

YWCA Women of Distinction honored on special night at Lewis and Clark Community College

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY - To properly recognize the greatness they have given to the community, the YWCA of Alton honored 11 “Women of Distinction,” instead of the traditional 10.

The **Women of Distinction Award** was established in 1991, and continues to be the signature fundraiser for the YWCA of Alton. Women are nominated from the community and chosen by an anonymous committee to receive the honor. The 11 women were recognized at a gala May 5 at the Commons Area of Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC).

Minnie Johnson, one of the women honored, is heavily involved in the religious community, working for Heartland Baptist Church, Union Baptist Church and the Women's Mission Unit, which collects school supplies for students in need living within East St. Louis. Johnson was escorted by **Alton Mayor Brant Walker**, and said she was elated for the honor.

“I'm really surprised they found me,” she said. “I'm a quiet worker.”

Walker said he chose her to escort into the event, saying he was proud of the women in the community working toward empowering everyone. He felt Johnson, as well as the rest of the Women of Distinction, were very deserving of their honors.

That sentiment was shared by **Reverend Diana Williams**. Williams was the first woman to accept the position of “pastor” in the Alton area. She has since served for more than 25 years. Currently, Williams serves for the Alton Housing Authority and is greatly involved with the United Fellowship International Ministries, the Alton Community Church of God and the Coalition of Concerned Citizens.

“I'm speechless,” she said. “It's a very humbling experience. I am happy for the rest of the women selected. Each of us is well-deserving. Each of us has played a part in helping the community.”

Williams was escorted by Scott Dixon.

Val Harris and Tawnya Hooper each said it was an honor to be among women such as Johnson, Williams and each other. Harris has worked at LCCC for more than 25 years and is passionately assisting women attain their GEDs while providing child care and parenting classes.

Hooper is a supervisor at the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Through her position, she has worked for the Child Death Investigation Task Force and assists foster children in finding homes.

The event was emceed by Cynthia Simms, Director of Human Resources at the Argosy. Williams provided the invocation before dinner

Following dinner was the awards presentation and a silent auction.

All 11 Women of Distinction are: **Stephanie Monroe, Kris Fulkerson, Valerie Harris, Karen Cooper, Minnie Johnson, Sandy Smith, Diana Williams, Liz Park, Sharon Pratt, Tawnya Hooper and Elaine Kane.**