

Merle Berke-Schlessel

2017 John Winthrop Wright *Ethics in Action* Awardee

Merle Berke-Schlessel, President and CEO of the United Way of Coastal Fairfield County (UWCFC) received the 2017 John Winthrop Wright *Ethics in Action* award on May 3rd at Amarantes Sea Cliff in New Haven during the 11th annual School for Ethical Education (SEE) Character Celebration.



“The *Ethics in Action* Award named after SEE’s founder recognizes a business or community leader who demonstrates a commitment to ethics and character in their leadership” noted David Wangaard, President of SEE. Under Berke-Schlessel’s leadership the UWCFC became an organization that moves beyond programs to achieve major community transformation.” Peter Donovan, (left) Director of Wright Investors’ Service in Greenwich and

Mickey Herbert, President and CEO of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council presented the award to Ms. Berke-Schlessel.

Ms. Berke-Schlessel then provided a key note address to the Celebration of about 140 participants that included student winners of two of SEE’s programs. Merle wove the themes of student Laws of Life writing and Integrity PSAs into her remarks and focused on the importance of seeking equitable solutions as an ethical leader.

During Ms. Berke-Schlessel’s tenure at the United Way, the twelve-town, regional United Way has moved from an agency funder to a dynamic organization driving collaborative community change, working with community stakeholders to develop and improve systems of care. She was the co-convener with Bridgeport’s Mayor and Superintendent of Schools, of the Bridgeport Alliance for Young Children, charged with implementing the City’s Blueprint for Young Children and School Readiness Plan. Under her direction, the UWCFC created a regional collaborative of mentoring providers; convened the coalitions that created the region’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, and provided institutional support for the network of after school programs. Ms. Berke-Schlessel is now engaged in leveraging these critical vertically aligned systems beyond programmatic intervention to achieve major community transformation. Under her leadership, the UWCFC serves as the backbone organization for Bridgeport Prospers, a cradle-to-career movement to improve outcomes for children and families.

Merle lives in Branford with her husband Robert, a surgeon and is a proud mother of two grown children and anticipating the birth of their third grandchild.

Ethics in Action Creates Character