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## Volunteer at the center of serving others

MHRC honors Colleen Volpe, volunteer coordinator for The Center in Asbury Park  
**BY KRISTEN DALTON**  
 Staff Writer



Colleen Volpe has volunteered for 20 years at The Center in Asbury Park and is the recipient of the 2012 Earl Teasley Humanitarian Award, to be presented by the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission on Feb. 6.

It is the humble concern for others that connects the late Earl Thomas Teasley with Colleen Volpe, this year's recipient of the second annual Monmouth County Human Relations Commission (MCHRC) Earl Teasley Humanitarian Award.

"It took me by surprise. It's pretty wonderful. I'm excited, I'm happy and I'm pleased that it puts The Center in Asbury Park at the forefront," Volpe said of her honor.

The Center is a volunteer-based not-for-profit that provides support services for people living with HIV/AIDS, including a permanent residence to 25 individuals and emergency placement for homeless individuals.

"Food is love, and housing is health care. It's a quote that I've read somewhere at some time, and it's what I believe, for me, underlies The Center," said Volpe.

"Simply put, The Center offers a safe space for people to come in off the street, and everyone on our database has been referred to us by their medical case manager," said Volpe, of Ocean Township.


As The Center's volunteer coordinator, she is in charge of 70-75 volunteers from various high schools, Monmouth University and Brookdale Community

College.

"I just have to give the volunteers a lot of credit. People pick a day of the week and they come every Monday or every Wednesday. They come every week. It is a true commitment," said Volpe.

The award is named in honor of Teasley, a former chairman of the MCHRC who died of pneumonia at age 43 in April 2010. His gentlegiant persona made him a quiet force for social justice, said Carolyn Schwebel, communications chair for the MCHRC.

Schwebel was one of three people named to the subcommittee that chose Volpe as the winner for the 2012 Earl Teasley Humanitarian Award. Volpe has volunteered at The Center in Asbury Park since 1992, and it is only fitting that her impact is recognized during The Center's 20th anniversary.



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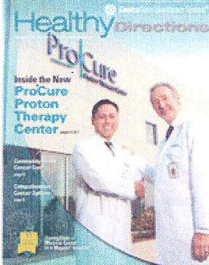
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"We took in the nominations that were given to us. There were three different people, and they were all good, but she seemed to come up as a person in a small place doing things that don't usually get recognized," said Schwebel.

"She's been there 20 years and didn't take a penny for any of her services. She's so selfless. She just works so many hours, gets volunteers together, and sometimes in a difficult situation, but it really helps the community."


Volpe recalled how her time at The Center first began when The Center's executive director, the Rev. Bob Kaeding, invited a speaker to St. Anselm Church in Wayside.

"One [speaker] was the






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Rev. Laura Lee Kent Smith, a United Church of Christ minister, who talked about the work she was doing with an AIDS organization in the northern part of the state," recalled Volpe.

"I left saying to myself, 'How did I get this old without knowing what was going on around me? I need to know more.' So Father Bob called a subsequent meeting and I think about a dozen of us came to that, and it went from there."

Volpe said she was surprised by how little she knew about HIV/AIDS at the time, especially since it affected so many people. But she said it was hard to say how much has changed since then. She's been too immersed in her work helping people.

"I see some of the same people over and over again, and I see new people coming in too. That's the only way I can judge: we're needed. We are needed in the community," she said before deflecting the credit to the volunteers she oversees.

"The volunteers, they're really very special people, and they bring their own enthusiasm and it's contagious. It's contagious, that's what it is, and with a different set each day, I'm a happy camper."

According to Schwebel, in order for a person to be considered for the award, they must be involved in humanitarian efforts and cannot be a member of the MCHRC. They must also live or work in Monmouth County.

Volpe will be formally recognized by the MCHRC on Feb. 6 in the conference room of the Monmouth County Agricultural Building in Freehold at 4:30 p.m.

"This is only our second time, but we're just keeping Earl so much in mind, and it's neat because his mom lives in Philadelphia and she and four family members made it here last year and are able to come again this year," she said.

As a black gay man, Teasley faced a lot of adversity, but he never shied away from his beliefs, said Schwebel. Instead, he embraced them and became an advocate for social justice. He was also a counselor and assistant professor at Brookdale Community College.

Schwebel worked closely with Teasley as vice chairwoman of the MCHRC and called him a close friend who was very empathic. When Brookdale held a memorial for him shortly after his death, she had the opportunity to speak about her friend.

"I was one of the speakers, and I looked around and said he was my friend but he was really everybody's friend. So many students were praising him for being their counselor. He's done a lot of stuff with the gay movement," said Schwebel.

"Back when he was a teenager, he used to be the organist for his little church, and the minister made some comment about homosexuals and Earl said to him, 'If you keep doing that, you're not going to have any more music in the church.' So the guy changed his tune, and Earl kept playing in the church."

