

“Creating Caring Communities”

# Connections



Interfaith CarePartners®

Volume 18, May 2007

## Sweet Charity – Making Caregiving Possible

**T**he 19<sup>th</sup> annual Sweet Charity celebration of volunteer caregiving on Tuesday, February 27, 2007 broke all records for attendance and contributions. J. W. 'Bill' Stewart (Chairman, President, CEO, BJ Services Company), Chris Wilmot (Chairman and CEO, WCW International), and Phyllis Williams were co-chairmen of the dinner. The Hornberger Conference Center ballroom was filled with 585 guests who enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by Melange Catering. The

Award was Charles B. Runnels, Chancellor Emeritus of Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

Proceeds from Sweet Charity help enable Interfaith CarePartners to provide all of its educational, training, and administrative services to congregations sponsoring a Care Team without requiring a fee. The corporations and individuals who generously support this major event each year provide the necessary funds to keep exist-



Walter Cronkite

ing caregiving activities strong and make growth possible throughout the year. Each participant in Sweet Charity makes a critical contribution to caregiving either as an underwriter, individual guest, guest star, dessert fair presenter, donor of printing, floral centerpieces, or volunteer time to arrange the ballroom. BJ Services Company, Valence Operating Company, and Swift Energy Company purchased several underwriter tables each which vaulted this year's proceeds to record levels.

efforts both here and abroad. But organizations such as this one, with its legions of volunteers and their daily acts of kindness and service to their fellow man, embody our true and unique American spirit. They are the ones who remind and reassure us of this country's greatness!"

Following the donated performance by Rita Coolidge, guests strolled through the Dessert Fair selecting sweet treats to take home donated by Abuso Catering Company, The Art Institute of Houston, Bistro Calais, Brennan's of Houston, Carmelo's Ristorante, The Lodge at Bayou Bend, Mark's American Cuisine, Melange Catering, Mockingbird Bistro, Pecan Palate Pleasures, Randalls Food Markets, Texas Restaurant Assn. - Cougar Chapter, and Tony's Restaurant.

Plans for the 20<sup>th</sup> annual Sweet Charity soon will be finalized. To everyone who made this year one for the record books – thank you for being part of Interfaith CarePartners' caring community.



The Rev. Bill Lawson, Walter Cronkite, Bill Stewart and Charles Runnels

ballroom took on a club atmosphere after Mistress of Ceremonies Melanie Lawson brought twice Grammy Award winner Rita Coolidge to the stage to perform in concert.

The centerpiece of each Sweet Charity is the presentation of awards to distinguished individuals and organizations which share the values and commitments of Interfaith CarePartners. The prestige of the Sustaining Presence Award was enhanced when it was presented to legendary CBS News anchorman Walter Cronkite, BJ Services Company, and retired pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, The Reverend William A. 'Bill' Lawson. The inaugural recipient of the new Chairman's Lifetime Achievement

It truly was a night to remember as each honoree graciously accepted their awards. Walter Cronkite addressed his acceptance remarks primarily



Above: Tony's Restaurant at the Dessert Fair  
Right: Rita Coolidge



# No Place to Turn Until . . .

Hortencia Vela was doing what wives typically do when their husbands develop Alzheimer's disease. She continued to love Santos and dedicated herself to tending to his needs as the disease gradually took its toll. Their children were not called upon to help because Hortencia pledged to care for her husband "in sickness and in health." Caring for him was an expression of her love for him. She believed that she would not need any 'help.'

In April 2006, Hortencia realized that, as much as she wanted, she could not provide all of Santos' care without assistance. She had become unsure how she could 'handle' him. Whereas he had spoken Spanish and English, now he could only speak Spanish which limited the resources upon which she might draw. Her health was suffering because she could not visit her physician, since she had no one to watch after Santos when she was away. Finally, she called the Alzheimer's Association who sent her to Interfaith CarePartners. When she called, she explained her situation, said she had no place to turn, and asked for help of any kind.

Hortencia was invited to attend a conference for caregivers at St. Patrick's Catholic Church. She learned valuable information about how to understand what was happening with Santos. Then Santos was registered to attend the monthly Gathering Place activity program for people with Alzheimer's disease conducted by the Alzheimer's Care Team® at Assumption Catholic Church. She attended the next caregiver conference at Westminster United Methodist Church where she found more information and support for her journey.

Santos enjoyed the Gathering Place at Assumption and Hortencia benefited greatly by the scheduled respite so she could see her physician and tend to her personal needs. Next Santos began attending the Gathering Place at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church and St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church. Now Hortencia had three 4-hour respite breaks each month and Santos has an



**Santos and Hortencia Vela**

outlet for his energy and enthusiasm. These interventions by sensitive and supportive Care Team® members have helped Hortencia and Santos to have a better life together, despite the travail they face. She has less stress. She

is more confident in her capacity to care for him. She has learned more about the disease and how to support him at home. And, her health has improved.

Hortencia did not know to whom to turn for help about a year ago. Now she has many friends to assist in her care of Santos, who also care for her. She no longer feels alone and feels less overwhelmed by her daily

duties. She knows now where she can turn for information, assistance, and the sustaining presence of dedicated and loving Care Team members who have comforted her and given her hope when she felt she had no place to turn.

## Ft. Bend YMCA to Co-Sponsor Caregiver Conference

One never knows what will result from a chance introduction. Several months ago Dr. Earl Shelp met Mike Flory, Chairman of the Board of the Ft. Bend YMCA, when they attended a meeting hosted by Interfaith CarePartners' board member Chris Wilmot at the Greater Houston Partnership.

As we waited for the meeting to begin, the conversation took the usual turn – what we did and why were we there. I spoke about our efforts to increase the number of partner congregations in the Sugar Land area and Mike spoke about a desire by the YMCA to strengthen its relationship with area congregations. I proposed that joint sponsorship of a conference for caregivers might respond to both of our desires by addressing an urgent need and enlisting congregations to publicize the event. The mission and services of both Interfaith CarePartners and YMCA could become better known to congregations, members, and the broader community.

Within days, a meeting was held and a decision was made to proceed with a conference on Saturday, September 8. Our experience in designing and conducting conferences for caregivers will be complemented by the extensive relationships and good will accorded to the YMCA. The end result will be a day to learn about resources and skills to enable caregivers to serve better and to care better for themselves. It also will result in increasing the visibility of the Care Team® program among congregations in Ft. Bend County, as well as identifying individuals and families who can be served by an existing Care Team.

From the first days of the Care Team program in 1986, it has been a collaborative venture: people, congregations, and organizations sharing a concern and working together to address a vital need for the presence and assistance of trustworthy volunteers when adversity strikes. We are delighted and proud that the Ft. Bend YMCA is a new partner in caregiving.

**Continental Airlines** 

*Continental Airlines is now the "official" airline for Interfaith CarePartners providing complimentary travel for program-related purposes.*



# Sunderland Care Team® Member Award

Delores Muske is the 2007 recipient of the Dr. Ronald H. Sunderland Care Team® Member Award for 2007. Mrs. Muske is the leader of the Alzheimer's Care Team® at Zion Lutheran Church in the Heights. The Award is named for the co-founder of Interfaith CarePartners. The Award was presented to Mrs. Muske during the church's service on March 4. Dr. Earl Shelp made the following remarks before presenting the Award.

"Although Delores did not join the team when it organized in 1993, it has grown and its mission expanded since she became leader of this vital caregiving ministry in September, 1997. It surely is an understatement to say that Delores is multi-talented and highly energetic. I am told that she is compared to the Energizer Bunny because she has an ability to get many things done. Her service to the congregation and to individuals facing challenges is not limited to the Alzheimer's Care Team and its in-home and Gathering Place ministries. She finds time to contribute to other ministries and programs, such as the blood drives, Holy Comforters, lawn care, WELCA, hospitality team, and outings for the church's older members, even as she lends a hand at Memorial Hermann Northwest Hospital and the Shepherd-Forrest Civic Club. In each of these activities, Delores serves God, church, and humanity.

Delores is not just a 'doer,' she is an 'equipper.' As leader of the Care Team,

she effectively identifies the special gifts of each team member and puts them to use. She may be the organizer of activities, but she delegates tasks to each member so that everyone has an important role to fill, and everyone makes a major contribution to the team's ministry. The Care Team is not 'her' ministry; it is a team's ministry where individual gifts complement each other to produce a ministry that brings honor to the church and glory to God.

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***I am told that she is compared to the Energizer Bunny because she has an ability to get many things done.***

Delores is a compassionate lady with a gift to listen to the stories of others. She somehow seems to understand the dark valleys through which, at times, people travel. More importantly, she somehow seems to say and do just the right things to let them know that someone cares about their travail, that they are not alone, and by her presence and compassion they experience God's love. Delores clearly fulfills Paul's admonition to the church

in Galatia to 'bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.'

Pastor Carlson describes Delores as a 'total self-starter.' She is the kind of member that pastors dream about having, since, as Pastor Carlson wrote, 'I never come to her with a suggestion. She has always come to me with ideas. What is more, she is always 'flying under the radar.' She is a 'low maintenance' person whose focus is always on the people she is serving rather than on making any sort of a name for herself.' Pastor Carlson did not say it, but I shall, the manner in which Delores lives out her faith is Christ-like and she sets an example of servanthood and discipleship that inspires us all.

Not only would pastors love to have a congregation full of people like Delores, Interfaith CarePartners would love it if each Care Team leader was blessed with Delores' gifts, commitment, compassion, and energy. She has led and molded the Care Team at Zion Lutheran into one of the select, outstanding teams on the roster of 107 teams. She attends continuing education conferences that we sponsor for team members and encourages her team members to keep learning how to be better caregivers in Christ's name. When we hold skill-building and educational conferences for caregivers at Zion, Delores is the 'go-to' person to make sure that everything is arranged and the event happens without a hitch."

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## "Something We're Committed to Do"

Gladys is an African American woman who worked at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church. She was well liked by her colleagues and church members who interacted with her. Unfortunately, she developed a number of physical problems over time that caused her to stop working. She now copes with diabetes, dialysis, loss of vision, limited mobility, frequent hospitalizations, balance problems, and other adversities. She lives with an attentive, devoted son in his apartment. He is a busy professional who must travel in his work which could create major problems for him and Gladys if the Care Team® had not been present and supportive since October 2002.

Virginia Batte, Sharon Webb, and members of the team's Care Circle who regularly relate to Gladys and her son have been a safety net for them. The team members have assisted in 'ordinary' ways such as visiting Gladys and providing companionship during the long days when she is home alone while her son works until late evening. And, of course, taking meals by and sharing a meal with Gladys when her son is away is a treat for all. But, the team has served in some 'extraordinary' ways, too. When Gladys injured a foot, the team researched and chipped in to purchase a portable ramp to provide wheelchair access to her apartment. They were packers and movers for two

past moves and will exercise these skills again in May. By transporting Gladys to frequent medical appointments and staying with her for hours, it is likely that her son has been able to retain his job.

Gladys and her son wanted to spend Thanksgiving with family in New Jersey several years ago. A team member made this wish come true by donating air fare for them. Gladys' son had to come back before Gladys was ready to return. This generous team member flew to Philadelphia to meet Gladys at the airport and escort her home. This visit and Gladys' extended stay would not have been possible without this act of kindness.

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## Something We're Committed to Do

*Continued on page 4*

Following a fall-related hospitalization, Gladys spent some time in a nursing home. Team members, thinking that nursing home residency might be in Gladys' best interest, explored with her long term care insurance company what benefits she had. Gladys, of course, was underwhelmed by this expression of concern. She wants to handle her problems in her own way. She may be down a bit, but she is not defeated. Even when in hospital she is quick to tell the nurses how things are to be done. Virginia reports that she is more 'gentle' with her directions to the team!

When she was more physically able there were fun outings with team members to the movies, concerts at the church, birthday parties, and the annual Christmas luncheon with the full team. And, there were those special lunches when they'd stop at her favorite southern cooking restaurant near downtown for fried catfish which she ate in abundance.

Gladys calls Virginia and her Care Circle 'angels.' She is very grateful for their friendship, companionship, and

assistance. She realizes that she could not have remained in an apartment without the team's sustaining presence. The team members admire Gladys' determination to be on her own and her resilience. Gladys, her son, Virginia, and the other team members are friends. They care about each other and give to each other in special ways.

The journey with Gladys is a long one — 4 ½ years and going strong. How much longer will the team be

faithful to Gladys and her son? Virginia says, "We're not going to abandon her. This is something we are committed to do."

Thank God for the compassion, dedication, and generosity of the Care Circle who serve Gladys and her son. They are giving life to Interfaith CarePartners' mission to create caring communities, and to lift up, comfort, and give hope to people like Gladys and her son.

## Caregiving for Generations

The media seem almost daily to report on the needs of older adults for practical assistance in order to age gracefully, independently, and safely in their homes, outside of an institutional setting. Reports also highlight the demands on caregivers of impaired family members and the stresses they endure through their loving service.

The Care Team, caregiver education and training conferences, information and referral, and other services of Interfaith CarePartners meet these current needs. As the program grows, an infrastructure is being built to meet these needs of future generations.

You can invest in these programs to assure that money will not be a barrier to ministry in the future by making a bequest to Interfaith CarePartners or its endowment fund. Your legacy of concern, compassionate values, and charity will be perpetuated as you invest in the

future for others. Being a good steward of God's gifts requires one's stewardship of resources extend beyond one's earthly needs for them. Contact Earl Shelp to discuss options. Congregations, family caregivers, and impaired older adults will bless your legacy.

## New Email Addresses

tbreaux@interfaithcarepartners.org  
jbriggs@interfaithcarepartners.org  
bcampbell@interfaithcarepartners.org  
dhennessy@interfaithcarepartners.org  
mhines@interfaithcarepartners.org  
skirby@interfaithcarepartners.org  
crojas@interfaithcarepartners.org  
vseivwright@interfaithcarepartners.org  
eshelp@interfaithcarepartners.org

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**Email:** [info@interfaithcarepartners.org](mailto:info@interfaithcarepartners.org)

**Web Page:** [www.interfaithcarepartners.org](http://www.interfaithcarepartners.org)

Earl. E. Shelp, Ph.D. President  
Ronald H. Sunderland, Ed.D. Co-Founder  
Janie Alderman Design Layout and Design

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**Interfaith  
CarePartners®**

701 N. Post Oak Road, Suite 330  
Houston, Texas 77024  
713.682.5995

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