

she

Shines™

FALL 2016 • FREE

celebrating the aspirations and accomplishments of women

Women of Achievement

share it
trust it
smile

The scales
Cia Husband

DEGRADING
WOMEN
ENCOURAGING
RACISM

Eliminating
Racism
Empowering
Women

- Kimberly Ahern
- Melba Depeña Affigne
- Carolyn Belisle
- Jessica David
- Adriana Dawson
- Kathy Flores
- Brittany Star Hampton
- Mary Kay Harris
- Melissa Husband
- Laura Ann Pisaturo
- Mary Reilly
- Camille Vella-Wilkinson
- Rose Ella Weaver

Organizations of the Year

Amica Mutual Insurance Co.
Bryant University

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca

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She Shines

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Circulation for this fall edition is 9,000.

smile



Hi Mollie!

photo by Deborah L. Perry

contents. share it

3 awards presentation

12th Annual Awards Ceremony

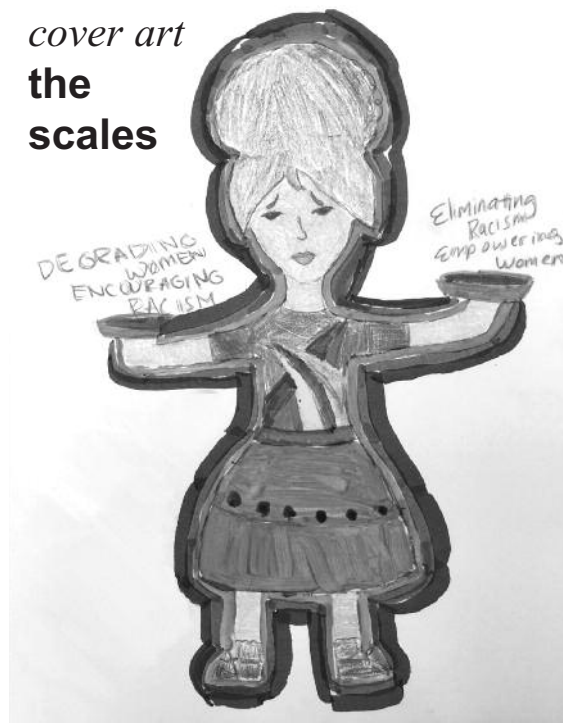
10 women of achievement

Kimberly Ahern
Melba Depeña Affigne
Carolyn Belisle
Jessica David
Adriana Dawson
Kathy Flores
Brittany Star Hampton
Mary Kay Harris
Melissa Husband
Laura Ann Pisaturo
Mary Reilly
Camille Vella-Wilkinson
Rose Ella Weaver

23 organizations of the year

Amica Mutual Insurance Co.
Bryant University

cover art
the
scales



“Teach us to race against racism and empower women. There is a girl that is holding up scales. The scales have words on each side. The side that is the heaviest is the more negative side.”
- Nia Husband, age 12

This edition’s cover artist enjoyed a girl-centric summer camp experience, attending Rosie’s Girls at YWCA Rhode Island. The camp offers a unique experience for adolescent girls to build self-esteem, perseverance, and leadership through learning and applying basic skills in the trades. Out of school, her hobbies are drawing, traveling, scrap-booking and making jewelry. In school, she enjoys Calculator Club and Golf. She is a 7th grader at Community Prep School. “I enjoy having clubs and going to something called Town Meeting . . . one class performs for the whole school . . . It feels like a community.”



eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

YWCA Rhode Island is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

YWCA highlights achievement

Congratulations to the 2016 YWCA Rhode Island Women of Achievement Award winners. Some are standing up for peace, some are standing up for justice, some are standing up for freedom, some are standing up for dignity, and all are making a positive difference in our state through actions that will be felt for generations.

Nominated by their peers, we celebrate 13 women who have blazed trails, suffered trials, broke ground, broke records and accomplished some tough stuff. Award winners include lawyers, public sector employees and elected officials, educators, philanthropists, non-profit leaders, business leaders, an artist, an athlete and a doctor.

Congratulations to Kimberly Ahern, Melba Depeña Affigne, Carolyn Belisle, Jessica David, Adriana Dawson, Kathy Flores, Brittany Star Hampton, Mary Kim Harris, Melissa Husband, Laura Ann Pisaturo, Mary Reilly, Camille Vella-Wilkinson, and Rose Ella Weaver.

We honor you, we thank you, and we celebrate the difference you are making in the world.

Most sincerely,

Deborah

Deborah L. Perry, President/Chief Executive Officer
YWCA Rhode Island

trust it

how to:

contribute. *She Shines* welcomes letters to the editor, articles, poetry, stories, graphics, photos and calendar events. Contact us if you have an inspiring story to tell or have a suggestion of someone to be featured. Only original contributions will be considered and may be edited due to space limitations. Include contact information: name, e-mail, address and phone number. Images provided electronically must be high-resolution.

submit cover art. The cover is reserved as a gallery of art in keeping with the *She Shines* theme. For consideration, send in a photo by e-mail attachment or mail. This is a wonderful opportunity for local artists to show their work. A biography is published in conjunction with the “Artist Canvas” section of *She Shines*.

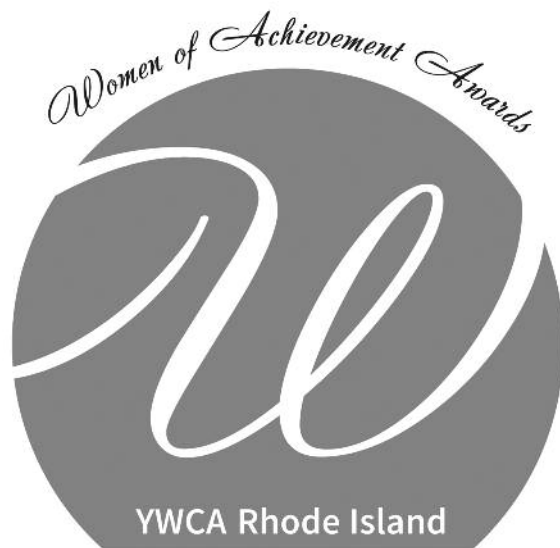
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receive the magazine. *She Shines* is a free publication mailed to members and friends of YWCA Rhode Island. To be added to the mailing list, send in the subscription form - available online at sheshines.org. The magazine is also available at YWCA Rhode Island and at various special events.

honoring women of achievement

YWCA Rhode Island recognizes
women in industry, culture and public service

*event underwriters and attendees
thank you!*



Thirteen women and two organizations were recognized for their accomplishments promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity at the 12th Annual Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon, held September 27 at Kirkbrae Country Club in Lincoln. Deb Ruggiero served as the event emcee.

Congratulations to the 2016 honorees. YWCA Rhode Island appreciates the underwriters and attendees celebrating the following Women of Achievement and Organizations of the Year: Kimberly Ahern, Melba Depeña Affigne, Carolyn Belisle, Jessica David, Adriana Dawson, Kathy Flores, Brittany Star Hampton, Mary Kay Harris, Melissa Husband, Laura Ann Pisaturo, Mary Reilly, Camille Vella-Wilkinson, Rose Ella Weaver, Amica Mutual Insurance Co., and Bryant University.

Women of Achievement Awards are recognized nationally. They bring attention to the accomplishments of women in industry, culture and public service in local communities. For additional information, visit www.womenofachievementRI.org.

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"YWCA is pleased to host this celebration for the twelfth year in a row to recognize the accomplishments of women across industry, culture and public service," says Deborah L. Perry, president/chief executive officer of YWCA Rhode Island. "YWCA recognizes these extraordinary women for their amazing achievements, they are truly making a difference in Rhode Island."

Editor's Note: The honorees are highlighted on pages 10 through 23.

we're making a difference

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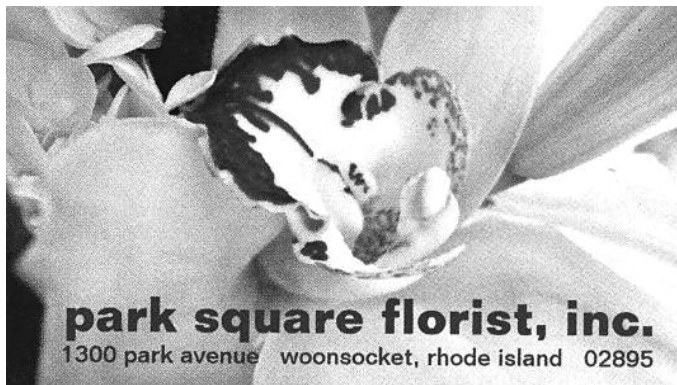
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Congratulations to all of this year's YWCA Women of Achievement!

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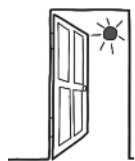
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Women of Achievement*

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Congratulations, Jessica David.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF THE HONOREES!

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Kimberly Ahern is a special assistant attorney general with Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General. She currently serves as a prosecutor in the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Unit. Prior to joining Attorney General's office, she was a judicial law clerk for Honorable Judge Maureen McKenna Goldberg of Rhode Island Supreme Court. She graduated from Roger Williams University School of Law, cum laude, and served as editor-in-chief of Law Review while there. Prior to law school, she graduated from Providence College, magna cum laude, with a degree in Public & Community Service Studies. Ahern is on the following boards – RWU Law Alumni Association, East Side/Mt Hope YMCA, and Women's Fund of Rhode Island.

photo by Agapao Productions

Kimberly Ahern

Every day, I have the honor of standing up in Courts in our State and being able to say, "I represent the State of Rhode Island." For the past six years, I have served as a Special Assistant Attorney General in the Department of Attorney General. For four of those years, I have prosecuted cases in our Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Unit. I see firsthand the impact that violence in a family can cause – the turmoil, the fear, the anger, the pain (both physical and emotional) and the hardships.

But despite that, I leave work every day proud of what I have accomplished, because I have the privilege to say I work on a daily basis to promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity. Justice is at the heart of what we, as prosecutors, strive to do each and every day. Our rules of professional responsibility tell us we are to be a "minister of justice" and not simply advo-

cate for a side. It is something I take very seriously when assessing each case and deciding what is justice for a particular set of facts.

Justice does not lend itself to easy definition or description. But for me, a large part of "what justice is" is working with survivors of sexual abuse, sexual assault, or family and domestic violence. So many of these individuals have endured unimaginable pain and oftentimes, at the hands of someone they once loved or cared about. I come into their lives at a very difficult moment, and usually that is when they have to take the witness stand to testify against the very person that harmed them. It is one way that allows them to take some control back in a situation where they have lost it, all at the hands of their abuser. It also recognizes their dignity and self-worth, something that is all too often overlooked by their abuser.

When I think back over the cases I have prosecuted and the way in which they promoted justice, I think of meeting with a deceased victim's family countless times while the case progressed through our criminal justice system. I think back to their embrace of me after they heard the words "guilty" directed toward the man who killed their 20-year-old daughter in a senseless act of violence. I think of the moment they were able to stand up in Court – next to me – and tell the Judge what they think should happen at his sentencing hearing. Nothing I could do would bring back their daughter, but at the end of that day, I went home knowing that I was able to help them find some peace and comfort. At the same time, we were able to bring about some justice for that young woman, who was taken from her family all too soon. ❖❖❖



Melba Depeña Affigne has served as director for Department of Human Services since January 2015. Depeña Affigne brings extensive experience working with diverse populations in the State. Prior, she served as director of Crime Victims Compensation Unit in Office of General Treasurer, executive director of Providence Human Relations Commission and executive director of Rhode Island Democratic Party. Depeña Affigne is a graduate of University of Rhode Island where she earned Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Masters in Human Development and Family Studies. She has served on board of directors of organizations such as Girl Scouts of Rhode Island, The Latino Civic Fund and Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island Corporation Board, among others.

photo by Agapao Productions

Melba Depeña Affigne

As a child who grew up in the Dominican Republic, a nation that experienced years of dictatorship and extreme poverty, my family and our community faced many daily struggles – jobs and public services were scarce. We found strength and support amongst each other. From an early age, my parents taught me to rely on our faith in God, treasure family, and serve a broader community – because they had been so crucial in our own lives. They showed me the importance of sharing and cooperation, values I’ve taken with me throughout my personal and profession journey.

My background has empowered me to challenge systems and people to tear down the walls of discrimination, oppression and indifference that keep our most vulnerable population without access to opportunities. Every day we are all called upon to stand up for justice in one way or another and it is our responsibility to answer the call. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best, “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating

with it.” This quote has been an important inspiration to take every opportunity I have to stand up for justice.

Before becoming the Director of Rhode Island’s Department of Human Services (DHS), I served as the Director of the Crime Victims Compensation Program in the office of the General Treasurer, my daily work involved providing support and encouragement to the victims of violent crime. I also served as Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Commission, my charge was to protect the rights of people who faced discrimination in housing, employment, and public services.

Now, as Director of Rhode Island’s Department of Human Services, my primary responsibilities are to strengthen families and help individuals to grow, to succeed, and achieve their goals. In some ways this position is the culmination of many years of work, in public and private sector agencies, focused on the needs of the community, working for social justice and defending human rights and dignity. Leading DHS is my

most challenging job yet, but it is also one which offers an abundance of opportunities to cultivate our community by providing assistance to those who may simply need a boost, as well as those who rely on state assistance to provide for their families. I am humbled, but also honored, to have this responsibility. With the values imparted by my parents, the memory of my own childhood experiences, and my lifelong commitment to public service, I will continue to serve, as best I can, promoting justice and dignity for all individuals and families in Rhode Island, and strengthening our community as a whole. Beyond my professional responsibilities, my commitment to community empowerment also led me to service on the boards of organizations that promote education for children, and healthy communities across the state.

I now have the opportunity to instill in my nine year old son, Alijah, those same values that have guided my professional and personal life. Standing up for justice is the ultimate responsibility that we all have. ✨



For 15 years, Carolyn Belisle has led Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island's efforts to leverage philanthropy, employee volunteerism, and strategic partnerships to address critical issues affecting Rhode Islanders' health. Belisle has served in a leadership capacity on boards including Goodwill Industries of Rhode Island, Big Sisters of Rhode Island, the American Heart Association, and Grantmakers Council of Rhode Island. United Way of Rhode Island honored her in 2013 as a Partner of the Year. She is a member of Providence Business News "40 Under 40" class of 2014.

photo by Agapao Productions

Carolyn Belisle

When people ask me what I do, I tell them I'm in the relationship business. Bringing people together at the right time, at the right place, for the right outcome—the work that I do is entirely centered on strengthening communities through building relationships. I spend most of my time connecting people or ideas, making introductions, sharing information—connecting the dots. At Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) we consistently emphasize the idea that “it takes a team,” and it's true. Whether our goal is as specific as engaging colleagues in community service, or as broad as making all Rhode Islanders healthier, none of us can achieve those outcomes alone.

Through BCBSRI's community-building programs, we provide a range of resources to local nonprofits doing critical work on the front lines to make Rhode Island a healthier place to live. In many people's minds, “resources” translates into “philanthropy”—you help nonprofits by writing checks, right? And of course, that is a part of it. I am incredibly proud of programs like BlueAngel Community Health Grants, for example, that help to fund new and expanding initiatives. But BCBSRI

is a nonprofit organization too; we are not a charitable foundation. We take a more holistic approach to using our resources to strengthen this ecosystem.

My role affords me the opportunity to really get to know the individuals and organizations in those front-line roles; the ones working hard to make life better in some way for Rhode Islanders. Having an opportunity to understand an issue, a need, or an opportunity, allows me to think creatively and work collaboratively across the sector to develop partnerships, solve problems, and make an impact. Sometimes that means facilitating a partnership between two organizations whose goals are aligned and whose resources are complementary, like Playworks and the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition, to transform recess for Rhode Island kids so that they can enjoy more active playtime during the school day. Other times, it's about finding the right BCBSRI executive to serve on an organization's board, so that the organization can benefit from a seasoned healthcare expert on the changing landscape of post-Affordable Care Act healthcare.

Ultimately, my work is about recognizing and harnessing the power of collective impact. When

we make connections and come together in the right spirit around important causes, we reinforce the fabric of our communities—and nothing makes us stronger.

I can't reflect on what I do without acknowledging what a rare privilege it is to be in this position and how fortunate I am to work with so many smart, caring and inspiring people. I cannot imagine another career that would align so well with my personal values, goals, and abilities. My desire to give back to the community comes from my upbringing. Growing up under the guidance of a strong single mother (with much love from a supportive extended family), we didn't always have a lot, yet I was always impressed that my mother still made time to give to others who were less fortunate than us. Her example led me toward pursuing a career where I can utilize my natural strengths and skills in work that benefits others. As I try to show my three daughters every day, it is possible to find your calling at the intersection of your own strengths, passions, and the world's needs. Find it and devote yourself to it, and your avocation will become your vocation. ✨



Jessica David is senior vice president of strategy and community investments at Rhode Island Foundation. She is responsible for the Foundation's strategy, grant programs, evaluation and learning, and economic security initiative. Among the projects she has led are the Rhode Island Innovation Fellowships, a program that empowers Rhode Islanders to improve life in Rhode Island; Make It Happen RI, an effort initiated in 2012 to improve the state's economy; and the Foundation's centennial campaign to preserve and enhance Roger Williams Park. A proud Rhode Islander, David gets excited about philanthropy, community making, Bruce Springsteen, and Roger Williams.

photo by Agapao Productions

Jessica David

I am very fortunate to work with many people and organizations who are standing up for social justice, helping families, and strengthening communities. My job is to support them. This is an honor and a privilege, and I learned so much from these community-makers. I believe that creating and strengthening community requires love, presence, opting in, and courage.

First, and always, love. My relationship with my community is like any relationship. What can be more intimate than the people and places that I choose to claim as my own? Relationships endure and thrive when there's mutual trust and devotion. There will be brilliant, sparkly moments that I want to put in my scrapbook, and there will be moments when I want to run away. Love is what allows us to get through those moments. Sometimes, I say aloud, Rhode Island, I love you. I've got your back.

Second, presence. I want to show up. I am part of my community, and my community is part of me. We reflect on one another, for better or worse. It's up to me to help create the kind of community I want to be part of. That means I get out there, explore, participate, connect, and try to find solutions to obvious problems. It means picking up trash at Roger Williams Park, shopping at the local makers' market, and putting up a Little Free Library in my neighborhood. And it means showing up, whenever I can, for other people who are creating community.

Third, opt in. I remind myself to start from a position of yes. Yes, I can help. Yes, we can do that. Yes, I'll be there. Is there anything more energizing than someone who helps you see and believe in your options? Say yes to the vision, say yes to the commitment, then we figure out how.

Fourth, courage. Communities are created because of shared experience or perspective, perhaps, but they are tested and strengthened during tough moments of dissension and difficulty. We can never truly see the world – or our community – from another person's eyes. So we must listen, always, and be open to others' truths. And we must stay present with one another. It's when we shut down or shut others out that community becomes impossible.

The truth is, we are all community-makers, shaping the places we live and influencing the people around us. We wield our power in many ways, every day. When we do it right, with intention and love, we are given in return a sense of roots, connection, and opportunity. ✨



Adriana Dawson serves as assistant dean of Professional Education & Employer Outreach for Roger Williams University's School of Continuing Studies in Providence. Prior, Dawson was first female appointed state director for Rhode Island Small Business Development Center. During her 12-year tenure, Dawson led Rhode Island's first Latino Business Expo. Dawson is on Board of Directors for United Way of Rhode Island, vice chair of Providence Economic Development Advisory Committee, member on Latino Policy Institute Advisory Board at Roger Williams University, and founding member of Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England's Hispanic Advisory Board. She was also appointed by Governor Raimondo to RI Commission on Women. Dawson holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from Northeastern University and a Master of Arts in Management & Organizational Communications from Emerson College.

photo by Agapao Productions

Adriana Dawson

At my core, I am a community agent. For as long as I can remember, my personal and professional journey has led me on a path to assist and advocate for those most vulnerable and whose voices are being silenced. Fortunately, for the past 17 years, my career has allowed me to help families and strengthen communities with a particular focus on economic empowerment and self-sufficiency.

I am now part of a team at Roger Williams University's School of Continuing Studies, led by Dean Jamie Scurry, which carries out this amazing work on a daily basis. We don't see ourselves just touching a student or program participant, we touch and transform families, neighborhoods, and communities. This work is done in collaboration with other community partners that share in the spirit of that mission.

In my current role overseeing the School of Continuing Studies Center for Workforce & Professional Development Career (CWPD), I support un/under employed individuals connect with our

accelerated career pathway programs that prepares them for in demand industry opportunities and long term career success. There's Pivot the Hustle Program, where we and a cadre of dedicated volunteers support men and women within 18 months of release with self-discovery and soft skill job readiness training that will aid in their successful transition. We also work very closely with municipalities to help address their unique needs by developing customized programs for often times, their most vulnerable communities. This work is all carried out in a way that honors and values the individual, family, and culture.

Outside of my work environment, I've also committed to sitting on a number of boards and commissions that allow me to extend my efforts in this area. As a Commissioner on the Rhode Island Commission on Women and Girls, we're currently focused on addressing the wage inequity in Rhode Island. My role on the United Way of RI Board enables me to support an organization investing in programs and initiatives

transforming communities, and my involvement with the Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England is helping them connect with a new and traditionally underserved membership demographic for GSSNE through their recently launched Hispanic Initiative.

In essence, helping families and lifting communities is in my DNA and I have the honor to assist people on a daily basis. I, myself, was a participant in many youth enrichment programs meant to assist teens from urban communities, particularly young women of color. I am also fortunate to come from a family of community servants and strong women! I now have a responsibility to do what I can to ensure that others have access, to help my daughter and other young girls of color feel like anything is possible, and that being bicultural/bilingual are assets not deficiencies.

My journey isn't over, in many ways, it's just beginning. There's a lot more work to be done and I'm ready! ✨



Kathy Flores has played and/or coached rugby for the past 30 years. She has represented her country both as a player and a coach of USA Rugby Women's National Team. Flores was recently awarded USA Rugby Coach of the Year in Fall 2015 and inducted into U.S. Rugby Hall of Fame in June 2016. "The thing I love most about my sport is the sense of confidence and self-esteem it gives to young women. I consider myself extremely lucky to have the opportunity to be a part of their growth."

photo by Agapao Productions

Kathy Flores

At Brown University I love the diversity of our rugby team. We have young women from all ethnicities, socio-economic levels and from hometowns around the globe. We are more than a varsity athletic team, we are a community within the "Brown Community" that embraces you and is there for you on and off the field. We attract a lot of young women who are "first generation" college students, let alone Ivy League students, who may be far from home and their familial support system. Whenever the players talk about our team to other interested students, they talk about how this team is like a family in the support they give to one another.

Now, I know most sports teams will feel the same way but there is something special about a rugby team. When rugby is played it as an interlocked unit both literally and spiritually. Rugby players are not selfish and individual success is not achieved without the other

fourteen players; even the simple act of passing the ball to a teammate is prefaced with the words "with you." Rugby is a tight-knit high-spirited community with a vibrant culture. Women's rugby is still relatively unknown in some parts of the country, and despite the physicality associated with it, we promote camaraderie and friendship not only the team but also with the opposition. Unlike other sports, if you host a team, you socialize with them after the match; treat them with respect, and even with some opponents becoming our closest friends.

Over the years I have seen the positive effects of rugby's ethos of camaraderie between rugby players and teams save many young women who had no support, were struggling with family issues, and with their identity in the world. Once, in a meeting with a USA Rugby National Team player, she told me of how she had struggled with her identity

and had thoughts of ending her life but how she decided to attend a rugby practice as a new player. At the end of that practice, she felt she'd found the kinship she lacked in her life, which set her on the path to becoming an elite level rugby player. While this does not happen so dramatically for everyone, it does teach us to be trustworthy and dependable, both on and off the field, through the inherent nature of how the game is played. It is for those reasons and the many, many intangible qualities I have witnessed over my thirty years as a player and coach, that believe the uniqueness of the sport, its very accepting culture, and the physical demands which has helped to shape and provide structure for those searching for belonging. Rugby is the sport for everyone. Once you are part of the community, whether as a player or spectator, you will remain a member of its family. ❖❖❖



Brittany Star Hampton is an associate professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology in the Division of Urogynecology and Reconstructive Pelvic Surgery, and clerkship director for Obstetrics and Gynecology Core Clerkship at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and Women and Infants Hospital in Providence. Dr. Hampton has a strong interest in clinical urogynecologic research, medical education and medical education research, mentoring, and global health. She has authored more than 30 manuscripts, lectures nationally on her areas of interest, and holds leadership roles in national organizations such as Society of Gynecologic Surgeons, American Urogynecologic Society, Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics and International Organization for Women and Development. Dr. Hampton travels yearly with physicians-in-training to sub-Saharan Africa for obstetric fistula repair and education.

photo by Agapao Productions

Brittany Star Hampton

The definition of dignity is the quality of being worthy of honor and respect. The inspiring women being honored by the YWCA all have different skill sets and abilities for promoting dignity in others. As a reconstructive pelvic surgeon, I have the unique ability to restore dignity for women by helping them overcome the problems of urinary and fecal incontinence, and pelvic organ prolapse. I do this as a physician in Providence, Rhode Island, and see the impact it has on giving my patients the freedom to live their lives without embarrassment or shame. These women have the ability to access me and my practice.

But not all women have this access to needed healthcare. Having a strong

interest in global health, I also travel yearly to Kigali, Rwanda to operate on women who need my skills.

These are women who suffer from obstetric fistula, a debilitating condition that occurs in women who do not have access to appropriate care during labor and delivery. These are women who have likely lost their baby and gained a fistula, or connection, between either their bladder or bowel and vagina. They are left with constant leakage of urine or feces. Subsequently most are abandoned by their husbands and families, unable to plow their fields and complete their tasks as subsistence farmers, and shunned from their village. These are women who live in a country that does not have surgeons

trained to take care of these complex problems, surgeons like me.

Restoring dignity to these women, and the freedom to live their lives again, by donating my time as a surgeon is one of the most rewarding things I do. My team works alongside Rwandan physicians, teaching them skills needed to take care of these women once we leave, with the hope that one day they will be able to take care of the women in their country. An estimated 3.5 million women suffer from fistula worldwide. The fifty or so women that my team helps each year is just a drop in the bucket of need, but it is fifty women who see a team of care providers who care about them. Fifty more lives restored with dignity. ✨



Mary Kay Harris is a community champion connecting people and policy in the City of Providence. She serves as a Providence City Councilor for the Eleventh Ward, which includes Upper South Providence and areas of the West End and Elmwood. Harris has secured housing for residents at risk of displacement and is working to strengthen economic development and bring new job opportunities to her ward. She has also established a new neighborhood association to empower her constituents. An eternal advocate, Harris believes in the power of unity and organization to realize positive change.

photo by Agapao Productions

Mary Kay Harris

I never imagined I'd become a City Councilwoman. For a long time, I believed people in my position were part of the problem. I believed real change—real, radical change—couldn't manifest inside an institution. To me, change had to come from the outside.

I was born in North Carolina, nowhere near the fast lane. It's been a long road from where I started and where I am now. Along this journey, I've witnessed desperate human suffering and injustice. I've also witnessed immense human compassion and hope.

We live in a country where abundance flows in the face of explicit human need. All too often, prosperity and poverty avert their eyes as they pass in the street. My life has afforded me the unique opportuni-

ty to serve from a position of understanding, from a place where I can identify need and work towards a solution. In early adulthood, as a single parent, I knew all too well what need felt like. I was fortunate to get an education and find steady work, first as a welder and later as a full-time community advocate.

In my many years as a community organizer for Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), I advocated for social and economic justice, tenants' rights, affordable homeownership, better schools, safer streets, and police accountability. At the time, there was no one to turn to if you felt unsafe filing a complaint about police brutality. I worked with a small group of activists to develop the Providence External Review

Authority (PERA), a civilian oversight board of the Providence Police Department. Together, we shed light on institutionalized injustice in our city.

Change never knocks politely at the door. Oftentimes, change has to beat down the door and force itself in. Years ago, I met an incredible champion for social justice, Councilman Miguel Luna. His passion for service encouraged me to take the leap from activist to public servant. When a heart attack took his life, I decided to keep his fight for justice alive. Today, as a City Councilwoman, I serve thousands of people who have been underrepresented for far too long. I listen to their needs, I amplify their voices, and I bring people and policy together to bridge the gaps. ✨



Melissa Husband is executive director of Community Action Partnership of Providence and an adjunct professor for Roger Williams University's SCS Community Development Program teaching Nonprofit Management. Husband holds a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from Roger Williams University and a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Rhode Island. She holds a Master Certificate in Supervisory Management and is a graduate of the Leadership Rhode Island's 2012 Theta II Class. She is an actively involved member of several boards, committees and commissions as a representative of the communities she serves including: Co-chair of Mayor Jorge Elorza's Housing and Neighborhood Development Committee, I-195 Commissioner, Public Utilities Commission Advisory Board Member, RI Coalition for the Homeless Board Member, United Way of RI Community Investment Board Member, just to name a few.

photo by Agapao Productions

Melissa Husband

I am proud and honored to lead an organization that strives to and succeeds at fighting to reduce poverty, revitalizing low-income communities, and empowering low-income individuals and families to become self-sufficient by: creating economic, educational and other opportunities for and providing a range of services to low-income families and individuals; mobilizing resources directed to the elimination of poverty; and educating the public on issues of poverty and community revitalization.

Growing up poor in the Southside of Providence, I know first hand what it's like

to struggle and endure the pains of poverty. I decided that I wasn't going to allow my circumstance to hinder me: but instead I decided, to quote Roberto Rivera, to turn my "pain into propane for personal empowerment and social change".

I made a personal commitment to serve my community in as many ways as I could. My life goals were and still are to: learn to be a great leader as a way to cultivate other leaders; use my influence and voice to make social change; be a mentor because my mentors have had a life changing impact on me; share my story to inspire and encourage others to survive

and thrive; and leave a legacy through my life's work and my children.

I am truly blessed to have a career I'm passionate about and to live out my legacy along side the amazing staff at CAPP who's passion and commitment to serve our communities is unmatched. I'm also so truly blessed to have a supportive husband and children, family and friends to keep me grounded and humble.

My life's motto is: If it doesn't challenge you it doesn't change you; I am forever changed and look forward to the change to come. ✨



Laura Ann Pisaturo has been a committed advocate for equal rights and a number of social justice issues impacting women, children and the LGBT community. She graduated cum laude from Suffolk University Law School and University of Rhode Island. Pisaturo has dedicated a large portion of her career to public service, working in both public and private sectors and holding legal position with Providence office of Hinckley, Allen & Snyder, LLP, Rhode Island Department of Attorney General, Day One, her own private practice and as chairperson of the Rhode Island Parole Board. She has taught as an adjunct professor at Salve Regina University and University of Rhode Island. Pisaturo was instrumental in the win for marriage equality in Rhode Island. She is actively engaged in the Rhode Island Bar Association and has served with distinction on Rhode Island Supreme Court Attorney Disciplinary Board as well as the City of Warwick Planning Board.

photo by Agapao Productions

Laura Ann Pisaturo

Much of the work I have been drawn to has involved issues of social justice: prosecuting domestic violence, advocating for children who have experienced sexual and physical abuse, marriage equality, working on legal issues impacting our transgendered community or the complexities of mass incarceration.

Most who know me have come to understand that my passion for social justice came from my father. To the eight of us who called him ‘dad’, he was larger than life. A man who, at an early age, came to the United States from Italy and went on to achieve and live the American Dream. And with all of his achievements, he chose and remained working as what one might describe as a “community lawyer” and a public servant. As a kid, I remember that he kept a small office in our house in the Silverlake section of Providence and he would often meet with neighbors - - most who spoken in broken English - - who

needed his help. When times were tough those neighbors paid with what little they had, sometimes pepper biscuits and eggs.

And it was from him that I learned that the small acts -- helping a neighbor buy a new home or who was out of a job -- were as important if not more so - - than the bigger acts that might perhaps gain more attention.

So, it was ‘pepper biscuits and eggs’ that came back to me, when:

- I accepted the pro bono referral to help the transgendered college student, who just wanted to change his first name to something more gender-neutral, return to court after a judge made his initial, pro se, petition contingent on his first having ‘top surgery’. Keep in mind that an NBA star can easily change his name to ‘Metta World Peace’ without first achieving world peace and yet a different standard was being set for this person because of who he was.
- I helped a divorced mother navigate the

family court to challenge her ex-husband’s refusal to consent to clinically appropriate and medically necessary hormone therapy for her transgender teenage son critical to address his gender dysphoria, a serious medical condition. Her child had been hospitalized time and again and she just wanted him to stop hurting himself and feel whole with who he was inside.

- In our first year together - - 12 years ago - - my (now) wife, Maria, and I began attending community meetings for marriage equality and committed ourselves to testifying and lobbying (year after year) until it became law.
- I made the exciting decision to run for public office and challenge the status quo.

I know from these and other experiences that marginalized groups too often get left out. So, I believe it is incumbent on each of us to do our small part, and it has been my honor to do mine. ✨



Mary Reilly entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1948 and began her teaching career at St. Mary's School Pawtucket and then at St. Mary's Bay View. She ministered for 6 years in Central America where she internalized the sufferings of women and girls. She returned to Rhode Island and worked as a member of the Team Ministry of St. Michael's Parish Providence. She co-founded Dorcas Place and with others founded McAuley House, Good Friday Walk for Hunger and Homelessness, The Child Opportunity Zone, Walk for Literacy, and NETWORK (Wash). She founded Sophia Academy along with the support of the Sisters Collaborative. Sister Mary has spent her life advocating for social justice and especially in ministries that empower women and girls.

photo by Agapao Productions

Mary Reilly

July, this year, Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace recipient for her advocacy for education for women and girls in defiance of the Taliban ruling, paid a surprise visit to Sophia Academy.

Malala celebrated her 19th birthday on July 12th. Born in 1997, she came into the world after the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing where concern for the development and education of the girl child was a major concern.

I was amazed at how deep my feelings were for this young woman who defied death. I was honored to meet her.

Where was I at 19 years old --- secluded in the novitiate of the Sisters of Mercy preparing for a life of prayer and service.

After 13 years of teaching in Rhode Island, I was missioned to serve in Honduras and Belize. The poverty that I witnessed and the daily hardships of the people, especially of the women and girls challenged me. It was there that my thirst for justice and my feminine consciousness developed.

Returning to Rhode Island, I became a pastoral team member at St. Michael's Parish in South

Providence. In response to need, McAuley House and the Good Friday Walk for Hunger were established. The Catholic Inner City had opened; community organizing was a major activity, empowering the people.

At the same time, the first Women Ordination Conference was held in Detroit, to which a group of us attended.

NETWORK (NUNS on the BUS), a social justice lobby was established by 47 Sisters, including Liz Morancy, the late Claire Dugan ssj and myself, in response to the Call to Action letter of Pope Paul VI, "Justice is a constitutive element of the Gospel," calling us to be involved in the political process. Our house became the center of political activity working in the campaigns of Liz Morancy and Arlene Violet.

At the end of these 10 years at St Michael's, Dorcas Place was started. In response to calls from very young mothers seeking Baptism for their babies, followed by a series of home visits, Deborah Thompson and I realized there was a growing class of poor illiterate mothers, many emancipated youths, living alone. Appeals to many State agency fell on

deaf ears. Programs developed over the years to meet the educational needs of the women transitioning from welfare to work.

During my 19 years at Dorcas Place, I learned about the extent of violence in the women's lives. Their children were their hope and their incentive for pursuing education. Dreams they had were for their children, no longer for themselves.

The Beijing Conference urged me to along with the support of the Sister Collaborative and others to open a middle school for girls from low income families in Providence.

Sophia Academy, a private non denominational school opened at the Algonquin Center in 2001.

Today, under the direction of my successor, Gigi DiBello, joined by an amazing dedicated faculty and staff. Sophia Academy is a school that empowers young girls preparing to take their place in a changing world.

Malala told the students that they were beautiful and seeing them gave her hope that the world had a bright future. ✨



Camille Vella-Wilkinson has over 25 years experience in Human Resources, Multicultural Competencies and Project Management. She participated in the development of Navy's Command Managed Equal Opportunity Program. A war veteran who served during Operation Desert Storm, she retired as a lieutenant commander. She was appointed and has continued to serve as a state commissioner for RI Commission for Human Rights. Vella-Wilkinson started her own business, Higher & Hire as a career coach and diversity trainer. Elected to Warwick City Council for three terms, community service has consistently been one of Vella-Wilkinson's guiding principles. She is a graduate from Long Island University with Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and Psychology. She is also a graduate of Warwick Citizens Police Academy. Vella-Wilkinson has completed two advanced degrees: a Master of Science Degree in Labor Relations/Human Resources from University of Rhode Island and a Juris Doctor from Roger Williams University School of Law.

photo by Agapao Productions

Camille Vella-Wilkinson

Vincenzo always had a pocketful of dimes rattling in his jacket. He would walk down busy commercial streets in our Brooklyn neighborhood keeping watch for the meter maid. When a red metal flag popped up, they would both race towards the car. A cobbler by trade, he wasn't a wealthy man. Vincenzo wasn't trying to thumb his nose at law enforcement. My grandfather just wanted to prevent hard working strangers from the costly surprise of a parking ticket.

Anna and Christina, typical Italian women loved to nurture others. The two sisters were constantly visiting the elderly and shut-ins, often bringing meals or other treats. During the NYC Teachers' strike in the late 60's, they packed huge shopping bags of sandwiches, filled thermoses with lemonade, coffee or soup and fed the picketers. I walked my first line with them at the age of 11 and added "Collective Bargaining" to my growing vocabulary.

We lived in a multicultural neighborhood

where world and national news were debated on most front steps. As youngsters, my sister Concetta and I routinely lit stoves and turned on light switches before Shabbat for Orthodox neighbors. We wrote letters and collected care packages for local boys who served in Vietnam. Too many times, we sang at their funerals. During the 60's and 70's, we individually participated in the Civil Rights, Gay Rights and Women's Rights movements by sit-ins, strikes or raising awareness and money for their various causes.

Service to others was the legacy handed to me by my grandparents and parents. It was considered the highest calling. While I have had the privilege of community service through the military and memberships in numerous associations, it is the one-to-one work that makes my heart soar. Our lives are defined by layers of multi-tasking. We have become so overly scheduled that our agenda alerts bombard us through social media, smart phones and now, even our watches

or fitbits. I appreciate the ability to stay plugged-in and maximize my efforts through organized social justice events, the Warwick City Council and the RI Commission for Human Rights but I am vigilant to ensure my community work is not solely dependent on transactions. Service should not be reduced to a bunch of red lines on a "To Do" list. It is a work of heart.

St Francis Assisi has been attributed with saying "Preach the Gospel. Sometimes use words." This is a beautiful, challenging concept in a society that often resembles the worst episodes of a reality television show. The Prayer to St Francis has been my family's blueprint for social justice, helping families and strengthening our communities. I remain engaged, look for even the simplest opportunity to "walk the talk" and empower others to do the same. But in between walking picket lines throughout Rhode Island, I store a bag of quarters in my car, and look out for the meter maids in Providence. ❖❖❖



Rose Ella Weaver joined Trinity Repertory Company in Providence as an acting fellow, working with Trinity for 22 seasons. She starred as Billie Holiday in Trinity's – Lady Day. On television, Weaver had roles in *The Brotherhood*, *In the Heat of the Night*, *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Young and the Restless*, and *L.A. Law*. In film, she starred opposite Jodie Foster in *The Accused* and appeared in *Poetic Justice* opposite the late Tupac Shakur. Weaver received a Bachelor of Arts from Wheaton College, Master of Fine Arts from Brown University, Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from Marymount Manhattan College, and Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from Providence College. She wrote *Menopause Mama*, a one-woman play with music that tells story of women and pro-aging; *Skips in the Record* about coping with Alzheimer's disease, which was awarded Rhode Island State Council on the Arts Fellowship in Playwriting; and *Silhouette of a Silhouette*, based on death of one of her brothers. Weaver has entertained audiences for more than 40 years in theatre, television, film and music.

photo by Agapao Productions

Rose Ella Weaver

For me, standing up for equity in our community is expressed through the creative work I write and perform. You see, I've walked in the shoes of hundreds of people over my forty-three years in the performing arts. Black people, white, rich, poor, young, old, people out of their minds with grief and stress and those wiser than I... all have been inside my soul and I inside them. So in studying and portraying the psychological, social, and physical essence of people, I have seen how important character is to our development and survival. I've seen how important art is to strengthening community. Theatre gives us a different way of seeing from what we are used to. It increases our empathy and our tolerance. I know it did for me because at one time I was a very bitter, narrow-minded and angry person because of racism.

Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live

in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," are words that I live by, teach and encourage through my writing, acting and singing.

I wrote my solo performance play, *Menopause Mama*, because I was sick and tired of anti-aging propaganda from Aristotle to beauty magazines dumping on girls and women. They were and still are telling us that aging is ugly and bad. Many women and men buy into that crock of crap thereby stunting their growth from an early age into self-loving, whole human beings. One of my characters states that, "Despite ridiculous taboos, Wise Women tried to instill in girls a sense of self-respect and love – a love for their youth and a love for their old age... that in one fable from ancient days, bleeding was blamed on Eve. Blamed! Says that Eve beguiled Adam into having sex, and for that "sin" women

were afflicted with bleeding for thirty to forty years of their lives ... that woman is filled with evil spirits when the blood comes down ... that menstruation is the work of the devil." LOL! But it's not funny.

Strengthening communities in my opinion means finding constructive ways to continuously enhance our people instead of tearing them down. Whether it be through life-long learning, (I received my Master of Fine Arts Degree when I was fifty), taking stock of where you are in the big picture of your community and improving yourself in all possible ways, treating everyone with equal respect, or going to the theatre to observe and learn.

We must not forget the past character of evil people who have destroyed our communities by pitting us against each other. We cannot dwell on them either. I show the difference through my art. ✨

“App challenges are used as a gateway to expose girls to computer science and coding. YWCA is thrilled to have the support of these two wonderful organizations.”

- Deborah Perry, President/CEO of YWCA Rhode Island

Amica Mutual Insurance Co. and Bryant University



YWCA Rhode Island sponsors The Fantastic Girtastic Code Company in partnership with Amica Mutual Insurance Co. and Bryant University. YWCA recognized them for their support in the development, creation and implementation of the App Challenge for middle school girls, on April 2 at Bryant University.

Twenty-seven girls ages 9 to 12 participated, many from the Paul Cuffee School. They worked together to identify a problem in their communities, thought creatively about how it could be solved using technology, created a storyboard prototype of a mobile application, and made presentations to a panel of judges. They were guided by mentors who included women working at Rhode Island companies such as Amica, Mojo Tech and Splatypus Web Design Studio, as well as professors from Bryant University and Rhode Island School of Design.

The girls worked in teams, presented their ideas to a panel of judges. Ideas ranged from an app to help you remember your homework to one designed to challenge gender stereotypes. The winner was an app which challenged gender stereotypes, “The Superwomen App”.

This app allows users to design their own superwoman. It also shares information about notable women in history, in their community, and throughout the world. The app would be available in the user's native language and tailored to where they live. Motivational quotes and quizzes are also a feature in their prototype.

The Fantastic Girtastic Code Company is a program of the YWCA Rhode Island which is designed to make computer sciences “relevant, cool, hip and exciting in an effort to educate, inspire and equip girls to pursue careers in computer sciences.” Using this approach, girls will learn about code instruction, meet female role models and mentors, connect to colleges and universities, and access industry leaders.



Amica Mutual Insurance Co., the nation's oldest mutual insurer of automobiles, was founded in 1907. The company, based in Lincoln, is a national writer of auto, home, marine and umbrella insurance. Life coverage is available through Amica Life Insurance Company, a wholly owned subsidiary. Amica employs more than 3,400 people in 44 offices across the country.

Bryant University is a leading private university offering an innovative business and liberal arts education. Founded in 1863, Bryant enrolls approximately 3,700 graduate and undergraduate students from 36 states and 72 countries. Bryant is recognized as a leader in international education and receives top rankings from U.S. News and World Report, College Factual/U.S.A. Today, and Bloomberg Businessweek.

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