



Congressman John Garamendi's

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE NETWORK

- When Women Succeed, America Succeeds -

2015 WOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

"It is the undeniable strength in women, a strength borne of compassion and not force that has brought so many of you here today. Each and every one of you has a heart of service. Your life as a mother, counselor, teacher, business woman is a testament to that fact"

Patricia Garamendi

California Assembly

Dear Women Leaders,

It is my honor to welcome you to our 2015 Women of the Year awards. The honorees today represent some of the most outstanding and dedicated women in the 3rd Congressional District. Nominated by their peers, these women and the leadership they have provided are being recognized for playing an integral and crucial role in improving the lives of everyone in their communities.

During the last 50 years women have made great strides in America. It used to be almost unheard of to see women as elected officials, CEOs, senior military officials, doctors or attorneys, but today some of our most successful leaders in the world are women. This progress has not come easy and many women before you have worked hard and strived to achieve the independence and rights you have today. I realize there is more work to be done to ensure that women have equal pay, flexible work schedules and affordable education. Each of the honorees will be a vital part of the future successes for women. I am inspired by each one of you here today and firmly believe when women succeed, America succeeds!

Congratulations,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Garamendi".

Congressman John Garamendi



Cecilia Aguiar-Curry

City Councilwoman

Winters – Yolo County

Cecilia Aguiar-Curry is currently in her second term as Mayor of Winters, a city of 7,000 residents in Western Yolo County. Cecilia has spearheaded many new initiatives for the city of Winters. She is an incisive leader with clear vision and the ability to make that vision a reality in tangible ways. She is an outstanding ambassador to the world at large for the city of Winters.

Under her leadership, the Yolo County Health and Human Services brought a branch to Winters. PG&E is also building a new training facility in Winters, providing more than \$500,000 in computer technology and training to the schoolchildren of Winters through a partnership with the Winters Education Foundation and the Yocha DeHe Foundation. She also was a successful advocate for the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument, revived the local Hispanic Advisory Community and developed the Winters Youth Council.

Cecilia also serves on the Board of Directors for the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), the New Hope Community Development Corporation, the Yolo County Housing Commission, the Water Resource Association of Yolo County, and the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Previously, she served on the Board of Directors for the League of California Cities. Cecilia is hard-working, responsible, compassionate, and an effective leader who truly cares about her community.

Nominated by Margaret Burns, Howard Hupe, and Robyn Rominger



Andrea Armstrong

Community Leader

Williams – Colusa County

Committed to the guidance and activities of Williams youth, in addition to serving as a school board member for 20 years, Andi has been a key organizer and speaker for the 'Every 15 Minutes' program in schools. As a teenager, Andi was in a serious car accident involving a drunken driver. She has shared her story across the North State to encourage students to consider the consequences of drinking and driving or being a passenger in a car driven by an impaired driver.

Andi's leadership was fundamental in the development and completion of the downtown mural project. The mural is the pride and the focal point in the City of Williams. She served for 7 years as President of Citizens for a Better Williams dedicated to the improvement of the historic downtown business district. Andi organized the City of Williams annual events and parades while developing a Summer concert series in the park. Full of fun, residents will often see Andi serving strawberry shortcakes outfitted in the old-fashioned Car-Hop tradition!

In 2012, local hero Sgt. Alejandro Jauregui lost both legs below the knees in Afghanistan. Andi, an Army Mom orchestrated his homecoming. With over 200 town folks and veterans cheering and waving flags in the center of town, they honored and welcomed Sgt. Jauregui home. Later, Sgt. Jauregui received a home from "Homes for our Troops" in Woodland. It was Andi who spearheaded a fundraiser that generated over \$10,000 to help pay for handicap accessible home features.

An inspiration is to many and admired by all, Andi goes above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that a call for help is answered.

Nominated by Pat Ash



Constance Boulware

City Councilwoman

Rio Vista – Solano County

Upon retirement after 30 years of service with the Social Security Administration, Constance (Connie) Boulware relocated from the Bay Area to Rio Vista in 2007. While on her journey of discovery in her newly adopted hometown, she found volunteer organizations and service clubs in need of an extra pair of hands and offered hers. Over time, Connie's interest in city government grew. She was appointed first to the Airport Committee and then to the Army Base Reuse Committee. In 2010, Connie was elected to the Rio Vista City Council and re-elected in 2014 where she serves today.

As a council member, Connie has a particular interest in the needs of Seniors and Children. Her hallmark has been her responsiveness to constituents and her ability to bring people together to tackle community needs. In the midst of a city budget crisis, Connie has been successful in bringing volunteers together to make much needed Senior Center repairs and provide unmet summer recreational needs for children at little to no cost to the City.

Connie also serves as President of the Solano County Library Foundation, Board Member of RioVision, Co-President of Women's Improvement Club, President of the Rio Vista Lions Club, and President of the Rio Vista Soroptimists Club.

Constance Boulware inspires with the quiet, modest and caring way she leads by example, drawing others to join her in making life better for her community. She never says, "We can't do that," but instead says, "Let's see what we can do together."

Nominated by Marci Coglianesse



Zenobia Brokenbrough

Musical Educator and Mentor

Williams - Colusa County

Zee Brown Brokenbrough has been the Minister of Music at the historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marysville, home to one of California's oldest choirs since 1978. For the past 10 years, Zee has been the Choir, Musical Theater and Piano teacher at the Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, one of the highest performing schools in the Yuba-Sutter region. Previously and for many years, Zee taught 3rd grade and music at St. Isidore's Catholic Church in Yuba City. Zee is an upstanding and inspiring educator who has given years of her time and talent to thousands of students.

Zee and Bethle AME's Choir spread joy throughout the community bringing hope to patients in Senior homes and hospitals, during holiday and fundraising events, street fairs, weddings, funerals, health fairs and a myriad of other events. Annually, Zee helps charter school students fundraise to travel and perform at Chico State and Disneyland.

Through music and Zee's educational programs, she is beloved by her students and peers. Zee broadens the minds of her students while challenging them to think critically, value diversity, and function competently, to become effective and confident leaders.

Nominated by Chuck and Linda Plummer Smith



Becky Brummet

*Special Education, California Teachers
Association*

Orland – Glenn County

Becky is a dedicated Special Education teacher at Orland High School who previously taught students at the Continuation school and Head Start. Becky goes the extra mile to ensure her student who face challenges get the services they need. Becky is described by her colleagues as a Worker Bee and a fearless child advocate.

Becky served the Glenn County Fair Board by appointment under Governor Schwarzenegger and has continued to support current appointees and activities since her departure. Becky was the co-founder of the 'Avenue of Lights', an annual display installed at the fairgrounds during the holidays that has expanded over the years to encompass a full mile. It poses as a Winter Wonderland to delight local residents of all ages!

Additionally, Becky serves as President of the California Teachers Association in Orland where she is a strong voice for fairness in the workplace. Her voice is amplified each day with a powerful task: she leads by example.

Nominated by Byron and Carolyn Denton



Barbara Christwitz

Community Leader

Clearlake – Lake County

Barbara Christwitz is the founder of Citizens Caring 4 Clearlake, a non-profit organization that leads neighborhood clean ups of trash and debris. She is dedicated to making Clearlake a better place.

In addition to Citizens 4 Clearlake, Barbara has been an active community member with an extensive volunteer resume. She volunteers for the Lake County Time Bank and Lake County Co-op and is a coordinator of monthly Peace Prayer dances. Barbara helped establish the Highlands Senior Service Center Garden and is a leader in the Girl's Circle sponsored by the Lake County Family Resource Center.

Barbara has been a tutor specialist at Yuba Community College for the past ten years. She is an amazingly giving person with an inexhaustible spirit who takes pride in her community.

Nominated by the City of Clearlake



Preet Didbal

City Councilwoman

Yuba City – Sutter County

Against all odds, Preet Didbal made history when she took the oath of office December 2, 2014 to become the first Sikh American women elected to the Yuba City Council. The daughter of farm laborers, Preet worked alongside her parents in the peach and prune orchards and on the graveyard shift at the local cannery during the summer months. She was the first in her family to attend and graduate college, earning her Master's degree in Public Administration with a concentration in Health Services. She is a health care services manager with the California Department of Corrections.

Preet's focus as a councilwoman is on education, children and public safety. Before her election to the City Council, Preet served as a Planning Commissioner for 10 years. She is an advocate for building a foundation for children of academic, economic and social opportunity so that they may thrive. She is particularly passionate about empowering young girls and women to reach their highest potentials. Preet spearheads quarterly Community Health and Safety forums in collaboration with local police, fire, schools and mental/public health agencies to educate the public.

Preet is also actively involved with local Runs to support Girls on the Run, Run Drugs out of Town, Hands of Hope Run for the Homeless, and Breast Cancer and Alzheimer's Research. She also collects backpacks for Western Farm Workers families every fall and volunteers for Back to School shopping with the Sutter-Yuba Association of Realtors to support low-income families and children. Preet's personal devotion rests in a desire to give back to the community that has given her so much.

Nominated by Pat Kittle



Dawn Dowdy

Track Coach, Mentor

Hamilton City – Glenn County

Dawn Dowdy is a dedicated Track Coach for Hamilton High School. Dawn has redefined the term 'dedication' and has not let the fact that Hamilton High does not have a track on campus hinder her students from reaching personal goals and competing in regional competitions.

Dawn has not allowed substantial budget cuts deter her from attracting a high number of students into her program. She has orchestrated fundraising to ensure students have the means to participate and takes a personal interest in each student to make sure they keep up with their academics. Some of her students have competed in the State Finals and obtained college scholarship funds.

Hamilton City is a small, tight-knit community of 2,000. Dawn's ability to mentor, motivate and maximize students' potential on and off the Track is priceless.

Nominated by Lee Ann Grigsby-Puente



Joanne Ellis

Community Leader

Yuba City – Sutter County

Joanne Ellis is the Executive Director of the Yuba Sutter Gleaners Food Bank and Thrift Store. The Yuba Sutter Gleaners Food Bank is the only all-volunteer Food Bank in California. In addition to coordinating food distributions at 22 sites, scheduling volunteers and arranging for deliveries, Joanne manages the Emergency Drought Box program authorized by Governor Jerry Brown to distribute among individuals most affected by the drought such as agricultural workers.

Joanne took the initiative to implement a successful pilot program called 'Food for Thought' at Park Avenue School in Yuba City. The program aims to minimize child hunger over the weekends when children and families do not have access to the National School Lunch program. It offers students the opportunity to take fresh local fruits and vegetables and whole grain breads home to prepare and eat over the weekend. With Park Avenue Elementary School containing the highest poverty levels in the district, the program has been very well-received.

Joanne is a member of the Lions Club and Yuba-Sutter United Way. Joanne is dedicated to helping the neediest in her community through broad collaborative efforts with supporting agencies who conduct cooking demonstrations and taste testing for her food bank families on a regular basis. Joanne's work is truly a labor of love.

Nominated by Sharman Kobayashi and Kim Sangha



Paula Emigh

Retired Teacher

Woodland - Yolo County

Paula Emigh was born and raised in Solano County, graduating from Dixon High School. As a student, Paula was very involved in school activities and believes that her experiences as a student led her to consider a career in teaching. When Paula was an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, she had an internship at a special education center in the area, where she was first exposed to teaching children with special needs. This experience convinced her that her future was in special education.

After graduating, Paula began a substitute position in Woodland which eventually led to over 30 years as a special education teacher. She was an integral team member in the development of the BEST program at Freeman Elementary School, helping to create a positive school climate for staff, students, and families. Because of the incredible work she has done with staff on disability awareness, Paula was named Woodland Joint Unified School District's 2014 Educator of the Year.

In all ways imaginable, Paula credits her career as being a team effort. Throughout her years teaching, Paula worked cooperatively with many paraprofessionals, parents, and families. Together they were able to prioritize and strategize plans to allow the students to grow beyond previous expectations.



Graciela Espindola

Youth Advocate

Live Oak – Sutter County

Graciela Espindola is the Program Coordinator of the Intervention and Prevention Programs that she founded and established for the Sutter County Superintendent of Schools Office in Yuba City, California. She has over 30 years of professional experience in educational systems and structures with an emphasis in social work.

Throughout her years of experience, Graciela has chaired several local and state organizations including President of the California Association of Child Welfare and Attendance organization, Chair of the Pupil Services Coalition, and California Delegate of the International Association for Truancy & Dropout Prevention. She has also served on the California Department of Education's K-12 Student Mental Health Initiative Advisory Board, School Attendance Review Board, and the Gang Risk Intervention Program.

Graciela has a certification in Counseling Vocational Assessment & Career Counseling from Chapman College and Human Resources and Management from the California State University, Sacramento. She is currently a Masters in Social Work candidate at the University of Southern California's dual Social Work and Global Policy PhD program. In addition, Graciela is also a successful grant writer and project manager, securing more than \$7 million in grant funds during her career.

Nominated by Angel Diaz



Margaret Fernandez

Community Leader for

Hispanic Advancement, Business Development

Yuba City – Sutter County

Margaret was born into a large family and raised in the Midwest. She came to Yuba-Sutter in 1985 where she studied business administration at Yuba Community College. A former Marketing Manager, Margaret currently works as Branch Operations manager for The Plus Group in Yuba City, a job placement agency. There are many moving pieces within the Marketing and Managing of the Human Resources industry today and it is a challenging job that Margaret has enjoyed for the past 10 years.

Margaret is the President of the Alliance for Hispanic Advancement. As one of its founding members, Margaret has organized a project, 'Saber es Poder' (Knowledge is Power) to bring together residents with local, state, federal agencies to share and align need with services. She also serves on the Boards of the Yuba Sutter Economic Development Corporation and North Central Counties Consortium.

What makes Margaret so special is that her passionate commitment is perfectly tempered by a kind heart and gentle and respectful demeanor combined with practical, progressive action.

Nominated by David Perez and Rose Mary Avila



Gloria Flaherty

Child and Family Advocate

Kelseyville – Lake County

Gloria is the founding Director of the Lake Family Resource Center. Lake FRC is a family resource, referral, and support center that has grown to serve 1400 families and 4,500 individuals annually. Under Gloria's leadership, it has acquired independent facilities and expanded programs.

As a member of the Kelseyville School Board, Gloria helped establish the first Education Foundation in Lake County. She also assisted with the development and operation of a Domestic Violence Shelter in Lake County.

Gloria has also served many years on First 5 and helped to secure funding for the Early Head Start program.

Two winters ago, Lake County experienced a severe drop in temperature that was adversely affecting the homeless population in Clearlake. Gloria responded without delay and opened a 'Warming Center' at one of the Lake FRC locations to provide shelter and respite. Gloria had no budget or supplies at the time, but she opened the doors of the center immediately, secured food donations, cots, and volunteer staff. She pulled it together, because it was the right thing to do. The Warming Center remained open for 2 months until the weather abated and homeless families were spared additional suffering because of her Can Do spirit and responsive action.

Nominated by the Michelle Scully



Elvia Garcia

Community Organizer

Davis – Yolo County

Among many other areas of community involvement, Elvia Garcia was instrumental in the implementation of the Yolo County District Attorney's Neighborhood Court Program. The Neighborhood Court Program utilizes restorative justice concepts, which identify crime as acts that cause harm done to people and communities and emphasizes the offender repairing that harm done to the individual and to the community as a whole.

Elvia has been a volunteer in this program since its inception in the Spring of 2013 and continues to be a driving force in the program. After observing San Francisco's model in an effort to better understand the program and how to best apply its practices in Yolo County, Elvia helped design the current facilitated conference model, panelist and facilitator training, and implement the Homeless Diversion Program model.

Elvia is a true example of courage and selflessness and her volunteer efforts continue to have a positive impact in the County of Yolo.

Nominated by Diane Parro and Jeff Reisig



Angie Gates

Community Organizer

Olivehurst/Marysville – Yuba County

Angie Gates is inspired by the people she serves through her volunteerism. “After the floods, I saw the good in people,” explained Angie. “It made me proud to call Yuba County my home.”

Angie has been a community organizer and volunteer in Yuba County for over 20 years. She spearheaded ‘So You Can’, a canned food drive and a critical networking agency. Originally designed to serve Olivehurst, the networking agency has expanded to include Linda, Arboga, Plumas Lake, and Marysville.

Hundreds of local families are helped each year by the organizations and annual events Angie provides leadership for, such as Olivehurst’s Christmas Parade and Car Show, Marysville Boots and Brews, Operation Turkey Swap, Holiday Dinner and Toy Drive, Olivehurst Little League, Marysville Kiwanis, Yuba County Senior Center, and Duke Memorial Foundation.

Beyond providing food for the hungry and conducting toy drives during the holidays for low income families, Angie is passionate about creating positive family events that promote a sense of community wellbeing so that people feel good about where they live.

What keeps Angie motivated are the smiles that she sees on the faces of many who return to say, “Thank you for helping our family out last year. Now that we are back on our feet, what can we do to help someone else this year?”

Nominated by Mary Jane Griego and John Nicoletti



Mary Jane Griego

County Supervisor

Olivehurst – Yuba County

Mary Jane Griego is a Yuba County Supervisor and has served continuously since 2000. Following the devastating levee breaches of 1986 and 1997, securing flood and levee protection for her Olivehurst residents has been of paramount importance, and Mary Jane has been a tireless advocate. She created the Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority (TRLIA), which received an Outstanding Engineering award for Flood Control in 2009 from the American Society of Civil Engineers. Mary Jane has also served on the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), First 5 Yuba Commission, Feather River Air Quality Management, Yuba County Local Agency Formation Commission, Yuba Sutter Transit Authority, and Yuba County Water Agency.

Mary Jane is the owner of Duke's Diner, a popular eatery seated in the heart of Olivehurst known for its infamous chili and homemade biscuits. It is a family business started by Mary Jane's father Duke many years ago. Together, they worked side-by-side until his recent passing.

The daughter of cotton farmers, Mary Jane's philosophy is that there is nothing that cannot be accomplished as long as you work hard and produce results. Mary Jane is no stranger to either. Her day begins at 4am with the opening of the restaurant and food preparation and managerial duties. She then powers through the remainder of her day and on into the evening as County Supervisor. Mary Jane's hard work and results are evidence of her deep commitment to community and family. To quote her late father Duke, "The proof is in the pudding."

Nominated by Curt Aikens and John Nicoletti



Alma Hickel

Community Volunteer

Colusa – Colusa County

When Alma Hickel won the Grand Prize at the Colusa County Fair Cook-off last year for her famous Walnut pie, it was no surprise to hear her confess, “I love to bake! I even grew and shelled the walnuts.” Alma has won multiple contest prizes for her baking skills over the years, but what Alma is most known for throughout Colusa is how generous she has been with her sharing her baking skills with the community. For many years, Alma has donated baked items to be sold or auctioned in support of local fundraising efforts.

She has also provided inspirational leadership to 4-H, Catholic Ladies Relief Society, Our Lady of Lourdes and the Colusa Regional Medical Center.

Alma, together with her late husband James, taught their five children the value of self-reliance, hard work, and giving back to their community through leading by example. Daughter and City Councilwoman Marilyn shares, “Our mother is amazingly kind. She operated a Daycare for over 35 years and cared for so many children. She watched them all grow up and has never forgotten them. Whenever there is a funeral in town, she will bake and take it to the family to comfort them.”

Nominated by Pat Kittle



Sandy Holman

Cultural Competency Educator and Mentor

Davis – Yolo County

Sandy Holman is the Director of United in Unity and The Culture C.O.-O.P. The ‘C.O.-O.P.’ which stands for Caring, Optimistic, Open-minded People was created to help individuals and organizations better meet the needs of diverse communities in a variety of settings. Both organizations focus on promoting respect for equitable practices, diversity, cultural competency, reading and a quality education for all.

Sandy helped to create Davis’ annual International Festival designed to bring people of all cultures together. She has written and published two beautiful children’s books, ‘Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?’ and ‘We All Have a Heritage’.

Known to many as ‘The Purple Lady’, Sandy has an unquenchable zest for life that has inspired thousands of Yolo County youth and adults over the past 30 years.

Through Sandy’s mentoring programs and collaborative projects, she is a beacon of light who leaves an indelible imprint on the lives she touches.

Nominated by Angela Angel and Debbie Carrion-Clifford



Jane Johnson

Community Organizer,

Mental Health Advocate

Fairfield – Solano County

Jane Johnson has been working in the nonprofit field in Solano County for 30 years. Originally from San Mateo County, Jane was part of the team that moved Marine World Africa USA from Redwood City to Vallejo, CA in 1985. Her passion for educating children about our world's wildlife continues but has taken a bit of a back seat to providing services to at-risk children in Solano County.

In 1989, Jane left Marine World to join the Girl Scouts. Under her tenure as CEO of the Girl Scout Council of Napa-Solano, the local organization was recognized nationally for its service to girls in underserved communities. Outreach programs focusing on self-esteem, empowerment, and job skills grew to include services in every low-income housing project in both Napa and Solano counties, juvenile hall sites in both counties, teen parenting programs, and a battered women's shelter.

Jane currently provides leadership as the Executive Director to Solano County's largest children's mental health service provider, Child Haven. She brings to the organization a solid business background, with a commitment to professionalism and a drive for excellence. Under her leadership, the agency has increased service contracts by 61%, diversified funding streams, and grown in cultural diversity, thus allowing local families greater access to mental health services. Collaboration and shared responsibility for our community is integral in Jane's management style. Jane is proud to have served on the leadership team bringing a Family Justice Center to Solano County, thus creating a single entrance to services for domestic violence victims, young and old.

Nominated by Carolyn Wold and Carmen Ward



Amandeep Kaur

*Chancellor's Science Fellow, Advocate
for Underrepresented Student Groups*

Davis – Yolo County

Dr. Amandeep Kaur is Science Fellow to Chancellor Linda Katehi at UC Davis. She is a UC Davis alumna and received her PhD in Physics from UC Davis in July 2014. She is a passionate leader and advocate for underrepresented student groups at UC Davis. She has consistently worked towards empowering underrepresented graduate student groups at UC Davis since the academic year 2012-13. She says that her true calling is public service and making an impact in the lives of people. One of her biggest accomplishments was to advocate for creating more fellowships for international PhD students. Her advocacy led Provost Ralph Hexter to create post candidacy NRST fellowships in the academic year 2013-14 and to implement a new budget model of \$2 million in the academic year 2014-15. This outcome has had a significant impact in the competitiveness of UC Davis and has allowed for equity for international PhD students at UC Davis. In May 2013, Amandeep was nominated by her peers and received an outstanding leadership award for her advocacy on behalf of international PhD students.

Last year, as a Graduate Student Assistant to the Dean and Chancellor (GSADC), Amandeep hosted Diversity Dialogues on Graduate Education, a series of seven discussions on creating strategies to empower women students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), students of color, international students, undocumented students, student veterans, student parents, LGBTQIA identified students, and students with visible/invisible disabilities.

Currently as a postdoctoral science fellow to Chancellor Linda Katehi, she is furthering her advocacy on bridging the gaps for women in STEM through her Empowering Women in STEM (EWIS) initiative. She also believes that graduate students with the right expertise can help policy makers in shaping public policy which has motivated her to create Emerging Leaders in Policy and Public Service (ELIPPS) initiative at UC Davis. One of her goals through ELIPPS is to inspire more students to join public service. She believes in leading by example and is a role model for many students at UC Davis.

Nominated by Erin Arms



Barbara LeVake

County Supervisor

Yuba City – Sutter County

Raised on a dairy farm in Merced, Barbara LeVake has been involved in agriculture and public policy issues all her life. She has been a member of the California Women for Agriculture for 40 years and is currently the State Legislative Director.

A resident of Sutter County for over 30 years, Barbara is a County Supervisor having previously served from 1989-1992 and as a Governor appointee to the State Reclamation Board.

Since 1995, Barbara has been the CEO of Brazil/LeVake Government Relations providing services to clients ranging from agriculture to energy to water interests. She also actively represents the agricultural industry as a member of the California Elected Women's Association, California State Association of Counties, Capitol Network, National Association of Business Women Owners, Western Growers Association, California Farm Bureau, and Western Plant Health Association. She is also a member of the Sutter Buttes Flood Control Agency and the Sutter Yuba Farm Bureau.

Barbara is respected as a bold leader who demonstrates grace under pressure. She works to shape policy to address the needs of today while being mindful of future generations yet to come. As a role model, Barbara helps to inspire in others, a reminder to advocate passionately, be a leader, and to always act with integrity and class.

Nominated by Carol Chandler and Kerri Hammerstrom



Dionne McCullar

Business Leader & Community Volunteer

Fairfield – Solano County

Dionne McCullar was born and raised in San Francisco. She and her husband, Charles are the proud parents of 3 grown daughters and 3 grandchildren. Dionne established a career with the San Francisco Police Department where she served for 14 years as a Peace Officer.

Now, a resident of Solano County, Dionne is co-owner of a successful small business, Front2Back Designs in Fairfield.

Dionne is Past President of Fairfield Kiwanis Club and Chair of Salvation Army Red Kettle. Dionne is an active supporter of Solano Hearts United/Solano Turkey Trot, Mission Solano, Heather House, Rotary Club, Yippie Yogurt Foundation, Heart2Heart, Little Wing Connections, The Leaven, Ride to Defeat Diabetes, Children's Nurturing Project, The Continentals of Omega Boys & Girls Club of Vallejo, and Children in Need of Hugs.

Dionne has also served as Ambassador for several area Chambers of Commerce. Her business motto is 'to treat customers how we would want to be treated as consumers and to give back to the community that has helped to sustain our business'. True to her word, Dionne is a shining star!

Nominated by K. Patrice Williams and Peggy Cohen Thompson



Jan E. Meyer

Youth Advocate

Live Oak – Sutter County

Jan Meyer is the Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Live Oak. For the past 15 years, city residents have been delighted to learn that there are no limits to Jan's imagination and determination to design and implement programs tailored especially for them.

Jan works collaboratively with schools and service and civic clubs to provide athletic programs to children and adults. She coordinates with these same organizations, local businesses, Live Oak's Chamber of Commerce, the Arts Commission, and Police and Fire departments to provide annual events including the National Night Out, Small Town Christmas, and the Live Oak Fall Festival.

Ensuring the recreational needs of Live Oak's youth are met is where Jan really shines! During the summer months, the community pool is a beehive of activity with entertainment, games, treats, and themed events. Jan has created scholarship opportunities for all youth programs, including Pool Passes based on family income, so that no Live Oak child turned away for the inability to pay. At the beginning of each school year, Jan works with service clubs to ensure that local students have the school supplies they need. If this or any other program falls short, she always finds a way to make up for the shortfall.

Every child of Live Oak is deserving of a safe community to play and grow in. What is special about Jan is that her heart holds each and every one of Live Oak's children within it!

Nominated by the City of Live Oak



Norma Montna

Lifetime Advocate for

Persons with Disabilities

Yuba City – Sutter County

Norma Montna married her high school sweetheart Larry and in 1961, gave birth to their only child, Butchie. Butchie was born with Down's Syndrome and is the inspiration behind Norma's lifelong mission to help others with disabilities. Her work includes offering peer support to families of children with special needs and active board membership with many of the agencies that provide educational and support services such as Easter Seals, Special Olympics, Yuba Sutter Mercy Guild, Kiwanis Family House, Gateway Project, Sutter County Board of Education, CA State Area Board for Developmentally Disabled, and Yuba Sutter Association for the Retarded.

In 1979, a community pool offering therapeutic warm water therapy for those with disabilities at no cost was established in memory of Butchie Montna. Butchie's Pool is unique and the only pool of its kind in the Yuba-Sutter area. The pool today serves a large number of area Seniors suffering from age-related disabling conditions at minimal cost and provides relief to over 1,500 individuals annually.

Norma, who still serves on the pool's Board of Directors, has poured her heart and soul into keeping this haven of love, fun, and physical support open and alive for 40 years.

"The pool was an idea we thought of after we lost Butchie, because he loved the water. He'd have been here every day," explains Norma, who fondly refers to former friends of Butchie's who still attend the pool as her 'kids'.

Nominated by Cynthia Roderick and Jan Kendel



Cathleen Olsen

Nutrition Advocate

Winters – Yolo County

Cathy is currently the Director of Nutrition and Food Services for the Winters Joint Unified School district and has been instrumental in educating students about good food habits and nutrition. When talking about meal plans, she always ensures it includes the numerous fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season.

In 2001, Cathy championed the start of the Winters Farm to School Program. Its mission is to raise funds to provide fresh and local produce to our children's school food program, educate children about the food programs, and reconnect children to the rich agricultural heritage in the Winters Community. Cathy has developed a strong network of farmers that have helped her achieve remarkable statistics. Currently 93% of fresh fruits and vegetables purchased are locally sourced, 50% coming directly from farmers. To ensure that school children are getting fresh produce, Cathy and the Farm to School committee also started an annual fundraiser that last year, provided \$50,000 for the Winters Joint Unified School District's Nutrition and Food Services.

Additionally, Cathy helps host a weekly Farmers Market and started a school garden that allowed students to cultivate plants throughout the school year. This past summer alone, Cathy and her staff provided over 400 breakfast and lunches for students ages 5-18.

Nominated by Cecilia Aguiar-Curry



Dorothy Pooley

Ombudsman, Advocate for Seniors

Willows – Glenn County

While Dorothy Pooley is officially retired, no one would know it. If you were to ask any of the Seniors at the Willows residential facility, they will tell you how ever-present and beloved she is there as their Ombudsman.

Dorothy's long career began in 1954 at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. She worked for RCA in their Communications Engineering and Optics Engineering Departments and TRW in their Minuteman Program. In the 1970s, Dorothy moved to Glenn County and has worked for the County in numerous capacities including Public Guardian, Court Investigator and Ombudsman.

As the Ombudsman for the Willows Center, Dorothy visits with the residents at least weekly. She is a liaison between the residents and their family members and the facility. Dorothy helps residents with problem solving when asked and always brings a friendly smile and a kind word of encouragement to all she comes in contact with.

One Willows resident summed up Dorothy with these words, "Dorothy loves what she does. If she is needed, she comes right away to help us solve problems. If she does not know the answer, she will find it for us. I can't think of a better person."

Nominated by Tina Brey



Ramona Prieto

Peace Officer, Public Servant,

Role Model

Davis – Yolo County

Assistant Commissioner (Ret.) of the California Highway Patrol, Commissioner Prieto has led by example, rising through the ranks to make a visible and lasting impact over her 38-year career of public service. Assignments took her up and down the state from Los Angeles to the Yuba-Sutter area where eventually she became the highest-ranking woman in CHP history as Assistant Chief and Deputy Commissioner.

Fresh out of the CHP Academy, Prieto was assigned to Central L.A. and made agency history in 1980 when she became the first female motorcycle officer. In 1986, Prieto was assigned to oversee special projects at the academy. In 1990, she was promoted to Sergeant and subsequently to Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Chief, Assistant Commissioner and finally Deputy Commissioner-the post she retired from earlier this year.

Commissioner Prieto's leadership is characterized by a warm, outgoing nature coupled with the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. She has encouraged others and promoted transparency in agency operations. Thanks to her high level of leadership, more women have been hired into the CHP including her youngest daughter who has followed in her footsteps and entered into law enforcement.

While Prieto has earned degrees in public administration and leadership, her family and husband, Ed are a top priority. She is ever mindful of setting good examples for their daughters to work hard, be goal-oriented and always strive to make things better.

Nominated by Elly Fairclough and Helen M. Thomson



Deidre Robinson

Business Leader, Mentor

Vacaville, Solano County

Deidre Robinson has worked tirelessly for over 20 years as a diverse leader of relationship-building and strategic alliances. Deidre's community service and volunteerism starts in Solano County and reaches as far as the San Francisco Bay Area. She recognizes the impact that others have had on her life and career and her passion for volunteerism, leadership, and commitment are based on a vision that is driven by personal experiences.

Her volunteer contributions to organizations such as CoachArt, Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Kid Fest, Relay for Life, and other groups are remarkable. In addition, Deidre is also the Vice Treasurer of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Tau Upsilon Omega Chapter, for which she provides volunteer services to students and young adult women through mentoring and workshops on leadership. Recently, Deidre was appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. to the California Board of Accountancy.

As a single mother of two, nothing has prevented Deidre from achieving monumental milestones both professionally and personally. She has been a role model for both her children and the community.

Nominated by Frances Gholson Nelson and Judy Belk



Evelyne Rominger

Community Leader, Mentor

Winters – Yolo County

Evelyne Rominger was raised south of Davis on a dairy farm. She met her husband Richard while they were both students at UC Davis and they have been married for 64 years. Evelyne has been a very active community member her entire life, starting with the Dixon 4-H Club and as the student body vice president of Davis High School and later as a member of the Commission of the Californias. She has also been active in several health associations, including as the founding board member of the Yolo County Mental Health Association.

Evelyne has been an unabashed, lifelong advocate for gender equality and social justice issues. She clearly and persuasively articulates the critical elements of any topic while leaving no room for ambiguity. Evelyne has spent a lifetime perfecting the art of challenging the status quo and pushing the limits of conventional thinking while promoting change by skillfully applying her elements of unconventional wisdom.

Evelyne has an enormous capacity to engage, mentor, and advocate for complex and sensitive issues, and to achieve the presumed unachievable, no matter the condition or concern. She also embodies a unique quality that demands intellectual clarity and a thoughtful approach to strategic planning, all while inspiring communities of people to move in a like direction. Evelyne is as dedicated to our California community as she is to her family and her friends and to traveling the world. She is a model for living a dedicated and productive life.

Nominated by Marlene Bell



Liesl Schmidt

Community Leader

Yuba City – Sutter County

Liesl is a Northern California native and is the Regional President for US Bank's Northern California Community Bank. She is the wife of a rice farmer, mother of a son who serves in the US Coast Guard and a daughter who attends CSU-Sacramento.

Liesl is an active Board member and Treasurer for the Yuba Sutter Chamber of Commerce, a Past President of the Yuba City-Marysville Soroptimist, and a Rotarian. She is active in many local organizations including the American Red Cross, Cornerstone Church, and the Yuba Sutter United Way.

A founding member of Girls on the Run in Sutter County, Liesl is committed to advocating for women at her place of work and throughout the banking industry by actively participating in women's leadership groups. Liesl's goal is to 'pay it forward' by mentoring, sponsoring, or advocating for women at US Bank and in the community for those who have a desire to be in more senior roles.

Liesl's priorities are 'faith, family, friends'. She is born leader who brings life, love, and enthusiasm to everything she does!

Nominated by Jim Whiteaker



Toni Scully

*Leader in Agriculture,
Advocate for Fair Farm Labor
Lake County*

A resident of Lake County for over 40 years, Toni shares in the ownership and management of Scully Packing Company which packs, stores, ships, and markets pears grown by Lake, Sacramento Delta, and Mendocino County families.

Toni is a strong advocate for the pear industry and farm labor reform. In 1996 following a revision in the Child Labor Code that would have prevented local teens from working during the pear season, Toni was the driving force behind pulling local leaders and the state senate to pass a bill that allowed Lake County teens to continue to work the harvest. This bill continues to be renewed annually today.

Toni cares deeply for her farm workers and their families as evidenced by her continuous efforts to educate and work with local, state, and federal policy makers. In 2006, Toni made the front page of the New York Times when Lake County and farming communities across California were experiencing severe labor shortages during harvest. A proponent of a reformed Guest Worker program to improve the health and safety of migrant workers, Toni worked with U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein in an attempt to pass the AgJobs bill.

Toni continues to advocate for a fair farm labor law that will provide agricultural employers with the stable, legal labor force they need while providing farm workers with the health and safety they deserve.

Nominated by Karri Hammerstrom



Marie Azevedo Spooner

Lifetime of Community Giving

Williams – Colusa County

Marie Spooner is a homemaker from Williams. Having lived through the Great Depression and World War II, Marie was taught how to take care of and make do with what you have and to share with others, whether it be feast or famine. Marie has applied that life lesson throughout her entire life.

Whenever Marie has come across anyone in trouble, she has not turned her back but done what she could. She has fed countless children over the years and offered safe shelter to those who needed it. She has humbly and quietly opened her home and heart to strangers.

As a skilled baker, Marie's locally renowned home baked pies have generated thousands of dollars for local charity in Glenn and Colusa counties. Marie's most famous pie sold at auction for \$4,000. The Buyer then sold the slices and collected an additional \$1,000 for a grand total of \$5,000 that a local family desperately needed for medical bills. When Marie discovered that the Buyer did not keep a piece of pie for himself, she baked him another!

Marie, at 94 years old, is truly an amazing woman and has yet to decline a baking request for a worthy cause!

Nominated by Sandy Denn



Cherie Stephens

Community Leader

Yuba City – Sutter County

Founder and Chair of the Yuba City Walk for Alzheimer’s, Cherie Stephens has helped to raise more than \$68,000 since its inception in 2013 and is on a personal mission to raise an additional \$48,000 by the end of this year.

As President of the Yuba City-Marysville Soroptimists, Cherie helped to expand and grow the Girls on the Run program with the goal to unleash confidence in young women while establishing a lifetime appreciation for health and fitness as tomorrow’s leaders. Utilizing last Fall’s fundraising dollars, Soroptimists recently completed a beautiful bathroom remodel at the Salvation Army Depot Family Crisis Center, a project intended to instill a sense of dignity and self-confidence for the women housed there.

Cherie is co-owner of Stephens Farmhouse where in addition to baking pies, making jams, and tending to the storefront, she offers an educational program to local students called ‘Kids in the Kitchen’. Cherie is a California Women in Agriculture Member and past member of several organizations including the CA State Fair Board, Prune Festival, St. Isidore’s Parent Club, and Farm Day.

Despite the rigors of running and growing a successful business, Cherie manages to balance marriage, family, community service, and philanthropy with exceptionally good humor. She is a living example of what is possible for us all!

Nominated by Rikki Shaffer and Jon Munger



Jennifer Terra

*Educator – Physical Education,
Diversity Advocate*

Davis – Yolo County

Jennifer Terra is a Physical Education instructor at Emerson Jr. High school in Davis who has been organizing Diversity training as part of the Peer Helping program for 24 years. Jennifer brings together junior high students and guest speakers who have suffered from discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying. The goal is to break down barriers between students and make them more aware of what they say and do and how their words and actions affect the people around them. The daylong trainings take place several times throughout the year and are open to any student who wishes to participate. Topics cover a wide range of disabling conditions, sexual orientation, race, religion, and culture.

Jennifer's Peer Helping program pairs an older student with each incoming 7th grader who monitors them periodically throughout the year and serves as a mentor. Peer Helper's give Prevention presentations to the 7th graders on alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and stress management. This builds trust and role modeling on how to treat themselves and one another with respect.

In Jennifer's P.E. classes, she establishes a learning environment at the beginning of each year *before* any physical education takes place. Her emphasis is on the principles of teamwork as a critical life skill to be utilized well beyond the basketball court. Jennifer's commitment to the nurturing of caring, young people who will in turn grow into a caring community are a reflection of her deep character and hope for a strong bright future.

Nominated by Gloria Partida



Susan Young

Educator, Agriculture Advocate

Live Oak – Sutter County

Susan Young is and has been an Agriculture teacher at Sutter Union High School for the past 35 years. She and her husband live in Live Oak and farm in Meridian.

During Susan's tenure at Sutter Union High School, she has served as a Future Farmers of America Advisor and has been involved in numerous activities promoting agriculture in the Yuba/Sutter area and at state, national, and international levels.

Susan is actively involved in the American Boer Goat Association, Northern California Meat Goat Association, and the Morgan Horse Association. Her participation on the Yuba-Sutter Livestock Committee and Youth in Ag has helped support and promote our region.

Susan has positively impacted countless young people throughout her long career as an outstanding teacher, mentor, and role model. She has instilled the values of hard work, dedication, and love of agriculture to all who have surrounded her. Her gift is her ability to reach students from all walks of life and motivate them to do their best.

Nominated by Ryan Robison

