

NEWS



November 9, 2016
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LIBERTY BANK PRESENTS WILLARD M. MCRAE COMMUNITY DIVERSITY AWARD TO CHRIS GEORGE

NEW HAVEN, CT — Liberty Bank has presented Chris George with the 2016 Willard M. McRae Community Diversity Award. George, executive director of the Integrated Immigrant and Refugee Services (IRIS) of New Haven, received the award from bank officials at a gala reception in New Haven Wednesday night. The event was attended by some 200 friends, family members, bank officials, and community leaders, including Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, and New Haven Mayor Toni Harp.

“In choosing the recipient of the award, we look not just for people who have given their time in service to community organizations, but for those who have made it their mission to make opportunities available to all,” said Chandler J. Howard, president and CEO of Liberty Bank. “Chris has devoted his lifetime to zealously promoting and protecting human rights, seeking social justice, and gaining equal access for all.”



IRIS Executive Director Chris George and Liberty Bank President and CEO Chandler Howard present a \$5,000 donation in George’s honor to the Integrated Immigrant and Refugee Services (IRIS) of New Haven. L to R: Liberty Bank Chairman of the Board Mark Gingras, Chandler Howard, Kathy McCrae, and Chris George.

Introduced in 2001 as the Liberty Bank Community Diversity Award, this award was renamed in 2009 in honor of Willard M. McRae, a past chairman and board member of Liberty Bank. It is designed to recognize an individual who has been a leader in the communities served by Liberty Bank in connecting people who are different—whether those differences are of religion, race, ethnicity, economic status, age, or any other aspect of diversity.

As this year’s award recipient, George was able to direct a \$5,000 charitable donation from the Liberty Bank Foundation to the nonprofit organization of his choice. He chose IRIS.

George was nominated by Kelly Hebrank, director of the Tariq Farid Foundation of Wallingford, who said, “The message of welcoming refugees as a celebration of diversity and inclusion is a message Chris has championed every day of his eleven-year tenure at IRIS.”

Howard reiterated those sentiments in his own remarks, saying, “I particularly want to thank Chris for reminding us of something we all grew up believing: that America is supposed to be the land of opportunity for everyone. This is the place where newcomers should always find an open door and a welcome—because we were all newcomers at some point.”

Since joining IRIS in 2005, George has led its growth from a little-known organization to a vibrant, well-regarded refugee resettlement program. IRIS has welcomed to Connecticut refugees from many nations and cultures and has partnered with local groups to help integrate refugees into local communities.

Under George’s direction the IRIS staff and several coalitions of diverse faith-based and community groups have resettled more than 450 refugees in the most recent fiscal year [September, 2015 to September, 2016], more than double the 218 refugees welcomed during the previous fiscal year.

During his career, George has volunteered for the Peace Corps, and worked for Save the Children in the Middle East. Subsequently, he became director of the Middle East division of Human Rights Watch. He has also worked through the US Agency for International Development to direct stronger legislative support for the Palestinian Parliament.

George is the sixteenth recipient of the Community Diversity Award. Previous winners are listed at the end of this release.

Established in 1825, Liberty Bank is Connecticut’s oldest bank, with more than \$4.5 billion in assets and 55 banking offices throughout the central, eastern, and shoreline areas of the state. As a full-service financial institution, Liberty offers consumer and commercial banking, home mortgages, insurance, and investment services. Well known for its community reinvestment efforts, Liberty maintains a longstanding commitment to superior personal service and unparalleled community involvement.

Previous Recipients of the Willard M. McRae Community Diversity Award

- 2015** **Maria Campos-Harlow**
Executive Director, Spanish Community of Wallingford
Former member of the board of directors of the Connecticut Association for United Spanish Action
Former member of the board of directors of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators, and the American Translators Association
- 2014** **Sara Chaney, New London**
Union Counselor, United Way/AFL-CIO
Board Member, Child and Family Agency
Treasurer NAACP
Volunteer, New London Community Meals Center
- 2013** **Teresa C. Younger, Shelton**
Executive Director, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Former President of the board of the Girl Scouts of Connecticut
- 2012** **Elsa Núñez, Windham**
President, Eastern Connecticut State University
Founder, Dual College Enrollment Initiative, the Academic Services Center, and the Center for Community Engagement at Eastern
- 2011** **Jacqueline Owens, Lebanon**
President, Norwich NAACP
Co-founder, Norwich Special People Reaching Out To Students Program
Co-founder, Greater Norwich Bully Buster Coalition
- 2010** **Ulysses B. Hammond, Waterford**
President, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Scholarship Trust Fund
Co-Founder and Co-Chair, New London Tutoring for Success Program
Chairman, Lawrence & Memorial Hospital
Founder, Minority Student Support Program, Connecticut College
- 2009** **Willard M. McRae, Middletown**
Past chairman and past director, Liberty Bank
Founding member, Liberty Bank Foundation Board of Directors
Co-founder, Middlesex Coalition for Children
Co-founder, Middlesex Child and Adolescent Services System Program
Co-founder, Wesleyan University's Upward Bound Program
- 2008** **Alejandro Melendez-Cooper, New London**
Director, Community Health Centers of Groton and New London
Founder, Hispanic Alliance of Southeastern Connecticut
- 2007** **Arthur Meyers, Middletown**
Director of the Russell Library
Chair, International Exchange Committee of the Middletown Rotary Club
- 2006** **Catina Caban-Owen, Windham**
Social worker, Windham Public Schools
Advocate for equal access to education and healthcare

- 2005** **Joseph Sheffey**, Uncasville
Founder of Child Adoption Resource Association, an adoption agency focusing on interracial placements
- 2004** **Lydia Brewster**, Haddam Neck
Community activist and founder of Middletown's North End Action Team
- 2003** **Ramón Ortiz**, Willimantic
Community activist and service coordinator for Village Heights Apartments, a non-profit housing complex for low-income families
- 2002** **Jane Glover**, New London
Founder of Kenté Enterprises and former mayor of New London
- 2001** **Claire Gaudiani**, New London
President of Connecticut College and the New London Development Corporation