Bringing Jobs and Hope to West Virginia

Women of Achievement honoree Deborah Harris shares her story of empowerment.

Becoming homeless and nearly losing everything would defeat some, but for Deb Harris, a single mother of three, it was the catalyst that would start her on the path to becoming the 2020 YWCA Women of Achievement Empowerment Award recipient. This award recognizes a woman who, with the help of a YWCA program, becomes empowered and enabled to pursue economic, education and professional goals.

Deb grew up in Beckley and relocated to Charleston in 2008, seeking a fresh start after becoming destitute. Shortly after, at the age of 30, she attended college for the first time where she obtained an associate degree in Behavioral Health Addictions.

While attending BridgeValley Community and Technical College as a single mother of three and with help from TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), she sought the services of the YWCA Mel Wolf Child Development Center. The staff of the YWCA Mel Wolf Child Development Center did more than provide Deb with a secure learning environment for her children. They gave Deb the confidence and support that was needed to shoulder the daunting responsibility of completing her education while raising her children on her own.

In 2014, she went on to attend West Virginia State University where she graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in Leadership and Rehabilitation. By this time, Deb had married her husband Phil and they added a fourth child to their family.

Deb again sought the assistance of The YWCA Mel Wolf Child Development Center while working full time as a TANF Counselor at BridgeValley CTC and earning a master’s degree at Marshall University (MU). She graduated summa cum laude with an Adult and Continuing Education degree from MU in 2018.

Since May of 2019, Deb has been working as Lead Transition Agent for the Governor’s Initiative Program “Jobs and Hope WV” in the Department of Education. By partnering with other state agencies, the Department of Education is able to provide services that the eleven Transition Agents around the state use to help individuals in recovery gain skills, maintain sobriety and eliminate barriers to career employment.

With the assistance provided by the YWCA Mel Wolf Child Development Center, Deb became empowered and developed the initiative needed to successfully complete her education goals. Through her work with the “Jobs and Hope WV” program, she’s sharing that empowerment with her clients.

Check inside to read about all 2020 Women of Achievement honorees!
Dr. Michelle Foster has been the President & CEO of The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation (TGKVF) since February 2016. With approximately $250 million in assets, TGKVF is the largest community foundation in Central Appalachia and ranks 82nd among community foundations in the United States. Before joining TGKVF, Michelle was the CEO of the Kanawha Institute for Social Research & Action, Inc. (KISRA). Michelle's original career was as a chemical engineer and she worked most recently at Union Carbide. She acquired her chemical engineering degree from City College of New York. Michelle also has a doctorate in community economic development (CED) from Southern New Hampshire University and two master’s degrees - one in CED from SNHU and another in engineering management from Marshall University. Most recently, she completed additional university-level studies in impact investing at the University of Oxford, Said Business School, as well as in nonprofit management and leadership at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government. In her free time, Michelle enjoys traveling, attending music festivals and theatrical productions, making scented candles, and soul line dancing. She also places a premium on spending quality time with her family and friends.

Mayor Amy Shuler Goodwin was elected November 7, 2018 as the first female Mayor of Charleston, West Virginia. Since the beginning of her term in January 2019, Goodwin prioritized fiscal accountability, transparent and efficient processes, fairness and forward-thinking policies and programming. Previously, Amy served as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Commissioner of Tourism for the State of West Virginia. She also was communications director for several governors, a congressman, a presidential candidate and a former Charleston mayor, the late G. Kemp Melton. She graduated from WVU with a degree in journalism and a minor in political science.

Amy was honored in 2004 and in 2014 with a Distinguished West Virginian Award for her meritorious service to the state. In 2003, she was recognized as a West Virginia ‘Young Gun,’ and in 2015 was selected as a member of Leadership West Virginia.

Goodwin and her husband Booth have two teenage boys—Joe and Sam.

Sandra M. Murphy, Esq. is a partner in the Charleston office of Bowles Rice LLP and leads the firm’s Banking and Financial Services Team. Through her work with West Virginia’s banking associations, she has assisted the industry and has been deeply involved in the passage of significant legislation affecting the financial services industry. Sandy serves on the Board of Directors of the Glotfelty Foundation and is also the Foundation’s Secretary. Sandy is the former Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation where she also served on the Development and Scholarship Committees. She also served as Chair of Partners Implementing an Early Care and Education System (PIECS). Sandy has been an active volunteer with the Education Elevators program at Piedmont Elementary School. She is also a member of the West Virginia Symphony Chorus. Born in Rhode Island, Sandy received her bachelor’s degree from Yale University and law degree from Brooklyn Law School prior to moving to Charleston in 1986. She and her husband, Charlie, are the parents of two children, Annie and Will.

Morgan Rhea Beals is a South Charleston native who earned her Associates in Fashion Merchandising at Kanawha Valley CTC and B.A. in Accessory Design at Savannah College of Art and Design. During her studies, Morgan was chosen to meet and learn from top leaders in her industry, such as Zac Posen and Alexander Wang. During her time in New York City, Morgan apprenticed at the Coach Headquarters in New York City, created shoes for singer-songwriter John Legend, and won an International Award for Best Student Made Handbag at the International Handbag Designer Awards for the ‘Ronald Briefcase’ from her Silently Speaking Gratitude Collection.

Morgan has since returned to her Appalachian roots and started her family-owned business in South Charleston, West Virginia. Morgan Rhea has been in business since January 2015 and continues to work with celebrity clientele while growing her business internationally.

Join us in celebrating these amazing women on Friday, February 28 at 12pm-1:30pm at the Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center! Visit ywcacharleston.org/woa to purchase tickets.
On The World Stage

YWCA Charleston is part of a global movement through its affiliation with YWCA USA and the World Young Women’s Christian Association (World YWCA), a global movement working for women’s empowerment, leadership and rights in more than 120 countries and 20,000 local communities.

What makes this information incredibly relevant and exciting to the YWCA Charleston is that Executive Manager, Andrea Thaxton Arbogast, was elected to serve on the World YWCA board of directors when she attended the recent World Service Council meeting in November in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Andrea’s interest in World YWCA was ignited by Casey Harden, who is now the General Secretary of the organization. When Andrea first joined YWCA Charleston in 2009, she started attending regional meetings to build her institutional knowledge and get to know her peers in other states. Casey, at the time was a YWCA Mid-Atlantic Region employee, shared a story she learned from the women of YWCA Sierra Leone about the plight of women and girls in their community who needed safer and closer access to water. At that meeting, Andrea witnessed our region being able to provide a grant enabling YWCA Sierra Leone to build a water well closer to their community. Girls were able to participate in education and experience greater personal safety because they weren’t walking miles unescorted to the only available water source.

Andrea’s interest in world projects led to an opportunity to attend the World Service Council meeting in Thailand in 2015 on a scholarship for young leaders. She then was elected to serve on the YWCA World Service Council in 2017. Since then, Andrea has helped support programs to develop the leadership capacity of her peers throughout the globe. The World Service Council also supports YWCA organizations during times of disaster recovery.

Andrea was thrilled and honored to be nominated to run for the World YWCA board of directors and spent weeks preparing for her candidacy presentation.

Andrea said “West Virginia is one of the most rural states in the nation and is often underrepresented. It is important that we have a seat at the table and strong representation.” Her goals include learning more about the World YWCA so she can support the work it is doing as well as lending her talents to the efforts to modernize the World YWCA Constitution and risk management assessment.

Congratulations and well done Andrea! We are excited to hear more about your work on the world stage!

To find out more about Andrea’s trip, checkout www.ywcacharleston.org/blog.

MEET DARLENE CASTELLI
YWCA Mel Wolf Child Development Center Program Director

Welcome to Darlene Castelli, director Mel Wolf Child Development Center! Darlene has an extensive background in early childhood education and social services. She joined the YWCA team in November.

Darlene is a native of Charleston. Prior to joining the YWCA Charleston, Darlene was the director of two different childcare and preschool programs for seven years. She earned her undergraduate degree in French and a Master’s Degree in Counseling from West Virginia University. She is a proud mom of two fabulous children.

“I am thrilled to be part of the wonderful Mel Wolf team and look forward to working with everyone here,” she said.
2020 YWCA DATES TO SAVE

WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT
02.28.20 | Charleston Coliseum

FRIENDS OF SOJOURNER’S STYLE SHOW
04.04.20 | Woman’s Club of Charleston

RACE TO END RACISM
04.25.20 | Magic Island

GIRLS NIGHT OUT
08.15.20 | Charleston Coliseum

GUYS NIGHT OUT
10.03.20 | Oakes Field

FOODIE FEAST
11.2020 | TBA

For full event details and how to get involved, go to ywcacharleston.org!