

## ELMWOOD PARK

## Local Women of Excellence are honored

BY KRISTIE CATTAFI  
Staff Writer

Six women were recognized in District 35 by Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter and given Women in Excellence awards in honor of Women's History Month on March 27.

The women honored included Dr. Donna Koch of Garfield, Esther Perez of Prospect Park, Dorothy Faber of Haledon, Alisha Harrison of North Haledon, Estelle Rondello of Elmwood Park and Elease Evans of Paterson. The event was held at the Royal Manor in Garfield.

"This event recognized a woman from each of the municipalities that I represent in the 35th Legislative District," Sumter said. "The purpose of the awards was to recognize women who give selflessly of themselves to the community and family; women who are strong business leaders; women of enormous faith, women who are involved in politics; and women who are born leaders."

The honorees were selected by a volunteer committee who reviewed the profiles that were provided by mayors, elected officials and committee members.

Faber was the first woman to run for mayor of the Borough of Haledon in 1970. She began her career in government service as a county committeewoman in 1950 representing District 1 in Haledon. In 1963 she became the first woman to win a borough council seat. Then she was the first woman to ascend to council president.

Faber moved to Prospect Park from Pennsylvania when she was 15 years old. She attended Hawthorne High School and then Spencer's Business School in Paterson. She began working at Faber's Interboro Laundry at the age of 16 during World War II.

Koch, who was born in Passaic to Polish immigrant parents, moved to Garfield following her medical school residency in 2001 and established her family medicine practice in 2002. She and her husband, Mariusz, are parents of two young boys, Darren and Daniel.

Koch has given back to the children in the Garfield community by being involved in a preceptor program called "Essential Piece" where she mentored high school students who demonstrated an interest in the medical field. She has provided employment opportunities for the Garfield High



PHOTO/EUGENE PARCIASEPPE JR.

Alisha Harrison of North Haledon (from left), Elease Evans of Paterson, Dr. Donna Koch of Garfield, Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, Estelle Rondello of Elmwood Park and Esther Perez of Prospect Park gather together at the Royal Manor in Garfield. Sumter honored six women with Women in Excellence awards.

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### Shavonda Sumter

DISTRICT 35 ASSEMBLYWOMAN

School Students' Co-Op program.

Koch has been a lifelong parishioner of St. Joseph's R.C. Church. Currently, she is a trustee on the Garfield Board of Education and is looking to continue her public service by running for a seat on the Garfield City Council this year.

Rondello is the Democratic Municipal Chair in Elmwood Park. She is the recording secretary for the Democratic Women of Bergen County, a member of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee's Affirmative Action Committee, a member of the New Jersey Federation of Democratic

Women, past president of the Elmwood Park Democratic Club, and served as first vice chair on the Commission on the Status of Women.

Harrison began work at the McDonald's owned by her father, Jim Henderson, in 1977. In 2002, Harrison and her husband acquired their first McDonald's in Paterson. Today, they own and operate four stores with three in Paterson and one in Jersey City.

Harrison is inspired by young people and this motivates her to give back to the community in which her family does business. The restaurants employ 250 youth in the City of Paterson. Her goal is to continue to support programs such as the Paterson Old Timers Baseball League, a league where her husband coached their two sons.

Perez is the first elected Hispanic in the Borough of Prospect Park. She served as mayor and as council president four times dur-

ing her tenure.

Her leadership responsibilities also include serving as the past secretary and treasurer of the Paterson Puerto Rican Parade. She is the former legislative aide to Sen. John Girgenti. Currently, Perez is employed by the Paterson Public Schools. For the past 22 years she worked as an elementary instructional assistant as well as being certified in Strengthening and Family.

Evans began her career in public office in 1985, when she was elected to the first of two terms on the Paterson Board of Education. As president of the Paterson Board of Education, Evans saw a transition of control of the education system to the state that is still impacting this community today. Seeing this switch and feeling the impact of state control helped propel Evans to seek greater elected challenges.

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