

Six Local Leaders Honored at 19th Annual African-American Achievers Awards

Palm Beach Gardens High School Senior Receives Four-year Scholarship to FSU

Deerfield Beach, Fla. – Six exceptional individuals -- a passionate performing arts instructor, a firefighter with a global reach, business leaders building communities, an educator overcoming adversity and a high school senior with a bright future -- were recognized at the [African-American Achievers](#) awards ceremony on April 6. More than 1,000 supporters attended the 19th annual event at the Broward County Convention Center, presented by [JM Family Enterprises](#), Southeast Toyota Distributors and [JM Lexus](#).

Congratulations to the 2011 African-American Achievers: **John W. Battle III**, Arts & Culture; **Dwight & Dinah Stephenson**, Business & Entrepreneurism; **Lt. Nathaniel Lasseur**, Community Service; **Mia Y. Merritt, Ed.D.**, Education; and **Victoria Fleury**, Jerome Edmund Gray Youth Achiever presented by [The Jim Moran Foundation](#). The event was hosted by Calvin Hughes, evening news anchor for WPLG Local 10, and featured special performances by the Women's Ensemble of Dillard Center for the Arts and EJ's Company Band.

"There is nothing more important than to say 'thank you' and to recognize people achieving extraordinary things," said Colin Brown, president and CEO of JM Family, during the celebration. "We are all interconnected and individuals who lift up the community deserve our respect and our honor. That's what this event is all about. Our Achievers' stories give us hope, and they inspire us to do great things."

Every year, JM Family, Southeast Toyota and JM Lexus make a donation in each honoree's name to the charity(ies) of his or her choice. To further respond to the needs in the community and support the good work that is being done, this year's charitable contribution was doubled to \$40,000 - \$10,000 in each category. They also donated \$500 to the charity(ies) of choice of those whose nominee was selected as an African-American Achiever. More than \$242,000 has been awarded since automotive legend Jim Moran, founder of JM Family and subsidiaries Southeast Toyota and JM Lexus, created the program in 1992.

Organizations chosen by the honorees to receive funding include The Dwight Stephenson Foundation, International Firefighters Assistance, John Battle Theatre Ensemble, Inc., Fred Taylor Foundation, Inc., Girl Power and Lotus House Women's Shelter.

Youth Achiever Awarded FSU Scholarship

At the ceremony, The Jim Moran Foundation announced Palm Beach Gardens High School senior Victoria Fleury as the recipient of the Jerome Edmund Gray Youth Achiever award. A natural-born leader, Victoria was recognized for her commitment to academics and community involvement. She consistently places in the top 5 percent of her class and is enrolled in her school's Pre-medical Five Star Magnet Program, which means she will be a Certified Nursing Assistant upon graduation. Victoria's passion for helping others and her interest in pursuing a career in neurobiology developed in high school when she befriended a classmate who has Tourette's Syndrome. Already an aspiring medical school student, Victoria will be the first in her family to attend college.

The Jim Moran Foundation, in partnership with Florida State University (FSU), selects a high school senior every year who qualifies for financial aid and has applied and received admission to FSU for the Jerome Edmund Gray Youth Achiever award. Named in memory of 1995 African-American Achiever Jerome Edmund Gray, Esq., the award is a needs-based, four-year scholarship to FSU with funding provided through the [Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship at FSU](#).

About the 2011 Achievers:

Arts & Culture: John W. Battle III

As a performing arts instructor at Hallandale Magnet High School, John Battle works tirelessly to provide students with an avenue for their creative energy. He believes success in the classroom can translate to success in life as long as you work hard to achieve it. John was instrumental in reinstating the school's Drama Club in 2002 and has seen significant academic improvement from its members – 100% receive their diploma and go on to college. In 2003 he founded the John Battle Theatre Ensemble, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to entertaining and educating inner-city youth through theatrical training, performances and a summer camp program.

Business & Entrepreneurism: Dwight & Dinah Stephenson

Dwight and Dinah Stephenson have been building communities and inspiring lives since the early 1980s. Their construction company, D. Stephenson Construction, has become a respected leader by operating with honesty and integrity, and it is those same values that fuel their service to the community. Dwight, an NFL Hall of Famer and former Miami Dolphins offensive lineman, and Dinah, a lawyer, are partners in life and in business. They established the Dwight Stephenson Foundation in 2007 to generate funding for charities that provide educational, health and human services to underserved children and families in South Florida.

Community Service: Lt. Nathaniel Lasseur

Lt. Nate Lasseur's enthusiasm for saving lives extends beyond fighting fires in his West Palm Beach fire station's district. His missionary parents taught him at a young age that blessings in life are only earned by helping others, and he practices that belief in everything he does. Nate's commitment to serve took a new direction after a memorable trip to Haiti. There he saw first responders battling fires in civilian clothes with minimal safety equipment. The experience inspired Nate to establish International Firefighters Assistance, Inc. A grassroots organization with a global reach, it partners with local firefighting units to collect equipment and coordinate training for rescue workers in underprivileged countries.

Education: Mia Y. Merritt, Ed.D.

An administrator for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Dr. Merritt uses her personal experiences as a misdirected youth to teach at-risk teens and young adults that their past choices do not dictate their future. She believes that both the seeds of greatness and the seeds of failure can be found in each of us. Her goal is to motivate young people to feed their greatness by setting goals, working hard and cultivating their gifts. For Dr. Merritt, facing obstacles is a necessary part of growing up. It's overcoming them and learning from mistakes that make the difference in your life. She is an eight-time author of personal development books, motivational and keynote speaker, and an avid volunteer with Girl Power!

[Click here](#) to learn more about our 2011 Achievers.

Independent Selection Committee

The 2011 honorees were selected by an independent panel of community leaders from Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties that included former Achievers. The selection committee reviewed more than 110 nominees after an extensive public outreach campaign.

- Ramon A. Brayan, Account Executive for WPLG Local 10
- Juliet Gray-Williams, Educator at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School
- Julie Hunter, Associate Director for Public Services of Broward County Public Library
- Hamish Reed, 1993 African-American Achiever and Account Manager for Hospira
- Perry Stokes, 2010 African-American Achiever and Teacher at Carver Middle School

To learn more, visit www.africanamericanachievers.com or [become a fan on Facebook](#).

About JM Family Enterprises, Inc.

JM Family Enterprises, Inc. (www.jmfamily.com), founded by Jim Moran in 1968, is a diversified automotive company ranked by *Forbes* as the 33rd-largest privately held company in the U.S. It is currently ranked No. 16 by FORTUNE® as one of the “100 Best Companies to Work For,” its 13th consecutive year on the list. The company is also ranked No. 3 on *Computerworld*’s list of “100 Best Places to Work in IT.” Primary subsidiaries and divisions include: Southeast Toyota Distributors, LLC, World Omni Financial Corp., JM&A Group, JM Service Center LLC, and JM Lexus. Headquartered in Deerfield Beach, Fla., JM Family has major operations in Jacksonville and Margate, Fla.; Commerce and Alpharetta, Ga.; Mobile, Ala.; and St. Louis, Mo.

About The Jim Moran Foundation

Founded by Jim Moran in 2000, the mission of The Jim Moran Foundation is to improve the quality of life for the youth and families of Florida through the support of innovative programs and opportunities that meet the ever-changing needs of the community. It is located at 100 Jim Moran Boulevard, Deerfield Beach, Fla. 33442. Through a long-term Grant Agreement, The Foundation’s significant funders are JM Family Enterprises Inc., and its subsidiaries, including Southeast Toyota Distributors, LLC. To learn more about The Foundation visit www.jimmoranfoundation.org or call (954) 429-2122.

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