



2006 Athena Award goes to Reneé Henderson Earls

Honor recognizes community leaders who help women

Thursday, October 19, 2006

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Odessa American

Without her family, Reneé Henderson Earls said she wouldn't be able to volunteer her time like she does. "I'd be remiss if I didn't thank my family — they're the reason I can do what I do," she said. Earls was honored Wednesday afternoon as the 2006 recipient of the Athena Award, which celebrates the potential of all women and recognizes those who support them.

"My heart is racing," Earls said after she was announced. Earls, a native Odessan, is the executive director of communications and marketing at Medical Center Hospital. She and her husband, Rich, own The Odessan magazine.

Earls has past and present affiliations with the Junior League of Odessa, Heritage of Odessa Foundation, Main Street Odessa, First Christian Church, ECISD Education Foundation, Girl Scouts of the Permian Basin and the Odessa Chamber of Commerce. Earls was chosen from a nominee list that also included Berta Calzada, Karen Dominguez, Vicki Gomez, Carole Ann McCarter, Thelma Stone and Dolores Vick.

"Berta Calzada said something as we were coming here and she's right — the honor is really in being nominated," Earls said.

Master of Ceremonies Pamela Hamm also commended all those nominated. "These seven exceptional women have achieved excellence in their businesses or professions, provided valuable services to the community and help women realize their full potential," she said.

Keynote speaker retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch went further.

"I'm proud of West Texas for embracing women and their roles in all walks of life," she said.

Kickbusch shared an inspirational story of her rise from the barrios of Laredo to becoming the highest-ranking Hispanic woman in the Combat Support Field in the U.S. Army — and about her father who motivated her.

"You don't have to leave Odessa-Midland to make a difference," she said. "It's in your neighbors, in asking yourself the question about diversity, about doing what's right. "Where better than Odessa-Midland, with strong women like we have here in this room, to bring healing and faith and hope," she said.