



P R O J E C T
RETURN

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Helping Men and Women Leaving Prison Make a Positive and Permanent Return To Our Community

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The Gwendolyn Moore Commitment to Restorative Justice Award

At the 35th Anniversary Celebrate the Return in 2015, the Board of Directors of Project RETURN introduced an award honoring a lifetime of work dedicated to social justice. This award was named after Representative Gwendolyn Moore, the Congresswoman from the 4th Congressional District of Wisconsin. Rep. Moore serves on Project RETURN's Advisory Committee and has been a longtime advocate for the formerly incarcerated, dating back to her years in the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate.



Sister Patricia Rogers was this year's recipient of the Gwendolyn Moore award – an honor we have only bestowed on two others in the past. Sister Patricia has been a champion of equality and empowerment for six decades. As a young girl, she joined her family in civil rights activities, including picket protests of businesses that refused to hire Black applicants. At 15 she was testifying in federal court about the conditions of her all-Black school and those of the new school she was attending as one of a handful of Black students to desegregate the Fort Smith, Arkansas High School. She received

degrees in both teaching and social work and has taught in New Orleans and Chicago. It was during her time in Chicago that God called her to religious service and Sister Patricia became one of the few Black nuns of the Dominicans. Until her retirement just this year, Sister Patricia was the Executive Director of the Dominican Center for Women – an agency that works with the residents of the Amani neighborhood to enhance quality of life and strengthen community bonds. She has also served as a member of Project RETURN's Board of Directors. In all of these positions, Sister Patricia has proven to be a tireless advocate and partner. Her many talents and strong sense of justice values have significantly improved the lives of so many.



Celebrate the RETURN a Big Success!



Project RETURN celebrated its 41st year of service to the formerly incarcerated at its annual fundraising gala on October 16th at Marquette University's Alumni Memorial Union. This year's Celebrate the RETURN (CTR) was extra celebratory, as it returned to in-person, drawing a record attendance of nearly 200 attendees and netting nearly \$9,000 to support the nonprofit organization's programs and initiatives.

Project RETURN considers each successful return of an individual to his or her community a cause for celebration. Thus, each year, the organization holds CTR to highlight the uplifting, powerful and moving success stories of Project RETURN clients. This year, former client and former president of the board, Rodney Evans, gave a moving testimony, as did Circle of Support Circle Keeper, Sylvester Jackson.

In addition to testimonials from individuals who have been directly impacted by incarceration, there were awards given to community leaders who have made an important contribution to social racial justice and prison reform. This year's award winners are:

- Sister Patricia Rogers, who was honored with the Gwendolyn Moore Commitment to Restorative Justice
- Emilio De Torre, who was honored with the Don Bein Service Award
- Shannon Ross, who was honored with the Elijah O'Neil Award of Excellence

The event was skillfully emceed by Dr. Robert S. Smith, the Harry G. John Professor of History and the Director of the Center for Urban Research, Teaching & Outreach at Marquette University. Secretary of the Department of Corrections, Kevin Carr, provided opening remarks. Moving and powerful performances were also part of the evening: local youth poet, Janiya Williams, recited her piece, *A Shade Too Dark*, to a standing ovation and staff member Andre Brown aka Apollian gave an upbeat and meaningful hip hop performance, engaging the entire crowd.

We are most grateful to the volunteer event planners, our sponsors, the silent auction organizers and donors, and to all who attended and made the event a great success.

If you missed the event, you can still make a donation to support Project RETURN. Please make your check payable to: Project RETURN and mail to our office:

Project RETURN, 2821 Vel R Phillips Ave, Suite 223, Milwaukee, WI 53212 or visit our website at <https://www.projectreturnmilwaukee.org/donate.html> to make an online donation.

The Elijah O'Neal Award of Excellence



The Elijah O'Neal Achievement Award is given annually to a client who has grown the most in a given year and shown other former incarcerated persons that change is possible. This year we recognized Shannon Ross. Shannon Ross is the Executive Director of The Community (thecomcommunitynow.us), which he founded with invaluable outside support in

2014 while he was serving a 17-year prison sentence. The Community addresses the effects of the criminal legal system with two arms: Pre-entry and Correcting the Narrative. Pre-entry leverages their ever-growing connection with half the Wisconsin prison population (with access to over 30,000 more incarcerated people nationwide) to provide them with every type of resource, encouragement, and now training to return to society as successfully as possible. Their Correcting the Narrative campaign showcases the successes, humanity, and agency of people with criminal records. Ultimately, they seek to bring society and the system-impacted community exactly where they need each other to be.



Since his release in September 2020, Shannon is also a grad student at UW-Milwaukee, a mentor with Prisons to Professionals, co-owner of a trucking company and a re-entry consulting firm, and a grateful father to a newborn baby.

The Don Bein Service Award

In 2005, Project RETURN created an award designated to one volunteer who, through his or her outreach to us and our clients, truly demonstrated that he or she is a champion of the mission of Project RETURN. This award was named after Don Bein, a man who fervently supported Project RETURN and our mission. He served for 22 years on the Board of Directors, serving in every capacity. During his time on the board, Don was extremely active in reaching out to people and uniting them for the cause of Project RETURN. He offered our clients excellent financial advice and showed them a path to stay out of prison. He did this through many volunteer outings such as recreational events, jobs, church services, or even the movies.



This year, Project RETURN, in commemoration of the hard work and commitment that Don Bein gave to us and our clientele, presented the Don Bein Award to Emilio de Torre.

Emilio De Torre is the Executive Director of the Milwaukee Turners – one of Wisconsin's oldest civic groups. He is dedicated to their mission of promoting a sound mind in a sound body through their principles of liberty against all oppression; tolerance against all fanaticism; reason against all superstition; and justice against all exploitation. Prior to this he was the Director of Community Engagement for the ACLU of Wisconsin for 14 years, where he started the legal observer program, served on the statewide election protection team, and worked to organize around the criminal legal system, immigration rights, voting rights and police accountability statewide. He serves on the Board of Directors for Shakespeare in the Park, on the steering committee for the Milwaukee National Lawyers Guild, and was the 2013 recipient of the YWCA's Eliminating Racism award. Emilio is dedicated to advancing the health, dignity, civil liberties and civil rights of all people, and is devoted to his family and friends.



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