

Throw Me Something: Committee for a Better New Orleans awards recognize civic participation

By Lynne Jensen

Special to The Advocate

The Committee for a Better New Orleans will honor Carol Bebelle, executive director of the Ashé Cultural Center, and the Justice & Accountability Center of Louisiana with Diana Lewis Citizen Participation Awards. The presentation will take place at a luncheon ceremony at noon Wednesday, Aug. 20, at the Hyatt Hotel, 601 Loyola Ave.

Bebelle was selected for her exceptional work at Ashé center and throughout Central City, where she is engaging the community in the revitalization of one of the city's most historic districts.

“Things go around and come around,” Bebelle said about receiving an award named for Diana Lewis.

“In the beginning, when we had the idea of combining community development and art, Diana was one of the people who saw the possibility and to be there to cheer us on.”

Established in 1998, the Ashé Cultural Center is a nonprofit organization that creates and supports programs and activities emphasizing contributions of people of African descent. It is housed in an impressive 18,200-square-foot building at 1712 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd. in the heart of Central City. Bebelle, an artist, writer and producer, founded the center with fellow artist Douglas Redd, who died in 2007. The center grew out of an art and cultural initiative called Efforts of Grace. “Art is a subset of culture,” Bebelle said.

A native of New Orleans, Bebelle earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Loyola University and a master's degree in education administration from Tulane University.

Bebelle described New Orleans as a place “where there are a lot of people with good hearts and intentions, but not always willing to make things happen.” Diana Lewis



Photo provided by the Ashe Cultural Center - Carol Bebelle will receive the Diana Lewis Citizen Participation Award, presented Aug. 20 by the Committee for a Better New Orleans.

made things happen, she said.

“It is so, so gratifying” to receive the Lewis award, Bebelle said. “Choosing me is choosing the work we do at Ashé.”

The Justice and Accountability Center is being recognized for its work in bringing highly marginalized residents who have been incarcerated back into civic life, including restoring people’s voting rights. The center tackles deficiencies in the post-conviction phase of the criminal justice system and provides a space for attorneys to come together.

The featured speaker at the luncheon will be Coleman Ridley, executive director of Forward New Orleans and the New Orleans Business Council. The invocation will be given by former Loyola University President Father James Carter, and there will be music by The Last Straws.

The event is sponsored by the Committee for a Better New Orleans, Jones Walker and Peoples Health. Past award recipients include Diana Lewis, the Neighborhoods Partnership Network, the Orleans Public Education Network, Beth Shapiro Lavin, the St. John No. 5 Baptist Church, Joel Myers and the Vietnamese-American Young Leaders Association.

Tickets for the event are \$60 per person or \$500 for a patron table of eight, which includes acknowledgement in the event program. Tickets may be purchased via PayPal, using the email address contributions@cbno.org, or by check payable to CBNO/MAC Foundation and sent to 4902 Canal St., Suite 300, New Orleans LA 70130. A limited number of tickets will be available at the door.

CBNO is part of the ongoing process to develop the New Orleans Citizen Participation Program, a formal structure to promote and sustain civic engagement that is mandated by the city charter.

For information about the Citizen Participation Awards, the Citizen Participation Program or CBNO, contact Keith Twitchell at (504) 430-2258.

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