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Sportscaster Visser gets Couric award

Pioneered football coverage for women

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Lesley Visser, a pioneer woman sports journalist who worked her 28th NCAA Men's Basketball Championship last month in Atlanta for CBS, said she had wanted to become a sports writer "from the time I was 10 years old."

One problem with such a goal was that women did not cover major league sports in 1963 for big newspapers or broadcast networks.

When she started covering the New England Patriots as the first woman NFL beat writer in the 1970s, stadium credentials stated, "No women or children allowed in the press box." There were also no women's restroom facilities nearby.

Visser, who was honored Wednesday as the seventh recipient of the Emily Couric Women's Leadership Award, told a Charlottesville audience that her mother had given her powerful advice.

"She said, 'Sometimes you have to cross when it says Don't Walk.'"

Fellow Pro Football Hall of Fame member Howie Long, who noted that her induction last year made her the first female inductee, introduced Visser to 380 people at an Omni Charlottesville Hotel ballroom luncheon.

Past recipients of the women's leadership award include Rita Dove, Sandra Day O'Connor, Caroline Kennedy, Donna Brazile and Katie and Emily Couric, a Charlottesville state senator who died six years ago of pancreatic cancer.

The Emily Couric Leadership Forum honored 10 high school seniors from Charlottesville and Albemarle County as finalists for the Emily Couric Leadership Scholarship.

Each of the 10 was recognized by their high school for leadership,

activism and community involvement and the overall winner was Lucie Rhoads of St. Anne's-Belfield School.

Rhoads, who won a \$10,000 scholarship, said she plans to attend Vanderbilt University and to major in human and organizational development.

"I am so honored to receive this scholarship," said the leader of her high school's community service program, which involves all of the school's students in a fundraising walk this week that she said would raise \$30,000 for the University of Virginia's children's hospital.

Rhoads called Couric "an inspiration not only for women but for all the people who aspire to a life of public service."

Dr. George A. Beller, Couric's husband, said the event honoring the women "just emphasizes the tremendous contributions that Emily made to this community and to the commonwealth. ... She really took very special interest in young women in fostering their leadership aspirations."

Beller said that Couric "would be extremely pleased to see how this luncheon has expanded and developed over the years to honor these special women."

The finalists honored Wednesday with \$1,000 scholarships: Irtefa A. Binte-Farid of Albemarle High School, Natalie Oschrin of Charlottesville High School, Leanna Margaret Berrey of Covenant High School, Robin Arielle Parker of The Miller School, Elizabeth Jane Arbogast of Murray High School, Brittany Beringer of Monticello High School, Amelia Josephine Goldsmith of Renaissance School, Ariel Shaker-Brown of Tandem Friends School and Kathleen Garson of Western Albemarle High School.