



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

October 5, 2011

Woman overcomes vision problem to pursue passion, wins award

When Patricia Dugan's eyesight began to fail, she was determined to find ways to keep her small business, Stitcher's Workshop in El Dorado that she has operated for 18 years. She learned needlework as a child by her mother's side and has been doing it for 55 years. Fortunately, surgery restored her sight.

Her passion for needlecraft is woven throughout her personal and professional life. As a member of the Union County Quilt Guild, Dugan, of Norphlet, helps make quilts for the Wounded Warriors Project, children in hospitals, and victims of fires and other disasters. She also volunteers through El Dorado Connections, which supplies volunteers to all civic-minded and charitable organizations in Union County.

As a result of her determination, success, and service to others, Dugan has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). Mrs. Dugan will receive the award during the Camden Lions Club's annual Distinguished Service Awards Banquet on November 1, at 6 p.m., at Southern Arkansas University Tech in the Charles O. Ross Center, located at 746 California SW Street, Camden.

Filmmaker Harry Thomason will be the celebrity guest speaker at the banquet. Thomason is an Arkansas native and has a new movie coming out about Hank Williams' final days. Tickets are still available at local banks and businesses or from Camden Lions Club members. For more information, people may contact Letitia Landers, program chair of the Camden Lions Club, at 870-836-3022.

"I really am surprised," said Dugan about being nominated. "I had no idea there was such a thing (as the Consumer of the Year award)." She is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an

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area award. She was chosen from an area that includes Ouachita, Union, Columbia, Ashley, Calhoun, and Bradley counties. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tarrie Barnes nominated Dugan because of her love for her craft and the way she taught others. “Every time I visited her in her shop, she showed how much she loved to give of herself,” he said.

“DSB made a huge difference for me. I didn’t know about the program before. It made it possible for me to have cataract surgery and it restored my eyesight. I probably would have had to close my business without it,” said Dugan. She said she had no insurance and wasn’t old enough for Medicare. DSB also provided counseling, guidance, and job follow-up services.

Dugan’s shop may be in South Arkansas, but she sells and ships products nationally and overseas. She is savvy in using technology, and her business has a website, a blog, and accounts on Facebook and Twitter. The needlework shop offers supplies and classes for cross-stitch, needlepoint, counted canvas, punch needle, and surface embroidery. It also sells beads, fabric, and tools. Dugan teaches needlework classes to both adults and children.

“I’ve been stitching since I was eight-years-old,” said Dugan. “My mother was an incredible seamstress – she never bought a pattern, but she didn’t like to do handwork.” So she taught the young Dugan to sew on buttons, hem skirts and pants, and embroider tea towels to sell as gifts. Dugan is glad her mother didn’t like hand-stitching, because it sparked an interest for a career she enjoys. She thinks “it’s a very good thing” for children to learn sewing and believes it increases their independence. “I actually know people that can’t sew a button on.”

Her husband Bill is retired from a national company, but helps her in the shop by framing needlework projects for customers, who affectionately call him “Mr. D.” The Dugans have four children, 11 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren, including a new baby girl born in September. The closest one to them lives in St. Louis. The Dugans enjoy traveling, especially to visit family.

In addition to the local quilt guild, Dugan is a member of the American Needlepoint Guild and the Embroidery Guild of America. She also knows how to knit, crochet, and make clothing, but does not do it commercially.

This is the fourth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others. At the end of the year, the DSB Board will select an overall state winner from the area winners who were nominated. The announcement will be made at the board meeting Dec. 9, and will be followed by a reception.

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DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired and whose goal is successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB's programs and services, call 1-800-960-9270 or 501-682-5463 or visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx>.