

Austin honored by Community Development Partnership

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EASTHAM -

There were moments of great emotion at the Community Development Partnership's annual meeting as people were honored for their work.

Past director Gwen Pelletier, who said she never used to cry, became a little misty as she presented the award named in her honor to Chris Austin, of the Homeless Prevention Council.

Pelletier said when she was a young mother 35 years ago, she met Austin, who was active in a local group of churches that became the Lower Cape Outreach Council. Pelletier said Austin saw people struggling to meet their daily needs and said, "I'm going to do something about this."

And she did, said Pelletier who did the same kind of grassroots work with the predecessor of the partnership, the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation. Now though, Pelletier is retired and "Chris still does this every day."

Along with raising six children with her husband Jack, taking in a number of foster children, and sponsoring Fresh Air kids for more than a decade, Austin is involved in innumerable non-profit organizations, including the Lower Cape Community Coalition.

"I really think it ought to be named the Chris Austin award," Pelletier said as she presented it to Austin, who received a standing ovation from the crowd gathered at Willy's Gym in Eastham for the 17th annual meeting of the group.

Austin said partnerships, such as the ones between a number of nonprofits on the Cape, were vital. She also said that as many people who need help on the Cape, there are 10 times as many who want to help. You just have to find them and show them how.

Community Development Partnership's current executive director Elizabeth Bridgewater became choked up as she presented a surprise award to board chairman Ernie Rogers, who was stepping down after 13 years of involvement.

He became the second person to receive the "Community Leadership Award" given by the Massachusetts Community Development Corporation. A representative from the statewide group said it is a special award because the person is celebrated in the community he or she works so hard for.

Bridgewater also filled the crowd in on the achievements CDP had made over the year.

The organization finalized work on Chatham's Balfour Lane, which boasts four new locally- owned homes and

accomplished the predevelopment work on 12 rental units in Harwich – if state funding comes through, construction will start in July. CDP was also selected as a developer for a lot in Wellfleet with one rental unit that will be joined by six more, and received rehabilitation grants that enabled them to help many homeowners.

Bridgewater also outlined new programs, which include working with Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen to secure affordable fishing permits and a tech program that “helps small business act like big ones” with the use of technology. CDP is partnering with other organizations and, if all goes well, a private group to combat the recent spike in foreclosures and to work with families to help grow their income.

The guest speaker of the evening was Ed Fouhy, the executive producer of the 1988 and 1992 presidential debates, who spoke about the presidential election. Although

“Anything can happen,” he said, “we seem to be on the verge of electing a black man to be our president.” He added it would be a “profound” event.

Having covered the civil rights movement for ABC television, he remembers how very different the nation was less than 50 years ago. Fouhy spoke about how Barack Obama has outspent and out-organized John McCain and gave the audience a tip: if Georgia goes for Obama, go to bed early.

We’ll see if his prediction holds true.

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