February 26, 2020
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OCFW Announces Four Recipients for the Annual Oregon Women of Achievement Awards

The Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW) is proud to announce the recipients of the 2019 Women of Achievement Awards. These women are recognized for their outstanding leadership in promoting equity and diversity opportunities for women within their education and civic engagement service. The 2019 awardees epitomize the Oregon State motto – “She Flies with Her Own Wings.”

Belinda Carroll brings her life experience as a writer, stand-up comedian, actor, activist. When she came out at age 15, her path took her through periods of houselessness, life on the streets, and challenges to become one of Oregon’s outstanding leaders. Awarded a Queer Hero award by the Gay and Lesbian History Archives of the Pacific Northwest in 2018, Belinda brings her wit and wisdom to her work as an acclaimed writer, standup comedian, and media personality locally and nationally.

Belinda’s longstanding and extensive contributions to the local LGBTQ community include her annual performances at Portland Pride, as head organizer of the annual Portland Dyke March since 2011, tour guide for Know Your City’s Pride Forever, highlighting Portland sites significant in its LGBTQ history, and most recently as co-founder of the Portland Queer Comedy Festival. The Festival’s two-fold vision to highlight queer and allied talent from all over the world, while giving back to the queer community through non-profit partner initiatives, is illustrative of the high purpose Belinda Carroll brings to her work, through shared laughter, awareness raising, and common effort.

Sharon Gary-Smith is a native-born Oregonian, a second-generation racial and social justice activist, community leader and agitator. She is the eldest of the four daughters of the late Bobbi Lou Mosley Gary and Frederick Douglas Gary, Jr, a “Tuskegee man,” both of whom were strong activists and advocates for equitable education, housing, and opportunities for all. From them, Sharon learned early on, “never forget who you are and whose you are.”

Sharon served for six years as the first national director of self-help programs for the National Black Women’s Health Project, Atlanta. She served as Vice President, Government Relations and Fund Development for the Austin Area Urban League, Austin Texas, and served as a special advisor to the late Anne Richards, former Governor of Texas.

In 2016, Sharon retired as executive director of MRG Foundation, Oregon’s leading social justice funder, which she led for 5-1/2 years. Her focus on bringing MRG’s history of bold, intentional funding of grassroots movements for justice in our state, significantly increased MRG’s philanthropic presence and visibility locally, regionally and nationally, positioning MRG as a critical thought and collaborative leader on racial and social justice issues among its peers in philanthropy.
She is the proud mother of Mariotta Patrice Gary-Smith, a health equity strategist with Health Share Oregon.

**Justice Adrienne Nelson** was appointed to the Oregon Supreme Court on January 2, 2018, making her the first African American to sit on the state’s highest court and on any appellate state court. Her election to a six-year term in November 2018 made her the first African American woman elected statewide in Oregon. In 2006, she was appointed as a trial judge on the Multnomah County Circuit Court in Portland, Oregon, making her the second African American female judge in the state of Oregon. Judge Nelson earned her Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Criminal Justice Summa Cum Laude from the University of Arkansas.

Over the years, Judge Nelson has been very active in the legal community and the greater Oregon community. She is a frequent speaker on several topics including diversity, inclusion, equity, leadership and professional development. Judge Nelson also serves as a mentor to many people and sits on the Reed College Board of Trustees, chairs the Self-Enhancement, Incorporated (SEI) Board of Directors, sits on the Oregon Community Foundation Metropolitan Portland Leadership Council, and sits on the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars Advisory Board. She is a tireless encourager, helping people succeed by living their best lives.

**Andrea Paluso** is co-founder and Executive Director of Family Forward Oregon and Family Forward Action, organizations founded by Oregon mothers to build economic and political power for mothers and caregivers by organizing with them to change policies and systems that perpetuate economic insecurity among women and caregivers — and the families who rely upon them. In her work, she has helped to lead campaigns for paid family & medical leave, affordable child care, equal pay, increasing the minimum wage, paid sick time, pregnancy accommodation, protections against workplace discrimination, reproductive health care access, and more.

Andrea has worked in public policy, nonprofit management, public education, community health, and international development at organizations like Outside In (Oregon), For Love of Children (Washington D.C.), Community Health and Advisory Network (New York), Peace Corps Niger and PLAN International. She has master’s degrees from Columbia University in social work and public health. In 2015, she was recognized by President Barack Obama as a White House Champion of Change for Working Families.

Andrea lives in Portland and is the mother of two kids, ages 12 and 14.

**The honorees** will receive their awards in a ceremony to be held March 10, 2020, that will be part of the Women’s History Month proclamation signing by Governor Brown. Since 1985 the Oregon Commission for Women has presented the Woman of Achievement Award to women in Oregon for leadership and success in their area of expertise, promoting the status of women in society, reflecting a commitment to equity and diversity, and serving as exemplary role models.

The Oregon Commission for Women was legislatively established in 1983 to work for women’s equality. The commission does this by advocating for women in the community, providing information on women to the governor and state legislature, serving as a link for women to state agencies, and providing services to individual women in Oregon.

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