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Daniels honors several at Black Expo reception

Areas are community work, health, trailblazer, business

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Gov. Mitch Daniels honored several Hoosiers Wednesday at the Governor's Reception for Indiana Black Expo's 40th Annual Summer Celebration.

Daniels handed out awards for community service, trailblazing, entrepreneurship and health and fitness.

"These leaders are investing in the lives of their fellow Hoosiers at a time in which it has never been more needed -- in our nation, in our state and in the communities from which they have come," Daniels said.

Among the award winners were Aster Bekele, an Indianapolis woman who is the founder and executive director of the Felege Hiywot Center. That organization serves underprivileged youths and second-generation Ethiopians by offering gardening, science and environmental preservation programs to help students develop life skills.

Daniels awarded Bekele, a native of Ethiopia, with the Rev. Charles R. Williams Community Service Award.

"I'm just overwhelmed right now. It means so much," she said. "I'm just happy for the kids. The first fourth-graders we started with are in high school now, and it's been amazing to see the change in them.

"They used to think of science as something they couldn't do. Now, that fear is gone."

Daniels also presented three Indianapolis Marine veterans with the Sam Jones Trailblazer Award.

Five Hoosiers were part of the Montford Point Marines, the first African-Americans recruited into the Marine Corps. Cpl. Averitte Wallace Corley, Sgt. Lancaster Warren Price and Sgt. Maj. Johnny C. Washington, all from Indianapolis, accepted the award. Walter Ezzell, Danville, and Everette Sweat, Indianapolis, are deceased.

"The story of the Marines is a rather emotional one," Daniels said. "They were heroic before they ever got to boot camp, as far as I'm concerned, willing to be pioneers of that kind."

Corley said he was 16 in 1944 when he joined the Marines.

"This award, especially coming from the governor, is a great accolade to me," he said. "This is a great day."

Expo award winners

These Hoosiers were presented awards from Gov. Mitch Daniels at his Statehouse reception for Indiana Black Expo's 40th annual Summer Celebration.

Rev. Charles R. Williams Community Service Award

» **Aster Bekele**, Indianapolis, founder and executive director of Felege Hiywot Center, an organization that serves underprivileged youths and second-generation Ethiopians by educating them through gardening, science and environmental preservation programs.

Sam Jones Trailblazer Awards

» **Cpl. Averitte Wallace Corley**, Indianapolis.

» **Walter Ezzell**, Danville (deceased).

» **Sgt. Lancaster Warren Price**, Indianapolis.

» **Everette Sweat**, Indianapolis (deceased).

» **Sgt. Maj. Johnny C. Washington**, Indianapolis.

All were part of the Montford Point Marines, the first African-Americans recruited into the Marine Corps.

Governor's Award for Achievement in Business and Entrepreneurship

» **Edward Lander**, Evansville, founder of WEOA-AM (1400), a 24-hour urban adult contemporary radio station that has served the Evansville area since 1997. Lander is the former state director for Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

Governor's Award for Achievement in Health and Physical Fitness

» **Dr. Danita Johnson-Hughes**, Gary, president and chief executive officer of Edgewater Systems for Balanced Living and the only African-American CEO of a certified mental health center in Indiana. Her organization is a comprehensive behavior health-care provider and child welfare services organization in Gary.
