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2025 Leading Women Awards Celebrate Harford County Women

In honor of Women's History Month, Harford County celebrated local women of the past, present and future at an awards ceremony on March 8.

 **Alexandra Walker**, Local Official

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Pictured L-R Back Row: Alison Imhoff; Honorata Filip (for Nicole Filip); Alexandra McDowell; Sasha Pazoki; Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly; Imani Gomez; Grace Donovan; Natalie Wirth; Sydney Grafton; Councilwoman Nolanda Robert; and Keynote speaker,

In honor of Women's History Month, Harford County celebrated local women of the past, present and future at an awards ceremony on March 8.

The Harford County Department of Housing & Community Services and Commission for Women held their 2025 Leading Women Awards ceremony at the Maryland Golf & Country Clubs in Bel Air. The awards recognize young women who are dedicated to compassionate community service and superior academic achievement. This year's ceremony also honored the late Elizabeth Hamilton Chew Forbes as the 2025 Leading Woman of Yesterday and keynote speaker, Stacey Rebbert, as the Leading Woman of Today.

There were 14 young nominees for the 2025 awards: Grace Donovan, Fallston High School; Amanda Dorsey, Fallston High School; Nicole Filip Harford Technical High School; Imani Gomez, Joppatowne High School; Sydney Grafton, Fallston High School; Lucy Heisey, North Harford High School; Alexandra McDowell,

Edgewood Middle School; Sanaya Nevels, Joppatowne High School; Sasha Pazoki, Aberdeen High School; Emily Rosado-Torres, Patterson Mill High School; Adara Samuel, Joppatowne High School; Sophia Trinh, Patterson Mill High School; Diana Walsh, The John Carroll School; and Natalie Wirth, Fallston High School.

The 2025 Leading Women Award winners are Alexandra McDowell for grades 7 – 8; Diana Walsh for grades 9 – 10; and Nicole Filip for grades 11 – 12.

Alexandra McDowell is a 14-year-old eighth grade student at Edgewood Middle School where she plays violin in the orchestra. She is a member of the Brown Girls International Travel Education Club which provides opportunities for young women of color to experience the world while changing the lives of others. As an Amicette member of the Zeta Youth Group, Alexandra assists with the Toys for Tots distribution center, decorates trunk-or-treat stations at Somerset Manor, and raises money for March of Dimes, Walk to End Alzheimer's, and Making Strides Against Breast Cancer. She participates in hygiene drives for the homeless and creates Valentine's Day cards for residents of The ARC. Alexandra maintains a 3.25 GPA and plans on seeking dual enrollment while attending Harford Technical High School to complete prerequisites early for a career as an orthodontist. Alexandra admires Bessie Coleman, the first American woman to earn an international pilot's license, for her perseverance through racial and gender discrimination.

Diana Walsh is a 15-year-old sophomore at The John Carroll School where she plays field hockey, is on the badminton team and intends on joining the track team in the spring. Diana holds a 4.2 GPA out of 4.0 and aspires to attend a university like Cornell or the University of Boston and to pursue a career in law. As a dedicated Girl Scout for 10 years, Diana has earned her Bronze and Silver awards and is working on her Gold Award. She serves as a camp guide at Girl Scout Day Camp and has taken part in the Girl Scout Encampment. Diana, along with her parents, collected personal hygiene products and created kits for donation to the Harford Community Action Agency. She contributed meals to the canned food drive at John Carroll, packaged Thanksgiving meals for those in need at the Havre de Grace Community Center, and volunteers at First Fruits Farm. Diana admires Princess Diana as a leading and inspiring woman for her humanity and selfless advocacy for children, and those with AIDS, cancer, and mental illness.

Nicole Filip is an 18-year-old senior at Harford Technical High School and president of the Harford County Regional Association of Student Councils. She coordinated a 5K run to raise money for her school's student leadership and donated twenty five percent of the proceeds to the Klein Family Crisis Center during mental health month. As president of the Student Government Association (SGA) and the National Honor Society, Nicole has organized canned food drives, prepared food for the homeless, started the creation of no-sew blankets for the Humane Society and led a campus cleanup on Earth Day. While maintaining a GPA of 4.2609 out of 5, she is on the wrestling team, volunteers as a 4-H camp counselor and served as a student page for the Maryland General Assembly. Nicole aims to attend the U.S. Naval Academy and pursue a position as a commissioned officer in either intelligence or aviation. She admires Olympic wrestler and gold medalist Amit Elor for challenging societal norms and advocating for self-empowerment.

As winners in their categories, the 7th-8th and 9th-10th grade winners received \$1,000, the 11th-12th grade winner received \$1,650 and all nominees received \$100 courtesy of event sponsors. Citations from Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly, and the Harford County Council were also presented.

"These outstanding young women are already changing the world. They have achieved excellence in school, volunteered countless hours to improve the lives of others, and are an inspiration to us all," County Executive Cassilly said. "I am proud to congratulate these Leading Women."

The late Elizabeth Hamilton Chew Forbes was honored as the Leading Woman of Yesterday. Dr. Amy Rosenkrans, secretary with the Maryland Women's Heritage Center, recounted Mrs. Forbes' life story and community presence. Regarded as a prominent suffragist in support of the Nineteenth Amendment, Mrs. Forbes' efforts to raise awareness included the Prairie Schooner Women's Suffrage Campaign. A historic marker stands to honor her and others at Tydings Park in Havre de Grace as part of the National Votes for Women Trail.

The keynote speaker and this year's Leading Woman of Today was Stacey Rebbert, vice president and chief marketing officer for Harford Mutual Insurance Group. Rebbert started by explaining a matryoshka, or Russian nesting doll, and how each piece embraces, incorporates and envelopes the one before it. "What does all this mean," she asked. "That single events in your life don't define you. You are the culmination of your lived experiences, and you are never finished." She presented each of the winners with their own doll.

The Commission would like to thank the Maryland Golf & Country Clubs for hosting this event and thank the following event sponsors for their generosity: APGFCU, [Harford County Public Library](#), Harford Mutual Insurance Group, Harford County Chamber of Commerce, Lisa Sparr of Coldwell Banker Realty, and Brightview Senior Living.

The Harford County Women's Commission consists of 15 volunteer members appointed by the county executive and approved by the County Council. Their mission is to support the economic, social, and political equality of women. For more information, please visit www.harfordcountymd.gov/service... or call 410-638-3045. Applications for the 2026 Harford County Leading Women Awards will be available in the fall of 2025.