

The Ottawa University Alumni Association
Presents the 2005
OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
To
Mildred Edwards Nottingham
Class of 1976



Field of Accomplishment: Music Virtuosa,
Corporate Leadership and Community
Activism

Mildred Edwards Nottingham, OU Class of 1976, has made tremendous contributions in the Kansas City Jazz scene. At the same time, she has pursued a corporate career and “given back” to the community through volunteerism.

As an August 2000 article in the KC Star put it: “There’s Millie Edwards, and then there’s Millie Nottingham. Millie Edwards is the singer, a member of the Wild Women jazz vocal ensemble. Millie Nottingham is the AT&T manager, a member of corporate America.”

Millie attended Ottawa University on a track and academic scholarship. She studied to be a music teacher, but after graduation she went on the road instead, singing in a Top 40 band. After several years she then decided to apply at Southwestern Bell. Millie started as an operator; then transferred to AT&T in 1984 when SWB divested. She then entered the management structure.

During her 24 years with AT&T, Millie was a highly motivated manager with extensive experience in teambuilding, training/supervision, communication, quality, community affairs and managing high performance teams. While responsible for Broadband and UNE-P Maintenance/Repair for 50 states, she also worked to earn her Masters in Education from Rockhurst University.

Millie is quoted as saying that she was destined to be a singer/musician. She started playing the piano at 4 and the viola at 10. She credits Elton John’s “Your Song,” which she heard while at college, for helping her shift into high gear.

Millie said, “It was rock with a classical feel, and I said, ‘I could do that.’ I purchased every Elton John songbook I could and started doing coffeehouses.”

Edwards is known in Kansas City for her big voice and wide vocal range as well as her friendly professional manner. She has been a regular on the Kansas City

jazz and blues circuit, performing at the best clubs and in radio and television spots. Music critics have praised her as revealing “a confident, full-range voice that has no doubt been heard in church on many a Sunday.” Her singing has been characterized as being “honest and dynamic,” and her phrasing is credited for pulling “out new things from old, familiar words.”

Millie has also dedicated her life to helping others. One of Millie’s greatest contributions to Kansas City’s metropolitan area has been her dedication to Harmony, created/established by Kansas City’s mayor Emanuel Cleaver. Harmony is a resource and catalyst in and for improvement of race relations, appreciation for cultural diversity and elimination of intolerance. She has served as Vice President, President and now sits on the Advisory Board with business, government, education and religious leaders. She also is the front-runner in fund raising activities for the past 30 years. Her voice has been instrumental in raising funds. The following are just a few of the other community resources which have benefited from Millie’s energies:

- Hope House, a shelter for battered women and children.
- Swope Parkway Health Center, a facility serving approximately 55,000 low-income families with clinics are located throughout KC’s metropolitan area.
- Kansas City Free Health Clinic, which promotes health and wellness by providing quality services at no charge to people without access to basic care.
- Breast Cancer Awareness Campaigns, which have benefited from the production of a Jazz CD with all proceeds going to breast cancer research.
- House of Menuha, which provides a nurturing environment for women to experience personal rest, reflection and renewal of mind, body and spirit, so that each is strengthened and better equipped to enrich family and community.
- JazzZOO, a fund-raiser which targets the improvement of quality of life for the animals at the Kansas City Zoo.
- CODA, which assists with burial cost of deceased musicians.

For her generous gift of time and talent in her music, her corporate leadership, and her community activism, Millie Edwards Nottingham is awarded the OUAA’s prestigious Outstanding Achievement Award.

Outstanding Achievement Award

This new award, established in 2005, is designed to recognize those who have made their mark and made a difference in their chosen field of endeavor. Recipients will, over time, constitute OU’s “hall of fame” and their life stories will help demonstrate what one can do with an OU education. The OUAA Board notes that the large number of awards being presented this first year should not be interpreted as diluting the importance of the recognition. With over 18,000 living alumni, the Board wanted this inaugural class to help demonstrate the scope and intent of the award. The number of awards given annually is expected to decrease in coming years.