

Volunteer Event News Article 2010

Peace-makers appreciated during Mediation Services event

by Sue Austreng
Staff writer

Neighbors in a snit over property lines and sidewalk snow-shoveling issues ...
Divorced moms and dads arguing about summertime custody arrangements ...
Brothers and sisters at war over details in dear old dad's last will and testament ...

Disputes and disagreements disrupt lives on a daily basis, but thanks to services provided by Mediation Services for Anoka County, peaceful resolution is possible.

On April 28, in recognition of the "magical work" of mediation and in appreciation of the peaceful resolutions accomplished, Mediation Services for Anoka County staged its annual volunteer appreciation event.

The event allowed time and space for expressing thanksgiving to mediators and board members for so passionately giving of their time and energies, their expertise and their hearts.

"You continue to give so much too so many. And you give not only your time, but your hearts, and we thank you for having your hearts set right," said executive director Kathi Jensen as she introduced Mediation Services board members and mediators gathered in the sun-splashed Anoka County Government Center atrium.

Awards

Awards were bestowed recognizing years of service and gratefully acknowledging above-board dedication and especially-pleasing and positive mediation attributes.

Five-year certificates were awarded to Maureen Devine (mediator), Janice Nordling (mediator), Deb Dahl (mediator/board member), and Kathy Timm (board member).

Ten-year awards were presented to Nancy Ernewein (mediator/board member) and Kate McPherson (mediator).

McPherson also received the Beulah Lea Award, given to commemorate Beulah Lea, a long time, beloved volunteer with Mediation Services.

"Kate has mediated for 10 years, but it was obvious from the start that her exemplary facilitative style has made her a role model," said Jensen, and then added, "What I appreciate about Kate is her commitment to mediation – she designates one specific day a month when we can always count on her ... As befitting Beulah Lea, she always does it in a cheerful, calm, bright way and with her sense of humor."

Tearfully accepting the award, McPherson insisted she gets more than she gives.

"This is truly an honor for me," McPherson said. "But I must tell you I get more out of the experience of mediation than what I put in. Every time I mediate I drive home more energetic, more optimistic, more empowered about life and about the community," she said. "This is truly a powerful experience. It is truly my pleasure and honor to be part of this organization."

The Mediator of the Year award went to Dale Despard, a two-time winner of the award.

The Mediator of the Year award, bestowed annually since 2003, goes to a mediator who is "reliable, willing to serve, committed to the agency, highly regarded by staff and other mediators and has distinguished themselves in some way," said Jensen.

Despard certainly fits that bill, Jensen said, reporting that, although he makes his home in Aitkin, Despard remains committed to his service as mediator in Anoka County.

"When Dale and his wife sold their home and moved north (to Aitkin, Minn.) he said he would keep in touch and continue to mediate, but moving several hours away, we thought we would seldom see him. Wrong," Jensen said. "Dale has continued to do more mediations this past year than anyone on our roster," she said.

Despard's empathetic personality, his experience with children and families, his insightfulness and wisdom make his mediation efforts especially valuable and successful, said Jensen.

Humbly accepting the award, Despard said, "I can't think of a better place to be purposeful and worthwhile than Mediation Services. I've always gotten far more out of mediation than I've ever given," he said.

The judge's comments

Judge Sharon Hall, of the 10th judicial district, served as guest speaker for the April 28 volunteer appreciation event and she spoke of the value mediators give to the judicial process.

"You all give so much time and talent during times that are very troubling," Hall said. "In some cultures the mediator is regarded as a sacred figure. They are worthy and honored individuals. You are certainly worthy, honored, sacred to

the court system because in addition to serving those people you work with, you really help the bench here in Anoka County," she said.

Jensen had earlier announced an April 27 decision made by Mediation Services for Anoka County that results in a partnership with Hamline School of Law to work in the county's conciliation court.

"Working with the conciliation court will take off some of the work load we have in that process," Hall said.

"You provide an environment where (the combatants) are listened to, they are respected. You massage the dispute and work your magic," Hall said.

"I thank you. The bench thanks you. You are our unsung heroes," the judge said to the mediators.

History of Mediation Services for Anoka County

Since 1987 Mediation Services for Anoka County, a 501(c) (3) agency, has been helping families, neighborhoods, schools, landlords, tenants, businesses and consumers manage and resolve conflict through education and conflict resolution services.

Professionally trained and supervised volunteer mediators assist individuals and communities to successfully resolve problems and disputes on their own using alternative dispute resolution methods.

Mediators are neutral, third-party facilitators who assist parties with communication in order for them to develop their own jointly-acceptable solution.

Community mediation is offered at no charge or on a sliding fee scale to the parties involved unless the mediation is for a large group, involves monetary recovery, or is a post-divorce issue.