

Honors

Human Dignity Award recipients stand for diversity, tolerance, and respect

By Ashanti M. Alvarez



Credit: Steve Goodman

From left to right: Rutgers President Richard L. McCormick, award recipient Tynesha McHarris, Board of Governors Professor Clement A. Price, award recipient Institute of Jazz Studies Director Dan Morgenstern, award recipient Board of Governors Professor Cheryl A. Wall, Rutgers–Camden Center for the Arts Director Virginia Oberlin Steele, Vice President for Student Affairs Gregory Blimling, and Professor Yael Zerubavel, accepting the award for the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life.

When members of the Rutgers community gathered April 18 at Winants Hall to honor the five recipients of this year's Human Dignity Awards, they saluted the Rutgers women's basketball team and Head Coach C. Vivian Stringer as shining examples of dignity in the face of intolerance.

"We are very, very proud of our coach and the members of the women's basketball team. They gave us a powerful lesson in humanity and dignity and what it means to show respect and also what it means to show compassion," said President Richard L. McCormick. "They set an example for the rest of the university community and the nation and the world."

The recipients of the five Human Dignity Awards – Allen and Joan Bildner, Rutgers–Camden Center for the Arts, the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers–Newark student activist Tynesha McHarris, and English Professor Cheryl Wall – may have received less attention than the women’s basketball team but also serve as exemplars of the university’s values of tolerance, respect, and diversity.

“Through their actions they engender the ideals of human dignity that our university strives to teach,” said Gregory Blimling, vice president for student affairs. “Because of their work and their energy, Rutgers is a better university. They remind us of what we mean to each other and what we want our students to learn.”

Each recipient received a plaque from McCormick, a \$1,000 award, and a \$500 honorarium to donate to the cause of their choice.

Board of Governors Professor of History Clement A. Price presided over the ceremony; he is chair of the Human Dignity Awards subcommittee of the [Committee to Advance Our Common Purposes](#). Price led a moment of silence to pay tribute to the more than 30 lives lost at Virginia Tech just two days before the awards ceremony.

“On our campus yesterday was a subdued day. It was almost as if we had lost someone from the Rutgers family,” Price said. “Whether it’s Virginia Tech, Rutgers–Camden, here in New Brunswick, William Paterson University, Princeton – these are precious places marked by two things pretty consistently: diversity of aspirations and safety. You feel safe when you’re on campus.”

The Human Dignity Award recipients are:

Allen and Joan Bildner, philanthropists and founders of The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life – The Bildners have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to developing programs that further justice, equality, and diversity at a variety of institutions. In July 2002, the Bildner Family Foundation established the Campus Diversity Initiative in New Jersey. Eight participating colleges in New Jersey will use the Bildner endowment to fund new courses, research, faculty training, and programs focused on reducing prejudice and increasing understanding of the growing number of minorities on college campuses.

Rutgers–Camden Center for the Arts – Founded in 1976, the center is a multivenue arts institution located on the Camden waterfront that produces and presents year-round programs in the visual and performing arts and arts education. The center has been designated a “Major Arts Organization of New Jersey” by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State. The Camden Arts Ambassadors and the Camden Arts Gardens are new programs designed to increase and enhance participation in the arts among Camden residents.

Institute for Jazz Studies, Rutgers–Newark – Under the leadership of Director Dan Morgenstern, the institute was honored by the National Endowment for the Arts as 2007 Jazz Master. This award is given to those who have made exceptional contributions to the advancement of jazz. Under Grammy-winner Morgenstern’s leadership, the institute has acquired more than 30,000 photographs, 100,000 recordings, and more than 6,000 books and periodicals constituting one of the largest jazz collections in the world.

Tynesha McHarris, Rutgers–Newark – Tynesha McHarris is a double major in political science and sociology and a minor in urban studies and community development. She was instrumental in bringing the first “Freedom School” to Newark, a program started by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), the national advocacy voice for all children in America. The CDF Freedom School program is a national summer and after-school enrichment program designed to serve children in communities where “quality academic enrichment programs are rare, too costly, or absent.” McHarris brought the program to Newark where, in partnership with schools, churches, and colleges, it serves as a haven for more than 50 children to learn and believe in themselves.

Cheryl Wall, Board of Governors Professor of English, School of the Arts and Sciences – Wall is the former chair of the Department of English and remains active in university affairs. In 2003, she was co-principal with Mary Hartman of the Institute for Women’s Leadership on “Reaffirming Action: Designs for Diversity in Higher Education.” This Ford Foundation-funded initiative examined the strategies higher education institutions successfully employ to enhance racial and gender equity. Most recently, Wall was selected to serve as vice chair of the Steering Committee on Implementation, a body organized to enact sweeping changes in undergraduate education at Rutgers.

© 2008 Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. All rights reserved.