

MEDIA ADVISORY:

February 23, 2017



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12th Annual WEDU Be More Awards Winners Announced

West Central Florida's best nonprofits and volunteers received honors during the annual luncheon hosted at the Bryan Glazer Family JCC in Tampa



Tampa, FL — WEDU PBS held the 2017 WEDU Be More Awards on Thursday, February 23rd with a crowd of more than 500 guests at the new Bryan Glazer Family JCC in Tampa. Continuing the tradition of honoring West Central Florida nonprofit organizations, the annual community event began at 11:00 a.m. with the Hall of Heroes followed by an inspiring luncheon and awards ceremony.



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.

Utilizing a panel of impartial judges who spent weeks reviewing applications and nominations, WEDU, West Central Florida's primary PBS station, 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 (2016).



To help commemorate the 12th year of the community event, guest presenters included: Heidi Shimberg, Bryan Glazer Family JCC and WEDU Board member; Marlene Spalten, The Community Foundation of Tampa Bay; Don DeFosset, WEDU Board Chair and Chairman of ATL Partners; Bill Starkey, former GTE executive and WEDU Board member; and Mason Dixon of Q105. The ceremony was emceed by Lissette Campos of ABC

Action News and Jack Harris of 970 WFLA.

The winner of this year's Be More Unstoppable Nonprofit of the Year Award will be featured on an upcoming episode of Up Close with Cathy Unruh and received a \$2,500 Community Investment Grant from WEDU.

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WEDU PressRoom: www.wedu.org/press

WEDU Video Portal: <http://video.wedu.org>

WEDU on Facebook: www.facebook.com/WEDUPublicMedia

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The inspiring ceremony started with the presentation of the WEDU Be More Hero Award. The award, accepted by **Stella Ferguson Thayer** on behalf of **A. Bronson Thayer**, is selected by WEDU and honors an individual or organization that truly epitomizes *everything* that the WEDU Be More Awards honor.

Bronson passed away on Christmas Eve at the age of 77 after a three year battle with prostate cancer. Bronson had served WEDU for many years as a board member and most recently as WEDU's Board Chair. Bronson was chairman of Bay Cities Bank and was also very involved in the community. He dedicated his time and expertise not only to WEDU, but also as a board member of Bok Tower Gardens Foundation, Tampa Museum of Art, the University of South Florida Foundation, and many others.

"WEDU and many of the nonprofits honored by the WEDU Be more Awards lost a staunch support and friend. Bronson's support, guidance and friendship to WEDU have been priceless and will be greatly missed. His vision and hope for this organization was inspiring," stated Susan Howarth, WEDU President and CEO.

Additional 2017 WEDU Be More Awards honors included:

BE MORE INFORMED

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.

Winner: Children First, Inc.

The mission of Children First is to strengthen children and families by improving the quality of their lives through a comprehensive approach to development, education, health and well-being. To date through Children First's **Raise Your Hand Campaign**, generous donors have pledged over \$3 million to better serve at-risk children and families.

BE MORE ENTERTAINING

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

Winner: The Arc Tampa Bay Foundation

As a service provider for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities for 58 years, The Arc Tampa Bay Foundation has a long history of advocacy efforts in support of their mission. Included in a robust calendar of activities, special events like "A Night to Shine" – an unforgettable prom night for people with special needs, The Arc Tampa Bay Foundation serves the entire range of persons with intellectual / developmental challenges—including persons with autism, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

BE MORE BRILLIANT

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.

Winner: Tampa Hillsborough Action Plan, Inc.

Tampa Hillsborough Action Plan, Inc.'s mission to provide result-driven programs that meet the economic, educational, health, housing, and social needs of urban and rural residents who experience challenges accessing mainstream resources. THAP is honoring their mission through their efforts to renovate and repurpose 10 thousand square feet of storage unit space located in East Tampa known as the 5508 Coworking and Collaboration Garage.

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BE MORE ENRICHED

Greenberg Traurig Arts and Culture Award | This award recognizes the organization that contributes to the spirit of adventure and exploration and offers rich experiences to their audiences

Winner: The Straz Center

Also known as Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, The Straz Center, established arts education as a community priority, working closely with area public, private and home school programs to enhance arts education for children throughout the seven-county Tampa Bay area. Outreach programs included curriculum connectors to Florida education standards and teacher study guides in print and online. The Straz Center's extended in-school artistic residencies, summer programs and after school offerings helped to fill the increasing gaps in arts education left by budget cuts.

BE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE

The Bank of Tampa Educational Outreach Award | This award recognizes 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.

Winner: Seniors in Service of Tampa Bay, Inc.

Seniors in Service is celebrating more than 30 years of service and 4,250,000 hours of assistance to Tampa Bay's vulnerable children and elders. Seniors in Service gets volunteers in the Tampa Bay area geared up to serve and positively impacts the lives of children and seniors through the Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent programs.

BE MORE HUMBLE

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.** 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.

Winner: Big Cat Rescue

Big Cat Rescue is one of the largest accredited sanctuaries in the world dedicated to abused and abandoned big cats. Home to approximately 80 lions, tigers, bobcats, cougars and other species, most have been abandoned, abused, orphaned, saved from being turned into fur coats, or retired from performing acts. What sets Big Cat Rescue apart is their work to end the abuse at its root by ending the private possession and trade in exotic cats through legislation and education.

BE MORE RELEVANT

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 finalists are chosen by majority vote with ultimate winner being selected by judges.

Winner: Coco's Pet Ranch

Coco's Pet Ranch works to rescue hard to adopt animals from unnecessary euthanasia. Coco's Pet Ranch provides a safe, loving forever home for seniors, injured, blind, etc. or emergency shelter and rehabilitation for those "code red" animals that can be adopted. Coco's Pet Ranch's video resonated not only with the community but also with the judges. Their well told personal story and call to action for support for their pet residents, inspired viewers to act.

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BE MORE INVOLVED

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.

Winner: Melanie Salava, Florida Cancer Specialists Foundation

Melanie is a stage-three breast cancer survivor. Following treatments and once she was strong enough, Melanie chose to walk 30 miles to raise awareness and funds for Florida Cancer Specialists Foundation. Melanie picked the Florida Cancer Specialists Foundation because of their efforts to provide non-medical financial support to patients undergoing cancer treatments.

BE MORE INSPIRING

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. The top candidates that achieved the most votes via an online poll will be further researched by an impartial judging panel to decide the ultimate winner.

Winner: Ryan Regan

Ryan, a young volunteer with Suncoast Hospice / Empath Health in Clearwater, has contributed more than 1,000 volunteer service hours in support of more than 240 families. Ryan was selected to serve as one of six members of the Suncoast Hospice Teen Volunteer Regional Leadership Board and he is active in the recruitment of teen volunteers. He also serves as a mentor to young people coming into the volunteer program.

BE MORE ENTREPRENEURIAL

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.

Winner: Kelly Kowall, My Warrior's Place

My Warrior's Place was founded by Kelly Kowall whose son Corey gave his life for our continued freedom. My Warrior's Place is a retreat center for veterans, military members, and first responders, Gold Star, Blue Star and Silver Star Families. Each program offered by My Warrior's Place plays an important role in healing and coping process.

BE MORE EMPOWERED

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. The top candidates 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.

Winner: Angel Snugs, Inc.

Angel Snugs, Inc. started with the passion of wanting to help others and a hobby of knitting scarves. In the first year, Angel Snugs expanded nationally through the honor of being placed in

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the American Cancer Society's database as a patient resource providing scarfs or “snugs” to patients. Within their second year, Angel Snugs was approved to be added as an international patient resource through Search Hope. This small but mighty organization is now providing comfort to cancer patients all over the world.

BE MORE POSITIVE

ABC Action News Positively Tampa Bay 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.

Winner: Jordan Litowchak

Jordan, a 17 year old high school student, was certainly the right person in the right place when an elderly gentleman suffering a medical emergency drove his car into a pond. Jordan with no hesitation jumped into the pond and pulled the man to safety just before the car sank.

BE MORE ENCOURAGED

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.

Winner: Community Tampa Bay

Community Tampa Bay's vision is a community free from all forms of discrimination. Community Tampa Bay works toward an ambitious vision by cultivating inclusive leaders to change communities through dialogue and cross-cultural interactions. Community Tampa Bay gives people the tools to have hard conversations with people who don't look like them and empowers them to build relationships based on understanding and mutual respect.

BE MORE UNSTOPPABLE

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 \$2,500 WEDU Community Investment Grant.

Winner: Tampa Hillsborough Action Plan, Inc.

Tampa Hillsborough Action Plan, Inc.'s mission to provide result-driven programs that meet the economic, educational, health, housing, and social needs of urban and rural residents who experience challenges accessing mainstream resources. THAP is honoring their mission through their efforts to renovate and repurpose 10 thousand square feet of storage unit space located in East Tampa known as the 5508 Coworking and Collaboration Garage.

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Complete details, photos, and videos from all of the WEDU Be More Awards are available online at www.wedu.org/bemore.

ABOUT WEDU PBS

WEDU is West Central Florida's leading PBS station 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 multi-media platforms including: television programming, station website, www.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 (ORC International's DualFrame CARAVAN, January 2016). For more information, program schedules or to support WEDU visit www.wedu.org; WEDU Public Media on Facebook and Twitter (@wedupbs) or call (813) 254-9338.

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