

Women's Issues Story #1
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Ceremony honors black women leaders

By Alexis Gines

Mayor Pro-Tem Cora Cole-McFadden had never seen an award ceremony in Durham like the one Durham resident Angela Ray and members of a production company presented Friday at the Hayti Heritage Center.

The ceremony, An Evening of Blackberry Whispers, recognized five black women in the state for their commitment to leadership, the arts, entrepreneurship, service, and for being a "Living Legend."

Cole-McFadden surprised Ray, CEO of Mahogany Dime theatre and performance production company, with a key to the city for creating the award ceremony.

In a phone interview, Cole-McFadden said: "...a weekend ago we (Durham residents) were celebrating the life and works of Dr. Martin Luther King and this coming week we are celebrating going into Black History Month...so it (the ceremony) was only fitting..."

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Ray said she plans to hold the award ceremony every year.

In a phone interview, Ray said “I feel that too often that black history only reflects heroes of yesterday.”

Ray said although it is not bad to recognize “heroes of yesterday,” Black History Month also tends to reflect the same heroes. “I think that’s a false representation of our accomplishments,” Ray said.

The “Blackberry Whispers” in the title of the ceremony are “either the achievements or accomplishments that are not heard,” Ray said. “It’s just the things that we (black women) do that are considered whispers that if anyone else did them it would be considered a shout.”

Debra Terry from Kernersville fought back tears when she received her award for the arts category.

“When you’re walking into your destiny it’s not always easy,” Terry said during the ceremony. The actress, comedian and producer has worked with performers such as actress Alfre Woodard and singers such as Patti LaBelle.

Carnetta Green won the service award for her work as Coordinator for Durham Housing and Community Development. She dedicated the award to her mother.

“She is always helping someone,” Green said during the ceremony. “I always said there goes that social worker.”

Green said she was just carrying on her mother’s journey.

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Rosalind Fuse-Hall, executive assistant to the chancellor of N.C. Central, won the leadership award. In an interview after the ceremony, Fuse-Hall said she is inspired by “planting seeds for the future and watching them grow.”

Fuse-Hall said she wants to see confidence increase in more black women.

“There are still lots of women out there who don’t want to be leaders,” Fuse-Hall said.

Mildred Council, owner of Mama Dip’s Kitchen restaurant in Chapel Hill, won the entrepreneurship award. In an interview after the ceremony, Council said blacks need to know two major things for economic success: mutual funds and real estate.

Bennett College president Johnnetta B. Cole, who was unable to attend the ceremony, won the Living Legend award.

Ray said a selection committee from the Mahogany Dime production company chose the award recipients based on nominations from residents across the state. Ray, as CEO of the company, selected the Living Legend award recipient.

Sources

Angela Ray

Cora Cole-McFadden

Ceremony Observations

Mildred Council

Rosalind Fuse-Hall