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Rising STARS recognized at Crispus Attucks

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Sparkly metal embellishments jingled on Yvette McDonnell's hips as she snaked through the crowd. When she approached the dinner tables, many children and adults from various backgrounds stood and mimicked the flowing way she moved her body.

McDonnell, recently appointed director of multicultural affairs at York College, is a professional belly dancer and uses the name Samira Nour when she performs. She combines classic Egyptian and cabaret style in her dancing, she said.

Monday, she used belly dancing to unite hundreds of people at the Crispus Attucks Association's annual Thanksgiving Celebration & Rising STARS Award Ceremony.

A variety of talents, including violin, vocal and rap performances, were showcased at the event. But McDonnell's performance inspired many in the audience to interact with her.

"I've always wanted to be a belly dancer," McDonnell, of Glen Rock, said. "It falls in line with my passion for educating people on multicultural issues."

Belly dancing also teaches women and girls to respect and value their bodies, she said.

"It's good for young girls because they develop self-esteem . . . To be happy with who they are and what they have," she said.

Crispus Attucks Youth Education Director Jacqueline Martino - who was recently named CEO of the Crispus Attucks YouthBuild Charter School - said the decade-old event is held to celebrate and value cultural diversity and those who promote a positive environment for children.

"It's to express thanks," she said. "We allow the youth to nominate different individuals . . . people they see in the community that are making a difference in the lives of children. It's important for young

people to have role models in their lives and feel like they're valued."

Sonia Loper graciously accepted her award. The York resident said she has been battling cancer for 20 years and was grateful to be part of "a village that raises our kids."

April Murray of York, a Crispus Attucks board member, said she was surprised to learn she would receive the award.

"I grew up in C.A.," Murray, 44, said. She looked around the room and said she was glad to see the diverse crowd. "Change is important." PIC: DAILY RECORD / SUNDAY NEWS - LORI CROUSE KLAUBER Samira Nour, Yvette McDonnell's performing name, dances with 9-year-old Makayla Williams of York during the annual Thanksgiving dinner at Crispus Attucks. PIC: DAILY RECORD / SUNDAY NEWS - LORI CROUSE KLAUBER Yvette McDonnell, York College's director of multicultural affairs, said belly dancing teaches women and girls to respect and value their bodies.

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