

SIUE Celebrates Phenomenal Contributions At Annual Luncheon

by Kalli Collins
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EDWARDSVILLE - The remarkable contributions of inspiring women who embrace and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion were recognized during Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's ninth annual Phenomenal Celebration held Wednesday, March 22.

“What the goal here today is to ensure these women are seen, celebrated, and supported,” said Kevin Leonard, PhD, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences’ during his opening remarks. “It is imperative we recognize these women for the works they have accomplished on campus and in their community, but we also want to ensure they know we as a community support them on their journeys as they continue great works into the future.”

“Every woman receiving this recognition today is making a positive impact at this University and in our greater community,” said keynote speaker Candi Johnson, program coordinator for SIUE’s Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Center. “These women have given of themselves to help others, and now others are giving them their well-deserved accolades.”

The 2023 Phenomenal honorees included 14 leaders from SIUE’s campuses, the Southern Illinois University (SIU) System and the surrounding community. Kind remarks were shared by each of the honorees’ nominators, underscoring their worthiness of this distinct recognition. Awardees are listed below:

- **Andreya Ayers:** office manager, Student Financial Aid, SIUE
- **Kerry Basarich:** instructor, coordinator of clinical acquisitions, Primary Care and Health Systems Nursing, SIUE
- **Mari Chimitris:** graduate assistant, Accessible Campus Community & Equitable Student Support (ACCESS), SIUE
- **Amanda Depew;** social worker, Supportive Services for Veteran Families /Chestnut Health Systems, community
- **Wendi Wills El-Amin, MD:** associate dean for equity, diversity, and inclusion at the SIU School of Medicine; and faculty in the Department of Family and Community Medicine and Department of Medical Education
- **Annette Fletcher:** early childhood teacher, Early Explorations Center, community
- **Michelle Ford:** building service worker, Morris University Center Administration, SIUE
- **Lauren Harris:** senior, majoring in history and political science, Student Government Internal Affairs Officer, SIUE
- **Holley Hentz:** senior, majoring in sociology, SIUE
- **Felina Herrera:** assistant community director, University Housing, SIUE
- **Au’Janee Lewis:** community director, University Housing, SIUE
- **Michele Lorenzini:** instructor, Department of Anthropology, SIUE
- **Hailee O’Dell:** senior, majoring in psychology with minor in Nutrition, SIUE student trustee
- **Mackenzie Richards:** junior, majoring in psychology, Student Government external affairs officer, SIUE

“These women sincerely showcase the attributes of truly phenomenal women,” said Lindy Wagner, assistant vice chancellor for inclusive excellence, education and development. “The campus, SIU System and community are better with their presence, and society benefits from all the work they put in.”

The celebration concluded with Kaelyn Cupil, an SIUE School of Nursing student, sharing her adaption of Maya Angelou's poem, "Phenomenal Woman," from the collection "And Still I Rise."

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high-quality education that powerfully transforms the lives of all individuals who seek something greater. A premier metropolitan university, SIUE is creating social and economic mobility for individuals while also powering the workforce of the future. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 12,500.