



Angel Weber gives of herself, constantly sees 'greatness waiting to happen in others'

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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(This is the first in a series of Alton YWCA Women of Distinction honorees for 2018)

ALTON - Angel Weber, one of the 2018 YWCA Women of Distinction, has used her artistic and teaching abilities to educate and inspire students and colleagues about black history and women's history, particularly in the time periods that current students and many adults have minimal knowledge.

Weber said when she learned she was one of the 2018 Women of Distinction she was humbled.

"My heart smiled and I felt joy," she said.

"Over the years, I enjoyed looking at the photos and reading the comments and words of wisdom from these wonderful Women of Distinction honorees. I have been blessed with talent. I am an artist and I am an art teacher for the Alton School District. I love my job as a teacher.

"I look at my students and see greatness waiting to happen. My mind is always creating something, inventing something, and I offer my students the right to let their imaginations soar outside the box. I love this because the kids are so funny and open-minded. I enjoy the challenge and the opportunity every day to stretch their imaginations because the world of art is where all children can shine and grow."

Weber said she is anchored in the belief that we are here not just for ourselves but to help and serve others.

"I feel you always have the opportunity to do good as long as your feet are upon the land because when life lays you down, only the good you did will still have life," she said.

These were the words used in Weber's nomination for the Alton honor:

"Every year, for black history month, she creates a large exhibit in the hallway that highlights a piece of black history and involves students in this project. She has donated many hours, on her own time, creating art exhibits that educate about the Jim Crowe time period, such as a display of separate entrances for black and white, a display highlighting Ruby Bridges, and a current exhibit which will be interactive, where students can experience a lunch counter sit-in during the civil rights protests.

"She involves her students in projects that extend far beyond art and cross other curricula. The middle school principal, Cindy Inman, supports this nomination and shared a story of how she engages students with their community. This past year, she challenged them to invent/design something that would benefit someone underprivileged. The students interviewed patients at a local nursing home and designed

an extended cushion after hearing from overweight patients how the cushions cut into their legs. They also designed a tray to attach to wheelchairs after hearing of that need. She directed them to research patent/copyright laws, and reach out to a local company, resulting in Cope Plastics building a prototype for wheelchairs. This is just one example of how she raises awareness of the need for full inclusion for those with disabilities and motivates students to make a difference in their community.

“She has been instrumental in the creation of an annual arts performance assembly at the middle school during Black History and Women’s History Month, and has been intentional about opportunities for students who might not have otherwise chosen to be involved in a theater or arts activity. This has added to the diversity of the students engaged in the performance and visual arts and increased inclusive participation by all students. She has specifically encouraged students from special education classes to take an active role and recently assigned a female student with special needs the role of Rosa Parks. This student had difficulty reading and didn’t socialize. She asked this teacher “Am I smart enough to do anything?” in the play. With help from the teacher and the student’s grandparent, she was able to perform with success, and her family says she now cannot stop reading. This is only one example of the impact this woman has had instilling confidence in students at a critical time in their lives.”

The person nominating Weber continued:

“Outside of her classroom role and time, she engages students in creating art projects on the middle school campus, which create a sense of community and acceptance. Staying late after school, she works with students every year, to ensure women’s history is incorporated into an annual assembly, creating displays related to women’s history, and encouraging her students to participate, whether performing, making displays, or working behind the scenes. She initiated a project to create a positive school climate, helping students decorate cafeteria posts, displaying reminders to respect others, and use kindness. After the death of a student in 2009, she helped create an annual remembrance wall that provides an opportunity for all students who wish to acknowledge the loss of a loved one, past or present. I have witnessed how this has powerfully given students a voice and method to express grief.

“She has displayed artwork at the YWCA, Jacoby Arts Gallery and other venues, depicting the emotions of racism. She personally experienced racism during an encounter many years ago where she and her child were shielded and concealed from the Ku Klux Klan. She has been a mentor to many students who struggled to find themselves in the turmoil of adolescence. She inspires students to use art to express themselves and even those who do not consider themselves to have artistic ability, are eager to participate in her class because she allows them to have a voice and a way to express that voice. Students who have struggled in other classes have excelled in hers,

and found a way to regain their confidence. She is truly instrumental in transforming student's lives in a positive way. Her dedication to educating youth about black history, women's history and a time that was different from today insures that part of history is not forgotten and will not repeat itself.

"She is an inspiration to the other school staff, as she gives them a perspective on race, through art, that allows for a different way to discuss and explore racism. I have been able to talk more easily about the topics of her art displays with both adults and students, with the presence of visual representations providing an opportune avenue for discussion. She provides a unique teaching tool that is often overlooked by others, or not available. And she does all of this with a gentle nature, good humor, and enthusiasm that is contagious. She truly loves what she does, and it shows in her art, her students and in the climate she creates in her classroom and throughout her school."

Angel Weber's club/service-oriented groups and organizations:

- She has been a member of the Illinois Arts Council for the past 20 years, and participated with a local program, supported by this organization, Arts in the Park.
- She has been involved with Jacoby Arts Center since before its current location in 2004, and has been a speaker for several of their events, as well as displaying her art there.
- She has become involved this year with the James Killion Park recreation committee, working to improve the conditions of the park. She will be working with youth to design and paint trash cans with inspirational messages.
- She was a founding member of the First Night New Year's Eve Committee through Lewis & Clark College, and volunteered to lead art activities at each First Night Event, until the program disbanded in 2013.
- She has been a part of the planning committee for ARTEAST – an annual metro-east arts event, since 1998, which showcases local art and artists throughout the metro east area.
- She currently volunteers with the Variety Club of St. Louis, planning children's art productions.
- She was instrumental in helping Lewis & Clark College begin the student art shows for the past six years, and taught art for young adults with disabilities to allow them to take a college level art class.
- She has been active in missionary work through her church for several years, offering and responding to all requests for singing at end of life.

(If you have someone you wish to include in the People Spotlight, provide a photo, information about the person and the person's contact information to Riverbender.com and Edglentoday.com Content Director Dan Brannan at dbrannan@riverbender.com).