

WFWP New Jersey HerStory Awards Celebrating Courage and Compassion

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On a beautiful sunny pre-Easter Saturday, March 30, 2024, WFWP New Jersey hosted a heartwarming event called HerStory Awards in Elizabeth, NJ to celebrate International Day of Women and Women's History Month. During the program, women were honored for their courage, compassion, and commitment to using their gifts and talents to uplift others.

Before starting the event, participants had a great chance to network, get to know each other in a relaxing atmosphere, and also explore more about WFWP's work in general before the main part of the HerStory event started.



Emcee Eunmi Rangala-Maddox invited WFWP USA Vice President, Katarina Connery, who opened the ceremony with her opening remarks by highlighting the importance of such events which empower women and uplift their spirits. Ms. Katarina Connery sincerely thanked all including the last year's awardees who came to support and celebrate the event this year. She also showcased the diamond-shaped awards by explaining their symbolic meaning. Indeed, the comparison of a woman to a diamond stands out as a shimmering symbol of grace, strength, and resilience despite the pressure and challenges.

The opening speech of the WFWP Vice President was followed by brilliant congratulatory remarks of public officials Hon. J. Christian Bollwage, Mayor of Elizabeth, NJ and Hon. Denise Wilkerson,

Councilwoman-at-Large for Roselle, NJ who came to support, celebrate, and honor Women's History Month together with all the guests and awardees.

After the powerful and empowering words of the mayor and councilwoman, the stage welcomed the first awardee - Sabrina Osso, the Founder and CEO of OSSO SAFE, who wholeheartedly thanked everyone for such a great opportunity to be awarded and honored for her great contribution and work. She shared some poignant lessons gained from her experiences in promoting safety and preventing violence in the workplace, schools, and homes. She encouraged everyone, for example, to "do it wrong until you get it right," not letting fear of failure or ignorance stop you, but learn from your mistakes until you improve.



When the second awardee - Mauryn J. Austin was invited to the stage, she shed some tears and was deeply touched by the words about her. Even though she has been investing so much in the young women she serves for over 19 years, the HerStory was the first award of recognition. She remembers each of the young mothers and their babies she has supported from homelessness until getting a job and their own apartment. When she was standing at the podium everyone could see and sense her vibrant personality, beautiful smile, and enthusiasm which shined so brightly and it was crystal clear that she was that person who does her job with great love and a big heart.



The third HerStory awardee was Ana Carolina Peña - a wonderful woman who carries an act of kindness with pride and love, fueling her desire to share her blessings with others. And she proved it once again during receiving her award. Once she came to the stage she kindly invited all to join her in praying and it was so beautiful when everyone closed their eyes and prayed with her. After such awakening practice, siblings Jasmine and Shinwon Barlaan with their lovely voices amazed the audience with a vibrant performance of the "Sound of Silence" before the commencement of the second part of the awards ceremony.

The fourth recipient of the HerStory Award, Faleeha Hassan shared her remarkable journey as a writer and her experience with loss, and tragedy due to the Iran-Iraq war which lasted 8 years and killed people dear to her. Even though writing was something dangerous for an Arab woman back in her country, she was persistent and took the courage to write honestly and freely about her life. She considers writing as a power to go beyond the limits, borders, and cultures.

The next awardee - Kiana Wooten, a breast cancer advocate who had undergone 4 major surgeries back to back due to infections and contracting sepsis twice, captivated the audience with her inspiring story of a

never-ending journey with the help of which she mastered an attitude to fight and WIN. While sharing her tale Ms. Kiana Wooten showed a true example of that strong limitless power, energy, courage, and love we all have and encouraged everyone to find that inner beauty and power within themselves.

The last awardee of the event was Shirlonda McLeod Brailsford - a passionate person who always supports people to live out their life's purpose. Once she came to the stage she listed every single awardee and highlighted the most amazing and unique personal qualities of each of them by leaving every woman inspired to overcome their challenges and head towards a brighter and happier future.



As the event neared its end, Christine Rapada, WFWP Elizabeth, NJ Chairwoman delivered closing remarks by thanking the whole team and invited everyone to join the WFWP and be an inseparable part of like minded women who truly embrace their womanhood and lead a life with the logic of love.

The closing performance of Matogba Nelson with the song "I am woman" infused the atmosphere of the event with joy and bliss whereby people sang along and danced together and were so happy for sharing such happiness with other women.

With an atmosphere filled with warmth and hope, the HerStory Awards finalized the day by leaving all attendees filled with inspiration to conquer personal challenges and come together in pursuit of their dreams and personal visions. Together everyone rejoiced in the unwavering determination of female peacemakers, sparking a shared commitment to craft a world characterized by empathy, compassion, and love.