

Palo Alto Weekly

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PENINSULA INTERFAITH ACTION
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Interfaith group honors 'community heroes'

Assemblyman, Working Assets founders and 'unsung heroes' honored at Peninsula Interfaith Action luncheon

by Jay Thorwaldson

A state Assemblyman, a couple who used entrepreneurial skills to fund social-justice programs and 21 local "unsung heroes" from the region were honored Friday for their work to promote affordable housing and social justice.

Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA) — a consortium of area churches, synagogues and other religious groups — held its annual "heroes luncheon" at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View.

Assemblyman Gene Mullin of Assembly District 19, which covers northern and coastal areas of San Mateo County, was recognized for years of work "on behalf of the working poor, especially for work with the Housing Endowment and Regional Trust of San Mateo County, and for his support to save the Health Plan of San Mateo" with state funds.

Michael and Frances Hall Kieschnick of Palo Alto were individually honored both for their overlapping and independent work.

Kieschnick is the co-founder and president of Working Assets, an innovative and "very successful model of a social change corporation" that grew from \$2 million in revenues in 1991 to more than \$100 million today. It is a wireless, long-distance and credit-card company that donates a portion of its revenues to nonprofit groups. Kieschnick also leads the firm's non-partisan political efforts and teaches a class on social innovation at Stanford University.

The Rev. Frances Hall Kieschnick is executive director of The Beatitudes Society. She was honored "for her long and impressive track record of contributions to the well-being of marginalized communities."

She was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1983 and has done more than two decades of parish and community service. The Beatitudes Society works to support Christian seminary and graduate-school students.

A large group of "unsung heroes" honored at the luncheon included several from Palo Alto, Stanford, East Palo Alto and Los Altos Hills, along with others from throughout the Peninsula, including:

■ Leif Erickson of Palo Alto, executive director of Youth Community Service (YCS) and affiliated with the First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, was part of the effort by the initial four congregations that formed PIA. He started as a volunteer with YCS, and in 2004 left corporate marketing in Silicon Valley to head YCS and "help young people discover the power they have to make a difference in critical community issues."

■ Tom Jaworowski of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Palo Alto, a PIA leader in the parish since 2001, was

active in encouraging large developers to include more affordable housing in their projects. He also has worked on behalf of the tobacco-tax initiative and to expand health care for a million California children not currently eligible for healthcare programs.

■ The late Jim Peterson of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto, a longtime physicist who worked in atomic and molecular physics at SRI International, mentored elementary-age children through the Ripples Tutoring Program at the Besse Bolton Child Development Center.

■ Scott Caputo of the Catholic Community at Stanford, a computer programmer, contributed to a major PIA signature-gathering effort to push for expanded health-insurance coverage for children.

■ Opal Harper of First Missionary Baptist Church, East Palo Alto, is a 43-year resident of East Palo Alto who volunteers in the Ravenswood City School District, where she worked from 1967 to 2000. She also volunteers with Eastside College Preparatory, where she has been instrumental in the school's expansion, and for the Ecumenical Hunger Program.

She is a charter member of Faith Missionary Baptist Church and is active in Faith's local organizing committee.

■ Steward Hyland of St. Francis of Assisi Church, East Palo Alto, is a soccer referee, school site council president, a former PIA board chair and serves on the African American Staff Group executive committee at Stanford. He is former chair of the One East Palo Alto board, and served as the group's Safe Program director for four years. He also has served on the EPACANDO board to promote affordable housing in East Palo Alto.

■ Irene Yoshida of St. Athanasius Church, Mountain View, joined PIA in 2002 to work on landlord-renter and tenants'-rights issues. She also has worked on the Children's Health Tobacco Tax Initiative of PIA's parent organization, PICO.

■ Leonard and Terri Goldberg of Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, have worked on social-justice issues within the congregation and worked to support comprehensive dental services in the new Fair Oaks Clinic in Redwood City. Terri has worked also to improve interpretive services for non-English-speaking Russian émigrés at local hospitals and clinics.

The Palo Alto Weekly and the Palo Alto Online community Web site are media sponsors of the heroes luncheon. ■

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