



Perris News

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Shelly Yarbrough Honored by YMCA

As a Native American Indian growing up in the 1960s, Shelly Yarbrough was often told by her teachers to keep her expectations low.

Learn to clean and cook, she was told, so you can work for other people. Even years later, when she earned a spot on the Val Verde Unified School District Board of Trustees, Yarbrough said she still encountered bigotry. She was once chided by a fellow board member, who remarked that he thought all Indians had gone extinct.

But such attitudes never deterred Yarbrough, who persevered and now serves on numerous local and state boards, including the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce and as a director at large for the California School Board Association.

The Perris resident was honored Thursday by the YMCA of Riverside County, which named her a Woman of Achievement. The award has been bestowed just 133 times in the last 25 years.

In an emotional speech before a crowd of about 500 at the Riverside Convention Center, Yarbrough said she tells students she meets in Perris, Sacramento and elsewhere in her travels to keep striving for excellence. Don't let walls hem you in or block your path, she says.

"If you push hard enough the concrete will move," Yarbrough said to a round of hearty applause.

Yarbrough was one of six county educators, businesswomen, medical professionals, law enforcement professionals and philanthropists to earn the Women of Distinction Award in 2009.

Event organizers heaped praise on the recipients.

Rebecca Goldware, president of the Board of Directors of the YMCA, said the honorees are committed to improve the lives of all Riverside County residents.

"The commitment comes through a variety of backgrounds and has made a difference throughout our community exceeding our expectations," Goldware said. "These people made a commitment to impact their community in a positive way. They did. Through their actions Riverside has been touched in so many ways. These impacts have defied the boundaries of gender, race and age."

She said Yarbrough and the other recipients "exemplify the values of the YMCA—to bring about peace, justice and freedom for all people."

Lori Pendergraft, YMCA Women of Achievement Chair for 2009, called the recipients people who have "demonstrated exceptional leadership, innovation and excellence in a myriad of areas."

Yarbrough, a member of Ojibwe tribe, continues serving on the Val Verde Unified School District Board of Trustees. During her tenure, the population of the district has more than doubled and Yarbrough has focused her considerable energy on celebrating the accomplishments of Val Verde students. Val Verde Schools have been named Distinguished Schools and received Gold Bell Awards and CIF championships.

She said she is most proud of the creation of the Val Verde Success Academy, which addresses the needs of at-risk students and encourages their success as they move toward graduation.

Of her most recent award, she said: "I am very honored and humbled to receive it. It is a recognition and culmination of the years of work I've put in trying to improve the lives of our children."



Yarbrough holds the Woman of Achievement Award.



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough pins a corsage on his wife during the festivities.



Shelly Yarbrough is surrounded by her children, Andrea, Kenny, Garrett and Schuyler, who attended the 2009 YMCA Women of Achievement ceremonies in Riverside.