NEA honors Tennessee educator Wendy Marcec for helping kids in Appalachia

Annual gala also marks 50th anniversary of the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner

BOSTON—NEA bestows upon Wendy Marcec, a retired Tennessee educator, its prestigious 2017 Reg Weaver Human and Civil Rights Award for her unbending work to alleviate the effects of poverty in Appalachian Kentucky.

Since 1967, NEA has recognized and honored those who have fought — and continue to fight — for human and civil rights. This year, NEA honored the outstanding work of 12 American social justice heroes at its annual Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner on Saturday, July 1, in Boston. The theme of the awards dinner is, “Living the Legacy: After 50 Years, Still We Rise.”

“Wendy Marcec embodies the spirit of Dr. Maya Angelou’s beloved poem ‘Still I rise,’” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Through her deeds and actions, this human and civil rights hero is still rising and carrying the torch forward. Tonight, we renew our commitment to stand for racial and social justice and pledge to continue to shed a light on her work as she guides and inspires us all.”

When Wendy Marcec was a music teacher and special education pre-school aide, she had a small yet powerful interaction with one of her students that prompted her to create her first initiative, the S.A.N.T.A (Send A New Toy to Appalachia) Project, in 2008. The project provides thousands of toys to children in Appalachia. In addition, she and her husband Jerry created A Lasting World, Inc. (ALW), a 501©(3), in order to empower underprivileged children living in Estill County, Kentucky, by providing them financial assistance and motivational support and inspiring them to take positive environmental action to promote long-term care of the earth. Twenty-seven percent of Eastern Kentucky’s population lives below the federal poverty level, making it one of the poorest regions in the country.

Since 2005, ALW’s two main projects have been to sponsor a free-of-charge, weeklong, outdoor education experience, Camp H.O.P.E., for students from Estill County Middle School, and an annual giving project so that impoverished families have a happy Christmas holiday. Overall, ALW has served over 130 students through Camp H.O.P.E. (Help Our Planet Earth), and provided financial and in-kind assistance to more than 850 families through S.A.N.T.A.

To read her full bio, please click here. Watch a video of Wendy Marcec as she works tirelessly for poor kids in Appalachia.

NEA also recognized the anniversary of its merger with the American Teachers Association, which represented black teachers in segregated schools. ATA originally created the Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner, and, as part of the merger, NEA continues this important tradition 50 years later.

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