Cheree Meeks, '40 Under 40' Woman of the Year, Honored Along With Six Other UA Employees

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Cheree Meeks, director of the First Year Experience at the Honors College, was named Woman of the Year last week as she and six other UA employees were recognized at the annual 40 Under 40 awards.

"It was just really powerful to see the impact that you have on different groups of people, and to be recognized for that is just an honor," Meeks said. "To be in a community that is so welcoming and a community that really cares about sharing successes is really cool."

Meeks is chair of the Honors College Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Committee and second vice president of the NAACP Tucson Branch. Her community involvement also includes service with the UA Commission on the Status of Women, which has designated her chair emeritus.

"I do it because it needs to be done. I do it because I care about the communities that I live in, I care about the world that I live in, I care about the legacy that's left behind," Meeks said, adding that she often thinks about the world that her daughter, Laila, will inherit as an adult. "It makes me want to do what I can to be a part of making this world a better place."

In addition to the Woman of the Year distinction, Meeks' 40 Under 40 recognition came with an interesting coincidence: Lance Meeks, her husband, was also among the honorees. Lance Meeks is program manager for METRO Goodwill Youth Program and the Re-Engagement Center at Goodwill Industries of Southern Arizona.

"That was something that made this so much more special," Cheree Meeks said. "I don't take it lightly that I was nominated and that I was actually an honoree. But to be able to share that with my husband, I think, is a testament to who we are and that we're pretty good together."

The Man of the Year distinction went to Isaac Figueroa, director of real estate and development at BFL Ventures.

The annual ceremony, now in its 14th year, was held Dec. 4 at the Pima Air & Space Museum. The Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Arizona Daily Star sponsor the event, which celebrates local professionals under 40 years old for their career success and service to the community.

The other UA-affiliated 40 Under 40 honorees were:

Tracy Crane
Assistant Professor, College of Nursing
Crane, who is also an associate member of the UA Cancer Center [5], has worked with more than 3,500 cancer survivors in the last 15 years, according to 40 Under 40 program materials. She currently focuses on understudied or vulnerable groups of cancer survivors, and how diet and physical activity can reduce cancer-related symptoms.

David O. Garcia [6]
Assistant Professor, Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health

Garcia is the program director for Nosotros Comprometidos a Su Salud, or Committed to Your Health, a community-based research effort within the College of Public Health to connect the Mexican-American community and health-related research. Though Garcia oversees the program, it is largely managed by students.

"It's a great honor, not only for me personally, but it reflects the efforts of my team," Garcia said of the recognition, adding that he also credits his family's support for the award.

Ravi Grivois-Shah [7]
Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine

Grivois-Shah is medical director of the Alvernon Family Medicine Clinic, a training site for family medicine residents that has 20,000 patient visits each year. In addition, he is medical director for the Department of Family and Community Medicine's Mobile Health Program, a free clinic for Tucson patients. Grivois-Shah has "dedicated his career to improving access and quality of care for underserved communities throughout Southern Arizona," according to program materials. He also is a member of the Tucson Unified School District Governing Board's Audit Committee.

Catherine "Cat" Merrill
Lecturer, College of Engineering

Merrill is program manager at the National Optical Astronomy Observatory's Community Science and Data Center in Tucson, where she provides software tools for astronomers and the astronomy community. Between 2012 and 2016, Merrill was lead systems engineer and deputy program manager of OCAMS, the camera suite for OSIRIS-REx, a UA-led mission to collect a sample of the asteroid Bennu.

She also serves on the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona's board of directors and the United Way Worldwide Global Women's Leadership Council, and is chair of Women United, a women-led organization within United Way that addresses early childhood literacy in Southern Arizona. In addition, Merrill sits on the board of directors for Girl Scouts of Southern Arizona and on the advisory board for Women in Science and Engineering [8], a UA program.

"It was surreal," Merrill said of receiving the distinction. "At some level, almost all of us would say we're being honored for work that we consider to just be part of our life. But it's sweet that somebody thought this work is important outside of me, my friends and my specific community."

Rebekah Hoppel Salcedo
Executive Director, Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid
Hoppel Salcedo began at the UA in 2008 as a financial aid counselor and was later the first student scholarship services coordinator for Scholarship Universe [9], a UA-created service that connects students with scholarship opportunities. She joined the Junior League of Tucson, a women's organization that promotes volunteerism and leadership, and has served on its board as secretary and as nominating director.

Gisela Telis [10]
Producer and Reporter, Arizona Public Media

Telis covers mental health for Arizona Public Media, the local member station for National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service. She previously covered science and health for The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor and High Country News. Her work has earned her several awards and distinctions, including six Rock Mountain Emmy Awards ? the most recent in September [11]? the 2011-2012 Rosalynn Carter Mental Health Journalism Fellowship and a 2016 National Health Journalism Fellowship.

Two business administration graduate students also were honored at the ceremony: J.P. Martin, executive director of the Global Chamber Tucson, and Rebeca Lopez, owner and co-founder of Milestone Pediatrics.

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[1] https://www.honors.arizona.edu/person/cheree-meeks
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