is not running her shop (One Stop Culture Shop), she is traveling to perform somewhere in Michigan or out of state. Wherever she goes to teach or perform, she is flanked with her children who range in ages from 16 years old to late 20s, her grandchildren, nieces and nephews, her sisters, brothers and often her 95-year-old father, all of whom she has taught drumming and dance, too, and they now make up the team that helps her teach.

Mama Jewel has studied and continues to study African dance, drumming, history and culture by connecting with dance/drum groups all over the United States and with groups visiting here from a variety of countries in Africa. She and her family often make their own outfits for performances and even make some of their musical instruments from dried gourds.

Over the years I have talked with many women who get their hair done by Jewel. They see her as a counselor, encourager, resource connector and advocate in addition to her role as a hair stylist. She also encourages healthy eating and teaches about its effect on skin and hair.

Mama Jewel leads as an empowered woman and sets an example that way. She speaks words of encouragement to the women who come to her shop, she makes women comfortable in their own skin through body movement of dance. She loves her community and addresses racism on every level as part of her daily walk, whether by encouraging someone to go with their natural hair, offering suggestions that can help navigate racism in other systems they interact with or by teaching history through dance and drumming.

She said: It's like a little taste of Africa, here in Grand Rapids, if you come in to the One Stop Culture Shop. You can learn about the culture ... More than anything, it is a safe place. That is what people find here at the One Stop Culture Shop, it's a safe place no matter who you are or what you're doing, you can find safety here and resources, as well. We're going to point you in the right direction, and just try to be a light in the community.

What I offer is healing. It is for all ages. It is the next safest place to participate in family-friendly (activities) other than church For me there weren't a lot of safe spaces for me to go, having a lot of

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children and the African culture definitely praised you and valued your wealth through your children, rather than your money. That is totally different, that is a non-American way of thinking, and I had been robbed of that way of thinking.

What motivates me to do this work is constantly being challenged with the value of black lives in the world. To reestablish, revive and remind everyone of the greatness of the dark people. It is a privilege and an honor to educationally entertain you, for you to get that message in any way possible. (To win this award), it feels great, it feels like someone cares, someone is paying attention and that my work isn't going in vain. It feels phenomenal.

In every sector of the city - North, South, East, West - I would like to see satellites of safe places like the one I have that teach the foundational self-love of, particularly, the ostracized people of this society.

Favorite quote: "My health is my wealth" - herself, Jewellynne Richardson

Guilty pleasure: "Hot fudge brownie a la mode with endless documentaries about the greatness of my people."



*Midian Johnson. senior at City High School.
(Photo provided to Mlive by Johnny Quirin)*

STUDENT HONOREE, YWCA JUDY LLOYD SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Midian Johnson, City High School

Age: 18

Nominator said: I cannot wait to introduce Midian Johnson to you. At the age of 17, she has proven time and time again that she is here to create positive, long-lasting change in herself and her community.

She is passionate about community volunteering and she is an accomplished student leader. Upon graduation, Midian hopes to continue her education at Howard University to pursue a career in medicine. Most impressive, Midian could graduate early, but she is on track to receive her 1B Diploma, which is no small undertaking.

Midian is starting a Women's Empowerment Club at her high school and is part of the Ambassador Program, a welcoming committee, at City High as well. She is continuously advocating for the voice of African Americans at City High and in her greater community and finds time to sit on the youth grand committee at GRCF (Grand Rapids Community Foundation). It's easy to be a "re-tweeter," but Midian does more; she's at the table - listening and making her voice heard.

Midian is always aware. Aware of how racism has deeply affected her family, community and the nation she calls home. She is aware that fighting for peace, justice, freedom and dignity for the marginalized is



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hard work. I have yet to meet another senior in high school with such a balanced approach to social justice, empowering women and having fun in the process.

She said: "It feels amazing to win this scholarship. It's something that I never thought I would get. I am extremely grateful for everyone in my life that has contributed to me getting this award. I am beyond thankful to the YWCA for giving me this opportunity.

During high school, I learned that having a support system is the key to success. Between my freshman year and sophomore year, I learned that you must have a support system because you cannot do everything on your own. High school taught me to have several support systems and to be actively supportive of your friends. I am thankful for my mother, teachers, friend and family, the leaders at Family Promise, and others for being wonderful support systems.

I am motivated to help other people because I have been in situations where others have stepped to the plate for me. So throughout my life, I try to give back to others however I can ... My mother inspires me the most to do what I do. She has done so much for me and sacrificed plenty. I feel that I could never repay her for what she has done for me. I just want to make her proud.

Advocacy sheds light on darkness, it allows a person to bring attention to issues. With advocacy you don't have to have struggled with a particular issue or be the most educated about it, what matters is that you care and want to help make a change.

I want to become a Maternal-Fetal Medicine Specialist when I get older. I want to help the community in this career field. Although I have a passion for medicine, I still want to be actively involved with advocating for those in need.

Favorite quote: "You can find the beauty in anything" - her life motto

Guilty pleasures: Watching Netflix