

Women's
Center for Ethics in Action

in alliance with men

**PLANNING ASSEMBLY
FROM ACADEMIA TO ACTIVISM
Women's Leadership in Multi-Cultural Maine
April 22, 2005**

In attendance were facilitator Anne Zill, Sandy Wright, Yirgalom Madie, Lael and Ron Stegall, Karin Anderson, Barrie Pribyl, Victoria Mares-Hershey, Carol Farley Kessler, Otrude Moyo, Shalom Odokara, Michael Odokara, Shaye McGann Robbins, with Cally Gurley of the Maine Women Writers Collection and Rebecca Hershey for lunch.

A. Personal Introductions & Stories:

Rather than recount the individual stories in detail, here are some of the qualities, themes, characteristics and values articulated by members of this group that resonated from their own stories and Perdita Huston's life:

*Multi-cultural emphasis, *idealism, *diversity and commitment, *courage, *dignity, *activism, *vulnerability, *extended family, *nurturing the spirit, *strategic thinking, *pushing through, *whole person appreciation, *learning through service, *listening, *laughter, *openness of heart, *mindfulness of the whole situation & the big picture.

B. There were two cautionary statements as we proceeded. The first was read by Victoria Mares-Hershey from Perdita Huston's last book, *Families As We Are*. "Many people try to help the disenfranchised, the uneducated, the poor, the voiceless. Their intentions are good, but all too often they bring theories with them that do not stand up to reality. Then if their programs or ideals fail, they blame the very people they are trying to help."

The second came from Karin Anderson who advised that this Award must not compete with existing awards. It has to have its own stamp of identity that clearly defines and distinguishes it from others. The sample title "purple star fish award" was mentioned as an example.

C. What other qualities do we want this Award to embody?

*Emerging leadership (becoming a butterfly), * 25 or younger woman, *inspiring others, *vision, * validating work in progress, *writing stories, *creating connections, *enabling character, to grow, to prepare for next phase, the bigger pond, etc.

Inspired by the Gallery's own motto, "May your spirit forever be free," this should be an Award from the Heart. It should help to validate the vision embodied in the recipient's program, her dreams without boundaries, while making the reality of her life and work

more broadly visible. The Award should help recipients to consolidate and/or expand their efforts.

The award process should reach out to young activists and their projects in their early stages of development. The award might be connected to a particular project but the funds would not be for project support. The award winner would use the funds for travel, communications, seminars – whatever she deemed useful for her leadership development. The award is to be given with the understanding that her leadership may not yet be fully expressed.

Other characteristics: It was agreed that the application process should not be onerous. Ideally, a state-wide nomination process would involve Maine citizens who know young women working in multi-cultural communities. Supporters and mentors will need to spread the word and get the notice out to their contacts far and wide looking for possible recipients outside the usual circles.

There should be both a **Cash Award** and an offer of **Mentorship** for the recipient. A Mentor Network will be created by asking each Planning Assembly participant to provide a minimum of five names of individuals who can offer training, mentoring and exposure. Some will be more appropriate than others depending upon each award recipient's situation and needs, and it will be up to the recipients to pick and choose among available mentors. Each awardee will have a minimum of three people "checking in" with her regularly. She might choose one or use the counsel of all three. Their aim will be to help the recipient maintain her *vision*, learn what she needs to learn in order to engage her community fully, formulate her *long-term strategies*, and develop her skills as an effective *advocate for social change*. There will be an expectation of continual transition and change along the way as she links up with appropriate contacts, sources of funds, and other entrepreneurial resources. The award winners will be expected to present their "Journey in Leadership Development" in whatever form it takes at the annual gathering.

Both the Institute for Practical Democracy and the Maine Women's Fund will be resources. Efforts will be made to grow the resources available for this Award from additional foundations and individuals. The network of involved participants, mentors and nominators must be developed during the coming year.

It was the group's expectation that this Award should be an annual event. The Annual Award Assembly will include an appropriate reading from Perdita's Collection of papers and correspondence housed within the Maine Women Writers Collection.

In **Summary**, the group determined that:

- ❖ the Award will be given to a young woman engaged in a multi-cultural context, interacting with people of different ethnicities, religion, language and/or culture, whose program and leadership is not necessarily fully developed, or at all visible on usual radar screens.

- ❖ It will celebrate in addition to multi-culturalism, diversity, commitment, spirit, openness of heart, a big-picture mindfulness, a “pushing through” mentality and strategic thinking.
- ❖ There will not be an onerous application process, perhaps a single page listing goals, strategies, accomplishments and budget. Nominations will be accepted from a broad group of people, developed by person-to-person contacts throughout the state of Maine.
- ❖ The Awardee may be engaged in journalism, or other writing and research, but advocacy of some sort is essential.
- ❖ The cash award will be accompanied by mentorship to help the Awardee learn the ropes, develop her leadership and entrepreneurial skills in realizing her vision and making her dreams a reality.
- ❖ The award winner/s will present their “Leadership Journey” to the annual award event.

What this group has not yet accomplished, and decisions that will need to be made include:

- 1) The size of the award. (\$500 - \$3,000) This will depend to some extent on whether other contributors to this award can be found.
- 2) The Group has not decided whether this Award is to end after three years, or whether the number of annual awardees is one, or more.
- 3) A plan for “getting the word out” and an application process have not been fully developed.
- 4) The network of mentors needs to be created and the first step is five names from each participant.
- 5) A page that describes the Award and the Nomination Process must be created and approved. (Zill will prepare a draft based upon the above that will require refinement and editing.)
- 6) The details of coordination with the Maine Women Writers Collection need to be worked out.
- 7) The likely administrative costs need to be calculated.
- 8) The specifics of the first Award Ceremony and Assembly need attention, including whether the winner/s present their “Leadership Journey” at the time of the award or the following year.
- 9) Publicity and marketing strategies must be determined.
- 10) The universe of possible recipients remains to be identified, including clarification about whether or not a young man might qualify.

An **Implementation Committee** was established to follow up on the decisions that were made in this Planning Assembly, as well as those items above that need attention (and others not mentioned here). *A date for a meeting must be found within the month.* Members include Cally Gurley, Yirgalom Madie, Victoria Mares-Hershey, Lael Stegall, Carol Kessler and Anne Zill.