



YWCA OF HOUSTON LAUNCHES NEW PROJECT TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

ABOVE: Michelle King; YWCA Board Member; Dr. Edith Irby Jones, OWL Honoree; and Jacqueline Bostic McElroy, YWCA Board Chair

The YWCA of Houston recently held a powerful luncheon that was focused on addressing a major issue impacting our community and highlighting some phenomenal women.

The 2018 Outstanding Women's Luncheon was held at the beautiful Royal Sonesta Hotel.

Nearly 500 people were in attendance at the annual Outstanding Women's Luncheon, a charitable event that helps the YWCA of Houston increase awareness of its mission and programs.

This year's honorary luncheon chair was Jacqueline W. Bostic, the YWCA of Houston Board Chair Emeritus, and the honorary luncheon co-chair was Jacqueline Bostic McElroy, the YWCA of Houston Board Chair.

The keynote speaker, Elizabeth Smart – a human trafficking prevention activist, author and *ABC News* contributor – received international attention when she was taken from her Utah home at age 14 in 2002 and held for nine months. As the founder of the Elizabeth Smart Foundation, she advocates vigilance by everyone and hope for all missing children – which connects to YWCA of Houston’s strong advocacy of human trafficking awareness and abolition.

“You can’t go in guns blazing — it’s not enough,” said Smart. “It’s not enough to rescue them, unless you have services in place and a safe place for them to go and be treated medically and to get the psychological care needed for them to become a functioning member of society. It’s not worth rescuing them because they will turn around and go right back and become a victim again.”

This year’s Outstanding Women’s Luncheon highlighted 11 honorees whose work in the Houston area exemplified the luncheon’s theme: *Women on the Rise! A Legacy of Commitment and Service*.

The esteemed honorees, by category, were:

Education: Ruth Simmons, Ph.D., President, Prairie View A&M University

Business: Edna Meyer-Nelson, Founder, President and CEO, The Richland Companies

Oil and Gas: Shawn E. Simmons, Ph.D., Engineer, Environmental and Permitting Manager, ExxonMobil

Dorothy Height: Edith Irby Jones, M.D., pioneering physician and humanitarian

Art: Beth Merfish, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Art History, University of Houston-Clear Lake

Healthcare: Juliet Breeze, M.D., CEO and Medical Director, Next Level Urgent Care

Law and Government: Jessica Farrar, Houston legislator, Texas House of Representatives

Community Philanthropy: Roxann Chargois, Western Area Director, The Links, Inc.

Outstanding Youth: Lauren Elie and **Jordan Fein**, Flower Power Gives

STEM: Paula McCann Harris, Engineer and Director of Global Stewardship, Schlumberger



Prior to the start of the Outstanding Women’s Luncheon, YWCA Board members and their Leadership Team held a press conference to announce a new project they are launching.

The YWCA of Houston is chartering new territory with the launch of the WYNDOWS Project, which seeks to provide the only 24-hour emergency housing for women ages 18 and older who are victims of human trafficking.

“The WYNDOWS project is an emergency assessment center for adults,” said YWCA of Houston board member Jennifer Hohman. “We are launching the project to help meet the needs of adult survivors to help close the gap.”

The WYNDOWS Project will launch Fall of 2018. YWCA of Houston will partner with local law enforcement agencies, Rescue Houston, the Human Trafficking Hotline and The City of Houston Anti-Human Trafficking Office.

This year’s fundraising affair has heightened the importance of the YWCA of Houston – the city’s second-largest provider of senior services. The YWCA of Houston continues to respond to the critical needs of elder community members still recovering from Hurricane Harvey and as the organization launches the city’s first and only emergency shelter specifically designated for adult women who have been trafficked.

For more information, connect to them @YWCAHOUSTON on social media or visit www.ywcahouston.org to learn more.

<http://forwardtimes.com/ywca-of-houston-launches-new-project-to-support-survivors-of-human-trafficking/>