

# The 2009 Capitol Hill Community Achievement Awards



From Left to Right: Rosetta Brooks, Donna Scheeder and Judy and Mike Canning.

BY STEPHANIE DEUTSCH

Each spring, the Capitol Hill Community Foundation gives three awards for extraordinary service to our neighborhood. This year's honorees are Rosetta Brooks, director of the St. Mark's Dance Studio; Donna Scheeder, chairman of the Eastern Market Community Action Committee (EMCAC) and a leader in DC Democratic politics; and Judy and Mike Canning, volunteers with a long history of leadership in neighborhood organizations.

They will be honored for their contributions to the Capitol Hill community at a gala dinner at the

Folger Shakespeare Library on April 29. It is a fundraising event supporting the community grants program of the Foundation, which distributes \$200,000 each year in small grants to neighborhood groups and projects. For information about sponsoring the dinner or purchasing tickets, please inquire at [info@capitolhillcommunityfoundation.org](mailto:info@capitolhillcommunityfoundation.org).

## Rosetta Brooks

Rosetta Brooks – universally called Rosie – grew up on 6th St. SE. Her first elementary school was

Giddings, in the building that now houses Results Gym, and she went to junior high school at Hine, “the old Hine,” she says referring to the building which burned in 1961, the year she graduated. Although she has lived for over twenty years in Vienna, VA, her heart is very much in this community where, until recently, her mother, who also grew up on the Hill, still lived, and where each week Rosie teaches dance to children and adults at three different venues.

From her first lesson as a small child, Rosie has

loved dance and has wanted to teach it. She was born with two club feet and the doctor who performed the surgery that corrected them suggested that dance would be good for her. Her mother found the Florence Blackwell dance studio off of Central Ave., SE and there Rosie got "good basic training" in ballet and tap. As a teenager she studied jazz dance with local teacher Lola Beaver and, later, at Howard University where she went after graduating from Dunbar High School.

At Howard, Rosie often danced with George Faison, who went on to dance with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and to be a Tony Award winning choreographer. It was he who told her in 1964 that a fledgling, semi-professional dance company based at St. Mark's Church on Capitol Hill needed a quick study to fill in for someone who was sick. Rosie took the part, learned it quickly and was hired as part of the company.

The dance company performed regularly at St. Mark's and other churches, at the National Theatre where they gave a children's show, on local television and in the Arlington and DC public schools. The studio also offered a full range of classes for children and adults in ballet and jazz dance. Since the death of studio founder Mary Craighill in 1999, it is Rosie who has been the director of the studio and has kept the Company together, producing twice yearly adult recitals in addition to the children's programs and teaching eighteen hours of class a week (the staff at St. Mark's includes two other teachers as well). She has done choreography for several productions of the St. Mark's Players, created liturgical dance that has been part of worship services, and has specialized in helping people who are not highly trained find satisfaction as dancers. With the help of an appointed Dance Board, Rosie makes recommendations for a scholarship in dance funded by an endowment honoring Mary Craighill.

Rosie also teaches dance at St. Peter's Interparish school, and at the TGIF after-school program for low-income children in Capitol Hill Methodist Church. It does not seem possible that this schedule would leave time for other employment, but Rosie also works part time as office manager at Garden Memorial Presbyterian Church in Anacostia.

In May of 1968 Rosie married Arthur Brooks, and they had two children, Antoinette and Joseph. The young family lived in an apartment in Anacostia but they were concerned about the quality of the schools there so, with the help of a gift of land from Rosie's late father-in-law, they moved to Vienna. Almost twenty years ago, when their children were still in their teens, her husband died suddenly of a heart attack. With the upbeat attitude that has influenced so many of her students, Rosie remembers that, "We buried him on the Wednesday and the next day I cooked Thanksgiving dinner. One of the things that got me through that was dance."

### Donna Scheeder

Raised in buffalo, NY, Donna Scheeder came to Washington with an eye on a career with the State Department. It was what she calls her "Clare Booth Luce" period which sent her to Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service where she studied history, government and economics. As a freshman student she volunteered to go to the office of her congressman to sign Christmas cards and she remembers that first trip to Capitol Hill as "the most exciting thing." She graduated from Georgetown and passed the notoriously difficult foreign service exam, but by then she had shifted her sights and begun her career on Capitol Hill as a researcher with the Congressional Research Service.

She rose quickly through the ranks, helping to build the resources of the CRS, then becoming coordinator of legislative research and in 2004 being recruited to head the Law Library of Congress.

Donna's first home on Capitol Hill was an apartment on 3rd St. SE. She was then married to theater director Louis Scheeder, who had been lured to Washington to help create a theater group to perform at the Folger Shakespeare Library. O.B. Hardison, the head of the Folger, and Hill doyenne Margot Kelly lived nearby, as did actors who came to town for particular productions. It was a "cohesive, fun" block with lots of porch sitting on summer evenings and cooking and eating together. Shopping at the Eastern Market for cheese and vegetables, crabcake sandwiches at Market Lunch and



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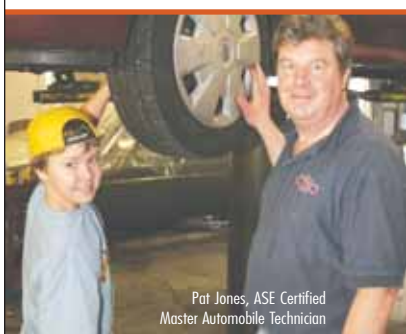
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meeting friends in the “turkey line” on the day before Thanksgiving became a regular, treasured part of Donna’s life.

By the late ‘70s and early ‘80s what Donna calls “the market wars” had begun to rage. The much beloved, hundred year old structure housing Eastern Market was in need of renovation and repair but discussions among members of the community, city administrators and the merchants on just how those improvements should proceed, produced at best a stalemate. “It never seemed to be productive,” Donna remembers. By then she had become involved in the Ward 6 Democrats, working on get-out-the-vote phone banks, running for precinct captain and winning, and serving on the state Democratic committee. When City Council member Sharon Ambrose succeeded in brokering a deal that put all the Market stakeholders at the table, she appointed Donna as her representative on the newly created Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee (EMCAC) which also included representatives of the mayor’s office, the ANC, Stanton Park Neighborhood Association, the Restoration Society, CHAMPS (the Capitol Hill Association of Merchants and Professionals) and three different merchant groups. The members of the committee, which met monthly in public as well as privately for committee meetings, elected Donna as chair.

Work was tedious and slow but, applying the same administrative skills she had developed at the Library, Donna persisted. One goal was to get the entire market under unified management. The other was to create a plan for renovation of the building that all could live with. “We were charged with maintaining the market experience,” Donna remembers, but with many powerful personalities and conflicting interests it was hard to achieve consensus.

At the end of April 2007, Donna smelled smoke in the air late one evening and awoke early the next morning to the news on the radio that Washington D.C.’s historic Eastern market was on fire. She threw on her clothes and ran over, where she found Mayor Adrian Fenty, City Council member Tommy Wells, many of the market’s merchants and a crowd of neighbors watching in shock as the market burned. The fire was devastating and yet, Donna now sees, it was in some ways “a blessing in disguise.” The painstaking work to create plans for the building’s renovation had already been done. A phased renovation, which is what had been envisioned so that the market could remain open while it was updated, would have been much more difficult. Now the work could move forward quickly. With the “wonderful” support of the mayor, his deputy Dan Tangherlini, and council member Wells, the incredible outpouring of financial donations from the community and the efforts of the Capitol Hill Community Foundation, and the

ongoing hard work of EMCAC, the market is set to re-open on schedule late this spring.

Donna feels that the enormous amount of time she has spent in meetings about the market over the past few years has been rewarding. “It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done,” she says, noting that the day the market reopens she plans to take two “victory laps” around it.

## Judy and Mike Canning

Judy and Mike Canning met as young students on the ship carrying them to Europe to study German. During a shipboard romance they discovered that they shared Midwestern roots – she is from Evanston, Illinois; he grew up in Fargo, North Dakota – and just about everything else. Living in Berlin made them both realize how much they loved the variety of experience offered by big cities and suggested to Mike the idea of a career in the Foreign Service with a specialization in the work of the United States Information Agency. A year after their return from Germany, they were married and living in an apartment on Capitol Hill.

The years since then have alternated between overseas assignments and periods here in Washington. As a “very green twenty-four year old” Mike was assigned to the press office at the embassy in Managua, Nicaragua and a year later he and Judy moved to Lima, Peru. Judy taught English as a second language, studied Spanish and enjoyed exploring the museums and pre-Colombian sites of Peru. They were assigned to Uganda, Kenya and then to Rome, which was perhaps, the highlight of Mike’s career. He was the embassy press officer, charged with explaining U.S. policy to Italian journalists. Both he and Judy learned Italian which Mike put to use, among other things, conducting an interview with actress Gina Lollabrigida. Judy studied Roman history and art and they explored much of the country. It was “fun to get back to Spanish” when Mike was assigned to head the USIA office in Buenos Aires, a “great, cosmopolitan city.” Their final assignment was Brasilia where they gamely tackled another language, Portuguese.

On their first return to D.C., with a new baby, and looking for a house to rent, Judy and Mike were surprised when a realtor asked them, “Have you considered buying?” In fact, they had saved some money (“There’s nothing to spend money on in Managua,” Mike says) and before they knew it they had purchased the house on Fifth St. SE where they still live today. It was the baby-sitting coop as much as anything else that during those early years made them feel at home on the Hill. “It was an institution like no other,” Mike remembers. “What would we have done without it?” A second daughter was born during that first return to Washington.

More and more, Judy and Mike found they

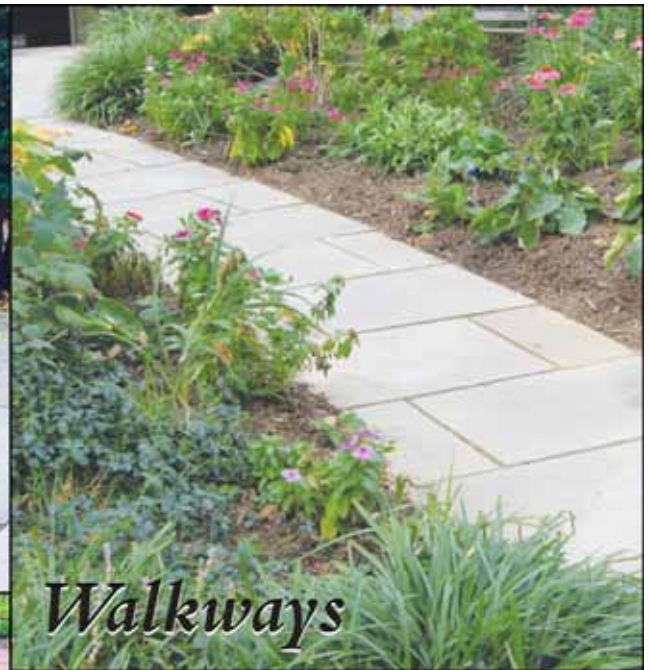
looked forward to coming back to D.C. because they knew they were returning to a community. With their daughters enrolled at Brent, Judy worked as a volunteer at the Textile Museum, took her children to classes at CHAW and at St. Mark's (they remember studying dance with Rosie). Judy volunteered with Reading is Fundamental and worked as the librarian at the Edmund Burke school where one of her daughters was studying.

And after Mike's retirement in 1993, they plunged more fully into the life of Capitol Hill. For ten years they delivered meals to homebound HIV patients with Food & Friends; Judy worked as a court-appointed special advocate helping children who had been removed from their families and were involved in the judicial system. Mike remained active as a consultant to the State Department, but he also began a second career as a movie reviewer, writing from thirty to fifty reviews a year for the past ten years for the Hill Rag. In 1999 he and Judy founded Films on the Hill, a volunteer-run film society associated with CHAW that shows movies from the 1910s to the 1950s from the original 16 mm prints. Judy began singing with the Capitol Hill Chorale and represented that group on the CHAW board. In 1998 when CHAW was temporarily without an executive director, Judy volunteered to be acting director at no pay and, along with bookkeeper Caron Anton, straightened out a crush of financial problems and hired a new, very successful director.

Most recently, after a conversation on a street corner hooked them on the idea of a local non-profit dedicated to enabling people to stay in their homes on the Hill as they get older, Judy and Mike were among the founders of Capitol Hill Village. Mike served on the search committee that hired the Village's first executive director, Gail Kohn. There is no place, they say, that they would rather live. And, thanks to the community, they plan to stay in their home here forever. ★



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