

2015
GIVE
Awards

GOVERNOR'S
INITIATIVE FOR
VOLUNTEER
EXCELLENCE

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PRESENTED BY **VolunteerMississippi**



Lynn Gaines

Lynn Gaines, Certified Financial Planner, has an impressive record of community service and activism that is sure to have a far-reaching impact to the Starkville community and beyond. When she opened her own practice in 1984, she simultaneously began forming long-lasting relationships with her clients and using her expertise to give back to the community. She has supported and been involved in projects with numerous community organizations, such as Starkville Area Habitat for Humanity and the Oktibbeha County Chapter of the NAACP. However, Lynn's most significant contribution is for her initiative to guide people out of poverty.

Lynn's character and determination is portrayed not only through the way she conducts business, but also in her personal and spiritual life. In January 2011, Lynn was ordained to the diaconate within the Episcopal Church. Her involvement with the church, along with her experience in financial planning, gave her the idea for developing a program focusing on guiding the less fortunate out of poverty.

Lynn set out to build a new type of nonprofit where not only dollars were donated, but individuals were offered the opportunity and guidance to change circumstances for themselves. Thus, she founded Starkville Bridges Out of Poverty: a local grassroots initiative with the bold mandate to eliminate poverty. When asked what her inspiration was for *Bridges*, Lynn said "Over my years as a financial planner,

I have come to recognize that education alone does not help people to become financially literate. After reading the book *Bridges Out of Poverty* by Ruby Payne and Phillip DeVol, it all made sense. I believed an 'all-faiths' based charity would be most effective, and so I set out to launch a 'Bridges Out of Poverty' initiative in my community."

Since founding *Bridges*, she has dedicated thousands of hours to the initiative - 30 hours a week for three years - while continuing her professional work as a full-time Certified Financial Planner. She has also contributed significant resources to the initiative by adding a full-time administrator and several part-time employees to her payroll, in addition to a suite of offices, telephones, office supplies, and computers.

Since its inception, two community training events have been held with 245 individuals in attendance, and 28 individuals have been trained as facilitators in the *Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World* curriculum. Lynn's initiative has also been noticed by the cities of Jackson, Gulfport, Vicksburg, and Tupelo, who have all either launched their own *Bridges* program or are planning to do so in the near future.

It is evident that Lynn Gaines is a servant to her community and a catalyst for positive change. Thanks to her ingenuity, dedication, and drive, hundreds of people will be given the tools to lift themselves out of poverty and live more joyful, productive lives.