

Going Beyond the Walls: Cheryl Honey



Cheryl Honey

Strong and courageous women are part of the fabric of American history. During pioneer days when families traveled in wagon trains across the continent, women had to be tough and resilient in the face of tremendous hardship. Cheryl Honey might be compared to those pioneer women. Life has brought her bitter experiences, but through faith and persistence, she has turned troubles into teaching tools. She lives in the Seattle area and this month was named one of five local winners of the 2007 Jefferson Award. This award was created in 1972 by Jackie Onassis and Senator Robert Taft, Jr., for the purpose of recognizing unsung heroes across America.

Cheryl has also received other prestigious awards and commendations, including the Giraffe Award for sticking her neck out to provide a solution to empower families. In October 2002, she was selected as an Ambassador for Peace by the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace (IIFWP); and in July 2003 she was presented with the Excellence in Leadership award on Capitol Hill. In November 2006, she went to Korea as part of an international Peace & Goodwill Tour sponsored by the IIFWP.



From left, Seattle-area Jefferson Award recipients Grover Haynes, Rita Selin, Cheryl Honey, Mark Boyar and Harriet Morton. (April 05, 2007)

Credit: Karen Ducey/Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Cheryl has been a friend and supporter of WFWP since 1996, when she attended a Japanese-American Sisterhood program. She experienced a personal calling in 1986 to serve her neighbors and bring the love of God into her community. She says, "I had a vision while praying inside my church. I saw the walls falling down while the congregation was inside. The church members were afraid to look outside the walls; they were afraid to go into the community. I knew I had to go there."

In 1992, Cheryl herself was in need of assistance when her marriage fell apart. As a single



Cheryl with her children.

From left, Emma, Cheryl, Nate, Kristin, Addie.

mother with four children, she applied for social services but was disturbed by the coldness of the bureaucracy she was forced to deal with. She told her caseworker, "I'm not broken and in need of fixing; I just need to be connected with people who care." Later, she and a group of friends were discussing their problems: drugs; alcohol; abandonment; lack of fulfillment. She went home that night with an idea: Why don't we pool our resources and help each other?

That idea inspired her to begin the nonprofit organization called **Family Support Network**. She knew the internet was a great untapped resource, so she brought together some tech-savvy people and worked with them to set up a website: www.familynetwork.org.

The Family Support Network has three basic levels, beginning with **Good Neighbors**. If you are looking for tools, services, or peer support to deal with a challenging situation, just fill out the registration form and you will gain immediate access to an abundance of resources from all the other Good Neighbors around the country.

On the next level, you can start a Family Support Network in your own neighborhood, school, church, or nonprofit organization by becoming a **Community Weaver**. Like weavers of cloth, Community Weavers pull together people and resources. More about this level of involvement is found at www.communityweaving.org.

Finally, to participate in service-learning opportunities, you can become a certified **Family Advocate** volunteer who is matched to neighbors needing one-on-one peer support services. These levels of volunteerism are supplementing the work of agencies and institutions, and some government agencies are referring clients to the Family Support Network because of its effectiveness.

Many people who volunteer in the network first joined as recipients of others' assistance. Other volunteers simply love the sense of purpose gained by working a few hours a week for the network. As one man put it, "I feel inspired by spending time with the Family Support Network. It's much more meaningful than just going to work, coming home and watching TV every day."

In 2006, Community Weavers facilitated 175,000 volunteer hours around America totaling \$2.6 million in direct services to individuals and community initiatives. These projects included: Operation SafeHaven to provide temporary housing for Katrina evacuees; food and babysitting co-ops; and recycling furniture and clothing.

Cheryl now travels to various places conducting workshops and training groups in the concept of Community Weaving. A woman striving to bring the love of God into all the homes and neighborhoods of this country, she works with anybody who shares her passion for helping. "All major religions teach that we are here on this earth to love one another. We have to go beyond the walls of our religion, culture and political beliefs to heal this world," Cheryl says.

Note: WFWP members may sign up for free as Good Neighbors at www.familynetwork.org. Enter Group ID: WFWP (all caps) so WFWP members will be interconnected to serve one another and be of service in communities all around the world.