

## Community leaders named 2009 local/emerging legends

Written by

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Three Twin Cities residents who found innovative ways to help others were honored recently at the 19th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday breakfast.

The breakfast – hosted by UNCF (United Negro College Fund) and the General Mills Foundation – was held Jan. 19 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The sold-out event, which drew 2,000 guests, featured Gen. Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret), as keynote speaker.

The 2009 Honorees are:

Emerging Legend: David Gholar, a student at Roosevelt Senior High School

Local Legend: Fran Heitzman, founder of Bridging Inc.

Local Legend: Margaret Lovejoy, founder of The Family Place

Each year, the annual MLK Jr. holiday breakfast includes the presentation of Local Legend awards to those actively involved in their community, demonstrating Dr. King's dedication to nonviolent social change. The Local Legend award honors those with a legacy of service, while the Emerging Legend award – new this year -- honors youth who are making their communities better places.

The three honorees are actively involved in the community and demonstrate King's six steps for nonviolent social change: information gathering, education, personal commitment, negotiation, direct action and reconciliation. The varied efforts of these three honorees touch many lives, making the Twin Cities a better place to live.

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David Gholar is a student at Roosevelt Senior High School. In 2006, his family had a tough Christmas, facing possible eviction and depending on a local food bank for food. The difficult time planted the seed for Gholar to help others. Partnering in 2007 with Urban Ventures, a Minneapolis nonprofit that receives funding from the sale of CityKid Java coffee, Gholar raised \$4,500 in coffee sales -- enough to help support eight families.

But this student's commitment to his community didn't begin and end with the holidays. He has participated in numerous leadership activities, building better neighborhoods with the City of Minneapolis' Step-Up program; tutoring elementary children in math and reading during the summers; and participating in the Kids Across America leadership experiences the past two years in the Ozarks.

In addition to these accomplishments, Gholar is also an active member of his academic community, serving on the Roosevelt Senior High School student council for the past three years and as school mascot this year.

Margaret Lovejoy was working as the director of an overnight shelter for families in Ramsey County when she heard a young child ask his mother where he was going to find her when he got off the school bus. Lovejoy was troubled by the realization that the families she helped at night had no safe place to spend their days. She quit her job, developed a program and used her personal assets to open The Family Place – the first day center for homeless families in Ramsey County.

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Today, The Family Place serves 40 people three meals a day, 365 days a year. Beyond nourishment and shelter, The Family Place provides families with a family room in which to relax, phones and computers, showers, laundry facilities and lockers for storing personal items.

Lovejoy, who encourages and supports education for others, continues to learn herself. With a belief that additional education will make her a better leader, she spends nights and weekends working on a doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Fran Heitzman was a maintenance man at a local church 21 years ago when a young couple brought in a used crib they no longer needed. The church could not accept it, so Heitzman called a local social service agency, which quickly passed it to a needy family. That got him thinking that there must be a way to provide struggling families with furniture and household goods. The nonprofit Bridging was born.

In the two decades since, the organization has grown dramatically and touched many lives, serving more than 46,000 families. That's four semi-trucks a day, \$1 million of furniture a month.

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Of course, this all doesn't happen without some heavy lifting. Heitzman, now well into his 80s, continues to be a tireless advocate for the organization, speaking to individuals, corporations and community groups to generate products and cash donations. And then there are the volunteers: more than 7,000 who bring the mission to life.

At the MLK Jr. Holiday Breakfast, Gholar, Lovejoy and Heitzman received their awards and were showcased in a video that detailed their important work.

As the nation's largest and most effective minority education organization, UNCF's mission is to enhance the quality of education by providing financial assistance to deserving students, raising operating funds for member colleges and universities, and increasing access to technology for students and faculty at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUS). UNCF institutions and other HBCUS are highly effective, awarding 25 percent of African-American baccalaureate degrees.

The General Mills Foundation, celebrating more than 50 years of giving, is a champion for stronger communities. In fiscal 2008, General Mills awarded \$87 million to communities, representing more than 5 percent of company pretax profits. Of that total, the General Mills Foundation contributed \$21 million in grants in targeted areas of youth nutrition and fitness, social services, education, and arts and culture.

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