

The Links: Emerald Service Awards

Written by Maya Beecham
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Margaret Hawkins and Sarah Scott gathered seven of their friends at a planning meeting on the evening of Nov. 9, 1946 at a home in Philadelphia.

This was the next step in their plans to officially form a club of African-American women with various chapters along the eastern seaboard. The women would participate in civic, educational, and cultural activities. Additionally, they would develop a deep understanding of their social and civic responsibilities. They called themselves The Links.



Fast forward to Saturday, Oct. 12 of this year at the Minneapolis Hyatt Regency, 1300 Nicollet Mall, and you could witness the legacy of the nine women realized in the 570 guests present at the Emerald Service Luncheon Awards hosted by the Minneapolis - St. Paul Chapter of The Links, Incorporated. The celebratory luncheon, emceed by award-winning actress and Minneapolis native Kimberly Elise, recognized the 40th anniversary of the local chapter and

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honored five women who have committed a lifetime of service to the community under the Links five focus areas of the arts, health and human services, international trends and services, national trends and services and services to youth. The honorees included Toni Pierce-Sands (the arts); Linda Finney (health and human services); Shegitu Kebede (international trends and services), Dr. Verna C. Price (national trends and services) and Robin Hickman (services to youth).



“(We explored) who is doing great work in the Twin Cities that is really changing lives and creating lasting outcomes,” said Tawanna Black, president of the Minneapolis - St. Paul Chapter of The Links. “Each of these five women really stood out to us. They have a legacy for doing the work not for recognition, but really because their hearts are in it. They have a record of building strong partnerships to take this work to the next level and we are really impressed by each one of them and thrilled to be able to honor them in this way.”

Pierce-Sands, is the co-founder of TU Dance Company and TU Dance Center. Pierce-Sands is internationally known for dance and worked with Minnesota Dance Theater and The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre School.

Finney, the first African-American to lead the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, co-founded the African-American Breast Cancer Foundation. As a breast cancer survivor she provides mentorship to African-American women about health issues impacting communities of color.

Kebede is founder of Going Home, Inc. a cleaning company that provides employment to immigrant mothers and those with little work experience. She is also co-founder of Flamingo Restaurant, which employs low-income women and survivors of domestic abuse. Additionally, Kebede provides after school tutoring and mentoring programs, a sewing class, and networking groups that helps women with parenting, domestic abuse, and employment.

Price tackled low graduation rates and high rates of violence at North Community High School through the Girls in Action program. The structured mentoring program helps girls envision a positive future and refocus on grades and graduation. Violence dropped at North by 75 percent since the inception of Girls in Action, and the program has extended to Detroit and Guatemala.

Hickman restored self-esteem and confidence in hundreds of girls from diverse cultural backgrounds in the last eight years as founder of the Lovin’ the Skin I’m In Hope and Healing Movement. Through the movement’s curriculum, events and films, girls have embraced

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themselves as their own personal standard of beauty.

“I hope that people are inspired not only by what they see in our programming but really by these five women to say whatever your passion is go out and make it happen,” said Black. “Find partners, find supporters, find your girlfriends and make it happen. There is not a shortage of need in our community. As African-Americans I think we hear the challenges and disparities quite frequently. We know them, we live them and we see them. But the reality is a small group of people can make a difference. You can pull together and make that happen. And we are best serviced where we are passionate.”

The Minneapolis-St. Paul chapter of the Links is one of 276 chapters that consists of 12,000 professional women of color in 41 states, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Margot James Copeland, the Links, national president gave her stamp of approval to the Minnesota chapter.

“This is a chapter of exceptional leaders – this is a chapter with a history of exceptionalism,” said James Copeland.

For more information about the Minneapolis - St. Paul chapter of the Links, visit www.mpls-stpaullinks.org.