

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

February 21, 2014



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## ***West Central Florida Nonprofits and Volunteers Receive Honors During 9<sup>th</sup> Annual WEDU Be More Awards***



**Tampa, FL — WEDU PBS** held the the 2014 WEDU Be More Awards on Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup> before a sold out crowd of over 500 guests at the A La Carte pavilion in Tampa. Continuing the tradition of honoring Tampa Bay area nonprofit organizations, the annual community event began at 11:00 a.m.

with the Bank of Tampa *Hall of Heroes* followed by an inspiring luncheon and awards ceremony.

Utilizing a panel of impartial judges who spent weeks reviewing applications and nominations, **WEDU**, West Central Florida's primary PBS station and public media source, recognized nonprofit organizations and individuals who applied or were nominated for honors in a variety of categories - culminating with one organization being named the *WEDU Be More Unstoppable, Nonprofit Organization of the Year* (2013).

The WEDU Be More Awards was created by WEDU PBS to help raise awareness for local nonprofits and their service to West Central Florida. Annually, the program helps introduce new donors, volunteers, and those in need of services to the worthy nonprofit organizations.

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BE MORE ENTREPRENEURIAL

**WINNER: Karen Mertes, Fulfill Your Destiny, Inc.**

***C1 Bank Engaged Philanthropist Award*** | This award will recognize an individual who has distinguished himself or herself in the nonprofit community by engaging entrepreneurial skills to build a successful nonprofit endeavor. *Examples may include:* Utilizing a keen business sense to build a new nonprofit serving our community; providing the driving force for a unique and successful fundraising campaign to support an existing nonprofit organization's initiative. The top candidates that have achieved the most votes via an online poll during the voting period will be further researched by an impartial judging panel to decide the ultimate winner. **Sponsored by C1 Bank.**

**Finalists:** Natalie Baird, Are You Safe, Inc.; Linda Eaton, Adoption Related Services of Tampa Bay  
Nisha Mandani, Our AIM Foundation, Inc.; Katy Meyer, Tampa Bay Veterinary Emergency Service  
Hailey & Olivia Scheinman, Livy's Hope

BE MORE RELEVANT

**WINNER: Big Cat Rescue**

***Best Use of Video Award*** | Awarded to the organization that tells a compelling story through video that has the power to compel someone to seek services, volunteer time, or support an organization financially. The winner is chosen by majority vote.

**Finalists:** Chapters Health System; Energy Essential, Inc.; Gulf Coast Dental Outreach; Livy's Hope;  
Suncoast Hospice Care Centers

BE MORE VOCAL

**WINNER: Becki Forsell, YES! Of America United**

***Steve Otto, Tampa Tribune Voice of Tampa Bay Award*** | This honor will be bestowed upon the individual, family, or organization that has lent a unique voice to bring awareness, credence, support, or action to an issue or cause faced by our citizens and thus making a tremendous impact in our community. Tampa Tribune columnist Steve Otto will review, select and ultimately announce the winner.

**Finalists:** Natalie Baird, Are You Safe, Inc.; Dotti Groover-Skipper, Tampa Bay Campaign Against Human Trafficking; The Haven of RCS; Karen Mertes, Fulfill Your Destiny, Inc.; Edie Rhea, Healing Root Ministry

BE MORE INVOLVED

**WINNER: Margo Knighton, Red Apple School**

***Mason Dixon Award for Volunteerism*** | One person can make an extraordinary difference. These award finalists were culled from an online poll driven by votes from the general public in the WEDU viewing area. Local radio personality and philanthropist, Mason Dixon, will ultimately choose and present the award to the most-deserving recipient from nominees that receive the most online support during the voting period.

**Finalists:** Joe Capitano, Sr., St. Peter Claver Catholic School; Tammy Denbo, People for Haiti; Dawn Greenwood, LAMPLighters; Arthur Leasure, Dunedin Fine Art Center; Brian McEwen, Champion for Children

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BE MORE POSITIVE

**WINNER: Avi Davidson**

***Positively Tampa Bay, ABC Action News Award*** | This honor will be bestowed upon an individual or group of people whose simple act of kindness made a tremendous impact on someone's life. The winner will be selected based on the selfless giving of time, treasure or talents. Nominees and finalists will be selected by ABC Action News. The semi-finalists and ultimate winner will be chosen by ABC Action News' Positively Tampa Bay and The Ryan Nece Foundation – the inspiration for this award.

**Finalists:** James Concar; John Edyvean; John and Jessica Session

BE MORE HUMBLE

**WINNER: The Junior League of Tampa**

***Warren Averett People's Choice Award*** | This award is driven by an online poll with votes from the general public in the WEDU viewing area. **The poll automatically includes a listing of all organizations that submitted an application in one or more of the five application categories, above.** This prestigious award exhibits the connection and relationship the organization has with the community and the people it serves by allowing area citizens to honor the nonprofit that they feel most exemplifies the spirit of the community. **Sponsored by Warren Averett CPAs and Advisors**

**Finalists:** Children First, Inc.; Crescent Community Clinic; Dundee Fine Art Center; Frameworks; GFWC North Pinellas Women's Club; Hands Across the Bay; More Health, Inc.

BE MORE BRILLIANT

**WINNER: Feeding America, Tampa Bay**

***The Mosaic Company Innovation Award*** | This award recognizes initiatives, projects, and/or services that are unique, creative, or innovative and will be presented to the organization responsible for the development, coordination, delivery, and results of the project. *Examples may include:* Resourcefulness when challenged with a limited budget; superior utilization of collaborative community partnerships; or ingenious staffing options by mobilizing members and/or volunteer support. **Sponsored by The Mosaic Company**

**Finalists:** Crescent Community Clinic; Our Aim Foundation; Starting Right, Now; Tampa Bay Harvest; YES! Of America United

BE MORE ENTERTAINING

**WINNER: Human Society of Tampa Bay, Inc.**

***Special Events Award*** | This award recognizes the uniqueness and effectiveness of a special event and the success in achieving outlined objectives. *Examples may include:* A related series of events, single original event, or fundraiser to recognize, salute, assist, celebrate people or businesses, brand your organization and/or build/strengthen relationships with supporters.

**Finalists:** Are You Safe, Inc.; Cookson Hills Toy Run; Greater Brandon Community Foundation; Housing and Education Alliance, Inc.

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BE MORE ENRICHED

**WINNER: Art Center Sarasota**

**Arts & Culture Award** | This award recognizes culturally-based organizations that contribute to the spirit of adventure and exploration through education in the arts and culture by creating an exciting and engaging museum experience to visitors. *Examples may include:* Programs or experiences related to the arts, performance, historic, or zoological; programs that provide cultural experiences to audiences who might not otherwise have opportunities to witness or be an active participant.

**Finalists:** Asolo Repertory Theatre; Dunedin Fine Art Center; Florida Studio Theatre; Glazer Children's Museum; Ruth Eckerd Hall

BE MORE INFORMED

**WINNER: More Health, Inc.**

**Nielsen Marketing Campaign Award** | This award recognizes the execution of creative and results-driven original marketing campaigns using multimedia platforms including, but not limited to, broadcast, print, social media and/or grassroots awareness campaigns. The applicant should demonstrate direct impact to established goals. *Examples may include:* A support element or collection of elements developed to promote, publicize, introduce, or create an identity or brand for a specific organization, service, program, or idea. **Sponsored by Nielsen**

**Finalists:** Hands Across the Bay; Operation Helping Hand; Unidos Now, Inc.

BE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE

**WINNER: American Stage**

**Educational Outreach Award** | This award will recognize the organization that through a specific project offered guidance, knowledge, emotional or physical support, and/or a mentorship program aimed at improving specific aspects of community life. The project should introduce and/or conducting programs to enrich and empower the community. *Examples may include:* Outreach or educational programs that effectively raised awareness or brought a new audience to an organization or cause.

**Finalists:** 1Voice Foundation; Children First, Inc. DACCO; Forward Thinking Initiatives; Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA

BE MORE INSPIRING

**WINNER: Avalon Theisen, Conserve It Forward, Inc.**

**Rising Star Award** | This award will recognize an individual, under the age of 21, who has distinguished himself or herself in the community directly accredited to their inspiration, dedication, motivation, or acts of kindness. Nominees represent up-and-comers whose accomplishments in, and contributions to, our community make them stand out among their peers and position them as future leaders. A short essay on the nominee's impact is necessary at time of nomination. Candidates may nominate themselves or be nominated by others. The top candidates that have achieved the most votes via an online poll will be further researched by an impartial judging panel to decide the ultimate winner.

**Finalists:** Whitney Lewis, Young Performing Artists, Inc.; Nishan Mandani, Grandkids Club; Courtney Opsatnick, Community Youth Development; Maureen Soliman, Crescent Community Clinic; Andrew Young, Peping Academies; Elaine Zlotnitsky, People for Haiti

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BE MORE EMPOWERED

**WINNER: Lifelong Learning Academy**

**Small Nonprofit Award** | This award will recognize the small nonprofit that best demonstrates the truth in statement that “big things come in small packages.” This award will recognize organizations with a budget under \$500,000 and despite its modest size, has a major positive impact on our community. A short essay on the organizations impact is necessary at time of nomination. Candidates can nominate themselves or be nominated by others. The top five candidates that have achieved the most votes via an online poll during the voting period will be further researched by an impartial judging panel to decide the ultimate winner.

**Finalists:** Are You Safe, Inc.; Crescent Community Clinic; Dress for Success Tampa Bay; Energy Essentials, Inc.; High Risk Hope; People for Haiti; YES! Of America United, Inc.

BE MORE ENCOURAGED

**WINNER: Wheels of Success, Inc.**

**Judges’ Choice Award** | The Judges’ Choice Award is given to an organization demonstrating an overall appeal due to its original and extraordinary approach to its respective. Not necessarily driven by an organization’s measurable results, this award is decided entirely by the WEDU Be More Award judges based on majority vote and consensus.

**Finalists:** Crisis Center of Tampa Bay; Florida Home Partnership; Keep Tampa Beautiful; Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind, Polk County

BE MORE UNSTOPPABLE

**WINNER: Feeding America, Tampa Bay**

**Nonprofit of the Year Award** | This award is the most coveted and is determined through extensive research. It is ultimately decided by an independent judging committee and given to one organization that, through a superior level of service, helps their constituency be more. Selected from all submitted applications, the criteria to win this award consists of overall organizational excellence; fulfillment of the Four Commitments to the Community, including service to the organizations’ constituency, level of community impact, financial viability and embodiment of overall community goodwill. In addition to many other benefits, the organization recognized with this award receives a \$1,000 WEDU Community Investment Grant.

**Finalists:** 1Voice Foundation; DACCO; More Health, Inc. Starting Right, Now; Tampa Bay Harvest

The 2014 WEDU Be More Awards are supported in part by:



**Bernard F. and Mary Ann Powell Foundation**

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**ABOUT WEDU PBS**

WEDU is West Central Florida's leading PBS station and public media company reaching 16 counties through media platforms including on-air programming and online experiences that broaden horizons, transport and transform and open gateways to new ideas and new worlds. Financially supported by the community, the organization offers a wealth of award-winning inspirational, educational and enlightening content over a variety of media platforms including: television programming, station's website, [wedu.org](http://wedu.org) and various social media platforms, monthly member magazine *Premiere*, educational outreach activities and a myriad of special events. WEDU's focus on the local community has resulted in the station being regarded as a beacon of trust for men, women and children of every walk of life no matter their age, ethnicity or socio-economic status. WEDU is a treasured community resource; a window to the world for the homebound and a vital educational source for the youngest members of society. WEDU prides itself on its position in the Tampa Bay community as a leader, partner, informed citizen and a member of PBS, the most trusted institution in America (Harris Interactive Trust QuickQuery, January 2013). For more information, program schedules or to support WEDU visit [wedu.org](http://wedu.org); WEDU Public Media on Facebook and Twitter or call 813.254.9338.

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