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Harbor names its heroes

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BY KIRSTEN FREDRICKSON NEWS-REVIEW STAFF WRITER

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HARBOR SPRINGS - For nearly 40 years, Mary Ellen Hughes has immersed herself in the Harbor Springs community, as a business owner, a volunteer and a dedicated resident.



Winners of the 12th annual Harbor Heroes awards were (front, from left) "Outstanding Citizen" Mary Ellen Hughes, "Ambassador of the Year" Mike Miller, "Volunteer of the Year" Teresa Chaney, (back, from left) community service award winner the Harbor Springs Area Historical Society, represented by Tanya Graham and Ed Meyer; president's award winner Stafford's Pier Restaurant, represented by Jody and Brian Ewbank; and president's award winner Andy Bowman.

Hughes, who was honored Wednesday as Harbor's "Outstanding Citizen" at the 12th annual Harbor Heroes event, said it has been because of Harbor Springs itself that she has been so involved.

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"All I can say is living in this town is contagious; you just get caught up in it all," she said as she accepted the night's top honor with tears in her eyes. "Most of it is this place. Everybody finds themselves involved because they are about this place. I get caught up in it."

Harbor Springs Chamber of Commerce executive director Kathy Lott described Hughes with one word: passion.

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"A passion for Harbor Springs that found its roots nearly 40 years ago, when tonight's honoree and her family arrived in partial pursuit of her late husband's passion for skiing. Since that time, we've seen her enjoy several business successes, unmatched customer loyalty, a dedication to family that is the envy of all, and a respect from a community that sees her only as someone who has given unselfishly of themselves for decades," Lott said. "Few have demonstrated more personal concern for the well-being of Harbor Springs than she. Her generous spirit, levels of dedication and well-regarded sense of personal integrity have blessed and

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helped countless causes take flight. The chamber has been one such very fortunate recipient of her special touch, in many more ways than one.”

Besides the chamber, Hughes has given of herself to Holy Childhood Church, the Petoskey Culinary Arts Program, the Harbor Springs Planning Commission, HARBOR, Inc., the Association for Harbor Arts, the Second Century Project and the Ram Boosters. Each year Hughes also puts together the Taste of Harbor Springs.

“And whether she knows it or not, which I sense she does, her infectious enthusiasm continuously raises our standards of community responsibility and levels of volunteerism,” Lott continued. “As a matter of fact, none of her several nominators for tonight’s award neglected to point out that when she calls, you don’t say no.”



Hughes, who will serve as grand marshal at the Harbor Springs Fourth of July parade next summer, said when people call on her for help she herself “can’t say no.” It’s that infectious spirit of Harbor Springs, she said.

Other efforts in community service were also honored during the evening.

Teresa Chaney, this year’s chamber volunteer award winner, was honored for her dedication to the chamber of commerce, her undivided attention to the community and her kindness to others in need. Chaney has served as hostess at the Taste of Harbor Springs, helped with the chili cook-off, served hot chocolate at the holiday open house and wrapped gifts for shoppers.

“Most recently, our recipient has helped bridge a decade-old gap between the downtown business community and the garden club resulting in an organized effort to enhance Main Street with flowers, a project that has the promise to one day make all of Harbor Springs a floral showplace for all,” said Lynn Steffens, who presented the award. “She is indeed special and would gladly give you her time and effort to support the chamber and its continued services to downtown business’s community activities.”

Walking home with the President’s Award was resident Andy Bowman and business Stafford’s Pier Restaurant, represented by Jody and Brian Ewbank.

Bowman has served on the Harbor Springs Planning Commission, harbor commission, downtown development authority and school board, as well as organizing the Paul Revere Run and Loppett Cross Country Ski Tour.

- Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce
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“But perhaps he is best known for the nick-name ‘Filibuster,’ which is pretty consistent with the recent suggestion that he staff the gazebo, where for only a quarter, any visitor could spend quality time with Andy,” Lott said, adding that Bowman “gives true meaning to the term community character.”

Lott went on to describe Stafford's Pier Restaurant as the type of chamber member that never says no, one that believes in the chamber's purpose and whose employees unselfishly volunteer for numerous events.

“This business has hosted or sponsored more events than I can count and gives generously of itself and its employees to chamber boards, committees and other volunteer efforts, as much if not more than any other member,” Lott said. “Ask us to give you the perfect example of a model chamber member and there will be no question that no one does it better than Stafford's Pier Restaurant.”

It was resident Mike Miller that took the stage as the “Ambassador of the Year” award recipient. Miller exemplifies the genuine fondness for Harbor Springs through his enthusiasm and service to residents.

“Always one to tell a funny story or joke, his daughters recall going out on weekends in high school, where at least one person would start a conversation with them by saying ‘I talked to your Dad today; wanna hear the joke he told me not to tell you?’ Must be why both his daughters use terms like friendly, funny, droll and social to describe him,” said Lott “Others, including his nieces and nephews, still remember him as the best source for Juilleret's ice cream, where he also dished up everything from planked whitefish to Big J clubs to thunderclouds for 40 years. Still others think of him as the outgoing, friendly and personable hometown boy who was active in basketball and track, and who was also affectionately known as Rat and Squeak's brother, ‘Mouse.’ Old habits die hard and today he remains one the friendliest faces you will ever see in town.”

The Harbor Springs Area Historical Society was honored as this year's community service award winner. This group of dedicated volunteers were recognized for their combined efforts to restore a significant building in Harbor Springs' history, turning it into a historical museum.

Historical society executive director Linda Young described the group as “true heroes” and as the “little engine that could” for having built up steam in recent years to create the dream of the museum.

“They have brought themselves up from a small organization to a power to be reckoned with,” she said. “Their commitment has been uplifting.”

In a surprise award, members of the chamber of commerce board of directors also honored executive director Lott for her dedication to the chamber since 2003. She was described as always giving more than 100 percent.

During the evening, Ron Foeller of Preston Feather also presented several awards for building projects that have occurred in the community.

Receiving the award for design was The Hinckley Company, Island Bean Coffee was honored for their beautification work within the city, Joseph and Beverly Salome accepted a heritage award for their home restoration work and Susannah Schmidt was honored for residential restoration.

A \$2,000 scholarship was presented by Mary Ellen Hughes to area culinary arts students. Every year, a portion of the proceeds from Taste of Harbor are donated to this fund.

The evening was sponsored by Northern Michigan Hospital, Chase Bank, Boyne Realty, Harbor Springs Car Care, Blue Cross Blue Shield and Blue Care Network of Michigan, Walstrom Marine, North Central Michigan College, Stafford's Pier Restaurant, The Rehmann Group, Dave Kring Chevrolet Cadillac, Corporate Title, The Bank of Northern Michigan, Preston Feather Building Centers, Evening Star Joinery, First Community Bank, Graham Real Estate, Harbor Brenn Agencies, Insurance by Burley, Jennifer Deegan Attorney at Law, Kane Construction, Northwest Michigan Works, Ramer and Moore and Schiller Funeral Home.

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