

Rose cited for women's causes

International honor for Women's Foundation leader, philanthropist

By Jane Roberts

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Gayle Rose receives an international award tonight for her unending dedication to the cause of women and women's philanthropy around the world.

The Women's Funding Network will present the award -- once given to Gloria Steinem -- at its annual conference in Seattle.

Other recipients are Bisi Adeley-Fayemi, executive director of the African Women's Development Fund, and J. Christine Wilson, co-founder of the Women's Foundation of Genesee Valley, N.Y.

"Gayle has spent the last 20 years working in philanthropy with a focus on women. She herself is a personal philanthropist," said Christine Grumm, chief executive and president of the Women's Funding Network, the umbrella organization for 116 Women's Funds around the world, including the seminal Ms. Foundation, formed in the 1970s.

Rose, chief executive of EVS Corp., helped co-found the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis in 1995.

"Gayle is a proven fund-raiser in all areas of the community, from the Women's Foundation to the arts to LeMoyne-Owen College," said Ruby Bright, executive director of the Women's Foundation.

The award honors her dedication to women's causes locally and her work to extend the foundation's reach by partnering with government agencies.

The nonprofit, known nationally for its partnership with the Memphis Housing Authority, is the first women's fund to secure private funding for the HOPE IV program, which helps women in public housing transition to more independent lives.

With Rose spearheading fund-raising, the Women's Foundation has raised more than half of the \$7.3 million it needs over five years to help with skill assessments, job training, placement and community building.

"It was Gayle's vision, leadership and commitment to stepping up to the plate that made it happen. Not only as a philanthropist but as a our No. 1 fund-raiser," said Bright, who nominated Rose for the award.

The Women's Foundation branched into public-sector work when it developed ways to access storm evacuees' needs following Hurricane Katrina.

"Ninety percent of the families that came to Memphis were headed by women. What the Women's Foundation did was develop an intake model focused on women and their needs," Grumm said.

The model was copied by city government agencies also trying to help, she said.

"The Memphis fund is solid and growing," Grumm said. "It also has a very diverse donor base."

Part of Rose's commitment to the Women's Foundation is to increase the level of female philanthropy in Memphis, "and changing the face of philanthropy," Grumm said.

"Everyone can be a philanthropist. We are committed to stretch gifts, be it \$10 or \$10 million."

The Women's Foundation started with a \$50,000 "seed" grant from Mertie Buckman in the early 1990s to explore ways to invest locally in women.

"She noticed that the budgets of men's organizations were twice the size of women's and girls' organizations and thought there could be a foundation that could support programs for women and girls," Bright said.

Today, the foundation gives more than \$550,000 a year to local groups supporting development of women and girls, and works to promote philanthropy among women.

"It's not only of her support of issues that deal with women and children, it's that her passionate advocacy for our city is born of such a genuine sense of personal responsibility," said Susan Stephenson, chairman of the Women's Foundation and co-chair of Independent Bank. "She connects in way that most people don't. We are all truly responsible for making the city better."

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