

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Michigan Women's Hall of Fame Announces 2017 Class of Honorees**

OKEMOS, MI – Eight women, one women's group, and one cultural icon were chosen from over 100 nominations to be inducted into the 34th class of the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. One man will also be awarded the Philip A. Hart Award. The induction will take place at the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame Awards Dinner & Induction Ceremony on Wednesday, October 18, 2017 at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center (219 S. Harrison Road, East Lansing).

### **The 2017 Contemporary Honorees are:**

**American Legion NUWARINE Post 535** in Lansing is Michigan's last remaining all-female American Legion Post. Post 535 was organized on November 25, 1946 in Lansing, Michigan by a group of 22 female WWII veterans who felt they should have their own American Legion Post. NUWARINE Post 535 is named after the organizational branches of the charter members (Army/Navy) NUrses, WAVes, WAcS, WAFs, spARs and marINES (USMCWR). Post 535 has the unique mission of educating others about women in the military through exhibits, youth programs, and other patriotic endeavors.

**Mary Kay Henry** of Detroit is the first woman president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Over more than thirty years with the union, she has helped tens of thousands of healthcare workers unite, pioneering non-traditional collective bargaining agreements and system-wide healthcare organizing strategy. In 2009, she was named one of the Top 25 Women in Healthcare by *Modern Healthcare* magazine. In May 2010, Ms. Henry was elected SEIU president. In 2015, she was included in the top 50 visionaries reshaping American politics by *Politico* magazine for SEIU's innovative leadership in the "Fight for \$15."

**Bernice Morton, Ph.D.** of Detroit has dedicated more than 60 years to nursing as a practitioner, educator, and community activist for minority women in nursing. She was the first African American to achieve tenure at Wayne State University. At WSU, she developed an affirmative action plan for minority students that was later published as a model for other nursing schools. Dr. Morton has also worked with others to develop the first Model Cities Comprehensive Health Care Center in the U.S. and served as the first nursing director of the program.

**Professor Rosemary C. Sarri** of Ann Arbor is a tireless and celebrated social worker and scholar whose research and activism in the field of social work has made a substantial difference in juvenile justice and children's rights. Dr. Sarri's testimony in front of Congress led to the passing of the Juvenile Justice Act in 1974. She has published over 15 books and 180 chapters and articles. In addition, she has advised various organizations and universities in developing social work education.

**Elizabeth Wetzel** of West Bloomfield is the first female Design Director for General Motors and has led significant award-winning designs for GM products spanning 3 decades. It was 2001 when she became Interior Director of Design responsible for all of GM's Carline Interiors spanning the Cadillac, Buick, Saturn, Pontiac, and Chevrolet brands. In 2010, she became the first female Director for Interior Design, Quality, and Color and Trim at GM's European Design Center in Russelsheim, Germany. Elizabeth's most recent recognition was for the interior of the Buick Avenir Concept, which received "Best Concept Vehicle" at the 2016 North American International Auto Show.

## The 2017 Historical Honorees are:

**Ella Mae Backus (1863-1938)** of Grand Rapids was the first woman in Michigan to become an Assistant U.S. Attorney. She served 35 years in the office the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Michigan beginning in 1903 as Clerk and then as Assistant U.S. Attorney in 1923 until her death in 1938.

**Clara Bryant Ford (1866-1950)** of Dearborn, wife of Henry Ford, is quoted as saying, "Men are willing to help boys and men; it behooves women to help womankind." Mrs. Ford made it her life's mission to do just this. During her lifetime, Clara Ford helped create and fund numerous programs on local, state, and national levels that focused on women's rights and self-sufficiency, education, healthcare, and environmentalism.

**Elizabeth Denison Forth (c.1790- 1866)** of Macomb County won her freedom from slavery and became the first black and one of the first woman landowners in Oakland County. After obtaining her freedom in Canada, Elizabeth returned to Detroit in 1815 and began work as a domestic servant for two Detroit Mayors, Solomon Sibley and John Biddle. Elizabeth invested her earnings in property in Pontiac and Detroit, in the Great Lakes steamer, Walk-in-the Water, and in Detroit's Farmers and Mechanics Bank. She willed a portion of her money for the building of St. James Episcopal Church, which remains on Grosse Ile.

**Verna Grahek Mize (1913-2013)** of Houghton campaigned to end the practice of dumping mining waste into Lake Superior, which led to government-set pollution standards. She persisted in a 13-year battle against a large mining company to save Lake Superior. The trial was one of the longest, costly and bitter fought environmental cases in history, which because of Mize's tireless efforts, led to the end of the company's dumping of waste materials into Lake Superior on March 16, 1980.

**Rosie the Riveter** is the iconic symbol that inspired a generation of women to enter the industrial workforce during WWII. This was during a time when women were desperately needed to fill the roles left by men who were serving overseas in the war. Women across the nation stepped up and entered American factories to keep the assembly lines running and the war effort moving forward. They shattered traditional beliefs about women working in heavy industry jobs and became role models for future generations of women.

**The Philip A. Hart Award** will also be presented at this event. This award is given annually by the Michigan Women's Studies Association Board of Directors to a man who has demonstrated a unique understanding and support of women's issues and concerns and has contributed to the advancement of women's rights and interests. This year the award will be presented to Senator Curtis Hertel, Jr.

**Sen. Curtis Hertel Jr.** of East Lansing was elected in 2014 to serve Michigan's 23<sup>rd</sup> Senate district. After taking office, Senator Hertel quickly began making a positive impact on issues affecting Michigan's citizens. As a leader in the fight against sexual assault, Hertel ushered in new legislation aimed at preventing sexual assault on college campuses by educating students about affirmative consent with Senate Bill 512, nicknamed the "Yes Means Yes" legislation. The bill will require Michigan schools teaching sex education to include instruction on affirmative consent, where both parties consciously agree to engage in a sexual activity.

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The mission of the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame is to promote the equality of women by honoring the history and celebrating the accomplishments of Michigan women. The Michigan Women's Historical Center, located inside the Meridian Mall in Okemos, is home to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame featuring over 300 honorees past and present, changing history exhibits, and a fair trade gift shop. Museum hours are Monday through Saturday, 10-9 p.m. and Sundays, 12-6 p.m. Closed all major holidays. A donation is requested for admission. The Michigan Women's Historical

Center & Hall of Fame is operated by the Michigan Women's Studies Association, a non-profit 501c3 organization.

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