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January 2, 2007
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Women's eNews 21 Leaders for the 21st Century 2007

Run Date: 12/31/06

*By Irene Lew
WeNews correspondent*

Women's eNews announces today its 21 Leaders for the 21st Century 2007: 20 women and one man who are dedicating their lives to improving the lives of all women at home, in the workplace, in school, in the media and around the world.

(WOMENSENEWS)--From a peacemaker who returned to her native Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban to help women run for political office to a Dominican woman who walked down the East Coast in a wedding dress to increase awareness about domestic violence, this year's 21 Leaders for the 21st Century demonstrate the risks that women are willing to take to make change in the world.

21 LEADERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Throughout September and early October, nominations for 21 Leaders poured in from readers, contributors and writers all over the world. Women's eNews whittled several hundred nominations down to 20 women and one man. Each submission received careful attention and discussion. In the end, the selection committee members, comprised of Women's eNews board members and editorial staff, were inspired and amazed by the acts of significance that the 21 Leaders are doing across the country and the world to improve the lives of women.

"Discovering these women and learning about their bravery, vision and commitment," said Rita Henley Jensen, editor in chief, "thrilled each of us on the committee. We founded Women's eNews because we had a hunch that these types of leaders were out there, doing this kind of work. Now, because we ask our readers to nominate the women and men who are making a difference, and they responded so magnificently, we are able to find them, tell the world about them and offer them the acclaim they deserve."

Promoting Peace and Security

Dena Merriam, founder of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, and **Aloisea Inyumba**, a senator in Rwanda's Parliament, have both promoted the peace and cooperation of women on local and international levels. Through her

initiative, Merriam brings together women from around the world to stimulate reconciliation efforts and peace-building activities. Following the Rwandan genocide, Inyumba initiated the Rwanda Women's Initiative to improve relations between Hutu and Tutsi women and improve their economic status and well-being. She continues to lead efforts to incorporate women's rights into the legal system.

Women such as **Kathleen DeBold** and **Elizabeth Saylor** both champion the rights of women who are often ignored. DeBold, as executive director of the Mautner Project, ensures that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women receive quality health care and are not discriminated against because of their status. Saylor, a lawyer, drew attention to the faulty training manuals and a government computer glitch that caused battered immigrant women to be illegally denied public benefits over and over again.

Marisa Rivera-Albert, president of the National Hispana Leadership Institute, nurtures young Latina women to develop their leadership skills and rise to positions of influence in business and government.

The lone male 21 Leader, **Jackson Katz**, is a former all-star football player who became outraged at the nonchalant way male violence against women was treated in society and committed his life to educating athletes at all levels about gender-based violence.

Fearless in Their Causes

Gloria Feldt, an author and advocate of reproductive choices for women, spearheaded the March for Women's Lives in 2004 and continues to boldly promote women's rights through her writing and the media.

Then there are fearless women like **Josie Ashton**, who brought the issue of domestic violence front and center by walking 1,300 miles in a wedding dress to protest a murder. **Sheila White** put up a determined fight against gender discrimination as the plaintiff in a landmark Supreme Court case after she spoke up against the sexual harassment she endured as a female forklift operator in a train yard.

Another Women's eNews 21 Leader who saw the need for enormous change is **Bernice Sandler**, who led the way for the passage of the Title IX amendment and has affected the lives and education of every girl and woman in the United States.

Ananya Chatterjea founded her own dance theater and strived to represent the complete cross-section of the feminine form through the art of dance. As a young girl, she was inspired by the Indian street theater that women's groups performed at places like bus stops and markets; she now uses dance to tell women's stories.

Jamie McCourt fulfilled her childhood dream of owning a baseball team by becoming president of the Los Angeles Dodgers. She scores a home run in her efforts to connect other women to the playing field.

This year's Ida B. Wells Award for Bravery in Journalism has been awarded to

Bushra Jamil, who founded Radio Al-Mahabba in Iraq. Despite a bombing of the radio station and the deaths of two staff members from violence, Jamil is more determined than ever to keep her radio station afloat and broadcast messages of hope and inspiration to Iraqi women living in uncertain times. Al-Mahabba, appropriately, is the Iraqi word for "love."

Making a Place for Women's Issues and Ideas

This year, we are also honoring several women who became a vital part of the women's movement in the 1970s. **Jane Mansbridge**, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who wrote the introduction to the sexuality section of the classic book, "Our Bodies, Ourselves," strives to improve the workplace for women and to weave feminist ideals into daily life.

Susan Weidman Schneider, co-founder of Lilith magazine and author of three books, raises awareness of Jewish women's issues through the media and mentors young women. **Janice Reals Ellig** put her own modern twist on the women's self-help guide by penning one of her own and running a business that recruits women into top positions in the corporate world.

Shelby Knox is a passionate activist who was dismayed by the abstinence-only education she was receiving in her high school. She became a champion of comprehensive sex education as a teenager and continues to lobby for change around the country.

Marie Wilson aims to increase the political profile of U.S. women. At the White House Project, Wilson oversees efforts to get out the vote, train women to run for office and increase women's voices in the media.

In Afghanistan, **Rina Amiri** has done the same. After the fall of the Taliban, Amiri helped form a women's media collective and then mobilized women to participate in Afghanistan's election, both as voters and candidates.

Women's eNews 21 Leaders **Charlene Ventura** and **Hannah Rosenthal** use their positions as executive directors to propel their organizations toward advancing the rights of women. Rosenthal, who heads the Chicago Foundation for Women, has emphasized the role of advocacy in changing the status of women. Ventura has been instrumental as head of the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati in bringing to light the suffering of battered women and children and helping them build new lives.

In 2007, these 21 Leaders for the 21st Century have made a significant impact on women and girls by acting as individuals as well as through leadership. They have helped spread the word, eased the suffering, stimulated transitions, nurtured the young and shared the wisdom of age.

Women's eNews celebrates their accomplishments on behalf of women around the world and hopes that readers everywhere will find inspiration in their stories, as they are posted on our Web site over the next three days.

Irene Lew is the editorial intern at Women's eNews and a writer based in New York.

Women's eNews welcomes your comments. E-mail us at editors@womensenews.org.

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