

JCHE resident, Mary McClukey, receives the Allston-Brighton Unsung Hero Award.

A Hero In Her Own House
By Karen Elowitz, Staff Writer
GateHouse News Service
Thu May 31, 2007, 08:11 AM EDT

Allston - Though Mary McCluskey has not always lived in A-B, as soon as she moved here almost 20 years ago, she loved it and made herself indispensable to her neighbors almost from the start.

A former resident of Winthrop, McCluskey sought out senior housing in Brighton when she decided that she could not afford her rent anymore. She contacted Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly on the recommendation of a friend and neighbor who had moved there.

Soon after moving into Wallingford Road, she started assisting her elderly neighbors in a variety of ways, from helping them get in and out of bed, to picking up prescriptions when the pharmacy would not deliver, to doing alterations on clothes.

Far from feeling that these tasks are burdensome, McCluskey revels in helping others, and is glad that she moved to a place where she can make herself so useful.

“I feel like I found a bit of heaven since moving here,” she said.

The feeling is apparently mutual. Ellen Feingold, president of JCHE, said that she is lucky to have McCluskey around.

“Mary has been a terrific person to have as a resident,” she said.

“She is a volunteer par excellence. And aside from her willingness to volunteer and participate, she’s an honest broker, and everyone trusts her.”

Though the senior complex she lives in now has a formal assistance

program and her help is not needed as much anymore by her neighbors, she still volunteers at the reception desk and in the computer room, and keeps herself very busy with other community and civic duties.

One of McCluskey's best-known roles is as corresponding secretary for the Brighton- Allston Improvement Association. "Even though I am not a homeowner, I find the civic matters very interesting," she said. She also acts as the liaison between BAIA and JCHE, making sure that issues of concern to one are conveyed to the other.

McCluskey was invited to serve on the BAIA many years ago by Theresa Hynes, whose former sister-in-law was a friend and former neighbor of hers.

"She's like the conscience of the community," said Hynes. "She's so extremely capable and competent, and so humanitarian. And she's tireless. I never hear her talking about being tired."

At 83 years old, McCluskey does more than folks half her age. In addition to her work for the BAIA, she also volunteers at the Brighton-Allston Heritage Museum on Tuesday afternoons, sits on the planning committee for the bicentennial, and helps elderly people with their finances in a program called the Bill Payer Assistance Program.

"The volunteers help people who cannot handle their financial matters," she explained. "Most of these people have no relatives or close friends who could help them."

When asked what drives her to perform such acts of generosity and helpfulness, McCluskey is characteristically frank. "I'm just doing what comes naturally," she said.

On June 7, McCluskey and five others will be recognized for their good work in the community by the Unsung Heroes Awards Committee, which honors those who go above and beyond the call of duty in their service to others.

McCluskey said she was grateful to be getting an award, but joked that she does her acts of kindness out of purely selfish motives.

“It has all enhanced my own life,” she said.