



## A Brief History

Tribute to Women began with one major understanding – that the women in our homes, workplaces, schools, community centers and in the arts deserved a long overdue night of recognition. The concept of the program grew from seeds the YWCA planted many years ago to nurture and realize the total capabilities of women, young or old, as impactful members of society. For decades, the YWCA had encouraged the full participation of women in all facets of life. The Tribute program finally allowed the corporations, organizations, school systems, and communities at large to recognize the amazing contributions and achievements of the powerful women in their area. Furthermore, it would provide a chance for the YWCA to not only acknowledge these accomplishments, but to conduct a mission driven event that far exceeded the limitations of just another fundraiser.

Thus, the torch was lit. Carrying it for a large portion of the journey would be then Chairperson Nancy Arnold. In conjunction with the YWCA and with the aid of an extremely enthusiastic group of volunteers, the plans for the first Tribute were underway. Committee meetings were already in process, and the empowered group was ready to dig in and get started. Yet, they lacked an essential component– financial and public support from the community.

After molding the concept of Tribute into an event approaching reality, Nancy and others met with numerous organizations, corporations, and small businesses alike to seek the seed money needed to get the first Tribute to Women event off the ground. Thankfully, those at the meeting agreed with the Steering Committee and the YWCA that these amazing women in their quiet glory deserved a night in which to be shown they were valued and cherished for their remarkable contributions. Not only that, but the visionary companies and their executives also concurred that the many vital programs provided by the YWCA only helped to perpetuate a society filled with the women that would be honored at that event. As such, it was a cause that met with an overwhelming YES from that point forward. These founding patrons— Bristol Compressors, Inc., Bristol Regional Medical Center, Bristol Steel & Iron Works, Inc., Raytheon, and The United Company— would provide the means to forever change the landscape for empowered women in the community.

With seed money secured, the Tribute to Women volunteers and YWCA staff were on the move. Among many points that were up for discussion was what would be given to the recipients as their award. In the process of brainstorming, a contest developed. The Tribute Committees and YWCA felt that the women of Tribute deserved an award indicative of the strength and beauty embodied in the event, and so a search was underway for local artists that could render such results. In the end, two were chosen – watercolorist Roma Baker, who conceived and created the design, and potter Sara Reese. It was a masterful design –power and grace beautifully married into one. It represented, in Baker’s words, “a place of honor since ancient beginnings—quiet strength with compassion, resourcefulness and courage.” Thus, “The Lady” was born. She would stand as a timeless symbol for all who followed.

Finding the award was a milestone for those planning the event and the production of it meant that they were nearing even closer to the night itself. The volunteers and staff worked tirelessly in the following months and weeks. Throughout judge selection and nominee considerations, through endless phone calls, late nights and haggling over even the smallest of details – flower arrangements, table linens, seating plans, lighting – no detail was seen as mundane. These women rallied together to create an event so memorable that it would be the model for every year that followed. For more than three decades, Tribute to Women has recognized dozens of exceptional women from every walk of life. With so many remembered, we look to the future, and the astounding women we are soon to behold.