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**County Recognizes Outstanding Local Leaders  
at Women's Equality Day Breakfast**  
*Annual Celebration Highlights Honorees' Spirit and Strength*

SAN JOSE, CA — Today, at the annual Women's Equality Breakfast, the County of Santa Clara's Commission on the Status of Women and Office of Women's Policy recognized two individuals and one organization for their outstanding contributions. The celebration attended by hundreds of supporters commemorates the anniversary of women's right to vote, and honors local women who are extraordinary leaders in the areas of nonprofit, community, business and government.

*Women of Spirit, Women of Strength* was the theme for today's commemoration held at the Marriot San Jose Hotel, to highlight the honorees accomplishments.

Honored today were **Manna Teclemariam**, from the African Community Health Partnership, with the Women of Distinction Award; **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, San Jose Raging Grannies**, with the Excellence Award; and community activist **Laura Elizabeth Coatney**, with the Rising Star Award. Civil and human rights leader **Aileen Clarke Hernandez** was the keynote speaker.

"This breakfast celebrates a critical moment in history, the anniversary of women's right to vote," said Lata Patil, Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). "We also hope to raise awareness in the community about some of the critical issues concerning women and girls."

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“We acknowledge the power and leadership of women in Santa Clara County,” said Supervisor Don Gage, Chairperson of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. “Women play a key role in our efforts to build and maintain a healthy, safe and dynamic community for all our residents.”

“These honorees richly deserve our community’s recognition for their endless advocacy, their innovative approach and their *can do attitude* to improve the lives of others,” said County of Santa Clara Supervisor Pete McHugh. “They exemplify the same desire to increase opportunities for women that our own Commission on the Status of Women has demonstrated over the last thirty four years. Not only are they making a difference in their communities, but their efforts have a tangible local and global impact.”

This year, the Commission on the Status of Women has focused on raising awareness about the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a United Nations treaty that seeks to address and remedy discrimination against women and girls. With the Office of Women’s Policy, the Commission held nine community meetings on a variety of topics including economics, political participation, health, girls, older women, violence, housing, media and education. The meetings culminated in a Northern California CEDAW Summit in San Jose this past June where a summary report on these activities was shared.

“There is an increasing interest to address discrimination and disparity women still face in our society,” advised Esther Peralez-Dieckmann, Director of the Office of Women’s Policy. “Despite our growing economic and political power, much work remains in order to create genuine equality for women to support themselves and their families and enjoy the highest quality of life possible.”

Proceeds from today’s breakfast will benefit the work of the County of Santa Clara **Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW). Established on December 26, 1973, and composed of 15 members appointed by the Board of Supervisors, the Commission seeks to eliminate the practice of discrimination and prejudice based on gender in the areas of housing, employment, education, and related fields. Its mission is to advise the Board of Supervisors on all issues that affect the lives of women and girls in Santa Clara County and to advocate for their equal participation and treatment .

**Enclosed: Biographies of honorees**

## **2007 Women's Equality Day Breakfast Honorees**

### **Woman of Distinction Award**

#### **Manna Teclemariam, African Community Health Institute**

**Manna Teclemariam** has been a community activist for the past 21 years. She founded Eritrean Women's Association, Tiguina School, and African Community Health Institute (ACHI), where she has coordinated African seniors social and educational programs and organized workshops for Eritrean youth and families.

As the executive director of the African Community Health Institute, Ms. Teclemariam helps provide linguistically and culturally sensitive health services to empower individuals and refugees from Africa to adjust to their new social environment, by learning and developing creative coping mechanisms. She has also served as program director and a community health educator for Eritrean orphans and orphans with AIDS.

Ms. Teclemariam has been a counselor for the American Lung Association, a community health screener, a student teacher, and a nutrition demonstrator at Andrews University, MI. She has participated in the Mental Health Subcommittee of the Immigrant and Refugee Forum advocating for a transformation of the mental health system to better serve immigrants. She initiated outreach to Eritrean communities for their participation in county-wide citizenship days. Community education, prevention and empowerment in various African communities are direct results of her activities. By leveraging the power of immigrant women, she has continued to create women leaders who are actively working to advance the needs of their community on a variety of levels.

Ms. Teclemariam continuously advocates for linguistically and culturally appropriate services in many other areas. Her advocacy directly resulted in the increase of numbers of Eritrean refugees and immigrants applying for citizenship and registering to vote.

### **Excellence Award**

#### **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, San Jose Raging Grannies**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), San Jose, is a member of the largest and oldest women's peace organizations in the world. WILPF has organizations in 37 countries and supports the work of the United Nations with consultative status and serves on numerous non-governmental organization committees of the U.N. The group works toward world disarmament, full rights for women, racial/economic justice, an end to all forms of violence at all levels of society, and changing government priorities to meet human needs.

One of its best known local projects of WILPF is the San Jose Raging Grannies. This group of passionate older women are committed to raging for peace, social justice, and environmental preservation. As women with strong conviction, they do not assume a "lady-like" demeanor when delivering their message. They arrive wearing outrageous hats and accessories and use well-known songs and music to communicate their message of peace and advocate for better public policy that promotes human rights and equality.

**Rising Star Award**

**Laura Elizabeth Coatney, Community Activist**

Laura Coatney is a young community activist who has been working on community beautification projects stemming from her passion and commitment to preserving the environment. She has devoted a great deal of time and energy to raising awareness about the need for sustainability, application of green standards, and reconnecting with nature.

Ms. Coatney's major community involvement started with the Sunnyvale Community Garden where she worked with other volunteers to establish the garden. Before the construction of the garden, she helped with the planning and research and she addressed the Sunnyvale City Council and spoke eloquently about the need for a community garden. She amazed decision-makers and the audience with her reasoning, political maturity and clarity of vision. Through her efforts and those of other key volunteers, the City of Sunnyvale awarded a 5-year lease agreement to Sunnyvale Sustainable Community Gardens. She was a designer and main creator of the "Growing Circle" at the Charles Street Gardens, a public place with cedar benches where people can sit, hold meetings, read and enjoy the garden.

**Women's Equality Day Breakfast Keynote Speaker**

**Aileen Clarke Hernandez, Civil and Human Rights Activist**

Aileen Clarke Hernandez is an urban consultant and CEO of her own firm, founded in 1967 and based in San Francisco. Appointed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, she was the only woman member of the first United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, created under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. She is the State Chair of the *California Women's Agenda* – a network of 600 + organizations serving women and girls; the Coordinator for the Bay Area's *Black Women Stirring the Waters*; and Chair of the *Coalition for Economic Equity*.

Mrs. Clarke Hernandez was the second national president of the *National Organization for Women (NOW)* and currently serves on the Steering Committee of the *California Coalition for Civil Rights*. She has received numerous awards over her five decades of work for human rights and in 2005 was one of the 1,000 women collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2006, the National Women's History Project selected her as a *Builder of Dreams and Communities* and in 2007 Soroptimist International of San Francisco honored her with its prestigious *Making a Difference for Women* award.

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