

Four honored as community heroes in Jefferson County

By Jeff Chew_Peninsula Daily News; May 12, 2010



Four community heroes were honored by three local Rotary Clubs on Tuesday. Clockwise, from left, are Mary Ann Verneuil (accepting for Gay Eisenberger), Mike Blair, Shirley Moss and Margaret Matheson. -- Photo by Charlie Bermant/Peninsula Daily News

PORT TOWNSEND -- Four hardworking, dedicated volunteers and community heroes were honored Tuesday with the Jefferson County Heart of Service award for 2010.

Mike Blair, Gay Eisenberger, Margaret Matheson and Shirley Moss were recognized at a luncheon attended by about 100 Rotarians, family members and guests at the Port Townsend Elks Club.

The Heart of Service honors the "dedication, sacrifice and accomplishments" of community leaders and volunteers "who have made a difference in Jefferson County, who have made our communities a better place by doing extraordinary things for their neighbors, their community or the environment."

It was the fifth year for the annual award, sponsored by the Peninsula Daily News, Rotary Club of Port Townsend (noon club), Port Townsend Sunrise Rotary Club and the East Jefferson Rotary Club.

A judging committee from each club selected the four Heart of Service recipients from nominations made by individuals, clubs, churches, businesses and other organizations.

"This is a day about community, and about heroism, and where the two join together," said John Brewer, PDN publisher.

"This is a day about ordinary people of extraordinary community accomplishments. This is a day about four people whose unselfish efforts have made Jefferson County a better place."

Brewer said the nominees were "inspirational in both spirit and deed," and they have made "a meaningful difference in the lives of our neighbors and our communities."

"They have inspired and engaged others," he said. "They get the job done. They deserve analysis -- and imitation."

Blair

Marylynne Gates of the East Jefferson Rotary Club and a Heart of Service awards judge, introduced Blair as "a man who truly fights for schools."

Blair, Chimacum School District superintendent who is retiring in June, led a coalition that won a ruling that Washington state is not fulfilling its constitutional duty to fully pay for basic public education.

The coalition -- the Network for Excellence in Washington Schools -- charged in its lawsuit with Blair's administrative assistant, Stephanie McCleary as the lead lawsuit petitioner, that the state was failing to meet its "paramount duty."

The King County Superior Court Judge John Erlick agreed, ordering the state Legislature to fully fund the actual cost of educating all children with ample, stable and dependable state funding.

Blair, who called it an honor to be on the same slate as the three other nominees, said his wife "should get the reward for 42 years with me."

He said the state has appealed Erlick's decision to the state Supreme Court, "but we think we are going to win."

Blair asked McCleary, with two children in the Chimacum School District, to stand and be recognized. She was applauded.

He also introduced the district's business manager, Art Clarke, "who helped with the numbers" in the lawsuit.

Blair was also cited for his Port Hadlock Community Church work as a volunteer coordinator with the Jefferson County Emergency Winter Homeless Shelter in Port Townsend.

Eisenberger

Chuck Henry with the Sunrise Rotary Club introduced Eisenberger of Kala Point as the driving force behind an innovative kindergarten phonics program at Chimacum Creek Primary School since 2006 and one of the founders of an educational consortium for the county.

Henry said that to replace Eisenberger would take two volunteers.

Chimacum Creek Primary School Principal Mark Barga spoke on behalf of Eisenberger, who could not attend.

"All of us have been surprised at how significantly all students have improved their reading skills," Barga said for Eisenberger, citing the 4-year-old program. "At the end of each school year we know we make a difference."

Mary Ann Verneuil accepted the award for Eisenberger saying, "Gay has made a difference and will continue to make a difference in the community."

Matheson

Ned Luce of the East Jefferson Rotary Club, introduced Margaret Matheson of Port Hadlock, whose vast and tireless contributions from her wheelchair to the Chimacum-Irondale-Port Hadlock community stretch over 60 years.

Luce said Matheson, who has long taught Sunday school to young children, was unsure she wanted to receive the award because she felt others deserved it.

Matheson has served with Jefferson County Fire Protection District No. 1, numerous church committees, the urban growth area plan and worked toward the construction of the South Seven Senior Village in Port Hadlock.

She has worked as a volunteer in Chimacum schools, for Habitat for Humanity of East Jefferson County, the Tri-Area Community Center and the food bank.

"I couldn't have gotten it all done without the help of the people who help me," Matheson said.

She cited Shirley Polk, who drove her to school as a volunteer aide for four years before she got a driver's license.

"Most of all, I couldn't have done it without my husband, Bob," Matheson said. "He never told me 'no you couldn't do that' . . . even as I drove off [with] a wheelchair."

The Mathesons have been married 62 years.

Moss

Hilda Anderson of the Port Townsend noon Rotary Club introduced Moss, assistant manager of the Port Townsend Food Bank, whom she said has many fans -- 10 of which nominated her for the award.

"Shirley does so many things," Anderson said, calling her "an inspiration to all of us."

Every week, Moss picks up hundreds of pounds of food from area markets and stores.

"The amount of food she picks up and drops off is easily in excess of 10,000 pounds," Anderson said.

"Shirley serves all elements of the community," she said, with the help of her father, Bill, who takes the bus in from Sequim each day to help Moss at the food bank.

"This must be a very proud day for Bill," Anderson said.

Moss said, "I know I get more from this work than I could possibly give."

Moss praised Helen Kullman, Port Townsend Food Bank manager -- who received the Heart of Service award in 2008 and this year was honored as Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce citizen of the year -- and John Owensby, who drives the truck hundreds of miles for Olympic Community Action Program that delivers food to food banks from Brinnon to Forks every week.

She also cited local businesses such as Henery Hardware, whose employees buy and donate "massive amounts" of food with their children each year to the food bank.

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