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Commission honors teen, lawyer, foundation *Salle E. Richards* *Staff*

If a child is born poor and black or Hispanic, he or she is still less apt to graduate from high school and break out of poverty, said Shawn Martel Moore, the keynote speaker Tuesday morning at the 24th annual Breakfast of the Chemung County Commission on Human Relations.

Moore is the Tompkins County deputy administrator and the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission director.

She found a responsive audience at the breakfast, where the local Commission on Human Relations also announced its annual Way Awards. Three Way Awards are given each year to an adult, a youth age 16 to 21 years old and an organization that have demonstrated dedication in furthering efforts to increase equality among all types of people.

The youth Way Award recipient is Whitney Greene, a senior at Elmira Free Academy. She was recognized for multiple contributions to the community including:

- * Raising funds for Big Brothers Big Sisters to help keep volunteers connected to youth in the community.
- * Volunteering for community events as a performer, host and usher.
- * Helping to plan and implement a Frisbee tournament to raise money for scholarships for area youth.
- * Being a volunteer videographer and manager of her high school basketball team.

One of the criteria for the adult Way Award is that the person must support efforts to eliminate all forms of social oppression. Richard W. Rich Jr., who became the county's first public advocate in 2003, was recognized for his continuing efforts to ensure that all people, no matter what their situation, have the opportunity to receive the same rights and privileges as anyone else.

Rich currently serves on the executive committee of the Elmira-Corning Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the board of directors of the Horseheads Town Youth Bureau. He was a member of the Chemung County Commission on Human Relations from 1998 to 2005 and chaired the commission from 2002 to 2005. He is the legal adviser to the commission.

The organization Way Award went to the Community Foundation of the Elmira-Corning Area Inc., cited for its many grant-making activities. Its grants to community projects total more than \$1 million a year. It is also the lead agency coordinating a communitywide collaboration initiative: the Chemung County **School Readiness Project**.

That project is dedicated to helping families of young children prepare for a lifetime of academic success during the first five years.

The foundation was cited as an organization working daily to ensure that good ideas are brought to life for the benefit of all the residents of our community.

Elmira schools Superintendent Raymond W. Bryant said it's not just up to the school district to erase the disparity of opportunity between those who have an adequate support system and those who do not.

"It has to be everybody," he said, referring to parents, families and communities themselves.

Bryant said this kind of initiative has been started in Elmira. One example is the early childhood intervention program.

"We have to ensure equity for all kids," he said.

Jan Smith, the Cornell Cooperative Extension facilitator for the Chemung County Commission on Human Relations, said Moore's talk underscored the fact that there is still much to be done.

"There is still a significant disparity," she said of how whites and minorities perform on standardized tests such as regents exams.

The issue may be socio-economic status, Smith acknowledged, but she added, "You are more likely to be impoverished if you are a minority."