

New Year's Resolution: Be an Everyday Hero By Kelly Burdick December 30, 1999

This New Year's Eve, when the ball is dropping and you're pondering how to make next year a better one, Marianne Larned wants you to think about role models.

Ms. Larned, the founder of the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, is working on a "**Celebration of Heroes**," an initiative to honor local heroes, people who make a difference in the lives of others. At the annual town meetings, members of the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute** and local schools will present residents with nomination forms. Residents will be asked to nominate someone they know who has been a hero to them. "This is to honor the ordinary folks," Ms. Larned said. "People who aren't above doing the little things, like donating used clothing, or the Boy Scouts collecting cans." Once those nominations are in, a selection committee will review the nominations and choose finalists. Ms. Larned expects to have a celebration of heroes on July 13 at the **Tabernacle in Oak Bluffs**.

"We plan to honor everybody," Ms. Larned said. "We will have different categories where we honor the story of the Vineyard, where everybody pitches in and helps one another." Ms. Larned said that she hopes people will look for possible honorees, as well as work to become everyday heroes themselves. "Encouraging people to do good deeds for New Year's is not a new idea," Ms. Larned said. "It would be phenomenal if

everyone in the world would do one good deed to see what we can do together."

The idea of honoring everyday heroes stems from a project by **Deb Hammet**, a fifth-grade teacher at the Oak Bluffs School. Last year, her class worked on the project that honored 10 local heroes. "The kids did a rigorous selection process and interviewed all of the people nominated," Ms. Hammet said. "They wrote biographies, and since we were studying poetry at the time, they wrote limericks about the heroes."

She said that this year the celebration of heroes will extend to all of the Island schools. "We'd like to include more people from different parts of the community," Ms. Hammet said. "We'd like to have more people in leadership roles be part of the selection committee. Ms. Hammet and Elizabeth Knox will hold an organizational meeting on Jan. 13, at 3 pm, at the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute's** office in Vineyard Haven. "At this meeting, Deb will give everyone an overview of how she integrated this project into her curriculum and invite school representatives to find the best way to make this work for their classes," Ms. Larned wrote in a letter inviting school teachers to be involved in the project. Extending the project into school curricula is helpful, according to Ms. Hammet. "It gives a child a sense of community," she said. "It shows an interdependency in the community where everyone can do something to help. And it also gives kids a sense of what they have."

Ms. Larned said that the Vineyard is the perfect place to start the **Celebration of Heroes project**. "People want to know where you stand on this Island," Ms. Larned said. "It's important to pitch in before you ask for something back."



Celebration of Heroes

Island foundation honors acts of service

By Paula Peters

Monday July 17, 2000

OAK BLUFFS -When **Jesse Taylor** was having trouble sleeping one night last year, she joined her parents watching the late news.

She was appalled by what she saw, the children of Sudan with bellies distended from hunger, people so famished they were dying on their feet. "I wanted to give them all of my allowance," - she said.

But that just wasn't enough to make a difference, so the 10-year-old Oak Bluffs girl began a campaign to raise money to deliver food to the starving people of Sudan. So far, telephone solicitations, yard sales, the raffle of a used car and her allowance have totaled more than \$1,100.

Last night, she was among more than 35 people from each of six island towns to be honored in the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute's Celebration of Heroes**. The ceremony was held at the Oak Bluffs Tabernacle and hosted by **Walter Cronkite**.

These are otherwise ordinary folks who do ordinary things, but seem to do them above and beyond the call of duty," Cronkite said. He said recognizing the unsung heroes of a community is the secret ingredient of Stone Soup, a fabled soup that fed the world.

"They challenge us to respond in kind," the veteran television anchorman said.

Founded five years ago in Vineyard Haven to develop curriculum and educational programs to promote volunteerism, community spirit and empower young people to create a better world. The Stone Soup Foundation has established programs in cities, churches and schools across the country.

The Institute's executive director, **Marianne Larned**, is also the author of "*Stone Soup for the World: Life Changing Stories of Kindness & Courageous Acts of Service*."

The **Celebration of Heroes** project was integrated into the island school system, where the children solicited nominations from each community throughout the year. In each town a winner was chosen in the youth, adult, senior, business, and seasonal resident categories.

Jesse was recognized as the first youth winner from Oak Bluffs. She also received the first **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. award**.

Cronkite also was recognized as a seasonal resident of Edgartown and received a special recognition from **Oxfam-America**.

"I'm honored but I'm embarrassed too," Cronkite said. "It's a little like being given a box of candy for having eaten a box of candy."

Several hundred islanders attended the event, which also honored people like **Helen Lamb, Camp Jaberwocky** founder, who was cheered by campers. The camp was established on the island 50 years ago for people with disabilities.

"She saw people in need and just had to do something," said camp volunteer **Ron Wooley**. "She is an amazing woman. She is definitely one of my heroes."

An award in the business category went to **Chilmark Chocolates**, where the owners have been employing people with disabilities to make and sell candy for 15 years.

Sixteen-year-old **Maxwell Butler of Aquinnah** was honored for his efforts to create a weather station at both the **West Tisbury Charter School** and in Aquinnah. Linked to the Internet, radio and television stations, Butler's stations have put the island on the weather map.

Community service, especially on an island is critical, said Butler, who hopes other students strive to become a Stone Soup hero.

"In the community where we live, it is so small and so interdependent, community service is very important," he said, "and it gives you a really good feeling." Cronkite says he hopes the program will elevate the values of human kind. Humans would be nothing if they are not their brothers' and sisters' keepers."