
CONFERRAL OF THE HONORARY DEGREE

DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES, *honoris causa*

Kay Bolden

Kay Bolden is the recently retired CEO and “Accidental Farmer” of the Warren-Sharpe Community Center, a multi-faceted, non-profit, community-based organization offering numerous social service programs and vital support to families living primarily on the southside of Joliet, Illinois. From 1991 to 2017, Ms. Bolden served as the organization’s first Executive Director, devoting her life to befriending, serving, and empowering the people in greatest need in her community—with programs in food relief and urban gardening, education, parent and family support, leadership development, recreation, and safety.

Founded in 1991 by Ms. Bolden’s beloved mother and civil rights activist and community organizer, Mrs. Kathleen Bolden, Warren-Sharpe grew tremendously under Ms. Bolden’s responsive leadership, “developing a holistic and inclusive approach to solving neighborhood problems” and growing a comprehensive community resource for low-income families throughout Will County, offering afterschool programs; a summer day camp; PACT, or Police and Children Together—a summer mentoring program in partnership with the Forest Park Community Center and the Joliet Police Department; food relief and urban farming; parenting forums; community service opportunities; and boys and girls mentoring and leadership programs.

Knowing that the majority of the Center’s families live in food-insecure households, Ms. Bolden worked especially on providing both emergency food relief and increased food security for hundreds of community families, through several food and farming programs: the Center’s food pantry, which provides for hundreds of families each week; Kids in the Kitchen— featuring planting, harvesting, and cooking classes; and Green Sprout Urban Farm, a youth-run urban farm initiative that provides organic vegetables and herbs for the Center’s children and their families, and teaches community members how to grow and cook their own food. As Ms. Bolden notes, despite the challenges of “contaminated soil, poor water quality, lack of infrastructure, lack of green space,” and other diminished conditions characteristic of low-income areas, after its first year, “Green Sprout Urban Farm...produced enough food to feed every single child in summer day camp, every single day, with surplus food for the food pantry.”

Warren-Sharpe’s extraordinary urban gardening efforts were recognized multiple times by then First-Lady Michelle Obama: In 2015, organization members and families were invited to tour the White House Kitchen Garden; in 2016, Warren-Sharpe became the first federally-recognized urban farm in Will County; and in 2017, Green Sprout Urban Farm was selected as an Obama Legacy Site by the Obama Legacy Initiative.

Born in Urbana, Illinois, Ms. Bolden was raised in Joliet, attended St. Francis Academy (now merged with Joliet Catholic High School) and received her Bachelor’s degree in English from Governors State University. She began her career in social services with the Joliet-Will County Community Action Agency and later managed programs within the State of California’s Human Services Department.

Both of her parents—two prominent “civil rights warriors”—inspired Ms. Bolden’s zeal for social justice causes from a very

young age. Her mother, the late Kathleen “Kat” Bolden—a Lewis alumna who, in addition to founding Warren-Sharpe, also served Lewis University as a dedicated administrator and adjunct faculty member in the Sociology Department; and her father, retired Judge Raymond Bolden, served as Associate Judge for the 12th Judicial District in Will County from 1986-2001, and as president of the Joliet branch for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

In addition to so skillfully serving her Joliet community, Ms. Bolden is also an accomplished writer for social and personal change, publishing more than 100 articles on community development and women’s empowerment for various popular print and online forums, including *Huffington Post*, *Thrive Global*, *Medium*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. She has also authored five books, including: *She Lives in You! The Kathleen Bolden Story*; *Veggie Casserole: Kids Cook the Darndest Things*, based on the Center’s garden program; *My Faith in Broccoli: Essays on Racism, Privilege, and Food Deserts*; and *The Young and the Rest of Us*, a memoir about her transformative solo walk of the Camino de Santiago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site leading to the Shrine of St. James in Northern Spain.

Ms. Bolden has presented at a variety of Lewis University leadership forums including the annual Women in Leadership Conference and the University’s annual Sustainability Awards ceremony. She has also served on the University’s Community Partner Advisory Program as well as the Community Foundation of Will County.

She received numerous awards for her outstanding commitment to her community, including: Lewis University’s 2014 De La Salle Award; the 2014 Community Service Award from the Joliet Chapter of the National Hook-Up of Black Women; the 2017 Woman of Distinction Award from Zonta Club of Joliet; and the 2018 Justice Award from the Black Bar Association of Will County.

The proud parent of three children—Jeremy, the current CEO of Warren-Sharpe; educator Karyn; and University of Illinois sophomore, Cameron —Ms. Bolden currently lives in San Diego, California, where she is Assistant Editor at *P.S. I Love You*, a literary magazine at *Medium*. She also continues her fierce activism through her work for Mama’s Kitchen, an advocacy group for LGBTQ rights and food assistance for HIV-positive individuals; her church leadership; and once again working to build a community garden to help transform a low-income, food desert neighborhood.

Ms. Bolden life’s work of truly nurturing the members of her community in greatest need reflects the hard-earned wisdom of her own words: “justice is a spiritual concept... love is a warrior...” and in turn reflects well core Lasallian principles and the Mission of Lewis University.

For these and other pertinent reasons, we are most pleased and privileged to confer on Kay Bolden, the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*, with all rights and privileges thereof. Done at Romeoville, Illinois, this 16th day of December, 2018.