



SOROPTIMIST
Best for Women

Soroptimist International of Trenton and Downriver Area
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Public Awareness/Awards Committee

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS

SI of Trenton and Downriver Area Honors Women with Awards

Five women were recognized with monetary awards from the Trenton and Downriver Area Soroptimists for their ambition and contribution to their communities. The awards banquet was held on March 14 at the Grecian Center in Southgate. Several essay judges were in attendance to celebrate with the winners. The applicants were evaluated on a set criteria and essays that assessed their contributions to women and society.

Soroptimist is an international organization of almost 1,500 clubs in nineteen countries for and by dedicated women who use their collective power to help other women and girls transform their physical, mental, and emotional lives and the lives of their families.

The *Live Your Dream Education and Training Award* is about helping women who have faced economic and personal hardships to live their dreams by attaining an education leading to their empowerment, financial stability, and independence. **Teiera Baker**, of Pontiac, a single mother of two-year-old, was selected to be the recipient of the *Live Your Dream* award. Ms. Baker is currently attending Oakland Community College pursuing a bachelor's degree in social work while working full-time. Her educational and career goals include running her own Case Management LLC at home, along with opening a chain of transitional shelters for families in crisis, while individualizing services to meet their needs. Teiera will work towards a master's degree in social work, with a minor in business management to help her to attain her goals.

Ms. Baker has overcome many heart-wrenching obstacles, physically, emotionally, as well as dealing with a numerous amount of family hardships. Starting life with a few birth defects and surgery which resulted in continuous migraine headaches, Teiera's home life was riddled with grief. Her father was imprisoned, and her mother lost custody of the children. Teiera found her deceased mother when she was about to move back in with her at age ten. She was forced to support herself at a very tender age. At twenty and homeless, she gave birth to her son in a shelter for pregnant girls. Despite everything she had to face alone, Teiera believed that

“school was always #1,” and is committed to continue to work, pursue her studies, and “to give my son the best life I can and become the best woman I can be.”

The *Virginia Wagner Educational Award* is given to a woman aspiring to complete a bachelor’s, master’s or doctorate degree to enable her to reach her career goals. Judging is based on a weighted criteria for judging that includes scholarship, extra-curricular activities, need, and effort toward education. **Wafa Askar**, of Dearborn, is attending University of Michigan- Dearborn and majoring in health psychology. She decided on a psychology major to help others deal with stress and emotional issues. She is currently working toward her master’s degree while working as an emergency social worker.

Ms. Askar is a refugee from Yemen where girls were and are discouraged from attending school. As quoted from opening sentences in her essay: “Girls should not go to school. It is not safe; you should stay home. Drop out of school, we must run away from war. Even if you completed high school, you would not go to college. Even if you completed college, what would you do with your degree? You will not go to work.”

Growing up in the Yemen countryside with her mother and six siblings while her father worked in the United States, her four sisters stopped schooling in middle school. Before finishing high school in 2011, the civil war broke out. Despite the risks, she began English classes as the family awaited immigration to the United States. Even after arriving in 2014, obstacles to education continued. Wafa had to wait months for transcripts to be sent from Yemen and converted to U.S. equivalent classes, her English wasn’t very good, and transportation to school was a problem. A top student in Yemen, she failed her first college class and was ready to give up on her dreams.

As a first-generation college student and most proficient in English, Wafa has been responsible to help her family members set up appointments, complete paperwork for immigration and citizenship cases, school admissions and housing issues, and assist two siblings with epilepsy with medical and work issues. Her sisters are learning English and working on their GEDs. Her brothers stopped schooling to work. Ms. Askar plans to continue to receive doctoral degrees in related fields to help others who share her values and strive to overcome challenges such as she did.

The *Soroptimist Prime award* is exclusive to SI of Trenton and Downriver Area. High school girls residing in Allen Park, Brownstown, Gibraltar, Grosse Ile, Lincoln Park, Riverview, Southgate, Taylor, Trenton, Woodhaven, or Wyandotte are eligible to apply. The Soroptimist of Trenton and Downriver Area high school girls’ award honors young women who make the community and world a better place through volunteer efforts. Because we have expanded our community involvement, this year we have three winners.

Ava Carson, a senior and member of the National Honor Society at Trenton High School. One service project in which she participated was the “Clean Love Project,” collecting items for care packages of essential toiletry items for women and girls in need. Ava also volunteers her time as a Sunday school leader, tutors students at Trenton High, and helped a friend with his Eagle Scout project.

The other Trenton High School winner is senior **Nina Lomas**. Nina’s special passion is as leader for “Fleece and Thank You,” which involves making blankets to provide comfort for children in hospitals. Each donated blanket has an attached video message to create a connection between the maker of the blanket and to the family which receives it. Nina also partners in the “Clean Love Project.”

Wyandotte’s first *Soroptimist Prime* winner is **Eliana Pettigrew**, a Roosevelt High School senior. Eliana began her work with Amnesty International as a sophomore. Currently its chapter’s president, she is most concerned with protecting the rights of women and to empower them to shape their own futures. Campaigning for support of reproductive rights, fundraising for Ukrainian refugees, and volunteering at the Wyandotte Soup Kitchen are a few of the projects of her Amnesty International chapter. Eliana is also the president of the Roosevelt High National Honor Society, and a member of United Sound, and Tri-M Music Honor Society.

A copy of the book, *Girl Rising: Changing the World One Girl at a Time* (by author Tanya Lee Stone) was given to each awardee.

The Trenton and Downriver Area Soroptimist organization meets on the second Tuesday of the month at the Woodhaven Community Center, and the fourth Tuesday at various local restaurants. All women are welcome to attend. You may contribute to the foundations that the Soroptimists support on [krogercommunityrewards.com](https://www.krogercommunityrewards.com). If you are interested in learning more about the Trenton and Downriver Area Soroptimists and our other activities, check out our page on Facebook@SoroptimistInternationalOfTrentonAndDownriverArea or sioftrentonanddownriverarea@gmail.com.