



**FOR RELEASE AFTER 8PM**

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## **Ten Area Women Honored at YWCA *Tribute to Women* Celebration**

*36 Years of Honoring Sioux Falls Area Women*

On Thursday, April 2, the YWCA of Sioux Falls celebrated the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of honoring local women with its *Tribute to Women* event at the Washington Pavilion of Arts and Science.

The special evening format of the area's premier recognition event for women honored more than 40 nominees – and 10 winners – in the categories of Administrative Professional, Banking & Finance, Education, Government & Law, Healthcare & Human Services, Nonprofit Service, Sales & Marketing, Science & Technology, Executive Leadership and the Sylvia Henkin Mentoring Award.

In 1974, Sylvia Henkin, well known as Sioux Falls' greatest cheerleader, had a vision for recognizing the outstanding contributions of women in our community. Her commitment to the YWCA on the local and national levels, which has since spanned several decades, helped her fashion a YWCA-led event where the community would come together to celebrate women's successes. The *YWCA LeaderLuncheon* was born. Last year, this event grew into an evening spectacular entitled *Tribute to Women*.

"The generous support of our sponsors and guests help us continue to strengthen our goal of helping working parents; especially working women in our community," said Laurie Knutson, CEO of the YWCA of Sioux Falls. "Tribute to Women honors amazing local women, while showcasing the YWCA mission of supporting women, children and families with affordable childcare, youth camps and sports and helping refugee and immigrant women start a new life."

More than 400 nominees, nominators, YWCA members, volunteers, business people and family members enjoyed the reception, silent auction and awards program at the annual event. Proceeds will support YWCA's childcare programs, scholarships for children's camps and sports programs, and support for refugee and immigrant women in our community. The event was sponsored by Avera McKennan with support from Argus Leader Media and a number of other Sioux Falls area businesses.

### *About the YWCA Sioux Falls*

*The YWCA of Sioux Falls was chartered in 1922 by a group of women and the Sioux Falls Ministerial Association, "for the betterment of women." Today, the YWCA is an active community partner offering quality and affordable programs, services, and opportunities as the recognized source for meeting the needs of women and their families.*

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**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
**ywca**

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**2009 Tribute to Women Winners**

***Administrative Professional - Doreen Pospisil, Sanford Health***

Doreen Pospisil is often the first “Sanford voice” many people encounter, and coworkers say she does this in a very welcoming and pleasant manner. Her days are busy supporting more than one Executive at Sanford Health, and she is praised for her competence, willingness to take on new challenges and her positive attitude. Since July of last year, she has continued her work and encouraging others even while undergoing treatment for Stage 4 lung cancer. Despite a dire diagnosis, her faith brought her to a declaration of remission just three months later, and she went on sharing her enthusiasm at work and through music as a singer with South Dakota Acoustic Christmas.

***Banking and Finance - Deana Larson, Wells Fargo Financial Bank***

By leading community development efforts, Deana Larson has helped address some of the state’s most important issues such as affordable housing, financial literacy and downtown revitalization. She is guided by the belief that when we strengthen communities, everyone benefits. She has worked with housing development projects in Sioux Falls, Habitat for Humanity projects on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, and also helped introduce Wells Fargo’s interactive financial education program to classrooms, teachers and students across the state.

***Education - June Larson, USD School of Health Sciences***

Through her roles as a full professor and assistant dean of the School of Health Sciences at the University of South Dakota, June Larson is a true advocate for the nursing profession. She secured a substantial federal grant to make nursing curriculum available to students in remote rural areas through the Intranet and to create and integrate culturally appropriate materials throughout the curriculum. She is a leader in state and national nursing advisory groups and led USD’s Department of Nursing to be one of three inaugural nursing education programs in the nation to be selected for designation as a NLN Center of Excellence for creating environments that enhance student learning and professional development.

***Government and Law - Kristine O’Connell, Woods Fuller Shultz & Smith, P.C.***

When she started her career, Kristine O’Connell was the second female attorney hired at her firm. Today, she is the senior female attorney at the firm and in 2008 was selected as the Attorney of the Year by the Women in Law organization at the University of South Dakota Law School. She is held in high regard by her colleagues, and she actively mentors and coaches new lawyers within the firm. She often draws upon previous experience as a critical care nurse as she practices law in the areas of healthcare, family, insurance, litigation, personal injury, government and employment law. She is an active participant in several legal and civic associations, and her colleagues praise her for her genuine caring spirit, dedication and professionalism.

***Healthcare & Human Services - Ruth Krystopolski, Sanford Health***

Ruth Krystopolski started the first integrated health plan and grew it to be one of the largest health insurance companies in the tri-state region. She has also spearheaded efforts in the areas of worksite wellness and connecting employees throughout the area to state and federal programs and resources they need to address social, financial and emotional concerns in these trying times. Most recently, she took on the challenge of a new realm of healthcare – research – and is orchestrating a research initiative that will benefit our local community, our country and even in locations abroad. With her new role taking her around the world, sometimes to areas unfamiliar with female leadership, she has learned to navigate and adapt to the social expectations necessary to cultivate trusting, productive and professional relationships.

**Non-Profit Service - Amy Sumner, Children's Miracle Network**

Amy Sumner joined the Children's Miracle Network eight years ago, and both colleagues and CMN families say she has infused new life and energy into the program, which has resulted in a significant increase in dollars raised and a positive impact on the lives of even more children and their families. People who know her say she does not see obstacles like others do – that she creates opportunities from barriers because she believes the kids they serve deserve her best efforts. One CMN mom expressed gratitude that Amy treats the children's families like family – always with the child's best interest at heart.

**Sales and Marketing - Della Jeffries, Blue Cross Blue Shield**

Della Jeffries grew up on a South Dakota reservation in very challenging circumstances. Forced to sell the commodity foods her family desperately needed caused her much anguish. That fact that she is now in sales field as a career is a testament to her belief in her company and the strength of character to overcome adversity. Her determination drove her to graduate from high school – then college – and obtain a job where she stayed for nearly two decades. Today, she works in business development for Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, building relationships with business clients to determine the products that meet their needs. She also commits dozens of hours each month with Wellmark's Inclusion and Diversity Council.

**Science and Technology - Meena Jaggi, PhD, Cancer Biology Research Center at Sanford Research**

Meena Jaggi is an associate scientist at the Cancer Biology Research Center with Sanford Research/USD, where she focuses on prostate cancer research. Her goals are to develop better methods for early prostate cancer diagnosis and improve methods for prostate cancer treatment. In spite of suffering a stroke while delivering her last child in 2008, she created history by publishing two papers in last month's issue of *Cancer Research*, a number one journal in the field of cancer research – the first South Dakotan to ever do so. Her passion for research has been her biggest strength in her personal recovery from stroke.

**Executive Leadership - Becky Nelson, Sanford Health**

As senior vice president and chief operating officer, Becky Nelson has expanded her responsibilities to oversee the strategic and integrated clinical operations of the entire Health Services Division for Sanford Health, which includes the Sanford USD Medical Center and all clinics and hospitals in the health network. She served as the hospital's first woman president and has been credited with leading the development of five clinical centers of excellence, a surgical tower and the new Sanford Children's Hospital. Service excellence is a high priority for Becky as she seeks to reach the hearts of patients through the souls of Sanford employees and physicians.

**Sylvia Henkin Mentoring Award - Carole Pagonos, Main Street Sioux Falls**

Carole Pagonos first arrived in the public eye in Sioux Falls almost 20 years ago, and it didn't take long for her to be referred to as the "mother of downtown Sioux Falls." Throughout her professional and personal life, she has served as an example of positive leadership at the local and state levels. Carole has always shown the ability to coalesce the ideas of remarkably different groups into a community ideal supported by all. She has never turned down an opportunity to serve, humbly sharing her broad public policy, education and business experience with others. Her energy and ideas have been contagious, inviting business owners, volunteers, city officials and consumers to jump on her bandwagon and bring life to downtown Sioux Falls.