Cook County Board President
Toni Preckwinkle
and
The Cook County Commission
on Women’s Issues
Present

The 20th Annual

Peggy A. Montes

Unsung Heroine

Awards Breakfast

78 EAST WASHINGTON STREET
CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER
PRESTON BRADLEY HALL
HALF PAST EIGHT IN THE MORNING
TWO THOUSAND AND SEVENTEEN
THURSDAY, THE SECOND OF MARCH
20th Annual Peggy A. Montes
Unsung Heroine Awards Breakfast
Thursday, March 2, 2017
8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

PROGRAM

Welcome
Merri Dee, State President, AARP
Mistress of Ceremonies

Remarks
Peggy A. Montes, Chairperson
Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues

Toni Preckwinkle, President
Cook County Board of Commissioners

Presentation of Awards
Merri Dee

Closing
Merri Dee
The Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues

COMMISSIONERS

Peggy A. Montes
Chairperson

Vera Davis
Dorian Carter
Dr. Frances Carroll
Echelle Mohn
Jennifer Artis
Jacquelyn Small
Jeaylu Gutierrez
Iris Millan
Marjorie Manchen
Ally Brisbin
Hon. Ginger Rugai
Andrea Raila
Trina Janes
Linda Fleming
Rebecca Darr
Terri Rivera
Sharon Brannigan
Dr. Harvette Grey
Dr. Ann Kalayil
Dr. Aparna Sen-Yeldandi
Cook County’s
Unsung Heroines

As an annual event in observance of Women’s History Month, the Commission on Women’s Issues honors one woman from each of the seventeen County districts, and an eighteenth honoree, selected by the four at-large members of the Cook County Women’s Commission. All eighteen women are recognized for their vital contributions to their respective communities. The award places these women’s achievements within the larger fabric of history and commemorates the powerful impact women have had on the development of our social, cultural, economic, and political institutions. The County honors these remarkable women as a way to bring their stories to light, to thank them publicly, and to celebrate the tradition of achievement and commitment to the greater good that is embodied by women leaders throughout the history of Cook County. Although their stories do not usually make the news, their contributions are truly newsworthy. These women are being recognized for using their time, talent, spirit, and enthusiasm to enrich and improve the lives of others.

Peggy A. Montes
Unsung Heroine Award

Peggy A. Montes, an educator, fundraiser, leader, and champion of women’s issues and rights, as Chair of the Commission on Women’s Issues, was the driving force behind the creation of the very first Unsung Heroine Award for the women of Cook County.

As a way to recognize and honor her remarkable achievements, in 2010 the award was renamed the “Peggy A. Montes Unsung Heroine Award.” On March 16, 2010, the Cook County Board of Commissioners acknowledged Ms. Montes in a special way by introducing a Resolution honoring her as a true heroine and officially renaming the award in her honor.
Savonya L. Rogers  
1st District  
Vera Davis, Cook County Women’s Commissioner  
Richard Boykin, Cook County Commissioner  

Savonya Rogers is a generous and committed person who gives her time and talent to assist children in need. She is a person that can be depended upon to give more than is asked. Although not a mother herself, she has spent most of her adult life helping children who are less fortunate.

Some time ago, Ms. Rogers took on the responsibility of a family of three boys in need. She became a person that they could depend upon. When the children experienced issues in school, Ms. Rogers was the contact person – using her personal time off work to help address the concerns. She paid school fees and rented tuxedos so the boys could attend their high school proms. To help support one of the boys through college, Ms. Rogers provided funds on a monthly basis, along with clothing and food.

Most of the college students from Carey Tercentenary AME Church depend upon Ms. Rogers for moral and financial support – generously providing her own money to assist them with personal items, school supplies, clothing, transportation fees and more. And during the Christmas season, her family provides more than 100 delicious meals for the community.
Gretchen Slusser
2nd District
Dorian Carter, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Robert Steele, Cook County Commissioner

Gretchen Slusser is the President of thredpartners, a Chicago-based management consulting firm she co-founded in 2004. From 2011 to 2016, Ms. Slusser served as Executive Director at Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA). She first became involved with CGLA as a volunteer and later as a donor.

In 2015, Ms. Slusser saw her passion project come to life in the unveiling of I Am Somebody, an art and video exhibit showcasing the lives of the people CGLA has served over the years. I Am Somebody is a call to action to take hold of our community, choose to nurture our neighbors and inspire others to do the same.

Her desire to affect real change in the community and to provide opportunities for the people of Chicago is what drives her. After leaving CGLA, she decided to use her experience as a management consultant, coupled with her learning and success as an Executive Director, to launch a program under thredpartners called Move.Me(nt). Move.Me(nt) works with nonprofits and foundations to create more efficient, effective and holistic organizations.

Ms. Slusser sits on the Advisory Board of North Park University’s Axelson Center, where she also teaches workshops on Project Management and Mergers & Acquisitions geared towards nonprofits. A breast cancer survivor, she lives in Chicago with her amazing son, Max, who is the light of her life.
Vanessa L. McNorton  
3rd District  
Dr. Frances Carroll, Cook County Women’s Commissioner  
Jerry Butler, Cook County Commissioner

Vanessa McNorton is an Educator, former Teacher, Master Teacher, and Principal and is dedicated and committed to increasing the numbers of people with knowledge and passion about the benefits of using restorative justice practices in transforming conflict in schools and communities.

She earnestly provides education about restorative justice practices and skills for using such practices. She also develops organizational relationships for the implementation of restorative justice practices in various settings – schools, churches, community organizations – as a way of transforming relationships, changing mindsets about conflict and healing our communities.

Ms. McNorton works with Nehemiah Trinity Rising, a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to building peace. Nehemiah Trinity Rising is a faith-based restorative justice consultancy with a mission to provide advocacy, education and opportunities that promote and utilize restorative practices. They are birthed out of a recognition that restorative justice is a critical component in reducing school suspensions and expulsions, and thus an important instrument in ending the school-to-prison pipeline. Her organization’s path has taken them from their start as a ministry to reformation as a not-for-profit, focused on the development and delivery of restorative justice training and other conflict resolution strategies.
Angela Hurlock joined Claretian Associates as the Executive Director in 2004, after three years as the Senior Director of Real Estate Development for Bethel New Life – a nonprofit serving Chicago’s West Side. Over the last few years, she has served as the Chair for the District Advisory Committee, as a Board member with the Chicago Rehab Network the Alliance of the Southeast.

In 2008, Ms. Hurlock received a Neighborhood Leader Award from Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago. In 2009, she was selected as one of 14 visionaries as part of the Chicago Matters: Beyond Burnham series, Chicago’s award-winning multimedia public affairs series. Also in 2009, she was selected by Fifth Third Bank as one of their six most influential African-Americans in celebration of Black History Month. And in 2010, Mrs. Hurlock received a Green Award from Chicago magazine for promoting sustainable housing.

Not only does Ms. Hurlock believe that every family needs a safe place to call home, but that it is not just the building of homes that create a great neighborhood, but the building of families in those homes. This includes working with local schools, churches and other organizations to build up services and resources for those families.

Mrs. Hurlock holds Masters Degrees in Architecture and Business Administration from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She and her husband, Peter are proud South Chicago homeowners and active members of their block club.
Tina Sanders
5th District
Jennifer Artis, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Deborah Sims, Cook County Commissioner

Tina Sanders has devoted nearly 50 years of her life to making a difference for youth and families. Fueled by a passion to do things a “new” way, she experienced a meteoric rise through the ranks of the Boys & Girls Club of Chicago where she began as a secretary in 1968 and retired as the Assistant Vice President of Operations in 2008.

In 2003, when the Boys & Girls Club planned a return to its core mission of youth and to discontinue their “welfare-to-work” programs for adults, Ms. Sanders, together with her husband Gladstone, founded Phalanx Family Services to continue the work. Beginning with a pilot contract from the Illinois Department of Human Services serving a few hundred clients in 2003 to nearly 2,000 annually today, Phalanx Family Services has helped more than 10,000 youth, adults, senior citizens, reentry citizens, veterans and the disabled to change their lives and go to work.

With her husband of 37 years, Mrs. Sanders has five adult children and seven grandchildren, all of whom, along with her staff, were in many ways integral to the development and success of Phalanx.

“I am deeply humbled by the honor I am receiving today. However, my sincerest joy is derived from each person who returns to thank me and my staff for helping them turn their lives around through employment!”
Stella Hernandez
6th District
Jacquelyn Small, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Edward Moody, Cook County Commissioner

In 2001, after the death of her granddaughter Alicia, Stella Hernandez went to work keeping her memory alive in the best way that she knew how – helping people. She has since founded the organization Alicia’s House; a nonprofit that feeds those in need, holds annual Christmas parties for special needs children and delivers food, candy and toys during the holidays to families experiencing hardship. From the South Chicago Heights location, Alicia’s House serves more than 25,000 individuals annually. Ms. Hernandez says, “we have never turned people away; we believe that if they come, they need it. Once people start depending on you for help, you just can’t stop giving.”

In the summertime, a lunch is provided for more than 1,100 kids at locations close to Alicia’s House. “Most kids probably get one good meal per day, and that’s the lunch at school. With children having parents who work full time, there is a need to provide a healthy lunch,” says Ms. Hernandez.

Her selflessness and continued commitment to honoring her granddaughter’s legacy through service makes Stella Hernandez a true “Unsung Heroine” in every sense of the word.
Idalia Flores Guzmán
7th District
Jeylu Gutierrez, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Jesús García, Cook County Commissioner

Idalia Flores Guzmán was born in Zacatecas, Mexico and moved to the United States at the age of 12. As a high school student, Ms. Flores was a member of many activities including her school’s DREAM Act Club, the school newspaper and the student oversight committee. In 2011, she began work with Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC), a community-based organization in the southwest side of Chicago, as a youth organizer concentrating on violence prevention and immigration rights.

Through her work with BPNC, Ms. Flores has organized community events, educational workshops and informational sessions about issues affecting the community, such as the campaign for Illinois Temporary Visitor Driver Licenses (TVDL), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the Illinois DREAM Act, Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), and citizenship. The workshops have been able to attract anywhere from 25 to over 100 participants with pro-bono attorney participation.

Ms. Flores is currently in the process of becoming accredited with the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) which will allow her to represent constituents in immigration court, and as a public notary to help community members file immigration applications. For the last 8 years, she has been organizing the Dream Act Club at Kelly H.S. where she helps youth leaders learn about immigration issues and helps fundraise for scholarships for students. Through her work each year, more than 500 community members receive information about different issues that affect the community. Mrs. Flores actively participates in campaigns to pass new laws and programs that benefit our community.
Carmen Medina was born and raised in Chicago as the youngest of five children in a single-family home. During her teen years, she made unwise decisions that would catch up to her later in life. She became a young woman battling substance abuse. But on June 10, 1997, she decided to give her life to Jesus Christ and has never looked back. Since her conversion, her family have become her best supporters.

It was during this time that she vowed to help teens living out of control lifestyles the way she once had. In 2008, she completed a yearlong internship at the Los Angeles Dream Center Boys and Girls Teen Home so that she could return and help open up a teen home at her own church. Today, along with the help of her husband Ivan, she is the director of Hope House for Teens – a teen home of the Chicago Dream Center under the umbrella of New Life Covenant Church. The home takes in teenagers in need that lead high-risk and unhealthy lifestyles. The teens live with Mrs. Medina and her husband in a home provided by the church.

Their mission is to reach, rescue and empower teens, to equip them with the tools they need for a successful future, to teach them self-sufficiency. Hope House provides them with a stable home environment where teens can grow in the Lord and restore hope within a faith-based program that strives to rebuild their self-esteem, mind and spirit.
Mary Ann Miller  
9th District  
Marjorie Manchen, Cook County Women’s Commissioner  
Peter Silvestri, Cook County Commissioner  

In 2001, Mary Ann Miller attended the Niles Citizens Policy Academy and her volunteer career began shortly after. She has attended the Cook County Sheriff’s Senior Citizen Law Enforcement Academy, the Chicago Police Department Seminar on Senior Fraud and Bank Safety and has attended all of the CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) training courses that have been offered by the Niles Police Department. She has been the Administrative Coordinator for her volunteer group of over 50 volunteers and coordinates thousands of hours of volunteer time at the various Village of Niles community events.

Ms. Miller is proudest of her work with the Senior Crime Reduction Awareness Measures (SCRAM) Program. Thanks to the work of the Niles Police Department, she has been able to work with individuals that were victims of scams that cheated them of thousands of dollars. She has been able to show seniors why they shouldn’t carry their Medicare Card and how to get off of mailing lists soliciting money. She also works at various Crime Prevention booths and activities throughout the year.

Some of her many accolades include being named the 2014 Niles Citizen of the Year by the Niles Chamber of Commerce; receiving the 2003 Citizens Recognition Award for service to Niles in Crime Prevention; and also, the 2012 Illinois State Triad Senior Citizen Volunteer Award.

Ms. Miller and her husband of 45 years, Robin, moved to Niles in 1987. They have twins, Jayson and Crystal.
Patrice Quehl currently holds the position of police social services manager for the Evanston Police Department – a role she has flourished in since 2015. Ms. Quehl began her career as an outreach worker in 1996 and, through her countless efforts, she has advanced the presence of restorative justice and the use of peace circles within the education system, one such example being the Family Group Conferencing Circle. The Family Group Conferencing Circle – the Evanston Police Department’s restorative justice program – works with youth offenders who have committed minor criminal offenses and consists of the victim and offender, their friends and family, facilitators, and RJE-trained community members. Together, the circle discusses the crime and promotes accountability, reparation, and healing for the entire community. The goal of the program is to divert youth from the criminal justice system while helping them right the wrong that they caused. Peacemaking circles are used in this process. The initiative aims to reduce the possibility of recidivism and to provide opportunities for competency development.

These programs have aided in connecting families of at-risk youth while focusing on improving their quality of life and reducing their contact within the criminal justice system.

Ms. Quehl takes on the leadership role of overseeing victim advocacy, domestic violence and mental health awareness to make police services more effective within the Evanston community.
Pamela Munizzi
11th District
Hon. Virginia Rugai, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
John P. Daley, Cook County Commissioner

Pamela Munizzi is presently the Special Olympics Coordinator for the Chicago Public Schools, but her volunteer involvement with the organization began over 25 years ago. Her position with the Chicago Park District, as coordinator of all CPD special events, brought Pam into contact with Special Olympics Illinois and Chicago; it was the beginning of her journey to help transform lives of children and adults with special needs. Ms. Munizzi has served in many capacities and many offices with Special Olympics, first as a board member, and eventually, President of Special Children’s Charities, the financial support team for the Chicago Park District program.

Ms. Munizzi’s career path led her to other employment opportunities, but her passion for Special Olympics Chicago never wavered. Growing up as a park “rug rat” herself, Pam experienced the importance and the joy of sports and is committed to ensuring the same opportunities for people with physical and intellectual disabilities – everyday, everywhere.

In 2012, she was appointed Special Olympics Coordinator of the Chicago Public Schools, and under her leadership, the number of schools involved in the events has grown from 87 to 149, with 3,500 student athletes participating.

Ms. Munizzi holds a M.A. in Public Administration from Illinois Institute of Technology and received their award for Model Administrator of the Year, as well as President Barak Obama’s Volunteer Service Award. Because of her 25-year contribution to the Special Olympics, Chicago, Cook County, and Illinois have witnessed the courage, character, dedication, dignity and worth of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Says Ms. Munizzi: “These athletes could teach the professionals about sportsmanship. They have touched my heart and my life; they are inspiring.”
Cari A. Meyers  
12th District  
Andrea Raila, Cook County Women’s Commissioner  
John Fritchey, Cook County Commissioner

Cari Meyers, a grandmother of four, doesn’t have time to retire. She is the founder of The Puppy Mill Project (PMP), a nonprofit that gets the word out about puppy mills – large commercial dog-breeding operations that put profits ahead of animal welfare and pet lovers.

Through Ms. Meyers’ leadership the Chicago City Council voted 49-1 requiring pet stores that sell dogs and cats to get pets first from pounds or humane societies. The Cook County Board took it a step further, voting unanimously to not only expand Chicago’s ban, but to also put the measure into effect five months earlier. Cook County pet stores are no longer able to sell dogs or cats from large breeding factories, making Cook County one of only seven counties in the U.S. to ban the sale of puppies from nearly 10,000 puppy mills.

Ms. Meyers says of her group: “One little organization, one grass roots, tiny organization with no funding from anybody... got it done, just because we were so passionate and determined.”

Before the bans, Ms. Meyers’ group convinced three pet stores to cease selling puppy-mill animals and convert to an adoption model; helped establish the Pet Store Disclosure Act that requires breeder information to be posted; and passed a “pet lemon” law that allows pet owners who purchased diseased pets to get their money back.

Recently, PMP assisted in a successful raid that resulted in 71 dogs being rescued from a breeder in Kankakee.
Josefina Alvarez
13th District
Trina Janes, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Larry Suffredin, Cook County Commissioner

While her psychology students at Adler University appreciate Josefina Alvarez’s commitment to education, diversity and inclusion, her work in her own community deserves recognition for its impact on Evanston youth and families living with mental health challenges. Board president of Mental Health America of the North Shore since 2015, Ms. Alvarez has served as a leader of this all-volunteer organization since 2012, clocking countless hours recruiting, training and supervising volunteers, conducting community outreach, raising much-needed funds and advocating for inclusive public policy that increases access to vital care that can save lives, strengthen families and enrich our community.

Her greatest interests are cultural competence within mental health practices, Latino/Latina mental health, substance abuse treatment, and mutual help programs. Those specialties are supported at Adler University with its emphasis on socially responsible practice. She also enjoys the opportunity to work with communities in collaboration with practitioners from other disciplines at the University.

Ms. Alvarez holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from DePaul University in Clinical Community Psychology.
Mary Beth Beiersdorf
14th District
Linda Fleming, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Gregg Goslin, Cook County Commissioner

Self-starter, inspirational, dedicated, determined: these are just some of the words that describe Mary Beth Beiersdorf of Salute, Inc. It truly is all about community. Whether through her volunteerism, her own organization, or her family, Mrs. Beiersdorf believes in the power of doing. She has made a multitude of selfless contributions, making a difference in the lives of so many veterans and their families.

In 2003, following her husband’s return from his Navy deployment, Ms. Beiersdorf and her husband founded Salute, Inc. to assist military service members, veterans and their families in meeting their financial, physical and emotional needs. Services include assisting with rent or mortgage payments, car payments, costs associated with education, groceries and utilities.

To date, Mrs. Beiersdorf and Salute, Inc. have assisted more than 2100 military service members and families, provided more than 2.6 million dollars in emergency financial assistance and changed countless lives for the better.
Laurie Stone
15th District
Rebecca Darr, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Timothy Schneider, Cook County Commissioner

Laurie Stone is retired from a 25 year career in Chamber of Commerce management. She served as President and CEO of the Greater O’Hare Association and as the Founding President of the Schaumburg Business Association.

Ms. Stone joined WINGS as Board President in 2010 and served four years in that capacity. She is a passionate supporter of the WINGS mission to end domestic violence one family at a time and enjoys interacting with the courageous women and children who access WINGS’ services.

She has served as a Trustee of Harper College since 1991, six of those years as Board Chair. Throughout her career, Ms. Stone has served on many additional boards and commissions in the Northwest Suburbs. She believes that every individual has an obligation to help their community grow and prosper. Her commitment to the community and her leadership to make the world a better place are unparalleled.

Ms. Stone is the proud mother of three sons and one daughter, and thoroughly enjoys being grandmother to five granddaughters and three grandsons…each of whom believes he or she is her favorite.
As Senior Vice President of Program Development and Evaluation at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, one of the largest not-for-profit social service agencies in the Midwest, Kathy Donahue-Coia oversees new program initiatives and quality oversight for 153 programs in 150 locations in Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois.

Ms. Donahue-Coia oversees the Performance and Quality Improvement, Program Development and Program Evaluation activities that ensure quality services and good performance for programs that serve nearly one million people each year, including the following: emergency assistance programs, homeless prevention activities, affordable housing development, child nutrition programs, family strengthening programs in early childhood, after school and youth services, and senior services.

Ms. Donahue-Coia chairs the agency’s Catholic Identity and Values Committee focused on keeping the roots of Catholic social teaching front and center in mission integration including supporting spirituality, peace and justice throughout the work of the agency.

A social worker at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago for 32 years, Ms. Donahue is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northern Illinois University and a Master’s degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois Chicago. Previously, she was an administrator of Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic and Family Violence Program at Rush Presbyterian St. Luke Hospital in Chicago. She went on to be trained as a Rape Victim Advocate and to do court observance for domestic violence cases.

Today, Ms. Donahue is a respected leader addressing issues of poverty, homelessness and hunger, not only at Catholic Charities in Chicago, but also at city, state and national levels.
Rebecca Lerfelt  
17th District  
Sharon Brannigan, Cook County Women’s Commissioner  
Sean Morrison, Cook County Commissioner

Holding a Masters degree in Social Work from the University of Chicago Social Service Administration, Rebecca Lerfelt has been with the PLOWS Council on Aging since its inception in 1975. She is also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

PLOWS is a non-profit social service organization serving individuals 60 years of age and older in Palos, Lemont, Orland and Worth Townships. In the four townships there are twenty municipalities and 70,000 persons over the age of 60. PLOWS places special emphasis on helping maintain people in their homes and provides a number of services with that objective in mind. With her aid in developing systems and resources that were previously non-existent in the agency, an ultimate promotion to Assistant Director was inevitable.

Ms. Lerfelt possesses high moral integrity with an unceasing ability to find solutions for the most difficult cases. She mentors by example the importance of making time for others. In a field of high burnout, her ethical problem-solving and innate ability to be the voice of reason in a sea of angst and turmoil changes the lives of staff and clients.
Joyce A. Chapman
At-Large District

Dr. Harvette Grey, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Dr. Ann Kalayil, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Dr. Aparna Sen-Yeldandi, Cook County Women’s Commissioner
Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Board President

Joyce A. Chapman has been involved in her historic Pullman community for the 47 years. She embarked on the mission in May 2002 to make her area the best in Chicago by starting the Pullman Community Development Corporation. Now, because of her advocacy, all can walk through the North Pullman area and see the revitalization that has taken and is still taking place.

In a process that would take two years, she managed to bring good housing to the area by talking the owners of a run-down property in the community into renovating and converting it into 210 federally subsidized housing units in a complex known as The Wheelworks Property. These units provide residents with a better quality of life and have improved living conditions in the area.

From 1999 to 2009, Ms. Chapman served as the CAPS Beat 512 Facilitator for the Chicago Police Department of the 5th District, working tirelessly with community residents to help deter crime in the community. She has also served for over 20 years as a community organizer and has worked with wards of the state and juvenile parolees as a way to assist the underserved populations in her community.

Ms. Chapman is a single parent of three beautiful daughters and seven grandchildren. She is the daughter of Charles and Kuniko Chapman. Born in Tokyo, Japan, she has attended schools on military bases in a variety of places and has traveled extensively. Her life’s goal is to help all residents improve their quality of life.
Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues
Commissioner Biographies

Peggy Montes, Chairperson
Peggy A. Montes is a native Chicagoan who has devoted her life to serving her fellow citizens, especially women, girls and disadvantaged children. She is noted for her philanthropic and volunteer successes in reaching goals for her beloved causes. Not many teachers leave their profession to lead organizations and found institutions. However, she has done just that and is still moving creatively into the future. Best known as a community, educational and women’s rights activist and Founder/President of the Bronzeville Children’s Museum (still the first and only African American children’s museum in the country), she is also a seasoned civic and cultural leader. She has received numerous awards and honors, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of African American Museums, Trustee Award from the DuSable Museum, HistoryMakers Award, Salute to Excellence Award from Illinois Governor George Ryan, Phenomenal Woman Award from State Farm, and Woman of Excellence Award from the Chicago Defender.
Dr. Harvette Grey, Commissioner At-Large

Dr. Harvette Grey received a doctorate in social-clinical psychology from the Wright Institute in Berkeley, California, a Master of Arts in Inner City Studies from Northeastern University and a Bachelor’s degree from Southern Illinois University. She has held several leadership positions such as the Executive Director of STEP School, a school for the Treatment of Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed Children; Founding Director of the DePaul University Women’s Center and Executive Director of the DePaul University’s Cultural Center. She has also been involved in many professional organizations: the National Association of Black Psychologists; the Women’s Education Network, and the Association on the Study of Classical African Civilizations. In addition, she has received numerous awards, including a distinguished Alumni Award from Southern Illinois University, DePaul University’s Women’s Studies Service Award, and a DuSable Museum of African American History Chicago Freedom Sister. Commissioner Grey is a lecturer and a consultant on culture, women and children’s issues as well as racism, civil and human rights and social justice issues.

Dr. Ann Kalayil, Commissioner At-Large

Dr. Ann Kalayil was named Regional Administrator of the General Services Administration’s Great Lakes Region in January 2011. Commissioner Kalayil heads operations that provide federal agencies and the U.S. courts in six states with support in vital areas such as real estate services, procurements, information technology, supplies, equipment, and vehicles. Headquartered in Chicago, the region has a workforce of almost 1,000 employees and an annual operating budget of about $450 million. Commissioner Kalayil is the first woman to serve as regional administrator of the General Services Administration in this region. Before this appointment, she worked for more than 18 years at the University of Chicago in Information Technology Services; has taught interdisciplinary courses on Asian-Americans at DePaul University, Loyola University Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. A Leadership Greater Chicago fellow, Commissioner Kalayil has also served on several government task forces and has participated in many panel discussions on the above issues. She is also co-director of the South Asian American Policy & Research Institute and a member of many community-based organizations.
Vera G. Davis, 1st District

Vera Garner Davis is a retired educator from the Chicago Public School System. Since retirement, she has worked with several organizations that provide needed services to the community. She is currently chairman of the Chicago Westside Branch NAACP where the fight continues for equality for all. She is president of the Bright Leadership Institute, an organization that develops leaders. She is a member of Carey Tercentenary African Methodist Episcopal Church where she currently serves as President Pro Tem of the Steward Board and has served in many other capacities including Christian Education Director and Sunday School Superintendent. She has sat on the boards of Loretto Hospital Foundation, Family Focus Foundation, Illinois Hunger Coalition, Illinois Partnership Office Advisory Council, Hands Up Recovery and The University of Chicago Advisory Committee for Cancer Research. She is finishing her term as president of the Congressional Club, comprised of spouses of the Presidential Cabinet, Supreme Court and Members of Congress. She has received many honors for her service to the community. However, it was truly an honor to cast an electoral vote two times for the historic election of President Barack Obama. She is married to the Honorable Danny K. Davis, Representative of the 7th Congressional District of Illinois.

Dr. Aparna Sen-Yeldandi, Commissioner At-Large

Dr. Aparna Sen-Yeldandi has worked over two decades in public and private sectors in the areas of teaching, information technology, university research and strategic planning. During her tenure in the City of Chicago and Chicago Housing Authority, she has worked with many human services agencies and spearheaded many inter-governmental projects. Commissioner Sen-Yeldandi is the former Executive Director of Apna Ghar (Our Home), an agency that provides comprehensive, culturally appropriate services to the victims and survivors of domestic violence focusing primarily on South Asian and other immigrant women and children. Commissioner Sen-Yeldandi serves as a Co-Chair on the Board of Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network, on the advisory council of Women’s Economic Justice, and as a Board Member of the Natya Dance Company, an internationally known dance company based in Chicago. Currently, she is working as a consultant for the not-for-profit sector providing mentorship, project management, strategic planning and resource development.

Vera G. Davis, 1st District
Dorian K. Carter, 2nd District

Dorian K. Carter is Special Assistant to the Chairman and CEO John W. Rogers, Jr., of Ariel Investments. Commissioner Carter serves her community through an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of women and girls. In 1999, Commissioner Carter co-founded The Glass Slipper Project, a 100% volunteer program that provides impoverished junior and senior high school girls with proper attire to attend their prom. Since its creation thirteen years ago, the Glass Slipper Project has dressed more than 23,000 girls throughout the Chicago region. In addition to her efforts on behalf of The Glass Slipper Project, Commissioner Carter also serves on the Local Advisory Board for New Leaders. Commissioner Carter is a member of The Cook County State’s Attorney’s African American Advisory Council. She is also a member of The Links, Inc.

Dr. Frances G. Carroll, 3rd District

Dr. Frances G. Carroll is a retired educator and former principal of the Nancy Jefferson Alternative School located in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. Commissioner Carroll is a current member of the Life Member Youth Guidance Board of Directors, a Trustee University of Illinois, a member of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and a Central Region Representative to the International Connection Committee. She has served on the Program Planning Committee to assist in the selection of the Public Meetings, and partnered with community groups in planning Health Fairs for the district. Commissioner Carroll assisted Cook County in the planning of Domestic Violence legislation, the County Child Care Initiative, collected cell phones for victims of domestic violence, and lobbied for equal pay for women.
Echelle Mohn, 4th District

Echelle recently spent 23 years as educator and Director of Technology of Augustus Tolton Catholic Academy. She is now a Computer Science Integration Specialist with Chicago Public Schools, consistent with her goal of teaching children technology while integrating life skills. She has taught in various settings and has developed a full curriculum designed to teach students technological skills and financial literacy skills. Her program is designed to start students as young as four years old with the knowledge of what they need to understand and live in our digital world. She has been a member of the IT Ministry at Trinity United Church of Christ (TUCC) and currently serves with the Media Ministry (Audio), Church in Society, Financial Consortium Council of TUCC. She co-hosts for the Financial Literacy Academy at Endeleo Institute. Her three sons, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Kevin, Jr., are her greatest pride and joy.

Jennifer Artis, 5th District

Jennifer Artis has served as the Director of Public Affairs for St. James Hospital and Health Centers for over 18 years. Prior to this position, Commissioner Artis co-founded and served as the Director of Crossroads Coalition and the Southland Healthcare Forum. Commissioner Artis has always been very involved in her community. This interest eventually led her to become Trustee of the Village of Richton Park. She spent over thirty years working for community health center development, health advocacy and coalition development for access to qualitative and comprehensive medical care for the working poor, uninsured and indigent. In addition to these activities, Commissioner Artis also serves as a Member of the Board of Advisors of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Matteson Rotary, and the GSU Presidents Board of Advisors.
Jacquelyn Small, 6th District

Jacquelyn Small is employed by Governors State University in University Park, Illinois where she is the Director of the Annual Campaign and a Major Gift Officer. She resides in Richton Park and is a member and former president of the Matteson Rotary Club. Commissioner Small has served as a member of the Board of Directors of United Way/South-Southwest and the Crisis Center of South Suburbia.

Jeylu B. Gutierrez, 7th District

Jeylu Belen Gutierrez was born and raised in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. She has lived in Brighton Park since immigrating to the United States. Commissioner Gutierrez currently works for CPS as a Student Advocate and Dean of Discipline for Irene C. Hernandez Middle School. She also serves as the board of directors treasurer for UNION Impact Center, a community based organization that engages an all-ages corps of committed community members to provide after school programs and youth mentoring in Back of the Yards. She previously worked as the Community Services Representative at Benito Juarez in Pilsen and the Meetings and Events Coordinator at Immaculate Conception Elementary School in South Chicago. Commissioner Gutierrez has also been involved in political campaigns in Chicago and Guadalajara and worked as the Sister Communities Director during the governor’s race in Jalisco. Jeylu received a Bachelor’s degree in International Relations at Instituto Tecnologico de Monterrey in Guadalajara and BA in Hospitality Management at Kendall College in Chicago.
Marjorie A. Manchen, 9th District

Marjorie A. Manchen is an attorney with the law offices of Smith & Smith in River Grove, practicing law with her husband, Bart Smith and his father. She concentrates her practice in domestic relations, guardianships, probate and other family law matters, as well as municipal work, for the past 25 years. Commissioner Manchen is also the Village Clerk of River Grove, elected in 2009, and has achieved designations as a Registered Municipal Clerk and Certified Municipal Clerk. She serves as a member of the Board of Directors of Guerin College Preparatory in River Grove since 2008, and formerly served as the chair and president of the Guerin Alumnae Board. Additionally, she is an active member of the River Grove Lions Club, the River Park Moose in River Grove, and a volunteer for Special Olympics Illinois in the Chicago area. Commissioner Manchen was Chair of the Elmwood Park Plan, Zoning & Development Commission for 11 years. She was also a member of the Elmwood Park Civic Foundation, former chair of the Taste of Elmwood Park Committee, a wish-granter for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in Kane County, IL, where she represented abused and neglected children.

Ally Brisbin, 10th District

Ally Brisbin is deeply involved in the Edgewater community on the north side of Chicago. She is a two-time entrepreneur, with a professional background in communications and economic and community development. Currently, Commissioner Brisbin works for 48th Ward Alderman Harry Osterman, focusing on economic development and communications. She is also serving her second term as a Community Representative on the Swift Elementary School Local School Council. She is a volunteer mentor through local non-profit GirlForward, an organization that serves adolescent girl refugees. A new addition to the commission, she is excited to join her fellow commissioners on the Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues.
Ginger Rugai, 11th District

Ginger Rugai served diligently as Chicago Alderman from 1990 to 2011. Commissioner Rugai began her career as an English teacher at Queen of Peace High School. Before becoming Alderman, she served as Assistant Director of the Beverly Area Planning Association, a member of the Illinois Senate Staff and Administrative Aide to State Senator Jeremiah Joyce. Former Mayor Daley appointed Commissioner Rugai to fill the vacancy of the 19th Ward Alderman in December of 1990. She was elected for her first term as Aldermen in February 1991 and was re-elected in 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007. Alderman Rugai was appointed to former Mayor Daley’s Task Force on Women’s Health and the Cook County Commission Women’s Issues. She is also active in the Mercy Home for Boys and Girls Leader Council. She received her BA and MA from Loyola University and a Doctor of Public Policy (HC) from Saint Xavier University. She was named as SXU’s first Senior Fellow. Commissioner Rugai and her husband, Ado, have three children and nine grandchildren.

Andrea Raila, 12th District

Andrea A. Raila is a Senior Analyst at the law firm of Raila & Associates, P.C., and mother of three. She has devoted 30 years to educating the public on financial management and ballot initiatives, and 18 years to a partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank and the Community Investment Corporation advocating financial literacy and responsible property management. Raila & Associates established mentorships with CPS and the Young Women’s Leadership Charter School. She served on the Executive Committee for the Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM) and the merger for CLAIM’s transition into Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA). Her volunteer focus is on Housing Opportunities & Maintenance for the Elderly (HOME), the Glass Slipper Project, and Apna Ghar. She helped establish the St. Gertrude’s Parish Adoption and Foster Families.
Trina Janes, 13th District

Trina Janes was appointed by Commissioner Larry Suffredin in 2003. She is a native of Evanston and now lives with her family in Skokie. She works a consultant with Haymarket Public Strategies. Commissioner Janes is a graduate of Evanston’s public schools, Bates College and the Kellogg School of Management. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco and is the former president of the Chicago Area Peace Corps Association and past Executive Committee member of the National Peace Corps Association. Commissioner Janes’ most important role is being the mother of two rambunctious boys. She coaches their soccer team and is an active PTA mom.

Linda Fleming, 14th District

Linda Fleming is the former Palatine township supervisor where she became involved with several nonprofit organizations helping women and children through the township outreach programs, including WINGS, PHD, and the Bridge. She has also served as Palatine Township Clerk and Trustee of the Village of Inverness. After her retirement she has continued working with the nonprofit organizations in the community.
Rebecca Darr, 15th District

Born and raised in Alton, Illinois, Darr completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Illinois. Prior to joining WINGS, she lived in San Jose, CA, working with homeless families and as the director of a non-profit alternative school for abused children and adolescents. While in California, she earned her master’s degree in Clinical Psychology. She and her husband, Joe, have three sons, including a set of twins. Rebecca Darr joined WINGS as Executive Director in 1999 and was named the Chief Executive Officer in 2014. Under her leadership, the organization has become one of the largest agencies in the state of Illinois providing services and housing to homeless women and children, and to victims of domestic violence. In 2005, WINGS built and opened the first and only domestic violence shelter in northwest Cook County and over the years added 30 units of transitional and permanent housing to allow women and children sufficient time to heal from the trauma of abuse. On Valentine’s Day, 2016, WINGS opened the first new domestic violence shelter in the city of Chicago in over a decade. Darr serves on several other boards and state-wide coalitions as part of her effort to advocate for stronger legislation and increased resources to prevent and end domestic violence.

Terri Rivera, 16th District

With 15 years of non-profit management experience, Terri Rivera’s passion is connecting people who care with a cause that matters. As the Executive Director of Back on My Feet Chicago, she inspires people to combine a passion for running with compassion for others. A runner and triathlete herself, Commissioner Rivera’s motto is “Relentless forward motion will get you to your finish line.” She was recently appointed to the Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues, where she represents the needs of women and children in the western suburbs. When not with the Back on My Feet family, she spends time reading, hiking and camping with her husband, and overseeing the relentless forward motion of her two sons, ages 9 and 13.
Sharon Brannigan, 17th District

Born to second generation Irish and Italian immigrants, Sharon Brannigan was raised in the south side neighborhood of Mount Greenwood in Chicago where the family owned a pizza business for 25 years. One of three children, she attended the public schools through grade school and then graduated from Queen of Peace High School (’80). Commissioner Brannigan married her high school sweetheart in 1984; together they had three children, moved from Chicago to Oak Lawn and finally to Palos Heights where she and her husband have resided for the last 25 years. Knowing the importance of a public education and as a stay at home mom, she volunteered countless hours through fundraising programs at Palos School District 118, raising tens of thousands of dollars for educational needs. While raising children, Commissioner Brannigan graduated summa cum laude from Governors State University (2004) with a BA in Public Relations. She became a substitute teacher in the Blue Island School District 135, until she landed the Marketing Director position with General Growth Properties at Ford City Mall. In 2008, she opened her own business, Sherry’s Flower Shoppe in Orland Park, where she currently works. Always concerned about her neighborhood and property taxes, in 2013, Sharon was elected Trustee of Palos Township and has served diligently since that time.
Cook County
Board of Commissioners

Toni Preckwinkle
President

Richard Boykin
Robert Steele
Jerry Butler
Stanley Moore
Deborah Sims
Edward M. Moody
Jesus G. Garcia
Luis Arroyo, Jr.
Peter N. Silvestri
Bridget Gainer
John P. Daley
John A. Fritchey
Larry Suffredin
Gregg Goslin
Timothy O. Schneider
Jeffrey R. Tobolski
Sean M. Morrison