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CATHI DILLON WINS HANCOCK-SETTLEMYRE AWARD; FORMER MISS AMERICA SPEAKS AGAINST CHILD SEX ABUSE

HICKORY -- Cathi Dillon received the 2014 Hancock-Settlemyre Award for her volunteer work to prevent child abuse and neglect in Catawba County at "An Evening of Awareness" presented recently by the Children's Advocacy and Protection Center of Catawba County.



The award was presented by Marilyn Van Derbur, a former Miss America and incest survivor; and Judy White, secretary/treasurer of the CAPC Board. The Hancock-Settlemyre Award is presented each year by the CAPC to an individual, community group or business that has worked to enhance the quality of family life, reduce family stress and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Cathi Dillon (left) receives the Hancock-Settlemyre Award for her advocacy for Catawba County's abused and neglected children. Presenting the award are Marilyn Van Derbur (center), speaker and advocate; and Judy White, CAPC board secretary/treasurer.

Dillon played a pivotal role in the creation of the Task Force to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect in Catawba County in the 1970s, which led to the creation of the Children's Protection Council (now a part of the CAPC). She is currently the community representative on the Permanency Planning Review Team, which is charged with ensuring that permanency is achieved for every Catawba County child in foster care.

Other nominees were Michael Van Buren, an assistant district attorney who has prosecuted many child sex offense cases and advocated for a new law that makes it a misdemeanor for adults to fail to report suspected child abuse; Diane and Don Knapp and Anita and Gary Freund, who reorganized the Longview Elementary PTA and helped start a thrift store (The Thrifty Lion) that raises money for the school; and Linda C. Shuford, who has cared for more than 50 foster children over 25 years.



Van Derbur, the event's keynote speaker, described her experience of being sexually abused from the ages of 5 to 18 by her father. For many years, she repressed the memories of her abuse. She said she struggled with shame for 50 years and went through years of therapy. She has spent most of her adult life as a public speaker, educating others about the harm done by child sex abuse.

On average, children who were sexually abused do not begin to heal from that experience until they are 35 to 50 years old. "I was 53 before I was able to say the ugliest word: incest," she said. However, she said, "I am a story of hope." Although Van Derbur did not want to become the public face of childhood incest, she was forced into the limelight as an adult when The Denver Post published a story about her on its front page. The outpouring of public interest galvanized her to advocate for child victims. She went on to write a book, "Miss America By Day," that tells her story.

Deb Johnson, director of the CAPC, concluded by asking anyone in the audience who had not taken the free training Stewards of Children: Darkness to Light to do so. The CAPC hopes to train 5 percent of the adults in Catawba County in how to prevent and respond to child sex abuse. Research has shown that when this tipping point is reached, community attitudes begin to change. So far, the organization has trained 3,100 of its goal of 6,000.

For more information about the training, or to schedule a training for your group, contact Kate Landry, CAPC outreach coordinator, at klandry@catawbacountync.gov, call the CAPC at 828-465-9296, or go to <http://www.catawbacountycapc.org>.