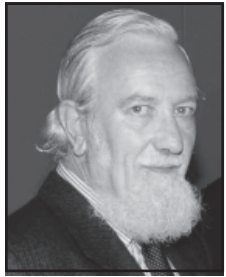


NATIONAL NEWS

BBPA Coming of Age, As Its Harry Jerome Awards Recognize Excellence

By Colin Rickards
Pride Contributing Writer



TORONTO, Ontario — Slick presentation, a bang-up opening youth-oriented musical motivational number, tight scheduling and admirable discipline among the recipients

— no hogging the microphone — made the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) gala presentation of The Harry Jerome Awards a fast-paced and entertaining event.

The theme this year was: “We Believe in You, We Believe in Us.”

“We are recognizing 13 of our brightest and best,” said BBPA President, Audrey Walters, kicking off the 26th such gala event, held at the Toronto Congress Centre last Saturday evening. “The Harry Jerome Awards Gala is a time when our community comes together.”

Out of what Walters said was a record number of nominations, The Harry Jerome Awards Committee, chaired by Karyn Percil, selected awardees in 12 specific categories — their ages spanning more than half a century, from early 20s to early 70s — while Walters chose educator Dr. Chris Spence, Director of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, to receive the President’s Award.

The Harry Jerome Awards, named in memory of Olympic and World Record holding sprinter Harry Jerome of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, began life as a simple one-off event in March, 1983, when a group of Black business people and educators got together and decided to do something to recognize the crop of Black World Class and Olympian track and field athletes then at the top of their careers.

The idea of the awards actually predates by a few months the incorporation of the BBPA itself, which came into being as a result of the same networking which led to the creation of The Harry Jerome Awards.

These soon moved away from solely recognizing athletic achievement, and gradually came to encompass excellence in the full gamut of the business and professional world.

However, because of its history, The Harry Jerome Award for Athletics has especial prestige and was won this year by soccer goalkeeper Anne Olukemi Ogundele. It was presented by Debbie Jerome, who has always been supportive of the awards program named for her late father.

The Harry Jerome Award for Lifetime Achievement went to Willie O’Ree, who 50 years ago this year became the first Black player in the National Hockey League, and now heads up the NHL/USA Hockey Diversity Task Force.

“I feel very humbled and very gratified,” O’Ree said, in accepting the award. “I encountered racism, prejudice, bigotry and ignorance in my early hockey days, but I have always been a positive person. This award means a lot to me — and it will mean a lot to

the boys and girls I work with.”

The RBC Financial Group has been involved with The Harry Jerome Awards for the past 14 years, and sponsored the 2008 Harry Jerome Community Service Award,

from Philadelphia to be present. “If you persevere, all the road blocks come down.”

Members of Warren Salmon’s family had flown in from Boston to see him presented with The Harry Jerome Award for Technol-



Warren Salmon (third from left), co-founder of the social/business networking group, **First Fridays**, allows his son, Shakarri, to hold his BBPA Harry Jerome Award. Joining in the night of celebration was Salmon’s family (left to right): Leslie Salmon (sister), Caitlyn (daughter), Mrs. Bev Salmon, former Toronto councillor (mother), and Dr. J. Douglas Salmon (brother).

which went to lawyer and social activist Roger Rowe.

A galaxy of political figures turned out for the gala, including Senator Donald Oliver, who was representing Canada’s Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity) Jason Kenny; Gerry Phillips, Ontario’s Minister of Energy, representing Premier Dalton McGuinty; and Ontario Progressive Party leader John Tory.

Michael Chan, Ontario’s Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, presenting The Harry Jerome Media Award to Marci Ien of CTV, said that she had “been a familiar face in all our homes since she made her debut on CTV eleven years ago.”

“This award is so special to me,” said Ien, some of whose family members had come up

ogy and Innovation.

Founder of Black Board International, an online service and software company tailed to people of African descent, Salmon, who was Nominated by community worker Ned Blair, is a dedicated volunteer, as well as the dynamo behind the popular First Fridays networking sessions.

For the Salmons, the Jeromes have become something of a family affair. His mother, former City and Metro Councillor Bev Salmon, received a Harry Jerome Award during her political career, and his father, the late Dr. Douglas Salmon, an eminent surgeon, received a Posthumous Harry Jerome Award.

Dr. Stephen Blizzard, who received The Harry Jerome Award for Health Sciences, spent his professional career with the Canadian Armed Forces as a jet pilot and aviation medicine specialist.

The Harry Jerome Trailblazer Award went to Dr. Alex MacGregor, Founder, President and current Dean of Faculty at the Toronto Institute of Pharmaceutical Technology.

As with perhaps most other recipients, the awards gala was an occasion for family, and Dr. MacGregor’s children — who, he said, had never had an opportunity to be present when he has received professional recognitions in the past — were in the audience.

The other awards went to: Vera Manu — Academics Award; Cheryl Foggo — Arts Award; Anthony Sherwood — Entertainment Award; Charles Oforia Attah — Leadership Award; and Professor Njoki Wane — Professional Excellence Award.

Under BBPA President Walters there is new leadership in the organization these days, and new things are being put in place. Breaking with the tradition of the tried and true of past years, the cadre of younger leaders is taking steps perhaps more attuned to the times, while attempting to stay true to the vision of the Founders, and to the roots of the organization.

The BBPA marked its 25th anniversary in 2007 and the new regime has ushered in new thinking on a number of levels, not least concerning a new name for the long-running Harry Jerome Scholarships.

These are dedicated to supporting and promoting the achievement of academic excellence by Black youth, and have been renamed The BBPA National Scholarships.

“We are very proud of the contribution we have made, and continue to make, to our youth and community,” Walters told *Pride News Magazine*. “This name change will set aside the confusion that sometimes existed in people’s minds between The Harry Jerome Scholarships and The Harry Jerome Awards. More importantly, will firmly establish the Scholarships as a national program.”

The Harry Jerome Scholarships were established in 1986, and over the past 21 years the BBPA has granted almost \$1 million to 340 students from across Canada. Last October, 40 students received scholarships valued at \$117,500.

“The Scholarships program was designed to give Black Canadian youth who demonstrate the potential to become the next generation of leaders in our community, the opportunity to continue their individual success,” said Stanley Julien, Chair of the Scholarship Fund.

“Through this scholarship program, we are able to assist these remarkable students in achieving their dreams of pursuing post-secondary education and realizing their potential. Our scholarship recipients are from all parts of Canada, so this name change is an important step in the growth of the Scholarship Fund.”

For more information on The BBPA National Scholarships, visit online at www.bbpa.org, call (416) 504-4097 or email at bbpa@bellnet.ca.

Comedian Jay Martin was M.C. for the Harry Jerome Awards Gala and entertainment was provided by the always-energetic Baby Boyz Dance Group, Eddie Bullen and the HJA Band and the Children’s Dance Theatre, among others. **PRIDE**



Dr. Stephen Blizzard and his sister, Flora Francis.

