



PRESS RELEASE

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STATE RECOGNIZES LOCAL VOLUNTEER FOR HELPING SENIORS

~ Grandmother of 18 receives two awards from Department of Elder Affairs ~

TALLAHASSEE – Cross City resident Mary Kennedy was among 80 of the state's best volunteers recently honored at the 12th Annual Department of Elder Affairs Golden Choices celebration. The forum awards volunteers who work to better the lives of Florida's elders. Kennedy, a grandmother of 18 and great-grandmother of four, was also named the local "Ombudsman of the Year" by her peers in the program for which she volunteers.

"The department relies on thousands of volunteers to create a better environment for elder Floridians to remain independent in their own communities," said Department of Elder Affairs Secretary E. Douglas Beach, Ph.D. "Volunteers are also a financial asset; they save our department over \$50 million each year."

"Making a difference in many lives for the better" is what drives Kennedy, an active U.S. Coast Guard auxiliary, to advocate for frail seniors in nursing homes and assisted living facilities through her volunteer work with Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. The group seeks to ensure the health, safety, welfare and rights of elders who live in long-term care facilities. Kennedy joined the program in 2007. Her fellow volunteers voted her the top volunteer of the year in the local council serving 11 counties in north central Florida.

The Golden Choices awards forum coincides each year with National Volunteer Week, which began in 1974 when President Richard Nixon signed an executive order establishing the annual celebration. Award winners spent several days in Tallahassee learning about the department's mission and the history of older adults.

The Department of Elder Affairs and its programs, including the ombudsman program, are in need of more volunteers to help Florida's seniors. For more information, visit the Department of Elder Affairs online at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us> or Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program at <http://ombudsman.myflorida.com>, or call toll-free 1-888-831-0404.

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