

Who got a TOGO? Awards honor service in Ithaca

Bruce Estes, bestes@gannett.com | @IJbestes 7:02 p.m. EST December 6, 2014



(Photo: Bruce Estes / Staff Photo)

The community contributions of 30 Tompkins County organizations and individuals were honored Saturday morning at the annual Town Gown awards at Ithaca High School's Kulp Auditorium.

The annual TOGO awards were developed by Cornell University's Office of Community Relations to recognize town and campus partnerships that improve the quality of life in the Ithaca area.

Funding to support 10 years of the Stephen E. Garner Summers of Service scholarships was also announced at the morning awards program attended by about 200 people.

The service effort provides local high school students summer jobs and civic engagement opportunities with United Way of Tompkins County agencies.

The donation to the scholarship fund came from the Cornell Student United Way campaign to honor Cornell President David Skorton and his wife Robin Davisson, a Cornell professor of molecular physiology. Skorton will be leaving Cornell in the summer to head the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Organizations receiving awards included:

- St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Ithaca's Collegetown that in addition to its religious role has become a community center for town-gown meetings and discussions.
- The Cayuga Lake Monitoring Partnership, which began in 2008. It has become a forum where agencies and organizations that monitor the health of Cayuga Lake meet regularly to share the results of their work and to explore ways to improve and expand monitoring efforts.
- The Kids Discover the Trail Initiative, a program that provides field trips to local museums, gardens, libraries and nature centers for Ithaca City School District students in grades Pre-K through 5.

The program is a collaboration between the Ithaca Public Education Initiative, the Ithaca City School District, and the Discovery Trail, which includes three Cornell sites — the Johnson Museum of Art, the Lab of Ornithology, and Cornell Plantations.

- The Ithaca Startup Works' Rev program at 314 East State St., Ithaca.

Rev is a business incubator that offers entrepreneurs a place to grow their businesses, obtain access to expert advice and business development at an accelerated pace. It was financed by a state grant and Cornell, Ithaca College and TC3.

- Several community and campus organizations that work on food distribution and recovery networks were also honored.

Cited for their efforts in developing and operating food pantries, feeding programs and systems to recover high-quality food that would otherwise be discarded included: Food Bank of the Southern Tier, the Friendship Donations Network, the Tompkins County Food Distribution Network, Loaves and Fishes and Foodnet. Also cited were Cornell Dining, the Cornell University Vegetable Research Farm and the Cornell chapter of the Food Recovery Network.

Individuals receiving awards included:

- Terry Byrnes for her community work on behalf of children.
- Audrey Cooper for her community service work on issues involving justice, race and inclusion.
- Mimi Melegrito for her work in advancing community, social and educational services.
- Jean McPheeters for her work building links between businesses, community groups, social agencies and the campuses.
- Nancy Potter for work directed at improving the lives of Tompkins County families and children.

•Aurora Valenti for her career as Tompkins County Clerk and developing a local state motor vehicles office that has been cited as a model of public service efficiency.

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