



## THE MISSISSIPPI PRESS

### Volunteers honored at United Way ceremony

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Staff Reporter

PASCAGOULA Three men and woman, two youth and two civic organizations were among the honorees Thursday at the 22nd annual Volunteers are Important People event sponsored by the United Way of Jackson and George Counties.

The volunteers were honored during a ceremony at LaFont Inn in Pascagoula for their service to the community.

Award winners were Bette-Jean Jones, female volunteer; George Simmerman, male volunteer; Holley Cunningham and Daniel Roberts, youth volunteers; Court Appointed Special Advocates, local community service team; Delta GEMS, youth division; and Dr. Bob Donald, humanitarian award.

All 19 nominees in every category worked a total of 81,870 volunteer hours in 2008.

"It's because of the volunteer hours you put in that inspire us to do better," said Ellen Cole, president of United Way's board of directors.

Donald, who won the award representing a lifetime of community service, said this community is known for producing outstanding public servants and named his inspiration as the late Jolly McCarty. Donald, a retired physician, helped found United Christian Outreach in 1982, the nonprofit that operates the Our Daily Bread soup kitchen in Pascagoula.

"It's a tremendous honor to represent this community with this award," Donald said.

Roberts, who tied with Cunningham for the youth volunteer award, was recognized for helping spearhead a walk against violence in response to the slaying of Michael David Porter last year. The walk raised more than \$3,000 for Porter's widow, Linda. Roberts is also involved in the American Heart Association's Heart Walk, mentoring children and volunteering for Habitat for Humanity.

"God blesses us so we can turn around and bless others," Roberts said. "I feel that everyone should do their part to help others."

Cunningham led an effort to raise funds for playground equipment at the Jackson County Exceptional School, which serves mentally and physically challenged students. Cunningham also has given Christmas gifts to children in foster care.

Jones volunteers with the Jackson County Literacy Council and Lake Elementary and is known for entertaining children in a Cat in the Hat costume, modeled after the character in the Dr. Seuss classic.

Simmerman serves as chairman of the Home of Grace's board of directors and volunteers as the nonprofit's legal counsel.

CASA volunteers time to advocate for abused and neglected children in the Jackson County court system, and CASA volunteers helped at Our Daily Bread, March of Dimes, Jackson County Civic Center and with local youth ministry teams.

The Delta GEMS participated in toy giveaways, volunteered for Salvation Army and Our Daily Bread during the holidays and served as hostesses at First Missionary Baptist Church.

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