

Eva A. McDonald Women's History Coalition Honors Two, Gail Drillinger is Key Speaker

by Leanne Guthrie, Reporter
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ALTON - The annual Eva A. McDonald Women's History Coalition 36th Brunch was held recently at the Best Western Premier in Alton and Gail Dillinger did a presentation on Mary White Ovington, co-founder of the NAACP.

Two awards were presented and Penny Parrish and Shirley Johnson received the “Woman Who Make a Difference” honors. The coalition selected “I Am Malala” by Malala Yousafzai as the book they are donating to many local school libraries this year.

“With July 2019 marking our 40th year, our mission to promote equity for all women and girls, lifelong education and positive societal change continues,” said Margarete Trushel in reference to the commission.

The brunch is a yearly tradition for many local women in the Alton area. The coalition-sponsored breakfast is to recognize influential women and the history of gender equality. The breakfast gives women of all backgrounds an opportunity to network and become more informed on gender issues. All while celebrating influential women and their successes within the community and learning something new too.

"I believe in the basic goodness of people and try to show respect and love to everyone I come in contact with, I encourage others to do the same. This makes the world a better place to live," said Shirley Johnson, one of the award recipients. "Community involvement has always interested me. Committed volunteers sharing their time and resources help to make a community great."

Shirley is active within the community, she volunteers and serves on many community boards. For years her passion for helping others has brought joy to many in the community. She holds her family and many grandchildren close to her heart and hopes that her examples will inspire them to make a change as well.

Penny Parrish received the second award. When presented with the award a piece was read about Penny's life and why she was so deserving of the award, written by members of the group.

“Penny is an example of women who have influenced and supported all aspects of home, church, and school to make important changes in the community for the better,” the group wrote of Penny. “Her knowledge, spirit, love for life, and making the world a better place has served a lot of us very well”

While Penny chose not to speak or come to the podium during the acceptance of her award, her friends, family, and supporters only had wonderful things to say. Many shared their love for Penny and praised her openness, kindness, and involvement in helping young women and the community.

Dillinger's strong performance background shined during her presentation. She spoke in character from the perspective of Mary White Ovington herself as she shared the interesting and influential history of Ovington.

Drillinger has worked in theater for many years and has performed in many productions. Currently, she is serving as Board Secretary of Little Alton Theater. She has played in an orchestra and sings in the Lewis and Clark Concert Choir and Limited Edition, a vocal jazz ensemble. She works at Lewis and Clark Community College and serves as President of Upper Alton Woman's Club.

“Very soon, I hope we will be awash in the many beautiful colors of spring. And we will appreciate that because it will bring us joy and will uplift our souls. Let that be our mantra for every day,” said Dillinger.

