2018

Awards; 2018-06; Athena Award

Catherine Collins

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2018 Athena Award nominees: Making the region better

Among many things, the goddess Athena is associated with wisdom, courage and strength. The 10 finalists for the ATHENA - an award bestowed by the Buffalo Niagara Partnership (and sponsored by Buffalo Magazine) that honors the valuable contributions made by individuals to advance the status of women in the region - exude these qualities in their professional and personal lives, empowering and inspiring future leaders in the community.

Here's a snapshot of where this year's finalists got started, who they leaned on along the way, how they've persevered and what they've accomplished.

**Compiled by Tracey Duffy**

**Photos by Heather Bellini Photography**

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**TANYA M. STAPLES**
Director, Community Schools
Say Yes Buffalo

**Guilty pleasure:**
“Law & Order, Special Victims Unit.”

**Career highlights:**
Partnered with Child and Family Services to establish Transitional Housing for women at Haven House, and with the IRS to launch the first Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program.

**Biggest obstacle I've overcome:**
I've had to have a great deal of patience as I continue to make progress after being diagnosed with Bells Palsy two-and-a-half years ago.

**Best advice I've ever been given:**
Perseverance and resilience are your best friends.

**Advice for women just starting in the workplace:**
Only compare yourself to you.

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**DR. CATHERINE COLLINS**
Member, New York State Board of Regents
Adjunct Professor, Niagara University,
Dept. of Professional Studies
Ph.D. program

**Interests outside career:**
Dancing the waltz with the Amherst Victorian Dancers.

**Superpower:**
Organization.

**First job:**
Nurse's Aide at Children's Hospital.

**Other firsts:**
First female and African American in 234 years to hold elected position on the NYS Board of Regents representing the 8th Judicial District.

**Life as an author:**
Written and/or edited 13 books, including academic and self-help books for women; recently completed first children's book.

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**NINA HEARD**
Plant Manpower Planner/Coordinator
General Motors Tonawanda Engine

**Born in:**
Flint, Michigan

**Highlight of my career:**
Being a part of the General Motors, Chevrolet and Diversity Communications team that was a driving force in seeing the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C. completed.

**Biggest supporters:**
My parents were my biggest fans and the ultimate role models. They believed in me, and my leadership skills, before I believed in myself.

**Best piece of advice I've been given:**
It only takes a second to get in trouble, but it may take a lifetime to get out of it.

**Advice for women just starting out:**
Always stand in your truth, even if sometimes you have to stand alone.

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**MICHELLE SULLIVAN**
Director/Partner
Freed Maxick CPAs PC

**Career highlight:**
I was the first woman at Freed Maxick to be on the firm’s Executive Committee, taking a seat at the table where decisions are made that affect the future of the firm.

**Advice for women just starting out:**
Challenge yourself to take opportunities outside your comfort zone and don’t wait to be asked.
Buffalo.com

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