

LOCAL

Acclaimed for making a difference

STORIES BY DANA BORCEA
and DANA BROWN

It was a night of glamour, celebration, recognition and history.

On Saturday, hundreds of people gathered for the 12th annual John C. Holland awards and gala dinner.

The awards recognize members of

the black community who have made significant contributions.

The event is hosted by Hamilton's Black History Committee at the beginning of Black History Month.

"We do that to honour our history, to pay tribute to all who have gone before us and on whose shoulders we now stand," said co-chair Patricia Wright.

Rev. John C. Holland, the son of a runaway slave, worked as a railway porter for 33 years before achieving his dream and becoming a minister at Stewart Memorial Church in Hamilton.

He was named Hamilton's Distinguished Citizen of the Year in 1953, a year before his death.

In addition to the awards, a mentoring and leadership program for black youth and young adults was also announced at the celebration.

With a \$96,700 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, a partnership between the John Holland Institute for Leadership and Stewart Memorial Church will see the pilot

program come to fruition.

Here, we take a look at the winners of this year's awards and highlight the contributions each has made.

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Winners in their own words

The black community's achievers tell of their dreams

Yanicke Parkinson, winner of the Mount Olive Lodge Scholarship, Youth Achievement

Parkinson, 18, is a first-year engineering student at McMaster who has also won several other scholarships.

While maintaining high marks, she finds time to lend her efforts to worthy causes — she's a science and math tutor and helps raise money to battle the AIDS crisis in Africa.

Parkinson came to Canada from Jamaica six years ago. Her goal is to be a chemical engineer.

Quote: "Achievement comes through hard work and dedication. That's the only way you can achieve something."

Amal Elmagadam, winner of the SISO award, Youth Achievement

Elmagadam, 22, is hoping to use her studies in political science as a way of encouraging other young people to become active in the community.

She has offered her time to several community organizations, many of which foster understanding and stand against racism. She is the founder of United We Stand, an annual youth forum that addresses social issues, public speaking, art and culture.

Elmagadam has her sights set on a career in education.

Quote: "This is truly a blessing. It's beautiful to be recognized for something you have such a strong passion for."

Emma Hughes, winner of The Spectator award, Youth Achievement

Hughes, 17, began her extensive involvement with community work when she was only 10 years old — she volunteered to work with special needs students at her school.

Since then, she has given her time and energy to work with children in various capacities, in addition to being involved with Christmas fundraising.

As a high school student, Hughes has maintained an honour-roll standing, something she achieved after learning how to cope with severe dyslexia. She is in Grade 12.

Quote: "I pray every morning that I stay different. Because if it wasn't for being different and being unique, I wouldn't be the person I am today."



A night of honours: Front row, from left, Afua Cooper, Beverly John, Karn Nelson, Yanicke Parkinson, Emma Hughes and Albert Graham. Back row, from left, Chris Spence, Rodney Diverlus, Cathy Ferreira, Kareem Ferreira and Amal Elmagadam.

Rodney Diverlus, winner of The Spectator award, Youth Achievement

At 17, Diverlus has an impressive resumé.

He's interested in music, theatre and dance, is president of Westdale's student council and is involved in fundraisers, student forums and the Student Voice newspaper. For the last two years, he has been a delegate to the Model United Nations Conference.

Despite the time and attention he devotes to extra activities, Diverlus is still a high academic achiever.

He has said he feels a responsibility to showcase his talents and personality and be a role model to motivate and inspire himself and his peers.

Quote: "This is just the beginning. This resumé will only get longer and you will see me more."

Karen Nelson, co-winner of the Community Service Award

Nelson is the co-founder of the Hamilton Youth Steel Orchestra, a group that has nurtured 28 young people over the past four years.

Through music, youths from diverse backgrounds have grown in their skill and confidence and are now in demand to perform in this city and beyond.

Nelson uses her accounting and organizational skills to manage the



Mark Graham, accomplished athlete and soldier, was killed in Afghanistan.

business operations of the orchestra. **Quote:** "The award is a validation for what the kids have accomplished over the last four years."

Afua Cooper, winner of the Black History Award of Merit

Cooper's long list of accomplishments include being an award-winning poet, historian, performer and author.

She has performed readings across

Canada and in several other countries and is known as a proponent of dub poetry. Her latest historical publication, *The Hanging Of Angelique*, has become a national bestseller.

In 2005, Cooper was chosen by *Essence Magazine* as one of 25 women who are shaping the world.

Quote: "It is truly a great honour to receive this prestigious award."

Mark Graham, winner of the sports award

Graham, a local soldier, gave his life in Afghanistan in 2006.

But before he joined the military, he was an accomplished athlete, having competed in the 400-metre relay at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. Two years later, he competed at the Commonwealth Games.

Graham received an athletic scholarship in the late '90s, but his sprinting career was ended by injuries.

He joined the military in 2004. Graham had been overseas about a month before being killed in a friendly fire incident when a U.S. pilot strafed his company.

Quote: "On behalf of the family, this is truly a pleasant and emotional surprise," said his father, Albert Graham.

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Mom and son volunteered thousands of hours

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"I'm so happy that he has taken the example and now he's an example for other youth in the community," she said.

Before the winner was announced, Cathy said that to her, the award meant "being recognized by the black community, to be a part of black history as it's being made."

Between mother and son, they have volunteered tens of thousands of hours through various organizations.

Much of that time has been spent making music on pan drums with city youth. Cathy founded the Hamilton Youth Steel Orchestra with her friend Karen Nelson in 2004. She says the pan drums give the children from diverse backgrounds "a chance to be seen in a positive light by the community."

Kareem, an imposing figure who stands 6 feet and weighs 270 pounds, admits he has raised eyebrows with his diverse resumé, which includes work with the Children's International Learning Centre and a summer camp for victims of domestic abuse and their children. "People don't always expect that of me," he said.

Cathy said a large, black man who paints and volunteers, may strike some as an "oxymoron," but adds her son's diverse interests are a natural offshoot of his upbringing, filled with opportunities and encouragement.

Kareem agrees that despite talk of the need for more positive black role models for youths, he suffered no shortage of inspiration growing up.

In addition to adopting his mother's commitment to volunteerism, Kareem also honed his painting and drawing under the watchful eye of his father, Roger, a local artist and teacher.

Kareem also points to mentors like educators and community activists such as Gary Warner and Eleanor Rodney — both prominent members of Hamilton's black community — who were regular visitors to the Ferreira home. His mother says black history month should not just be about looking back, but acknowledging the kind of success she's nurtured in her own children.

"This is an opportunity to acknowledge black people making history here and now!"

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Spence's dedication to community and education began with exposing his students to role models

Chris Spence has spent his career trying to make a dent in a stubborn problem.

The public school board director began teaching in Toronto's Jane and Finch corridor where he noticed too many students falling behind.

"I had great concerns, especially with some of the young black boys," he said.

Spence says the reasons for their disproportionate challenges are varied and complex.

He points to a "fatherless society" as well a phenomenon within some members of the young, black

community that discourages success.

"There's this notion that if you succeed, you're selling out or acting white," says the former B.C. Lions running back. "When white kids do well, they win status, but when black kids excel, they lose status."

His solution was exposing role models to his students, starting with himself.

On Saturday, Spence was honoured for his efforts with the John C. Holland award for professional achievement.

"I'm humbled to receive an award carrying the distinguished name of John C. Holland ... his life continues to

be an inspiration to us all," Spence told the crowd while accepting the award.

Born in England but raised in Canada, Spence credits his parents and sports coaches for the mentorship he needed to succeed.

In addition to his more than 15 years as a teacher and senior administrator, Spence is the author of several books and has won many other awards for his contributions to the community and the area of education.

Spence is not sure if he supports the idea of black-focused schools, recently approved in Toronto. But he insists change is needed.

Beverly John credits strong role models for career success

Beverly John was so enchanted with Canada when she moved here from Jamaica to study nursing, even the frigid winters didn't phase her.

She spent her first Christmas in Sudbury after being invited to spend the holidays with her college roommate's family.

"It was so pristine, just like a winter wonderland," she said. "The change in seasons was always a novelty I thoroughly enjoyed."

John moved to Burlington six years ago and holds the title of vice-president of Patient Care Services and chief executive nurse at Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital.

She is also a recipient of the John C. Holland award for professional achievement.

"It's just such a tremendous surprise and pleasure to be honoured

by one's peers," she told the crowd in her acceptance speech Saturday.

John began her career as a registered nurse and in 1986 was promoted to simultaneously manage three nursing units at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

While pursuing her career, she obtained her bachelor's degree in administrative studies in 1991 and later earned her masters of education in 1999.

John credits strong role models, including relatives and colleagues, as well as people who "looked out" for her when she was a young woman, with giving her the tools she needed to succeed.

She believes that Black History Month is especially necessary for those who did not experience the same supports.

NOTICE TO CITIZENS
HAMILTON CITY COUNCIL
INVITES PUBLIC CONSULTATION
ON THE 2008 BUDGET

The Mayor and Members of City Council invite citizens to attend the Committee of the Whole meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 28, 2008 to provide comments on the 2008 Tax Budget.

Times: 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Location: Albion Room A/B
2nd Floor, Hamilton Convention Centre
1 Summers Lane, Hamilton

Anyone interested in speaking is asked to pre-register as a delegation by February 15, 2008. Please contact:
Mary Gallagher, Co-ordinator - Council/Committee of the Whole and Budgets
(905) 546-2424 ext. 4304 mgallagh@hamilton.ca

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