

2019 Juanita Gray Community Services Award Nominees

Rose Andom

Ms. Andom has been a prominent business woman in Denver who counts among her friends the most powerful leaders in the City. It is thanks to Ms. Andom that an important civic project was completed in 2016 - the Rose Andom Center, to benefit survivors of domestic violence. She has not sought the spotlight for her efforts and was surprised by the enthusiastic response that resulted as much for her personal journey as for her breath-taking \$1.5 million gift. As a child, Rose Andom witnessed domestic violence perpetrated by her father against her mother. Years later she too experienced domestic violence in her own marriage. Like her mother before her, Ms. Andom left that marriage as well as all her worldly belongings.

Ms. Andom went to work for corporate McDonald's where she spent a long and successful career moving up through the company. Before she retired, Ms. Andom owned the three McDonald's franchises at Denver International Airport; was Vice Chair of the National Black McDonald's Operators Association and employed hundreds of people at her restaurants.

Through the trials and tribulations of her life, Ms. Andom evolved into a courageous survivor, confident business woman, and role model of character. It takes courage to publicly speak about childhood trauma and domestic violence, but she frequently speaks to groups about her experiences with violence and provides hope to survivors. Ms. Andom utilized her past experiences and success to help others. She has served on various boards and committees, specifically those that actively promote the success of women and people of color as leaders in the community.

donnie l. betts (lowercase is intentional)

donnie l. betts is a founding member of two theater companies in Denver, Colorado: City Stage Ensemble and Denver Black Arts Company. He attended Yale School of Drama. Mr. betts' credits in theater performance and directing are quite lengthy. His film performance credits include "Switchback" and "Honeydripper," both written and directed by John Sayles. His production company, No Credits Productions, produces the award-winning radio drama "Destination Freedom, Black Radio Days," and documentary films including "Music is My Life, Politics My Mistress: The Story of Oscar Brown Jr." This documentary film was screened at over 25 film festivals worldwide and won eleven "Best Documentary" and Audience's Choice Awards and aired on PBS, in addition to stations nationwide. His first film, "Dearfield: The Road Less Traveled" a docudrama about the all-black town in northern Colorado, was nominated for an Emmy and screened on PBS. He won an Emmy for his film "My Voice" a film on spoken word artist/actor Jeff Campbell. His films on Lincoln Hills and Dr. Justina Ford currently air on RMPBS.org.

Mr. betts is also a skilled facilitator of conversations about race and inclusion in America. While Mr. betts' contributions to bringing diverse stories to light through theater and film are various, he has also impacted our local community in other ways. For four years, while working at History Colorado Museum, he helped to curate exhibit and multimedia presentations in addition to creating new programs and working with school children across the metro area. His current work with the Center

for Advancing Professional Excellence at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus includes expanding their wellness work with the Aurora Police and Fire Departments. He currently produces "The Why" Women of Power TV series streaming on various platforms.

Dr. Rhonda Michelle Coleman

Dr. Coleman is the founder and director of the Healing Garden Holistic Education Center and Health Clinic. She is also a certified instructor and lifestyle coach for the Centers for Disease Control Diabetes Awareness and Prevention Program. Dr. Coleman has been named a Certified Food for Life Instructor by the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine. Other accomplishments include Onda Mansa Rhonda Coleman which is one of the highest level of achievement in the Afro-Brazilian Martial Arts called Capoeira. Dr. Coleman is also a United States Air Force veteran.

She serves on several community boards and commissions including the Human Relations Commission with the City of Aurora. Dr. Coleman is an annual speaker at the Integrative Medicine for the Underserved Conference (IM4US). She founded the Healing Garden with the purpose of educating and enhancing the lives, health and longevity of the African American community in Aurora and Northeast Denver. The Healing Garden is a center for holistic health education which hosts professionals of color who work collaboratively to offer clinical care, mental health education, nutritional health education and movement classes to a diverse clientele. Dr. Coleman is on a mission to create a culture of health in her community and is focusing on educating communities of color on the benefits and uses of traditional and complementary medicine system. She has received multiple honors and awards throughout her career.

Sydney Cross-Watts (Youth)

Ms. Cross-Watts is a 17 year old who is a vibrant, talented teen who has inherited a true passion for community service and volunteerism. Currently a junior at Regis Jesuit High School in Aurora, Colorado, she has always been an exceptional student and continues to embrace what each new school year brings. Ms. Cross-Watts has been on the honor roll at Regis since her freshman year. She has many talents and interests. Her mother has worked hard to provide opportunities which has allowed Ms. Cross-Watts to hone her skills and talents in the areas of basketball, volleyball, cooking and music.

Ms. Cross-Watts is a very busy young person and stays active with school and her studies, sports, volunteering and various extracurricular activities. She has served as a facilitator, essay reader and in 2013, led the pledge of the allegiance for the Colorado State House of Representatives. She has direct ties to the National Council of Negro Women – Denver Section. Ms. Cross-Watts continues to serve as an on-call/summer volunteer for the Denver Public Library (Park Hill Branch). She loves the Lord and has been a faithful member of Higher Ground Church of Christ.

Ms. Cross-Watts never takes herself too seriously, she has an infectious laugh and inquisitive mind. She is no doubt on the path to becoming a great leader in her school and community.

Dr. Erik Huffman

Dr. Erik Huffman has done absolutely amazing work this year. He is the founder and CEO of Handshake Leadership. This year Handshake Leadership won best *Social Impact Company* awarded by the Colorado Springs Business Journal. Additionally, Dr. Huffman won *Young Entrepreneur of the Year* in the Pikes Peak Region. He is also a 2018 Colorado Springs Business Journal Rising Star.

His impact on the community is amazing. He volunteers with School District 20 on the district's technology advisory committee. Dr. Huffman trains secondary teachers how to teach cybersecurity, and he hosts cybersecurity classes for local Girl Scout troops. This year, his company partnered with Care and Share food bank to collect food for those in need. Dr. Huffman always preaches "purpose over profit" and demonstrates that every chance he gets.

Daphne Rice-Allen

Ms. Daphne Rice-Allen is a Denver native and has worked with various non-profit organizations over the years. Due to Ms. Rice-Allen's commitment and energy, the Black American West Museum has weathered many challenges that this organization has experienced. Over the years, she has diligently worked in various capacities with the Museum, to include serving as the Executive Director, a Board Member and a volunteer. Thanks to her focus, the Museum has experienced a rise in the attendance and sponsorship to keep this long held community treasure open and active.

Ms. Rice-Allen has held leadership roles working with the Black Arts Festival as volunteer coordinator utilizing her skills of time management techniques in planning a successful event. She has worked for Blue Cross/Blue Shield and with the Alzheimer's Association. As well as volunteering with her church (Peoples Presbyterian Church), Ms. Rice-Allen is an entrepreneur and has been happily married for 20+ years.

Brenton Weyi

A first-generation essayist and creative polymath with a passion for uniting people, Brenton Weyi uses the power of word to explore the human experience. Whether through verse, poetry, or music, Mr. Weyi captivates audiences and compels them to think deeply about the world and their place in it. A celebrated artist within the Denver community, he has worked tirelessly to amplify the voice of those making local and global impact by producing events that foster institutional collaborations and connections. He captured the attention of local, national, and international audiences as the chief architect for Emmanuel Weyi's campaign for Presidency of the Democratic Republic of Congo which saw his efforts featured in the LA Times and on NPR. Locally, aside from professional performances with Playback Theater West and Storytellers303 a capella, Mr. Weyi is also renowned as a storyteller, speaker, and facilitator.

Additionally, Mr. Weyi supports impact-driven organizations, by helping them to articulate and craft their story and messaging. His work with Denver-based nonprofit US-Brazil Connect helped them raise \$8 million in funds to continue their work creating conscious global leaders. He is also a regular presence at Up with People's Leadership Roundtable, where his multi-dimensional interests and intellectual improvisation have made him quite a memorable guest. Mr. Weyi recently partnered with the City of Denver, who commissioned an original work as part of their Imagine 2020 initiative.

Over the past two years, he has appeared on the TedX Boulder stage, as both a speaker and emcee. His most recent undertaking has been the writing and production of a multi-genre musical, *My Country, My Country*, which centers around the nexus point of Congolese independence told through the parallel perspectives of Patrice Lumumba of Congo and King Baudouin of Belgium.

Edna Williams

Miss Edna as she is known at the Ford-Warren Branch Library has been volunteering at the branch for more than 20 years. She has read stories to hundreds, if not thousands of kids over the years. Currently, Miss Edna volunteers two days a week at the branch, as well as some outreach events in the community. For the last five years she has been a part of two weekly story times at Ford-Warren Branch Library.

Miss Edna is an extraordinary storyteller and reader. Before and after story time, she shelves materials at the branch library. This is no small task for the young, but Miss Edna is 87 years young. While she is one of the hardest workers, Miss Edna always had time to lend an ear. She is an empathetic and considerate listener to family, friends and all who are lucky enough to make her acquaintance. Miss Edna continues to inspire the visitors to the branch as well as so many children, as they become lifelong readers.

2019 Special Induction in to Blacks in Colorado Hall of Fame Honoree

Dr. Jennie Mae Rucker

Dr. Jennie Rucker was a life changer who thrived on encouraging higher education and community service. Jennie attained several advanced degrees including her Doctorate in Library Sciences from Denver University. She married George Webster Rucker, the first Black pharmacy school graduate from CU-Boulder and went on to open Rucker's Drug Store. In her professional life, Dr. Rucker was a Denver Public Schools secretary, substitute teacher and a founding faculty member at Community College of Denver. She was extraordinarily proud of her Doctorate degree in Library Science, which was appropriate in her position as outreach librarian at the Denver Public Library. She retired from the library in 1997.

Dr. Rucker sang in the chorus for the National Negro Opera Company and The Spirituals Projects Choir. She also sat on the board of the Colorado Historical Society. She was a Philanthropist, traveling from Africa to South America building schools and financing education for the children she so adored. She partnered with various organizations allowing her to open the doors of her home to traveling students. From Egypt to Equador, all were welcomed in her home.

As a Community Leader/Activist, Educator, Patron of the Arts, World Traveler, Missionary, Singer, and life-long student, it would be impossible to encompass all that Dr. Rucker has accomplished. Based on those accomplishments, she rightly deserves a place in the *Blacks in Colorado's Hall of Fame*.

