

Assemblyman Tom Alfano hosted his 3rd annual "Women of Distinction" awards celebration in the Elmont community today at Dutch Broadway School where over 500 people jammed the Dutch gymnasium to pay tribute to outstanding women who have made a difference in the community or through the professions. The awards program is the third installment hosted by Alfano that has grown each year.

"This is a day where we say thank you and celebrate the work that women do, not only in the Elmont community but in professional endeavors. I host this event to promote community awareness and to show the outstanding work that women do in all areas and walks of life. We have nurses, doctors, correction officers, community volunteers, PTA members, teachers and entrepreneurs. Each of them has made a difference and is a role model for our young people to look to," said Assemblyman Alfano.

In this installment of the program, Assemblyman Alfano tapped Latin Long Island Magazine Managing Editor Maria Morales-Prieto as his keynote speaker. Morales-Prieto is a guest columnist to Long Island Business News and Divina.Com as well as co-producer on the series 'The Cuban Americans' for PBS. Recently, Morales-Prieto sold a sitcom to FOX and produced her own publication entitled El Informal, which was dedicated to Cuban exiles around the globe.

Local student Billy Rothwell of Sewanhaka High School kicked-off the event with a thunderous rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" followed by Dutch Broadway School 4th grader and Jamaican Singer Jahnei Clarke who sang "God Bless America." The Haitian American Family Association Dancers performed a piece at the intermission celebrating diversity in the community.

The keynote speaker for the program, Maria Morales-Prieto, noted, "I am thrilled to have been asked by Assemblyman Alfano to serve as the keynote speaker at this year's Women of Distinction Awards Celebration, and am privileged to have been given the opportunity to address such a distinguished group of accomplished women who are making a difference every day by opening a new avenues and serving as role models to today's young people."

Aubrey Phillips, President of the Elmont Elementary School District School Board, said, "This event helps build our community and recognize the outstanding work that women throughout Elmont do each and every day. The people we honor today are role models and leaders. We

salute you.”

Elmont Inter-School PTA President Sandra Smith served as MC for the event. Joining her during the program were ECAP President Cheryl Lee, former honorees Judy Van Haaren, Theresa Weston-Morris, School Board Member Pamela Monteverde, School District Liaison Norma DeBartolo and Elmont Memorial High School student Jessica Diaz.

“This awards celebration has become an important part of the Elmont community. It recognizes women for their contributions and it motivates all of us to give a little more and to be even better role models for our young people. Assemblyman Alfano’s idea has turned into a great community building cornerstone,” said MC Sandra Smith.

This year’s “Women of Distinction” program had several sponsors who made the day a special one for the honorees and community at large. Coca-Cola, CHASE Bank, Martino’s Pizza, Home Depot, Sandy’s Party Supply, 1-800 Tuxedo.com, the Elmont Elementary Teacher’s Association, Manoussos and Associates Law Firm, Fine Fruits & More and Affinity Health Care have donated their services.

“Each of the esteemed honorees has been recognized for their proven leadership, outstanding abilities, and gracious willingness to share their knowledge and expertise in order to make a difference in the lives of others,” said Governor George Pataki.

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton also noted, “this ceremony celebrates the accomplishments of the many extraordinary women in the Elmont community. All of these women have demonstrated their dedication to their community through their unwavering commitment to community service through both volunteer and professional activities.”

Before the ceremony, Alfano hosted a special coffee-hour with the honorees to personally thank them for their service and work in the professions. The coffee also gave the opportunity for speakers to meet the honorees and “network”; as one honoree billed the get-together.

The program kicked-off with young men in tuxedos escorting the honorees into the gym as their names were called. Dr. John Williams, Superintendent of the Sewanhaka High School District, School Board President Aubrey Phillips, Dutch Broadway Principal Walter Aksionoff and Elmont Memorial High School Principal John Cappozzi welcomed everyone to the third annual event.

This year's program had a new addition to the format. Assemblyman Alfano instituted his 1st Annual "Sandra Day-O'Connor Award" for trailblazing leadership. The award is named after recently retired US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day-O'Connor. Alfano developed the award to recognize outstanding leadership and skills in uniting people, consensus building and promoting opportunity. The 1st annual award was presented this year to Dr. Maria Palandra by Alfano. "Maria is a trailblazer in empowering young people and families to strive for their dreams and getting the very best possible education. She led by example and is an inspiration to many throughout the community. I'm very proud to present this honor to this truly deserving leader."

The honorees for the third annual "Women of Distinction" are:

- Anne Levin, Covert Avenue PTA 1st VP, Elmont North LL, Sewanhaka Football Booster Club and VP Sewanhaka HS PTA
- Helen Fries, Elmont Fire Department EMT and EMT teacher
- Joan Montgomery, Covert Avenue PTA, Boy Scout Leader St. Vincent DePaul troop, Sewanhaka Class Reunion Committee, Elmont School District Staff 27 years
- Pat Marshall, local entrepreneur and music teacher
- Angelina DiMarco, GYO staff member and Argo Civic Leader
- Heather Moses-Clarke, RN at Alden Terrace School and church volunteer
- Cathy Negron, Elmont Cardinals Football and Elmont South Baseball
- Bibi Karim, Gotham Avenue PTA, Customs Broker JFK Airport
- Michelle Duroseau, RN, community and church volunteer
- Sheila Shell, VP JP Morgan Chase Treasury Services, Dutch Broadway PTA
- Sandra Fox, educator and President of Elmont Jewish Center
- Theodora Ridley, NYC Board of Ed Early Childhood, Professor at Touro College, VP-Dutch Broadway PTA
- Tiria Onwuchekwa, Project Mgr Revitalization and Rehab for blighted communities and Publishing Company Co-Owner
- Tracey McKeller. Former Police Officer, Child Protective Specialist Advocate and Elmont Cardinals Board member
- Dr. Marsha Darling, Professor Adelphi University, PBS Consultant
- Sharon Woitko, PTA President at EMHS, coach, religious educator and volunteer
- Dr. Karen Green, basketball coach, clinical psychologist and SKIP program originator
- Lora Pitkin, Gotham Avenue PTA President, Home Health Care Aide

- Diana Delahanty, community volunteer, PTA advocate and church organizer
- Maria Probst, Church Volunteer, Food and Clothing Drive Coordinator and School Attendant
- Sybilla Daniel-Douglas, RN at Brookdale Hospital and Treasurer of Parkhurst Civic Association
- Louvenia Banks, Asst Director of ECAP, Parkhurst Civic Exec Bd, Retired US Treasury Department
- Denise Byfield-Aboagye, teacher, President of Jamaica Square Improvement League
- Sandy Figueroa, Professor, Chairperson of Business Dept at Hostos College, Eucharistic Minister at St. Boniface Church, Argo Civic Secretary
- Elizabeth Gilbert, Former President of Nassau County Council VFW, 50 year member of VFW, volunteer St. Albans Medical Center
- Mariana Andersen, Clara H. Carlson and Sewanhaka PTA, St. Vincent DePaul Outreach volunteer, East End Civic Association volunteer
- Ellen Jackson, Corrections Guard at Rikers Island and Elmont Cardinals Football League Board of Director
- Tania Lawes, ECAP volunteer, NYC Foster Care Social Work, Trinity Lutheran Church Manager
- Adele Weremeychik, Teacher Aide Dutch Broadway School, Tech Asst, AARC volunteer, Chairperson in Boy Scouts of America
- Rosalie Spiridigliozzi, Stewart Manor PTA Co-President, Treasurer Inter-School PTA, Central Council Delegate, Girls Scouts Volunteer
- Loren Brereton, Teacher Clara H. Carlson School, Bulldogs Basketball, Girl Scout Leader, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Fundraising Chair of Jack and Jill of Nassau County
- Rhonda DeFreitas, RN Nursing Supervisor of North Shore LIJ, Clara H. Carlson volunteer, PTA central council delegate
- Louise Graham, Religious Teacher, Girl Scout Leader, Softball Coach, Worked at Elmont Bowlaire, Carlson PTA member
- Cathy Fritz, President Carlson PTA, Religious Teacher at St. Vincent DePaul

The ceremony concluded when Dutch Broadway student Jahnei Clarke, sang "The Star Bangle Banner" to a rousing ovation. A post ceremony reception was held on the Dutch Broadway School lawn to congratulate the honorees. "This is Elmont. Everybody has come together to pay tribute to real leaders in every walk of life from the community. I'm really proud to have the privilege of serving such a dynamic community," Alfano concluded.

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