

Toyota and espnW Recognize 8th Class of Everyday Heroes at The espnW: Women + Sports Summit, 2023

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PLANO, Texas (Oct. 25, 2023) – Last night at The espnW: Women + Sports Summit in Ojai, CA, presented by Toyota, the eighth class of Toyota Everyday Heroes was announced and honored.

Toyota’s Everyday Heroes program recognizes female individuals making a difference for women and girls in their local communities through sports. The Heroes were provided with grants in the amount of \$15,000 and recognized on-stage by Team Toyota Athlete and three-time Paralympic medalist, Danelle Umstead along with ESPN’s Elle Duncan. Toyota has been a presenting sponsor of The espnW: Women + Sports Summit for 11 years.

Throughout the three-day event, Toyota is giving attendees a firsthand look of the all-new 2024 Tacoma and the first-ever 2024 Grand Highlander and supporting “The Summit in 60 Seconds” daily recap videos that are shared throughout the event and on espnW social handles.

“Toyota is proud to announce the 2023 Everyday Heroes – Mechelle Lewis Freeman and Peggy Turner – who are both extraordinary women going above and beyond in their communities to make a positive impact for women and girls through sports,” said Angie White, senior manager of media, Toyota Motor North America. “Their stories are a true example of what hard work and determination can achieve, and we’re proud to honor them and their accomplishments.”

Mechelle Lewis Freeman ([TrackGirlz](#) – Frisco, TX)

Mechelle Lewis Freeman has been called a “track girl” since she was 14. After a standout collegiate career at the University of South Carolina, Mechelle worked in advertising until she decided to take another shot at running, ultimately competing in the 2007 World Championships and the 2008 Olympics. Mechelle knew the power of mentorship and the importance of sports for girls, particularly in middle school when girls are most likely to drop out of sports. Given her personal experience as an elite athlete and coach with connections throughout the sport, Mechelle was in a unique position to do something about it. Mechelle founded TrackGirlz, which focuses on physical health, mental strength, guidance, and support for girls who want to pursue track and field.

Mechelle raises money through grants and in-kind or monetary donations. She is constantly working to find new ways to keep TrackGirlz going. This year they are a NYC Marathon Charity Partner. With additional funding, Mechelle continues to work towards her two main goals: building a dedicated facility for TrackGirlz athletes and increasing the grant distributions the organization makes.

Peggy Turner ([TIRR Memorial Hermann](#) – Houston, TX)

Peggy Turner’s journey to being a pioneer for wheelchair basketball and advocate for adaptive athletics began right after college when she created the first adapted sports initiatives in the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. Peggy was then recruited to become the Athletics Community Liaison & Adapted Sports Coordinator at TIRR Memorial Hermann where she continued the work of inclusion and improving the lives of people with disability through sports.

In her time at TIRR Memorial Hermann, Peggy helped create the Hotwheels program, first with a high school team and then with elementary and middle school age wheelchair basketball teams. She also manages two adult wheelchair rugby teams (TIRR Memorial Hermann Texans) and an adult wheelchair softball team. The TIRR Memorial Hermann Hotwheels youth wheelchair basketball program allows athletes to feel included like their able-bodied peers and gain valuable skills like navigating a hotel and airport as a person with a disability. Peggy has raised funds for the program through donations directed to the adaptive sports program.

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 two years;

- Are currently creating sports opportunities for girls and women in their local communities, and making a meaningful, inspiring impact with quantifiable results.

Past Honorees:

- [2022](#) – Liz Ferro (Founder & CEO of Girls With Sole) and Nzingha Prescod (Founder of the Prescod Institute for Sport, Teamwork, and Education – “PISTE Academy”)
- [2018](#) – Cecelie Owens (Founder/President, G.I.R.L.S Sports Foundation), Liz Brieva & Megan Livatino (Founder & Executive Director, Girls Play Sports) and Melissa Clarke-Wharff (Founder, Courage League Sports)
- [2017](#) – Darlene Hunter (Founder, Lady Mavericks Wheelchair Basketball), Fartun Osman (Founder, Somali Girls Rock) and Mira Manickam (Founder, Brown Girl Surf)
- [2016](#) – Courtney Payne Taylor (Founder, Girls Riders Organization), Tracy Pointer (Founder, GROW/GROW Girl) and Beth Devine (Founder, Philly Girls in Motion)
- [2015](#) – Chrissy Lewis-Summers (Founder of Beyond Sticks) and Heidi Boynton (Founder of Mini Mermaid Running Club)
- [2014](#) – Dr. Kimberley S. Clay (Co-founder, Play Like a Girl!), Monica Gonzalez (Founder, Gonzo Soccer) and Claire Smallwood (Co-founder and Executive Director of SheJumps)
- [2013](#) – Barb Lazarus (Founder, Game On! Foundation), Justine Siegal (Founder, Baseball For All) and Mobolaji Akidoe (Hope 4 Girls Foundation)