

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Memphis, Tennessee

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Lending a hand

2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipients

By Peggy Linton, Special to My Life

Wednesday, May 4, 2011

Volunteer Northwest Mississippi honored recipients of the 2011 President's Volunteer Service Awards on April 12 at a dinner in the Haraway Center on the campus of Northwest Mississippi Community College in Senatobia. Nine of the recipients were from DeSoto County.

The awards are made possible through The President's Council on Service and Civic Participation established in 2003 to recognize the valuable contributions volunteers are making in our communities and encourage more people to serve. The council created the President's Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service.

Charleen Shields of Horn Lake commits much of her spare time to services for the betterment of the community, serving especially nonprofit organizations. Among her many contributions, she directs a group in Creative Arts for adults of all ages at the Garden of Grace Church, knits hats for the needy and baby blankets for St. Jude and The Med, works for Relay for Life as a cancer survivor, and is a founding member of the Mid-South Machine Knitters Guild.

Verlechia Evette Porter is an advocate for domestic violence prevention. She organized a memorial to her friend, Taffi T. Crawford, during National Domestic Violence Month in October and formed the Taffi T. Crawford Domestic Violence Memorial Fund.

Mary Dee Swatzyna of Hernando is a community volunteer and gives selflessly of her time. She is one of the planners and executors of the Water Tower Festival 5K and 10K, a volunteer for Sunset on the Square, DeSoto County Habitat for Humanity, Palmer Home for Children and Hernando Optimist events.

Petronella May of the Eudora community volunteers for Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation. She now serves as the volunteer coordinator as well as the mammal coordinator. She took the time to study and learn all she could about helping Mississippi wildlife in need and educating the general public.

Patsy Vick of Walls spends countless hours in volunteer work for the Hispanic community. She formed a committee for volunteer support to the new DeSoto County Hispanic United Methodist Church, Cristiana Iglesia, located in Horn Lake. She organized and participated in the International Cultures Festivals the past two years, and she teaches English as a Second Language classes at First Baptist Church in Horn Lake.

Betty Taylor of Hernando lives an active life as a retired educator. She volunteers at the Hernando Community Garden serving on the Advisory Council, is on the board of the Shepherd Center, an outreach program for seniors, and a member of Seniors In Action in Horn Lake working with other members on volunteer projects as needed. Additionally, Taylor volunteers for Palmer Home for Children, DeSoto County Emergency Management and Porter-Leath Children's Center in Memphis.

Pam Selby of Horn Lake is a retired educator from the DeSoto County School District and has a love and passion for the environment and its protection. As a master gardener, she volunteers on numerous gardening projects while teaching young people the benefits of growing their own vegetables. She is currently working on a puppet character, Cassie Catalpa, for use in presentations to children about gardening and being green.

Olive Branch Emergency Food Ministry began 20 years ago thanks to the dedication and determination of **Linda Smith** of Olive Branch. She is the only person remaining that began this mission, and she is still working to maintain the professional degree this nonprofit has for serving those in need.

Daphne Craig of Olive Branch has been a volunteer with hospice since 2009 and has logged more than 520 contact hours. She is active in grief support sessions, provides clerical support, assists in planning annual remembrances, and educates and promotes the benefits of hospice. In addition to her hospice volunteer work, she collected more than 900 books, loaded them into a vehicle and personally delivered them to the library in Bay St. Louis after Hurricane Katrina. She also donated \$500 to the library to replace a destroyed computer and printer. Craig is an active member of the Friends of the Olive Branch Library and a member of the Olive Branch Library Board.

The remaining 2011 recipients are from the Community Foundation's remaining seven counties served and they include:

John Ruskey of Coahoma County; Gail Johnson of Tunica County; Rose Atkins and Joan Richardson of Quitman County; Mary Slaughter, Louanne Pepper Cossar, Robert Grayson, Lekeathis Johnson and Dr. Lenagene Waldrup of Tallahatchie County; Phyllis Williams, Glenda Gookin and Betty Brown of Tate County; Ray Emmons, Tracy Reynolds, Chelius Carter and Terry Rodgers of Marshall County; and Lt. Deputy Earl Burdette of Panola County.

To learn more about the work of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi connecting people who care with causes that matter, go to cfnm.org or call (662)449-5002.

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