



Lewis and Clark's Val Harris honored as Woman of Distinction

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GODFREY – Lewis and Clark Community College’s Associate Dean of Adult Education Val Harris has been honored as one of the YMCA’s Women of Distinction for 2016.

“It is a huge honor to be included with this group,” Harris said. “There is this power that can be found in a group of current and former Women of Distinction. These women have made giant strides toward making our communities better.”

For more than 20 years, Harris has been an advocate for students at Lewis and Clark Community College. She has served with the Adult Education department for the past 26 years.

The Adult Education programs at L&C revolve around meeting the educational needs of adults who lack basic skills and are looking for a non-traditional way to find their path and fulfill their potential. Many have dropped out of high school.

Under Harris’ leadership, the department has grown to include numerous programs and services to promote student success.

“My life goal is to make the world a better place by giving people access to transformative resources, like education,” Harris said. “It is hard to see myself doing anything else.”

Besides GED preparation and English as a Second Language courses, L&C also offers support services and coursework to help students transition to college, including Project READ, which provides volunteer tutors to provide individualized tutoring for those who need extra assistance; family education programs, which encourage an intergenerational approach to educational achievement; and the YouthBuild Building Futures program, for which Val was the principal grant author.

“Being involved with YouthBuild has fed my soul,” Harris said. “I love to give students the opportunity to transition into college. These efforts have kept me excited about my work, while reminding me how important our goals are.”

Harris earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Illinois, a master’s degree in higher education leadership from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and will complete her Doctorate in Education in December 2016.

A native of Collinsville, Illinois, Harris considers Alton her home and has lived here for nearly 30 years. She is a devoted and proud parent to her son.

Harris has served on multiple statewide committees and boards throughout her career. She has served on the Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association, Incorporated (IACEA) board of directors for many years and continues to do so. She has even served a term as president of the association.

One of her proudest achievements was being nominated by her colleagues at L&C and selected as IACEA's 2009 Administrator of the Year. She has also been recognized by the 100 Black Men of Alton and the Madison County Urban League for her work in the community.

Harris volunteers for the Gateway IETC by doing taxes for people who are economically disadvantaged. She serves on the Alton Area and Lewis and Clark Habitat for Humanity Affiliate boards. She is a committed supporter of Safe Connections in St. Louis and their work to end relationship violence and sexual assault.

"I have been inspired by many women on my journey – by their compassion, their drive to innovate and make change for the better, their intellect, their leadership, and their ability to listen deeply," she said. "A favorite of mine is Dorothy Stoneman, founder of YouthBuild, for her dedication to creating spaces across the nation for young people where 'love meets opportunity.'"

To learn about opportunities in L&C's Adult Education program, visit www.lc.edu/youthbuild.