



News Release

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Century Names Women of Distinction for 2012

Century College has selected six women to receive Women of Distinction awards for 2012. They are: **Claire Avitabile**, Executive Artistic Director at 20% Theatre Company; **Vednita Carter**, Founder/Executive Director of Breaking Free; **Cindy Reuther**, Founder/Executive Director at Laura Jeffrey Academy; **Sharon Rice Vaughan**, Co-Founder of Women's Advocates; **Lois Severson**, Co-Founder of Women's Advocates and **Bernice Sisson**, Co-Founder of Women's Advocates.

Claire Avitabile started the 20% Theatre Company to support and vigorously promote the work of female and transgender theatre artists and to celebrate the unique contribution of these artists to social justice and human rights. She has always wanted to “pay it forward” and provide as much opportunity as possible for teen-aged girls.

Vednita Carter founded Breaking Free, an Afro-Centric non-profit agency that assists women and girls to escape systems of prostitution and abuse by providing advocacy, direct services, housing, education and hope to 400-500 women, girls and their children each year.

Cindy Reuther is the founder and executive director of Laura Jeffrey Academy, the first and only 5th to 8th grade girl-focused public middle school in Minnesota. Cindy's interest in equity for women and girls began early in her career – working with young people in leadership where she observed biased and unbalanced gendered experiences. An innovator at heart, she began projects aimed at dismantling gender stereotypes and providing opportunities for women and girls to access their power and voice.

Sharon Rice Vaughan, Lois Severson, and Bernice Sisson were involved in the very beginning of Women's Advocates, the first shelter for battered women in the country. Women's Advocates developed out of a grassroots effort to create a telephone service for women who needed legal information. It ended up with all kinds of women calling and wanting a place to stay. In the beginning, the founders of this institution had no idea what sorts of terrible secrets were common among women who needed shelter to escape violent relationships.

Women of Distinction award recipients are being honored by Century College not only for their professional accomplishments, but also for their work in improving the lives and increasing opportunities for women and girls. Century began its Women of Distinction awards program in 2005 to highlight the accomplishments of women in our society, and also to celebrate that more

women gain access to higher education through community/technical colleges than through any other type of post-secondary institution.

Century's 8th annual awards ceremony and reception will be held from **5 to 7 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 6**, at Dellwood Hills Golf Club, 29 Highway 96, Dellwood. Lee Valsvik, a well-known Twin Cities radio personality now on KOOL 108, will be the guest host and the Century College Choir will perform.

The Women of Distinction awards are sponsored by Century College and the Century College Women and Gender Studies Department. The public is invited to attend this free event. To RSVP, please call [Theresa Glass](#) at 651.779.5531.