

Honoring the county's outstanding women

Rocky Pt, Miller Place home to 'Hall of Famers'

BY JOE DARROW
joedarrow@tbrnewspapers.com

They clean the homes of cancer patients for free. They ensure the hungry have food. They work to end drunk driving. They care for the mentally ill and victims of abuse when no one else will.

They are the altruistic and accomplished women of Suffolk, and now they have a wall of honor.

Suffolk Executive Steve Levy unveiled the county women's wall of honor in the lobby of the H. Lee Dennison Building in Hauppauge Monday evening. On display in the first-floor plaza of that government office tower are the portraits of the 29 women inducted since the hall of fame's inception in 1994.

"I think it's very nice [the inductees] are being honored for the work they

do and to acknowledge that someone is paying attention," said Dena Cohen, president of the Long Island Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, who was named to the Hall of Fame in 2007. "I'm honored to be honored."

Marion McNulty, selected to the Hall of fame in 2006, called it "a wonderful testament to the women who have given so much..."

The wall was inspired by similar monuments Levy said he observed in Legislature chambers in Albany during his stint as state assemblyman. When he became county executive in 2004, he increased the number of honorees, Levy said, because there are so many deserving women, recognizing them at the previous rate of one or two per year would "take forever."

"We still aren't even touching the surface of the number of quality women who have contributed back to their

county," the executive said.

"I'm very honored to be up there on the wall with all these great women," said Theresa Ward, a 2009 inductee. Ward is owner of the Rocky Point-based Theresa's Family Cleaning. She began the program Cleaning for a Reason, in which her company cleans the homes of breast-cancer patients free of charge.

Sr. Pat Griffith, a Catholic Sister of Mercy, founded Mercy Haven 25 years ago when public mental hospitals began closing, leaving their wards with no place to go. The organization now spans 40 properties across the Island and houses victims of mental illness and itinerant families with children.

Levy said when he met Sr. Pat years ago he "learned that God really does have people placed on earth to work on his behalf."

Frances Watkins of Kings Park, a 2009 inductee, founded and directed the county's Emergency Food Pantry Network in 1970. The pantries were located at an inter-denominational network of churches and offered sustenance to the working poor. These are not people on welfare, Watkins said, but "people who work every day of the week and by the end of the month can't afford food" because other needs like shelter and utility costs intervened.

By the time she retired in 1991, the network had 827 emergency food pantries across Suffolk. Watkins has also served as foster mother to 11 developmentally disabled children.

Marion McNulty of Miller Place entered the Hall of Fame in 2006. McNulty was the first woman elected to county-wide judicial office in Suffolk's 300-year history — she is the judge overseeing matrimonial matters for county Family Court — and is the founder of Suffolk's Women's Bar Association.

The wall "is a wonderful testament to the women who have given so much to the county over the years," said McNulty.

Other honorees include Julie Woodley (2009) of Setauket, who founded Restoring the Heart Ministries to support victims of abuse and holds fundraising dinners for families of deceased 9/11 victims and U.S. military members; former and first female Stony Brook University President Shirley Strum Kenny (1999); Brooke Ellison (2009) of Stony Brook, author, public speaker and stem-cell research advocate; Middle Country Public Library Director Sandy Feinberg (2008) of Stony Brook, who led the creation of regional resources like the Community Resource Database of Long Island, Mid-Suffolk Regional Literacy Program and Miller Business Resource Center; and Karen Acompora of Fort Salonga, who founded the Louis J. Acompora Foundation to provide free defibrillators to schools following the tragic death of her son.

