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Top News

Ten people who work to make CNY a better place to live

January 01, 2004

By **Frank Brieady**
Staff writer

Their service to Central New York is inspiring.

One is a neighborhood grocer who chose to offer job training to the youngsters who frequent his market rather than chase them out. Two are high-ranking Syracuse University

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administrators whose leadership and expertise has been applied to a wide variety of community issues.

Most have worked to secure a brighter future for area children, providing such basics as food and immunizations for low-income families as well as child-abuse services and higher education opportunities for teens with dreams but no money.

They are The Post-Standard's annual Achievement Award winners, a group of 10 people who donate their time, energy and personal resources

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to make this community a better place to live.

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They will be honored before several hundred guests and admirers at a luncheon, noon Feb. 5 at the Holiday Inn Syracuse/Liverpool, Electronics Parkway, Salina, in cooperation with the Syracuse Federation of Women's Clubs. Reservations can be made with coupons appearing in The Post-Standard.

Following is just a hint of their considerable accomplishments:

Kenyon Craig, of Cazenovia, gave up a job as a shopping mall manager for The Pyramid Cos. in 1989 to pursue a far less lucrative venture in real estate.

Working for free, he created the nonprofit Housing Visions Unlimited, which acquires and rehabilitates homes in low-income neighborhoods and offers them to families who can purchase the properties after living there 15 years.

Currently, Housing Visions Unlimited provides homes for more than 300 families in Auburn, Binghamton, Syracuse and Utica.

Virginia Donohue, of Hannibal, wanted to make dreams come true for teens who didn't think they could get into college.

In 1999, the teacher-turned-accountant with three college degrees gave up her job as chief financial officer for a computer and imaging equipment dealership and devoted herself to her passion for higher-education counseling. She formed On Point for College.

The nonprofit provides all the support and financial aid counseling necessary to begin and continue college education for hundreds of young students, 270 of whom are currently enrolled in two- and four-year colleges. The retention rate is 80 percent.

Linda Ervin, of DeWitt, retired from a career as a real estate agent but never slowed down. She was the first black to serve on the Jamesville-DeWitt school board, two of 12 years as president.

She has worked with Jubilee Homes, the Syracuse Black Coalition, the Vivian Teal Howard Residential Health Care Facility and Syracuse Links.

Ervin is a foster parent and a trained literacy volunteer and works with the Onondaga County Court Appointed Special Advocates Program for abused and neglected children.

Nirelle Galson, of DeWitt, created a memorial for the 35 SU students who died in the terrorist attack on Pan Am Flight 103. She organized the initial service for those who died, helped establish Remembrance Scholarships in memory of the dead and established guidelines for the university to deal with crises.

As executive director of the International Programs Abroad, Galson has set up safeguards for traveling students that have grown her program from 800 to 2,000 participants.

Away from work, she has leadership roles with the Metropolitan School for the Arts and the Syracuse Jewish Federation.

Horace Landry, of Syracuse, has been involved in a long list of causes, ranging from Junior Achievement to the Salvation Army to the American Red Cross and Loretto.

He is an SU professor emeritus of management who is retired from the Price Waterhouse Coopers accounting firm, where he had been a partner. Landry has brought his management and fund-raising skills - and contributed significant personal money - to many local nonprofits over several decades.

On the numerous occasions when he has been honored, he designated a charity to benefit, most often those serving children.

When the InterReligious Council of Central New York gave him its InterReligious Leadership Award on his 80th birthday in 1992, the event raised \$80,000 for Congregations Concerned for Children to combat childhood hunger, homelessness and despair in the community.

Cornelius B. Murphy Jr., of Syracuse, spent 30 years rising through the ranks of the O'Brien & Gere engineering firm, serving eventually as president and board chair, as the Syracuse business became a world leader in environmental, construction and manufacturing engineering.

Then he became president of the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry, revamping academic majors, launching scholarship prizes, establishing outreach to area high school science programs and sending his students into the community in greater numbers than ever before to donate the skills they are developing.

His technical, management and educational expertise have led to such local accomplishments as the New York Indoor Environmental Quality Center.

Paul Nojaim, of Onondaga, has set an example for small businesses in Syracuse to provide solutions to the problems of youth unemployment and all the trouble that can come when young people have too much free time in tough neighborhoods.

A member of the Mayor's Intervention Task Force on Youth Violence, the third-generation grocer set up a jobs program for neighborhood teens at his store, 307 Gifford St. He offers life-skills training that go beyond bagging groceries: job interview techniques and lessons about being punctual and reliable.

His interns are encouraged to finish their schooling and become productive community members.

Pam and Mike O'Donnell, of Clay, have adopted the families and children of Central New York as their special cause, working with Success by 6 to increase immunizations for babies, delivering food baskets and toys and leading crews to clean playgrounds.

Since moving to Syracuse 10 years ago, they have served with Healthy Start, the Pediatric Child Abuse Care and Enhancement unit at University Hospital, Vera House, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Syracuse and the Maternal Child Health unit at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center.

Mary Ann Shaw, of Syracuse, is the associate of the chancellor of Syracuse University and has been involved in a variety of critical causes in the community since she and her husband, SU chancellor Kenneth "Buzz" Shaw, moved to town in 1991.

She has served as chair of the board of the United Way of Central New York and remains active in its Success by 6 movement to improve the health and learning of young children from low-income families.

She was instrumental in developing the university's Literacy Corps - now

170 strong - and recently took on the post of chair of the executive committee of the Central New York Children's Hospital.

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