

Five Apex Award finalists serve SW Fla.

By *Laura Ruane*
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These women both lead and serve.

They drive businesses or other organizations that make our community healthier, wealthier, smarter — and more enjoyable.

They work hard outside the office as well, giving their time and talents generously to civic and charitable efforts throughout Southwest Florida.

These five females are finalists for the Apex Award, a tribute to one outstanding woman for her professional achievement, community service and volunteerism, and personal development and leadership skills.

The five women - chosen from among more than 30 nominees - will be cheered at a black-tie gala and ceremony Saturday at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa south of Fort Myers. It will honor all five Apex finalists, culminating in the announcement of one overall winner.



From left; Dr. Mary Kay Peterson, 21st Century Oncology/Radiology Regional; Veronica Barber, Afcaam Catholic Center; Dr. Aysegul Timur, Hodges University (seated); Tammy Hall, Lee County Board of County Commissioners; Sarah Owen, Community Cooperative Ministries Inc. (Valerie Roche/news-press.com)

Here are the Final Five and just a sampling of what they do:

Mary Kay Petersen, M.D.

BUSINESS / ORGANIZATION: Radiology Regional Center

TITLE: Director of Women's Imaging

TIME IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA: Resident since 1999

ROLE MODELS: On a daily basis, the patients and friends affected by breast cancer. Their emotional strength, physical endurance, continued hope and positive outlook are woven into my life professionally and personally. My father is another role model. He's been steadfast and strong

through every physical, financial, and emotional adversity he has faced. He has the biggest heart anyone could ever hope for.

GREATEST SUCCESS: My children. Brooks and Haley are my pride and joy.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Partners for Breast Cancer Care; American Cancer Society; Breast Cancer Coalition of Lee County; Susan G. Komen Foundation, Southwest Florida affiliate, founding board member; and the National Consortium of Breast Centers Inc.

WHAT APEX RECOGNITION MEANS TO ME: It honors and thanks those who support and assist me, professionally and personally.

Veronica Dickens Barber

Organization: AFCAAM Catholic Center

Title: SKILLS Female Mentoring director, mentoring programs coordinator

TIME IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA: Born and reared in Fort Myers

ROLE MODELS: Harriet Tubman, a slave who freed hundreds of her people through the Underground Railroad. I admire her ability to think and plan in the midst of turmoil, to go against the grain for the greater good, and to get up after being knocked down. Also, grandparents Elijah Bradwell and Catherine White, who loved me unconditionally, and made me believe I could do anything.

GREATEST SUCCESS: Landing a job as the first African-American TV reporter in Fort Myers, with WBBH-TV 20 in 1974.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: City of Fort Myers Youth Service Coalition and Teen Advisory Council; chairwoman for Dunbar Core Network of 22 community agencies and organizations; board member, Grandparents Returning Into Parenting, board member, Mt. Hermon Ministries and Women's Leadership Team; board member, University of Florida's Agricultural & Natural Resource Council; and member, Department of Juvenile Justice Council.

WHAT APEX RECOGNITION MEANS TO ME: I was genuinely surprised and honored. I do what I do out of a love for God's people.

Tammy Hall

Organization: Lee County government

Title: Lee County commissioner

TIME IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA: 31 years

Role model: My grandmother, Charlotte Hall, taught me tough decisions must be made in every business, the importance of customer service, and to never be afraid to try anything. I can still hear her say "patience, faith, and reward."

Greatest success: My role in the Northern Everglades Estuary Protection legislation securing the protection of the Caloosahatchee River and estuary. I am also proud to have been the first chairwoman of the Lee County Board of County Commissioners, and the first woman to be re-elected to that board.

Community involvement: Pace Center for Girls, board member; Edison/Ford Board of Trustees; Greater Fort Myers Chamber; Tourist Development Council, chairwoman; Uncommon Friends; and Fort Myers Women's Community Club.

WHAT APEX RECOGNITION MEANS TO ME: I am extremely honored to be included in such a distinguished list of accomplished women. Just as I was encouraged to never be afraid to try anything, I hope to encourage and inspire other women to do the same.

Sarah Owen

ORGANIZATION: Community Cooperative Ministries Inc.

TITLE: Chief executive officer

TIME IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA: 8 years

ROLE MODELS: I am inspired daily by the men and women who reach out for help from our agency. Many of these folks overcome tremendous obstacles to get back on their feet. Also, Sam Galloway Jr. (auto dealer and soup kitchen supporter), who taught me success is directly tied to your willingness to do something for those who can do nothing in return for you.

GREATEST SUCCESS: Surrounding myself with teams of incredible people who are willing to walk alongside me in my work and my personal life.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Founding member, Hunger Task Force; Harry Chapin Food Bank board of directors; Edison Ford Foundation board of directors; Cape Coral Women's Giving Alliance

WHAT APEX RECOGNITION MEANS TO ME: My accomplishments were not achieved alone, but rather in concert with other community servants. I share this recognition with all of the people who have been part of my journey.

Dr. Aysegul Timur

ORGANIZATION: Hodges University

TITLE: Professor and vice chair of the business administration program

TIME IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA: Teaching at Hodges since 1999.

ROLE MODELS: My mother instilled such values as being concerned for others, respecting diversity, working hard, and making learning a lifelong pursuit. Dr. Jeanette Brock, Hodges University's executive vice president of academic affairs, not only is a strong leader; she has a compassionate side. Good listeners make good leaders: Dr. Brock has shown me the importance of both traits.

GREATEST SUCCESS: Building an academic career and a family and serving the community. Eleven years ago, I moved from Turkey to this continent, not knowing English or the U.S. culture. I try to never say "I can't."

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Teaching my students to think critically, communicate effectively, take initiative, demonstrate leadership, and research information. Also: the Naples Council on World Affairs Outreach Committee; Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce; Vineyard Elementary School; Hispanic Institute at Hodges University; and the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation.

WHAT APEX RECOGNITION MEANS TO ME: It validates my passion for teaching and learning continuously and for applying core values of caring and the belief in hard work, with family support.

Additional Facts

AT A GLANCE

Event: Fourth Annual Apex Awards

Date: Saturday, Nov. 21

Time: 6:30-10 p.m.

Cost: \$85 single admission; cost varies for VIP tables and sponsorships

Location: Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, south Fort Myers

Organizer: Women In Business, Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce

Award Presenter: BB&T/Oswald Trippe and Co.

Sponsors: The News-Press, BioDrain of Florida, Mark Loren Designs, Chico's Charities, Ruth Messmer Florist, Interior Landscapes and Residence Inn by Marriott.

Learn more: Contact the chamber at fortmyers.org or call 332-3624