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Outstanding Women Recognized in Spokane by Prestigious YWCA Award

YWCA Spokane Announces 2026 Women of Achievement Award Honorees

January 5, 2026 | Spokane, WA – YWCA Spokane proudly unveils its 2026 Women of Achievement Award Honorees!

Nine extraordinary women will be celebrated for their remarkable contributions to our community at the **Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon on Friday, March 6th, from 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM at the Davenport Grand.**

For 44 years, YWCA Spokane has honored women whose leadership, vision, and dedication have shaped Spokane for the better. These awards recognize not only professional success but also a deep commitment to giving back and creating lasting impact.

Honorees are selected through a rigorous, community-driven process. Public nominations are carefully reviewed by a diverse committee of YWCA Spokane board members, volunteers, and staff using an impartial scoring system. Each honoree stands out for her transformative influence and alignment with YWCA Spokane’s mission: **eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.**

Since its inception, the Women of Achievement Awards have celebrated **more than 300 trailblazing women**, shining a spotlight on the diverse contributions that make Spokane thrive. This year’s honorees continue that legacy by giving generously of themselves to ensure Spokane is a stronger, more inclusive place for everyone.

Join us in honoring these inspiring leaders and amplifying their stories. Together, we celebrate the power of women to create change.

The winners of the 2026 Women of Achievement Awards are:

- **Anesu Whacha**, Arts & Culture Award
- **Becky Rempe**, Business & Industry Award
- **Patricia Castaneda**, Carl Maxey Racial & Social Justice Award
- **Jaime Stacy**, Community Enhancement Award
- **Dr. Lori Hunt**, Education Award
- **Lisa Gardner**, Government and Public Service Award
- **Shadan Kapri**, Science, Technology & Environment Award
- **Autumn Kern**, Young Woman of Achievement Award
- **Dr. Gloria Aston-Baynes**, Lifetime Achievement

To learn more about the accomplishments and community impact of the 2026 award honorees, visit <https://ywcaspokane.org/2026-women-of-achievement-honorees/>

WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS CELEBRATION TO BE HELD FRIDAY, MARCH 6th.

Registration for YWCA Spokane's 2026 Women of Achievement Awards luncheon is available at <https://ywcaspokane.org/woa>. The event will be held in-person at The Davenport Grand on March 6th, 2026, from 11:00AM – 1:00PM.

Beyond celebrating these incredible honorees, the Women of Achievement Luncheon shines a spotlight on a critical issue—domestic violence in our community. This powerful event not only raises awareness about the epidemic affecting Spokane but also generates essential funding to sustain YWCA Spokane's life-changing support services for survivors.

Because of the incredible support of major event sponsors, Numerica Credit Union, AgWest Farm Credit, Hanna Agency, Hamilton Studio, Lamar Advertising, Washington Trust Bank, Kaiser Aluminum, and Avista, proceeds raised at the luncheon directly benefit YWCA's programs and services for those impacted by domestic violence, homelessness, and unemployment.

ABOUT YWCA SPOKANE

Since 1903, YWCA Spokane has been a vital resource in the community, helping individuals overcome social, economic, and personal barriers to achieve healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Today, areas of focus include supporting victims of intimate partner domestic violence, building economic empowerment, promoting early childhood education, and confronting racial and social justice issues affecting their clients and the community.

Each year, YWCA Spokane provides life-changing services to over 14,000 individuals, children, and families. Through a continuum of care, including a 24-hour helpline, safe shelter, and legal advocacy they work to disrupt cycles of trauma while creating pathways toward healing and independence.

YWCA Spokane envisions a community where domestic violence is no longer tolerated. By working at the intersections of inequality, poverty, and domestic violence, they aim to disrupt long-standing societal patterns of trauma. Learn more at ywcaspokane.org.

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2026 WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE BIOS

ANESU WHACHA | ARTS & CULTURE

Anesu Whacha is a dynamic leader whose accomplishments reflect the YWCA mission of eliminating racism and empowering women. Through her advocacy, creativity, and servant-leadership approach, she creates inclusive spaces that celebrate Black culture, uplift women, and dismantle barriers to equity. Her confidence and perseverance inspire those around her to persist and thrive, making her a beacon of empowerment in her school and community.

From her first days at Shadle Park High School, Anesu stepped into leadership with vision and purpose. Remarkably, she was elected Associated Student Body President during her first year—a testament to her ability to unite diverse student groups and foster collaboration. As President of the Black Student Union (BSU), she has expanded its reach beyond campus, organizing the inaugural “Letting Go” community reflection event to promote healing and dialogue within Spokane. These initiatives demonstrate her belief that leadership should unite rather than divide, creating spaces where every voice is valued.

Anesu’s influence extends beyond student government. As a columnist for *The Black Lens Youth Connection*, she uses her platform to confront discrimination and amplify Black voices, challenging bigotry while inspiring collective growth. Her writing reflects courage and clarity, tackling difficult issues with honesty and hope. Through thoughtful listening and decisive action, Anesu models what it means to empower others while working to eliminate racism.

Her accomplishments are as diverse as they are impactful. Anesu participates in wrestling and cross country, balancing athletics with academics and leadership roles. She serves in the MultiCare Junior Cope Program as she pursues her aspiration to become a pediatrician—a goal that underscores her deep care for others. In 2025, she was crowned the first Miss Juneteenth Spokane, a historic honor that highlights her pride in Black culture and her commitment to representing her community with grace and boldness.

Anesu’s strengths make her an extraordinary role model. She is a natural uniter—creative, strategic, and an excellent communicator. She turns innovative ideas into concrete action, delegates responsibilities effectively, and consistently prioritizes the well-being of others. Her ability to listen thoughtfully, express ideas clearly, and approach challenges with perseverance and tact sets her apart as a leader who uplifts everyone around her. Whether advocating for food security through the Bite 2 Go program, organizing community events, or mentoring peers, Anesu demonstrates integrity and a servant-leadership style that inspires trust and collaboration.

Her impact reaches Black and multicultural youth across Spokane. Through BSU leadership, participation in the Spokane NAACP Youth Council, and contributions to *The Black Lens*, she amplifies stories that challenge stereotypes and promote equity. Her work with Sister Circle, supported by The Links, Incorporated, nurtures

the social and emotional well-being of young women of color, while her advocacy for food security ensures that vulnerable students have access to basic needs.

Anesu Whacha is more than a student leader—she is a catalyst for inclusion, empowerment, and cultural celebration. Her accomplishments embody YWCA’s mission in every sense: dismantling racism, uplifting women, and fostering communities where all can thrive. With her vision, resilience, and servant heart, Anesu is shaping a future defined by equity, hope, and opportunity.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Anesu Whacha with the 2026 Arts & Culture Award.

BECKY REMPE | BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

Becky Rempe is a lifelong educator and champion for Spokane’s immigrant and refugee communities. Her journey began twenty-three years ago in Quy Nhon, Vietnam, where she taught English and discovered the transformative power of language in building bridges across cultures. Since then, Becky has taught at The Ohio State University, Columbus Literacy Council, Spokane Community Colleges, Eastern Washington University, and Whitworth University, shaping countless lives through education and mentorship.

Today, Becky serves as Director of Barton English Language School (BELS), a role she has held for the past six years. Under her leadership, Barton has become a vibrant hub of learning and belonging for multilingual learners. Becky works alongside dedicated volunteer teachers to identify and address the unique needs of immigrants and refugees, ensuring that language learning is accessible, practical, and empowering. Her vision extends beyond the classroom—she collaborates with local universities and nonprofits to connect students with housing, healthcare, and safety resources, creating a holistic support system for those navigating life in a new country.

Becky’s approach reflects the YWCA’s mission to eliminate racism and empower women. She has built programs that dismantle barriers and foster inclusion, such as free classes and childcare, a “Mommy and Me” program for mothers with infants, and bilingual online lessons for Afghan women who could not leave their homes. These initiatives ensure that women—often among the most vulnerable in resettlement—can access education without sacrificing safety or family responsibilities. Through partnerships with organizations like World Relief, Mujeres in Action, Manzanita House, and the International Rescue Committee, Becky amplifies immigrant voices and creates pathways for women to thrive.

Her leadership is marked by innovation and compassion. Becky has expanded Barton’s offerings to include medical English, citizenship study groups, TOEFL preparation, workplace readiness, and even English through song. She launched The Migratory Space, a podcast where immigrants share their stories, and helped create Community Language Clubs in collaboration with Manzanita House—spaces where cultures connect through conversation and cuisine. Under her guidance, Barton received the Partners in Community and Campus Engagement Innovation Award, a testament to her vision and impact.

Becky's strengths lie in her ability to combine professional expertise with cultural humility and creativity. Having lived abroad, she understands the courage it takes to learn a new language and culture, and that empathy shapes every decision she makes. She listens deeply, responds thoughtfully, and celebrates every milestone—whether it's a student passing a citizenship test or a volunteer discovering the joy of teaching. Her leadership style is relational and inclusive, fostering a sense of belonging for students and volunteers alike.

Beyond her professional work, Becky continues to learn and grow. She and her daughter are currently studying Spanish through Community Language Clubs, modeling the lifelong learning she encourages in others. Her guiding principle is simple yet profound: education is not just about curriculum—it's about human connection, dignity, and hope.

Through her work at Barton and her partnerships across Spokane, Becky Rempe has created more than a school—she has built a community where immigrants and refugees find safety, opportunity, and a sense of home. Her leadership exemplifies what it means to empower others, eliminate barriers, and nurture a future where diversity is celebrated and every voice matters.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Becky Rempe with the 2026 Business & Industry Award.

PATRICIA CASTANEDA | CARL MAXEY RACIAL & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Patricia (Pat) Castaneda lives the YWCA mission of eliminating racism and empowering women every single day. As a Latina immigrant, single mother, and community leader, Pat has faced the barriers of race, language, and identity—and transformed them into bridges for others to cross. Her life's work is rooted in the belief that every person deserves dignity, safety, and opportunity.

In 2021, Pat co-founded Manzanita House, a nonprofit dedicated to serving immigrants and refugees in Eastern Washington. Under her leadership, Manzanita House has grown from a small volunteer effort into a trusted regional organization with more than twenty staff and eighty volunteers. Today, it provides immigration legal services, resource navigation, and cultural programs to over 1,000 people annually, many of whom are women—mothers, and grandmothers who fled violence or instability and arrived here alone. Pat created spaces like *Women's Teatime*, where women gather to share tea, practice English, and build friendships that strengthen confidence and well-being. These programs do more than teach language; they restore hope and belonging.

Pat's leadership extends far beyond direct service. She chairs the Washington State Refugee Advisory Council, convened the Eastern Washington Refugee Coalition, and serves on the Hate Crimes and Violence Advisory Committee for the Attorney General's Office. Her advocacy has shaped statewide policy and funding for thousands of immigrants and refugees. She meets with elected officials, testifies before legislative committees, and ensures immigrant voices are heard in decisions that affect their lives. Her calm courage and unwavering persistence have earned her respect from lawmakers, nonprofit peers, and community members alike.

What sets Pat apart is not only what she accomplishes, but how she leads. She is a servant leader who listens deeply, shares power freely, and credits others before herself. Her humility, paired with intelligence and humor, makes people feel both grounded and inspired. Staff describe her as “the calm at the center of every storm.” She models inclusion as an everyday practice, building partnerships with more than sixty organizations and creating a board that reflects global diversity—from Bhutan to Guatemala, Pakistan to Indigenous communities.

Pat’s impact ripples far beyond Spokane. Through Manzanita House, she has served immigrants and refugees from more than 70 countries, including people of color, survivors of war, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, and elders who once felt invisible. Her work transforms isolation into inclusion, fear into hope. She empowers women to find their voices, uplifts emerging leaders, and advocates tirelessly for justice.

Pat is proof that love, lived experience, and persistence can change systems that once shut people out. She meets fear with courage, bureaucracy with determination, and inequity with vision. To know Pat is to understand what true leadership looks like—leadership rooted in compassion, integrity, and a deep belief in others. Through her work, thousands of families now see Spokane not just as a place to live, but as a place to belong.

Patricia Castaneda is more than a leader; she is a builder of bridges, a protector of rights, and a beacon of hope. She embodies the YWCA mission in action and invites all of us to rise with her.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Patricia Castaneda with the 2026 Carl Maxey Racial & Social Justice Award.

JAIME STACY | COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT

Jaime Stacy is an educator, author, and visionary leader whose work is transforming lives and communities across Spokane. As the Founder and Executive Director of SWAG—Strong Women Achieving Greatness, Jaime has mentored and empowered more than 1,000 young women since 2017. Through SWAG, she creates safe, supportive spaces for girls to explore leadership, self-confidence, and goal-setting while breaking down systemic barriers. Her programs partner with organizations across Spokane—including YWCA Spokane—to provide resources, experiences, and hope for young women as they define and pursue their own success.

Jaime’s commitment to equity and empowerment extends far beyond her classroom. She serves as Vice President of the NAACP Spokane Branch, where she advocates for racial justice and community unity. Her leadership across Spokane has included serving on the Board of Girl Scouts of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho, as a member of Delta Kappa Gamma Spokane, and on the Mead Citizens Advisory Committee. In 2021, Jaime made history as the first African American woman to run for the Mead School Board, amplifying conversations about inclusion and anti-bullying initiatives. She also founded Hope Rising in Mead, a community group dedicated to fostering hope and connection.

Her impact has earned widespread recognition. Jaime is the recipient of the Trendsetter Award as an Emerging Leader in the Inland Northwest, PICCE's 2024 Community Innovator of the Year, and the Inland Northwest Juneteenth Coalition's Pillar Award. These honors reflect her unwavering dedication to creating pathways for equity and empowerment.

Education has always been central to Jaime's journey. After graduating from Sikeston Senior High School in Missouri, she earned a degree in Business from Metro Business College, a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Health Science from Grand Canyon University, and a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership from Eastern Washington University. Her academic achievements mirror her belief in lifelong learning and her commitment to modeling perseverance for the next generation.

Jaime is also an accomplished author of two children's books, with plans to write more in the future. Her writing reflects her desire to inspire young readers and share messages of love, courage, and resilience. Whether through literature, mentorship, or advocacy, Jaime's guiding principle remains the same: to be a faithful example of strength, courage, and honor.

Her work embodies the YWCA's mission to eliminate racism and empower women. Through SWAG and her partnerships with YWCA Spokane, Jaime leads programs like Transformations Camp and the Youth Self-Care Summit—empowerment spaces centering the experiences of young women of color. She uplifts youth voices, models allyship, and creates opportunities for girls to see themselves as leaders capable of shaping their communities and futures.

Jaime Stacy is more than an educator—she is a connector, a mentor, and a catalyst for change. Her leadership bridges education and civic engagement, ensuring that every young woman she encounters knows she is seen, valued, and capable of greatness. Through compassion, advocacy, and action, Jaime continues to transform Spokane into a community where diversity is celebrated, equity is prioritized, and hope is abundant.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Jaime Stacy with the 2026 Community Enhancement Award.

DR. LORI HUNT | EDUCATION

Dr. Lori Hunt is a seasoned higher education leader with over 20 years of experience spanning K-12 systems, community colleges, and four-year universities. Currently serving as Chief of Staff & Strategy for Spokane Colleges, she champions student-centered, equity-driven initiatives and leads strategic efforts that strengthen institutional responsiveness, integrity, and innovation. A proud first-generation college graduate, Dr. Hunt earned her Doctorate and Master's degrees in Educational Leadership from Washington State University and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Gonzaga University—a journey that fuels her passion for expanding access and opportunity for others.

Dr. Hunt's career reflects her unwavering belief that education opens doors and that inclusive leadership transforms lives. While at Spokane Community College, she co-created the Female Summit, an all-day event

that brought local high school students to campus for workshops and panels with accomplished women from across the region. This initiative provided mentorship, inspiration, and a sense of belonging for young women navigating their formative years, helping them see higher education as a pathway to confidence and possibility.

In her current role, Dr. Hunt played a pivotal role in launching the Guaranteed Admissions Program (GAP) in partnership with Whitworth University. This groundbreaking initiative guarantees admission and a minimum \$25,000 scholarship for qualifying Spokane Colleges students - removing financial and institutional obstacles that disproportionately burden underrepresented populations. Through this work, she is transforming access to higher education and creating opportunities for students who might otherwise be left behind.

Beyond her professional achievements, Dr. Hunt's dedication to community is reflected in her extensive volunteer leadership across organizations that align with her values, passions, and lived experience. She has served on the boards of Women Helping Women Fund, College Success Foundation, Volunteers of America of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho, Slingshot, and Governor Inslee's Family Medicine Education Advisory Board. Additionally, she is an active member of Soroptimist International of Newport, and for the past 13 years, she has been a leader for the Spokane African American Graduation Celebration, serving as co-chair for many of those years. These roles underscore her commitment to equity, inclusion, and community empowerment.

What sets Dr. Hunt apart is her authenticity and compassion. She is admired for her ability to see potential in others and works tirelessly to help them succeed. Her advocacy often goes beyond policy—she has quietly provided personal “mini scholarships” to students facing housing insecurity or financial challenges that could derail their education. These acts of generosity reflect her deep belief that every student deserves a chance to thrive.

Dr. Hunt's influence reaches from her hometown of Newport to the greater Spokane region and across the state. She builds partnerships that connect education, community, and opportunity, always centering equity and access. Her energy, optimism, and integrity inspire those around her, making her a true role model. Through her leadership, mentorship, and advocacy, Dr. Lori Hunt embodies what it means to be a Woman of Achievement—uplifting others, championing equity, and creating lasting positive change.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Dr. Lori Hunt with the 2026 Education Award.

LISA GARDNER | GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC SERVICE

Lisa Gardner, a proud Spokane native, is a dynamic leader whose career reflects an unwavering commitment to racial equity, civic engagement, and community empowerment. She currently serves as President of the NAACP Spokane Branch and as Director of Communications and Community Engagement for the Spokane City Council, where she has redefined how local government connects with residents—centering equity, transparency, and access in every initiative.

Lisa's academic foundation includes a Bachelor's degree from Eastern Washington University and a Master of Science in Public Relations from the University of Maryland. Her professional journey began in Baltimore at GolinHarris, where she worked on multicultural marketing for McDonald's Family Restaurants, helping the global brand engage diverse communities. After returning to Washington, Lisa founded MQG Consulting, LLC, providing marketing and communication services to minority- and women-owned businesses. Her clients included the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development and Microsoft, reflecting her ability to elevate underrepresented voices in business and technology.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lisa returned to Spokane and stepped into her current role with the City Council. At the same time, she deepened her community involvement by joining the NAACP, where she became President in 2024. Under her leadership, the Spokane NAACP experienced a revitalization of its communications infrastructure, expanded outreach to youth and families, and hosted impactful forums on racial equity and healthcare disparities, including sickle cell anemia awareness. Lisa's ability to convene thought leaders and foster dialogue has brought nationally recognized voices—such as Cliff Avril and Kibi Anderson—to Spokane, sparking conversations about identity, equity, and progress.

Her leadership extends beyond the NAACP. Lisa is the Executive Director of the TakeAll Coalition, working alongside community leaders Luc Jasmin and Jerrall Haynes to empower minority-owned businesses and nonprofits through advocacy, education, and philanthropy. She also served as an adjunct faculty member at Whitworth University, teaching Public Relations and Communication, and continues to share her expertise through writing for publications such as Spokane-Coeur d'Alene Living, Trending Northwest Magazine, The Black Lens, and the Spokesman-Review.

Lisa's dedication to service is evident in her involvement with organizations that align with her values. She has served on boards including SNAP, the Ronald McDonald House, and the Carl Maxey Center's Black Business Alliance, where she champions equity and opportunity. As a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and the Spokane Chapter of Links Incorporated, Lisa models leadership rooted in integrity and community uplift.

Her accomplishments reflect the YWCA's mission of eliminating racism and empowering women. Lisa has created spaces for dialogue on systemic inequities, mentored emerging leaders, and strengthened civic processes to ensure historically excluded voices have a seat at the table. Under her presidency, the Spokane NAACP achieved a milestone not seen in over four decades: the reactivation of its Youth Council, reigniting a pipeline for youth leadership and civic engagement.

Recognized by the Spokane Journal of Business as one of its 2025 People of Influence, Lisa Gardner is a strategic communicator, empathetic leader, and coalition builder whose work transforms institutions and communities alike. Her legacy is one of empowerment—rooted in mentorship, advocacy, and a deep belief in the collective power of community.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Lisa Gardner with the 2026 Government & Public Service Award.

SHADAN KAPRI | SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, & ENVIRONMENT

Shadan Kapri is an award-winning attorney, bestselling author, and internationally recognized human rights activist whose work is transforming conversations around justice, equality, and ethical responsibility. As the founder of Kapri Law & Consulting, an international boutique law firm headquartered in Spokane, she champions families, survivors, and marginalized communities through her practice in family law, civil rights, and international human rights.

Born in Tehran and raised in Spokane after fleeing the Iranian Revolution, Shadan's lived experience as a first-generation immigrant fuels her relentless pursuit of equity. Her advocacy is deeply personal—rooted in the belief that justice should never be a privilege, but a universal right. In her family law practice, she fights for women navigating domestic violence, custody disputes, and divorce, ensuring that safety and autonomy are accessible to all.

Shadan's influence extends far beyond the courtroom. In 2020, she published her debut book, *The Red Movement: Social and Environmental Justice in the 21st Century*, which quickly became an international bestseller and earned multiple global awards, including the International Impact Book Award and the Book Excellence Award. The book sparked a worldwide initiative—also called *The Red Movement*—that challenges consumers to recognize the hidden human cost behind global supply chains. Its urgent message is clear: every purchase is a vote for justice or exploitation. By exposing modern-day slavery, forced labor, and environmental harm, Shadan empowers individuals to align their choices with their values, igniting a cultural shift toward conscious consumerism.

Her second book, *Corporate Greed: The Human Cost*, cemented her reputation as a fearless voice for the underdog. A bestseller in human rights law, it reveals how corporate practices in healthcare, housing, banking, and big pharma exploit legal loopholes to maximize profits at the expense of vulnerable populations—perpetuating systemic inequality across the nation.

Shadan's third book, *Discovering Your Passion: The Path to Your Authentic Life*, turns the lens inward, guiding readers toward personal empowerment and authenticity. With motivational clarity, she encourages individuals to reject conformity, embrace self-discovery, and pursue their passions with courage and conviction.

Across her career, Shadan has become a catalyst for change—challenging injustice not only through legal channels but also through cultural consciousness and global activism. Her work reflects the YWCA’s mission to eliminate racism and empower women. By dismantling systems of oppression and amplifying silenced voices, she reimagines a world where ethics, sustainability, and human dignity are the norm. Whether in courtrooms, on global stages, or through the pages of her books, Shadan inspires individuals to confront exploitation and elevate equality.

Recognized as a powerful advocate for vulnerable communities, Shadan continues to lead with vision, integrity, and unwavering courage. Through her legal victories, bestselling books, and global initiatives, she offers a blueprint for systemic change—proving that empowerment is not a slogan but a strategy. Her ultimate goal is clear: to inspire the next generation of social justice activists to fight for a world that benefits the many, not the privileged few.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Shadan Kapri with the 2026 Science, Technology, & Environment Award.

AUTUMN KERN | YOUNG WOMAN OF ACHIEVEMENT

Autumn Kern is an honors student at Gonzaga University, where she is pursuing her interests in human rights, climate justice, and ethical global development. Her academic and professional journey reflects a deep commitment to justice, sustainability, and global solidarity.

Autumn’s leadership and impact began early, guided by her Catholic faith and a belief in human dignity and peace-building. At just 17, she interned with the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, helping mobilize over 22,000 voters in a campaign that redirected \$1.7 billion from jail expansion toward mental health care, addiction treatment, and job training—investments that strengthen opportunity for women and communities of color. This formative experience ignited her passion for systemic change and set the stage for her future work.

On campus, Autumn has advanced equity and inclusion through her role at Gonzaga’s Unity Multicultural Education Center (UMEC), where she created safe spaces for students from historically marginalized communities and amplified their voices through forums and advocacy initiatives. She also serves as Parliamentarian for Gonzaga Model United Nations, mentoring teammates and contributing to the program’s national recognition for research and diplomacy.

Autumn’s dedication to sustainability is evident in her current role as Sustainability Data Coordinator for Gonzaga University, where she supports institutional sustainability reporting and collaborates with campus partners to advance climate initiatives. Moreover, as a recipient of a \$6,500 National Science Foundation grant, she conducted scientific research through the Smithsonian Institution on blue carbon and coastal ecosystems in the Mesoamerican Reef ecoregion, contributing data and analysis relevant to climate change mitigation,

community resilience, and policy-relevant marine management across Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Her commitment to human rights is equally profound. Autumn completed an internship with The Advocates for Human Rights, supporting research and policy analysis related to gender-based violence and access to justice. She helped draft NGO shadow reports on the conditions of women and girls in countries undergoing the Universal Periodic Review process, ensuring governments are held accountable for discrimination and violence against women.

Autumn's leadership extends beyond titles—it is rooted in empathy, collaboration, and integrity. She helped found Spokane's first Citizens' Climate Lobby chapter, inspiring bipartisan members to engage lawmakers on equitable clean-energy policy and helping grow the chapter to over 400 members. She has also served as an International Humanitarian Law Instructor with the American Red Cross, teaching the ethics of compassion in crisis.

Across her academic and professional experiences, Autumn Kern exemplifies the YWCA's mission to eliminate racism and empower women. She uplifts marginalized voices, advocates for systemic change, and models what it means to lead with courage and compassion. Her ultimate goal is to pursue a career where she can continue to help people and the planet move toward a more just and sustainable future.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Autumn Kern with the 2026 Young Woman of Achievement Award.

DR. GLORIA ASTON-BAYNES | LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Dr. Gloria Aston-Baynes has devoted her life to education, equity, and empowerment. Raised in a small town outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she has called Spokane home for more than thirty years. Her academic journey reflects her unwavering commitment to learning and leadership: a B.A. in Elementary Education from Youngstown State University, an M.A. in Secondary Reading Education from Atlanta University, and an Ed.D. in Literacy from Washington State University.

Dr. Baynes began her career teaching Reading/English in Spokane Public Schools, where she served in multiple roles before retiring in 2013. Her work emphasized literacy as a tool for advocacy and self-determination, particularly for students from marginalized communities. Today, she continues to shape minds as an Adjunct Professor in Eastern Washington University's Africana Studies Program, where she has taught for 12 years and serves as the department's liaison and mentor for the College in the High School Program. Her presence in the classroom is more than academic—it is a beacon of cultural understanding and empowerment.

Beyond her professional achievements, Dr. Baynes is deeply rooted in service. Guided by Shirley Chisholm's words, "*Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth,*" she has spent decades working with organizations that uplift youth and dismantle systemic racism. Her greatest passion lies in mentoring young

women—especially African American women, women of color, and women with disabilities—providing resources and guidance to help them access opportunities and thrive.

Her leadership spans numerous organizations and initiatives. Through Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., she has supported programs like the Dr. Betty Shabazz Academy and Dr. Jeanne L. Noble Institute, guiding young women toward academic excellence and career readiness. As a member of The Links, Incorporated, she has championed key initiatives like the Services to Youth Program, which enriches young lives through academic excellence in STEM and cultural appreciation, and Sister Circle, a support group. She has volunteered with the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, the Carl Maxey Center, and served on the Spokane Public Schools Diversity Advisory Council, advocating for equity in education. Her work with the NAACP Education Committee ensures families have access to resources and support, while her involvement in the inaugural Miss Juneteenth Spokane pageant celebrates cultural pride and progress.

Dr. Baynes's influence extends to countless community initiatives—from mentoring educators and organizing financial-aid workshops to hosting cultural events and feeding unhoused neighbors through Kingdom for Christ. She owns Aston & Associates, providing research and professional development to build inclusive, culturally responsive schools. Her decades of service include roles on scholarship committees, voter education campaigns, and programs that connect youth to networks of opportunity. She is a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Her strengths—analytical insight, cultural competence, and a gift for mentorship—make her a trusted advisor and role model. She blends data-driven strategies with compassion, ensuring that educational decisions are both evidence-based and human-centered. Even in retirement, she continues to mentor, teach, and advocate, demonstrating humility and steadfast dedication.

Dr. Baynes's life work embodies the YWCA's mission to eliminate racism and empower women. Through education, advocacy, and service, she has opened doors for generations, challenging inequities and creating pathways for success. Her legacy is one of resilience, leadership, and love—a testament to her belief that every child deserves a level playing field and every woman deserves the opportunity to thrive.

YWCA Spokane is honored to present Dr. Gloria Aston-Baynes with the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award.