



Karen Andrade-Mims

On January 28, 2012 Karen Andrade-Mims will receive a tremendous honor. She'll be named "2012 Zeta Woman of the Year" by Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Epsilon Xi Zeta Chapter, during a luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Princeton. The service-oriented sorority will bestow Karen with the award based on her significant contributions to greater Trenton.

The award confirms the importance of a lifetime spent in the service of others by Karen, Executive Director of Trenton's UIH Family Partners. Not bad, considering she grew up thinking she'd be a teacher, but caught the "social work bug" in college.

After earning a BA in Sociology at University of Pennsylvania, Karen worked in Pennsylvania's child welfare system with abused and neglected kids. And that triggered her passion to work with vulnerable families.

Karen came to UIH following positions with Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey (PCA-NJ) and Planned Parenthood Association of the Mercer Area (PPAMA). UIH, formerly known as Union Industrial Home for Children, has roots dating back to 1859 as the oldest New Jersey nonprofit dedicated to children's welfare.

When she arrived at UIH in 2008, her experience helped refocus the organization. UIH used to have separate facilities; a residential home for mothers and children and a location with programs for fathers. Faced with economic challenges, UIH closed its residential program in 2010, but that provided an opportunity to concentrate on fatherhood initiatives.

UIH now helps fathers with workforce development, computer classes, anger management, and parenting skills. Karen calls the approach a comprehensive plan to empower men to be better fathers and pillars of their families.

"We've made it a core value to present a welcoming environment," Karen says. "When fathers come into our program they see male staff and pictures on our walls of men with their children. So we make it a point of asking them to prepare for success by bonding with their kids, even if they're not living at home. Most of these men want to work, meet their child support obligations, and do the right thing. They're treated with respect, regardless of their circumstances, and we help boost their self-esteem."

UIH works with about 300 men per month, and Karen has made it a point to tout the organization's success stories with new clients. That includes the construction of a "Wall of Fame" featuring photos of men who've gained success in jobs obtained with UIH help.

Karen is most proud of three signature programs at UIH. The first is "Platinum Dads." Mercer County men are nominated as Platinum Dads based on their exemplary role as a father or father figure. Nominees are honored at an annual awards breakfast.

The second is the UIH Ambassadors program. It highlights former clients, now successful men, who came through UIH. Ambassadors are asked to serve on an advisory board to help UIH stay abreast of community needs.

The third that Karen created is the Dress to Impress ("D2I") program. Through D2I, new or gently worn interview-appropriate clothing is collected for UIH clients, so they can feel confident in the job market.

"When Karen gets involved she always rises to the occasion," says John Santisi, who worked with Karen while CFO at PCA-NJ. "Her ability to assess situations, take charge, and rise to the top is something I've always admired. And she's a great speaker; she really captures an audience and gets them involved."

When Karen leaves her UIH office, her desire to serve others goes along. She serves in board and membership capacities on the Princeton Human Services Commission; Mercer County Commission on the Status of Women; Center for Non-Profits; PPAMA; Trenton School-Based Youth Services Program; and Mercer Street Friends Healthy Families-TIP program.

Karen is Recording Secretary for Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority – Phi Eta Omega Chapter. AKA, the country's oldest African American, sorority, consists of college-educated women dedicated to civic and community work, raising scholarship money, and supporting historic projects.

Karen is a 2007 Leadership New Jersey Fellow and 2009 Civic Sector Leadership Fellow. She's also former Community Relations VP for the Junior League of Greater Princeton.

All are great honors. But her greatest might be watching her daughter, Bethany, follow her footsteps into the social work world. Bethany is working toward a Masters of Social Work at Monmouth University while interning at the United Nations to gain exposure to international social work experiences. ■

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