

Two Berkeley women to be honored by county in March

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Berkeleyside blog

Two women with Berkeley ties will be inducted into the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame later this month, county officials have announced. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Hall of Fame, and both women, along with eight others, will be celebrated March 23 at a luncheon in Oakland.

"Each of these outstanding inductees contributes to life in our community in ways that help make Alameda County a place that is second-to-none in terms of its vibrant culture and the rich diversity," said Alameda County Administrator Susan S. Muranishi, an event co-chair, in a prepared statement. "Our Women's Hall of Fame also continues to flourish, and we believe our newest inductees will help make 2013 our best year ever."

Recently retired Berkeley Fire Chief Debra Pryor will be honored in the non-traditional careers category. According to her bio, which was provided by the county, "By the time she was named Berkeley's first-ever woman Fire Chief in 2004, Debra Pryor was well accustomed to setting new standards for women in a field that has always been dominated by men. In 1985, Debra's athletic ability and innate leadership skills helped her to become the first female firefighter in the history of her hometown of Berkeley. She would become the city's first female paramedic, and the first woman to hold the titles of lieutenant, captain, assistant chief, deputy chief and fire chief. She also was the first African American woman Fire Chief in California history. These achievements speak volumes, but more important is the inspiration Debra has provided to other women determined to pursue careers that for many years have been off limits to them."

Rita Sahai will be honored in the culture and art category. Sahai is described as "an acclaimed composer, performer and teacher of Hindustani Classical Music. Born in India, Rita was chosen to at age nine with the renowned vocalist Pandit Rama Shankar Mishra. At 14, she won first prize in the prestigious 'All India Music Competition.' She later studied in the United States with the world famous sarod maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. Rita's dedication and unique vocal talent have brought her the title 'Gayan Alankar,' or Jewel of Music. Rita tours throughout the world and has collaborated on projects as diverse as a blue grass recording led by Grammy Award-winning artist Béla Fleck to Alonzo King's Lines Ballet, 'Skyclad.' She has produced two well-received solo Albums as well and currently teaches music throughout the Bay Area and at UC Davis."

This year's inductees also include Ophelia Basgal of Oakland, Business and Professions; Gilda Gonzales of Oakland, Community Service; Ruth B. Love, Ph.D. of Oakland, Education; Carolyn Bloede, Director of Alameda County's Sustainability Program, Environment; Sherry Higgs of Fremont, Health; Sandra Pitts-Johnson of Oakland, Justice; Hope A. Michelsen, Ph.D., of Livermore, Science; and Alice V. Deng of Pleasanton, Youth.

The Hall of Fame program raises money for local charities that provide resources to women and children in the community. It also sponsors a youth scholarship to help a young woman further her education or training.

This year's Women's Hall of Fame luncheon and awards ceremony is set for 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 23, at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral, 4700 Lincoln Ave., Oakland. The event will be hosted by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and the Alameda County Commission on the Status of Women. Tickets to the event cost \$75. For sponsorships and tickets, visit the Alameda County Women's Hall of fame website.