

# Seniors' Resource Center Honors Senior Heroes

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By **Mike McKibbin**

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The way Chuck Lautenbach looks at it, he has a great job as a volunteer at Lutheran Medical Center in Wheat Ridge.

“How many people get to tell hundreds of people where they can go?” the 95-year-old Golden resident said as he received an award for his volunteering. “Nicely, of course.”

Lautenbach was one of eight senior citizens honored at the Senior Heroes 2018 award presentation at the Mountain Vista Senior Living Community in Wheat Ridge on Thursday, May 10. The Seniors' Resource Center and Jefferson County Council on Aging presented eight awards for volunteer work.

Lautenbach has volunteered 12 to 15 hours a month at Lutheran Medical Center in Wheat Ridge for the past quarter-century.

Debbie Anderson with Lutheran Medical Center wrote in her nomination that Lautenbach, a U.S. Army veteran, began his volunteer work as a “mailman.”

“His upbeat personality led to friendships with the staff throughout the hospital, who affectionately nicknamed him ‘Chuckles,’” Anderson wrote in her nomination. “Chuck went on to oversee the daily operations of the hospital’s Blue House tea room and consignment shop ....”

After the Blue House closed, Lautenbach volunteered at the info desk, Anderson added, “as he loves to be near other volunteers and staff and help hospital visitors. Chuck loves to talk with staff and visitors and knows no strangers ....”

Another honoree, Geraldine “Gerry” Johansson, 93, of Arvada, has volunteered 13 hours a month for 34 years at the Apex Community Center of Arvada. Earlier in life, Johansson served in the USO during World War I.

“As Gomer Pyle would say, ‘golly, thank you, thank you, thank you,’” Johansson said to laughter from the crowd.

“Through Gerry’s efforts and talents with crafts, she helped the Apex Center raise funds for projects such as purchasing automatic doors, lobby furniture and kitchen appliances for community use,” wrote Dale Marshall, volunteer specialist at the center, adding that despite receiving a pacemaker 28 years ago and a few replacements, Johansson has not slowed down.

“At 93 years young, she amazes everyone with her humor, wisdom and hard work ....”

Senior Heroes have been honored for about 17 years to bring attention to the likelihood many agencies would be hard-pressed to provide services without volunteers and to recognize volunteer efforts.

Each February, nominations are sought from hospitals, libraries, senior centers, faith communities, cities and retirement communities. Between 20-45 nominations are received and honorees are chosen by a group of three representatives each from the SRC and the council on aging:

Charles “Charley” Ault, 71, of Arvada, volunteered more than 20 hours a month for 19 years at the Wheat Ridge Optimist Club.

Wade Hammond of the club noted Ault is a board member, past holder of various offices with the Optimists, and headed up a Junior Optimist Club. Those clubs teach area teens how to help the community through volunteerism, Hammond wrote in his nomination.

“Charley lives out the Optimist creed of a ‘friend to youth’,” he added. “He gives time to the children of the community through the Christmas and Immediate Needs programs that serve 300 kids per year. In 2017, the gifting program provided 65 families with Christmas gifts and food cards.”

Cynthia Best, 70, of Evergreen, volunteered 60 hours a month for the last seven years at the Mount Evans Home Health Care & Hospice in Evergreen.

Lori Carpenter, director of volunteers for the program, wrote that Best “multi-tasks” for Mt. Evans as a volunteer receptionist, organizing fund-raising events and performing data entry tasks.

“She is described as dedicated and hard-working,” Carpenter wrote. “... Cynthia is known for her meticulous and confidential work ethic, all done with the special compassion needed in a hospice and care environment.”

Judith Gordon, 79, of Golden, volunteered 12 to 15 hours a month for the last eight years at the SRC’s adult day and respite care center in Wheat Ridge.

Tia Saucedo with the SRC noted Gordon presents a weekly specialized reminisce discussion group for seniors with dementia.

“Judith puts much into the program by devoting thought and energy to what clients will respond to via music, special topics and getting to know each participant,” Saucedo wrote. “Additionally, Judith volunteers in the SRC kitchen with food prep and cleaning.”

Sandy Graber, 67, of Arvada, volunteered 50 hours a month for the last eight years at the Community Table (formerly the Arvada Community Food Bank).

“Her behind-the-scenes help includes client services (client intake and database), accounting assistant, helping with the Feeding the Future Backpack program and special events such as Thanksgiving Box distribution, postal food drive and golf tournament,” Jaci Hjelmgren of the

Community Table wrote.

Charie Platt, 84, of Lakewood, volunteered more than 100 hours a month with the Colorado Volunteers of America's foster grandparent program in Jefferson County.

Patti Krattenmaker with VOA Colorado noted Platt helps pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students at three Jefferson County elementary schools in Lakewood and Golden with their reading skills and building confidence.

"Charie is passionate about helping students, taking each one to heart," Krattenmaker wrote.

Marge Seyfer, 77, of Wheat Ridge, volunteered 15 to 20 hours a month with the Wheat Ridge Business Association for more than 30 years.

Cheryl Brungardt with the association called Seyfer a "cheerleader for all things Wheat Ridge and getting others involved in the community."

"She has organized the Wheat Ridge kite festival and served as vendor chair for the Wheat Ridge carnation festival," Brungardt wrote. "... She is known for her high energy and is a great role model for using one's time to benefit the greater community."

Also honored was council on aging President Cary Johnson for his work with the Jefferson County District Attorney's office to help prevent senior fraud crimes. Current DA Pete Weir and his predecessor, Scott Storey, presented Johnson with his award.

### **40th anniversary brings challenges**

May is Older Americans Month nationwide and the SRC is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

In 1978, the SRC began as part of the Jefferson County Department of Social Services. It was incorporated in 1982 as a nonprofit provider of information, services and advocacy for seniors in the metro Denver area. Its main area helps seniors who have trouble staying in their homes due to health or financial reasons.

Locations are its headquarters in Denver, a Wheat Ridge adult day facility, the Yellow House in Evergreen, southwest in Littleton, the Mark T. Starr Center in Lakewood and the Johnson adult day program in Englewood.

Transportation, adult day and respite care, volunteer services and opportunities, in-home care, care management, chores, mental health outreach, wellness and services for adults with developmental disabilities are offered.

The over-85 population – the main demographic served by the program – is the fastest growing in the U.S., SRC President and CEO Monica Roers noted in an interview.

“And as more Baby Boomers retire, those numbers will just continue to go up,” she said. “We’re seeing smaller families as well, so the numbers of seniors is growing faster than the younger populations” that have traditionally helped pay for senior services through their taxes.

The SRC has a \$10 million operating budget, 256 employees and 819 volunteers, Roers explained. Staff and volunteers provided “in-depth” services to 10,189 seniors in 2017, according to program figures.

Roers said the SRC’s “braided funding” of government, foundations and individual donors has provided some stability over the years.

“But with the federal funding questions at the moment, it’s a little more unstable,” she stated. “For now, we’ve been able to ask our other sources like foundations and the state to fill in some gaps.”

Most of the SRC’s federal funding comes through the Older Americans Act, the same source as other programs that help area seniors, such as Meals on Wheels.

The SRC recently began a thorough review of its services, Roers said. That includes a technical assessment to make sure services are not hindered by a lack of technology. A salary assessment will help the program stay competitive in recruiting and keeping staff as the cost of living rises. The program recently added 15 new positions for drivers, personal care and in-home providers, along with assistants for an Alzheimer’s care program, Roers said.