

# *Tribute!*

eliminating racism  
empowering women **ywca**

## 2009 *Awards Celebration*

Presented by  
the YWCA West Central Michigan  
with Title Sponsor



# *agenda*

**November 4, 2009**

Noon to 1:30 p.m.

DeVos Place

## **Welcome**

Elsa Kerr

*Chair*

Board of Directors

YWCA West Central Michigan

Ellen James

*Chair*

2009 YWCA TRIBUTE! Awards Steering Committee

John H. Bultema III

*President*

Fifth Third Bank Western Michigan

Ruth Butler

*Honorary Chair*

2009 YWCA TRIBUTE! Awards Steering Committee

## **Invocation**

The Reverend Diane Maodush-Pitzer

*Professor of Liberal Studies*

Grand Valley State University

Heather Jackson

*Former Intern*

Girls Incorporated® at the YWCA West Central Michigan

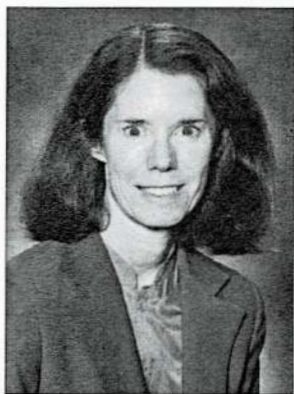
## **Luncheon**

## **Awards Presentation**

Ellen James

Ruth Butler

*Thank you for attending!*



**Leslie Cameron Curry**  
*Litigation Director*  
Legal Aid of Western Michigan  
*Nominated by Miriam Aukerman*

Leslie Cameron Curry's office is adorned with objects representing her greatest passions in life. Mythic photos of once war-torn Ireland hang on her walls. Posed and candid pictures of her children and husband sit on file cabinets. Nearby, is a photo of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. In life and work, Leslie intertwines her love of family with her desire for justice.

A tireless advocate for those living on the margins, Leslie has spent more than 25 years on our legal system's front lines. She has improved the lives of those most often found there: women, people of color, and individuals living in poverty.

The need is great. Gender, ethnicity and poverty can create vulnerabilities to legal problems. They can also hinder positive legal resolutions. Nationally, on average, low-income households experience one civil legal need per year. Legal Aid of Western Michigan's (LAWM) clients live at or below 125 percent of the poverty level. Fifty percent are people of color. Eighty percent of Leslie's clients are women.

Through her representation in divorce and custody proceedings, Leslie has helped domestic violence survivors escape their abusers. She has obtained benefits for those with disabilities and protected the meager earnings of the

working poor. She has saved families from homelessness by stopping evictions and fighting foreclosures. In doing so, Leslie has earned a reputation as one of our community's best attorneys on issues of poverty, housing and family law.

Leslie balances her clients' needs with her role as supervisor of LAWM's attorneys who represent 260,000 clients annually. She prioritizes caseloads, guides legal strategies, and supports LAWM's special projects such as the "Counsel & Advocacy Law Line" partnership and the "Reentry Law Project" for those being released from prison.

To help her staff balance family and professional life, Leslie supported opportunities for LAWM attorneys to bring their infants to work. A deeply valued mentor, she has inspired countless attorneys to dedicate themselves as advocates for those in poverty.

Leslie has devoted her personal time to a range of organizations that work to achieve greater equity and inclusion, including the Michigan League for Human Services, Grand Rapids Public Schools' Teen Parent Program, the Women's Resource Center, the YWCA West Central Michigan, Hope College's Pre-Law Program, and the Michigan Poverty Law Program.

With a combination of humility and passion, Leslie uses the law as a tool to help thousands. As a result, the doors of our legal system have been opened wider.



**Carol Johnson**

*Artist, Educator, Social Worker*

*Nominated by Michele Suchovsky*

Carol Johnson is an accomplished artist.

Her work spans an extraordinary range of media and addresses topics central to her life and our broader community - the African American experience, sexism, children, family. She has sought opportunities to explore these themes with partners including the Grand Rapids Christian Schools, Calvin College, the Nokomis Foundation, and the Dominican Center at Marywood among others. Carol's work can be found in collections throughout our region at Olivet College, Spectrum Health-Butterworth, the MCI Corporate Collection, and Lansing's Black Children Family Cultural Center.

Carol developed a well-regarded exhibit between Russia and Traverse City. She participated in the local Multicultural Association of Professionals' effort to bring the Alvin Ailey Dance Company to Grand Rapids, and contributed to a companion exhibit on race. Carol has served on the Frey Foundation's Committee for Public Art and UICA's Board of Directors. She was a founding member of the Kendall College Alumni Board.

Yet, it is in helping others use art to tell their stories, understand one another, and find their place in the world that she finds the greatest joy. When she ended a 20-year career in early childhood education, she pursued her greatest joy with zeal. Carol earned a Bachelor's Degree

in Fine Arts at the age of 40, and her Master's of Social Work at 52.

Always smiling, Carol is as quick on her feet as she is with a compliment and a hug. Laughter and energy fill her classrooms. Often working with students who struggle to fit in, she is part art-teacher, part social worker, and part cheerleader. Gently, she helps them believe in themselves with the same care that she lavishes on one of her delicate Raku creations. Says one student, "Art lets me express myself and lets others understand me."

Carol has collaborated with VSA arts of Michigan-Grand Rapids and the Metropolitan Hospital Long-Term Assistive Respiratory Unit to provide art programming for health-bound adults. She is a regular artist-in-residence for VSA's school programs for youth with disabilities. She is education coordinator and facilitator for Senior Helpline Community Outreach Ministry, providing programs to local churches and faith groups, and offering classes on topics from grandparent support to "starting over" for widowed spouses. To encourage teen girls to stay in school, Carol teaches "Flipping the Script", a creative expression class.

Carol's work and inspiration have been instrumental in making our community more diverse, caring and open. In all that she does, Carol educates us, enabling us to see our worth and our commonality.



# *business, management, industry and labor*



## **Shelley E. Padnos**

*Executive Vice President and  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Louis Padnos Iron & Metal Co.  
Nominated by Sue Conway*

Shelley Padnos describes how she recognized at a very young age that she was different. Hers was the only Jewish family in her hometown of Holland. They looked different. They celebrated different holidays. Like most children, at times she longed to be like everyone else. But today, she is much more comfortable with herself. Laughing, she proudly shares story after story about her family and how her experiences growing up helped to shape her.

In 1984, after successfully practicing law for several years, Shelley joined her family's business, Padnos Iron & Metal, a company founded by her Russian immigrant grandfather. In doing so, she stepped into an industry that is highly competitive and overwhelmingly male. In the years since then and with Shelley's guidance, the company has expanded to become one of the nation's largest recyclers with 400 employees and annual sales estimated at \$300 million. Shelley helped lay the foundation for the company's programs designed to support employees as they work to purchase homes and put their children through college. Working to ensure women within her organization have opportunity for professional development, she has been instrumental in the success of Padnos' "Leadership for Women" education series.

Shelley has earned the respect of her peers, evidenced by her highly visible leadership positions with the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc. (ISRI), the industry's 1,400-member national organization. She was the first woman to serve on ISRI's national Board of Directors and its first female chair. Shelley was an early leader on ISRI's national theft prevention effort and spearheaded a nationwide effort that achieved the industry's greatest legislative reform, the Superfund Recycling Equity Act.

The values that have guided her professionally also inform her community activities. A passionate advocate for educational opportunity, Shelley serves on Grand Valley State University's Board of Trustees. Shelley has served on the Boards of Directors of Planned Parenthood of West and Northern Michigan, Holland Hospital, and Priority Health. She is a founder of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation's Social Venture Investors for Philanthropy.

Walking into Padnos Iron & Metal, visitors are immediately struck by a sense of warmth and family. It's a familiarity borne from a company that has been nurtured by three generations. Shelley, who leads her family's business with her brother and cousins, is working to ensure that the company that has had a presence in West Michigan for almost a century maintains that culture by remaining true to those roots and continuing to move forward.

# community service



## **The Honorable Sara J. Smolenski**

*Chief Judge*

*63rd District Court*

*Nominated by Pamela K. Olsen*

If laughter can cure what ails you, then perhaps Judge Sara Smolenski should be referred to as *Doctor Smolenski*. Regardless of her title, she proudly credits her parents and the Dominican nuns who educated her with two things—a desire to help others and the ability to make people laugh.

Sara is known throughout the Grand Rapids community for lots of reasons: the judicial position that she has held since 1991, her generosity, her comedic flair... the list goes on. However, it is the attention that she has brought and the money she has raised for numerous local non-profit organizations that earn her the YWCA's TRIBUTE! Award.

Whether serving on an organizing committee or as a local celebrity auctioneer, Sara helped to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars over her years of involvement. She has shed light on the issue of mental illness and helped our community better understand its victims. She has assembled fundraising committees to ensure that important community events, such as the annual Golf Fore Dominicans, could continue. Her work benefits charities that serve every sector including Gilda's Club, God's Kitchen, St. Andrew's Hugh Michael Beahan Foundation, C-SNIP, GVSU, the American Cancer Society, West Michigan Catholic Charities, the

Boy Scouts of America, Guardian Angel Homes, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, and the ALS Foundation.

Sara's commitment is extensive and deep. She is well informed about the organizations she supports and the issues they address. She candidly shares how some experiences have cemented her dedication, such as the murder of a close friend by her friend's husband over 20 years ago. Thus, Sara continues her active participation in the annual Women Lawyers vs. Judges Charity Softball game to benefit the YWCA's services for victims of violence.

Sara has served on the Boards of Directors and Advisory Boards for St. John's Home for Children, the ALS Foundation, Michigan Women's Foundation, the American Cancer Society, Kent County Literacy Council, Hospice of Michigan, RAVE (Resources Against Violent Encounters to Women of West Michigan), the YWCA West Central Michigan, and the Grand Rapids Bar Association Law Day Committee.

Her service and professional leadership have garnered noteworthy awards: the ATHENA Award from the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Grand Rapids Community College's Distinguished Alumna Award, and recognition twice as one of the *Grand Rapids Business Journal's* "50 Most Influential Women of West Michigan."

Marked by her desire to ensure the dignity of the people of our community, Sara's good work has touched thousands.

# professions



## **Pamela J. Wells**

*Principal*

C.A. Frost Environmental  
Science Academy  
Grand Rapids Public Schools  
*Nominated by Christine Barfuss*

Pamela Wells loves children.

Always with a smile, she bounds into classrooms with a level of energy and excitement rivaling that of her students. As if pulled by a magnet, students run to her to tell her about their day. With that same energy, she is relentless in her efforts to give students every chance to succeed. She will do no less because she knows for many she is their lifeline. A short note from one former student captures it best: "I graduated...and go to [college] now. I grew up with a lot of struggles, but you saw potential in me. Thank you."

Under her leadership for the past 18 years, C.A. Frost has been transformed from a neighborhood elementary school serving 125 children into one of West Michigan's leading environmental science education programs with more than 500 children in grades K-8.

Pam describes the transformation. "We started with five teachers sitting around a kitchen table, literally." Each new year saw marked growth, and soon a middle school addition was constructed. In 2002, Pam successfully incorporated the Grand Rapids Public Schools' environmental theme school into C.A. Frost's program. Today, students learn a comprehensive curriculum in all core academic areas, which are woven together through the environmental concepts of

awareness, knowledge, skills, advocacy and stewardship. The wide-ranging student population includes those with autism, learning disabilities, emotional impairments, and the academically gifted. The school boasts a waiting list of parents from across the area eager to enroll their children. The result is a student population that reflects our city's broader demographic makeup.

Evidence of her success is apparent. C.A. Frost's students consistently score at the highest levels on the Michigan Education Assessment Program tests. The school garnered the State of Michigan's "Golden Apple Award" for achievement, and in 2008, achieved "'A' status" on the state's report card. C.A. Frost has attracted investment of community leaders, including Meijer, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Grand Valley State University, and Fishbeck Thompson Carr & Huber. Produce from C.A. Frost's organic greenhouse is featured on the menu of local restaurant, Bistro Bella Vita.

Pam's enthusiasm is contagious. Hundreds of parent volunteers assist with fundraising, field trips, community outreach and music/arts events.

For the range of her efforts, Pam has been recognized with WOOD TV8's "Unsung Hero" award and earned Grand Valley State University's "Distinguished School Leadership Award". Yet, for her, the best reward is the self-confidence and love of learning that her students exhibit each and every day.



# sports, fitness and wellness



**Stephanie Painter, RN, MSN, C-PNP**

*Area Director of School*

*Health Programs*

*Grand Rapids Public Schools/*

*Spectrum Health*

*Nominated by Diane Gibbs*

In the early 1990s, Stephanie Painter was a school nurse, frustrated by the impact that poverty and lack of access to health care was having on student education. Simple issues, such as lice and lack of immunizations, were common reasons for children to miss school. She describes her earliest years with tears in her eyes, "It was heartbreaking to see children excited to learn, but unable to because they were falling through the cracks."

A group of nurses, including Stephanie, school officials and other stakeholders tackled the problem and Stephanie was charged with launching a pilot program—the School Health Advocacy Program (SHAP)—in Coit School within Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS). The pilot included a full-time school-based health aide who provided on-site services such as treatment of minor illness and injuries, lice screenings, dispensing medication, immunization monitoring, health education, reporting suspected abuse, enrollment in health insurance and referrals for other health and social services. The program was a success and health-related student absences dropped. Over the course of two years, among other markers, immunization rates jumped from 60 percent to 100 percent. Lice infection rates were all but eliminated.

Today, the program Stephanie helped create and now directs, serves more

than 35,000 students in five area school districts including Godfrey Lee, Cedar Springs, Comstock Park, Greenville, and GRPS. Its services have expanded as well to include care for students with complex medical needs such as tracheostomies and ventilators.

To provide for more consistent student care, Stephanie has been deliberate in recruiting health aides from the neighborhoods and populations they serve. Aides are mentored and encouraged to pursue their education in the health field. The result is remarkably low staff turnover and greater trust of the program from the children and families participating.

Realizing successes for students in other districts, SHAP is a statewide and national model. Additionally, Stephanie currently serves as the President of the Michigan Association of School Nurses, helping to promote best practices statewide. Stephanie is an active partner with the Kent County Health Department and Kent Intermediate School District in developing health responses, such as that needed for H1N1. SHAP was a partner with the Children's Assessment Center in the creation and distribution of an abuse prevention program for third graders.

Stephanie's work has received recognition from numerous organizations such as the Child and Family Resource Council, Michigan Hospital Association, and the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation. With each endorsement, our community is once again assured that our children are receiving the care they need.



# *judy lloyd student leadership scholarship award*

## *presented by the ywca board of directors*



### **Judy Lloyd**

September 18, 1945 to June 1, 2005

*"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."*

*-John Quincy Adams*

It was this way with Judy Lloyd as well. Her kindness and extraordinary grasp of the issues facing our community, inspired countless numbers to follow Judy's lead. She was a role model for us all; the most graceful and respected of leaders. Judy led in a quiet, unassuming way – connecting individuals and organizations to the benefit of those most in need. She was a cheerleader and a touchstone, knowing who to bring to the table to get a job done and then devoting herself wholeheartedly to the tasks needed to get there. She touched hearts and strengthened our community at the same time. Judy's passing was met with an outpouring of generosity in her memory. These gifts which the YWCA has housed at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, are directed to long-term support of our services to create a community supportive of women and their families.

Within the YWCA, Judy's two-decades of influence was immeasurable. She participated on the TRIBUTE! Steering and Selection Committees. She helped establish and grow the YWCA's Circle of Women Celebration exponentially. Judy was a mem-

ber of our Finance Committee, helping manage finite resources to effectively address the seemingly infinite challenges facing women and girls. She led the YWCA's Board of Directors during some of the organization's most historic moments and helped to lay the foundation for fundamental change in the national YWCA. And through each moment, with each task, Judy offered those she worked with warm words of encouragement and the practical hands-on help to succeed beyond expectations.

With a corps of volunteers who resemble Judy's dedication and quiet leadership, the YWCA has worked hard over the last century to create an environment that allows women and girls to thrive and lead. The TRIBUTE! Student Award is an extension of that. We honor those young women who, while still in high school, have already shown themselves to be gifted, competent models for us all. The connection between these young women and Judy is natural and apparent. It is most appropriate that the Student Leadership Award should bear her name.

Inspired by Judy's life and work, the YWCA Board of Directors chose to establish the Student Leadership Award in her honor. It is designed to offer practical help to TRIBUTE! student honorees as they work to fulfill their dreams. It is in this way that we recognize Judy and commit ourselves to a future motivated by her values and example.

# student honoree

*and recipient of the ywca's judy lloyd student leadership scholarship award*



## **Storee Harris**

Creston High School  
Grand Rapids Public Schools  
*Nominated by Maya Frazier*

The first thing you notice about Storee Harris is her gentleness. She is quick to smile and laugh, like most teens. Yet just below the surface she possesses a quiet seriousness. An inner strength that is palpable.

Storee has worked hard for what she has achieved in her young life. She does so with a very personal purpose: to become a physician and researcher in hopes of finding treatments for the ailments from which her grandmother and mother suffer.

On track to graduate first in her class of 200, Storee hopes to secure a place in Purdue University's 2010 freshman class. She is well on her way. She is a member of Creston High School's Honor Club and Vice President of the National Honor Society. She has received recognition for her academic achievements each year of high school. Storee has participated in several Grand Rapids Area Pre-College Engineering Program camps. Her hard work has attracted attention from outside her school as well. Michigan State University presented her with its "Outstanding Junior Award". The Van Andel Institute and the *Grand Rapids Times* awarded her summer internships.

Quick to share her appreciation for the encouragement she has received over

the years from teachers, family and friends, Storee wants others to have that same encouragement. She volunteers much of her time with the Delta GEMS, an all-girls organization focused on community service. Through her participation in the CK Club, Storee tutored children in math and writing for three years. At the end of the program, all of her students showed dramatically improved test scores. As a Grand Rapids Rotary Representative, she is involved in the Life Leadership Conference. She is a student member of the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. A member of New Hope Baptist Church, she was honored with their "Excellence Award" for volunteering.

In addition to her academic pursuits and volunteer commitments, Storee is a member of her school's junior varsity and varsity golf teams. This fall she was chosen Homecoming Queen.

Storee is conscious of the fact that her achievements have made her a role model to some. Because of that and her own determination to succeed, she is deliberate in the choices she makes. "It's important that those who have put their faith in me, know that I value that. But it's equally important that other students, know that they can do great things when they put their minds to it."