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Local alumnae chapter finds new way to honor scholars, public servants

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Members of Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, Inc., a public service sorority focused on sisterhood, scholarship, and service. First Row: L-R Dana Foddrell, Arthena Roper, Erica Logan (President), Dr. Delores Foster, Dr. Sandra Foddrell, C. Carolyn Togans. Second Row: L-R Carla Hunter, Sharron Steele, Kimberley Crockett, Esq., Cheryl Roberts, Angela Brown, and Tamara Togans.

Submitted photo

MARTINSBURG — Six high school seniors and four community members were recently honored by the members of the Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.

EPAC hosts its Jazz Brunch and Silent Auction annually in April to publicly honor its award recipients. This year, with the impact of Covid-19, EPAC canceled its yearly event but found a new way to recognize the achievements of this year's awards recipients.

On June 15, EPAC honored the awardees by recognizing these distinguished individuals in a short video presentation that went live on the social media platform YouTube. The video is now growing in “likes” and being “shared” on other platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

Specifically, EPAC awarded two, \$1,000 scholarships and four, \$500 book scholarships to deserving senior scholars living within the Eastern Panhandle. EPAC also honored community servants with awards given in the areas of Arts and Letters, Education, Community Service, and the Friend of EPAC.

Receiving the \$1,000 scholarships were Alexis Edwards of Jefferson High School and Mary Bishop of Musselman High School. Edwards is the daughter of Regina Hostter and Allen Edwards. She holds a 3.64 GPA and has plans to attend college at Shepherd University in the fall where she will study nursing. Bishop is the daughter of Michelle and Peter Bishop. She holds a 4.38 GPA and has plans to attend Fairmont State University in the fall where she will also study nursing.

The four, \$500 book scholarships, were awarded to Carter Warhurst, Jamison Matthews, Emma Stover and Diana Ruiz Velasquez. Warhurst is a senior at Jefferson High School with a GPA of 4.25, who plans to study English at Shepherd University. Matthews is a senior at Hedgesville High School with a GPA of 4.20, who plans to study Physical Therapy at Fairmont State University. Stover is a senior at Washington High School with a GPA of 3.87, who plans to study Education at Fairmont State University. Ruiz Velasquez is a senior at Martinsburg High School with a GPA of 4.14. She plans to study Business and has been accepted to WVU and Shepherd University.

The Arts and Letters Award is given to an individual who has brought cultural awareness to Berkeley and Jefferson County through their talent or appreciation of the arts. This year’s award recipient is Jane Rissler.

Director of the Jefferson County Museum located in Charles Town, Rissler has been a true change agent and champion for black history in Jefferson County. The museum has been transformed since her arrival in 2011, and is now more inclusive of the black experience. Rissler also created an African-American Advisory Committee for the museum, and partnered with the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC to lend it the Green-Copeland American Legion Post flag for display through December.

EPAC gives the Educator Award to an individual who has made a significant contributions in education beyond the normal job responsibilities that directly impacts EPAC's service area. This year's award recipient is Dr. Veronique Walker.

Dr. Walker has spent over 20 years as an educator, child advocate, and champion for diversity and inclusion. She currently serves as Associated Superintendent of Equity and Inclusion for Berkeley County Schools. In this leadership role, she leads and oversees programs benefiting students and professional staff. Since her tenure with Berkeley County Schools, she has organized or helped to organize over 150 trainings addressing areas like professional growth, multiculturalism and anti-harassment campaigns.

EPAC gives its Service Award to any individual, group or business that performs service or demonstrates significant support of public service efforts in the community through monetary funding, donation of services, endorsements or sponsorships. This year, EPAC has awarded two Service Awards.

This years' Service Award in Berkeley County was awarded to The Children's Home Society of West Virginia. CHS is a private, non-profit child welfare organization whose mission is to promote the well-being of children. Programs include adoption, foster care, in-home and in-community services for

children and families, emergency shelter care, mediation, parent education training, prenatal and early childhood services, volunteerism and mentoring, school based social work, day care and comprehensive assessment services.

EPAC has partnered with the CHS on service initiatives in the past. Key leaders in its Martinsburg office have been ardent supporters of EPACs events and initiatives, including Victoria Slater-Madert and Celestine Boyd.

In Jefferson County the Service Award is awarded to a group of concerned African-American women led by Linda Downing Ballard, who called for the removal of a plaque placed on the Jefferson County Courthouse by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

The plaque honored soldiers of the Confederacy who fought and died in the Civil War. The women proposed to take the plaque down and with pressure on local leadership, the plaque was relocated to a non-public place. The outcome was recognized, not as a tactic to erase history, but rather a compromise of all involved parties, taking into account the sensitivity of all Jefferson County residents.

Finally, the Friend of EPAC Award is special to EPAC because it is given to an individual or group that has facilitated EPAC public service initiatives or shown significant support of EPAC-sponsored programs and events. This year's award was given to Fisherman's Hall.

Originally built in 1885, Fisherman's Hall served as an educational meeting space for the black community in the aftermath of the Civil War. It was built by a group of black men who wanted to start a benevolent society that would teach former slaves about things like banking and health.

Established by the Grand United Order of the Galilean Fisherman, Fisherman's Hall became one of the first buildings of its kind in the nation. During its prime, the center was surrounded by black leaders who supported the community and were dedicated to empowering others. Fisherman's Hall secured funding from an America's Treasures grant through the National Park Service, and along with grants from the governor's community participation program and donations from area organizations and its members, it has been restored.

EPAC has been a beneficiary of these restoration efforts. EPAC has used the community space to host its monthly chapter meetings, monthly mentoring activities, election/candidate forums, and expungement workshops. The community space currently hosts a number of meetings from a variety of organizations including American Public University Systems and the city of Charles Town.

The President of EPAC, Erica Logan, shared with our staff that, “EPAC was very disappointed it had to cancel the Jazz Brunch this year, but we certainly did not want to miss an opportunity to recognize student leaders and community servants whose efforts improve the quality of our community.”

Next year’s Jazz Brunch and Silent Auction is scheduled for April 17, 2021. To watch the video in full visit the Facebook page of Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter.