

PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Open Communities to Honor Justice Day Volunteers, Susan Trieschmann and Lesley Williams with Justice Awards

Celebration to laud recipients and champion their work advocating for justice and inclusive communities in the northern suburbs; will be held October 26

Winnetka, IL, September 1, 2016 – Open Communities' awards recognize the work of volunteers and community members who live the motto of "Welcoming Communities". These individuals will be honored at the the "We All Benefit" Awards event on Wednesday, October 26 at the Evanston Unitarian Church with refreshments and entertainment.

Our recipients this year are:

- The **Justice Day Volunteers** for the **Rayna and Marvin Miller Community Justice Award**, for their demonstrated grassroots leadership in organizing Justice Day in 2015, as well as establishing a definition for the Welcoming Community and [framework](#) for northern suburban communities to aspire to, in order to be considered inclusive and diverse.
- Evanston resident **Susan Trieschmann**, Executive Director and founder of Curt's Café, a job training cafe for at-risk youth, for the **Jean R. Cleland Social Action Award**, named to honor one of the North Shore's most stalwart champions for housing justice and a founder of Open Communities along with the Millers.
- **Lesley Williams** for the **Spirit of Open Communities Award**, in recognition of her grassroots organizing to fight Islamophobia and racism in Evanston. In light of tragic events across our nation regarding race, and rhetoric that has caused a divisive atmosphere, the Spirit of Open Communities Award has been designated this year to honor an individual who exemplifies and works towards the ideal of just and inclusive communities.

"We are so proud of these individuals who work to promote justice and demonstrate that xenophobia and racism are not acceptable in our communities," said David Luna, Executive Director of Open Communities in announcing the award selections.

The **Justice Day Volunteers** are this year's recipients of the **Rayna and Marvin Miller Community Justice Award**, which recognizes the commitment and achievement of an individual or group in promoting the mission of just, diverse and open communities over the past year in Chicago's northern suburbs. The volunteers worked tirelessly for over a year to organize Justice Day, which took place July 26, 2015. Nearly one thousand people gathered on the Winnetka Village Green to renew their commitment to social justice that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of in his historic address fifty years prior at the same location. The volunteers were also instrumental in establishing the Principles of the Welcoming Community, a tool that municipalities can use to evaluate themselves in order to become more accessible, safe and engaged; and by which residents can hold their elected and appointed officials accountable. The members continue to work in their communities to promote justice through social change

The **Justice Day Volunteers** include: Andy Amend, Kristin Berg, David Borris, Catherine Buntin, Marilee Cole, Beverly Copeland, Betty Ester, Helen Gagel, Nancy Goodman, Bennett Johnson, Sherry Medwin, Carol Michelini, Kathy Miller, Jennifer O'Neil, Fr. Bob Oldershaw, Nan Parson, Nancy Pred, Nina Raskin, Frances Roehm, Sharon Sanders, Rev. Jan Smith, Denyse Stoneback, Patti Vile, and Elliot Zashin. The award also honors Mary Powers, who passed away earlier this year.

Susan Trieschmann is the founder and Executive Director of Curt's Café and recipient of the **Jean R. Cleland Social Action Award**, which recognizes an individual or group who has undertaken action having impact to promote the mission of diversity and inclusiveness in the northern suburbs. Curt's Café, which stands for Cultivating Unique Restaurant Training, is a job training café and catering business that offers valuable opportunities to at-risk youth, specifically those who have been released from prison, those who are at risk of being incarcerated, and teenage mothers. The motto that guides her work is "Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start now and make a brand new ending."

Susan has been instrumental in coalescing support among Evanstonians of all backgrounds for this cause. Her work includes partnering with local congregations and other groups, serving as an "ambassador of conscience", mobilizing neighbors to contribute financially, as well as offering their time and talents to support the program.

Lesley Williams is the recipient of the **Spirit of Open Communities Award**, designated this year to honor an individual who exemplifies and works towards the ideal of just and inclusive communities. In December of 2015 and March 2016, Lesley Williams organized rallies to show support to Muslim residents and to raise awareness of Islamophobia. The first rally, which she organized in less than a week, drew hundreds of participants and attracted positive media attention to the issue. At the rally, Lesley stated, "I'm proud to be standing with over 30 religious and community organizations who differ on certain issues, but who are united in their condemnation of racial and religious bigotry." Lesley has been a local leader in the Black Lives Matter movement, which has brought "important conversations to kitchen tables, living rooms, classrooms and neighborhoods all over Evanston", according to one of her nominators.

These awards highlight Open Communities' transformation in 2012 from one solely focused on fair and affordable housing in the northern suburbs to one that educates, advocates and organizes to promote just and inclusive communities.

The "[We All Benefit](#)" awards event is Wednesday, October 26th from 6:30pm to 9:00pm at the Evanston Unitarian Church 1330 Ridge Avenue, Evanston. Tickets are \$75.00.

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About Open Communities

Founded in 1972, Open Communities is a nonprofit whose mission is to educate, advocate and organize to promote just and inclusive communities in north suburban Chicago. The agency works with current and prospective residents and local groups to promote economically and culturally diverse communities. Its work includes the investigation of fair housing discrimination and landlord/tenant complaints, foreclosure and predatory lending counseling and prevention, Homesharing, immigrant leadership development, fair housing education and advocacy, and grassroots organizing. Its service area comprises the northern Cook and southern Lake County municipalities of Deerfield, Des Plaines, Evanston, Glencoe, Glenview, Highland Park, Highwood, Kenilworth, Lincolnwood, Morton Grove, Niles, Northbrook, Northfield, Park Ridge, Skokie, Wilmette, and Winnetka.