

Human and Civil Rights Awards

Saturday night's Annual NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner honored the contributions of individuals committed to justice for all people.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., MEMORIAL AWARD

Maynard Holbrook Jackson (deceased), Atlanta, Georgia

Maynard Holbrook Jackson's legacy embodies the next phase of the civil rights movement by moving the battle from the streets to the realms of elected office and corporate boardrooms. Jackson was only 35 when in 1973 he was elected Atlanta, Georgia's first Black mayor. He created Neighborhood Planning Units, which gave grassroots neighborhoods a voice in city politics. He tackled police brutality; created a nationally praised public arts program; and greatly expanded Hartsfield International Airport while making sure that affirmative action programs guaranteed minority participation.

Yet, if his heart was in political action, his soul was in educating young people to achieve. He founded the Maynard Jackson Youth Foundation to teach business skills to disadvantaged youth. He created a regional arts and humanities program for children and youth. He established the American Voters League to increase national voter turnout and to encourage young people to go to the polls.

His dynamic leadership; ability to coalesce differing political, economic, and societal factions; and vision for equality and opportunity for all has established his legacy as an architect of the "New South." When a heart attack claimed him last year, Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin paid tribute by saying, "Never had I met someone so bold and so committed to succeed. Maynard was fearless, courageous, and audacious—a lion of a man."



VIRGINIA URIBE AWARD FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP IN HUMAN RIGHTS

Kevin Jennings, New York, New York

In a nation where

four out of five gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) high school students experience harassment at school, educators know we have a long way to go. But Kevin Jennings sees

a day when "every child learns to value and respect all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity."

Jennings is co-founder and Executive Director of GLSEN, the Gay and Lesbian Straight Education Network, which provides support for over 2,000 high school-based clubs throughout the United States. Called Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), the clubs empower educators and students to end bullying and harassment through education. Jennings was the faculty advisor to the nation's first GSA, founded at the school where he taught in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1988.

Jennings has helped create age-appropriate curriculum for schools; led GLSEN in its successful effort to make Massachusetts the first state to outlaw discrimination against public school students on the basis of sexual orientation; wrote and produced



the award-winning documentary, *Out of the Past*, and, in 1993, established a statewide program called "Safe Schools for Gay and Lesbian Students."

In 2004, GLSEN launched its first effort aimed at name-calling in middle schools, "No Name-Calling Week," held in March and observed by over 4,000 educators in their classrooms. No Name-Calling Week was supported by over 40 national education and youth service organizations.

GEORGE I. SÁNCHEZ MEMORIAL AWARD

Lupe Ramos-Montigny, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Born in Weslaco, Texas, Lupe Ramos-Montigny traveled as a girl to harvest beets and cherries in Michigan and tomatoes in Indiana. This experience taught her the value of sustained effort, the importance of education, and the need for advocacy for minorities.

First and foremost an educator, Ramos-Montigny has taught in the Grand Rapids Public Schools for the past 25 years. She began as a migrant education teacher working with students and families who, like herself, harvested a variety of crops. Now a middle school social studies and language arts teacher at Westwood Middle School in Grand Rapids, she serves as a role model of civic action, cultural awareness, gender equity, and leadership.

She was instrumental in the creation of Weaving Ethnicity (WE), an organization that promotes racial balance and gender equity. She organized a classroom project to celebrate the contributions of local African-American leaders to the Greater Grand Rapids Area. And she successfully persuaded the state of Michigan to name a day and a street after César Chávez.

A dedicated Association member, Ramos-Montigny was the first Hispanic president to serve the Michigan Education Association (MEA)/Region 9. An MEA Board Member, Ramos-Montigny attends the U.S. Congressional Hispanic Institute in Washington, D.C., where she helps set the national agenda as it pertains to Hispanics around the country.

At home, she was the organizing force behind the Michigan Democratic Hispanic/Latino Caucus, where she has served as chair for the past five years and saw the successful election of the first Hispanic member of the Michigan House of Representatives. In 2003, she became co-chair of the Michigan Democratic Party.

ELLISON S. ONIZUKA MEMORIAL AWARD

Rev. Michael Yoshii, Alameda, California

A clergyman in the manner of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Michael Yoshii combines religion with social activism. He rolls up his sleeves and fights for justice, particularly as it affects Alameda's growing Asian community.

A third-generation Japanese American, Rev. Yoshii has spoken out on a number of issues, such as housing for the poor, racial diversity, and civil liberties violations. Stressing the importance of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds getting



to know each other, he initiated discussion forums among Alameda's politicians, businesspersons, and citizens.

He also was instrumental in establishing the Alameda Multi-Cultural Community Center, which serves as a hub of activities for Alameda's many ethnic cultures. Several years ago, Rev. Yoshii worked with community members in lobbying the Alameda School District and the Alameda Board of Education to conduct a diversity audit, which led to new hiring goals to increase diversity among the district's workforce. Rev. Yoshii also helped to establish the Organization of Alameda Asians (OAA), which promotes voter registration drives and forums for the Alameda community. He was the convener for the Coalition of Alamedians for Racial Equality (CARE), a community response to racial controversy with the Alameda Police Department. CARE has evolved into a multicultural training program for students to address issues surrounding identity, culture, and racism. Through the Buena Vista Community Institute, youth projects serving the Asian Pacific population have been developed under his guidance.

Rev. Yoshii has forged new opportunities for multicultural relationships in a city undergoing rapid demographic changes. His message: If we're going to live together, we have to learn to respect each other and appreciate our differences so that we can create a better world together.

ROSENA J. WILLIS MEMORIAL AWARD

New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated School Corporation, New Albany, Indiana

Realizing that the challenges of diversity in their Indiana community covered the spectrum, the

New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated School Corporation adopted a multicultural plan in 1994 that provided a proactive direction for facing the issues of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. The plan has five goals—training, hiring, infusing curriculum, improving communication, and providing outstanding opportunities for student achievement.

Diversity training for employees was a first step. The corporation established an ongoing, mandatory program of staff development for all employees to engender sensitivity and acceptance of diversity.

The local school corporation also has demonstrated commitment to diversity in hiring for all categories of school personnel. In November 1994, the school system hired its first Director of Equity and Diversity who oversees diversity training for faculty and staff throughout the district and helps to recruit and retain minority professionals. Recognizing that schools cannot do the work alone, the district established a Diversity Advisory Council of members of the community, teachers, administrators, and support staff. Beyond its commitment to African-American studies, the plan has expanded the celebration of cultural diversity to include areas of ethnicity, religion, and gender.

A student outreach mentoring program, in partnership with the University of Indiana, encourages minority students to attend college and become teachers. From "Children Around the World" art contests;



community luncheons honoring Martin Luther King Jr. and parenting seminars on student achievement, the positive messages of diversity's value are infused in every aspect of the classroom and the community.

LEO REANO MEMORIAL AWARD

Chief Phillip Martin, Choctaw, Mississippi

Chief Phillip Martin is the democratically elected tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, a federally recognized American Indian tribe that includes 9,200 enrolled members living on or near reservation land in east central Mississippi. More than a local leader, Chief Martin has expanded the borders of educational opportunity for his people such that many consider him to be an American visionary.

In the early 1960s, no Choctaw could attend public school, so Chief Martin opened the first Choctaw high school in 1964, recognizing that education held the key for the future success of his people. He realized the importance of early childhood education and used federal funds to establish the first Head Start Program on the Choctaw Reservation. Allocating the lion's share of the funds toward the development of a strong curriculum, he also retooled the existing space for the Head Start facility, creating a school in the round whose physical structure spoke to the importance of the circle in Indian culture.

How successful have the efforts of Chief Martin and his tribe been? In 1962, only 6.4 percent of Choctaw heads of household had more than an eighth-grade education. By 1997, that number had increased to nearly 70 percent. In addition, the Mississippi Choctaw became the first tribe in American history to enter into a contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to manage and control the largest American Indian school district in the nation.

Today, all the old schools on the Mississippi Choctaw Reservation have been replaced with new buildings. The Head Start Program has been expanded. The new Choctaw Hospitality Institute has been added, providing vocational training and education, as well as career development for members of the Mississippi Choctaw. And Chief Martin has created a Tribal Scholarship Program through which Choctaw students attend colleges and universities outside the reservation.

H. COUNCILL TRENHOLM MEMORIAL AWARD (NON-BLACK)

Norman Dale Conard, Fort Scott, Kansas

A third-generation educator, Norman Dale Conard teaches social studies in Uniontown High School in Kansas, a small rural high school with little diversity.

Conard has received numerous honors, yet his greatest source of pride has been assisting students in developing over 60 projects of tolerance.

"We use historical documentaries and drama performances to present the teaching of tolerance and the acceptance of diversity," says Conard.

The best known of his students' projects

