

Hendel: Women of Toledo celebrate language, culture on International Women's Day

3/20/2022

BY BARBARA HENDEL / THE BLADE



Nazarene Brewer Tubman, right, and her daughter Naz Tubman before speaking at the International Women's Day luncheon at the Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion on March 8.

THE BLADE/PHILLIP L. KAPLAN

[Buy This Image](#)

WOMEN'S History Month has erupted in a wealth of stories about women who have made an impact in our society, many paving the way for others.

A standout event that shared women's stories was the Women of Toledo program and luncheon to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8. International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women and a call to action for accelerating gender parity. This year's international theme is #BreakThe Bias, celebrating women's accomplishments and raising awareness of bias that still presents a challenge for many women.

The event, presented by Dana Inc., was at the Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion. Starting things off was a greeting presentation by local language ambassadors, who spoke in German, Mandarin, Spanish, Arabic, French, Hindi, Bahasa Indonesian, Bahasa Melayu, Filipino/Tagalog, Russian/Tatar, Turkish, and Ukrainian. It was like a grand parade as the women came to the podium and introduced themselves.

The ambassadors included **Julia Mazak**, representing Belgium and German; **Qi Wu**, representing China and Mandarin; **Awilda Almanzar**, representing the Dominican Republic and Spanish; **Farah El-Nahal**, representing Egypt and Arabic; **Linda Rouillard**, representing France and French; **Anju Gupta**, representing India and Hindi; **Irina Arribas**, representing Indonesia and Bahasa Indonesian; **Nina Corder**, representing Malaysia and Bahasa Melayu; **Mely Arribas-Douglas**, representing the Philippines and Filipino/Tagalog; **Nailya Weber**, representing Russia and Russian/Tatar; **Nazife Amrou**, representing Turkey and Turkish; **Yuliia Tyshchenko**, representing Ukraine and Ukrainian, and **Ana Synder**, representing Venezuela and Spanish.

All of these accomplished women have stories, and all speak their mother language plus English.

Then **Fanhong Jiang**, a violinist at the University of Toledo Department of Music, offered a lovely performance. Ms. Jiang is the student of **Junqi “Sophie” Tang**, a violin professor at the University of Toledo and Montecito International Music Festival. Ms. Tang is also the music director of the Cincinnati Music and Arts Society.

Rhonda Sewell, the Toledo Museum of Art's first director of belonging and community engagement, welcomed everyone and gave opening remarks. And **Erin Baker**, director of equity, diversity, and inclusion at the Toledo Lucas County Public Library, was the forum moderator. She introduced the four featured women from different parts of the world who now call Toledo their home.

The speakers were Ms. Mazak, a senior gear engineer at Dana Inc., from Belgium; **Nazarene Brewer Tubman**, a health care administrator from Liberia, and her daughter **Naz Tubman**, and Major **Demelza Newlove** of Australia. Major Newlove is currently an Australian Army Reservist employed as an exchange officer at Bowling Green State University Army Reserve Officer Training Course.

The storytellers shared their uplifting immigrant stories about struggle, journey, loss and accomplishment to forge diverse paths to arrive in northwest Ohio. They described many obstacles along the way, but they persevered and here they are, doing well in the Toledo area.

The sit-down luncheon for about 180 women was catered by the Toledo Museum of Art, and ended with Toledo jazz legend **Ramona Collins**, a community supporter and founding board member of the Women of Toledo. Ms. Collins sang “What a Wonderful World.”

Thanks go to program partners: Toledo Museum of Art, Dana Inc., the city of Toledo Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Huntington, The Links, KeyBank, M&M Heating & Cooling, the Toledo Lucas County Public Library and many more including **Crystal Jordan**, **Linda Fayerweather**, TARTA, and United Way of Greater Toledo. Thanks also to live streaming from **Travis Lattimore** of Social Green Thumb, **Alex Leatherberry** of Limitless Creatives Marketing & Design, **Kerri Brimmer** of Brimming Design, and **Amy Wildman** of Schramm’s Flowers and Gifts.

Kudos to Ms. Corder and her task team including **Kristina ElSayed**, **Kaitlin Kaiser**, **Izzy Nelson**, and apprentice, Ms. El-Nahal, supported by Women of Toledo board member **Kristie Knighten**.

Women of Toledo, established in 2014, is a nonprofit organization that advocates for diversity and inclusion, focusing on economic empowerment through programs and services. For information go to womenoftoledo.org.

EXCITING progress was the meeting at woman-owned Jera's Heavenly Sweet on Tuesday. There the Toledo City Council ratified a United Nations human rights treaty titled the “Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,” which opposes the effects of discrimination against women and girls, which includes violence, poverty, and lack of legal protections.

COMING up is the Women of Toledo’s Women’s History Month event at 10 a.m. Monday at the Libbey Court of the Toledo Museum of Art. In conjunction with the program, there will be the inauguration of the

Northwest Ohio Women's Business Council, hosted by Ms. Sewell. The WBC, an initiative under Women of Toledo's Economic Development Initiatives, was created based on the evidence and data collected by the city of Toledo Forward Cities E3: Equity for Every Entrepreneur scorecard, which includes four essential categories to support the entrepreneurial ecosystem — people, programs, networks, and narratives.

The keynote speaker is **Soon-Young Yoon**, the United Nations representative of the International Alliance of Women and author of the book *Citizen of the World: Soon-Young and the UN*.

There will also be an exhibition of women entrepreneurs and their historical journey to economic empowerment in the Toledo area. Exhibitions include Betty Timko, Ella P. Stewart, Florence Scott Libbey, Grace Smith, Margaret “Rusty” Monroe, Marge Roth, Mildred Benson, Rose La Rose, Rose Ondrus, and Sophia Lustig.

ALSO coming up is Toledo Macaron Day at So Sweet Lebanese and French Pastries between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday. It is inspired by the annual Jour du Macaron in Paris, in which free macarons are given out and proceeds are given to charity. The patrons of So Sweet will receive one free macaron in exchange for making a donation to 'NO WOMEN LEFT BEHIND' Initiatives Fund.

Barbara Hendel is The Blade's society editor. Contact her at bhendel@theblade.com or call 419-724-6124.