## **Richmond Confidential**

## Richmond residents honored for fighting alcohol abuse

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Richmond Police Sergeant DeWayne Williams and community activist Naomi Williams were recognized for their work combating alcohol and substance abuse at the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday. Every year, through the People who Make a Difference awards, the county's Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board recognizes the work of a handful of volunteers and paid staff from around the county whose work on dealing with issues of alcohol and substance abuse is exceptional.

County Supervisor John Gioia, who represents Richmond, said alcohol abuse is not necessarily more prevalent in Richmond than in the rest of the county, but that the city faces different issues than many of the more suburban and affluent towns in Contra Costa County. "One issue in West County is the sheer abundance of liquor stores and the crime that happens around liquor stores," he said. "There is a greater proliferation of problem liquor stores in this part of our county."

That's an issue that Naomi Williams has been working on for years as part of the West County Alcohol Policy Working Group. A longtime community activist, she has worked to prevent liquor stores from being opened near schools and parks, and has gone on ride-alongs with the police to locate and fine liquor stores that sell to minors.

Sgt. Dewayne Williams (no relation to Naomi Williams) says that in his current post with the department's Property Crimes Unit, most of his cases don't involve alcohol. But in his 26 years on the force, he's taken on a number of different roles, including working in the narcotics unit and as a patrol officer, and that in those capacities he saw a lot of crimes related to alcohol. He was recognized for his continuing involvement with the West County Alcohol Policy Working Group.

"Alcohol and drugs have a big pull for our youth," Sgt. Williams said, and was quick to redirect attention to the efforts of the Alcohol Policy Working Group. "They deserve the praise," he said. "They're very much involved in either stopping new liquor stores from coming into the community and making sure that youth can't get alcohol from the stores that sell alcohol."

Over the years, Sgt. Williams has been part of numerous decoy stings, in which a young person with a fake ID tries to buy alcohol. When they find a store that sells alcohol to the decoy, the department works with the liquor store owners to spot fake IDs. "All of our decoys show ID, but we need to teach the employees how to spot the fakes," he said.

But he says that it has to go further than just running decoy programs to make sure stores aren't selling to young people. "Our youth aren't always getting liquor from a store," he said. "They get it from their parents or from a friend's house."

For that, he said the community needs effective peer education programs. Naomi Williams said that the process of making liquor less accessible to minors also has to start with educating the parents and building a stronger community. "When I was coming up, everybody in the neighborhood was your mama," she said. "It really does take a village."

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