



## **2021 Paula Bailey Community Inspiration Award**

At the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Paula Bailey Dining in the Dark program on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, LBB proudly announced Sila Miller as the 2021 Paula Bailey Inspirational Community Award winner!

Mrs. Miller was born in the 60s in rural north Florida with a vision impairment. Her mother was prescribed the anti-miscarriage drug Diethylstilbestrol (DES), which is now known to lead to underdevelopment of the eyes. At that time, there were not many education options for children with vision loss. Her parents made the difficult decision to send her to the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine several hours away from their home.

The profound feelings of abandonment and homesickness Mrs. Miller felt could certainly have led her to be distrustful and bitter at an early age. Yet she flourished by focusing on making friends and succeeding academically. After graduating from the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, Mrs. Miller was excited to return home since she missed her family.

Mrs. Miller married her husband Robert, who is also visually impaired. With the realities of 2 non-drivers finding fulfilling work and now attending college, they moved to Tallahassee where there were more transportation opportunities. Mrs. Miller secured work with the State of Florida, where she

has now worked for 34 years. She progressed up through the ranks at the Department of Children and Families. A few years ago, she accepted a position at the Florida Department of Education's Division of Blind Services assisting with dispute resolution and program development.

Beyond her professional life, Mrs. Miller serves her community in different capacities by having served on LBB's Board of Directors, held several offices with Tallahassee's Chapter of Florida Council of the Blind, and she continues her involvement and advocacy in improving bus service and pedestrian safety in Tallahassee by occupying a seat on Tallahassee's Transit Advisory Committee.

Mrs. Miller perfectly embodies a determined yet joyful spirit, an intelligent and practical mindset, a generous and compassionate heart, and she acts upon the world around her to improve it. All these qualities make her the perfect recipient for the 2021 Paula Bailey Inspirational Community Award winner!

Congratulations Sila!

The Paula Bailey Community Inspiration Award was created in memory of LBB's longtime friend and beloved Tallahassee resident who became blind and deaf after contracting meningitis in 1999. Despite receiving this difficult diagnosis after being in a coma for several weeks, Paula persevered. After reaching out to LBB for assistance, she was able to learn how to navigate and maintain a fulfilling life through orientation, mobility, adjustment, self-advocacy counseling, and learning valuable communication skills.

Unfortunately, in 2005 we lost this inspiring woman when she was killed in

an automobile accident on her way to represent and bring awareness to blind individuals and march in the Springtime Tallahassee Grand Parade. Paula remains an inspiration to all of us at LBB. It was a privilege to have known Paula and to honor her every year with this event.

Every year prior to our annual Paula Bailey Dining in the Dark event and announcing the award recipient, LBB invites our community to send us their nomination for the award. The ideal individual will be inspirational in a community we represent because of their positive attitude and ability to learn the necessary skills to adjust, advocate for themselves, and live a fulfilling and independent lifestyle.

Past winners Paula Bailey award recipients are Ronald Fox, John Plescow, Lloyd Blackwood, Jr, Owen McCaul, Norine Labitzke, Michael Elliot, William Benjamin, Barbara Kiger, Delores Wussler, and Dexter "Chip" Orange.