

Peace Islands Institute's 5th Annual Award Ceremony was held on June 3, 2012 at Hilton Hasbrouck Heights. Over 200 guests and many dignitaries joined PII to applaud accomplishments of the honorees.



Peace Islands Awards 2012 Honorees

Diversity Appreciation Award: Assembly Speaker Hon. Sheila Oliver

Education Award: Asm. Patrick J. Diegnan, District 18

Community Service Award: Prosecutor Robert A. Bianchi, Morris County

Media Award: Michael Aron, Chief Political Correspondent of NJTV

Peace and understanding Award: Wahy-ud Deen Shareef, Senior Advisor to the Mayor of Newark

Business Award: James R. Coyle, President of Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce

Asm. Gordon Johnson (District 34) hosted the event.

The winners of PII Art and Essay Contest were also recognized at the event. The contest for grades 6 through 12 was held for the third time and the winning arts and essays were exhibited during the reception. Winners received more than \$10,000 all together.

Peace Islands Executive Director Levent Koch welcomed the guests. He said, "The reason we are gathering here tonight is simple but noble; we have come together to honor some remarkable and inspiring individuals who have committed themselves to making this world a better place for us all. e are profoundly honored to present them with awards they so justly and completely deserved."

He continued saying his appreciation, "We value their dedication, we salute their courage, and we pay tribute to their continuous commitment. Let their devotion and courage be an inspiration to us all and may others follow in their footsteps".

Hon. Sheila Oliver Diversity Appreciation Award made speech after she received her award: "There's no doubt that there's a common thread amongst all of us and I guess that is what has connected each honoree this evening to PII is the Interfaith Dialogue.

I am so proud of the work that Levent and his colleagues have done with PII. It is tremendous. And someone had made a reference to how this organization has established itself, grown and expanded. It is phenomenal to see an organization (PII) has so many leaders from the

corporate sector, government, non profit sector, education community of this state - all connecting up with an organization, which has as its objective: 'elevating our consciousness and our diversity'.

I thank PII because by promoting cultural diversity, inclusion, bringing everyone to the table, taking people to Turkey it elevates peoples' consciousness and reminds us of that our planet is a very diverse place- it does not necessarily revolve around one state, nation or government; and I think that the work that you were doing will go a long way. I commend you for acknowledging and engaging young people. I read some phenomenal essays this evening I saw artwork that was reflective of a depth of understanding of young people. To sensitize young people to issues of poverty, and social justice means that we are inculcating within young people a sensitivity that as they go through their life's journey they will step into the realm of leadership to end this state, to promote the ideals, that so many of us, that are here this evening believe so strongly about." She concluded by pledging to continue to work with PII in promoting the concept of cultural understanding.

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Wahy-ud Deen Shareef, Peace and Understanding Award recipient said, "If i have to choose a legacy which i would be remembered, I guess it would be that I would choose to be remembered as a man who dedicated his life to seeking to teaching and to imparting to others the love of peace and understanding. I thank you Peace Islands Institute and Dr. Koch"

Business Award recipient **James R. Coyle** said after thanking the PII for being honored, "I see they really have a strong passion for what they do. The understanding they increase between cultures is so essential to world and frankly incumbent on rest of us.

He said "I have worked with Levent and the Turkish community for a number of years, I have a strong passion for what they do. The understanding they have increased between cultures is so absolutely essential to this world. We need more knowledge, that knowledge will only come if people are interested, the Peace Islands Institute really leads to that interest, it gets people involved in different cultures, ideas and beliefs. Spoke about self interest, he works with Turkish business groups where they promote trade between Turkey and U.S, they post delegations from Turkey, they are helping to organize business delegations to Turkey, and not just Turkey, but everywhere in the world really needs this.

Education award recipient **Asm. Patrick J. Diegnan** said "The philosophy of the PII is what I try to follow everyday, all of us should strive to address these challenges each and everyday. I

hope mission statement of the PII becomes a common theme around the world."

Michael Aron, Media Award Chief Political Correspondent of NJTV started off by speaking about his trip to Turkey and how remarkable it was and recommended to anyone who hasn't attended before. He said, "We have an organization that brings people together, and links the nationality of a foreign nation to the power structure state in this country, he doesn't know any organization that has done that.

Community Service Award honoree **Prosecutor Robert A. Bianchi** expressed his feelings by quoting his father, he said "My dad taught me this adage when I was younger, 'A minority seizes authority, becomes a majority and hates a minority.' Everyday I wake up, and I say to myself if today were my last day and I'm laying on a bed just before I'm gone, to a better place, hopefully, is it the treasure that I accumulated in dollars and cents.... in my mind and for you young folks, volunteerism like these folks do, giving more and more of yourself to others, even when its difficult to do because you're tired... that's the treasure of knowing that you made a difference."

PII was presented resolutions/letters by the following elected officials:

Governor Chris Christie, US Senator Robert Menendez, US Senator Frank Lautenberg, Congressman William Pascrell, Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen, Congressman Scott Garrett, Congressman Leonard Lance, Congressman Steve Rothman, NJ Senate Resolution by Sen. President Sen. Stephen Sweeney, NJ Assembly & Senate Joint Resolution by Sen. Loretta Weinberg and Asm. Gordon Johnson.

Pictures from the event:



Master of Ceremonies Asm. Gordon Johnson



Assembly Speaker Hon. Steve Oliver



Asm. Patrick J. Diegnan, District 16



Presenter Robert A. Bianchi, Merrick County



Michael Aron, Chief Political Correspondent of No TV



Wahyud Dhan Sharief, Senior Advisor to the Mayor of Newark



James R. Coyle, President of Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce

