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## Urban League praises Elgin education advocate

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**BY JULIE MULLEN For The Courier News**

After years of working to ensure that lower-income families have the educational opportunities they deserve, Elgin resident Laurel Bault soon will be recognized by the Quad County Urban League for her efforts.

Bault, who has been chosen for the Outstanding Educator Award by the Aurora-based organization, will receive the honor at a festive gala celebration Thursday.

The Quad County Urban League aims to empower and provide opportunities for people of color, as well as for women and disabled residents in DuPage, Kane, Kendall and Will counties.

Special programming allows access to career development, housing, and cultural exchanges through multiple programs, with the ultimate goal of achieving independence and personal growth.

For many years, Bault served as the Family Involvement Coordinator at Elgin's Garfield Elementary School, where she helped create a community-based school that offered families further educational opportunities, such as GED and literacy classes. Bault also secured social services for families beyond what a school might traditionally offer.

The Bonus Learning Time after-school program was another initiative implemented during Bault's tenure at Garfield -- a time she said she began to see flaws in the state's education system.

Due to an over-reliance on local property tax to fund education, Bault says that Illinois has one of the largest spending gaps in the nation, which directly correlates to an achievement gap between students in lower-income areas and their peers at public school in more affluent communities.

Bault's activism led to her position as Regional Organizer for A+ Illinois, a campaign to reform education funding and quality in the state.

Living in Elgin with her husband and two college-age children, Bault spends time supporting the Elgin Area League of Women Voters, Coalition of Elgin Religious Leaders, Elgin Cooperative Ministry, and other civic and political organizations.

Nine awards in all will be doled at Thursday's event to Chicago-area professionals, organizations and companies, spanning a variety of fields. The awards include categories of Outstanding Religious Leadership, Outstanding Community Service, Outstanding Corporate Service, Trailblazer Award, Board Member Award and Lifetime Achievement Award.

Marc Morial, President and CEO of The Urban League, will serve as guest speaker, emphasizing the organization's overall vision before presenting the awards to this year's notable nominees.

There also will be a special appearance by author and former legal counsel, speechwriter and adviser to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Clarence Jones, who co-authored the critically acclaimed book, What Would Martin Say ?

The Equal Opportunity Awards Dinner serves to honor individuals who have furthered the standard of equal opportunity, and exhibited leadership resulting in notable contributions to the civil rights cause in the Quad County communities, said Theodia Gillespie, president and CEO of the Quad County Urban League.

"The Annual Meeting and Equal Opportunity Awards Dinner is one of the most important Urban League events. Individuals from business, government, not-for-profits and the general public will come together ... to continue the discourse on closing the economic gaps in our communities," Gillespie said. "The event culminates with the recognition of local humanitarians, who are helping move our communities toward greater equality for all people."