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LEADERSHIP AWARD FINALISTS

Mentors, mavens and changemakers

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



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.



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.



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.



MICHELLE SULLIVAN

Director/Partner
Freed Maxick CPAs PC

Best descriptor:

Determined.

What this recognition means:

It is extremely humbling. I hope other women can better envision their own career paths and success, and be encouraged and empowered.

Dealing with disappointment:

Many of my greatest achievements started with adversity; it drives me to make an impact.

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.

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