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True dedication

Chamber Woman of Year says faith a driving factor in work

By Patrick McDonough
 Argus Observer
 Saturday, January 1, 2011 10:05 PM PST

Ontario — Although being chosen by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce as Woman of the Year is an honor Rene Cummings is thankful for and appreciative of, it is also, in many ways, a humbling experience for the New Plymouth resident.



Rene Cummings sits behind her desk at Harvest House Missions in Ontario. Cummings, who the Ontario Chamber of Commerce named as Woman of the Year, helped found the organization and, as executive director, plans to continue the group's mission of helping the community through existing programs and other programs Harvest House envisions for the future.

As executive director of Harvest House Missions in Ontario, Cummings has impacted many in the community through her work, but Cummings said much, if not all, of the credit belongs to her higher power as well as others in the community.

"Personally, I couldn't do anything," she said. "In fact, I am always amazed when anything gets done through me."

But many things are being done by Cummings and Harvest House such as a host of projects aimed to better the community and the lives of its residents.

Cummings cites the group's summer lunch program, the work the group is doing with the Next Chapter food pantry, the SEASON youth program and other efforts to help young people and others in the community as examples of that work.

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It does take a great deal of hard work, Cummings admits. She said she has been accused of working all of the time, but she said that is because her work is, in many ways, her life.

Cummings and Harvest House are inextricably bound, she said. Cummings' outlook and philosophy are reflected in the organization that she helped to found with Lillian Titus.

Cummings said it was her own experience as a single

mother of four that helped to shape her life and guide her to helping others. She also worked in the local Head Start program for 16 years where her ability to help others was honed, and she was able to see many of the needs in the community.

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"We saw a need in the community through the hungry and the homeless," she said. "We believe the church and believers are commanded to take care of the poor and the hungry, the widow and the orphan."

"God wants us to help people," Cummings said, referring to a quote from the biblical book of James about helping those in need.

She said that today the definition of orphan can include children in foster homes and the legal system who do not have a positive and caring influence in their lives.

Cummings said the work Harvest House does is about being a positive influence and about human connections and helping people through those connections.

Cummings said she counts on her relationship with God to be effective in the community, and that the programs also depend upon relationships to effectively assist people in finding a better life.

"We believe that all of our programs are really about relationships," she said. "They are about relationships with others in the community making a difference, as well as relationships with those in the programs."

"We work on building protective factors, on making a positive impact in their lives through activities, role models, meals and field trips. We can't always reduce risk factors for area kids, but we can move the balance in their lives towards protective factors."

Cummings said she still enjoys reading and spending time with her family outdoors, camping and hiking, but she also enjoys the life she feels God has given her the grace to allow her to lead.

"I work almost all of the time," she said. "But it is not just my work. It is my ministry. It is what I was called to do."

Cummings said she and those at Harvest House continue to have a vision for the future.

"We really are focusing on a transitional living program for kids 18 to 24," she said. "We also are working on a family program to safely reduce the number of children in foster care."

Cummings said the group always welcomes support from individuals and community groups in its work and mission.

"It is a work of love," she said. "Anything good that has happened with Harvest House is all God's strength and not mine."

For more information about Harvest House, call (541) 889-1905, or visit the organization's website at www.harvesthousemissions.org.

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Comment Blog - Note: All Comments Subject To Approval

Norma J Barnett wrote on Jan 4, 2011 10:25 PM:
" I commend Renee for her hard work in this community. She has shown herself to be faithful and compassionate in her work. She also started the Thanksgiving dinner with the help of some of the other churches and volunteers. They met a real need in my life a couple of years ago when I was too sick to cook and I know many others benefitted from those dinners too. Renee has been easy to work with and seems to always have an even temperament. She sets a real example of what God can do in a person's life. God Bless you Renae. "

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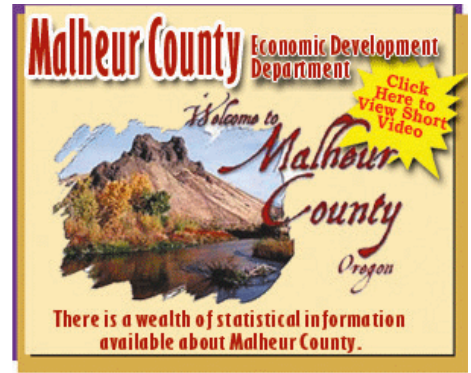
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