

Making a Difference

Capitol Hill Group Ministry Honors Capitol Hill Volunteers

BY PATTIE CINELLI

At the annual Interfaith Thanksgiving service held at St. Mark's Episcopal Church on Nov. 23, the Capitol Hill Group Ministry celebrated the contributions of men and women who volunteer their time, money and expertise to help others.

Members of 14 congregations nominated those whose generosity stood out in 2008. The honorees and others worshipped together at the service led by clergy from 10 congregations, and listened to a performance by the Capitol Hill Chorale.

There was a special tribute to Linda Parke Gallagher, co-chair and board president of Barracks Row Main Street, and Harold (Hal) Gordon, founder of the Holy Comforter St. Cyprian Community Action Group (CAG). These two remarkable members of the Capitol Hill community passed away this summer.

"This is the fifth year that Capitol Hill Group Ministry (CHGM) has celebrated community service on the Hill," said Barfonce Baldwin, CHGM executive director. "As we gave thanks for these contributions, we also celebrated the opportunity to bring together community members from a number of faith traditions to share fellowship and a common commitment to service."

The 14 honorees and the religious institutions that nominated them are: Frances D'Antuono, St. Joseph's on Capitol Hill; Dr. Rosalie S. Johnson & Sandra Austin, Capitol Hill Seventh-Day Adventist Church; Phil Burton, Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church; Ellen Opper-Weiner, Hill Havura; Carol Watson, Unity Church of Washington DC; Terrell Lewis, Washington City Church of the Brethren; Baseemah Beyah, Masjid Muhammad; Jack Richards, St. Mark's Episcopal Church; Susan Sedgewick, Capitol Hill Group Ministry; Sue Marullo, Capitol Hill United Methodist Church; Joseph Freeman, Ebenezer United Methodist Church.

I interviewed five of the volun-

teers recognized at this year's service. During this time of financial uncertainty, learning about how neighbors give of themselves to those in our neighborhood who really have little or nothing may put our own circumstances in perspective.

Terrell Lewis

Terry Lewis said that if you are really a Christian you have an obligation to answer God's call. Terry got the call this summer when the Washington City Church of the Brethren's nutrition program didn't have a cook to make lunches for its 70-120 needy patrons. "My grandmother taught me how to cook when I was a little boy."

He laughed. "I enjoy cooking, so instead of letting the program go by the wayside, I did what was right, donned an apron and have been cooking ever since." Four days a week, Terry's day begins at 8 a.m. when he gets to the church and prepares the food that is served for lunch. Clean up usually goes until about 3 p.m. Then he returns to his regular duties as facilities manager at the church where he has been a member for 10 years. "Choosing grace over greed is the way it swirls around in my head. Even on a difficult day, I enjoy what I do. There is a great deal of satisfaction knowing we've done our best to care for people."

Terry said his church couldn't do what it does without the help from a lot of people on Capitol Hill. If you want to help call 202-546-8706.

Jack Richards

Jack Richards is one of those people whose help Terry Lewis couldn't do without. Jack coordinates the collection, preparation and delivery of casseroles from St. Mark's Episcopal



Front row: Chaplain Sandra Austin, Ellen Opper-Weiner, CHGM Employee of the Quarter Parchelle Brooks, Dr. Rosalie Johnson, Baseemah Beyah, Sue Marullo, Back row: Joseph Freeman, Phil Burton, Terrell Lewis, Fran D'Antuono, MaryJoy Ballentyne, Stephanie Soper, Darrin Howell, Jack Richards, (not shown: Susan Sedgewick, Carol Watson).

Church's congregation for the Washington City Church of the Brethren's nutrition program and has been doing it for nine years. "My goal is to motivate and not lose sight of the 20-casserole minimum." Jack is known to entertain celebrants at Sunday services with his humorous weekly calls for casseroles. He also coordinates a team, whose number ranges from 2 to 11, to buy and chop vegetables on Sunday nights that are used to make soup served during the week. "In the past, we chopped 150 lbs of cabbages and onions, sometimes having to use a cleaver to hack them up. Now we changed the menu to carrots, potatoes and broccoli."

Susan Sedgewick

Susan Sedgewick is one of the stalwarts of the Capitol Hill Group Ministry. She served on the board for six years and was President. She became aware of CHGM through her membership in St. Mark's 13 years ago when she saw CHGM collecting Thanksgiving baskets for the poor. While her contributions are many, she

was recognized for her tremendous work spearheading the renovation of Shirley's Place, a small townhouse on G Street, SE, which provides a place for workshops, respite, light meals and case management for families and homeless people in crisis. "After a group of dedicated women got together to raise \$250,000 for the renovation, I asked for pro bono assistance from interior designers, other churches, contractors, Hill businesses, the Capitol Hill Community Foundation and others on and around the Hill and coordinated their efforts to make the project a reality." A year ago the newly designed Shirley's Place opened.

Ellen Opper-Weiner

Hill Havurah named Ellen Opper-Weiner for her years of community service. When I asked her to talk about her volunteer work she had to make a list of all the organizations to which she gives her time. "I've been a volunteer all my life. It's part of what I do. I like it." Ellen, who has lived on the Hill for 31 years, serves on the Dept. of Corrections Community Ad-

visory Committee, she's vice-chair of the board of directors for SAFE Inc, which serves survivors of domestic violence and chairs their resource development committee. Ellen is chair of Neighbors United Inc., a Hill East group providing services to elementary and high school students; she's on the steering committee of the Hill East Waterfront Action Network; she's also on the board of Our Nation's Capitol, Inc., which works on the issue of fiscal imbalance. And she's been a long-term member of the CHAMPS (Capitol Hill Association of Merchants and Professionals) economic development committee. Ellen does all this while maintaining her own law practice.

Fran D'Antuono

Fran D'Antuono has been a criminal defense lawyer since 1982, representing the poor in criminal cases for 27 years. "It's literally a vocational call that I answered. If you represent the poor, you'll always be poor. But I love it. It's a way for me to share the lives of my clients and the life of the Lord as well." Over the years, because Fran became well known in the courts for her work, her clients seek her out. "The Lord sends them to me, if you must know the truth. Often I'm the third, fourth or fifth lawyer on the case. People are not always easy to love, but if that's your call you love them no matter what. It's been a wonderful 27 years." Fran not only represents the poor, she also becomes their friend. "People stay in my life forever." Fran also is involved in the ministry and liturgy of her church, St. Joseph's on Capitol Hill. For years she coordinated all liturgical ministries while also serving in those ministries and singing in the choir.

CHGM is a community based non-profit founded in 1967 to engage neighbors, congregations and organizations in the community to celebrate a shared commitment to social justice. The CHGM puts faith into action that empowers and provides hope for families and individuals who are homeless or in crisis. To learn about CHGM and volunteer opportunities log onto: www.capitolhillgroupministry.org. ★



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