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VCIC Announces Recipients of 60th Annual Tidewater Humanitarian Awards

*The 2024 Tidewater Humanitarian Awards will be presented by
the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities on March 21, 2024*

(Virginia Beach, VA) - The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 60th annual Tidewater Humanitarian Awards. These 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 South Hampton Roads. The Humanitarian Awards Celebration will take place on March 21, 2024 at the Westin Virginia Beach Town Center.

2024 Tidewater Humanitarian Award Recipients

Thomas Brandl - Tom Brandl has lived a life of military service, education, and community impact. Graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1979, he served as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps for 29 years, commanding units and earning a Master of Arts in National Strategy and Policy. Post-retirement in 2008, he transitioned to defense consulting but sought a more fulfilling path. Enrolling in the WoodenBoat School in 2011, he discovered a passion for boatbuilding. Recognizing a void in youth boatbuilding programs in Hampton Roads, he founded the Tidewater Wooden Boat Workshop (TWBW) in 2014. TWBW imparts STEM education and life skills to disadvantaged youth while emphasizing inclusivity. Tom's dedication, coupled with TWBW's commitment to diversity and free accessibility, has left an indelible mark on his community, impacting over 1,500 kids since 2015.

Don Comer, Jr. - Don Comer, former President of Don Comer Ford, Inc, has left an enduring mark on Portsmouth since making it his home in 1966. He has served with various organizations, including the Virginia Auto Dealer Association, Rotary Club of Churchland, and Bon Secours Hampton Roads, not only leading in the boardroom, but working in the community itself. Currently active on TowneBank's Portsmouth regional board and the Portsmouth Partnership, Don exemplifies the tenets of leadership, contributing to the Lefoe Leadership Fund and the newly formed Give Back 2 Da Block, an organization committed to violence interruption and guiding youth on positive paths. Comer's love for jazz and cultural engagement has added a unique dimension to his community service, creating a harmonious blend of philanthropy and community enrichment.

Susan S. Goode - Susan S. Goode is a dedicated community leader and advocate with a profound commitment to the arts, environment, and local communities. Among her many commitments, Susan has been an integral part of the Virginia Wesleyan University Board of Trustees since 2006. Her involvement extends to key roles in organizations such as the Elizabeth River Project, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, where she serves as secretary. Recognized for her contributions, Susan received the YWCA Women of Distinction award and alongside her husband David, earned prestigious honors such as the Governor's Arts Award and the Americans for the Arts Legacy Award. An unwavering advocate for arts accessibility, Susan actively supports inclusivity and fairness in community affairs.

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Laura Geringer Gross – Recognized for her professional excellence, Laura Geringer Gross has been named in Best Lawyers in America (2020-2024) and Virginia’s Legal Elite (2006, 2008-2023). Additionally, she received the Influential Women of Virginia Award (2010) and Women of Distinction by YWCA of South Hampton Roads (2008). Laura is affiliated with professional bodies such as the American Bar Association, Virginia Bar Association, and Norfolk-Portsmouth Bar Association. Her community leadership roles include Past President of the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater and the Jewish Community Center of Tidewater, and Women’s Cabinet Chair for the United Jewish Foundation of Tidewater. Laura's extensive legal background, community engagement, and commitment to inclusivity underscore her multifaceted contributions.

Iris J. Lundy - Iris Lundy's leadership focuses on reducing health disparities through engagement and collaboration with diverse communities. As the Vice President of Health Equity for Sentara Health, she employs her nursing and healthcare administration background to innovate community interventions, improve health outcomes, and reduce barriers to care. A colon cancer survivor and former Army veteran, Lundy's personal experiences inform her compassionate leadership. Engaged in numerous boards and affiliations, including the Mayor’s Advisory Committee, NAACP, and various health organizations, Lundy actively contributes to advancing health equity on a national scale. During the pandemic, she aided in combating misinformation, and met the community where they were – opening up vaccine clinics in churches, trailer parks, public housing, beaches, and museums.

Michael R. Toliver - Reverend Michael R. Toliver recently retired as the pastor of First Baptist Church South Hill, a role he held for 36 years. As the Senior Pastor, Toliver managed a vibrant ministry with impactful outreach initiatives focused on addressing homelessness, hunger, and disadvantage within the community, collaborating with organizations such as the Foodbank of South Hampton Roads. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, Toliver is deeply engaged in community revitalization efforts, co-leading the "Serve-The-City" initiative in collaboration with Centerpoint Church and the Chesapeake Police Department. Toliver's extensive community involvement spans roles with ForKids, the Chesapeake Coalition of Black Pastors, the Rev. Jake Manley Memorial Foundation, and the Old Dominion Ministers Association.

Sixty years ago, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities - then called the National Conference of Christians and Jews - began a tradition in South Hampton Roads, “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 high school students in the region through the Connections Institute and Diversity Dialogue Day. VCIC also provides professional development for many local educators, businesses, and nonprofit organizations, leveraging diversity and inclusion to achieve success. In 2018, VCIC opened a Hampton Roads office on the campus of Virginia Wesleyan University.

Sandra Porter Leon is chairing the 2024 VCIC Tidewater Humanitarian Awards Celebration. The event’s Humanitarian Sponsors are Sentara Health and Virginia Oncology Associates, and the Benefactor sponsor is TowneBank.

For more information about the organization or about reservations for the Awards on March 21st, go to www.inclusiveVA.org.

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