For Immediate Release

LSU Women’s Center Announces 2016 Esprit de Femme Award Recipients

BATON ROUGE, January 27, 2016– The LSU Women’s Center will honor Women’s History Month on Thursday, March 18, at its fourth annual Esprit de Femme Awards Sunrise Celebration. This year’s awards ceremony will be held at Boudreaux’s in Baton Rouge, beginning at 8:00am. All proceeds will support the mission and initiatives of the Women’s Center. 2015 Esprit de Femme honoree, Charlotte Placide, is serving as the 2016 Esprit de Femme honoree chair for the Sunrise Celebration.

Established in 2009, the Esprit de Femme award is an annual acknowledgement of a person who has made exceptional efforts toward the advancement of women in Louisiana. This award honors individuals who elevate the status of women in the community through their contributions to the arts, education, healthcare, business and industry, charity, and civic engagement.

This year also marks the first year that the Esprit de Femme Student Leadership Award will be given. This award will honor and recognize two LSU students who exemplify the ideals and principals of the Esprit de Femme awards though the awarding of a scholarship. The award recipients will be selected in February and will be awarded their scholarship at the Sunrise Celebration.

“We are excited about all of our honorees and look forward to the opportunity to recognize their phenomenal contributions at the fourth Annual Esprit de Femme Awards Sunrise Celebration,” said Summer Steib, LSU Women’s Center director. “These women have made lasting impacts on the lives of countless women in our state and blazed trails for other women. Our 2016 honorees represent diverse backgrounds and accomplishment—our honorees are leaders and trail-blazers in government, medicine, arts, the business sector, nonprofits, academics, and civic engagement.”

In 2016, the Esprit de Femme award will be presented to eight deserving recipients. The recipients are Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Renee Chatelain, Teri G. Fontenot, Dr. Elizabeth “Terry” Fontham, Dima Ghawi, Dr. Carolyn H. Hargrave, Sybil Morial, and Rep. Patricia Haynes Smith. The 2016 Men Who Champion Women honoree is Dr. Isiah M. Warner.

Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco began her career as a public servant in 1984, when she became the first woman ever elected to represent the people of Lafayette in the state legislature. On January 12, 2004, Blanco became the first woman governor of Louisiana. In 2005, Governor Blanco led Louisiana through Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, the largest natural disaster in American history. Because she had revamped the evacuation plan for the state to feature contraflow on the interstate system, many lives were saved and more than 1.3 million people were moved to safety. She commanded more troops than any governor in U.S. history, deploying tens of thousands of National Guardsmen to storm-impacted areas across south Louisiana. She
led a ten-month fight to secure the additional funding needed from Congress to help rebuild the more than 200,000 destroyed homes in Louisiana.

Renee Chatelain is a native of Baton Rouge and a graduate of Louisiana State University, holding both a B.A. Degree and a Juris Doctor. A former dancer, Chatelain has been a guest teacher for Iceland Dance Theater in Reykjavik, Iceland, and at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, at Hunter College in New York, and Southeastern Louisiana University. She serves on the Advisory Board of the American Mural Project. She is a co-founder of Mid City Dance Project, Inc. She served as Executive Director at the Manship Theatre. Chatelain is a member of the Louisiana State Bar Association, Baton Rouge Bar Association, and has been a panelist for the Lt. Governor’s Cultural Economic Summit. She is a recipient of Baton Rouge Business Report’s Most Influential Women in Business, the Unsung Hero’s Award by Louisiana State University’s Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs, and has been recognized by the Louisiana State Senate for her contribution to African Americans in Louisiana through the Arts. Chatelain was a 2005 finalist for the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Angel Award, was recognized by LANO as a Louisiana Heroine, and is a member the 2005 Leadership Class of the Baton Rouge Area Chamber.

Teri Fontenot is the President/CEO of Woman’s Hospital, Baton Rouge, LA, a position she has held for nearly twenty years. Fontenot was the 2012 chair of the American Hospital Association Board of Trustees, served two terms as a director on the Sixth District Federal Reserve Bank board and was Audit Committee chair. She currently serves on numerous not-for-profit, private, and publicly held company boards. Fontenot was named to Modern Healthcare’s inaugural list of the Top 25 Women in Healthcare, the Baton Rouge Businessperson of the Year in 2013, and is in the Hall of Distinction at LSU’s EJ Ourso College of Business.

Dr. Elizabeth “Terry” Fontham joined the faculty of LSU Health Sciences Center in 1980 and served as Chair of the Department of Public Health & Preventive Medicine in the School of Medicine and then as Dean of the School of Public Health. She is an internationally recognized cancer epidemiologist, the author of more than 200 scientific publications including Surgeon General’s Report contributions, and the only non-MD to serve as national president of the American Cancer Society. Fontham has served in leadership positions on numerous professional and community service boards of directors.

A global citizen and social change agent, Dima Ghawi shares her personal and professional experiences to educate and inspire the professional and social advancement of women across cultures. Ghawi emigrated to the U.S. from Jordan in 1996. Breaking from her restrictive cultural norms and expectations, Dima became the first woman in her family to graduate college. She went on to earn her Masters in Business Administration and work worldwide for several Fortune 100 companies including IBM, Merrill Lynch and Bank of America. Now a highly sought-after speaker, Ghawi has reached thousands globally through speeches, training workshops and leadership seminars. In 2015, Ghawi launched her own consulting company dedicated to elevating the professional and cultural status of women around the world.

Dr. Carolyn Hargrave recently retired as Vice President for Academic Affairs of the LSU System, having served in that position since 2002. During her 45-year career with LSU, Dr. Hargrave also served as Professor of Information Systems and Decision Sciences, Associate Dean of the Graduate School, and, from 1981 - 1991, as Provost and Vice Chancellor for
Academic Affairs. From 1997 - 2000, she served as Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs of the Louisiana Board of Regents. Professional activities include serving as Chair of the GRE Board, Vice-Chair of the Executive Council of SACSCOC, and Chair of the Library Network Commission, which initiated, implemented, and oversaw the operation of LOUIS, the Louisiana Online University Information System.

Sybil Morial is an educational pioneer and civil rights leader who is the matriarch of a family synonymous with social progress and leadership both in New Orleans and in the nation. Morial was active in Urban League of Greater New Orleans, the League of Women Voters, and founded the Louisiana League of Good Government (LLOGG), a non-partisan, interracial women’s organization devoted to guaranteeing civil liberties and full participation in government for all Louisiana citizens. In 2015, Morial was awarded an honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from Xavier University and published her memoir, “Witness to Change: From Jim Crow to Political Empowerment.”

A Baton Rouge native, Representative Patricia “Pat” Smith was reelected without opposition and is currently serving her third term in the LA House of Representatives. She has received numerous awards and acknowledgments for her work to advance the lives of underrepresented citizens in our state. Rep. Smith serves on Appropriations, Education, Labor & Industrial Relations Committees, as well as the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget. Her many appointments include the House Executive Committee.

The 2016 Men Who Champion Women Honoree is Dr. Isiah Warner, a Boyd Professor, which is the highest professorial rank in the LSU system. He has more than 300 refereed publications in a variety of journals relevant to the general areas of analytical and materials chemistry. Dr. Warner has focused his career helping his students understand their true potential and has been instrumental in supporting and advancing women and underrepresented minorities in STEM fields. In 2014, LSU was recognized as the top university in granting Ph.D. degrees in chemistry to women and underrepresented minority students, an achievement Dr. Warner was instrumental in helping LSU achieve. Dr. Warner has been recognized with numerous national awards for his leadership and contributions to his field.

Online registration for the 4th Annual Esprit de Femme Awards Sunrise Celebration is now open at www.lsufoundation.org/edf. Tickets, tables, sponsorships, and honorees recognitions can be secured through the registration portal.

The LSU Women’s Center provides support, referral and information to students, faculty and staff on issues and concerns related to women. The center also promotes the advancement of gender equity issues and wellbeing through its services, educational programs and advocacy efforts.

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