



News Release

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2025 SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

HOLLAND, MICHIGAN –The Holland Human Relations Commission (HRC) presented the 2025 Social Justice Awards and the 2025 Youth Social Justice Award at City Hall on Wednesday, January 21st; a recording of the awards is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3OkRC25v6Y>.

For the past 27 years, the annual Social Justice Awards have recognized 128 individuals and organizations who exemplify the virtues of social justice by promoting equal opportunity and access for all residents. Awards are presented in the areas of Housing, Education, Employment, Government Relations, Community Relations, Health Services, and Accessibility. The Holland Youth Advisory Council selects and awards the Youth Social Justice Award recipient. View a list of previous Social Justice Award recipients at socialjusticeawards.cityofholland.com.

The 2025 Social Justice Award recipients are:

EDUCATION: Cynthia Martinez

Filmmaker Cynthia Martinez's passion is to highlight the intersection of diversity and education by bringing forward the often-overlooked stories of Latino and first-generation college students.

Cynthia's 2023 documentary *First Voice Generation*, follows three Holland-area TRIO students as they wrestle with identity, belonging, and their college dreams as children of Mexican immigrants. Cynthia shares their stories with the community through film screenings, student events, and public conversations. The film garnered awards including Best Independent Feature Documentary at the Central Michigan International Film Festival and Best Feature Documentary from Lady Filmmakers, plus recognition at the Mexican American Television and Film Festival. Martinez received the "Arts in the Community" award by the Hispanic Latino Commission of Michigan during this year's 50th-anniversary celebration.

Cynthia's openness about her own journey as a granddaughter of Mexican migrant farmworkers who became a first-generation college student helps others, especially youth, feel seen and underscores the importance of representation among educators and community leaders.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS: Doug Zylstra

Since 2019 Doug Zylstra has served as an Ottawa County Commissioner representing the residents in the City of Holland. A consistent advocate for the marginalized in the

community, Doug has been a strong voice supporting policies that ensure equal access and opportunity and has been central to many of the positive changes at the county level that impact Holland's most vulnerable populations. He has been an outstanding advocate for public health services and worked to help fund the Ottawa County Housing Fund and the ODC Childcare expansion using American Rescue Plan funding.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS: **Women Who Care Holland Zeeland**

Women Who Care Holland Zeeland demonstrates that when a community of likeminded women gather and pool their modest resources, without respect to color, creed, national origin, or any other artificial distinction, they can make transformational change in their community.

Now celebrating their 15th anniversary, Women Who Care Holland Zeeland has awarded more than \$1.35 million to more than 40 local charities. The members gather quarterly and vote on nominations for the collective donation. Recent recipients include 70×7 Recovery, Ready for School, Renew Therapeutic Riding Center, Grant Me Hope, Children's Advocacy Center, Mosaic Counseling, Camp Sunshine, and Escape Ministries.

HEALTH SERVICES: **Reach For Recovery**

For the past 50 years Reach for Recovery has been on the front lines helping individuals and families in Holland who struggle with alcoholism and chemical dependency. Their dedicated team understands that addiction doesn't discriminate and

that combating stigma in substance use disorder and mental health can feel like navigating a labyrinth of judgment, misunderstanding, and isolation.

ACCESSIBILITY: Kayla Gearing

A transformational leader within Holland Public Schools, special education teacher Kayla Gearing builds environments where every student feels seen, welcomed, and included. She revitalized and expanded the district's Peer-to-Peer program, creating supportive structures that bring together students of all abilities to learn, collaborate, and build meaningful relationships. Kayla also launched Unified Sports at Holland High School, providing inclusive athletic opportunities where students of varying abilities play on the same teams. Through both efforts she has broken down social and cultural barriers, challenged stigmas, and encouraged students to celebrate one another's strengths.

Centered on dignity, respect, and belonging, Kayla's leadership is evidenced in a broad range of school-based efforts that elevate student voice, promote access, and strengthen equity. She collaborates closely with staff to design inclusive learning environments, partners with families to support diverse learner needs, and regularly advocates for accessible opportunities within school programming. Her programs are rooted in equal participation, ensuring that students who have traditionally been marginalized experience connection, achievement, and community.

YOUTH SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD: Anotidaishe Graca Mangwiro

Ano Mangwiro, a senior at Holland High School, was selected for the Youth Social Justice Award by her peers on the Holland Youth Advisory Core Council.

Born in Africa and raised across Africa and Europe, Ano brings a global perspective to Holland and consistently exemplifies social justice through actions that uplift marginalized communities, amplify youth voices, and promote equity. Ano has contributed more than 150 volunteer hours serving alongside vulnerable residents—supporting families through monthly HPS food distributions, volunteering with Community Action House, providing toys and holiday assistance through the Salvation Army, and organizing drives for children in foster care.

Through her service on the City of Holland’s International Relations Commission, Ano advances intercultural understanding and unity, including key contributions to the 2025 International Festival of Holland. Her work in Student Leaders Initiating Change (SLIC) General Assembly and Executive Committee further demonstrates a commitment to justice for young people by teaching middle-school students about bullying and harassment and leading initiatives such as Red Ribbon Week which discourages substance use among teens.

As a member of the Holland Youth Advisory Council, Ano advocates for youth representation and cross-community connection. Her leadership reflects empathy, fairness, and integrity, working not for recognition but to help every resident—regardless of background or circumstance—feel seen, valued, and supported.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: **Diane Kooiker**

For more than four decades—and especially during her eleven years as Director of the Herrick District Library—Diane Kooiker has served Holland’s diverse population with dignity, inclusion, and vision by embedding inclusive values into every facet of the library’s operations. She has worked to eliminate barriers to library service and increase access to resources. She champions programming that highlights a wide range of cultural perspectives, ensures multilingual resources are readily available, and prioritizes accessibility for patrons with varying needs and abilities. Under Diane's leadership, staff members receive two years of ongoing training on homelessness issues and how to work with community members experiencing homelessness - a commitment of hundreds of hours in staff time.

Diane created the collaborative partnership between Herrick District Library and Community Action House that pays for social workers to be onsite at the library to advise residents and assist them in completing online forms for government and nonprofit services, applying for jobs, and more. This provides increased access for those who are already visiting the library and lessens the transportation obstacle that exists for crossing US-31 to access CAH's offices. The Michigan Library Association has deemed this partnership the "gold standard".

(Descriptions pulled from organization websites and nomination forms.)

About the Human Relations Commission:

The Holland Human Relations Commission promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in housing, education, employment, and public service. The commission

pursues a community of belonging for all residents, with consideration for groups that are underrepresented, underserved, or marginalized. Learn more about HRC goals and activities by visiting humanrelations.cityofholland.com and by following along on [Facebook](#).

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Photo Caption:

Front Row, L-R: Jane Patterson, Stacy Kamphuis, Ann Gamache, Anotidaishe Graca Mangwiro, Cynthia Martinez

Back Row, L-R: Kayla Gearing, Jeffrey Marschall, Doug Zylstra, Diane Kooiker