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By Rasheed Oluwa

Ex-Judge Kaye, 3 others get Val-Kill Medals

HYDE PARK - Judith Kaye, the state's former chief judge, said she couldn't have imagined the path her life would take when she was a girl working at her family's shop in the Village of Monticello.

Most people would not have taken her, or any woman, seriously if she had said she planned to practice law, Kaye said Sunday afternoon as she received her Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal.

Kaye was joined by Jeh V. Johnson, an architect living in the Town of Poughkeepsie; Madeleine Kunin, former governor of Vermont and United States ambassador to Switzerland; and the Anderson Center for Autism in Staatsburg as this year's Val-Kill Medal recipients.

More than 200 people attended the 23rd annual medal ceremony, held at the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill in Hyde Park.

Kaye said it was the inspiration of women like Roosevelt and others that gave her the confidence to achieve her goals.

"I assure you that had I expressed the aspiration to be the chief judge, I would have been sent to have my head examined," Kaye said. "But I have to tell you the truth. That aspiration never crossed my mind. Today, one-third of our nation's state judges are women. Imagine that."

The medals are given to people who have made significant contributions in the arts, citizenship, community service, education, philanthropy and other humanitarian causes. The winners are people who represent the spirit of Eleanor Roosevelt.

In addition to honoring individuals who represent Roosevelt's ideals, the event also raises money for programs held at the Eleanor Roosevelt Center.

Those programs include the Girls' Leadership Workshop, a summer program aimed at educating and empowering girls to become more socially active.

"We teach girls how to take their dreams and make it work," said Kathleen Durham, executive director of the Eleanor Roosevelt Center.

Johnson, who was honored for his work in urban development and as one of the founders of the National Organization of Minority Architects, credited Roosevelt for helping to voice the concerns of blacks in the 1940s.

"Simply stated, she was a beacon of hope for people who needed the help that well-respected northern whites could bring to situations that were lost under the radar of most Americans during the closing of World War II," said Johnson, who is black.

Kunin said Roosevelt was her role model as a child.

"She invented her role," Kunin said. "She didn't have any role models as to how to be the first lady and an activist in a participatory kind of way. My apologies to all of the other first ladies, but she really did do it differently."

Neil Pollack, executive director of the Anderson Center, said that while a cure for autism doesn't exist, his organization and others like it have hope.

"I will tell you that all of the competing forces colliding in the world of autism are ultimately on the same team, striving for advocacy, treatment and prevention," Pollack said.

During the event, a group of about 10 pickets from the Jonathan Carey Foundation were seen outside the entrance to the Roosevelt site.

The foundation, which is based in Delmar, Albany County, is dedicated to educating parents on how to protect their disabled child.

Michael and Lisa Carey started the organization in the memory of their son, Jonathan, who was killed in 2007 while being cared for by two workers at the OD Heck Developmental Center in Schenectady. The Careys allege their son

was abused during his time at the Anderson Center.

Pollack said the allegations were untrue. "That's all they are - allegations," Pollack said.

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