

## VIDEO: Val-kill award winners honor Eleanor Roosevelt's example



Nina Schutzman, Poughkeepsie Journal 11:14 p.m. EDT October 19, 2014



(Photo: Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal)

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**HYDE PARK** – It's an honor none of them will ever forget.

Annual Val-Kill Medal awards were given to six people who have followed the example of former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, a champion for human rights and social justice, officials said.

Honorees this year were Diana Nyad, Geraldine Laybourne, Lehmah Gobowee, Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel, Katrina vanden Heuvel and Astor Services for Children & Families.

The awards are given each year by the Eleanor Roosevelt Leadership Center at Val-Kill, with a Medal Ceremony held at the former first lady's stone cottage retreat and home in Hyde Park.

Last year, the national historic site was closed because of the government shutdown.

So this year, it felt "really good to be back in this tent," said Kathleen Durham, executive director of the Leadership Center. "This is Eleanor's home."

But the Val-Kill ceremony is not just a party to the Leadership Center. It's a fundraiser to raise money for their programs, which try to teach participants to have a "strong sense of self," Durham said.

They like program participants to learn "how to identify solutions and not dwell on the differences," and to take action, "without wallowing in what's not working," lessons they take back into their communities, she added.

The heated tent by the property's gardens was packed with medal ceremony attendees on Sunday afternoon.

At center-stage were the recipients, whose pride in winning the same award as the likes of Pawling resident and actor James Earl Jones, women's rights activist Gloria Steinem and diplomat Richard Holbrooke, was evident.

"Anyone whose associated with the name and the actions of Eleanor Roosevelt is clearly honored," said Nyad, an athlete, journalist and humanitarian.

To "think that what I did and what my team did means something to humanity ... that we were somehow inspiring, we believed that to never give up is the way to go through life, to reach for the stars is the way to tap all of your potential, and make everyone around you hope for better ... then I'm honored," Nyad added.

While the Leadership Center likes to focus on promoting women's empowerment, they also want to involve men, officials said.

Last year, the first Eleanor Roosevelt Community College Emerging Leaders men's program was formed.

Joshua Wright, a member of the group, was on hand to help Durham thank sponsors of the event.

"We have great people who are impacting our community in tremendous ways," said Wright, a 20-year-old City of Poughkeepsie resident and Dutchess Community College student. "I feel very honored in the sense that I'm among some special people, who really changed not only my life, but life for many of us."

The Community College Emerging Leaders develops programs and implements them "within our communities," like one Wright helped start called [GRIT](#), "meant to inspire students who are academically dismissed" at Dutchess Community College, he said.

Val-Kill medals have been presented to a litany of local residents, as well as statewide, national and international figures.

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**October honorees:**



Val-kill award winners honor Eleanor Roosevelt Nina Schutzman

- Diana Nyad, champion athlete, journalist and humanitarian. Nyad's words mirror Eleanor Roosevelt's regarding living a meaningful life: "We should never ever give up."
- Astor Services for Children & Families, a Rhinebeck-based nonprofit organization that advocates for empowering healthy children and families. Astor lives up to the promise of

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family." Eleanor Roosevelt led the effort to draft the document. "We feel privileged to do the work we do on behalf of vulnerable children and families, carrying on Eleanor Roosevelt's life's work to educate and care for the well-being of children and families and to ensure that all children have a childhood," said James McGuirk, executive director/CEO.

- Geraldine Laybourne, advocate for women's leadership and media/technology entrepreneur. She is committed to helping the women of the world as evidenced by her "Global Mentor's Walk," a national program for shaping leaders.
- Nobel laureate Lehmah Gobowee, Liberian peace activist and an advocate for women and girls. Gobowee was selected for her contributions as a transformational agent for peace.
- Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor and publisher of The Nation. She is a leader and advocate for human rights and social justice.
- Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel, founder and chairman emeritus of the Four Freedoms Park Conservancy Inc., and former U.S. ambassador to the European Office of the United Nations. He has worked for ideals of social justice, human rights and collaboration among nations.

### **Video**

Visit [www.poughkeepsiejournal.com](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com) for footage of the ceremony and luncheon