

2017 WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT

MEET THE HONOREES



Friday, November 10

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca



Karama Blackhorn (Racial Justice & Civic Leadership): Karama Blackhorn (Rogue River Shasta) is a Queer indigenous activist, educator, and organizer. Their work centralizes anti-oppression education to build community and empower leadership through culturally responsive and celebratory spaces. Karama is a first-generation student now pursuing a Master of Public Administration in Tribal Governance to utilize their experience as a multicultural affairs professional and passion for education to create stronger policies and programs that advance opportunities and access for minority students while aiming to decolonize education to better support these students when they get to school. Karama is an advocate for educational access, a community leader, a visionary, an educator, and a passionate activist. While historically students of color have a graduation rate about 10% lower than white students (33%), **Karama's work has contributed** to a 98% graduation rate for students of color and white students enrolled in the Diversity and Equity Peer Mentor Program that they developed. Karama is a founder of Queer I Am, a statewide LGBTQ summit for 300 students for two days of immersion in Queer community building, history, and culture. Karama was instrumental in building the FIRE Summit (a college access event that was a collaboration between tribes, school districts, and SPSCC) and organizing the **YWCA Olympia's Racial Justice Summit**, among dozens of other conferences, events, boards, and programs. Karama started a sex positive business and does freelance social justice graphic design, coordinated various queer oral history projects, and various HIV prevention programs and services, eventually helping to start an msm safer sex nonprofit. Throughout it all, Karama encourages a sense of belonging and is focused on intersectional inclusivity from the streets to the boardroom. Karama believes in the power and wisdom of people to lead and help their own communities in the way they know best. Their work is focused on creating access where none existed, and mentoring folks to build skills and confidence to create the change in the world, and in themselves, that they feel is needed.

Leslie Cushman (Racial Justice & Civic Leadership): Leslie exemplifies the YWCA Olympia's Mission to eliminate racism as a crusader! Leslie recognizes the fundamental role white supremacy plays in this

country. She believes the truths shared by people of color, by indigenous people, and by women, and is convinced that – in order to move forward – this country has to face the debt it owes to people of color and Native Americans. In 2015, following the May 21st shooting of Andre Thompson and Bryson Chaplin, Leslie co-founded the Olympia Coalition to Reform Deadly Force laws, which became a supporting partner of the Black Alliance of Thurston County. During the 2016 legislative session Leslie and her mentor, Kathy Baros Friedt, worked with Dr. Karen A. Johnson and a newly formed coalition of community advocates on legislation to reform Washington law related to the use of Deadly Force. Unfortunately, this legislation was not successful, but a legislative task force was established to study the issue. Since then, Leslie and her colleagues established De-Escalate Washington, which is a political action committee for a statewide initiative to the legislature. Leslie serves as the Policy Director for the Campaign. I-940 will require statewide standards for law enforcement to receive training on de-escalation, mental health, and first aid, require that first aid be rendered at the scene, establish standards for the use of deadly force, and mandate completely independent investigations. A key component is the requirement to include diverse communities in the development of policy. In addition to policing issues, Leslie is involved in solidarity actions at the Northwest Detention Center and peace vigils at Percival Landing. Leslie helped found Thurston Gun Sense, a group dedicated to preventing gun violence through safe storage. Leslie volunteers with Not This Time, a Seattle-based nonprofit founded by Andre Taylor, whose brother was shot by Seattle police in spring of 2016, and is an advisor to Latino Civic Alliance, a statewide organization advocating for civic engagement and reciprocal relationships between the community and political representation. Leslie has close ties to the Puyallup Tribe through work and friendship, and supports the Tribe in its work to achieve Justice for Jackie. Leslie is a citizen science volunteer with the Nisqually Reach Nature Center and aspires to be a Cop Watch volunteer.



Dr. Marie Johantgen (Health & Safety): Marie exemplifies a woman who has spent her life giving back to the local community and to the world at large. Marie has spent her career as a Board-Certified Obstetrician Gynecologist currently with Kaiser Permanente (formerly Group Health) and has been in clinical practice for over 20 years, taking care of women with compassion and skill. Her CV is long and impressive, but what sets her apart is the amount of time and energy she has spent helping women in her free time. In 2009, she started the local chapter of Dining for Women, an organization where women meet each month, have a potluck dinner together, learn about international health issues that affect girls and women, and raise money to help grassroots secular organizations in developing countries. The group, which is focused on sustainability and improving the conditions of women and families, has raised almost **\$50,000 for organizations that support women’s health and safety**. Marie also worked for The Olympia Free Clinic for four years, providing care to local adults who have no insurance or are underinsured. Additionally, she is active in RESULTS, a citizen’s advocacy group whose mission is to end poverty, and she volunteers for CIELO, an organization that supports local immigrants. Throughout her career, she has gone on multiple trips to developing countries to offer gynecologic care to women who would otherwise not have any, including Haiti, Rwanda, Peru, India, Kenya...she is well traveled, all at her own expense.

Malika Lamont (Health & Safety): Malika Lamont is the Opioid Response Program Manager for CHOICE Regional Health Network, formerly with Evergreen Treatment Services, and Thurston County. Malika received her BA from Xavier University of Louisiana and Master of Public Administration Degree from The Evergreen State College. According to her nominator, **“Malika has had to fight every day of her life for a respected and heard seat at the table....and it’s working.”** Throughout her career, she has worked with vulnerable populations to increase health and improve social conditions for the most vulnerable. She works to address social determinants of health, including, but not limited to, substance use disorder, mental health issues, poverty, and homelessness for 19 years, beginning as a licensed Adolescent Counselor and Family Care Coordinator for Pierce County Alliance and Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, WA, and becoming a foster parent.

She was then recruited by the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment to do planning for people with developmental disabilities as a personal agent and she started her own consulting business to improve education for youth with disabilities. In 2005 Malika moved to Thurston County Public Health and Social Services to implement HIV testing interventions in Family Planning Settings as a result of an HIV outbreak. After the sudden illness of a co-worker she also took over the Syringe Exchange Program and HIV counseling and testing. She was at the helm during what is being described as one of the worst heroin epidemics in the region and transformed the program into a regional exchange that served six counties and led the way to increased access to substance use disorder treatment and health care and decreased disease incidence, and was the catalyst, author and person to implement the Naloxone Policy and Distribution Program in Thurston County. Malika helped start the Olympia Free Clinic, is a board member at Behavioral Health Resources, co-chair of the Thurston County Safety Net Council, a Steering Committee Member for the Thurston County Asset Building Coalition, a St. Martin's RN to BSN Advisory Board Member and Preceptor. She is a founding member of the Washington Association of Syringe Service Programs, Full Circle United and is involved in other movements for social good. She enjoys spending time with her family, friends, and animals. She loves to cook for people and to go camping.



Merrill Angela Pusey-Williams (Racial Justice & Civic Leadership): Merrill is a fierce advocate for social justice. Her true superpower is her genuine love for community, her warmth, her fierce intellect, and her commitment to truly radical inclusion. She is involved in multiple community organizations from Full Circle United and De-Escalate Washington to Black Lives Matter. Merrill was a member of the advisory **committee for the YWCA Olympia’s Racial Justice Summit**. She has advocated for Communities of Color, for the LGBTQ community, for SafePlace and other organizations supporting survivors of domestic violence, and for the #NoDAPL movement. She raised a son and **became a grandma, and then started community college in her 50’s**, graduating from South Puget Sound Community College and the Evergreen State College-Tacoma Campus. She became a student leader and activist as well as an intern for Senator Bob Hasegawa during the 2017 legislative session. Merrill survived an abusive relationship, drug addiction and homelessness. She has chosen to share her story of recovery in many spaces in order to give hope to other women who are in abusive relationships or are struggling with addiction. She has worked in a homeless shelter where she supported many people whose lives mirrored her own when she was struggling to get back on her feet. She has mentored countless students

in her journey through college, talking to them about how they might use their strengths and experiences to persist through even the most challenging moments of their academic careers.



Seifert Law Offices (Business of Achievement): Seifert Law Offices is an immigration & legal services firm based in Olympia. Since 1989, they have aided thousands of people from over 150 different countries successfully immigrate to the United States. Lisa Seifert is the principal attorney of Seifert Law Offices. **According to Lisa**, “I believe that everyone should have a chance. Our work takes time and patience to help people. **We give it.**”

Ms. Seifert is a Past President of the Washington Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) and has served on regional and national committees to advance immigration policy and practice. She has testified in local courts as well as before the Washington State Legislature on immigration issues. **She and her team have volunteered for immigrant assistance events such as AILA’s Citizenship Day, AILA’s Military Assistance Project, and support for Dreamers. She was also one of the “airport lawyers” deployed at airports to assist immigrants and families impacted by the president’s Muslim Travel Ban.**

Seifert Law Offices was also selected for their employment practices including competitive wages, health insurance, a matched retirement account, flex scheduling, and assistance for job-related training including college coursework and conferences. **According to an employee**, “The reason I decided to take the job at SLO was due to the type of services that we provide in support of the immigrant community. This type of work requires cooperation, collaboration and communication at a high level, especially since we are a small operation. Lisa promotes an atmosphere of professionalism that gets the job done in an important way with positive outcomes for our clients. It gives me great pleasure to hear the wonderful comments from our clients when they have attained their legal status.”

As her nominator said, “I have known Lisa for over 20+ years as she has been our family immigration lawyer. I personally met her while struggling to complete my US Citizenship application. Lisa was volunteering at a local Community College with people who need help with US Citizenship issues. I then became her client and after a year, due to the complexity of my immigration issues, I realized as a struggling college student, I could no longer afford her services. So one day, she pulled me in the office and offered to donate her services. Which nearly three years later, we succeeded and I got my citizenship. That’s the kind of giving person she is. She is a very humble person yet a very powerful voice for those who are voiceless.”

YWCA IS ON A MISSION