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Marilou Barsam, Cofounder of Bedford Embraces Diversity Honored as a 2020 Commonwealth Heroine

Months before the nation turned its focus to civil rights challenges, Marilou Barsam and the Bedford Embraces Diversity (“BED”) group that she founded were hard at work addressing the hurdles facing marginalized groups in a largely Caucasian region. Recognizing the importance of her leadership early this year, State Rep. Ken Gordon (D-Bedford) nominated Ms. Barsam as the Commonwealth Heroine of the 21st Middlesex District. The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women recently released the members of its 2020 class of Heroines, Ms. Barsam among them.

“Fighting for justice for people of color, people of the LGBTQ+ community, and people of minority religions is nothing new for Marilou Barsam and BED,” said Rep. Gordon. “It did not take the recent tragedies to get her efforts started. But it is because of her ongoing efforts that we live in a more welcoming community, right here and right now.”

Ms. Barsam and BED have organized responses to incidents of anti-Semitism in public schools and three independent multicultural festivals that have since become a permanent fixture of the town’s Bedford Day. BED also sponsors an annual Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast where it invites African-American members of the community to share their experiences and perspectives. Through the First Parish Unitarian Church of Bedford, Ms. Barsam helps immigrant families at risk of deportation and educates other houses of worship interested in joining their efforts.

“I accept this nomination on behalf of my fellow board members who have worked tirelessly for the last several years on issues related to diversity here in and beyond Bedford,” said Ms. Barsam. “It is so inspiring and rewarding to know that our collective efforts have been noted and appreciated by the Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this recognition.”

The Commonwealth Heroines are women from throughout the state who perform unheralded acts on a daily basis that make our communities better places to live. Commonwealth Heroines use their time, talent, spirit, and enthusiasm to enrich the lives of others in their community. They strive to protect and represent the interests of seniors, victims of violence, children, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations.

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women will celebrate the seventeenth-annual Commonwealth Heroines Class of 2020 virtually. On June 24, the original date of the event, the Commission will share a link to the slideshow on their social media platforms.

A complete list of this year's honorees is available by contacting the Commission at mcsw@state.ma.us.

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