

2011 PRESIDENT'S VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS



John Ruskey of Clarksdale is a volunteer for youth at-risk. He owns and operates a business, Quapaw Canoe Company, with a passion for the Sunflower and Mississippi Rivers. John formed The Mighty Quapaws, an after-school apprenticeship program for Clarksdale at-risk youth, teaching skills which include swimming, canoe making, paddle construction, and river guiding. But the underlying lessons taught are team building, problem solving and communication. In February 2004 the Mighty Quapaws completed Dorothy the Double Eagle Dugout which now sits in the children's room of the Carnegie Public Library. "You can't get in the canoe unless you have a book with you!", stated Ruskey.

The Mighty Quapaws took second place at the Mississippi River Memphis Canoe Race in May, 2004. The Mighty Quapaws program is made possible through a grant from the Dreyfus Health Foundation. Mighty Quapaws become skilled River guides as tourist experience life on the River (from a canoe).

John is also establishing the Lower Mississippi River Foundation, Inc. a non-profit for the betterment of public outdoor recreation on the Lower MS River. Programs under this new nonprofit will include:

The Lower MS River Water Trail, Friends of the Sunflower River, Might Quapaw Apprenticeship, Save Buck Island Campaign, Buck Island Stewardship/Friends of Buck Island, and Muddy Waters Wilderness.

Charleen Shields of Horn Lake commits much of her spare time to services for the betterment of the community, serving especially, non-profit organizations. She directs a group in Creative Arts for adults of all ages at the Garden of Grace Church, providing many of the supplies. As a founding member of the Mid-South Machine Knitters Guild, you will find Charleen knitting hats (approx. 100) each year for MIFA and baby blankets for St. Jude and The Med. She has a special place in her heart for Relay for Life, as she is a cancer survivor. Charleen also assist with fundraisers for Heart's Desire Therapeutic Riding Center in Senatobia. She works with different local RV Clubs called "The Second Chance Sams", a place for people who have received a second chance for their lives. As an avid camper, Charleen participates in the 'Clean-Up America' team, cleaning local state parks and campgrounds. She also delivers Angel Food to seniors and shut-ins at her church. Did I mention that Charleen is retired? And still working just as hard!

Evette Porter of Southaven is an advocate for domestic violence prevention. Due to death of her closest friend, Taffi Crawford, to domestic violence; . Taffi was a nurse in the Baptist Memorial Hospital-DeSoto ER. Through this test and trial, Evette revealed a new layer of her character, integrity and commitment. She organized a memorial to Taffi during National Domestic Violence Month in October and formed the Taffi T. Crawford Domestic Violence Memorial Fund This fund will allow her to reach other women and children in the Mid-South area with domestic violence prevention information. Events to support the Fund, which she has coordinates, include the Taffi T. Crawford Domestic Violence Memorial Luncheon held at Brown Missionary Baptist Church, a prayer vigil and the Taffi 2K Health Walk.

As a former college basketball player, she volunteers her time in the athletic department of her church working with youth.

Her love for her friend and dedication to serving others has earned Evette Poter a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award.

Hernando may be growing in population but it is still a small community at heart, and communities need that certain person who is always ready and willing to help. **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 the 10K, a volunteer for the Sunset on the Square, a worker with DeSoto County Habitat for Humanity, an example to the young people of Palmer Home for Children and a strong volunteer for the Hernando Optimist events.

It has been said by one of her fellow neighbors in Hernando, “No matter what take places....Mary Dee is there to assist”.

Hernando is fortunate to have Mary Dee Swatzyna.

Finding a cottontail bunny hit by a car led **Petra May of Eudora** to her introduction to the Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation. A native of South Africa, she spent time on a rhino preserve for almost 2 years taking school children on safaris and living in the bush. So volunteering for the MWR came naturally. 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 MS wildlife in need and to educating the general public. Petra has gone far beyond volunteerism. She has put in long hours with the animals in her care and uses her personal funds to build cages and buy special food for her charges. She also has assisted with fundraisers for this non-profit. Just recently she and her husband released four young river otters (affectionately referred to as the boys) back into the wild. As Walt Whitman said “This is what we should do; love the Earth and sun and the animals”.....we are glad Petra May loves our wildlife and we honor her with a 2011 President’s Volunteer Service Award.

The Hispanic community in DeSoto County is blessed.....blessed to have such a dedicated volunteer. **Patsy Vick of Walls** spends countless hours in volunteer work for the Hispanic community. Working alongside the pastor of the new Hispanic United Methodist Church, she formed a committee for volunteer support to this cause. Cristiana Iglesia is located in Horn Lake. She organized and participated in the International Cultures Festivals held the past two years. Patsy collects children and adult used costs for Cristiana Iglesia members or

anyone in need, and she teaches English as a Second Language classes at First Baptist Church in Horn Lake. Patsy tries to go the second mile with her students, helping them with problems they may encounter in our English society.

When she is not working with the Hispanic residents, you will find Patsy volunteering in various roles at her church in Walls, Minor Memorial United Methodist Church.

Or you may want to take the time to talk with Patsy about her dedication to Mia's Children, a non-profit organization founded on the dream of seeing young people in Bucharest, Romania, who have limited resources grow up in a loving, encouraging environment and become happy and healthy members of Romanian society – physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Patsy has a giving spirit asking for nothing in return. On behalf of the lives you have touched, we honor you as a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipient.

You might think when one retires they would want to spend their time reading, relaxing and maybe even a little shopping. Our next recipient may have a little time to squeeze in these activities when she is not participating in senior programs in DeSoto County. **Bettye Taylor of Hernando** ended her teaching career, but has become a star student in the subject of volunteering. When there was talk of starting a community garden in Hernando, Bettye volunteered to serve on the Advisory Council (and to pull weeds). She volunteers for the Shepherd Center in Hernando, an outreach program for seniors, where you will find her providing rides to a doctor's appointment or to pick up a few groceries. She is an active member for Seniors In Action in Horn Lake. This organization seeks and finds various volunteer opportunities and way to serve the community. She completed the certification course through Volunteer Northwest MS for Safe Spaces, a program designed to entertain children in shelters during times of disaster. Bettye does not stop there....she also has a soft spot for children volunteering at Palmer Home for Children and serving as a reading mentor for Porter-Leath Children's Center. Bettye states, "Wherever the need is, I try to be available". Her values and dedication to serving others comes from her parents and their love of serving.

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. It is a personal campaign entitled 'It's Easy Being Green in Mississippi'. She demonstrates how to make cleaning products that are environmentally friendly reducing the amount of containers put in landfills. She is an avid user of shopping totes which she has used for 15

years and composting of household waste. She shares her secrets for being green every opportunity she gets.

Currently, she is coordinating a school garden project in DeSoto County, Sowing Seeds of Success – at 16 elementary schools. If you see someone in overalls, a straw hat covered with seeds and a determined look on her face.....you can bet its Pam Selby a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Mississippi is experiencing the worst hunger and food insecurity of any state. This statement is nothing new to our next recipient. She sees the needs of those experiencing food emergencies each week. **Linda Smith of Olive Branch** is a charter member of the Olive Branch Emergency Food Ministry Board which began 20 years ago. In fact, she is the only remaining Charter member still volunteering for the cause. The organization operates with volunteers from local churches many of whom she personally trains to sort, prepare, interview and distribute food to those who are in need. Their stated mission is to provide emergency food for up to seven days to Olive Branch-area residents who are having a difficult time providing food for their family. This takes organization and dedication....and Linda Smith has provided this for the past 20 years. Tonight we salute Linda and her work by awarding her a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award.

Daphne Craig of Olive Branch has been a volunteer with Unity Hospice Care since 2009 and has logged over 520 contact hours visiting patients to provide companionship and support for terminally ill patients and their families. 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 donated \$500 to the library to replace a computer and printer destroyed. Because of her love of books, Daphne is an active member of the Friends of the Olive Branch Library and a member of the

Olive Branch Library Board. A favorite quote of Daphine's "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are". She has been faithful to her patients, Unity Hospice Care and the community. We honor Daphine Craig as a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Ray Emmons does not actually live in Marshall County, but he spends quality time volunteering for Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. Ray first became acquainted with Strawberry Plains when he participated in the first Audubon Naturalist Class in 2006 to create a more wildlife friendly environment on his own property. Since that time, he has voluntarily constructed five Chimney Swifts towers at Strawberry Plains logging over 500 hours in construction time. He implemented design ideas into these towers that serve as great examples in Strawberry Plains' environmental education programs and help conserve this bird species in decline. Ray volunteers annually at the Hummingbird Migration Celebration and Nature Festival, usually working the parking lot, the toughest job at the festival, according to the Center's Director. To show appreciation for his concern for the natural world as shown by work on his property, Strawberry Plains and at Hunter Douglas (his wife's employer), we proudly recognize Ray Emmons as a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Awards recipient.

Tracy Reynolds of Holly Springs is a community volunteer and organizer, lover of music and just having a really good time! He was recently honored as Holly Springs Main Street's Volunteer of the Year for his dedication and total hours he worked for Main Street in 2010. Tracy served as an organizer of Bikers' Night in Blues Alley – to revitalize Blues Alley, increase tourism and provide a street festival for the community. The event was so successful that it will be held again in 2011. It is because of this work that Holly Springs is being revitalized as a destination for the 'blues'. Thank you, Tracy Reynolds, for seeing a need, answering a call, and getting it done! Help me congratulate Tracy as a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Another **Marshall County** resident does not just sit by and wait for things to happen. **Chelius Carter** is a volunteer and organizer for preservation through Preserve Marshall County & Holly Springs, Inc. He led the effort in clearing the property around historic Chalmers Institute, the first university to be chartered by MS state legislators in 1837. "We figured 183 years was long enough and

the proud old structure needed our help”, he said. Labor force was provided pro-bono by Chelius and others as the daunting task of preserving this treasure began. It is still a work in progress. In gratitude for the foresight and skills needed to preserve the history of Marshall County, we honor Chelius Carter as a 2011 President’s Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Terry Rodgers is a life-long resident of **Byhalia and Marshall County** and is a community volunteer for charity. He has a 40 year career with Northcentral Eclectic Power Association, where he is still employed. He has dedicated his life to service of his church and community. He has been president of the Byhalia Lions Club and the Byhalia High School Booster Club. As a long time member of the Byhalia Chamber of Commerce, Terry has served as president and for many years as the Chamber Horse Show Manager. His volunteer service as fireman has assisted the Byhalia and the Barton communities. He has spent endless hours organizing and heading up events such as cooking bar-b-que, golf tournaments and festivals to raise money for needy or ill children and families. Terry has worked tirelessly as a volunteer for the Clydesdale Christmas Store, a charity for needy children. In June he starts growing his beard and hair and by December Terry is transformed into a very authentic Santa Claus. He sits for hours with adoring children on his knee, telling “Santa” their Christmas wishes. He is in numerous Christmas parades and tree lightings throughout Marshall and DeSoto County. Not only does Terry have that Christmas spirit....he has a ‘giving spirit’ and for that we congratulate him as a 2011 recipient of the President’s Volunteer Service Award.

Panola County Lt. Deputy Earl Burdette is a volunteer for seniors and youth. In extreme weather he helps locate and distribute fuel and fans to seniors. In winter he finds local landowners who donate trees and he supervises a group of Panola County inmates in cutting the firewood for seniors to use in their homes. He has sought donations to purchase gas and assist with electric bills of seniors. His work is not confined to the senior population; Burdette serves as a mentor for the local championship football team donating his time each Friday night for security and to help keep the young men from making bad decisions. He also serves in the 114th Military Police Unit of the MS Nat. Guard. Lt. Deputy Earl Burdette is not only an example to others; he is a shining example to his son

who is here with him tonight. Help me welcome Earl Burdette and his son as he receives a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award.

Rose Atkins lives in Batesville, but is a doer of good deeds in **Quitman County** and the Town of Marks. She does not see herself as others see her. To Rose, the way she lives her life is just normal. She started Project Hope Outreach in which she collects needed items (usually overstocked items in an 18-wheeler---which she drives) for various projects. Her 'gave-away days' in Roadside Park in Marks allows people to come and take items they need (tissue, paper towels, cleaning supplies). At Christmas she collected toothpaste and food items for each of 110 inmates at the Lambert, Ms Prison and for the 14 men at the Marks jail. She collects items and takes to the local nursing home as well as volunteers to do ladies' hair. "You never know when it's going to be your time (of need)...You've always got to be ready to do a good deed," says Rose. We honor Rose Atkins for her good deeds tonight as a 2011 recipient of the President's Volunteer Service Award.

Joan Richardson of Darling (Quitman County) is the publisher for By U Magazine – a GOOD DEED publication which highlights and honors volunteers assisting non-profits. The magazine promotes and highlights "Do Gooders" as they reach out into their communities. By U readers pooled their resources together making miracles happen. For example they paid utility bills for families who would otherwise have had their utilities disconnected; raised funds saving seven homes from foreclosure which kept these families from becoming homeless; pulled together resources to build a free home for a Vietnam Vet who lost his home to fire and had no insurance to rebuild; and sought assistance for the family of a 5th grade student in Quitman County who was diagnosed with lupus and cancer in 2007....to assist with paying the families utilities, house rent, donations to a trust fund for medical expenses, sending the student a care box, calling the family to offer help, and praying for the young student. By U also highlights special months such as Breast Cancer Awareness Month and features stories of survivors. Richardson spends countless hours gathering information and stories as well as promoting good causes, therefore, she is being honored along with the hundreds (and thousands) of volunteers she comes in contact with each day. Joan Richardson is a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Robert Grayson is a former Mayor of Tutwiler and a volunteer for historical preservation. He is a member of the Emmett Till Memorial Commission, established by the Tallahatchie County Board of Supervisors for the purpose of fostering racial harmony and reconciliation; seeking federal, state, and private funds and grants to initially restore the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi; exploring the restoration of other buildings and sites of historical value; and promoting educational tours of the courthouse and other sites in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. This Commission to date has placed a series of historical markers to tell the Emmett Till story, developed a brochure and Driving Tour,

and is working to restore the Tallahatchie County courthouse, the site of the trial and acquittal of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for the murder of Emmett Till. History is everything in Mississippi and without dedicated people like Robert Grayson, much of our history would not be preserved. Thank you for your perseverance.....Help me welcome Robert Grayson as a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Lekeathia Johnson of Sumner (Tallahatchie County) is a volunteer for youth and seniors. She has been active in the communities of Webb, Sumner and Tutwiler since a teenager. She is an Alumnus of the AmeriCorps program, and in three years, logged more than 3,000 hours of community service. She received the AmeriCorps*VISTA Outstanding Class Member Award. Lekeathia has spearheaded a beautification project at RH Bearden Elem. School; several health and wellness projects including an exercise program and two health fairs; and the implementation of a community garden in western Tallahatchie County. She has returned to Bearden Elementary School as a reading tutor. When she is not working at the school she is the co-coordinator of the youth department at Frierson Chapel MB Church in Brazil, MS. The senior population is also close to her heart as she works with senior citizen activities throughout Tallahatchie County. Thank you for your dedication and volunteer spirit and please come forward as we present to you a 2011 President's Volunteer Service Award.

Louanne Pepper Cossar of Charleston is a community and preservation volunteer. She volunteers as the Music Director for the 1st United Methodist Church of Charleston, conducting children's choirs, hand bell choirs and adult

choirs. She is a member of the church's Food Distribution Team for the MS Food Network.

Her volunteer work has a personal touch as she sends birthday cards to all church members and emails keeping them informed of prayer needs and church programs. Her outreach includes sending newsletters to prison inmates in the area. Her other community work includes three term president of the Charleston Arts & Revitalization Effort, a nonprofit organization with a mission to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston through the arts and community involvements while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town. She serves as the secretary/treasurer of the Tallahatchie County Home Improvements, Inc. – a nonprofit organization with a mission to work toward improving the quality of living for senior citizens and other Tall. Co. residents that are in need of home repairs that would otherwise be impossible due to financial and/or health issues. Louanne is a member of Tallahatchie County Fair Association and Chaplain of National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution. Charleston is blessed to have Louanne Cossar.