

## **15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL HEINZ AWARDS**

### **RECIPIENT BACKGROUNDER**

**Beverly Wright, Ph.D., 61, New Orleans, Louisiana**

A leading scholar on and advocate for environmental justice, Beverly Wright is honored with the Heinz Award for her work on behalf of communities, especially those in Louisiana's "Cancer Alley." As head of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Dillard University in New Orleans, she has been tackling issues of environmental racism and working to raise the profile of environmental issues in poor and minority communities nationwide.

For more than two decades, Dr. Wright has directed numerous grassroots, community-initiated programs and provided opportunities for communities, scientific researchers and decision makers to collaborate on programs and projects that promote the rights of everyone to be free from environmental harm.

Since Hurricane Katrina, much of her work at the Deep South Center has focused on research, policy and community outreach as well as assistance and education of displaced African-American residents of New Orleans. Dr. Wright, who is a professor of sociology, lost her own home to Katrina and has been an advocate of the safe return of residents, addressing the critical issues of health and environmental restoration and monitoring fairness as it relates to standards of clean up. After 200 sites around the city identified elevated lead and arsenic levels, she forged a unique partnership with the U.S. Steelworkers to launch a proactive pilot neighborhood clean-up project. The project, called A Safe Way Back Home, trained more than 60 small businesses and contractors in hazardous waste removal, mold remediation and health and safety methods and trained literally hundreds of volunteers from around the country to assist community residents in the clean-up and return to their devastated homes.

As the founding director of one of the first university-based environmental justice organizations, Dr. Wright has been at the forefront of the movement. She had an early leadership role in forging national policy to eliminate disparities involving environmental concerns and has remained steadfast in the movement's leadership since day one.

**Said Teresa Heinz, chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation:**

*"Beverly Wright understands what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said many years ago, 'A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'" For Dr. Wright, that threat to justice arrived in the form of environmental harm—too much of it from nearby chemical plants, polluted buildings and the devastation from Katrina. She showed us the disparities between rich and poor and minority communities when it comes to the environment's impact on their health. The divide exists and she has worked tirelessly to close it. I am deeply honored to award her one of this year's Heinz Awards."*

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