

YWCA MISSION IN ACTION

March 26, 2025

Mary Massarueh, Communications & Fund Development Manager

mmassarueh@ywcatnva.org; 423.573.6107 ext. 2

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Announcing 2025 YWCA Tribute to Women Award Recipients

YWCA NETN and SWVA's award continues the tradition of honoring women throughout the region who are dedicated and committed to positively impacting their community.

The 34th Annual YWCA Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia Tribute to Women Awards Banquet will honor five remarkable women at the Bristol Train Station on Thursday, May 1, 2025, at 6 p.m.

Organizations from across NETN and SWVA submitted nominations for categories that reflect the many avenues and professions women utilize to effect change: Business/Finance, Healthcare, Mission Impact, STEAM/Education, and Community Engagement.

An independent panel of out-of-state judges made their award selections for each category based on leadership qualities, positive impact on the community, and demonstrated growth and achievement.

“Participating in the YWCA Tribute to Women Panel has been truly exhilarating,” said Melani Patterson, Sharp Business Systems USA, 2025 Tribute to Women Panel judge. “Each woman I encountered is not just outstanding but a beacon of inspiration! Their unwavering commitment to uplifting their communities has left me in awe. It was a challenging decision, but I focused on the incredible potential each woman holds to create lasting change for women, children, and the diverse fabric of our society.”

The 2025 YWCA NETN and SWVA Tribute award recipients include:

Business/Finance

Shelly Wiseman, Materials Manager at Strongwell, exhibits multiple qualities of effective leadership in both her professional and civic capacities. As a female in a male-dominated industry, she has shown resilience by investing 30 years of her life to Strongwell, rising from a support position to upper management. Today, Shelly leads an all-female team, sharing her appetite for learning, leadership, and mentorship. In 2023, Shelly was awarded with the Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing Woman of the Year award in the management category and was one of 50 women leaders featured in *Plastics News's* "Women Breaking the Mold" Special Report. Outside of work, Shelly serves on numerous boards, including at Girls Inc., and also works with high school students to encourage them to pursue careers in manufacturing. She is a member at Highlands Fellowship Church and an advocate for social justice and diversity.



Community Engagement

Donna Bare, Financial Representative with Modern Woodmen of America, is a business leader, financial advisor, and faithful follower of Christ. A deeply committed community leader, her efforts have made a tangible, positive impact on countless individuals, organizations, and schools in the region. From building wheelchair ramps and playground equipment to delivering food and essentials, Donna inspires others to come alongside her in labors of love. She has facilitated hundreds of millions of dollars in donations and supplies to numerous organizations and most recently spent countless hours supporting those affected by Hurricane Helene. Dedicated to empowering women, she is a member of GRIT—an entrepreneurial women's group—and Vice President of the Ladies Ministry at Roan Street Church of God. Her many awards and recognitions over the years are a testament to her ability to balance professional achievements with heartfelt service to others.



Healthcare

Dr. Teresa Tyson, President and CEO of St. Mary's Health Wagon, grew up amid the poverty and health disparities in Appalachian coalmining communities and resolved to make a difference. Since then, her life has been a story of resilience, resourcefulness, and a relentless pursuit of healthcare equity in one of America's most underserved regions. Four decades ago, Teresa led a team of collaborators to create The Health Wagon—the oldest mobile free clinic in the nation. Since then, cross-sector partnerships she created have expanded services to include specialty clinics, cutting-edge telehealth programs, and groundbreaking healthcare delivery methods, changing the landscape of healthcare in Southwest Virginia. Alongside this work, Teresa is committed to educating the next generation of rural healthcare providers. She partners with over 50 academic institutions, offering clinical training to students and enriching their understanding of Appalachian culture and rural healthcare needs.



Mission Impact

Dr. Theresa Burriss, Associate Vice President for Community Engagement and Economic Development at Emory & Henry University, is driven by a passion for the people of this mountain region. A key component of her work is her leadership over the Helen Matthews Lewis Women's and Gender Center at Emory & Henry, where she strives to support students, faculty, staff, and community individuals in the quest for equity and justice. Through her oversight, Emory & Henry has assumed critical roles in the areas of addiction prevention, small business development, housing development, and agricultural sustainability; her extensive knowledge in these areas has paved the way in support of cross-sector regional priorities. Theresa holds an interdisciplinary doctoral degree in Appalachian Studies and Women Studies. Her education and teaching focus on solutions for Central Appalachia. A Fulbright Scholar, she holds leadership roles in multiple organizations and has earned numerous honors.



STEAM/Education

A former teacher, **Sonie Schermer**, has pursued her passion for learning and appreciating living things as a volunteer with Steele Creek Nature Center and Park. Beginning in the early 1990s, she worked with others to create the original Nature Center and spearhead an expansion, fostering support from elected leaders and nature lovers on a grassroots campaign to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for exhibits and labs. Since then, through membership on various boards and as an ambassador for Tennessee's third largest municipal park, she has focused on preserving the park's natural elements and expanding research and discovery opportunities for all ages. Today, Steele Creek is a testament to Sonie's ability to translate ambitious dreams into a tangible community resource that allows tens of thousands a year—many of them children destined for science careers—the opportunity to explore and appreciate the natural world.



More than 225 women have been honored through the YWCA NETN and SWVA Tribute to Women. A previous Tribute reflected on what the awards program meant to her. “As women, we create, innovate, and lead. Hard work is our foundation, and persistence shapes our future,” said Subhashini Vashisth, Corporate Innovation at Eastman Chemical Company, 2025 Tribute to Women Emcee. “I was honored to be a 2024 STEAM/Education award recipient — a recognition that reflects the collective effort of those who supported me. Today, I reflect on my journey, amplify our impact, and start a ripple effect. Let's build a strong community that inspires women and girls to strive for excellence and pursue their dreams.”

Bristol Train Station is located at 101 Martin Luther King Blvd., Bristol, Va. Tickets can be purchased online at www.ywcatnva.org/tribute-to-women-tickets. Please send questions to tribute@ywcatnva.org. Funds from this event support the mission of YWCA Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, including efforts to eliminate racism, increase the economic empowerment of women and girls and promote women's health and safety. YWCA NETN and SWVA has proudly served and empowered those within the community for more than 80 years.

###