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YOUR PICKS: Many in Greater New Haven deserve recognition this year

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The New Haven Register has been naming a Person of the Year since 2004, and we've asked your help in making that choice.

Beginning with Dacia Toll, founder of Amistad Academy, in 2004, we've named people who do tremendous good in the community, such as Joanne Goldblum, founder of the New Haven Diaper Bank.

We've named Kelly Brownell, director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University, who fights for policies to improve nutrition and fight obesity.

We even named our own Ann DeMatteo, who turned her battle with breast cancer into a message of hope and inspiration.

This year, we went with a choice some consider controversial: the Rev. James Manship.

But you nominated several other people as well, many of whom would have made worthy persons of the year.

Our criteria have never been too specific. We have tried to find a person who contributes something to improve the community, or to inspire change. We enjoy letting you know about someone you may not be familiar with, someone

who toils outside the spotlight of fame.

And we have stayed away from politicians and celebrities. Many do good work, but they have their own spotlights.

In all our picks, we've tried to tell you about the person behind the public face, to portray them as the unique human being they are.

So here are some of your nominations for the Register's Person of the Year, with the nominator's reason for naming that person.

MARGRET ANDREASSI

David Baker of Sound & Music for Stage & Film wrote: "She is the tactical brains behind The Elm Shakespeare Company, an ensemble who have been providing free, enlightening and engaging theater for the masses in New Haven for years. They hire locally, educate students of all backgrounds and aptitudes, all while operating at regional theater standards.

"Margret is the central processing unit for all their endeavors and stands behind the scenes with unmatched patience and a positive attitude. Despite having to constantly think in dollars and cents, she never sacrifices a noble idea. She brings order to the chaos that inevitably arises when 30 to 40 creative personalities converge on one project."

RICH FIGLEWSKI

"I would like to nominate Rich Figlewski of the Dry Dock in Wallingford," wrote Marion Zambory, a caseworker with the town's Youth and Social Services.

"Originally Rich opened the Dock for fellow recovering addicts to have a place to go for coffee and conversation, with no triggers for slip-ups. The Dry Dock evolved into a tremendous resource for so many people affected by substance abuse, their families and those of us in need of resources for clients.

"Rich is ALWAYS available to an addict or a family member seeking help and guidance. He's been known to get up at 2 a.m. and drag someone out of a crack house, bring someone in medical need to the E.R. and continue to follow through with supporting their entrance into recovery.

"In addition he will help families with an intervention, place willing addicts in treatment centers, visit them in prison and the hospital and he always offers follow-up fellowship. Rich does all this with no fees. He is truly amazing, and a great resource for us all."

SHAWN HOPKINSON

"Shawn Hopkinson should be chosen for person of the year because after the devastation from Tropical Storm Irene he started 'People Helping People' in his hometown of East Haven. He started (it) himself with his unemployment check and purchased snacks and cases of bottled water to hand out to families in need and volunteers helping with the aftermath.

"After Day 1 there were dozens of donations and volunteers and they worked countless hours of their personal donated time as well as food, toiletries, clothing and anything else that would be helpful to the families whom lost everything down (in) Cosey Beach. After the cleanup stopped, he helped to organize a benefit show to raise money for the victims of Tropical Storm Irene."

JEFFREY KEREKES

Several people nominated Kerekas, who won 45 percent of the vote against nine-term New Haven Mayor John DeStefano Jr. in November.

“This was a very robust showing for a first-time run for political office and it was accomplished against a sitting mayor with all the advantages of incumbency, including a campaign chest that was 17 times that of Jeffrey’s campaign,” wrote Harry David, who added: “Full disclosure: I supported Jeffrey as his campaign treasurer.”

Pei Ye said Kerekes showed courage. “Kudos to Jeffrey for standing up to entrenched power!” Rebecca Turcio called him “the person politicians were meant to be.”

Another supporter said, “His candidacy had impact. It forced the mayor for the first time to address the flaws in his administration ... directly led to the immediate hiring of (Police) Chief (Dean) Esserman quicker rather than later; and forced DeStefano to all of a sudden embrace community policing.

“More importantly, though, is that Jeffrey showed us how a relentless, disciplined person, with little money, a lot of vision and guts, a strong work ethic and a core group of good friends, can offer voters a real choice and can give their concerns a voice large enough to force even the most powerful, well financed and insulated leaders to hear and fear the outcome. Jeffrey brought both hope and change. And he’s not the mayor.”

Another nonprofessional politician was nominated too: Oni Sioson, a write-in candidate for mayor of East Haven, for “his almost quixotic effort to change the image of East Haven.”

CHRIS RANDALL

“As executive director of the New Haven Land Trust, Mr. Randall has displayed strong leadership in issues related to food access, sustainable agriculture, community development and environmental education. It is hard to learn of or find a grass-roots initiative in New Haven that does not involve Mr. Randall in some sort of capacity, always lending a helping hand.”

MICHAEL WISHNIE

The director of the Law Clinic at Yale, for “mentoring bright law students who aspire to do more with their law degree than just collect a nice paycheck. With great care, he guides law students, not just in practical matters of law but inspires his charges to follow their hearts.”

PETISHA MONIQUE ADGER

The first black female assistant police chief in New Haven, who co-founded the New Haven Guardians, “a fraternal police association that is committed to establishing relationships between the urban community and police” and the New Haven Public Safety Academy.

CASEY RIDGWAY

The West Haven resident, who has a form of bone cancer, “is a fighter full of courage and she represents what these kids with pediatric cancer go through. She has helped bring up the awareness of pediatric cancer ... The community has come together to support her and that is very special. It makes you realize what’s really important in life.”

MEL GOLDSTEIN

“Dr. Mel” is retired meteorologist at WTNH News 8 who has battled multiple myeloma for 16 years. “With all his health problems he was always there,” wrote an online reader who lives in North Carolina.

JIM CALHOUN

The longtime University of Connecticut men’s basketball coach “has done more to raise community spirits across

the entire state than arguably anyone else in history. What he’s accomplished in his career — three national championships including this year — would have been considered virtually impossible prior to his arrival at UConn.”

SHAFIQ ABDUSSABUR

“In a year when shootings left New Haveners feeling despair about how to address youth violence, Dixwell beat cop Shafiq Abdussabur offered inspiration. How he got to be a cop — and in a position to make a difference — offers another inspiring tale about how to build a true ‘community policing’ force.”

FRANK, CLAIRE CRISCUOLO

“Frank, who passed away on Dec. 14, and Claire have been pillars of the New Haven business and philanthropic communities. They’ve served on boards, supported many charitable events, and have in general contributed much to the community. Their greatest gift has been their friendship to the people in the community. Both always providing a warm greeting — Frank with his gift for listening and joining customers for a chat, Claire with her gift for giving of her time. They are good people who deserved to be recognized for their good presence in the community and for Frank’s presence that will be sorely missed by all who had the chance to know him or simply meet him.”

TONI FRACASSO AND TIFFANIE PERROTTI

“After losing their brother to Ewing’s sarcoma, they have continually supported Yale-New Haven Children’s Hospital the past eight years. In honor of their brother they started Don’s Hat Rack, which provides hats for children with life-threatening diseases. They also have a benefit motorcycle ride every June and with the profit from this they provide the hospital with needs that are not always in the budget.”

WILLIAM GINSBERG

President of the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, “whose activities have substantially and affirmatively impacted the 20-town region,” Ginsberg is a “knowledgeable, committed leader in his second decade of service to this community.”

Others

Randy Kaufman of Branford said, “The award should go collectively to the jurors who convicted and had the courage to sentence (Stephen) Hayes and (Joshua) Komisarjevsky to death.”

Sarah Williams suggested “Richard L. English for his incredible generosity.” English bequeathed \$40 million to several community organizations.

And someone nominated “New Haven schoolteachers ... It’s about high time respect was shown to those that deserve it.”

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