

Recipients of the 2019 Iris Awards Announced



Iris Awards will be presented to (left to right) Ann Fischer, Stacey Graham, Rekah Strong, Lynn Valenter, and Maureen Montague (H-ROC Iris Award).

Five women representing exceptional leadership, philanthropy and community service are the winners of the 2019 Iris Awards, honoring women of achievement in Southwest Washington. They will be recognized at an awards reception on Thursday, March 7.

Awards will be presented to Ann Fischer, founder of the Healthy Equitable Living Project; Stacey Graham, president of the Humane Society for Southwest Washington; Rekah Strong, executive director of Educational Opportunities for Children and Families; and Lynn Valenter, vice chancellor for finance and operations at Washington State University Vancouver. H-RoC, a non-partisan

political action committee dedicated to the advancement of elected and appointed female leaders in Southwest Washington, has chosen Columbia Springs Executive Director Maureen Montague for the Iris Award they sponsor.

The award ceremony takes place in Gaiser Student Center on Clark College's main campus. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the ceremony begins at 6:00 p.m. The event is open to the public and tickets are on sale through the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce at <https://www.vancouverusa.com/events/details/2019-iris-awards-reception-18904>. The cost is \$35 per person. A table sponsorship, which includes eight tickets, can be purchased for \$310. Seating is limited.

Clark College is located at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver. Driving directions and parking maps are available at www.clark.edu/maps. Anyone needing accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College's Disability Support Services Office at (360) 992-2314 or (360) 991-0901 (VP), or visit Penguin Union Building room 013, by February 26.

About the Iris Awards

The Iris Awards follow in the tradition of the Southwest Washington Women of Achievement Awards, which began in 1985 at Clark College. In

2012, the event was reintroduced as the Iris Awards, still celebrated on or around International Women's Day (March 8) and with the same core mission: honoring the lasting and far-reaching contributions of women in Southwest Washington and beyond.

This year's awards are sponsored by Clark College, the Clark College Foundation, the *Vancouver Business Journal*, the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, and H-RoC.

The 2019 Iris Award Honorees

Ann Fischer



Ann Fischer

Ann Fischer is the founder of the Healthy Equitable Living Project (HELP), a food pantry located at the First Presbyterian Church in Vancouver. HELP was launched in 2013, when the Vancouver Health Department asked if the church could assist local

schools in serving families who were experiencing food insecurity. Fischer began by soliciting donations from neighborhood grocery stores to help five families. Over the past six years, HELP has expanded to serve between 50 and 60 families from 14 different schools.

Through the food pantry, Fischer makes sure people are not only fed, but fed well. Fischer hand-selects many of the products that the pantry offers, with a focus on high-quality, nutritious, and organic foods. It is not unusual for Fischer to remember individual patrons' specific dietary needs, from vegan to gluten-free. She also created the pantry's Breakfast Club, where families are served a hot breakfast while they wait to shop, giving them a chance to build community and friendships.

Fischer has a long record of service in the community, ranging from supporting her local church to organizing fundraisers for children's organizations. For 25 years, she ran an antique shop called Turnabout that offered assistance to people who were transitioning their living situations.

Stacey Graham



Stacey Graham

Stacey Graham has served as president of the Humane Society for Southwest Washington (HSSW) since 2013. Graham's career spans 40 years leading for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Her wide-ranging work experience includes positions in the Oregon Legislature and Oregon Governor's Office, as well as key roles in public relations and advertising agencies, the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, and the Vancouver-based First Independent Bank.

Graham joined the HSSW team charged with creating a sustainable and effective business model; raising the level of awareness and visibility of the Humane Society in the local community and animal welfare industry; and dramatically increasing the save rate of the animals in care. Under her leadership, HSSW launched a five-year, \$6 million capital campaign. In 2018, HSSW was named the Best Nonprofit in Clark County.

Graham's community service includes serving as city council president in her hometown of Stayton,

Oregon; on the boards of the Clark County YWCA, The Historic Trust, the Lighthouse Community Credit Union, Nonprofit Network of Southwest Washington, Metropolitan Family Service, Northwest Pilot Project, Portland Radio Project and H-RoC; and on the Empower Women + Girls steering committee. Graham has helped develop strategic plans for many local nonprofits, including North County Community Food Bank, Vancouver Symphony, Partners in Careers, Clark County Arts Commission and Pink Lemonade.

Rekah Strong



Rekah Strong

Rekah Strong is a highly accomplished public and non-profit executive. She currently serves as the executive director for Educational Opportunities for Children and Families (EOCF), the largest early learning organization in Southwest Washington.

Prior to this position, Strong served as chief of operations and equity officer for the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette and chief diversity and inclusion

officer for Clark County.

Earlier in her career, Strong spent more than a decade working for the State of Oregon to improve outcomes for children and families in Oregon's child welfare system.

Strong has a long record of public service and community involvement in Southwest Washington. During her tenure with Clark County, she helped lay the initial framework and push for the Clark County Freeholder process and expansion of the Clark County Council. More recently, she was reappointed by Governor Jay Inslee to serve as a Clark College trustee and actively advocates for education. She was also recently selected as the newest board member of Clark County's Developmental Disability Advisory Board, and has served on the boards of We Reign Youth Foundation and Southwest Washington Chapter Red Cross.

A Clark College alumna, Strong earned her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and master's degree in Social Work from Portland State University. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Social Work Research.

Lynn Valenter



Lynn Valenter

As the vice chancellor for finance and operations at Washington State University Vancouver, Lynn Valenter leads a range of functions including budget and accounting, capital planning, dining services, facilities operations, human resources and public safety. She began her career at WSU Vancouver more than 20 years ago, holding roles as facilities and auxiliary services manager and director of finance and operations before being named as vice chancellor in 2015. Valenter has been instrumental in increasing WSU Vancouver's public engagement and service during an important period in the campus's growth.

Valenter's engaged, enthusiastic, and equitable leadership style has been of service to both the university and the local community. As an active member of Empower, she supports initiatives that help local girls and women, and she is a frequent volunteer with Winter Hospitality Overflow, an organization that helps people in need during the winter months. Her board service includes Camas Civil Service, Institute for Metropolitan Studies at Portland State University, Columbia Credit Union, H-RoC, Greater Portland Inc., and the Columbia River Economic Development Council. In 2016, Valenter was honored by the *Portland Business Journal* as a part of their Women of Influence in the nonprofit category.

Maureen Montague



Maureen Montague

It is no exaggeration to say that Maureen Montague has been involved in the Southwest Washington region her entire life. A graduate of Hudson's Bay High School, she returned to Vancouver after earning her bachelor's degree from Lewis and Clark College in Portland and began working for Janus Youth Programs, serving at-risk youth in a shelter setting.

After leaving her job to become a stay-at-home mother, Montague remained deeply involved in her community. A visual artist and a published writer, she volunteered at local arts nonprofits and was a founding member of North Bank Artists. These activities gave her experience with grant-writing and collaborating with partner organizations on events, skills that would become useful in her developing career. Additionally, her writing skills led her to be recruited to serve on the digital team for President Barack Obama's 2012 re-election campaign.

In 2013, Montague was hired as the executive director of North Bank Artists, where she organized the Vancouver Arts District with community partners. In 2016, she was named the executive director of Columbia Springs, an environmental education nonprofit and protected urban natural area on the Old Evergreen Highway in Vancouver. Her work is focused on financial sustainability, program development, and improvement of all community services.