

Torch of Wisdom Foundation to hold 25th anniversary black-tie gala

By Donald James

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Since 1993, the Torch of Wisdom Foundation (TOWF) has sought viable ways in which to empower families, young people, adults and communities. Since its inception, the Southfield, Mich.-based 501c 3 organization has implemented programs and events, awarded scholarships to youth, and raised the awareness of cultural arts throughout Southeast Michigan. Each TOWF program, according to the organization's purpose statement, addresses values-based issues to find sustainable solutions that increase economic, social and education opportunities for youth, adults and families.

On Saturday, November 10th, TOWF will hold a black-tie gala to celebrate its 25th anniversary. Under the banner theme, "A Moment in Time: Twenty-Five Years of Changing Tomorrow Today," the silver celebration, to be held at the Rosterball near downtown Detroit from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., will feature award-winning R&B recording artists, "Kindred the Family Soul." The gala will also recognize "Silver Celebrities," who are individuals and organizations who've played important roles in the growth of TOWF.



R&B recording artists, "Kindred the Family Soul."

"Reaching our silver milestone is significant," said Yolanda Durfield, TOWF's president and board chair. "Twenty five years of hard work, dedication and commitment to making a difference will be celebrated. Torch of Wisdom Foundation has been one of Metro Detroit's hidden gems for a while, and this gala will provide an opportunity for us to shine, but most importantly recognize those who have helped us reach this special moment."

While appreciative of the signature event's sponsors, such as the Michigan Chronicle, Fifth Third Bank, Public Service Credit Union, Comerica Bank, Varsity Lincoln, and Northland Chrysler Jeep Dodge, Durfield reflected on how far TOWF has evolved since its inception.

"We were initially founded by several women of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated's Southfield Alumnae Chapter, who wanted an organization to focus on outreach programs that would impact the community through our sorority," said Durfield. "However, the founders of TOWF saw a greater need to expand our services. We felt we needed more of an expansive outreach into the community. We wanted to partner with other organizations to focus on the areas of scholarship, cultural arts, and community enrichment."

Durfield said the organization first's vision, 25 years ago, was to locate and purchase a building that would house TOWF's programs, activities and events, all centered on mentoring, education, recreation and community empowerment. In 2011, TOWF's vision came to fruition, when the organization bought a commercial building in Southfield and appropriate



Wayne United job fair focuses on diversity and inclusion

By Branden Hunter

Paul Thompkins did not think he would be helping customers at Home Depot transport bags of concrete, flowers, and appliances to their cars when he got out of the United States Army in 2016. He planned on enrolling in graduate school and finding a job that would combine the business management skills he had learned in college with his four years of experience in an artillery unit.

Yet, here he was two years later, working a job he did not expect to be at, taking orders as if he was in the military again, and feeling hopeless about his future career prospects.

"I just knew once I left the Army it would be easy for someone like me to get a job," said Thompkins, who is 30. "I earned a degree, I served my country, and I wanted to get back into the civilian workforce. I thought the country that I served would have served me better."

Thompkins was one of hundreds of metro Detroit job seekers either looking for employment or in search of better opportunities at the Wayne United job fair on the campus of Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD).

Wayne United is an initiative launched by the Wayne County Executive's office to promote diversity and inclusion throughout the County. The job fair put a special emphasis on assisting employers identify perspective employees from within underserved communities including veterans, refugees, immigrants, and returning citizens.

"I am absolutely committed to the reality that talent is evenly distributed throughout the universe," said Wayne County Executive Warren C. Evans. "But what people often don't have is opportunity and opportunity is what makes that talent blossom.



That is what makes events like this one so great because it gives refugees, immigrants, returning veterans and returning citizens an opportunity to showcase their talents through employment."

Among the 35-plus vendors in the lobby of WCCCD's student center included International Trucking School, the Westin-Southfield, MCM Staffing, SenTech Staffing, IHOP Subway, Global Detroit, and Goodwill, among others. Those who RSVP'd were able to share their resume with employers prior to the day of the fair, but walk-ins were not turned away at the door.

Wayne County is the most populous county in the state of Michigan and serves as one of the most diverse communities in the entire nation. It is home to large African-American, Hispanic, Asian, German, Polish, Irish and Arab populations and also has a large concentration of immi-

grants and refugees spread out over 43 communities. They need jobs and better opportunities, which Evans and his team are dedicated to providing.

"The county executive is very passionate about diversity," said Zaineb Hussein, Director of Diversity and Inclusion for Wayne County. "He's been known to say that adversity is our strength and it's a very common theme in a lot of his messages. Because of that, he likes to create initiatives and events that highlight Wayne County's diversity and today we hope those who came today, needing a job, walk away with one."

In September 2018, the unemployment rate for veterans in the country was 3.4 percent, down from 3.7 percent from last year. According to an article by Forbes, between 60 and 75 percent of ex-offenders are

Anniversary

From page B-1
by named a Torch of Wisdom Foundation Plaza.

Over the years, TOWF, said Durfield, has served about 800 participants with its stand-alone programs and events, and more than 2,500 individuals, youth and senior adults in partnership ventures.

Youth activities include such initiatives as, The Learning Network, a youth employability skills program; the Wisdom Warrior Project (former known as Young Women for Change); and the Financial Reality Fair, which in partnership with Public Service Credit Union, provides young people with information necessary for budgeting to meet future expenses and lifestyles at the start of their chosen careers.

"The Financial Reality Fair gives young people an example of what it will be like to live life as an adult," said Durfield. "It's a fun way for youth to know and better understand how they should budget their incomes."

In an annual salute to individuals who are making a positive difference in the community, TOWF, through its "Honoring Local Heroes: Changing Tomorrow Today" sector presents the "Black-No-Tie Awards." The honorees, according to Durfield, recognize organizations and leaders who are empowering youth, families and underserved communities.

"We've grown so much over our first 25 years," Durfield said. "And over the next 25 years and beyond, the Torch of Wisdom Foundation will continue to grow, serve and empower the community through awarding scholarships and raising cultural arts awareness. We want to continue to be the premier organization that

benefits families, youth and communities based upon identifiable needs."

To purchase tickets, tables and sponsorships for the November 10th Torch of Wisdom Foundation's

25th anniversary black-tie gala at the Roostertail, or to learn more about TOWF and future activities and events, log on to www.torchofwisdomfoundation.com/upcoming-events or call 248.327.6815.

clean pair of socks if no one is giving them some. They are out all day with the same pair of socks on in the cold, the snow, and the rain and there are foot diseases that affect them from not having on clean,

"One thing about me, I do not do this because I want any type of recognition," said Woods, who experienced being poor growing up on the city's west side. "Giving back to my community is truly my passion."

If you want to donate to Socktober Detroit, IM2A has a community drop-off location at 20042 West 12 Mile Road in Southfield or Woods can be reached at 313-312-3528.

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