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Complimentary

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Metro Detroit

*Anniversary  
Issue*



*Rhonda Walker*

**GOOD MORNING DETROIT!**

on the cover

# Good Morning Detroit!

Metro Detroit  
awakens to the  
radiance of  
Rhonda Walker

*by Elaine Perlin Crossley*





Left: Rhonda with her father Dr. Ronald Gillum, her mother Harriette Gillum, younger sister Robin Gamble and older brother Ronald Gillum Jr.



Right: Rhonda on set with her co-anchor Guy Gordon

Some people emit a rare and special aura. Is it beauty, style or grace? Eloquence, confidence or generosity of spirit? When it comes to WDIV morning news anchor Rhonda Walker, it's all of the above. The willowy beauty's "wow" factor is palpable as she enters a room and lingers as she exits.

### RISE & SHINE

While most of us are in the depths of dreamland around 2:00 a.m., Rhonda hops out of bed. She says, "I wake up happy and embrace each new day, so it's appropriate that I wake up others." She actually does her own hair and makeup at home before she leaves for her 3:45 a.m. arrival at the studio. "I choose my own wardrobe, too," she adds.

Her style choices are always impeccable. She notes, "Even as a kid, I took the time and energy to dress up. How I carry myself has always mattered." Rhonda's fashion idols are iconic women of individual expression and taste – Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Princess Diana, Michelle Obama and Kate, Duchess of Cambridge.

Upon entering the studio, she is camera-ready for delivering the morning news. But first, it's all about business – hitting the Blackberry, consulting with the crew and assembling a forthright, balanced newscast. And, when we rise, there she is – reliable, pleasant and picture perfect on TV screens throughout metro Detroit.

### A REPORTER'S REPERTOIRE

On achieving a balance between objectivity and emotion, Rhonda explains, "Sometimes it's difficult. If, for instance, a house fire has occurred, someone has lost a home, keepsakes and memories – you react to the reality. You have to be mindful but not disconnected. We're fortunate that our management allows us to be human."

As a WDIV anchor since 2003, does she still get camera-shy? "Sometimes there's a 'hit' to your confidence for whatever reason," she admits, "and you need a pep talk from 'self!'" As a frequent public and motivational speaker though, Rhonda's confidence level is high, and she feels that "speaking from the heart" is the best antidote to any sense of fear.

How does she handle unscripted breaking news? She responds, "A producer talks in your ear, and you have to stay calm and focused. It's a challenge but also an adrenaline rush."

### RHONDA REVEALS ...

Born in Detroit, Rhonda and her brother and sister were raised in Lansing by her parents Dr. and Mrs. Ronald and Harriette Gillum. Today, close family ties extend to her nieces and nephews. A graduate of Michigan State University, she majored in communications and explains, "I was always inquisitive and liked knowing what was going on. I loved public speaking, and, as a kid, I would practice with a hair brush as my microphone."

A test of her strength was experiencing the anguish of divorce. She shares, "I was like a fish out of water. It was hard being in the public eye and going through something so personal. I had to stay strong and not be defeated." She suggests a couple of tips that helped her through: "Have no more than a 48-hour pity party, then get it together! And ask yourself, 'Will this really matter in five years?'"

These days, she enjoys time spent with family, friends and her significant other. She unwinds over a glass of wine and a seafood dinner, a football game, a shopping spree or an evening of "Dancing With the Stars." And, she loves traveling, especially to the serenity of Northern California.

### A COMMUNITY OF LOVE

Rhonda has been honored by a list of awards from A to Z. To mention a few: Alternatives for Girls Role Model Award, the Michigan Business and Professional Association's Distinguished Leadership in Media Award, the YWCA of Western Wayne County Woman of the Year Award and numerous "Best Dressed" awards. And, the list goes on.

About her many prestigious nominations and honors, Rhonda selflessly says, "What I love most is being in the company of other accomplished women."

Having interviewed many celebrities and luminaries, she is most touched by the stories of everyday people within the local community. Read on to learn more about her own story – the establishment and far-reaching effects of the Rhonda Walker Foundation.

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Photo opposite page by Boswell  
 Hair by Ming of Madison Bleu  
 Makeup by Joey Killmeyer  
 Wardrobe Styling by Illysia Neumann-Loreck

# Heart of Gold

*by Elaine Perlin Crossley*

The Rhonda Walker Foundation sprinkles gold dust on inner city teen girls





Rhonda Walker and girls who participate in her mentoring program

Although Rhonda Walker has been bestowed with a loving family and friends, a solid education, an amazing broadcast journalism career and lots of public admiration, she found herself wanting more – not for herself, but for others.

In 2003, Rhonda started the Rhonda Walker Foundation, a non-profit mentoring program for teen girls. Today, she stands proud as president of a foundation to which she devotes her heart and soul. She says, “It keeps me so busy, but I can’t imagine my life without it.”

The mission of the foundation is “to empower inner city teen girls towards becoming strong, confident, successful and moral future leaders.” Rhonda and a dedicated board of directors see that the mission is carried out through a fruitful core program called Girls to Women.

Teens are recruited in 8th grade and continue until high school graduation. Over this five-year span, frequent events include workshops, seminars, field trips, camps and retreats – all focusing on personal and career development. A strong adult mentor is matched with each teen.

Rhonda enthuses, “I am so proud of the outcomes. The foundation is so purposeful, and I see tremendous strides from formerly shy kids who once suffered from poor self-esteem. I am so grateful to be able to expose them to opportunities they never would have had.”

Nikki Howard Combs, owner of her own event planning business and member of the board of directors of Rhonda’s foundation says, “Rhonda serves as a great role model in professionalism, service and character to all of our girls. We are

proud to have a 100% high school graduation rate, with two of our original girls graduating from 4-year universities this year.”

Programs include etiquette training, education in the arts, culture and history, community outreach, team-building and leadership, college tours, dressing for success and more. Through a job-shadowing program, teens observe the goings-on at such reputable companies as Comerica Bank, Compuware, General Motors and others. And, a summer job program allows for the girls to gain “real world” experience.

Since qualifying girls stand to earn college scholarships, fundraising is of the utmost importance. This past July, the first-ever “Give and Get Fit” fundraiser at the Somerset Collection was a smashing success. It promoted healthy eating and better fitness, not only for the teens, but for metro Detroiters as a whole.

The largest annual fundraiser will take place on October 23, 2011. Rhonda explains, “It’s our ‘Moving with Success Empowerment Brunch’ that allows for conversation with powerful women of purpose. It connects the teens with women at the top of such fields as technology, finance, law, medicine, automotive and others.”

As she helps to prepare teen girls for a bright future, Rhonda is an ambassador of leadership, confidence and self-esteem. She, herself, is a true inspiration.

RHONDA WALKER FOUNDATION  
P.O. Box 251746 • West Bloomfield  
800.652.2989  
[www.rhondawalkerfoundation.org](http://www.rhondawalkerfoundation.org)

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- **DONATE:** As a 100% volunteer organization, donations go directly to programming for the teens.
- **VOLUNTEER:** The ways to get involved are endless. Contact: Monyka Murphy, RWF Volunteer Chair, [mmurphy@rhondawalkerfoundation.org](mailto:mmurphy@rhondawalkerfoundation.org)
- **BECOME A MENTOR:** Download the application forms on the website and email them to Terri Bond, Mentoring Committee Chairperson, [tbond@rhondawalkerfoundation.org](mailto:tbond@rhondawalkerfoundation.org)
- **RECOMMEND A TEEN MEMBER:** Visit the website to view the criteria for recommending a teen from one of four Detroit middle schools: Plymouth Educational Center, Consortium College Preparatory School, Sherrill Elementary Middle School and Detroit International Academy.
- **SHOP AT THE RWF STORE** (accessed via the foundation’s website): All proceeds from online store sales go to the foundation’s scholarship fund.

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