

Women honored for business excellence, community service

- Story
- Discussion

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They are women who balance outstanding careers with family and volunteerism.

Friends and colleagues call them innovators, mentors and community leaders.

Now, they can add another title, as new Athena Business Women's Award recipients.

Five Quad-City women — Lisa Brothers Arbisser, Kim Armstrong, Cheri Bustos, Linda Neuman and Dana Wilkinson— were honored Tuesday by the Illinois Quad-City Chamber of Commerce and The Women's Connection as 2009 Athena winners.

More than 250 people attended the luncheon at the i wireless Center in downtown Moline, where each of the winners credited their support system of family and friends for helping them succeed.

“These five honorees are a shining example to all aspiring leaders in their commitment to integrity, professionalism, innovation, mentoring and giving back to the community,” said Colleen Rafferty, executive director of The Women's Connection.

This is the fourth year for the Athena awards, with a total of 19 women recognized through the program so far, including the newest honorees:

* Dr. Lisa Brothers Arbisser, co-founder of Eye Surgeons Associates, P.C. A world-renowned cataract surgeon, Arbisser co-founded Eye Surgeons Associates with her husband, Dr. Amir Arbisser, 25 years ago. It since has grown to include five locations and a staff of more than 100.

Arbisser said she has completed many firsts in her career, including becoming the first Quad-City surgeon to offer outpatient cataract surgery, the first to use the Yag Laser, the first to introduce topical anesthesia using eye drops instead of injections and the first to introduce the no-stitch incision technique for surgery.

In addition to her practice, and service as an educator within her profession, she also has made numerous contributions to the Quad-City community in arts and education. She is a charter member and board chairman emeritus of the Davenport Schools Foundation; a member of the Presidents Club in support of Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa; serves on the ethics advisory board of Augustana College; among other volunteer work. She also is co-founder with her husband of the See Life Clearly Foundation to advance the quality and availability of eye care in the region.

“This is such an honor,” she said Tuesday, dedicating the Athena award to her partners and coworkers at Eye Surgeons Associates. “Thank you for this recognition.”

* Kim Armstrong, assistant dean of student support services at Black Hawk College, Moline. After growing up in a family of educators, Armstrong continues that legacy in her role at Black Hawk, providing administrative leadership for student engagement, enhancement and retention. She also provides focus to diversity and student leadership initiatives, as well as direct oversight of the Center for Elderly Learning.

She has mentored countless students, focusing on empowering young women through education. She has served on the Balm of Gilead National Black Church Awareness of HIV/AIDS, as an advocate for the mental health department; on the board of Churches United; on the board of trustees of Trinity Medical Center; as chairperson for the Target Neighborhood Committee for United Way, Success by 6; on the board of the United Way of the Quad-Cities Area; on the board of Bethany for Children and Families; on the board of the Girl Scouts of Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois; on the board of The Women’s Connection and other volunteer work.

“I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way,” she said as she accepted the award, thanking her colleagues and friends for lifting her up. “I am my sisters’ keeper and they are mine.”

* Cheri Bustos, vice president of public relations and communications, Iowa Health System. With a career that has included 17 years as a newspaper reporter and editor, seven years in health-care management and two years on the East Moline City Council, Bustos said she always commits herself to public service and a passion to make a difference.

In her current professional role, she oversees all marketing, communications and public relations for Iowa’s first and largest integrated health system.

She also works as an advocate for women’s leadership and health. She is founder of the Iowa Outdoor Women’s Association in Des Moines; on the board of directors for the Iowa Sports Foundation; on the board of directors for the Iowa Statewide Poison Control Center; on the board of directors for the YMCA of Greater Des Moines and vice president of the Women’s Connection board of directors. She also volunteers for Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Junior Achievement, Skip-A-Long Child Development Services board of directors and other organizations.

“My parents never placed any limits on my hopes and dreams,” Bustos said, adding that her father always tells her, “Help the helpless.”

* Linda Neuman, retired member of the Iowa Supreme Court, attorney at law. A retired Quad-City lawyer and judge, Neuman made history in 1986 when then-Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad appointed her as the first woman to serve on the Iowa Supreme Court.

Earlier in her career, she was a partner in the law firm Betty, Neuman, McMahon, Hellstrom and Bittner in Davenport. She also worked briefly as vice president and trust officer for Bettendorf Bank and Trust before her appointment in 1980 as a Scott County judicial magistrate, a part-time position that gave her the chance to balance her career and a growing family.

She was appointed District Court Judge for the 7th District of Iowa in 1982, before moving on to the Supreme Court. She retired from the bench in 2003, and now teaches courses in legal ethics and appellate courts at the

University of Iowa College of Law.

She also serves as a trustee for St. Ambrose University, on the community advisory committee for Augustana College Center for the Study of Ethics, a reader for the sight impaired and other community service.

“This award delights me greatly,” Neuman said, thanking the “wonderful people who have surrounded me and lifted me up and supported me.”

* Dana Wilkinson, founder and chief executive officer, Paragon Commercial Interiors in Davenport. In 1983, at the age of 26, Wilkinson was a young wife and mother — and a new business owner. She decided to start her own commercial interior design business, which is now known as Paragon. The business has grown to a staff of 15, and was awarded for its “Excellence in Commerce” by the Illinois Quad-City Chamber of Commerce, among other honors.

With a degree in interior design and experience gained working at a Chicago design firm, Wilkinson helped introduce the concept of corporate image to local businesses when she started the first-of-its-kind firm in the Quad-City area. Paragon has been involved in many large commercial construction projects in the Quad-Cities and worldwide, including India, Russia, China, Canada and Mexico.

As part of the architect selection committee for the Figge Art Museum, Wilkinson traveled the globe, meeting architects for the project. She then was chosen to serve as executive director of the Museum of Art Foundation, leading fundraising for the \$47 million building project.

Paragon donates interior design services to area non-profits, and Wilkinson serves on the board of directors of Gilda’s Club, is a member of the Trinity Foundation Board of Directors, vice chair of DavenportOne Downtown Partnership and board member of the Riverboat Development Authority, among other service.

“Thank you for promoting the success of women,” she said.