

Val-Kill awards to honor 6 on Oct. 19

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(Photo: Julie Milligan/Courtesy photo)

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Eleanor Roosevelt was born 130 years ago, but the ideals that made her a recognizable figure around the world still resonate – and will be celebrated Oct. 19 as the annual Val-Kill medals are bestowed on those who exemplify her spirit and advocacy.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill will present its 2014 awards at a ceremony and luncheon at the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site off Route 9G.

The Roosevelt family has received international attention from the airing of a mini-series, "The Roosevelts: An Intimate History" on PBS. Eleanor, Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt are the focal points of documentary filmmaker Ken Burns' most recent effort.

Val-Kill medals have been presented to a litany of local residents, as well as statewide, national and international figures.

All recipients have contributed to society in areas such as education, advocacy, social justice, public service and human rights – all priorities of the former first lady, who is buried with Franklin Roosevelt at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Previous Val-Kill medal winners include Pawling resident and actor James Earl Jones, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin and diplomat Richard Holbrooke.

"This is our opportunity to honor those who bring to life the values of Mrs. Roosevelt's legacy," said Chris Roellke, ERVK board chairman and dean of Vassar College. "This year's medalists come from all walks of life and are role models for the global community."

October honorees, according to Val-Kill officials:

- Diana Nyad, champion athlete, journalist and humanitarian. Nyad's words mirror Eleanor Roosevelt's regarding living a meaningful life: "We should never ever give up."
- Astor Services for Children & Families, a Rhinebeck-based nonprofit organization that advocates for empowering healthy children and families. Astor lives up to the promise of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family." Eleanor Roosevelt led the effort to draft the document. "We feel privileged to do the work we do on behalf of vulnerable children and families, carrying on Eleanor Roosevelt's life's work to educate and care for the well-being of children and families and to ensure that all children have a childhood," said James McGuirk, executive director/CEO.
- Geraldine Laybourne, advocate for women's leadership and media/technology entrepreneur. She is committed to helping the women of the world as evidenced by her "Global Mentor's Walk," a national program for shaping leaders.
- Nobel laureate Lehmah Gobowee, Liberian peace activist and an advocate for women and girls. Gobowee was selected for her contributions as a transformational agent for peace.

- Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor and publisher of The Nation. She is a leader and advocate for human rights and social justice.

- Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel, founder and chairman emeritus of the Four Freedoms Park Conservancy Inc., and former U.S. ambassador to the European Office of the United Nations. He has worked for ideals of social justice, human rights and collaboration among nations.

The Oct. 19 program also raises money to support the Eleanor Roosevelt Leadership and Human Rights Legacy programs, including Girls' Leadership Worldwide, which empowers girls to be leaders and catalysts for creating sustainable change; the Eleanor Roosevelt Emerging Leaders Program for community college students, and other initiatives.

Val-Kill is the former first lady's home. She died in 1962.

Tickets are \$175. For tickets and sponsorship information, visit www.ervk.org or call 845-229-5302.

If you go

What: Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill's 2014 Medal Ceremony and Luncheon

When: Noon to 2 p.m., Oct. 19

Where: Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, Route 9G, Hyde Park.

Tickets: \$175, www.ervk.org or 845-229-5302