

## 'They know your name'

### *Health care professionals honored for work with ill, aging*

Allison Brophy Champion

Staff writer

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Phyllis Lewis helps people stand on their own - literally.

A restorative aide at Culpeper Health & Rehabilitation Center, she works with patients after physical and occupational therapy to help them maintain the highest levels of day-to-day functioning, including standing and walking.

"I'm getting them to do what they can for themselves," said Lewis, 46, a Culpeper native.

"It's my joy," she said of her 24 years in the health care profession. "It gives me peace of mind to know that the elderly are being taken care of."



Donna Jenkins, center, of the Culpeper Health and Rehabilitation Center is congratulated after being recognized for her work by Aging Together during a breakfast at the Country Club of Culpeper Thursday morning. Staff Photo, Vincent Vala

Aging Together, a community partnership for older adults, Thursday recognized Lewis and 12 other local health care professionals, all women, for their work behind the scenes caring for the region's ill and aging population.

Friends, relatives and community leaders gathered at the Country Club of Culpeper for breakfast to celebrate their selflessness and to rain down some well-deserved thanks.

"Compassion, dedication, caring, mentoring, flexibility, enthusiasm, faithful, dependable, cheerful," said Peter Mocariski, manager at the Culpeper employment office, naming traits used to describe the women in the nominations for Outstanding Health Care Professionals.

"The bottom line in the health care profession - changes, technology, innovation and medication aside - is the amazingly dedicated people who provide day to day care for the patients. They know your name and you know their name."

Honoree Geraldine Strother, 56, shares a stronger bond with her patients at the President Madison Inn of Orange than just knowing their names.

"They are like family to me," said the soft-spoken patient care aide who started out as housekeeper at the home for adults more than 15 years ago.

Strother is like a rock to the Inn's residents, who range in age from the mid-30s up to their 80s, said administrator Ramona Reynor of Louisa.

"They know that when Geraldine comes in everything is going to be done the way it's supposed to be done," said Reynor. "She is one of the most loyal, dedicated employees we have."

In all, 30 health care professionals were nominated for the Aging Together Award, including honoree Donna Jenkins, 54, of Lignum. Activities assistant at Culpeper Health & Rehab, she started working at the Madison Road facility nearly 23 years ago and in spite of her own health problems has endured.

Perhaps Jenkins had some help from within her own ranks.

"We call ourselves sisters," said Lewis of her co-worker and fellow honoree.

Added Jenkins, "Through good times and bad we have each other."

Likewise, the patients have Jenkins to keep them entertained.

"I keep them happy," she said of her position in which she organizes fun activities like jewelry making, popcorn night and crafting. "Just because they are (in the rehab center) they should not miss out any quality of life."

Jenkins does not take her responsibilities lightly.

"Being with the residents is the most important thing in the world to me," she said.

Behind closed doors in facilities that some people never visit, area health care professionals give and give and then they give some more. In terms of money, they're not the highest paid individuals and the necessary tasks they do day in and day out are not always the most pleasant.

But for most, they don't do it for the money and they don't often complain. Caring for the ill and aging, surely, comes from the heart.

According to Aging Together Project Manager Chris Miller, their profession is the most critical part of the workforce.

"The aging population is going to triple in the next several decades, making the need for the people who do this kind of work so important," she said. "These are the frontline staff - the people taking care of our parents and grandparents."

Allison Brophy Champion can be reached at 825-0771 ext. 101 or [abrophy@starexponent.com](mailto:abrophy@starexponent.com).