Skating phenom Alysa Liu honored at Richmond State of City

By: Mike Kinney and Mike Aldax February 27, 2019

Richmond gleamed with Pride and Purpose Tuesday night, when Mayor Tom Butt honored four famous community members during his State of the City address.

Among the special guests honored were Alysa Liu, the 13-year-old who this year became the youngest to ever win the women’s U.S. Figure Skating Championships; Betty Reid Soskin,
famous National Park Service ranger who was named as one of the 2018 Women of the Year by *Glamour Magazine*; Marcus Faumui, the Richmond firefighter and cancer survivor named the hardest-working person in the U.S. by United Airlines last year; and Najari Smith, the Rich City Rides founder who recently won the Jefferson Award for community volunteerism.

The four champions in their own rite received standing ovations at the State of the City.

“Now these are not all the famous people in Richmond,” Mayor Butt said. “We thought it was a good sample and represents the best that Richmond has to offer.”

Richmond Mayor Tom Butt (far left) honors four distinguished community members during his State of the City on Friday, July 26, 2019, including, from left to right, Rich City Rides founder Najari Smith, Richmond firefighter Marcus Faumui, National Park Service ranger Betty Reid Soskin, and skating phenom Alysa Liu. (photo by Mike Kinney)

In addition to being a guest of honor, Liu received a city proclamation honoring her massive victory in the free skate competition at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships. Not only was she
the youngest to win it, she received the highest technical element score in the competition and became the youngest female skater to land a triple axel at the U.S. Nationals.

She began skating at age 5, skated in her first competition in 2015, and at age 9 qualified to compete at the senior level.

“The city of Richmond is delighted to have a resident with such incomparable talent,” said Councilmember Melvin Willis.

Liu, accompanied at the State of the City by her father, Arthur, told the Richmond Standard what it takes to be a national champ.

“If you want to skate too, you can; just follow your dreams,” she said. “Don’t let anybody make you do it. And don’t do it for them. Do it for yourself.”

Soskin needed no introduction. At 97, she’s the oldest person serving as a permanent National Park Service ranger, and was integral in establishing the Rosie the Riveter/WWII Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond. She’s also an author, community and civil rights activist and perhaps one of the nation’s most electric speakers.

Mayor Butt called her a “moral compass in challenging and chaotic times,” and praised her honor as one the 2018 Glamour Women of the Year. Soskin was, as always, humbled by the recognition Tuesday.

“I have found after a long life that if you live long enough, you begin to get awards for being able to tie your own shoes,” she said.
Another humble guest of honor, Faumui denied being the hardest working person in the U.S. — even though he took his physical agility test at the same time as he endured chemotherapy. The firefighter who battled cancer, is known to work 60 to 70 hours weekly and organized a benefit for foster children was named “hardest working” among 30,000 nominations across the country.

His wife nominated him for the award.

“Nowhere near am I the hardest working person,” he said. “Little kids deal with cancer all the time. I’m just lucky enough to have a beautiful wife who cares about me. Lucky enough to be a firefighter, too.”
Richmond firefighter Marcus Faumui (right) seated alongside his wife, Alma, at the State of the City address on July 27, 2019.

Smith also declined to take credit for his accomplishments, citing the Richmond community as the catalyst. The well-known bicycle and transportation activist in Richmond and the East Bay has been fighting to increase sustainability in modes of travel, along with mental health and community-building. His grassroots efforts earned him the prestigious Jefferson Award for community volunteerism.

“It’s because of you all who come together to make the city great is why I’m up here today,” Smith said.

Smith gave shout outs to other community members doing great work before inviting city residents to the weekly Sunday rides Rich City Rides leads from Unity Park, leaving at 10:30 a.m.
“If you don’t have a bike, we’ll make sure to provide you with one,” Smith said. “At Rich City Rides we want to make sure no one is left out of the movement.”