

## East Texas African-American women honored for their service to community

By Zak Wellerman [zwellerman@tylerpaper.com](mailto:zwellerman@tylerpaper.com) Feb 18, 2020 Updated Mar 28, 2020



Honorees Veretta Rider, Yolanda Prince, Dr. Shirley McKellar and LaToya Sessions-Jordan are recognized at the Texas African American Museum (TAAM) 2020 Notable African American Women program at the Rose Garden Center in Tyler on Tuesday. Texas African American Museum is in Tyler at 3000 N. Border Ave.

Sarah A. Miller/Tyler Morning Telegraph



For their service in East Texas, 20 African-American women who are community leaders, philanthropists and role models were recognized Tuesday by the Texas African-American Museum in Tyler.

The ceremony at the Tyler Rose Garden Center honored women who have worked hard in their careers and help their communities.

The women were: Reverend Orenthia Mason, Gayle Hayward, LaToya Sessions-Jordan, Doris Batson, Veretta Rider, Kayla Lyons, Glinda Howard, JoAnn Hampton, Janae Holland, Debbie Broughton, Lisa Williams, Dorinda Williams, Suzette Farr, Yolanda Prince, Dr. Jennifer Jackson, Dr. Angela Smith, Dr. Cheryl Garmon, Dr. Shirley McKellar, Chanel Howard-Veazy and VaLita Waits.

Gloria Washington, TAAM executive director, encouraged attendees to support others and be an example for young girls.

“Your potential is great and it shows in your ever-being. Let’s continue to teach our young females the importance of standing up for that which is right,” Washington said. “We’re here today to recognize for your strong endearment, your strong courage, your commitment to stay vigil and prepared for that which you are faced with. Strong women, strong faith. Strong leadership is much to be admired and saluted.”

TAAM Volunteer Coordinator Denise Pendleton said the women’s portraits will be on display at the museum for the rest of Black History Month and during March, which is Women’s History Month. The museum is at 3000 N. Border Ave. in Tyler.

The biographies of the women will also be bound into a collection, Pendleton said.

“These are women not only accomplished in their chosen careers, but they are dedicated to a life of service,” she said. “These are women who are moving our city forward.”

Pendleton said they hope to make the recognition an annual event around February and March for Black History and Women’s History months.

Tyler Councilwoman Shirley McKellar gave her gratitude to her fellow honorees and the museum.

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“There’s something about being honored in your own hometown. Thank you for honoring all these beautiful women of East Texas,” McKellar said. “They’re doing amazing work and I know that they’re going to continue and you’re going to continue to do the great work that’s being done in East Texas.”

Smith County Precinct 4 Commissioner JoAnn Hampton expressed her gratitude and reminded attendees to exercise their right to vote this election.

“To all my sisters who are here to be honored, it is wonderful to be considered on the same level as you,” Hampton said.

A UT Tyler graduate of the inaugural Doctor of Practicing Nursing and Heaton Eye Associates Director Dr. Cheryl Garmon said she appreciated the honor and being among the other women.

“What a great it is to be here and be among everyone here. I am just so overwhelmed and grateful for the journey on which God has set me forth,” Garmon said. “And being here with a diverse group of women, I am excited for your journey as well.”

Pharmacist and Texas College professor Dr. Jennifer Jackson, who is a Longview native, credited the East Texas environment to her success.

“Our culture honors African-Americans at this moment, but we know it extends well beyond the boundaries of February,” Jackson said. “ I am a seedling and I have grown to be a tree here to harvest and give back. To the women of this community, I say if you ever want to build a nation, build a woman.”

She is also the current Miss Plus Intercontinental, a global honor under the Miss Plus World Pageant showcasing the beauty of all women.

Wood County Precinct 2 Justice of the Peace Janae Holland encouraged women to be active and work to pursue their goals.

“We’re got to go and we’ve got to set the example for these little girls. And for my son, who’s sitting out there, who’s 16, he’s got to know that there’s a strong woman behind him,” Holland said. “So we’ve got to move.”

American Heart Association Corporate Market Director Suzette Farr said she was humbled to be honored with the award and advocate for heart disease prevention.

“It means so much to me to be able to get out and advocate, educate and truly engage women and men of color in knowing more about the number one killer of our people, which is heart disease,” Farr said.

### Honorees

- Doris Batson: Kids Aspiring to Dream creative director
- Debbie Broughton: Founder of Gospel Aerobics and Young Girls with Purpose
- Suzette Farr: American Heart Association Corporate Market Director
- Dr. Cheryl Garmon: Heaton Eye Associates director
- JoAnn Hampton: Smith County Precinct 4 Commissioner
- Gayle Hayward: Smith County Director of Probation Services
- Janae Holland: Wood County Precinct 2 Justice of the Peace
- Glinda Howard: Jewel Premium Sanitary Napkins awareness ambassador
- Dr. Jennifer Jackson: Pharmacist and professor
- LaToya Sessions-Jordan: Social media creative and founder of “I Am Beautiful” movement
- Kayla Lyons: KLTN news anchor
- Rev. Orenthia Mason: Elder of North Tyler District CME Church and Tyler ISD School Board trustee
- Dr. Shirley McKellar: Tyler District 3 City Councilwoman
- Yolanda Prince: Entrepreneur and president of Democratic Club of Smith County
- Veretta Rider: Co-owner of Rider Homes and Rider Construction
- Chanel Howard-Veazy: Principal of John Tyler High School
- VaLita Waits: Attorney and founder of Friends Giving Back
- Dorinda Williams: March of Dimes coordinator and member of Tyler Together Race Relations
- Lisa Williams: Black Nurses Rock president and CEO and NAACP Tyler secretary

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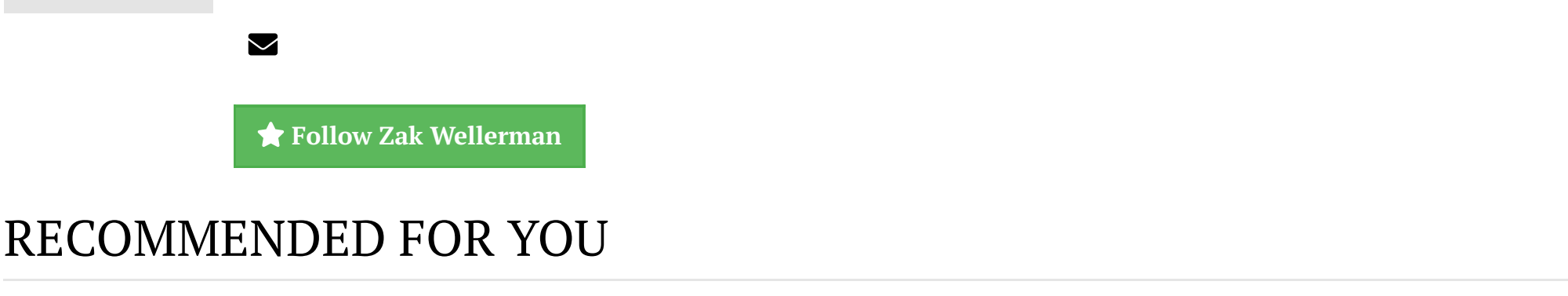
**Zak Wellerman**  
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I came to the Tyler Morning Telegraph in September 2019. I report on crime, courts, breaking news and various events in Tyler and East Texas.

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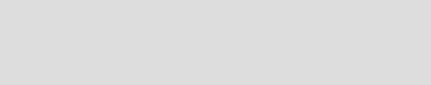
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