

Hayes named recipient of 2014 Albion Fellows Bacon Award

Hayes helped many find place to call home

by Michael Doyle

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Luzada Hayes, retiring director of Aurora, will be the recipient of the Albion Fellows Bacon award from the Evansville Women's Equality Day. The honor will be given in a luncheon Aug. 26 at the Old National Events Plaza, formerly known as The Centre

EVANSVILLE, Ind. - In her 23 years as a social worker, Luzada Hayes often looked to the work of Albion Fellows Bacon for guidance.

So it is only fitting that Hayes would now be recognized for her efforts with an honor bearing the name of her inspiration. Hayes has been named recipient of the 2014 Albion Fellows Bacon Award presented by the Women's Equality Day Committee.

“People who know me might say I’m not usually at a loss for words,” Hayes said. “But when they told me about this award I was truly speechless. I’m so very humbled and appreciative that I could be in a position to carry on her name in some way.

“If people do not know about Albion Fellows Bacon I would encourage you to read about her. She is the perfect example of how one person really can make a difference.”

Jayne Walters, director of development at Aurora, Inc. and one of those who nominated Hayes for the award, said Hayes is not just a co-worker and friend, but a mentor to her as well.

“She is so passionate for her work and gives everything she has,” Walters said. “She has taught me a lot. Without Luzada being in the position she is and working as hard as she does, I think this community would be missing out on a great leader.”

Hayes is executive director at Aurora, Inc., a nonprofit with the mission of preventing and ending homelessness in Evansville and Vanderburgh County. Hayes said Aurora’s and her own personal causes are directly drawn from the ideals of Bacon, whose reforms in public housing assistance and building standards were her most well-known accomplishments.

“I strongly believe that the place a person or a family lives is the basis for their own stability,” she said. “It is your base, your mission control. Without that it is very hard to be functional. What we see is that when people are helped to get decent, adequate housing that they might not otherwise be able to have, they become much happier and more productive, and when you can accomplish that on a large scale it benefits the community as a whole.”

One example in particular, Hayes said, perfectly illustrates that concept.

“A few years ago, I was working with a family living in a shelter,” she said. “They had an 18-month-old baby who had never spoken a word and was not developing like he should have. We worked to get that family in a proper home and within a very short time he was happy and making all kinds of noises. It took the safety and security of that new home for that child to start developing normally, and as far as I know he is still doing very well.”

Hayes began her life in social work at 29 years old, when she decided to go back to college and get her degree. Although she was married and had a 7-year-old daughter, and was past the point where most people make such a drastic career change, Hayes said she never had a second thought.

“I knew I wanted to do something that felt important,” she said. “I’d had a string of jobs that at the

end of the day I would go home and not feel like I had done anything worthwhile. So I decided I needed to do something else with my life. I've been fortunate to be able to help people and hopefully make a difference.”

Walters said Hayes was not only an inspiration to herself and her co-workers, but also to social workers in the community as a whole.

“She has faced down some incredibly challenging situations that most people probably could not handle.” Walters said. “It is her poise and leadership in those situations that I find inspirational. She sets an example for everyone in social work to follow.”

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