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Public Employee Press

Lifetime Achievement Award goes to **Dazzling dancer Etta Dixon**

By MOLLY CHARBONEAU

Dance, exercise, healthy eating and training your brain are keys to successful and fit aging, says Etta Dixon, 82, a former Metropolitan Transit Authority Secretary, Local 1655 member and a DC 37 retiree for more than 20 years.

"In dealing with healing, prevention is the intention," says Dixon, describing how she once coached a volunteer at a Kwanzaa event so he could lead her on the dance floor. "He said he had been waiting his whole life for someone to show him those steps. That's the type of body movement that keeps us healthy and active."

On May 9, Dixon was among five women honored at this year's Clara Lemlich Awards for bringing her positive message to seniors citywide with dance instruction and health and wellness outreach - and for inspiring young people to get and stay active through dance.

In a message to the event, Mayor Bill de Blasio lauded Dixon and the other honorees for "their inspiring leadership and unwavering commitment to lifting up our residents and moving our city forward."

Honoring lifetime achievement

"The Lemlich Awards honor women who have been working for the larger good their entire lives, in the tradition of those who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire over 100 years ago," according to Labor Arts and the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, the co-sponsors. That is certainly true of Dixon.

Dixon won dance competitions in her youth at the renowned Savoy Ballroom on vibrant Lenox Avenue, the street Langston Hughes called "Harlem's heartbeat" in his poem "Juke Box Love Song." She still cuts a rug and brings home prizes from Lincoln Center's annual Midsummer Night Swing.

For years, Dixon also performed at meetings and gatherings of the DC 37 Retirees Association when she was secretary to their late Vice President of Publicity and Public Relations Norman O. Davis, her dance partner at those events.

Today, as part of Mature Magic with her dance partner Bernard Dove, 76, Dixon is active with the Harlem Swing Dance Society, where she demonstrates swing dance techniques and shares the rich heritage of the Lindy Hop, which originated in Harlem's African American community in the 1920s and 1930s.

"Dancers like Etta keep people involved, engaged, connected and joyful," said Patch Schwadron of the Actors Fund, a former dancer who introduced Dixon at the standing-room-only awards ceremony at the Museum of the City of New York's Puffin Gallery for Social Activism. "The energy is always there to leap, take action, listen, watch, and send that energy out to others."

With that, the music rang out and Dixon and Dove brought down the house with a rousing swing dance performance that wowed older audience members and awed the younger ones, who had only seen such dancing on video.

A role model

Dixon has been a role model in other areas, too.

At age 63, she was a multi-medal winner in the Senior Olympics and the first woman on her Brownsville, Brooklyn, street to become a homeowner. At 75, she received her B.A. degree from The City College of New York and earned a brown belt in karate. In 2012, she was honored as a civic activist by the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President for installing energy-saving solar panels on the roof of her home.

For more, watch Etta Dixon's interview at bit.ly/Etta2016 and visit www.laborarts.org and Facebook.com/LaborArts.

A story about her solar panel project appeared in the December 2006 issue of Public Employee Press, which can be read on the union's website at bit.ly/DixonGoesSolar06.



Mature Magic: DC 37 Retiree Etta Dixon, with her dance partner Bernard Dove, performed at the Museum of the City of New York, where Dixon was one of five honorees to receive a Clara Lemlich Award for lifetime achievement.