

The 2008 Ombudsmen of the Year

Florida's Outstanding Elder Advocates Honored for Exemplary Service to Seniors

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Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program recognizes several of its best and brightest volunteers at regional meetings throughout the state each quarter. During the most recent meeting, four exemplary ombudsmen were honored with the distinction of "Ombudsman of the Year."

These advocates each spent hundreds of hours helping some of Florida's frailest elders by responding personally to their concerns. Florida's volunteer ombudsmen are charged with protecting the health, safety and welfare of the state's more than 160,000 long-term care residents. Through their daily activities with the program, these four special ombudsmen provide a shining example of selflessness and public service.

Ombudsmen of the Year from 13 of the program's councils were announced in the previous issue of *Elder Update*. Now, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program congratulates its other 2008 Ombudsmen of the Year!



Bill McMahan
Withlacoochee Council

Bill McMahan had more than a decade of experience with another state's Ombudsman program when he volunteered to help Florida's program in 2000. His experience and commitment have proven invaluable, and his outstanding advocacy has led

to his recognition as "Ombudsman of the Year" from his council.

"I wanted to help people," said McMahan. "I can't sit and do nothing. (I like) helping someone get through the day."

The father of three and grandfather of four is known by his peers to be an individual who will never turn down an assignment. "Bill is easy-going, thorough, cooperative, and collaborative, and has a great sense of humor," says District Manager Marilyn Anderson.

McMahan is a member of the Withlacoochee district council, which completed 185 facility assessments and 651 complaint investigations in its five-county area last year.



Betty Bairley
East Central Florida Council

Orlando resident Betty Bairley knows that volunteering as an ombudsman is all about the people. When asked what she enjoys most about the work, Bairley explained, "Interacting with people, with residents, residents' families and other ombudsmen."

After retiring from a career as an office manager, Bairley joined the ranks of volunteers in Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program in the summer of 1993. During her tenure with the program, she has faithfully advocated for Florida's vulnerable long-term care facility residents, has served on her council's leadership team and was nominated

more than once for "Ombudsman of the Year." This past year, she was honored with the title she so richly earned.

"Betty has unselfishly dedicated 15 years to this program," said District Manager Lashea Heidelberg. "In the past she has even assisted with administrative tasks in the office just to help out. She is always willing to go the extra mile for the residents."

Bairley is a member of the East Central Florida district council, which investigated 829 complaints in four counties last year.



Mary Domask
First Coast Council

When she first spotted an article in her local newspaper about volunteers in Florida's Ombudsman program, Mary Domask wanted to find out how she too could become an advocate for the state's most vulnerable individuals.

One of the things Domask most enjoys about her work as an ombudsman is "being able to help others with the simple things." She is pleased to know that she is "making a difference in someone's life."

"Mary is always willing to take on extra work," said District Manager Mike Milliken. "She is a fantastic advocate, from (her work as) district chair last year to her continual pursuit of the Ombudsman program's mission."

The active grandmother of three also enjoys golfing, swimming and biking, and spends much of her time outdoors.

Domask is a member of the First Coast district council, which covers five counties in Northeast Florida. Volunteers in this district completed more than 450 complaints investigations and assessments last year.



Romana Colby
First Coast South Council

Romana Colby was first introduced to the Ombudsman program by chance while visiting a relative in a nursing home one day. A former ombudsman also happened to be at the facility that day, and he spoke with Romana about his experience as an advocate for long-term care facility residents.

"Through my visits to see my mother-in-law, I observed the living conditions residents experience in facilities," Colby said of her decision to become an ombudsman. "I wanted to help improve their quality of life by being someone who could help maintain the dignity and respect they deserved."

Colby, a mother of three, also volunteers with her church as a visitor and minister to the sick who cannot attend Sunday services. This past year she was nominated for "Ombudsman of the Year" for her dedication to caring for people, both within her duties as an ombudsman and beyond.

Colby is one of 17 First Coast South district council members whose combined efforts resulted in 255 complaints investigated last year.