

Diamond award winner

At 87, she marks 25 years as a volunteer

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER

She's 87 years old but doesn't look a day over 70.



Stella Murphy, Diamond Award winner selected by the Farmington Area Commission on Aging, was honored at a Volunteer Recognition Luncheon Tuesday sponsored by the city of Farmington Hills Senior Adult division and Botsford Continuing Care.

Murphy spends four or five days a week at the Costick Activities Center where she packs meals for Meals on Wheels, serves meals in the noontime program, greets seniors and counts the lunch proceeds. She has been performing these tasks for 25 years, ever since she retired from the J. L. Hudson Co. where she worked as a sales clerk and supervisor. And she hasn't let cancer, a hip replacement or knee replacement surgery put her out of commission.

"Stella is the exception to Murphy's Law - when she is around, everything goes right," read the nominating letter submitted by the Hills Senior Adult division staff. "She is one of the most cherished volunteers, and at 87 she maintains this schedule with a jaunty smile and a

bounce in her step."

She received a plaque from Commission on Aging chairman John Washburn. Her name will also be added to permanent plaques to hang in the Costick Center as well as both Farmington and Farmington Hills city halls. The Diamond Award is given annually to the volunteer 75 years of age or older who is still actively volunteering in the community, whether it be with the schools, church, seniors or any other organization.

Murphy's daughter, Sharon Chaplinsky, of Brighton, and granddaughter, Denise Spotta of Lake Orion, were there for the ceremony. She has three other granddaughters, Jackie, Linda and Kelly, who live out of state. Her friend Arley Ralph of

Southfield, who also volunteers at the Senior Center, noted that "Stella dances every week in the line dancing here. She has boundless energy."

Mary DiManno, senior adult division supervisor, said the 600 volunteers in the program "are what makes this so successful. A lot of our programs wouldn't run if it wasn't for you," she said to the 300 or so volunteers who attended the appreciation lunch at the Costick Center.

She noted that last year 82,184 meals were served. That saved the city \$47,000. Drivers alone for the Meals on Wheels program logged 6,906 hours of driving, which would've cost the city \$37,987 at minimum wage. Packers put in 1,320 hours, for a savings of \$7,260.

Keynote speaker Don Johnson stressed "Volunteers are the torches of the world, the cream of the crop. Volunteers carry the seed of hope."

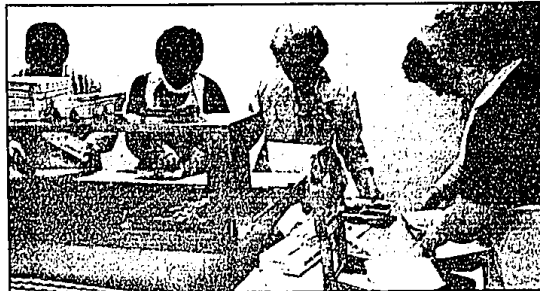
This year's theme was "Volunteers - plant the seeds of success."

Also nominated for the Diamond Award were Elaine Rousseau, 77, active in the Women of North Farmington for 34 years, and a volunteer for Life Care Ministries; Virginia Starr, 77, who works with first-graders at Forest Elementary; Robert Jagers, a volunteer tutor at Longacre Elementary; and Marguerite Harris, 83, active in section 38 Homeowners group, the South Oakland Shelter, and active at her church, St. Alexander's.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BARRER

Preparation: Stella Murphy spoons broccoli into trays.



Assembly line: Stella Murphy (center) packs meals with Veronica Walker, Eleanor Cebula, Norma Willhoft and Bernice Szymanski.



All smiles: Stella Murphy (center) with Linda Murphy, senior adult specialist, and Mary DiManno, senior adult supervisor at the volunteer recognition luncheon.



Applause: Stella Murphy is touched by the tribute read about her by John Washburn, Commission on Aging chairman. He presented her with a plaque honoring her for 25 years of volunteering at the Farmington Hills senior program.

Commission benefits seniors

The Farmington area Commission on Aging was established in 1977 to represent seniors of both Farmington and Farmington Hills.

It's made up of three members from Farmington and eight members from Farmington Hills, appointed by respective city councils to three-year terms.

Charged with the responsibility of identifying the needs of older adults; advising city councils as to programs and services which would be beneficial; disseminating information as to the services and programs available.

The commission meets the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. The first three months of the year at Farmington City Hall, the balance at the Costick Center. Meetings are open and input from seniors is welcome.

Service award

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helm for eight years and now directs the Livonia chorus, and Donald Strombers, who followed as director for two years, are coming back to be a part of the 20th anniversary show.

For the past decade, Steven SeGraves, who directs musical groups at Schoolcraft College, has served as director of the Farmington chorus.

Susan Garr, a chorus co-founder, has served as the group's accompanist since 1980. Six years ago, Garr was honored as the FAAC's Distinguished Service to the Arts winner. She is the music director at St. Alphonsus Church in Dearborn and has served as choir accompanist for the Farmington, Livonia and Royal Oak school districts.

The chorus was established under the sponsorship of the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department. Every Tuesday night during the school year, the chorus practices at the Costick Activities Center.

According to Hall, it's like one big happy family.

"The chorus experience really did change my life," she said. Coming to Farmington Hills as the mother of three young sons, the chorus gave her a much needed creative outlet.

"My husband was happy for me to leave because I always came home smiling," she said.

"It's truly a labor of love. The people have so much fun. On stage, magic happens."

For the anniversary show, her son, Brad, will recreate the 'Big Spender' number he performed with Melissa Patterson several years ago when they were pre-teens. Melissa is the daughter of Randy Patterson, who with Maria Kruse "are two of the hardest working chorus members - the choreographers," said Hall.

So much so are the chorus members like family that Angie Nelor, a singer who moved back to her native England when her husband was reassigned by Ford Motor Co., is coming to Farmington Hills with husband, Arnie, just for the anniversary show.

When Susan Garr's daughter, Melissa, was comatose two years ago following a freak accident, the chorus dedicated a touching Heritage Park concert to her. Melissa, who made a remarkable recovery, now takes voice lessons and sings with the chorus.

"We're all so excited about the award," said Hall. "Good choral is really good art."

Tickets to "It's a Grand Night for Singing" may be purchased for \$10 (\$8 for seniors and students) by sending a check payable to Farmington Community Chorus and an SASE to Dixie Doerr, 30404 Hanley Ct., Farmington Hills, MI 48331. Or call (248) 788-5332 for more information.



Kathy Hall, chorus business manager

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