

Elaine Johnson receives Broad Shoulders Award

by Nikki Rosenberg

With her innately positive attitude and life-long calling to help people, nurse Elaine Johnson provides comfort, support or a smile to all she encounters. Inspired by Johnson's unwavering attitude of hope and courage, her friend and supervisor Esther Valdez nominated her for Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Broad Shoulders Award. Johnson received the award at the Fourth Annual Nominate HER Awards Luncheon on May 21 at La Colombe d'Or Mansion.

Johnson has a 47-year career of helping people. While still in high school, she volunteered at a hospital and realized her vocation.

"I wanted to be able to help someone through something and try to make it a little easier, a little better," Johnson said.

She received her degree in nursing from Roosevelt Hospital, a diploma hospital in New York City. Her former husband's job brought the couple to the south, where they moved between Louisiana and Houston for a number of years. During that time, Johnson practiced nursing in various hospitals, including Charity Hospital in New Orleans.

In 1978, Johnson became partially paralyzed from a spinal surgery. She was able to walk with a cane and braces until her arthritis made it too difficult. For the last five years or so, she has used a wheelchair to remain active.

Johnson said with a laugh, "I've been slowed down for 32 years, but now I'm a speed demon in my wheelchair."

While Johnson reared her two boys, Michael and Randy, she took a 20-year break from nursing. Even so, she volunteered at local hospitals and clinics, as well as a volunteer EMT.

"I was in charge of hand-holding on the ambulance," said Johnson. "I couldn't do the physical part, but I could hold the patients' hands and support them."

When she was ready to go back to work, she was challenged to find a nursing position that did not require intense physical labor. Through her connections from volunteering, Johnson was hired at Houston Northwest Medical Center's Nurse Health Line where she answered health related questions from callers.

Johnson said, "When I got that job, my son said, 'That's great! You've found a job where you can sit and talk on the phone. You've been practicing for years!'"

When the hospital closed the line in 1999, Johnson began her current position in The Breast Center. There, she is responsible for calling patients who will need to return for additional testing.

Valdez said, “She is the voice of reason and calm when she does the call-backs. Having someone who can take the time to talk and answer questions is important. Being able to put the patient at ease, and tell her she’s not being called because she has breast cancer, but because she needs additional tests, takes a very special kind of person. And we found that in Elaine.”

In addition to volunteering as a facilitator for the American Cancer Society’s support group, “Care, Share and Be Aware,” Johnson has supported the Komen Race for the Cure and the Breast Cancer Network of Strength Walk. She is a board member of The Weathervane Foundation, which raises money to fund breast cancer research.

She serves as program coordinator and vice president of the Bluebonnet Critical Incident Stress Management Team. The non-profit organization works with emergency service departments after traumatic events.

Helping others has helped Johnson stay positive about life and face her own challenges.

She said, “You learn more about other people and see what you have as an individual is not as bad as some people have it. I’ve always had the feeling that I got more back out of volunteering than I gave. Volunteering has helped me appreciate my life more.

“It’s the same with the breast cancer survivors, I’ve learned so much from those women...It’s not a job; it’s not an effort. It’s a pleasure.”

Johnson also pushes people to try new things. Although it took much convincing to get her on the slopes 15 years ago, she has been an avid skier ever since.

Johnson said, “When I started doing it, I thought, ‘Holy mackerel, if I can do this - if I can go out and go skiing and do all they taught me - there’s just a whole lot more I can do.’ So, I try to motivate people to give things a try, to see what it can do for your life.”

Nikki Rosenberg is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

Hashmat Effendi receives Community Angel Award

by Kim James

Hashmat Effendi's response to human suffering has put smiles on the faces of thousands of children around the world. And, because of that, Effendi is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Community Angel Award.

Bushra Qureshi, a friend, nominated Effendi. She commented, "Growing up as the child of a government official, a life of privilege gave Effendi perspective. In a wealthy Pakistani family, many things came easily, including medical care. Effendi remembers accompanying her father to different hospitals and clinics in Islamabad. They would be provided with excellent service and attended to quickly. She noticed, though, that those who had more pressing needs but happened to be poor were the last to be attended to, if at all."

Effendi said, "I used to ask my dad, 'Don't you think this is wrong? These people are waiting just because they are poor.' Isn't it our responsibility to help them, to help ease their pain?"

Effendi's father acknowledged the disparity, agreeing that this particular practice of privilege was not fair, but was more concerned with his daughter's interest in these people - in Pakistan, the rich and poor do not associate with each other. He did not realize she was listening to her heart.

Following the example of Mother Teresa, Effendi decided to reach out to the poor in her community. By age 13, she was using her father's contacts to obtain free hospital treatment for beggars and poor children. She also collected medicine and clothing from her relatives and neighbors to distribute to the poor.

At 14, Effendi's friends began to criticize her, saying she couldn't make much of a difference by passing out vitamins to beggars. Though discouraged, she continued her outreach, fueled by a saying of Mother Teresa's, "We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean, but if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something."

In 1979, Effendi moved to the United States and began raising her family. She continued to reach out to those desperately needing medical treatment and built a network of medical professionals and organizations, engaging in a wider set of activities in the medical field across the world.

There was still a special place in her heart for children; perhaps motherhood had something to do with it. Effendi is a mother of three. In her travels, she noticed one thing was common across cultures – a mother's love for her child.

"The way I love my child and the way a woman in Nigeria or Kenya or Nairobi or Pakistan loves her child is the same," she said.

Effendi worked persistently and spent much time in prayer, pulling together teams of doctors to lend their medical expertise and individuals who believed in and could help finance her project.

“You can have anything you want if you want it badly enough,” Effendi said. “You can be anything you want to be, do anything you set out to accomplish if you hold to that desire.”

With that attitude, Effendi’s dream became reality. The House of Charity, which she founded in 1996, is dedicated to improving the quality of life of underprivileged children of greater Houston and surrounding areas. Effendi’s passion is to ease the pain of children suffering from congenital deformities or severe burns and give them a chance at leading normal lives. To do this, House of Charity provides daily necessities and free surgical care to correct their deformities, disabilities and burns. Since its inception, House of Charity has helped more than 150,000 children worldwide.

House of Charity recently opened a distribution center where local low-income families can get clothing, household and other personal items at a discounted rate.

Abroad, House of Charity works to establish free clinics for burn revision and cleft lip/palate surgery and upgrade charity hospitals.

Though her vision of serving others is being realized daily, Effendi says the journey has been, and remains at times, a difficult one. The work is never done.

“I have seen plenty of pain and suffering,” she said, “I have seen people’s spirits dying because they have suffered so much.”

The work can be taxing, but the tasks at hand keep her going.

“It doesn’t matter where you are, where you see and meet people,” Effendi said, “You just have to reach them.”

Effendi’s drop in the ocean has definitely been noticed.

In 2008, Effendi was awarded the Tamgha-i-Imtiaz, the highest civilian award given by the government of Pakistan. House of Charity has been recognized by the City of Houston, Shriners Hospital for Children – Galveston and the Ninth Congressional District of Texas.

Effendi says she continues to be awed and humbled by the recognition she receives and is honored to receive this newest award.

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

Crystal Washington receives Evolving Eve Award

by Kim James

Crystal Washington, a daring young entrepreneur with a passion and gift for encouraging and inspiring small business owners, is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Evolving Eve Award.

She was nominated for the award by a friend, Crystal Brown-Tatum, who said, "Crystal built a business network of thousands of business owners without a single loan, grant or investor. Her proven market strategies have helped hundreds of small business owners reach their next level and build their client base and revenue."

Early on, Washington realized the power of presentation and the importance of maintaining relationships. In elementary school, she would make high grades on projects, not necessarily because the content was perfect, but because she made the final product look pretty. Washington says this skill came naturally to her. By the time she was in high school, teachers were so impressed with her level of work they would go out of their way to help her. School guidance counselors knew her and her work well, and they would forward information about scholarships and other opportunities to her before offering it to other students, if at all. This carried her on to the University of Houston, where she majored in hospitality management.

Washington secured a management position in the hospitality industry immediately following college. By age 23, she had worked her way up to revenue management.

Though she enjoyed her career, she felt a calling to be of greater service to small business owners.

"I was making one big company millions of dollars a year, but I didn't feel fulfilled," she said.

A self-described "planner without a parachute but armed with a strong calling," Washington left corporate America in 2007 to start her own company. Washington is now owner of Black-Market Exchange, a marketing firm designed to connect small business owners in Houston's urban community.

"I learned to eat fear for breakfast every single morning," she said of her first year in business, taking that attitude to function outside her comfort zone, conquering whatever nerve-wracking task presented itself.

Washington's strong ability to connect with people was a blessing, and ultimately it built her business. Her goal was to reach a community she initially had little connection with. She hadn't yet learned about minority-owned or woman-owned business certification, but she did know the importance of establishing strong connections and presenting a polished product.

“Social networking literally built my business,” she said.

Using networking websites, satisfied clients would tag her work and recommend her services one project at a time. Washington ended up scoring major contracts from contacts made through Facebook. In less than one year, thousands of business owners were connecting through Black-Market Exchange.

As a consultant, Washington teaches image marketing and business networking to entrepreneurs seeking to experience substantial business growth. Her goal is to empower them and give them access to information that will help them accomplish their goals. She shares with others what has been so instrumental in her career – the power of connecting with people.

“The only thing you can never leverage is your network,” she said. “Knowing the right people can get you in the right places and direct you to resources you didn’t know about.”

Washington is most proud to have reached a point in her career where her name and reputation are valued and trusted.

“That’s a major accomplishment and an attribute to my mentors and family,” she said. “I can recommend something, and people know they can trust me; they know I wouldn’t recommend something that would steer them in the wrong direction.”

Washington encourages others to figure out their purpose. She also notes that many are so addicted to the external, they miss discovering their purpose.

“I always want to be evolving, and I encourage others to evolve along with me if they want to go,” she said.

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

Barbara Schlattman named recipient of Gutsy Gal Award

by Kim James

Barbara Schlattman is using her eye for design to transform the appearance of her community. And for that, she is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Gutsy Gal Award.

Beth Eaton nominated Schlattman for her work as chair of the Green Medians Steering Committee.

"Barbara got the idea five years ago to add green medians to FM 1960. The area had become a very high-traffic, strip center-lined road, far from the quiet, beautiful area it once was. She and her committee have worked with the Texas Department of Transportation to add medians and raise enough money to add the green, said Eaton.

Schlattman is the owner of Barbara Schlattman Interiors, Inc., an award-winning residential and commercial interior design firm. It was her love of beauty that drew her attention to the unattractiveness of FM 1960. Making the main thoroughfare look better had crossed her mind more than once.

"I believe everyone deserves to be surrounded by beauty," Schlattman said. "It's not just for the rich. It's for everyone."

So, she and a friend, Gary Cofran, decided to plant trees along the shoulders of FM 1960. The pair began making phone calls to determine what was required to turn that idea into reality. In the process, they made contact with Catherine McCreight of HNTB Engineers who had a bigger vision to share with them.

From McCreight they learned that back in 2003, the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce sought assistance from TxDOT and other organizations to study road improvements for FM 1960. As it turned out, TxDOT had recommended the installation of raised medians along an eight-mile stretch of FM 1960.

The FM 1960 Median Project presented a special opportunity, so Schlattman's plan changed from planting trees along the sides of the road to making the medians look great.

By the end of 2004, the Green Medians Steering Committee had two members, and Schlattman was committee chair. The committee later joined the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce and grew to include 14 more members. The FM 1960 Median Project was accepted and funded by the 2006 Legislature.

TxDOT agreed to allow the committee to landscape the medians if three conditions were met. Schlattman and her committee would be responsible for hiring a landscape architect, providing water and maintenance, and financing the project.

Schlattman worked with 19 different water districts, represented by 12 different law firms, to come to an agreement to maintain and water the medians. To date, the Green Medians Steering Committee has raised \$470,000 for its project. The green installation is scheduled to begin next January.

There's more to the Green Medians Project than aesthetics and scenic beauty. The landscaping is said to increase property values, revitalize economic development and bolster community pride.

"It's been such a blessing to see the community step forward and work together," Schlattman said. "Eight miles is a long stretch. It's not just about one subdivision or one water district. Each part is important."

Even the youngest members of the community have contributed to the Green Medians Project. For example, last November, 280 children (ages five to 12) submitted drawings of what they wanted the medians to look like. Their artwork was displayed at the Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts in the Green Medians by Kids Art Expo. And, a Brownie Troop donated the proceeds of its cookie sales.

Still on the project's to-do list is raising more needed funds, getting trees and plants donated and working with TxDOT to finalize the drawings and agreements.

While Schlattman is grateful for this award, she sees it more as an award for the community.

"It's not an award for me," she said, "It's an award for an idea, which is to revitalize and improve our area. It means our project is significant."

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

Savvy Sister Award goes to Dianah Dulany

by Nikki Rosenberg

Dianah Dulany, owner of ComedySportz Houston, was presented the 2010 Savvy Sister Award from Houston Woman Magazine on May 21 at a luncheon at La Colombe d'Or Mansion. The event honored seven women, all deemed excellent role models, in the publication's Fourth Annual Nominate Her Awards program. Friend and co-worker Claire O'Malley nominated Dulany for the award.

O'Malley said, "Dianah is an all-around savvy woman. She's got great business skills; she communicates well. She's humorous, and she just brings fun to life."

From the time she was a little girl in Central Texas, Dulany dreamed of performing musical comedy professionally. She realized her vision when she opened ComedySportz in Houston almost 20 years ago.

Dulany said, "ComedySportz consistently produces quality entertainment that is appropriate for all ages. A show can genuinely entertain a 14-year-old's birthday party, a bachelorette party and a church group of singles all at the same time! Seeing or being part of a performance always makes my day."

Before Dulany found her dream career, she paid her dues. She studied theater and acting at Southwestern University in Georgetown, TX. She continued her education at Lindenwood College in St. Charles, MO, where she received her MFA in Theater Management.

Dulany moved to Milwaukee to take part in a summer stock company. She remained there to accept a position to manage Theater Tesseract. Though Dulany worked 60 hours a week at the non-profit theater company, she found time to sign up for improvisational classes at ComedySportz. When she completed the classes, she was invited to join the troupe. Four years later, Dulany got the chance to transition from troupe member to club owner.

Dulany said, "I performed with them for four years and was then offered the opportunity to open my own club. I didn't really want to leave Milwaukee, I loved it there, but since I had this opportunity, I returned to Texas."

By that time, Dulany had become friends with the Comedy Sportz founder. He assisted Dulany with a small loan to help her open the business. When she was ready to start auditioning actors, he flew to Houston to help her choose her original troupe.

Dulany found local talent in the theatre department at the universities, as well as by placing ads in newspapers. While holding auditions, casting and training her original ensemble, she began scouting for performance venues. In November 1990, ComedySportz performed its first show at the River Cafe on Montrose Blvd.

As Dulany explained, “People are often convinced that our show will be dirty or “blue,” and that if they sit too close, they will be picked on.”

In the beginning, the business struggled financially. So much so, Dulany considered closing the doors to ComedySportz. It was then she learned one of her greatest lessons in business.

Dulany said, “When times were tough, the troupe rallied, and I learned I could rely on it, no matter what. Through financial issues, personality conflicts and other business challenges, I’ve learned honesty and openness in every situation is the way to go. I also try to apply the improvisational tool of ‘yes, and’ to my life – saying yes to everything possible. It can really make a positive difference!”

With the support of her troupe, Dulany’s business grew. In addition to the public performances, she began booking private events — everything from birthday parties to corporate training seminars. She began teaching classes to adults and children, adding special programs in the summer. When the business found a permanent home on Town and Country Blvd., she rented the space for special events.

Dulany now employs over 40 people, who still act as her support system.

“I work with the greatest group of people in the world,” Dulany said. “This troupe respects each other, both on the stage and off. We are truly an ensemble, with everyone making a difference.”

By combining her love of improvisational comedy and business acumen, Dulany was able to introduce Houstonians to a new form of comedy theater. Her courage to persevere through times of adversity has led to laughter and fun for multiple generations.

Nikki Rosenberg is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

Victoria Noble receives Tomorrow's Woman Award for 2010

by Kim James

Victoria Noble is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Tomorrow's Woman Award, given for achieving high marks in high school and showing promise of future leadership by making a contribution to her community.

She used her passion for art and heart to make a difference in Houston's homeless community.

Tracy Burnett, executive director of Cathedral Health and Outreach Ministries, nominated Noble.

Burnett said, "Victoria is energetic, faithful, proactive, has vision and makes things happen. She thinks about things beyond herself. She really thinks about the community and helping other people."

In 2009, it was time for 17-year-old Noble, a Girl Scout, to plan and complete a Gold Award Project. The Girl Scout Gold Award Project "should fulfill a need within a girl's community, create change and, hopefully, become ongoing."

Noble was put in touch with Burnett, who in turn connected her with an art therapist and other individuals who were excited about helping Victoria's vision become reality.

The Beacon, an arm of Cathedral Health and Outreach Ministries, is a day center that provides hot meals, clothing, private shower and lavatory facilities, laundry services and case management to people living on the streets of Houston. And, at the end of June 2009, The Beacon (thanks to Noble) provided its clients with a creative outlet — two days of art classes.

"I picked the homeless, because they don't get the opportunity to do art, to be exposed to this kind of thing," Noble says. "I wanted to give them the opportunity to experience something everybody else gets to do."

Each of The Beacon's clients was given a folder, paper and pencils. Noble arranged for Coley Jones, an art therapist, to speak to the group about how art can bolster esteem. She also had an artist show the group the different mediums they could work in, different types of art they could do. The group then went outside to a garden area and designed masterpieces on wooden plaques. Some clients took them with them, while others left theirs behind. Today, their work hangs in The Beacon's dining hall.

"On the very first day Victoria was there doing the project," Burnett says, "one of the clients came to me and said, 'We're not offered opportunities like this to create with our hands and heart and soul. As an addict, this is something that I need.'"

After observing and interacting with the clients, Jones told Chris Noble, Victoria's aunt and owner of Marnoble Computer Sales & Service, that she would be willing to teach art classes at The Beacon every month. In turn, Chris asked Jones to tell her what was needed to make that happen and she would fund it. The art class at The Beacon has been taught by Jones every month since.

When asked why she thought it important that this class continues, Chris remembers seeing two women waiting in the line to shower. She could tell they were professional people who, for some reason or another, were down on their luck and found themselves homeless or very close to it. The art class gives them a chance to take their mind off their situation, an opportunity to feel "normal."

"I could tell that the whole event meant something to them," Chris said, "I could tell it made a difference in their world."

Since the class has become ongoing, Burnett has had several clients make positive decisions not to use drugs the day or night before, knowing they have the art program to go to.

"I want things for our clients that are beyond the essential services," Burnett says. "I have always wanted a creative piece to our program, but because of budget and time constraints, it never quite came together. Victoria made that happen. She's fulfilled a dream for me, and I'm forever thankful."

Last year, clients decorated Christmas ornaments that were hung on The Beacon's Christmas tree. The project was very successful, so much so that community volunteers and others were practically begging to buy the ornaments off the tree. This year, the art students will make more ornaments to be sold, hopefully to become The Beacon's trademark thing – homeless art.

Through her project, "Undiscovered Artist," Noble reports learning "there are so many people who are talented but not known." Her project has empowered them and brought awareness of the talent of the homeless people of our city to others.

"A lot of times these people are overlooked and don't think they can be someone," Noble said, "but they really are."

Noble will be a freshman at Texas Christian University in the fall.

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

Kay King named recipient of Wise Woman Award

by Nikki Rosenberg

Since 1959, Kay King has been a major influence in Houston's fashion industry. Her designs have been seen in major department stores and magazines. Yet, for almost 30 years, her greatest influence on fashion has been behind the scenes. As an educator and administrator at Houston Community College, she has inspired generations of students to shape the industry she loves.

In recognition of her role as a teacher and mentor, King was selected as the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Wise Woman Award. King was honored at the Fourth Annual Nominate HER Awards luncheon on May 21 at La Colombe d'Or Mansion.

Dr. Cheryl Peters, who nominated King for the award, said, "Kay is truly exemplary. She has many natural gifts: her wonderful human relations skills, her energy, and her courage and spirit. The fact that she just doesn't ever want to stop going and doing."

Even when she was forced to quit her job in order to adopt her son, Collin, King found a way to keep working. After 10 years of marriage and 11 as an employed designer, King and her husband, George, decided it was time to have a baby. When it was clear they could not conceive, the couple applied to adopt a child from DePelchin Children's Center whose rules at that time stated mothers could not work outside the home.

While still waiting for the baby, King was offered a job at Foley's as the men's fashion director. The part-time position led to a job that would change King's career. Judge Roy Hofheinz had fired his costume designer just one month before he planned to open a new theme park, AstroWorld. He called an acquaintance at Foley's who suggested King design the outfits he needed. She agreed to design and manufacture the uniforms and costumes for all park employees.

King said, "I didn't go to bed for a month. It was the best worst job I ever had. But it was very, very rewarding, and the costumes turned out just great."

That job, and the relationship it cemented with Judge Hofheinz resulted in a boost to King's career. Her designs included the Astrodome employee uniforms, Derrick Dolls Houston Oilers Cheerleader uniforms, Houston Rockets Flight Crew uniforms, and various uniforms for Parker of Houston.

During that time, King was asked to serve on an advisory committee at HCC to develop a curriculum for the new fashion design program. After writing the curriculum, King was asked to teach a class as well.

"I was scared to death, because it was never on my radar plan. But I couldn't believe how much I loved it," King said. "In 1991, I went back to school and got a master's degree in liberal arts."

Though a master's degree was not required, she committed to her education because she was committed to those she was educating. She was Lead Instructor and in charge of hiring when the program began. From the beginning of the program, she hired only instructors with fashion industry experience to prepare the students for the more difficult aspects of the job.

When she became chair of the Lifestyle Arts and Design Careers Division, she continued the practice in each of the nine programs: Fashion Design, Fashion Merchandising, Theatrical Costume Design, Interior Design, Culinary Arts, Pastry Arts, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Travel and Tourism, and the Historical Fashion Collection.

The notoriety of her students, thus the college itself, has grown during her tenure. Her encouragement to enter state, national and international competitions has resulted in her students winning numerous awards.

In 1996, King became an educator of a different sort. As president of the Federation of Houston Professional Women, she planned a trip to D.C. for members. The trip's success led to King's position as travel director ever since. For 15 years, she has conducted trips of up to 22 women to various cities around the world.

Peters said, "The women on Kay's trips will go anywhere and try anything. Her courage and her spirit are boundless. And I've found very few women, as they get older, to exemplify that and model it for others."

King said, "I believe in living life to the fullest. I believe in taking risks to accomplish what you want to accomplish. I guess that old adage, 'Do what you want to do and ask forgiveness later,' is one of my philosophies, too."

Nikki Rosenberg is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.