

Women of Distinction recognized

Three honorees highlighted for roles in community

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Journal photo by Ron Agnir

MARTINSBURG - A full house gathered Wednesday to recognize the 2011 Women of Distinction as selected by the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital. The program, begun in 2005 with seven initial honorees, welcomed three into the ranks of those chosen for their distinguished service, excellent leadership and their capacity to serve as role models for girls.

Berkeley County's Bernice Collis and Mary Hayward were joined by Jefferson County's Phyllis LeTart as the 2011 Women of Distinction. The women were selected from a significant number of nominees, according to former recipient Teresa McCabe. McCabe said that all of the honor's former winners gather to select the newest members to be added to their ranks. While the goal has been to aim for a recipient from each of the three counties, Jefferson, Berkeley and Morgan, McCabe said that sometimes it doesn't work out that way.

Collis, who is vice president of Minghini's General Contractors Inc., is the only one of this year's recipients who was a member of Girl Scouts. She is the former president of the Girl Scouts of Shawnee Council and serves on the board of the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital.

In addition, Collis is a member of the MVB Bank board of directors, the Martinsburg Rotary Club and was the first woman recognized by the chamber for the Leslie Golliday Business Person of the Year Award.

Hayward, regional sales manager with Susquehanna Bank, serves on the Martinsburg-Berkeley County Chamber of Commerce board of directors and is chairman of the Women's Networking Committee. She also serves on the American Cancer Society Board, the city of Martinsburg

Planning Committee, the War Memorial Park Committee, the Martinsburg Rotary Club and the Junior Civic League.

LeTart, vice president of legal and business affairs with Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races, has served in many ways in the short amount of time she has been in this area. She serves on Hospice of the Panhandle's board of directors, where she chairs the nominating committee. She also is a member of the personnel committee and sits on the Jefferson County Capital Campaign Committee. Before relocating to Jefferson County, LeTart was recognized by the AIDS Alliance in New Jersey for her volunteer work there.

Each of the women chosen were hesitant to sing their own praises prior to Wednesday's luncheon. They all referred to the experience of their selection as "humbling."

Collis explained that she saw the day's event as a privilege, since money was being raised to support Girl Scout programs.

"Scouting was very important in my life and in my sister's life," she shared.

LeTart agreed, saying, "It is less about honoring us as it is to ensure that there is support to Scouting, which helps offset many negatives in society."

Several of the 22 previous honorees were on hand to welcome Collis, Hayward and LeTart into what they see as a distinguished group of hardworking women. Diane Dailey, who was one of the original recipients in 2005 when the program was initiated, sees the Women of Distinction as a recognition of women in the community who have reached a balance in business and serving the community.

"It's all about balance," she said. "All of these women share one thing. They all genuinely like people, which makes it easy for them to get involved in the community."

Lidia Soto-Harmon, CEO of the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital, explained that each of the honorees is an excellent example to the Scouts in showing how important it is to give back to one's community as well as to be a success in one's profession. The event, which Soto-Harmon called an honor to continue, also provides a lesson to the Scouts who attend and learn about the accomplishments and sacrifices of the women who play a prominent role in their community.