Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis Legends Award

The Legends Award pays tribute to women whose work embodies the mission of the Women’s Foundation. The purpose of the Legends Award is to applaud these Honorees, whose visionary and innovative work is paramount in their specialized areas of outreach. Legends Award Artists and Writers create works of art and prose that personify the Legends Award Honorees’ accomplishments and contributions to this community.

Legends Award Reception
Tuesday, April 17, 2012 | 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
The Columns at One Commerce Square | 40 South Main Street

2012 Legends Award Honorees

Honorable Bernice B. Donald
Judge Donald was nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit by President Barack Obama and is the first black woman to hold this position. Prior to the Court of Appeals, Judge Donald served on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. She has achieved several other “firsts” including the first African American woman in the United States to serve as a bankruptcy judge and the first African American woman to serve as a judge in Tennessee.

A trailblazer for women and minorities, Judge Donald has served as President of the National Association of Women Judges and the Association of Women Attorneys. She has worked with Leadership Memphis to provide leadership training for Memphis Housing Authority residents. In June 2005, Judge Donald co-founded 4-Life, a skills training and enrichment program for students in schools located in areas of concentrated poverty.

Velma Lois Jones
Native Memphian Velma Lois Jones has been a staunch advocate for education and seniors and has been lovingly described as a “general in the army of civil rights.” A long-time activist, she marched, boycotted, picketed and recruited others to join in the demonstrations that brought Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Memphis.

Currently serving on the local NAACP Executive Board and Education Committee, she was the first woman to serve as president of the Memphis Branch of the NAACP.

An educator for 43 years, Velma Lois was the first black classroom teacher elected as president of Memphis Education Association and the Tennessee Education Association (TEA), becoming the longest serving president in the history of the TEA. In her retirement, Velma Lois is a strong champion for older Americans and serves as Regional Impact Team leader for AARP. On February 13, 2012, The White House Office of Faith-based Neighborhood Partnerships honored her, at the age of 81, with the “Drum Majors for Service” award.

Sylvia Goldsmith Marks
Affectionately known as “Syl,” Sylvia Goldsmith Marks is described by many as generous, kind, thoughtful, giving and one of our community’s most passionate volunteers. For over 70 years, her philanthropic and humanitarian involvement and love for nature and youth are woven into the fabric of local organizations such as Memphis Botanic Gardens, Memphis Jewish Federation, Diversity Memphis and Youth Villages. She has held countless leadership positions and has served on numerous community boards.

Sylvia’s wisdom and passion while working alongside Mertie Buckman resulted in the groundbreaking idea that became the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis (WFGM). For the past 17 years, Syl has provided a quiet strength, joyful energy and annual financial contributions to advance the mission and vision of WFGM.
Dorothy Gunther Pugh

Ballet Memphis’ founding artistic director and CEO Dorothy Gunther Pugh has helped expand Memphis’ cultural horizons while highlighting a new dimension of Memphis’ creative soul to audiences around the world. In 1986, at a time when few women in Memphis were heading up their own organizations, she founded a company with two professional dancers and a budget of $75,000. Today, Ballet Memphis employs 18 professional dancers, operates with a $3.2 million budget and is regularly lauded for its artistic innovation and excellence. Dorothy gives voice to the need for more women in the arts and dance leadership. During the economic downturn, she sought collaborations with local youth organizations to ensure that any child who wanted to dance could do so on scholarship at Ballet Memphis. Most recently, she created a new program using modern ballet in more than 30 local community centers to help fight the childhood obesity epidemic. The company has received grants and high praise from many including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Dance project. The Ford Foundation lauded Ballet Memphis as a “national treasure.”

Dr. Shirley C. Raines

Dr. Shirley C. Raines became the first woman president of the University of Memphis on July 1, 2001. Described in The Commercial Appeal as “powerful, prepared and personable,” she has become known for her effective work in building productive partnerships on and off campus. In a sense, she has led the U of M to be a “living” member of the larger community. This emphasis has enabled the university to receive significant increases in annual giving to the university, research grants and contract awards. The U of M was selected to join a growing network of universities committed to increasing the graduation rate of first-generation college students through participation in the First Scholars™ program.

While remaining steadfast in the university’s mission of improving the quality of life for women and children through education, health, economic stability and leadership, Dr. Raines is leading the school during its landmark centennial year, 2012. Her unwavering passion resonates in the motto that the University of Memphis is an accomplished community of Dreamers, Thinkers and Doers.

2012 Legends Award Honorees, Artists and Writers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legends Award Honoree*</th>
<th>Legends Award Artist</th>
<th>Legends Award Writer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honorable Bernice B. Donald</td>
<td>Darlene Newman</td>
<td>Cathryn Stout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velma Lois Jones</td>
<td>Siphne Sylve</td>
<td>Sonia L. Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia Goldsmith Marks</td>
<td>Erin Harmon</td>
<td>Sharon Wheeler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy Gunther Pugh</td>
<td>Eszter Sziksz</td>
<td>Ellen Rolfes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Shirley C. Raines</td>
<td>Sunny Montgomery</td>
<td>Lynda Sagrestano</td>
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</tbody>
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*Each Honoree’s Artist and Writer appears on the line adjacent to the Honoree’s name.

2012 Legends Award Committee

Rosemarie Fair, TaJuan Stout Mitchell, Co-chairs
Penny Aviotti | Rosie Phillips Bingham, PhD | Gale Jones Carson | Gadsby Creson | Elizabeth Edwards
Desiree Franklin | Regina Hubbard | Carissa Hussong | Carol Lott | Marina Pacini | Cecelia Sawyer | Susan Stephenson | Regina Walker
Becky Jones West | Ellen Westbrook

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