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May 3, 2007

Advocate for women gets top honor

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Local philanthropist J. Christine Wilson was among three women worldwide to receive the 2007 Changing the Face of Women's Funding Network, a worldwide partnership of 116 nonprofit funding organizations.

Wilson, 53, of Pittsford, received the award Saturday at an international conference in Seattle.

"I was completely overwhelmed and shocked and completely humbled by the whole thing based on the other women," Wilson said. She received a porcelain plaque with the honor.

Wilson, the daughter of Xerox founder Joseph Wilson, was one of eight co-founders of the Women's Foundation of Rochester. The Rochester-based foundation aims to fund economic and social change, and promote economic self-sufficiency to ultimately break the cycle of poverty.

The agency has given more than \$700,000 in grants to area agencies that serve women and girls. Foundation of Rochester launched at St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center, 417 South Ave. For two years, Wilson was the sole financial supporter of the center to help women develop leadership skills and self-esteem, said Ellen Scalzo, executive director of Genesee Valley, which nominated Wilson for the honor.

"She's an amazing woman — a dynamo," Scalzo said. "She's a strong, consistent voice for the disenfranchised. She talks the talk, she walks the walk and often generously supplies resources when she sees a program with a long-term impact."

According to Christine Grumm, chief executive officer and president of the Women's Funding Network, efforts by the network are part of a global movement that "is advancing social change by and through women and girls."

Wilson said she supports charities because she believes "that the world in many, many ways needs some change. Women are where the greatest change could evolve from. Now I'm even more convinced of it. All statistics point to a major problem in our society, with health care and violence. If women were lifted out of poverty and given a fair shake in every community, I believe that the world would be much better, particularly in the United States."

The other honorees were Nigeria native Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, co-founder and executive director of the African Women's Movement; and Gayle S. Rose, chief executive of EVS Corp. and co-founder of the Memphis in Tennessee.

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