

Marie Claire's
**YOUNG
WOMEN'S**
Honors

Build a single-engine airplane at 14. Win an Olympic medal in a sport you took up a mere 12 months earlier.

Write a bill that sails through Congress. These are just a few remarkable achievements by the women we will recognize, in partnership with Gina Rodriguez, on *The CW* on December 19. It is our first awards ceremony celebrating inspirational women of grit, grace, and greatness, but given just how many women out there are daring to dream and then making things happen, it certainly won't be our last.

BY BROOKE HAUSER

SIMONE BILES

The Dynamo

WORLD & OLYMPIC CHAMPION GYMNAST

The Clinique Difference Maker Award

Bona fides: After winning four gold medals and a bronze at her debut Olympics in Rio (not to mention three World Championship titles), Biles, 19, is the most decorated American gymnast of all time. **Early drive:** “I was a very hyper kid, energetic, loud, excited all the time,” says the talented Texan. “I remember being on the playground. I would always be flipping because most kids could not do it, so I thought it was unique that I could.” **Name check:** She’s been compared to Michael Jordan, LeBron James, and Tom Brady, but prefers to just be herself. “I’m not the next Usain Bolt or Michael Phelps,” she told a reporter in Rio. “I’m the first Simone Biles.” **Fan club:**

Girls want to be her; boys want to date her. Recently, while Biles was traveling for Kellogg’s Tour of Gymnastics Champions, an Iowa high schooler asked her to prom. “He tweeted me his proposal,” says Biles. “We were practicing at our last show in Omaha, Nebraska, and I look up in the audience, and I see him holding a sign.” (It read: “Number 1 in the World, Number 1 in my Heart, Simone Biles, PROM?”) Will she go? “I don’t think I’ll be able to make it,” she says. “I’m so busy.” **Dream friend date:** “Zendaya, Demi Lovato, and Zac Efron. He’s hot—I think he’s everyone’s celebrity crush,” says Biles, who got a surprise visit, and a friendly kiss, from Efron in Rio. “And where would we go? A pizza place because I love pizza.”

Tweet her: @Simone_Biles.

Photograph by CHRISTIAN WITKIN



VANESSA KERRY

The Pioneer



CEO & COFOUNDER OF SEED GLOBAL HEALTH

Life's work: Kerry is the brains behind Seed, which sends U.S. doctors and nurses to train health-care workers in places where such professionals are scarce. (Think of it as a medical Peace Corps.) Since its founding in 2011, Seed has taught more than 8,000 doctors, nurses, and midwives in Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Swaziland, and Liberia. "I don't think there's a single health problem in the world that can't be solved without some creative and intelligent thinking," says Kerry, 40. Now *that's* the kind of person you want on the front lines of the global health-care crisis. **Paging Dr. Kerry:** Somehow she manages to continue pulling shifts as an attending physician in the ICU at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital. **Biggest challenge:** Closing the gap between the "two standards of care in the world." What she means is, getting a safe surgery in the U.S. is all but guaranteed, but in countries where Seed works, "Volunteers do glove counts at the beginning of the week to figure out how many C-sections they're going to be able to do versus how many breech births they're going to have to try to deliver vaginally." **Success story:** After a Seed volunteer taught Tanzanian student Aliasgar Khaki how to resuscitate infants, he encountered a baby in a pediatric ward who had stopped breathing. "Everyone said the baby was dead," recalls Kerry, but Khaki discovered that the baby still had a pulse and said, "Actually, we can save this child." They did, and Khaki now leads neonatal resuscitation trainings around the country. "That's the kind of impact," Kerry says, "we're looking to have." **Get involved:** seedglobalhealth.org.

BLAZER, \$3,495, BRUNELLO CUCINELLI; EARRINGS, KERRY'S OWN. Photograph by JAN WELTERS

MC's
YOUNG
WOMEN'S
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INVENTOR & FOUNDER OF
UNCHARTED PLAY

Passion project: As a 19-year-old Harvard University student, Matthews invented the SOCKET, a soccer ball that generates energy as it's kicked around. In 2011, she founded Uncharted Play and began distributing the ball and a jump rope called PULSE in developing countries with spotty grids, whose residents can use the toys to power their homes. **Bragging rights:** Everyone from Bill Gates to Ashton Kutcher is a fan, and in 2012, President Barack Obama invited her to represent small businesses at the signing of the America Invents Act. **Honorable mentions:** U.S. Chief Technology Officer Megan Smith once called her “the Elon Musk of kinetic energy,” but Matthews, now 28, has other bold-facers in mind. “I always tell people that I want to be the perfect balance of Bill Nye the Science Guy and Beyoncé,” she says, adding, “but I really should be saying Marie Curie and Beyoncé.” **New guard:** “It’s my prayer that I can be successful enough that when people think about the pattern for a CEO, they’re not just looking for a Mark Zuckerberg—they’re looking for a Jessica Matthews, too,” she says. “Can you imagine being able to walk around as a black girl and people being like, ‘I’m going to assume that you’re going to run a \$5 million business?’” **To-do list:** Integrating the technology into anything that moves, from suitcases to baby strollers: “Imagine a world where everything around us is a source of power.” **Get involved:** unchartedplay.com.

TOP, \$540, KENZO; EARRINGS, \$3,500, ROSE-GOLD RING, PRICE UPON REQUEST, CARTIER; SILVER RING, MATTHEWS' OWN.

Photograph by CHRISTIAN WITKIN



The Innovator
JESSICA O. MATTHEWS

COMPUTER SCIENTIST &
FOUNDER OF CODE TO INSPIRE

The Google Made With Code Award

Passion project: In 2015, Forough, a former professor of computer science at Herat University, opened the first all-female coding school in Afghanistan. Its first graduating class of 50 women collected their certificates in December. **For the win:** “All the girls at our school were raised during the Taliban regime, and most didn’t have access to computers,” says Forough, 29. “It’s a huge accomplishment to see girls who didn’t even know how to use the Internet now writing code.”

To-do list: Open branches beyond Herat in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, and eventually, throughout the Middle East and Africa.

Dream dinner party: “I would invite three of the most influential people in tech: Mark Zuckerberg, Sheryl Sandberg, and Elon Musk,” she says. “They’re visionaries, and they made something happen that people thought was impossible.” What’s on the menu? “I would serve *qabuli*: rice with meat, raisins, carrots, and almonds—it’s a very famous dish in Afghanistan.” **Learn more:** codetoinspire.org.

TOP, \$425, MICHELLE MASON; RING, \$2,634, DJJULA; SCARF, FOROUGH'S OWN.

Photograph by CHRISTIAN WITKIN

FERESHTEH FOROUGH

The Revolutionary



FASHION EDITOR: BRITTANY KOZERSKI; MATTHEWS: HAIR: AMANIN MADRIS; MAKEUP: NIA THOMAS; FOROUGH: MAKEUP: BANK AT FACTORY DOWNTOWN



The Trailblazer
AMANDA NGUYEN

SURVIVOR ACTIVIST & FOUNDER OF RISE

Bona fides: In 2014, Nguyen launched Rise, a nonprofit of Millennial activists fighting for the civil rights of rape victims. In October, President Barack Obama signed the sexual-assault Survivors' Bill of Rights—which Nguyen wrote—into law. “I’m proof that you can change your country,” says Nguyen, 25, who celebrated the victory with friends on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. **The impetus:** “This law was born from my experience with the broken justice system,” says Nguyen, who was raped in 2013 in Massachusetts, where evidence from her rape kit could be destroyed after six months unless she kept filing to preserve it. “Survivors are continually victimized by the very system that was built to seek justice for them. I had a choice: I could accept the injustice or rewrite the law.” **Best advice:** “The most important thing is just showing up,” says the former deputy White House liaison for the State Department. “People don’t realize how powerful their own voices can be. We asked people to call or tweet at their member of Congress. Elected officials see that, and it makes a difference.” Maybe that’s why her legislation received zero opposition votes in both the House and the Senate. **To-do list:** The two-time NASA intern dreams of becoming an astronaut. “Astronauts often experience what’s called ‘the overview effect,’ which happens when they see Earth for the first time. They leave as technicians but return as humanitarians with the understanding that we’re all on this Earth together.” If that doesn’t pan out? She’d like to be president of the United States. You go, girl. **Sign on:** risenow.us.

DRESS, \$2,483, JIL SANDER; EARRINGS, \$1,600, HEARTS ON FIRE.
 Photograph by JAN WELTERS

PARALYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST

Bona fides: McFadden won six medals in wheelchair-racing events at the Rio Paralympics. Her trophy case boasts a total of 17 Paralympic medals and 15 World ParaAthletics medals, plus she’s won 16 major marathons. **Backstory:** Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, with spina bifida, McFadden, 27, spent her first six years in an orphanage without a wheelchair. “I wanted to be just like all the other kids and go everywhere they were going,” she says. “So I learned how to walk on my hands and to scoot on the ground.” She was adopted at age 6 by an American woman in Maryland. **Sweetest victory:** In 2011, she tracked down her birth parents in Russia. Soon after, she learned that the 2014 Winter Olympics would be held there, in Sochi. “I wanted my birth family and my [adoptive] family to [see me compete],” McFadden says. **Minor detail:** She didn’t compete in any winter sports. But within a year, she’d transformed herself into a cross-country ski racer and went on to win silver. **Role model:** “When you think of tennis, you think Serena Williams—I hope to do the same for wheelchair racing.” **Follow her:** tatyanamcfadden.com.

The Champion
TATYANA MCFADDEN



MCFADDEN: SEAN M. HARFEY/GETTY IMAGES; NGUYEN & MAXEY: FASHION EDITOR: ALISON EDMOND; HAIR: JENNY CHO AT STARWORKS; ARTISTS: MAKEUP: PATI DUBROFF AT FORWARD ARTISTS; MANICURE: FLAR NOIRE AT WALLING HOLLISTWOOD PRODUCTION; ALICIA ZUMBACK AT CAMP PRODUCTIONS

MC's
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CREATIVE TECHNOLOGIST & FOUNDER OF LOOMIA

The Lord & Taylor Rose Award

Passion project: Imagine wearing electricity-conducting clothes capable of heating themselves, sensing when the wearer is lifting something too heavy, and telling parents if their kid is being pushed around at school. Maxey's Brooklyn-based company, Loomia, is heading toward that future with electronic textiles, or "smart fabric." **Early**

drive: "I loved making things, especially stuffed animals and clothes, when I was in high school," she says. But what other teenagers intern for Tommy Hilfiger and *Nylon* magazine? Such experiences led Maxey to study fashion design in college, but she dropped out after a semester when she won a Thiel Fellowship, which famously awards \$100,000 to fellows to skip college and pursue their big ideas instead. **Best advice:**

"Learn skills," says Maxey, who also writes code. "If you learn how to build or sew or code or design something, you'll always have a place." **Bragging rights:** In 2015, the now 23-year-old built the electronics for an LED dress by Zac Posen for Google's Made With Code initiative.

Maxey now counts North Face and Topshop among Loomia's partners and collaborators. Even the Obama administration has tapped her for wearable-tech advice. **Secret talent:** "I play the saxophone. A lot of jazz, especially jazz improv, is about learning skills, notes, and rules, and how you can break them. I think that's why I like this industry so much—there aren't many rules yet, so it's a great chance to create my own."

Learn more: loomia.co.

DRESS, \$375, HALSTON HERITAGE;
EARRINGS, MAXEY'S OWN.

Photograph by JAN WELTERS

The Futurist
MADISON MAXEY



SABRINA
The Genius
GONZALEZ PASTERSKI

PHYSICIST & HARVARD PH.D. CANDIDATE

Bragging Rights: The 23-year-old has been name-checked by Stephen Hawking and called “the next Einstein” by her Harvard mentors; she has a standing job offer from Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. **Early drive:** “When I was little, I wanted to design spacecraft,” says the Chicago native, who did the next best thing and took flying lessons at age 9. When she was 12, she began building a single-engine airplane from a kit in her garage; it took two years to complete. Once it was certified as airworthy, she took it for a spin, becoming the youngest person in history, at age 16, to build and fly her own plane. That same year, she was admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. **Words of advice:** “Be optimistic about what you believe you can do,” says Pasterski, who in 2013 was the first woman in two decades to graduate from MIT at the top of her physics class. (And she did it in just three years while she was still in her teens.) “When you’re little, you say a lot of things about what you’ll do or be when you’re older—I think it’s important not to lose sight of those dreams.” **Motivating motto:** “What have you done *lately*?” **Check her out:** physicsgirl.com.

JACKET, \$498, POLO RALPH LAUREN. Photograph by JAN WELTERS

FASHION EDITOR: ALISON EDMOND; HAIR: JENNY CHO AT STARWORKS ARTISTS; MAKEUP: PATI DUBROFF AT FORWARD ARTISTS; MANICURE: PILAR NOIRE AT NAILING HOLLYWOOD; PRODUCTION: ALICIA ZUMBAC AT CAMP PRODUCTIONS

“THERE ARE GIRLS ALL OVER THE WORLD WHO ARE HUNGRY TO LEARN AND WHO TAKE EXTRAORDINARY RISKS JUST TO HAVE A CHANCE TO FULFILL THEIR POTENTIAL.”

RIGHT: Michelle Obama, who founded Let Girls Learn in March 2015



The Role Model MICHELLE OBAMA

MARIE CLAIRE'S YOUNG WOMEN'S HONORS IS ALL ABOUT INSPIRATION. WHAT BETTER PARTNER THAN THE FIRST LADY'S LET GIRLS LEARN?

FROM TOP LEFT: Obama with girls on International Women's Day in March 2016; the first lady at a Let Girls Learn presentation in Madrid; Albertha, 19, is studying business in Liberia thanks to Let Girls Learn



Michelle Obama knows how much work it can take for a girl to get an education. Growing up in a cramped, noisy apartment on the South Side of Chicago, she often woke up at 4 a.m. to study in peace. “I can tell you, my education has been the key to everything I’ve been able to achieve in my life,” the first lady told *MC*. “So for me, this issue has always been personal.” Which is why, in March 2015, she launched Let Girls Learn (LGL), a bold initiative to raise awareness about the fact that, worldwide, 98 million girls are out of school. “There are girls all over the world who are hungry to learn and who take extraordinary risks just to have a chance to fulfill their potential,” Obama says. “I knew I wanted to make it my mission to help them get the education they deserve.”

Nearly two years later, LGL has invested more than \$1 billion in new and ongoing government programming in over 50 countries; signed on 11 nations—from the U.K. to Mexico to South Korea—with some pledging an additional \$600 million; and enlisted more than 100 companies and organizations to pitch in supplies, expertise, and financial support. Such investments are already making an impact in Pakistan, where 12-year-old Sana Sufiyan, who used to work eight-hour shifts in a shoe factory, is now learning to read and write after an LGL grantee persuaded her parents to enroll her in school; and in Malawi, where Halima Robert, who was forced to drop out of school to wed at 15, had her marriage annulled and continued her studies thanks to an LGL program that discourages child marriage. “I carry the stories of the girls I’ve met with me every day,” Obama says. “Their passion, intelligence, and determination are an inspiration to me, and I plan to keep speaking out on their behalf, not just for the rest of my time as first lady, but for the rest of my life.” *Take action to help girls around the world get an education. Go to letgirlslearn.gov to find out how to get involved.* —Kayla Webley Adler

FROM TOP: ART STREIBER/AUGUST AP PHOTO/CAROLYN KASTER, BURAK ANILUTAN/ADOLU/AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES, NEIL BRAND/OLD/USAID