

THE THERESA NEWS

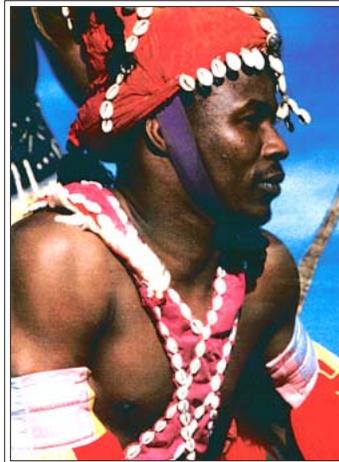


THE THERESA ALESSANDRA RUSSO FOUNDATION

WINTER 2008

Let's Dance!

THERESA AWARDS DINNER DANCE
May 2, 2008



Sidiki Conde
2008 Theresa Award Recipient

By Susan S. Russo

Professor Rebecca Morgan
2008 NAELA-Theresa Award Recipient

By Laury Gelardi

It is with great honor that we present to you, Sidiki Conde, our 2008 Theresa Award Recipient. When I think of this remarkable man, these adjectives come into my mind:

I
ntrepid
I
nspiring
I
ncredible
I
nnovative
I
maginative

There are just a handful of dancers and choreographers who have chosen to work with differently-abled dancers. Even fewer are the dancers and choreographers who themselves have continued to pursue their careers in the field of dance, despite what others may think of as tragic circumstances.

Sidiki was born in Guinea, West Africa. He lost the use of his legs when he was a young child. He tried to continue to attend school, but it was very difficult without proper assistance, and the other children teased and taunted him. He eventually stopped attending school, and so he never learned to read and write. The call to dance and sing came to him in a dream when he was fourteen years old. Music and dance then became his transcendence and his vocation.

(continued on page 2)

Vibrant - Articulate - Compassionate - Dedicated - Driven. Those are the attributes you sense immediately when you meet this year's recipient of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys - Theresa Award, Professor Rebecca Morgan. I met Becky almost 20 years ago at a gathering of elder law and disability specialists hosted by the National Judicial College. Becky was chair of that program and was most distraught that the hotel where the meeting was held was not accessible for wheelchairs or accommodating for the hearing impaired. I watched with amazement as she commanded the respect needed to get a ramp built pronto and the telephones immediately lowered. I knew at that moment that this woman was someone special and someone who makes a difference.

Becky grew up in Clinton, Missouri, a small rural community of about 7,000 people. She was the middle child of three. She married her husband, Jay (also from Clinton) in 1974. When Jay graduated with his Master's Degree in Gerontology he took a position with the Office on Aging in St. Petersburg, FL and Becky entered Stetson University College of Law. Little did she know it was just the start of a life in education and at Stetson - one dedicated to educating others about the need for access for those with special challenges. (continued on page 2)

2008 Theresa Award Honorees

Sidiki Conde (continued)

There are 26 different ethnic peoples in Guinea, each with their own language and traditional arts. Sidiki traveled to remote villages to meet the people and learn their songs and dances.

In 1986 he founded the *Message de Espoir* (The Message of Hope) a music and dance ensemble with other artists with disabilities. He has performed with West Africa's premier traditional dance and music ensembles including *Les Merveilles de Guinea*. He performed and directed the musical arrangements and company rehearsals for this company. In 1988 was given the job of company rehearsal master.

Sidiki has worked to change people's perceptions of people with disabilities. He became the manager of "The National Association of the Republic of Guinea for the Handicapped." In this capacity, he worked to develop programs to help people with disabilities gain job skills.

In 1988 Sidiki came to America and formed his own company, Tokounou, the next year. Tokounou is the name of the village where he was born.

Sidiki has worked extensively with children and adults of all abilities giving performances and teaching African dance and music in schools, hospitals and universities. His list of awards and fellowships, residencies and performances is endless. This gentleman is truly working tirelessly to spread his message of hope throughout the world!

Sidiki has been artist-in-residence for the past seven years in New York City's Special Needs Public Schools. "Sidiki the Man, the Music, the Message" was a featured documentary in the "2004 Other Film Festival" in Melbourne, Australia.

In addition to being a dancer, singer and choreographer, Sidiki is also a composer. He keeps hundreds of rhythms in his head. In 2008 there will be a release of a CD of Sidiki's own compositions, funded by a grant from the New York State Music fund.

He lives in Manhattan, with his wife, Deborah and continues to inspire all of those whose lives he touches.

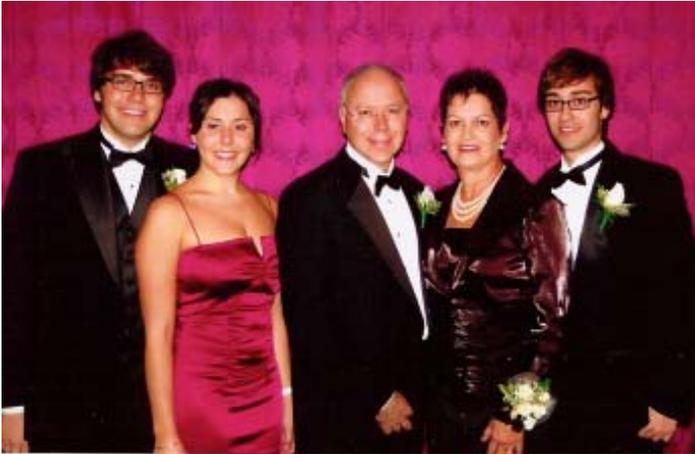
Rebecca Morgan (continued)

Becky's career has been a steady and fluid climb at Stetson - from Visiting Professor to Associate Professor to Assistant Dean to Associate Dean and finally as the Director of the Center for Excellence in Elder Law and the Director of the LL.M. Program in Elder Law. She has steered the development of the Elder Law Program at Stetson from a fledging profession to one of innovation and national prominence. Stetson recently completed the construction of their Model Courtroom - one with access for all, regardless of illness, disease or mental or physical challenges. Becky describes it as, "elder friendly and barrier free to provide physical access to justice to those who might not otherwise have it." She goes on to state, "the design is intentional, but not obvious." She notes that accessibility is something that benefits everyone in everyday life.

While Becky is one who prefers to work behind the scenes, she is also one who has risen to the leadership of several prominent professional organizations - she has served as President of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys in 1998-99; President of the National Senior Citizens Law Center in 2000-2002; and she has served on the faculty of the National Judicial College since 1992. She is a natural leader. She is one who gives so much of herself that she inspires others to do the same. She jumps in and digs down to find solutions that work for everyone. She is a consensus builder in every sense of the word.

Becky believes in NAELA's motto: "Doing Well by Doing Good." She is a voice for those who may not have one. She has dedicated her life to educating lawyers on the needs and challenges of those with special needs. Training them to go out and spread the word. When asked who inspires her - Becky's response was, "Jay, my husband, inspires me every day and has for the last 34 years. Mary Alice Jackson, a good friend of mine is amazing and keeps me going. Vincent and Susan Russo who have personally experienced the loss of Theresa have turned that loss into the Theresa Foundation that helps so many." She went on to say, "Actually, I am inspired by anyone who does good things for the right reasons." That is why Becky inspires us all.

Theresa Foundation honored at Crystal Ball



It was an honor, privilege and a real treat for me to attend the 31st Annual Long Beach Catholic School "Crystal Ball" on Saturday, November 10th. Susan, Vincent, Dante, Elizabeth and Robert were honored by being the 2007 recipients of the Community Service Award in recognition for their work and dedication to The Theresa Foundation and the countless blessings the Foundation has granted to the community and this great nation of ours. The award was well deserved.

Susan and Vincent delivered a beautiful visual and vocal presentation in their acceptance of this award. The love this family projected to each other and their community was dynamic. It is amazing to me that one little girl who did not have the ability to speak as we understand language, spoke volumes in her short life. Theresa still speaks to us when we see the joy in a child's face as they accomplish that which should be impossible, or hear the laughter of children engaging in simple play. These wonderful sights and sounds should inspire us to ask ourselves how we can make a difference in the life of one child, when one child has made the difference in the lives of thousands of children.

Jane James (Theresa's Aunt)



Save these Dates!

Let's
Dance!

Fourteenth Annual
Theresa Awards Dinner

Friday, May 2, 2008

7:30 p.m. Cocktail Reception

8:30 p.m. Dinner and Dancing

Bridgeview Yacht Club

Island Park, New York

"Swingin' Fore Theresa"



GOLF
OUTING

THERESA FOUNDATION

Mark Your Calendar!

Swingin' fore Theresa Golf Outing

Monday, June 23, 2008

Brunch 10:30 a.m.

Shot Gun Tournament at Noon

Dinner and Awards 5:30 p.m.

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