

*Mediation Services Hosts Volunteer Appreciation Event
With County Attorney Robert Johnson Featured Speaker
By Kathi Jensen, Executive Director*

Mediation Services for Anoka County (MSAC), a non profit agency providing mostly free alternate dispute resolution services to the Anoka County community in Coon Rapids since 1987, held it's annual Volunteer Appreciation Event at the Anoka County Government Center Thursday, April 30th from 5 to 7 PM. County Attorney Robert Johnson was the guest speaker.

Debbie Dahl, 2009 board president welcomed the fifty people present. "When you volunteer, it means you give without any regression, without condition, but full devotion," and "I am honored to be here tonight. This agency wouldn't function without your involvement, your talents, and your dedication." Ms. Dahl, who is Human Resources Director for the City of Fridley, added that she would love it if everyone approached their job with the same desire and passion as the volunteer mediators.

She then introduced County Attorney Robert Johnson, who has been employed by the county for almost 40 years and county attorney for the last 26 years. He told the group about his support of mediation. Both he and had father, the previous county attorney, have served as honorary chairs of a Mediation Services past fundraiser. He also explained the expanded collaboration with Mediation Services and his office to provide Restorative Justice to both victims and offenders.

"At one time, I was a victim of crime, and it did not feel good. I was extremely affected, and I had questions about the incident." He explained that Restorative Justice helps victims get their questions answered while still holding the offender accountable. A dialogue can be arranged through the program where the parties can talk to each other outside the court arena, get their questions answered and all come up with solutions to heal the community. "It helps both parties move on with their lives, and offenders are less likely to re-offend having had to face their victim directly."

Johnson elaborated on how he has seen his office change dramatically in the last 26 years – from a small staff of around ten to well over ten times that now. "The increase in crime along with the increase in penalties for those crimes have contributed to a burden on the court." He noted that the increase is also due to the influx of drug and chemical dependency problems. "In the early days, my goal would be to prosecute to the full extent of the law. Now we want to prosecute and set sentences so that people do not return to the court system." He feels that mediation, settling problems in a safe setting outside the court with the aid of neutral mediators, is a cost-effective way of the future to help out the courts. He thanked the agency and their 32 volunteer mediators for all that they have done to help people create peaceful solutions to their problems.

MSAC Executive Director Kathi Jensen also thanked the speaker, the board of directors and the mediators before presenting awards with Dahl. "You volunteers don't get paid – not because you're worthless, but because you are priceless as one writer has said. You are all priceless peacemakers who have lent a hand in many different ways to help create peaceful solutions for our clients."

5 year Certificate (2004) Elizabeth Bromley, Bill Erhart, Anita Tomlinson, board members.

10 year Awards (1999) Mary Ann Broos – Assata Brown – Casimir Burzynski- Tami Duke – Vicki Granros – Linda Herman– Richard Jefferson – all mediators.

20 year Awards (1989) Sue Dilcher
Past board member and current mediator.

Karrie Schaaf – Family Specialist – “Spirit Award” - Karrie has contracted with MSAC since Dec. 2007 to fulfill an obligation to Anoka Count’s Family Homeless Prevention grant.

Beulah Lea Award: Anita Tomlinson

This award was first given in April 2003 to commemorate Beulah Lea, a long time, beloved volunteer. This “volunteer of the year” recipient must be a long-time volunteer who has worked behind the scenes of the agency and possesses a bright, positive outlook, furthers mediation and is highly regarded by agency staff and volunteers. This person should exemplify Bea’s character – cheerful, calm, bright and have a good sense of humor.

Tomlinson has served as the agency’s board secretary for 5 years and is an administrative assistant to business faculty at Northwestern College for 26 years. She and husband Tim live in Blaine and have one adult daughter.

Mediator of the Year Award : George Wallin

This honor has been awarded annually since 2003 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. Wallin has been a mediator for over 2 years. He and his wife Rachelle have an adult son and daughter and live in Big Lake. As A CEO for Connections, Inc. a telecommunications company, he is an avid biker, runner and cross country skier and also cherishes time with his family.

Jensen said that George makes himself very available to MSAC and did more mediations in 2008 than anyone else. “His thirst for learning is unquenchable and he has turned in more training credits than anyone else as well – attending workshops on both the state and local level to improve his skills. He is conscientious about following up after mediations and compassionate with disputants, ardently helping them get to the source of their problems for mutual solutions,” Jensen added.

Master of Ceremonies Dahl then thanked Coon Rapids Famous Dave’s for providing a very affordable buffet for the event and Culvers of Anoka for the donated dessert. Other thanks were issues to Bromley Printing for the invitation and poster, Dave and Lonni McCauley for flowers, local artist Mark Sanisto for providing the mediators with caricature sketches and the Coon Rapids High School String Quartet for the prelude of lovely classical music. Texas Roadhouse of Coon Rapids donated a gift basket and security was provided by Anoka County Sheriff’s Office.

For more information regarding mediation and the agency's programs, please call Mediation Services for Anoka County at [763-422-8878](tel:763-422-8878).



County Attorney Robert Johnson spoke to the volunteer board members and mediators and guests about their contribution to the court system and the



value of mediation.



The Coon Rapids High School String Quartet volunteered their talents to entertain the volunteers: Ann Waskosky, Violin; Caitlin Andrea, Violin; Ashley Rades, Viola; Carole Braschayko, Cello.



10 Year Mediator Recipients with Executive Director Kathi Jensen (right). Richard Jefferson, Mary Ann Broos, Casimir Burzynski, Tami Duke, Vicki Granros, (Linda Herman and Assata Brown absent).



Board Chair Debbie Dahl, Karrie Schaaf, and Executive Director Kathi Jensen. Schaaf received an award for her contracted services with MSAC for the Anoka County Family Homeless Grant and the passion that she has put into reducing the number of homeless youth in the community.



Anita Tomlinson (right) received the Beulah Lea Memorial Award for her commitment behind the scenes the last 5 years at Mediation Services. Beulah, a long time volunteer, is represented by her daughter (middle) Barb Gilbertson of Spring Lake Park with Debbie Dahl, Board Chair (left).



Debbie Dahl and Kathi Jensen pose with the 2009 Mediator of the Year, George Wallin, Big Lake. Wallin has been a mediator for 2 ½ years and won the award based on his dedication, training, and compassionate and conscientious abilities to help people solve problems.



Elizabeth and Scott Bromley, Bromley Printing, Coon Rapids, enjoyed the free artistic services provided by caricature artist Mark Sanisto.



Mediation Services's staff members serve food to the volunteers. Deb Huebner, Program and Administrative Assistant and Cassie Zonnefeld, the Restorative Justice Specialist who administers the victim/offender program for MSAC in collaboration with the County Attorney and Victim Witness Program.