

Closing the Gap Awards Will Honor Race Relations Progress

New Detroit will honor achievements in improving race relations on Wednesday, June 18 at the Detroit Opera House. The tenth annual Closing the Gap awards dinner will be chaired by Bill Taubman, chief operating officer of The Taubman Company.

“We are very pleased to honor these achievements in race relations. These recipients are leaders in their fields and will inspire others to be innovative and aggressive in achieving racial progress,” said Shirley R. Stancato, New Detroit’s president and chief executive officer.

The 2008 Closing the Gap honorees are:

Corporate Award

ArvinMeritor, Inc., the Troy-based automotive supplier

Individual Award

Dr. David DiChiera, the founder and general director of the Michigan Opera Theatre, based in Detroit

Community Organization Award

Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit

In 2004 ArvinMeritor opened a new \$40 million Detroit Technology Center for production of Light Vehicle Systems. Located in Detroit’s Southwest/Delray area, this assembly plant for sunroofs and suspension modules has meant a major economic boost for this community. The facility employs 450 hourly and salaried workers, who hold production, professional and management level positions. Eighty percent of the plant’s employees live in the immediate area, neighborhoods with large numbers of Latino and African American residents.

In addition, ArvinMeritor has developed a strong partnership with nearby Southwestern High School and participates with the Southwest Detroit/Fort Street Business Association. ArvinMeritor has brought jobs and capital investment to this multi-racial Detroit neighborhood.

Dr. David DiChiera is a nationally-respected

cultural leader who has expanded the racial boundaries of opera through casting, programming and audience development at the Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT). The opera company, which he founded in 1971, received national acclaim for its commission and co-production of *Margaret Garner*, based on Nobel laureate Toni Morrison’s book, *Beloved*.

Dr. DiChiera has consistently championed African American singers. He is well-respected for strong community outreach across racial lines and innovative music education programs for disadvantaged youth. His successful strategies are evident—12 percent of the MOT’s audience is African American, more than three times the national average.

Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit was founded in 1992, when most Detroit Public Schools eliminated arts education due to budget cuts. Mosaic empowers young people, primarily African American, through professional performing arts training and the creation of high-quality theatrical and musical performances. Mosaic annually reaches 100 young people from age 12 to 18 who are members of the Mosaic Youth Ensemble, as well as



Dr. David DiChiera

1,000 additional youth aged 6 to 18 who are enrolled in beginning and intermediate programs. Mosaic members surpass other local students in educational achievement—95 percent complete high school and continue to college.

Through a rigorous rehearsal, class and performance schedule they gain valuable interpersonal and leadership skills. In addition, they develop a sense of community responsibility by performing in nursing homes, homeless shelters, juvenile detention centers, and hospitals. Mosaic has earned arts awards and has been selected to perform abroad.

Each year, the Closing the Gap awards inspire metropolitan Detroiters who are dedicated to racial progress, whatever their professional or personal background. This special dinner, New Detroit’s only fundraising event, provides sponsorship opportunities to support the coalition’s ongoing mission. Information is available by calling (313) 664-2006.



Mosaic Youth Theatre performers in “SING JUBILEE! The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers”
Credit: Andre Smith



ArvinMeritor relies on local residents for most of the workforce at its Detroit Technology Center in southwest Detroit.

New Detroit Presents Findings of the High School Innovation Network

Nearly one-third of all public high school students in the U.S., and nearly one-half of all African American, Latino and Native American youth, fail to graduate with their class. It’s a startling statistic and the dropout problem is particularly severe in southeastern Michigan.

“It is critical to the future success of Detroit, our region and the State of Michigan that young people attain the skill levels they need for the 21st century workplace. We must confront this crisis and when we do, I believe we will discover the opportunity to transform ourselves as a community,” said New Detroit President and CEO Shirley R. Stancato.

Last year, in response to the low graduation rates in Detroit schools, New Detroit convened a High School Innovation Network with financial support from The Skillman Foundation. The 40-person Network includes Detroit parents, teachers, administrators, union officials, and leaders of higher education and community-based organizations. They are committed to enhancing high school education so that more students will graduate and succeed in post-secondary education and employment.

The New Detroit team visited successful high schools in low income areas to learn how they engage students, improve academic performance and

reduce dropout rates. The site visits included New York and Chicago public schools because they have implemented several promising practices yielding positive academic trends and higher graduation rates over a two-year period.

The team’s site visits and data review identified five key strategies necessary for improving high schools:

- **Rigorous and supportive academic courses**, ideally in small schools, within districts that offer a wide selection of schools

- **Collaborative school leadership** with effective professional development and input from all stakeholders

- **Strong adult-student relationships** between students, counselors, mentors and others in a school environment where all feel safe

- **Public/Private Partnerships** between schools and a range of individuals and organizations that care about education

- **Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting** to provide objective, comprehensive information about student/school/district successes and challenges

New Detroit’s board was engaged and excited by the presentation of the High School Innovation Network report at the May board meeting. Presenters included: Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School

Academies; Connie Calloway, Ph.D., general superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools; Sidney Lee, treasurer of the Detroit Federation of Teachers and AFT – Michigan; and Sharon Johnson Lewis, educational consultant.

“Nothing we could talk about is more important than this—not gas prices, the economy or foreclosures,” said Quisenberry. “People ask, ‘Why can’t you just wave a magic wand and fix this?’ It is going to take every one in this room,” he said. He stressed that schools must focus on actions that will impact students, not adults, and recommended that principals should control budgets and personnel.

Sidney Lee, treasurer of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, thanked New Detroit for enabling her and the union to participate in the High School Innovation project. “Our children deserve the best, and so do our staffs,” she said.

Sharon Johnson Lewis, who was an educational consultant for the project, described how it grew out of research conducted for the Gates Foundation, which found that some students would have stayed in school if more was expected of them. She said that the school environment and safety were important factors in students’ decisions to complete high school, but that personal reasons were also important. Some students

dropped out because they became parents or had family obligations.

Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Superintendent Dr. Connie Calloway spoke about some of her goals for the system—no more than 22 students per class, physical and fine arts education in every building, and adequate planning time for teachers. “One of the hopeful aspects is that organizations such as yourselves realize the importance of education,” she said.

In Dr. Calloway’s view, school level leadership is the most important element in successful schools. She found that the DPS lacked a “common language of success and failure” and that metrics have now been implemented to provide comprehensive, useful data about achievement levels.

Following the presentation, New Detroit Chairman John Rakolta, Jr. commented that Dr. Calloway has “the toughest job in the State of Michigan” and offered her New Detroit’s assistance. Board members engaged in a spirited discussion, expressing strong interest in helping to implement the report. This project was made possible by the generous support of The Skillman Foundation. Visit www.newdetroit.org to view the High School Innovation Report.



By Shirley R. Stancato

It is shocking but true—35 schools in southeastern Michigan have dropout rates of 40 percent or higher. This is a national problem but unfortunately, our region is a “leader” when it comes to high school dropout rates.

The results of the dropout problem are tragic—for the young people, their families and the communities in which they live. As dropouts, their potential for future success is severely limited because most jobs, vocational and technical training, and college require a high school diploma.

We all have a role to play in addressing this problem and a stake in its outcome. Recently, New Detroit, the Detroit Regional Chamber and United Way for Southeastern Michigan, were the co-conveners for the One D Dropout Prevention Summit. This event was presented in partnership with America’s Promise, The Skillman Foundation and the Detroit Parent Network.

Local and state school and union officials, as well as representatives from large

urban districts around the country, and experts from universities and nonprofit organizations, provided insights about the problem and potential solutions. Young people offered their perspectives. We heard about successful school turn-arounds in other regions which have overcome the barriers of low income, aging schools and large class size.

We were encouraged by their achievements and will learn from their strategies and tactics. I was impressed by the degree of commitment from the Summit participants from our region—both public and private sector. They are determined to meet this challenge and New Detroit, along with One D, will work together on behalf of our young people.

New Detroit has been an active advocate for quality education in Detroit for 40 years—supporting adequate school finance, educational innovation, parental and community involvement—all to promote educational achievement. Our current High School Innovation Project has brought together nearly 40 community stakeholders to investigate models for effective high schools that will keep students engaged through graduation. We must undertake new educational approaches because we cannot allow so many young people to forfeit their future.

Shirley R. Stancato was recently chosen as a Michiganian of the Year by The Detroit News.

New Detroit Participates in White House Summit

New Detroit was honored to be chosen as one of 12 nonprofit organizations nationwide to participate in a benchmarking summit sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI). The summit enabled larger nonprofits, such as New Detroit, to share their best practices in teaching management skills to smaller community-based organizations.

“We were very pleased at this recognition for New Detroit’s capacity-building achievements. We have helped many local organizations gain strength and stability so that they can better fulfill

their individual missions, primarily serving communities of color,” said New Detroit President and CEO Shirley R. Stancato.

Sonia Plata, New Detroit’s director of Community Capacity Building, was selected by CFBCI to discuss organizational change management. New Detroit helps small nonprofits assess their organization and plan improvements in such key areas as fund development, programming and financial management. “These are organizations that make the choice to change by investing their time to learn, grow and adapt in this challenging environment,” explained Plata.

Our Mission



“To work as the coalition of Detroit area leadership, addressing the issue of race relations by positively impacting issues and policies that ensure economic and social equity.”

Emerging Leaders Explore Race Relations with Local High School Students

Forty high school students recently spent a day exploring black and Jewish history in northwest Detroit, led by New Detroit’s Emerging Leaders. The Emerging Leaders Initiative was begun in 2006 to build relationships among young African American and Jewish leaders and to increase their knowledge about race-related issues. The goal is to develop a network of knowledgeable leaders committed to improving the region’s race relations. An earlier generation of Jewish and African American leaders worked together closely during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

The Emerging Leaders, whose ages generally range from 22 to 40, believe that they lacked an opportunity for interracial interaction when they were teenagers. They want to ensure that today’s young people will have the experience of knowing people of different races and religions. As a first step, the Emerging Leaders planned a day of cross-racial learning and interaction for local teenagers, focusing on northwest Detroit because of its history as a Jewish and now African American neighborhood.

The students came from Oak Park, Seaholm, Mumford, and the University of Detroit Jesuit high schools. The program was held at the City of Detroit’s Northwest Activities Center, formerly the Jewish Community Center. Following “ice breaker” activities, the group took a bus tour of northwest Detroit that included landmark African American churches, some of which were once synagogues, schools, retail areas, and the wall that once divided black and white neighborhoods. Tour leaders included Dewitt Dykes, professor of history at Oakland University, and Arnie Collens and Alan

Zemmol, presenters from the Jewish Historical Society.

The tour presenters explained that deed restrictions often prevented blacks and Jews from buying homes in some subdivisions until a 1948 court ruling made these covenants illegal. However, federal agencies would not provide government-backed home mortgages in mixed neighborhoods. In response, a wall was built separating black and white areas between Pembroke and Eight Mile Road. With that separation, Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) mortgages were then permitted. Today a remnant of the wall remains, decorated with colorful murals.

“In today’s society, we still have the wall. It is a mental wall,” said Jason Lee, executive director of DAPCEP and an Emerging Leader, who helped plan the event. One of the high school participants added, “It is not about where you live. It is about how people conduct themselves.”

Following the tour, students discussed the current racial environment. Several criticized “stereotypes put out by the media.” One student said, “We want to live in a world that is devoid of racism, sexism, violence. We want to believe that everything has changed. Racism and sexism are concealed.” The young people expressed a strong interest in additional joint programs.

Later in the afternoon, alumni from Mumford and Oak Park high schools met for a reception and dinner, sharing memories and high school year books.

The Emerging Leaders Initiative is funded by The Jewish Fund with other Jewish organizations serving as partners.

New Detroit and Partners Present Genealogist Darius A. Gray

New Detroit, in partnership with the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, pre-

sented Darius A. Gray, renowned author and genealogist, who spoke about “Blacks in the Bible.” Gray is co-director of the Freedman Bank Project, co-



Event sponsors and participants included: Bishop Bill Geiger, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; David J. Fike, Ph.D., Marygrove College; New Detroit President and CEO Shirley R. Stancato; Darius A. Gray, author and genealogist; Rev. Dr. Marsha Foster Boyd, Ecumenical Theological Seminary; and New Detroit Chairman John Rakolta, Jr.

host of the “Questions and Ancestors” television program, and a participant in the PBS series “Ancestors.” Gray introduced an enthusiastic audience to the role of blacks in the Bible, which provides the earliest genealogical record for black bloodlines.

Leadership Summit on Race Is Planned

New Detroit will hold its second invitational Leadership Summit on Race from October 12 to 14, 2008 at the Detroit Marriott Renaissance. The first Summit, held in 2006, brought together 300 leaders from southeast Michigan.



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