

(Entertainment AIDS Alliance 2011 Visionary Honors program content)

## Pam Grier – 2011 Honoree

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Quentin Tarantino called her “Hollywood’s first female action star.” Film fan-site Rotten Tomatoes ranked her as the second-greatest female action heroine in movie history. And *Ebony Magazine* named her one of the “100 Most Fascinating Women of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” Movie fans the world over clearly concur—Pam Grier is a distinctly unique icon in the world of cinema. As the star of a series of classic “Blaxploitation” films in the early 1970s, she not only helped define that genre, she opened the door to starring roles in action films for both women and minorities alike.

Among Grier’s most celebrated films is the mid-’70s troika—*Foxy Brown*, *Coffy* and *Sheba, Baby*, which established her as the first bona fide female action star. Grier’s most acclaimed film, however, may be her 1997 big-screen

comeback vehicle, *Jackie Brown*, director Quentin Tarantino's homage to the aforementioned films and their alluring star. For her work in that film, Pam received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress and won Screen Actors Guild and Satellite awards.

Pamala Suzette "Pam" Grier was born in May 1949 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the daughter of Gwendolyn Sylvia, a homemaker and nurse, and Clarence Ransom Grier, who worked as a mechanic and Technical Sergeant in the U.S. Air Force. Her family moved frequently during her childhood, eventually settling in Denver, where she appeared in a number of stage productions and participated in beauty contests to raise money for college tuition.



She moved to Los Angeles in 1967 and, while working as a receptionist at American International Pictures, was discovered by director Jack Hill, who cast her in his "women in prison" films *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *The Big Bird Cage* (1972). She soon became a staple in Blaxploitation films beginning with 1973's *Coffy*, in which her character was advertised in the trailer as the "baddest one-chick hit-squad that ever hit town!" With the demise of the genre, Grier migrated to a number of memorable roles in film and television including *Fort Apache: The Bronx*, Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, *Roots: The Next Generation*, *Miami Vice*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and *The Cosby Show*.

Pam Grier's "leading lady" status was revitalized with *Jackie Brown*, and she's been back in the spotlight ever since. In 2000, she earned an Emmy Award nomination for her work in the animated *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child* and went on to land featured roles in such top-rated TV series as

*Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Smallville* and *The L Word*, for which her role as Kit Porter has earned her both critical and popular acclaim. In 2010, Pam added “best-selling author” to her resume when her memoir, “Foxy: My Life in Three Acts,” topped the *New York Times*’ non-fiction list.



Throughout this celebrated career, Pam Grier has made a consistent and wide-reaching commitment to philanthropic and humanitarian causes. An unswerving supporter of LGBT issues, including Marriage Equality and suicide prevention, Pam's support of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is renowned.

An avid lover of animals, Pam is a dedicated advocate in the rescue and care of neglected horses and, in a unique program in Colorado, trains them for a therapeutic riding program for handicapped and disabled children. Pam was also a driving force in the effort to rescue abandoned animals in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, securing temporary housing for animals until new homes could be found. Another personal passion of Pam's is the community garden she sponsors on the grounds of Fort Worth's National Multicultural Heritage Museum.



A benefactor of numerous scholarship-based programs, it's only fitting that, in 2011, Grier was the recipient of two Honorary Doctorates from the University of Maryland and Langston University. Presumably, those honors and a life well-spent compensate for the dream of an Ivy League education that Pam Grier reluctantly abandoned when stardom came calling. Filmdom's and society's gain, indeed.

