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Social worker, lawyer receive Ryerson alumni awards

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Stephanie Asare

Empowered through her social work studies at Ryerson University, Stephanie Asare was set to take on the world when she graduated in 2001.

She was impressed with the work that Ryerson Distinguished Visiting professor, Stephen Lewis, was doing in his then new role as the United Nations Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa to draw attention to the epidemic and convince leaders and the public that they had a responsibility to respond. And she made the trip from Toronto to Barrie to listen to him speak at an event.

Armed with her resume and ready for a challenge to make a difference, she asked Lewis a question pertaining to international placement and he was able to secure an

internship for the Ghanaian-born community worker at the Global AIDS Alliance in Washington D.C.

“Stephen Lewis has always been someone that I have looked up to,” said Asare, who was presented with a Ryerson Alumni Award of Distinction last week. “He spoke passionately about the role of social work and what we need to do within social work to actually make an impact and provide therapeutic, psycho-social and capacity-building initiatives that are sustainable.”

Six years ago, Asare established Social Workers Beyond Borders (SWBB), a non-governmental organization that enables social work students and professionals to volunteer in developing countries.

“This is all part of that Ryerson experience that I got that really kick-started my career,” said Asare.

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Former Canadian Association of Black Lawyers (CABL) president, Frank Walwyn, was also honoured with an Alumni Award of Distinction. He's a 1989 Business Administration program graduate.

"As a corporate commercial litigator, not a day goes by without me using the principles and skills learned at Ryerson to better understand clients' problems and to create solutions for them," said Walwyn, who was named one of Canada's top lawyers in the area of corporate and commercial litigation in the 2012 edition of The Best Lawyers in Canada. "Business and accounting principles inform all of the corporate and commercial legal work I do and I say, without reservation, that the education I received at Ryerson in those areas has contributed immeasurably to my ability to effectively serve my clients.

"But I have a higher appreciation for Ryerson than even the education it provided and that has to do with its commitment to inclusiveness and diversity and the way this commitment manifests itself in the student body and faculty. I think it's that commitment, together with an uncompromising pursuit of academic excellence, that gives Ryerson alumni the sense of community that they all feel and it's what keeps us loyal to the institution."

Called to the Ontario Bar in 1995 and a member of the Bars of St. Kitts & Nevis, Dominica, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda and the British Virgin Islands, Walwyn will be honoured with a Vice-Chancellor Award at the third annual University of the West Indies Toronto fundraising gala on March 10.

Previous recipients of the Ryerson Alumni Award of Distinction include Grenada's honorary consul general, Jenny Gumbs, who is a 2002 Public Administration graduate. She was recognized five years ago.

By RON FANFAIR

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