

A Decade of Honoring the Extraordinary Spirit of Unsung Heroes in Washington County

They are not extraordinary people in the manner of Gandhi or Mother Teresa. They are mothers, fathers, and grandparents. They are teachers, firefighters, coaches, accountants, council members, program managers, and retirees. As people, they aren't much different than the rest of us.

What is different, what is extraordinary is their willingness—nay their passion—to give their time and energy to benefit their neighbors and improve their community. The 30 people who have received People's Choice Awards from the Community Foundation of Washington County since the program began all have one very special thing in common: they don't find reasons not to help.

These volunteers have devoted 15, 30, even 60 years to the causes they feel improve the quality of life for all in Washington County. Some of them seem to have been born with their hand in the air. Others followed the example their parents set. Some were asked to help by a coworker or friend and never said "no." Many were moved to volunteer because of a seminal event in their lives. Yet others are active Christians who say, "Here am I, Lord. Send me!" Though those in their close circles may sing their praises, they are largely unsung heroes in our midst.

10th Anniversary

This year, the Foundation celebrates the 10th anniversary of the People's Choice Awards (PCA). The program began with a committee of the Foundation seeking to create a signature event that would echo and bring awareness to the mission of the Foundation.

Michael Day, elder law attorney and Foundation board member, had observed the contributions of citizens who lived and volunteered in our community throughout their lives. He admired their selfless devotion and the fact that many of them volunteered the equivalent of a full-time job without pay and without fanfare.

"I knew of people who were generally not wealthy and would never be cited in the news for a generous philanthropic gift," said Day. "Though they couldn't afford to give generously of money, they gave generously of something even more precious to them—theirself, their time, their talents, their abilities and their passion."

Jumping on the opportunity, Day proposed that the Foundation create an awards program to recognize individuals who have a long history of supporting community activities—an award for everyday people like firefighters, foster parents, coaches, teachers, homeless shelter workers, scoutmasters, hospital volunteers, and PTA supporters.

Foundation Trustees Dick Phoebus, then a bank president in Hagerstown, and Joe Tischer, a local independent businessman, helped Day bring the idea to fruition. Tischer was a Hall of Famer at Towson University for lacrosse and soccer, and founder of the Dream Come True organization to benefit children with serious or life-threatening illnesses. He felt that he had received a lot of recognition in his day and thought the exposure would help him draw attention to the PCA program.

Together, they formed the PCA program to ensure that committed volunteers who don't seek glory for their volunteer efforts would be properly thanked and spotlighted—even if just for one special night.



Michael G. Day

They reached out to the *Herald-Mail* newspaper and WHAG-TV (NBC 25) for support and received it immediately. The *Herald-Mail* agreed to publish the nomination form in the paper and cover the awards banquet with an article highlighting the winners' accomplishments. Tischer recalls, "They were wonderful. They really jumped on the opportunity."

WHAG-TV (NBC 25) has also been a critical part of the program. The station creates a video tribute for each award winner that is played at the awards dinner and broadcast on the air. Weatherman Lou Scally brings fun and humor as the event's emcee. Scally says he has enjoyed being the emcee over the years because he believes "it's a happy program to recognize those who work to make a difference but don't get the PR attention." He says, "I've known people who want the glory, but aren't willing to do the work. These people are just the opposite. I always wonder how they fit it all in their lives."



Joe Tischer

Judging the Awards

Each year, nominations come from people all over the community. The judges are selected from positions within the community that enable them to understand the contributions made by nominees. David Engle, director of the county's Department of Social Services, has been a PCA judge from the beginning and is always impressed with the caliber of nominees. "You read these stories and each one seems more compelling than the one before. It's very humbling."

Four or five judges review the applications independently and then gather to talk about how impressed they are and decide on a winner. "It is really, really hard," says Engle. "I read and re-read the applications. It's not something you can say here is the clear winner. You have to pore over them and weigh a variety of factors, including diversity of service."

The Foundation staff and board members are purposefully disconnected from the judging process so that the selections are truly made by the community. Ultimately, three award winners are selected each year. Because the decision making is often so difficult and there are so many worthy nominees, those not selected are invited to submit a nomination again in the future.

Day is very proud of the program. "The fabric of our community was made by people just like those we honor with the People's Choice Awards. The rubber really hits the road through their contributions."

Each of the three award recipients are presented with a large, engraved glass plaque and a \$5,000 endowment fund established at the Foundation on their behalf to benefit the non-profit organization of their choice. The money from the endowment fund comes from the sale of tables at the awards ceremony. Tischer once had an experience in which he was to be presented an award, but was informed that he was responsible for selling tickets to the event at which he would be honored. "We wanted to do the PCA ceremony completely differently," he recalls. "Each Foundation board member buys a table of 10, so the place is packed."

The initial decision to provide the endowments required the approval of all the Foundation's board members since they would be contributing the money. "It was approved unanimously," Day recalls. "Every director was completely vested in the program."

This strategy also helps the Foundation spread the word about its mission. A variety of community leaders and citizens are invited to the event as the guests of board members. It enables them to celebrate the accomplishments of the award winners, see first-hand the work of the Foundation, and enjoy a lovely evening.

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David Engle

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Day believes that the benefit of the awards program extends far beyond the three award recipients. “An important part of community leadership is setting an example and this program creates a written and visual record of people’s efforts in the community and hopefully inspires others to believe they can make an impact—often a far greater impact than by money alone.”

The Full Impact

While philanthropy is a vital source of much needed financial support for struggling non-profit organizations, volunteerism itself makes quite a large economic impact.

Someone once said, “Volunteers are unpaid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.” The quotation is credited to anonymous, but it would likely be wholeheartedly echoed by any charitable organization or endeavor.

In fact, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Maryland’s 1.2 million volunteers dedicate nearly 200 million hours of service annually, providing an estimated economic contribution of at least \$3.9 billion. The impact, however, is far greater than financial.

If you’ve ever borrowed a book from a library, received care in a hospital, learned something at school, prayed at church, or been free to generally pursue happiness, you’ve benefited from the work of a volunteer. In fact, volunteerism is so much at the core of our country’s founding, it likely wouldn’t have existed without them.

Nearly every major institution we enjoy today was formed initially by volunteers long before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Teachers, police officers, doctors, firefighters, and soldiers often fulfilled those roles without pay. The war by which Americans won independence was largely fought by an army of volunteers. Citizens’ homes and businesses were the first hospitals. Most members of the community had responsibility to their farm and family but also a community role and responsibility.

Today, however, when government handles many societal problems and family schedules are pushed to the brink with work, school, and kids’ activities, not every citizen takes on a community role. Some may assume that volunteers are people who simply have more time on their hands for such efforts. They’d be wrong.

An analysis by CNCS shows that the largest difference in how time is spent between volunteers and non-volunteers is in how much television they watch. Volunteers, on average, are about as busy as others, yet they make the time to serve. In a typical week, recent volunteers spend approximately 15 hours watching television compared to 23 hours for non-volunteers. On average, non-volunteers watch 436 more hours (the equivalent of over 10 weeks of full-time work) of television than volunteers each year.

Volunteerism is especially important at a time when the economy is riding roughshod over many non-profit organizations. In fact, 2008 represents the first decline in charitable giving in current dollars since 1987 and the second since 1956, says the Giving USA Foundation in its annual report on philanthropy. The year 2009 is likely to be much worse.

Not Just for Others

Though the benefits of volunteering are countless for non-profit organizations and the communities they serve, there are proven benefits to the volunteer as well. It's been estimated that between 60 to 70 percent of older adults engage in formal or informal volunteer activities. These activities help seniors stay physically and mentally healthy and support the feeling that they've made an important contribution in life.

In fact, research by CNCS showed that during a five-year period, older adults who volunteered with two or more organizations experienced a mortality rate 44 percent lower than that of their non-volunteering peers with similar health and family factors.

Young people volunteer at twice the rate of adults overall with 55 percent of young people volunteering, compared with only 29 percent of adults. Youth who volunteer are less likely to engage in risky behavior, are more likely to feel connected to their communities, and tend to do better in school.

Benefits to the Community

Whoever volunteers in our community and for whatever reason, one thing is for sure—the non-profit organizations of Washington County and our community at large are the real winners. The results of everyday citizens stepping forward to close gaping holes of need have improved our community immeasurably.

A Family Affair

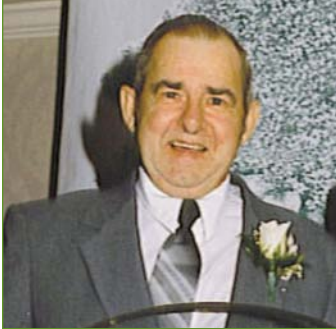
Betty Willson, 62, says that volunteerism has made her life more interesting and given her experiences she otherwise wouldn't have had. Willson's mother was one of the founding volunteers of the local Meals on Wheels program, so it came as a natural to her to seek volunteerism activities early in life. Soon after they got married, she and her husband became volunteers with VISTA, the domestic Peace Corps. Their decision to live on one income when they had children enabled her to be more involved at church and in the community.

Since then, Willson, who was one of the first three PCA recipients in 2000, has worked with Washington County Food Resources, Inc., Washington County Community Action Council, and the Western Maryland Interfaith Housing and Religious Effort to Assist and Care for the Homeless (REACH). When the director of the Washington County Council of Churches Social Help Center retired, Willson took that over, reopening an office that had closed.

Lately, her volunteering spirit has led her southward. She made 11 trips to areas impacted by Hurricane Katrina before moving to Gulfport, Mississippi to fulfill a full-time volunteer position at a United Methodist Disaster Response volunteer center. She's been there since March and will stay until next year. The Washington County native says, "If anyone had told me before this that I'd be living in Mississippi one day, I'd have called them crazy." What's not crazy is the calling she has felt to help the people there, as well as the people here.



2000 Mildred Fiery, Dorothy Truax, Betty Willson



2001 Cindi Messersmith,
Charles Rowe, Sr., and
Jean Wainwright

Twenty years ago, Cindi Messersmith, a 2001 PCA honoree, woke up one Christmas morning and decided the best place for her and her children was helping serve lunch at the former Sheraton in Hagerstown where local restaurateur, Nick Giannaris (also a Foundation Trustee), hosted a meal for homeless individuals and others without a place to go. That meal started her on a path to serving the homeless and other needy individuals.

Ten years later, she helped start Turning Point of Washington County's Homeless Outreach Program, Hagerstown's first outreach to the homeless. "There was no outreach effort to go look under bridges and at homeless camps in the woods to find people and get them services like medical care and mental health evaluation," recalls Messersmith.

Since then, she has been working with homeless individuals, helping them with whatever they need; usually basic necessities like shoes, socks, a birth certificate to help them apply for assistance, and especially can openers since they are sometimes given canned food but have no way to open it. She carries all these items around in her car. "My world belongs to the homeless, mentally ill, and addicts, or as my kids and friends say, 'people,'" says Cindi.

Though she frequently "bums" donations, she's never been turned down. "I've asked local garages to donate car repair, bicycle shops to donate bikes to help people get to work, and others to donate tents and tarps for shelter in bad weather."

Now employed at Turning Point for 19 years, she has volunteered at the Community Free Clinic, and the REACH cold weather shelter. Her children, and now grandchildren, continue to be part of the effort, also volunteering at REACH.

"I'm tickled that the Community Foundation does what it does," says Messersmith, "But I don't do it for recognition. I just cannot imagine not doing it for a hug and a smile."

Recognition of a Lifetime

For many recipients, the award is an acknowledgment of lifetime achievement. Ralph Stottlemeyer, who received a PCA in 2002, says the award meant a lot to him and made him feel that "all the work really paid off."

Stottlemeyer has devoted his life to coaching and teaching kids, mostly at South Hagerstown Senior High School. "It just feels like home," says Stottlemeyer. After 37 years coaching wrestling, baseball, and football; 35 years teaching shop and business education; and maintaining the school's field as he does his own front lawn, he should know.

He's an example of someone who just needed to be asked. His former history teacher and coach, Doug Cochran, was someone Stottlemeyer respected. Cochran simply asked, "Have you ever thought about teaching shop?" Later, he also got him involved in coaching.

Stottlemeyer, 65, and his wife Sharon, who has been an elementary school teacher for 29 years, have even taken kids into their home when they no longer had a place to go. At different times, they took in three boys who went on to become productive adults. He tends to think of all the kids he's taught and coached as his own and has at least 100 photos of them in his house to cherish. He was honored to be best man at one of their weddings.

Stottlemeyer chose to use the \$5,000 fund from the People's Choice Award to establish a scholarship for one South High academic student athlete each year.

The scholarship generally provides \$250 each year and was established in his father's name. Stottlemeyer's father, a veteran who had stormed Normandy on D-Day, passed away the week before the ceremony. "I would have loved for him to have been there," he says. When the fund didn't produce the regular proceeds this year due to the poor performance of the stock market, Stottlemeyer and his wife stepped up to the plate, donating the money themselves to ensure a student would continue to be recognized.

As with most volunteers, however, Stottlemeyer's truest reward isn't recognition for his lifetime devotion, it's simply to "watch the kids succeed, move on, and make better lives."

In 1980 Connie Pauley of Smithsburg became a volunteer because she didn't want other families to have to go through what she had. Seeking mental health resources for her son, she recalls a shocking dearth of programs and understanding. "There was no hospital in the area where people could even be evaluated. They had to be strapped down and transported to Cumberland. It was awful." She made a decision right then and there to change things.

Pauley, now 66, recalls how nervous she was when she first went to testify before the Mental Hygiene Administration. "It was scary, but I felt I had a lot of wrongs to right. I just tried to correct a problem, a system with many flaws."

Over the years, she has dedicated herself to improving the quality of life for Washington County citizens with mental illness and their families. She is on the board of Way Station, the advisory board of Turning Point, is president of the Washington County Mental Health Advisory Board, and president of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Washington County. She receives phone calls from families all over the country seeking advice and help, holds a monthly support group for local citizens, and hosts a picnic for them every year.

When asked how often she volunteers Pauley says "every minute of every day. I just do what is needed anywhere. I never say 'no,' I just figure it out." Pauley was surprised to receive the PCA in 2003, especially since the nominator had to create a ruse to get her to talk about her volunteerism and activities. "They lied and told me it was for Turning Point's publication. I thought if it's for TP's consumers, I'll do it." She doesn't hold a grudge and was very honored to receive the award, though she was nervous that night. "I was a little out of my element," she remembers. "I have no problem walking into a meeting with community leaders and talking about mental health issues. This was different because the attention was on me."

She is quick to point out that she would do the work without any awards. "When you give something, you don't expect anything back."



**2002 William "Mac" McLean,
Vivian Hackman, "Coach" Stottlemeyer**



**2003 Connie Pauley, Janet
Newcomer, Florence Hill Graft**

Blaine Snyder's father inspired his lifetime devotion to trains, firefighting, and volunteerism. Snyder, 76, who won a PCA in 2007, has been a fire suppression volunteer for 57 years at First Host Company in Hagerstown, where his father also volunteered.



2007 Bill Beard, Daniel Fleming, Blaine Snyder

Originally, Snyder actively fought fires, but in later years became more active in leadership as president and helping raise funds for new fire vehicles. He serves on various fire-related county committees, including as past president of the Washington County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association and as past president of the EMS Region 2 of the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, and other fire-related organizations.

His father's love of trains also inspired Snyder's work to help establish the Roundhouse Museum in Hagerstown. Snyder is currently chairman of the board and one of the original founders of the museum. "As a kid, my dad and I would go train watching to see all the steam engines," says Snyder. The family tradition lives on as his children and grandchildren are becoming active in volunteerism.

Snyder had mixed emotions about receiving the PCA because he felt that his reward ultimately lies elsewhere. "I don't go looking for anything," says Snyder. "I am fully convinced that you are a servant [of God] and you'll reap rewards as a result." But he acknowledges that the unexpected award was "quite an honor" and designated the Roundhouse Museum as the beneficiary of his endowment.

In It for the Long Haul

J. Gilbert "Buss" Everline, 86, was one of those who had a hard time saying, "no." It just wasn't in him not to contribute. The former Boonsboro councilman served two terms because he was asked to help the town establish a sewer system. He says, "I never wanted to be on town council, but I enjoyed it tremendously."



2008 "Buss" Everline, Jan Dorsey, Jerry Overdorff

It was the same thing with the Boy Scouts. Everline admits that in 1946 he didn't jump at the opportunity to be a scoutmaster with the Boonsboro Boy Scout Troop, but agreed to help as an assistant leader. He laughs when he recalls that the scoutmaster then moved after two months and he wound up with the position for five years, beginning a 20-year history with the troop.

A World War II veteran, Everline became active in the establishment of a home for the Legion Post #10 in Boonsboro, and served in several leadership capacities. He has also been very active at his church, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran in Boonsboro, for more than 60 years.

He says, "I see things that ought to get done, so I get involved." He cites the creation of Devil's Backbone Park in Boonsboro as an example. As he explains it, "A friend said to me, 'Hey Everline, since they got rid of the power plant, wouldn't that

make a nice park?' So I said, 'I'll get right on it.'" And he did. It opened to the public on June 26, 1966.

He was asked by local businessmen to try and attract the London Fog coat company to locate its manufacturing facility in Boonsboro. Everline and his committee were successful and the company provided jobs in the area for nearly 30 years.

After his wife of 66 years, Frankie, became active at Boonsboro Elementary School, he joined her there and enjoyed what would be his favorite volunteer activity. For 24 years, Everline was involved with the school's Parent Teachers Association, and helped with the school's computer lab and swim program.

Everline has faithfully answered the call when he was needed throughout the years. Echoing the research that volunteerism is good for a body and soul, he says, "Volunteering somehow makes life seem more worthwhile; gives you purpose. You look back on life and think, 'I've done my best.'"

A PCA recipient in 2008, Frankie admonished Everline on the way to the ceremony not to get long-winded. As one who appreciates poetry, Everline instead simply recited a poem he had learned in childhood about a man who loves his fellow men (see poem at right.)

Other PCA winners have had long histories of volunteerism as well. Hugh Brandenburg (2005 winner) has volunteered at the Western Maryland Hospital Center for nearly 30 years. Rollan Myers (2005 winner) has volunteered for the ARC of Washington County for more than 30 years. Florence Graff (2003 winner) has volunteered with the San Mar Children's Home for 50 years—and has been a generous financial supporter. Mildred Fiery (2000 winner) has volunteered for more than 50 years at Western Maryland Hospital. Anne Hinkle (2004 winner) started volunteering when she moved to Washington County 70 years ago.

Their Example

As Mike Day points out, "No People's Choice Award winner became a volunteer to receive accolades and awards. They don't expect anything in return for their efforts, including heaping helpings of credit. They quietly, yet doggedly, show up whenever needed to help others."

The awards program acknowledges their efforts, thanks them, and creates awareness of the value this kind of service brings to the community.

Joe Tischer isn't sure whether the awards have motivated other citizens to volunteer. He says, "You can't motivate people, they have to motivate themselves. But, there's always the hope."

Though recognition doesn't drive the volunteers, it certainly provides the gratitude they deserve from the community and the acknowledgment that their service makes a difference. In a day when Hollywood celebrities, sports figures, and politicians embroiled in scandal receive the vast majority of attention, the Community Foundation's People's Choice Awards certainly show us great examples of what is good and right about our country, and especially here in Washington County.

About Ben Adhem

*Abou Ben Adhem (may his
tribe increase!) awoke one
night from a deep dream
of peace, and saw, within
the moonlight in his room,
making it rich, and like
a lily in bloom, an Angel
writing in a book of gold:*

*Exceeding peace had made
Ben Adhem bold, and to
the Presence in the room he
said, "What writest thou?"
The Vision raised its head,
and with a look made of
all sweet accord answered,
"The names of those
who love the Lord."*

*"And is mine one?" said
Abou. "Nay, not so," replied
the Angel. Abou spoke more
low, but cheerily still; and
said, "I pray thee, then,
write me as one who
loves his fellow men."*

*The Angel wrote, and
vanished. The next night
it came again with a great
wakening light, and showed
the names whom love of
God had blessed,*

*And, lo! Ben Adhem's
name led all the rest!*

*James Leigh Hunt,
recited by Buss Everline,
2008 PCA winner*



2005 PCA Winners



2004 PCA Winners with Phoebe and Day



2006 PCA Winners

Past PCA Winners

2007

William Beard

Home Ramp Project

Daniel R. Fleming

Hancock Scouting

Blaine Snyder

Hagerstown Roundhouse Museum

2006

Mary Anna Kline

Williamsport Food Bank

Sharon Mattingly

Funkstown PTA

Robert McCusker

Hancock Historical Society

2005

Hugh Brandenburg

Western Maryland Hospital Center Auxiliary

John Long

Washington County Humane Society

Rollan Myers

ARC of Washington County

2004

Anne Hinkle

Western Maryland Hospital Center Auxiliary

N. Linn Hendershot

MIHI

James and Ethel Martin

REACH

2003

Florence Graff

Community Free Clinic

Janet Newcomer

Community Free Clinic

Connie Pauley

Turning Point

2002

Vivian Hackman

REACH

William H. "Mac" McClean

ARC of Washington County

Ralph "Coach" Stottlemeyer

Ralph Stottlemeyer, Sr. Scholarship Fund

2001

Cindi Messersmith

REACH

Charles Rowe, Sr.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

Jean Wainwright

Food Resources

2000

Mildred Fiery

Girls, Inc.

Western Maryland Hospital Center

Dorothy Truax

Clear Spring Elementary PTA

Betty Willson

Social Services Help Center