



NEWS RELEASE

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VCIC Announces Recipients of 56th Annual Peninsula Humanitarian Awards

(Newport News, VA) - The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 56th annual Peninsula Humanitarian Awards. The awards honor individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to the promotion of respect and understanding among people of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in the Peninsula community. The 2024 awards will be presented by the Peninsula Chapter of VCIC at their annual dinner on Thursday, February 22, 2024, at the Newport News Marriott at City Center.

The 2024 Peninsula Humanitarian Award Recipients

Xavier L. Beale – Xavier Beale is Vice President of Human Resources and Administration for Newport News Shipbuilding, a division of HII, located in Newport News, Virginia. Named to this position in 2022, Beale oversees all aspects of human resources administration, including employment, labor relations and recruitment, as well as Newport News Shipbuilding's Apprentice School. He is actively involved in the community and serves on the Hampton Roads Community Action Program's Board of Directors and the Hampton Roads Advisory Committee for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Beale was appointed in 2023 by Governor Glenn Youngkin as the Vice Chair of the Virginia Board of Workforce Development and he also serves on the Board of Directors for the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education. Beale previously served on the Virginia African American Advisory Board and Virginia Living Museum's Board of Trustees. He is also an active member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and is committed to helping all Virginians reach their full potential.

Syed Ismail – Dr. Syed Ismail served as a senior research scientist in different capacities at NASA Langley Research Center for over 35 years. After retiring from NASA, he has been serving as a Senior Research Scientist consultant with Analytical Service & Materials, Inc. Dr. Ismail has been involved in several community activities. He is a founding member, past President, and a Trustee of the Muslim Community of Tidewater and a founding member of the Peninsula Islamic Community Center. He has been associated with several community development and charitable activities while serving in these organizations. He has been a member of the University Chaplains Association at Old Dominion University since 2017, serving to foster spiritual life on the ODU campus, and works with the team to promote interfaith understanding and support the wellbeing of the campus community. He has also been a member of the VCIC Peninsula Chapter. In collaboration with other organizations, he organized annual Iftar dinners to show support for and building connections with the Hampton Roads Muslim community.

Eugene M. Jordan, II – Eugene M. Jordan, II, recently retired as Corporate General Counsel of Old Point Financial Corporation and previously served as Chairman, President and CEO of Old Point Trust & Financial Services, N.A. He practiced law in the largest law firm in Phoebus for a number of years with great law partners (his dad and sister), who taught lessons of law, the courtroom, and legal research far better than law professors. They merged into one of the largest firms in Hampton at that time, Cumming, Hatchett & Jordan. Current Board activities include serving on the Board of Old Point Trust & Financial Services, N.A., member of the Peninsula Chapter of the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, serving as Vice Chair of the Board of Riverside Regional General Hospital, Board member of Bernardine Franciscan Sisters Foundation, Board member of VuBay Foundation, Elder of First Presbyterian Church, Hampton. Past Board service includes: Smart Beginnings, Civic Leadership Institute (Class of 2007), First Book Hampton Roads, Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center, and Boy Scouts.

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Nick G. Vlahakis – Nick Vlahakis has had a 25-year career with ATK, culminating as Chief Operating Officer, with responsibility for 60 facilities in 22 states that employed 14,000 people. Nick's contributions to the community include establishing and funding facilities for worship, learning, and the arts. Specifically in Williamsburg, the Vlahakis Education Center in the Hellenic Center, St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church is a 2-story building with offices, classrooms, and space for social events. At William & Mary, he has created the Vlahakis Recording Studio in the new music building on campus. It will be used both for the school and for a variety of projects serving the community. Nick is a member of Carnegie Mellon University's CFA Dean's Council, where he started working with students on entrepreneurial projects as part of the Music Entrepreneurship Program. Nick and his wife, Kimi, also established the Vlahakis Recording Studio at Carnegie Mellon's School of Music, which will be operated in perpetuity. There is also a scholarship in his name at the school.

Gwendolyn R. Williams – Dr. Gwendolyn Williams is dedicated to improving the overall well-being of healthcare providers, decreasing burnout, and mitigating moral injury. She is an avid advocate for health equity for marginalized and historically disadvantaged groups and a self-proclaimed social justice warrior. Dr. Williams is the first woman to serve as President of the Medical Executive Committee at Sentara Care Plex Hospital. In 2022, she was elected as the President of the Society of Hospital Medicine, Hampton Roads Chapter. Prior to her role as Chief of Staff, she served as the Chief of Medicine and Vice President of the Medical Executive Committee. She is the Co-Chair of the Sentara Medical Group Wellness & Engagement Committee and utilized this role to bring many wellness initiatives to healthcare workers during the pandemic. She is proud to say she has helped to diversify the Board with more women than any other board in the Sentara system, and an increased number of People of Color and varying religions.

The 2024 Peninsula Distinguished Merit Recipient

Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center – Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center (PPCC) is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1973 by a group of clergy and laity on the Virginia Peninsula. For more than 50 years, PPCC has served individuals, couples, and families by providing professional counseling and consultation in a faith context. PPCC is committed to removing barriers to care, making sure that anyone who seeks help can receive it. Their donor-supported Client Assistance Fund covers counseling fees for the uninsured, underinsured, and those who can't afford to pay., PPCC is committed to providing support and education that reaches a larger audience than can be done in their one-on-one counseling through over 40 partnerships with local congregations, businesses, universities, military, and other community organizations. PPCC also equips clergy and congregations to advocate for and walk alongside people who are struggling, helping faith communities think through and implement the best ways to care for the families in their congregations.

Fifty-six years ago, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities - then called the National Conference of Christians and Jews - began a tradition on the Virginia Peninsula, "to honor the work of our friends, neighbors, and family members who gave to others the same rights, respect, and dignity that they sought for themselves." Today, VCIC works with schools, businesses, and communities to achieve success through inclusion. The 89-year-old organization delivers programs to educators and students in the region through Diversity Dialogue Day, Project Inclusion, and professional development sessions. VCIC also conducts workshops for many local businesses and nonprofit organizations, leveraging diversity and inclusion to achieve success. The organization opened an office in Hampton Roads in 2018 to better serve the community.

The 2024 VCIC Humanitarian Awards Dinner is chaired by Dr. Jeffery O. Smith. Metro Productions, Sentara Health, and Virginia Oncology Associates are the Humanitarian sponsors, and the Benefactor sponsors are Old Point National Bank and TowneBank (at time of writing).

For more information about the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, or information about reservations for the Awards Dinner on February 22, go to www.inclusiveVA.org/peninsula.

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