

espnW and Toyota Recognize Sixth Class of Everyday Heroes at 2018 espnW: Women + Sports Summit

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Newport Beach, Calif., October 3, 2018 — Last night at the ninth annual The espnW: Women + Sports Summit presented by Toyota, espnW and Toyota announced the sixth class of Toyota Everyday Heroes. Toyota Everyday Heroes are individuals making a difference for women and girls in their local communities through sports. The Heroes were recognized on-stage and provided with grants in the amount of \$10,000.

“These unsung heroes are creating innovative programs and enhancing their communities through sports,” said Samantha Goot, general manager of media and engagement marketing, Toyota Motor North America. “As a company that fosters the careers of women, Toyota is proud to honor the 2018 Everyday Heroes – Cecelie Owens, Megan Livatino, Liz Brieva and Melissa Clarke-Wharff – and help further their mission to inspire and empower women and girls through sports.”

The 2018 Toyota Everyday Heroes are:

Cecelie Owens (G.I.R.L.S Sports Foundation – Buffalo, NY)

Cecelie Owens, an educator and native of Buffalo, is the Founder and President of the G.I.R.L.S. Sports Foundation, Inc. (GSF). She founded the non-profit organization in 2007 to make a positive impact on girls in Buffalo through sports participation, mentoring, educational workshops and more, preparing them to be successful in all aspects of their lives. G.I.R.L.S. stands for Goals, Integrity, Respect, Leadership, and Sports – the main pillars of the program. Cecelie involves parents and members of the community to not only have fun, but teach the girls strategies for overcoming adversity, encourage a healthy lifestyle, and promote teamwork. More than 5,000 girls have participated since the organization was founded. In 1999, Cecelie became the first African-American woman inducted into the Buffalo State College Athletic Hall of Fame and has served as the Director of the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) hosted at Buffalo State College for 10 years.

Liz Brieva and Megan Livatino (Girls Play Sports – Evanston, IL)

Frustrated by seeing girls drop out of sports after middle school, Liz Brieva and Chris Livatino, the Director of Athletics at Evanston Township High School, founded Girls Play Sports. The program is dedicated to fostering leadership skills and confidence in girls through their participation a wide variety of sports. Focused on middle school girls, GPS exposes them to sports with the help of coaches and high school athletes from ETHS. They believe exposure to many sports is crucial for encouraging girls to stick with athletics. Since launching GPS, they have seen a dramatic rise in participation at ETHS, including more girls participating in sports than boys at ETHS.

Megan joined the Girls Play Sports team as Executive Director in 2014. Megan Livatino graduated from Evanston Township High School (ETHS) where she played volleyball, basketball and soccer for four years. She went on to play volleyball at Northwestern University and graduated with a BS in Organizational Studies.

Melissa Clarke – Wharff (Courage League Sports – Des Moines, IA)

Melissa Clarke-Wharff founded Courage League Sports, a non-profit adaptive sports and recreational facility that offers year-round programming for children and adults who aren't able to go full speed due to a physical, cognitive or emotional disability. After her son Jack suffered multiple strokes when he was eight years old and frustrated by lack of options for adapted recreational activities for kids and adults who live with a disability or a chronic healthcare need, Courage League was born. With over 50,000 children and adults with special needs in Greater Des Moines, Courage League's vision is to have an option for everybody, while offering adapted programs in music, sports, arts and fitness for all ages and abilities.

“These women have proven to be real trailblazers in the world of women in sports and we are proud to honor them this year,” said Laura Gentile, senior vice president, espnW & Women’s Initiatives. “It’s not every day that people selflessly dedicate their time to a cause such as this and we would like to thank them for helping advance this initiative.”

To qualify for a Toyota Everyday Heroes grant, a person and/or organization must:

- Have been operating as an active, sports-related organization for at least three years;
- Are currently creating sports opportunities for girls and women in their local communities, and making a meaningful, inspiring impact with quantifiable results;

Last year's honorees were Darlene Hunter (Founder, Lady Mavericks Wheelchair Basketball), Fartun Osman (Founder, Somali Girls Rock) and Mira Manickam (Founder, Brown Girl Surf). **In 2016**, the honorees were Courtney Payne Taylor (Founder, Girls Riders Organization), Tracy Pointer (Founder, GROW/GROW Girl) and Beth Devine (Founder, Philly Girls in Motion). In 2015, **espnW** and Toyota honored Chrissy Lewis-Summers, founder of Beyond Sticks, and Heidi Boynton, founder of Mini Mermaid Running Club. The 2014 honorees were Dr. Kimberley S. Clay, Monica Gonzalez and Claire Smallwood. **In 2013, espnW and Toyota recognized** Barb Lazarus, Justine Siegal and Mobolaji Akidoe as the inaugural recipients.