32nd Annual
Women of Distinction
October 21st, 2021
eliminating racism empowering women
ywca
McLean County
# Welcome

**Liz German**  
*CEO and President, YWCA McLean County*

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# Remarks

**Hannah Mesouani**  
*Director, Mission and Equity Consulting, YWCA McLean County*

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# WINGS Awards

**Camille Taylor**  
*YWCA McLean County Board Member, Past Woman of Distinction, WINGS Chair*

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# Women of Distinction

**Beth Whisman, Frances Maddox**  
*YWCA McLean County Board Members*

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# Closing Remarks

**Liz German**  
*CEO and President, YWCA McLean County*

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On behalf of the YWCA McLean County Board of Directors, I am pleased to welcome everyone to the 32nd Annual YWCA McLean County Women of Distinction Awards. We had fervently hoped to see you all in person this year and even though we can’t physically gather, I know we are sharing the communal spirit of this event.

It’s not only appropriate, but necessary that we recognize and honor the women in McLean County who rise each day and do the work that makes our communities thrive. This year’s 21 nominees represent excellence in many diverse endeavors, and they bring passion and resilience to that work. We celebrate them and are grateful for the positive impact they make every day.

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*Linda Kimber, Chair  
Board of Directors, YWCA McLean County*
Kaitlyn Erdman was a 2018 recipient of the WINGS award. When awarded, Kaitlyn was a nursing student working on her bachelor’s in nursing at Methodist College in Peoria. She traveled from Chenoa to Peoria three to four days a week, while working full time at OSF in Bloomington. She and her fiancé, Oscar, had a one-year-old daughter, Tinley.

On June 15, 2018—just three weeks after receiving her WINGS award—Kaitlyn was tragically killed in a car accident on her way to work on I-55 near Lexington. She was 25 years old.

In 2019, the award was renamed to honor her and is now the Kaitlyn M. Erdman Memorial WINGS Award. Kaitlyn epitomized the intent and purpose of the WINGS Award. The WINGS Award was established to encourage women in professional and personal development through mentoring and financial support. The award is sponsored by past recipients of the YWCA McLean County Women of Distinction Award.

Because of their generosity, the award is given annually to _Women to Improve their skills for a Notable purpose which allows them to Grow professionally and to achieve Success._

Applicants for this award must demonstrate a commitment to professional and personal growth as well as a commitment of service in McLean County.
Meet 2021’s WINGS Recipients

Teresa Fowler

Vera Traver

Niayr Maines

Nicole Kirstein

Kelli Brown

Amanda Carter

Julie Stoll
Past WINGS Award Recipients

Julia Zuniga Alzamora 2018
Nicole Anderson 2019
Danielle Beasley 2015
Rickielee Benecke 2014
Jessica Bushong 2015
Shannon Busick 2015
Lupeda Calhoun 2005
Sabrina Cavenaugh 2015
Jillian Nicole Cooper-Richardson 2017
Chanelle Crispin 2009
Phyllis Davidson 2015
Lisa Dever 2014
Lauren DiLorenzo 2016
Leanne Downey 2014
Angela Dunk 2012
Sarah Duvendack 2015
Kaitlyn Erdman 2018
Kimberly Ewald 2011
Crystal Ocampo Fernandez 2016
Staci Floyd 2008
Kerstin Ford 2017
Aly Frantzen 2020
Perrian Fuller 2014
April Garcia 2017
Elizabeth German 2011
Luisa Gomez 2014
Anna Gomez-Verma 2007
Janis Green 2004
Brishaun Hamilton 2017
Melinda (Melle) Hany 2018
Leigh Hayes 2016
Amanda Hendricks 2019
Tina Hubbs 2009
Mary Judith Irwin 2012
Grace Foote Johns 2008
Heather Johnson 2016
Cynthia Jagondzinski 2014
Nicole Kaminski 2019
Rebecca Kinsey 2016
Judi Khalilallah 2009
Alicia Lenard 2013
Jillian McGriff 2019
Regina Meyer 2018
Tiffany Mitchell 2012
Elizabeth Morgan 2010
Kate Myers 2019
Amanda Nesby 2009
Melissa Ann Newby 2014
Deb O'Connell 2001
Teresa Orrick 2002
Janine M. Peacher 2013
Nicki Peterson 2020
Janet Proeber 2000
Nancy Esarey Quedraogo 2013
Shannon Regilio 2010
Angelica Riley-Taylor 2009
Christina Roberts 2014
Yadira Ruiz 2009
Ashlee Sang 2020
Kristal Shelvin 2019
Authrine Singleton 2020
Starla Southward 2011
Colleen Steinberg 2013
Julie Stoll 2018
Kamaya Thompson 2010
Shani Trapp 2006
Tisa Marie Trask 2016
Stephanie Turrentine 2018
Jody Watkins 2003
Brianna Welch 2008
Andrea While 2015
Jewel Woodard 2020
Gretchen Zaitzeff 2012
Tina Zimmerman 2017
YWCA Women of Distinction Awards recognize women who live and/or work in McLean County and demonstrate outstanding leadership and excellence through professional and personal endeavors in the following categories:

**Business/Education**
The Business/Education Award is given to a woman who excels in the business or education field and shows outstanding abilities, accomplishments, and leadership. She will be an innovator in her field, nurturing and inspiring to others, and continually contributing to the vitality of our community.

**Community Leadership**
The Harriett F. Rust Community Leadership Award will be given to a woman who has made significant contributions as a volunteer to better McLean County. This woman contributes greatly to the quality of life in the community through political involvement, public service, government, or social service. She may be elected, appointed, hired, or be a volunteer.

**Human Services**
The Human Services Award is given to a woman who works or volunteers in the human services sector and shows great accomplishments and leadership through direct assistance or advocacy that enhances the quality of life for all, especially those who face disadvantages/challenges, for people in McLean County.

**Mission Impact**
The Mission Impact Award is given to a woman who excels at amplifying the YWCA Mission in her work and daily life. The award honors a woman for her academic/career achievements, community service, advocacy, and commitment to the YWCA Mission of eliminating racism and empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.

**STEAM**
The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) Award is given to a professional in the field of science, technology, engineering, arts, or math. This woman has demonstrated exceptional leadership in the field of STEAM; helping to break down gender barriers and carve a path not just for herself, but for generations to follow.

**Promise**
The Promise Award is given to a woman who has been in their career for five years or less. A woman of Promise is making significant contributions to her community through her leadership, maturity, innovation, volunteer service, or other special achievements and inspires others to follow her example.

**Community Key**
The Community Key Award is given to a woman who serves McLean County through a job that ensures the function of her community. This award honors a woman for her hard work and dedication to a position critical to the effective, efficient functioning of everyday life. Countless doors – both literally and figuratively – would not be able to open without her.
Meet the 2021 Women of Distinction Nominees
Judge Amy McFarland
Judge McFarland has spent 21 years promoting dignity and justice. After receiving her bachelor’s degree at Illinois State University, she attended the University of Denver College of Law before returning to Illinois to practice. During her career, Judge McFarland offered her legal services to the community first as a respected family law attorney and mediator and continues today as a Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit. In addition to her legal practice, Judge McFarland has served numerous community organizations, such as McLean County's Mediation Association, Project Oz's Board of Directors, McLean County Chamber of Commerce, Eastview Christian Church, and more. Her passion for criminal justice shines through in her care for the community and her dedication toward peaceful mediation, sufficient mental health care, and restorative justice principles as the presiding Judge over McLean County's Recovery Court.

Annette Morrison
Annette is the Central Point of Entry, Senior Information Services, and Caregiver Advisor Supervisor for CCSI Case Management, LLC which serves four counties in Central Illinois. This position is just the most recent in Annette’s 25-year career in human services. Annette is dedicated to helping those in our community who are often not able to get the help that they need, whether it be due to language barriers, immigration status, or other factors. In her work, Annette prioritizes genuine human connection with those she is serving and sees every client she works with as a full and dignified human being.

Angela Chasensky
Angi Chasensky cultivates partnerships for ROSC (Recovery Oriented Systems of Care) at Chestnut Health Systems. As the project Coordinator for ROSC, she has connected many individuals in the community who are receiving support for substance use or behavior health afflictions with services necessary to effectively acclimate to the community. Angi also works to reduce stigmas that surround substance abuse and behavioral health and to support those who do not have access to necessary resources through her work at Chestnut as well as through her volunteer service on the McLean County Recovery Court Board and additional community advisory councils and associations.

Catherine Porter
Catherine is the Executive Director for the Carle Health & Fitness Center where she fosters collaboration of the Carle Health & Fitness Center, McLean County Orthopedics, Carle Bromenn’s Cardiac Rehabilitation and Training and Performance Center, and aids in the development and execution of programming. Catherine has been in the health and wellness industry for 25 years. Outside of her career, Catherine is actively involved in many community organizations, including serving as Board President for the Child Protection Network and as a board member for Habitat for Humanity of McLean County.
Dr. Dawn Beichner

Dr. Beichner is a professor of criminal justice sciences and women's and gender studies at Illinois State University. Dr. Beichner's research focuses on victimology, incarcerated women, prisoner reentry, and restorative justice. Along with her position as a professor, Dr. Beichner is the Graduate Coordinator for the Department of Criminal Justice where she supports students in their important research, including a current research project working to empower survivors of sexual assault. Dr. Beichner’s research has been published more than twenty times and she has conducted nearly thirty presentations of her work. Outside of her work in academia, Dr. Beichner is involved in the community through multiple organizations, such as her work with the YWCA Labyrinth Outreach program, her position on the board of Dreams are Possible, and her work in bringing multiple community organizations together for the development of the McLean County Reentry Directory.

Dr. Elizabeth Haywood

Dr. Haywood is a professor of biology at Illinois Wesleyan University. She received her bachelor's degree in biochemistry/molecular biology from Illinois State University and her master's and Ph.D. both in microbiology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Though she has only been at IWU for a few years, Dr. Haywood has already left her mark on campus as the Faculty Advisor of "Students of Color in STEM" which won organization of the year in 2021. Dr. Haywood advocates for marginalized students on campus through her commitment to social justice and anti-racist pedagogy in her work and currently serves on the IWU Council for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Faculty Committee on Diversity. Dr. Haywood has presented on and published her research multiple times and has also received numerous awards for curriculum development and teaching.

Feli Sebastian, Ph.D.

Dr. Sebastian is a clinical psychologist with more than thirty years of work in her field. While working in her practice in the Bloomington-Normal community, Dr. Sebastian dedicated much of her work to serving marginalized populations, such as those who are deaf or hard of hearing, veterans, people of color, and those seeking disability benefits. She is also the founder of three non-profits: Labyrinth Outreach Services, which empowers previously incarcerated women and is now under the operation of YWCA, the ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, which honors extraordinary women in the community, and Dreams Are possible, which provided training for trades and sustainable employment for women. Dr. Sebastian has also served on multiple boards and volunteers regularly in the community. She is a published author and has received multiple awards for her professional work.

Gaynett Hoskins

After graduating from Illinois State University with her bachelor's degree in social work in May 2017 and then from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with her master's in social work in August of 2019, Gaynett was excited to put her life and educational experiences to work in the community. She previously worked with many community organizations, including Children's Home and Aid and the McLean County Health Department, before finding her current position as a Community Advocate for Prairie State Legal Services. Gaynett has always been active in the community, providing service through Home Sweet Home Ministries, YWCA McLean County’s Stepping Stones and Labyrinth programs, Dreams Are Possible, and more. Gaynett also founded Sisters By Experience, an organization that works with young teen girls of color to support their education and empower them.
Hannah Johnson

Hannah shares her passion for community through her position as Director of Youth and Family Education at the McLean County Museum of History & Cruisin’ with Lincoln on 66 Visitors Center. She has worked at the Museum since 2014 and in that time has helped the museum to develop and grow its programming, such as implementing the Community in Conversation series and strengthening existing programs such as the Futures in History Camp. Hannah is also leader of the Central Illinois Community Educators where she has worked to eliminate barriers for McLean County residents. Hannah has ensured that the Museum is a true community partner and has worked with groups such as Black Lives Matter, NAACP, Not in Our Town, YWCA McLean County, and more to enhance the telling and preservation of the history of McLean County.

Holly Ambuehl

Holly is a community organizer for Illinois Partners for Human Service where she handles government relations on behalf of more than 100 health and human services nonprofits. Through her work, Holly uses her extensive knowledge of research and public policy to build a strong network of organizations that collaborate to support the health of the community. Holly previously has worked in the Arizona Governor’s office, as a policy director for the SW Autism Research and Resource Center, Children’s Action Alliance, and the Arizona House of Representatives. Holly was also the leader of the John M. Scott Commission which distributes grants for health services across McLean County. In addition to all of this, Holly also formed an LLC, Mosaic Collective, which has facilitated research projects for a variety of community issues, such as the school-to-prison pipeline and high school graduation rates.

Jessica Schiek

Jessica is an early childhood educator who currently teaches at the Bloom Community School after previously working with children at Thomas Metcalf Laboratory School, Mulberry School, and the Clubhouse Child Care Center after receiving her degree and teaching certification from Illinois State University. Jessica’s teaching style emphasizes creating a nurturing environment in which students feel secure and supported in their learning and free to ask questions and make mistakes. Jessica has presented on risk in early childhood at several conferences and has won several awards, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children Lasting Legacy Scholarship.
Kristen Buhrmann

After graduating with her degree in Communication from the University of Evansville, Kristen put her talents and passions to work in a variety of ways before starting her career as a web content specialist at Illinois Wesleyan University. During her time at IWU, Kristen has used her role to challenge established norms and privileged systems. In the short time Kristen has been at IWU, she has created a staff working group that focuses on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion and has implemented a plan for the University’s social media to genuinely support LGBTQ+ and BIPOC community members. This has included advocating for and implementing a public acknowledgement of Juneteenth and Pride month for the first time in the University’s history, and more. Kristen is also actively involved with the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, Illinois People’s Action, and the Bloomington-Normal Jaycees.

Marty Lane

Marty is a Community Advocate at Carle BroMenn Medical Center. She has worked as a trauma nurse for nearly thirty years, where she is not only able to physically take care of individuals, but she is also able to be an advocate for those in her community. Marty works as liaison between police and the Black community in an effort to promote peace and support the Black Lives Matter movement. Additionally, because of her work and experience as a nurse, Marty has become a mentor for young nursing students, who she provides with guidance. However, Marty’s commitment to the community does not stop there, it follows her home where she runs a food bank for those in need. Marty truly supports the community in all aspects of her life.

Marlene Dietz

Marlene is well known for her work during the seven years she served as the First Lady of Illinois State University. Before her time at ISU, Marlene was a teacher in Carbondale and Kansas City schools. Upon moving to McLean County, Marlene immediately began serving the ISU community through her support of the Multicultural Leadership Program and Big Red Marching Machine. She also actively served the larger off-campus community through her work with organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club and Rotary International. In addition, Marlene has served on the Board of Directors for The Children’s Discovery Museum, Baby Fold, and Marcfirst.

LaKeesha James Smith

LaKeesha's passion for serving the community comes from a deep, personal place of care. Since her graduation from Illinois State University, LaKeesha has been serving the community through her roles in social service. She worked for The Baby Fold for more than ten years serving children and families first as a residential treatment specialist, then as a family services coordinator, and finally as a clinical services case manager. After her time at The Baby Fold, LaKeesha worked at Midcentral Community Action and Carle BroMenn Medical Center before finding her current position as the Elderly Services Coordinator for Bloomington Housing Authority where she assists more than 250 residents of Bloomington's public housing sites and has worked diligently to ensure the safety and care of residents, especially during the pandemic. LaKeesha is also the Director of Empowered to Create, a local organization serving children and families.
Michelle Maurer

Michelle has served others in her professional nursing career for more than 35 years. During that time, Michelle worked as a school nurse in several local schools and as a staff nurse at Carle BroMenn Medical Center in intensive and critical care. For nearly two decades, Michelle has also trained the next generation of nurses through the Mennonite College of Nursing at Illinois State University as an Instructional Assistant Professor and Clinical Facilitator. During her years of service, Michelle has presented on and published her work in addition to receiving several honors and awards.

Rachel Carpenter

Rachel is the Education Manager at the Children's Discovery Museum. After graduating with her Bachelor's of Science, Biology & Secondary Education from Calvin College and then her Master's of Science in Forestry at Michigan Technological University, Rachel worked as a teacher and program director in Michigan schools before finding her home in Central Illinois. With her background in life sciences, Rachel has worked diligently to elevate the museum's educational programming for local youth. During the pandemic, Rachel began representing the Children's Discovery Museum on a United Way of McLean County task force and worked with Central Illinois Community Educators to support schools and youth programming and ensure continued education of children during the time of virtual learning and shutdowns.

Dr. Miranda Lin

She received her bachelor's degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and her master's and Ph.D. from Florida State University. She has worked as a teacher, guidance counselor, director of curriculum, director of a child development center and more in Florida, Taiwan, and China before bringing her talents to ISU. As a professor, Dr. Lin works in the School of Teaching and Learning and instructs in an array of courses, many of which focus on cross cultural teaching and learning and early childhood education. Dr. Lin has also been published in numerous national and international refereed journals and books, has led more than 100 presentations, and has received many awards and accolades for her accomplishments. In addition to her work as a dedicated professor, Dr. Lin also serves to local organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the ESL and Bilingual Credential Committee of the Illinois Professional Development Advisory Council.

Peggy Hundley

Peggy has positively impacted McLean County in many ways. For more than thirty years, Peggy worked at Illinois State University in the College of Education and the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. During this time, she received several Civil Service and University awards for her accomplishments and service to the University. Since her retirement from the University, Peggy has dedicated her time to volunteering for First Night, Heartland Theatre, the Children's Discovery Museum, the Brotherhood Tree, the Miller Park Zoological Society, and more in an effort to make our community a better place.
Tracy Patkunas

Tracy is a realtor with RE/MAX Rising and wholeheartedly believes that volunteer service is a critical part of a healthy community. Currently, Tracy serves as the Chair for the McLean County Chamber of Commerce where she has been an ambassador for 15 years. She also serves as a board member for several organizations, including the Bloomington-Normal Sunrise Rotary and the Miracle League of Central Illinois. Previously, Tracy has volunteered with the Children’s Discovery Museum Guild, Epiphany School Club, Alzheimer’s Association, and many more.

Women of Distinction
YWCA McLean County
Laura Duvendack

1979-2021

For Laura Duvendack, community care was a lifelong vocation. As a child, her parents described her as being always focused on helping others and being a good friend. She came to the Bloomington-Normal community in 1998 when she transferred to ISU as a sophomore. During her time in school, Laura worked with many community organizations such as YWCA McLean County and the Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal, where she worked as the Program Director for more than ten years. Even when she was in a position of service, Laura still sought other ways to care for the community. In 2008, Laura founded the McLean County Afterschool Alliance and in 2011 began working with the Back to School Alliance as their Resource Fair Chair. Since 2013, Laura had been working at La Petite Academy as a Team Lead. All of this work stemmed from Laura's profound passion and love for children - her own children and every child she encountered. Her care for the community extended into every facet of her life, and her loved ones said “to know her was to love her.” After a brief battle with cancer, Laura passed away July 25th, 2021 surrounded by family and friends. Her impact on the community and love for others will never be erased.