

National Coalition of Citizens Group Selects Arkansan as Recipient of the
2009 Cernoria Johnson Memorial Advocacy Award



Kathie J. Gately, BSW, SLTCO

Arkansas Advocates for Nursing Home Residents (AANHR) is excited to have submitted the winning nomination for the 2009 National NCCNHR Cernoria Johnson Memorial Advocacy Award. AANHR submitted their nomination this past July with letters of support from Governor Mike Beebe, Attorney General Dustin McDaniel, Director of the Office of Long Term Care Carol Shockley, Director of the Division of Aging & Adult Services, Krista Hughes and the new Kentucky State Long Term Care Ombudsman, Kimberly Baker.

AANHR is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and improving the quality of care and life for Arkansas residents in long term care facilities. AANHR stated in their letter of nomination “Kathie has been an advocate for the elderly and disabled since the time she was 15 years old. During her years of involvement with long term care facilities in various capacities, she advocated, protected and enhanced the lives of those who lived there as well as their family members.”

Martha Deaver, President of AANHR upon approval from the Board of Directors, reached out to involve others that have known and worked with Kathie over the past

twenty-four years of her professional career in providing services to disabled and aging adults. Governor Mike Beebe did not hesitate when contacted. Sharing Kathie's contribution to expanding the program, "In 2005, Kathie expanded LTC Ombudsman classroom training to expose future generations to the field of long-term care, opening up training to universities around the State. Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia was the first to take advantage of this opportunity, and all of their students seeking degrees in Social Work successfully completed the program. Gately began working with the local LTC Ombudsman program in Searcy and with the Dean of Harding University's School Of Nursing in 2007, receiving approval for the Certified Volunteer Ombudsman segment of the program to be incorporated into their baccalaureate curriculum. This innovative, first-in-the-nation partnership garnered Harding University School of Nursing a National Award from The Hartford Foundation." Addressing her in the closing of his supportive letter, Governor Beebe commends "In the increasingly complex and rapidly growing area of long-term care, Kathie has proven her ability to serve the needs of our citizens and to earn the trust of those she serves."

Dustin McDaniel, Arkansas Attorney General describes not only her work in his letter of support, yet her character "Kathie has been an advocate for nursing home residents in Arkansas since the young age of 15, when she first volunteered at a long-term care facility. Since then, Kathie has dedicated her life to protecting and enhancing the lives of elderly Arkansans, most recently as our State Long Term Care Ombudsman." "Kathie is a true leader amongst her peers, and as a result, Arkansas stands out as a leader within the long term care arena."

The Office of Long Term is the entity charged with the regulatory compliance of long term care facilities. Carol Shockley, Director of the Office of Long Term Care commented that as such the Office of Long Term Care certainly has significant contacts with the office of Ombudsman, and has long enjoyed an excellent working relationship with that office. Ms. Shockley credited Kathie with the significant growth of the volunteer portion of the Ombudsman program. In addition, “Kathie has been a fierce advocate for culture change in Arkansas. Kathie works closely with the Pioneer Network and the Arkansas Accord – an invaluable resource to both facilities and families for efforts toward person-centric care in the long term arena.” “These efforts demonstrate Kathie’s commitment to improving the lives and conditions of long term care residents and her tireless dedication to reach these goals.”

One of the honors that Kathie received from the National Association of State long term care Ombudsman is to share her knowledge and experience by mentoring the new State Long Term Care Ombudsman of Kentucky. “She is the consummate advocate for the rights of all elder and other vulnerable adult citizens, not just in Arkansas, but all across the country.” “Her unselfish willingness to share initiatives she developed in Arkansas has proven to be priceless resources for the advancement of the Ombudsman program in Kentucky.” “She has proven herself to be a blessing, not only to me, but to the Kentucky residents living in long term care.” These are just a few of the examples that Kimberly utilized in her support of Kathie’s nomination.

The Director of the Division of Aging & Adult Services was very pleased to supply her letter of support. Krista Hughes spotlighted the growth of the program under Kathie’s

tenure. “The State Long-Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman supports the Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsmen, who advocate for residents of nursing homes and residential care facilities. Under Kathie’s leadership, the Arkansas LTC Ombudsman program has seen significant growth. She developed a training, recruitment and support structure that nurtured the growth to 300 volunteer ombudsmen. Because of Kathie Gately’s efforts, Arkansas has one of the best ratios of ombudsmen to nursing home residents in the nation. The Arkansas program has received national recognition as one of the premier volunteer ombudsman programs in the country.”

Remarkably, NCCNHR received a second nomination for the Cernoria Johnson Advocacy Award regarding Kathie by Ms. Debbie Medley, Regional Ombudsman with Western Area Agency on Aging and one of the five State Certified Volunteer LTC Ombudsman Instructors. Ms. Medley acquired the needed letters of support from Connie Parker, Assistant Director with the Division of Aging & Adult Services, Mary Askew, RO, SCVOI and Peggy Moody, Executive Director, Catlett Care. In Debbie’s nomination she reviewed numerous accomplishments that have been achieved under Kathie’s leadership on the program “Even though Mrs. Gately has been the State Ombudsman for only six years she has made a tremendous impact on the lives of our nursing home residents and assisted living residents. The quality of their lives has greatly been improved due to Mrs. Gately’s commitment, passion and tenacity to make the lives of long term care residents the best it can be.” Fellow Regional Ombudsman for Northwest Area Agency on Aging, Mary Askew, RO, SCVOI noted in her letter of support “Kathie has been an example for the entire nation through her hard work to

develop the Volunteer Ombudsman Program in Arkansas....”

Anyone that is familiar with Ms. Gately is well aware of her core philosophy that it takes everyone working for and listening to those valuable and vulnerable Arkansas citizens to truly make a difference in both the quality of care and quality of life we provide. She has consistently strived to promote positive working relationships among all stakeholders in long term care. Peggy Moody, Executive Director of Catlett Care sums it up in her support letter “I feel like Ms. Gately is deserving of this award as she has worked tirelessly to combine the efforts of the Arkansas Long Term Ombudsman Program along with all agencies and committees who advocate for nursing home residents.” In addition, Connie Parker, Assistant Director for the Division of Aging & Adult Services incorporates Kathie’s Ombudsman identifying story that has inspired hundreds if not thousands – “One of Kathie’s favorite stories is about the child admonished by an adult that returning beached star fish to the ocean one by one would not make a difference because there were thousands of beached star fish, which the child replied “well it makes a difference to this one” as he tosses it into the water. She is one advocate who is making a difference - often one at a time.”

Kathie feels that she owes her passion in serving those whom reside in long term care facilities and those who live outside to her grandmother. Born in Forrest City with the given name of Kathie Fussell she spent the majority of her childhood in a small Arkansas community named Crow Creek. As Kathie speaks about it she describes it as a rich childhood, not in monetary definitions, but in the vast wealth of wisdom and beliefs that her grandmother, great-grandmother, great-uncle and great aunt’s instilled in her. “So

many of not only our youth, but our generation misses out on such valuable gifts – the teachings of our Elders. I was so blessed.” She shares that the joy, knowledge and love that she has received from all the elders and disabled adults that she serves is priceless.”

Kathie smilingly recalls when she began college at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, her advisor, after the first semester recruited her into Social Work from Business Administration. He neglected to inform her that the pay would not be the same as a matter of fact quite a bit less. He did tell her though that no amount of money would ever be as satisfying as the rewards she would receive from doing what is right for those who needed her the most. He was right; she says that every time she holds a frail hand, listens to a lost story and hears the return of laughter she is inspired.

She was one of the pioneers in developing Social Work programs in facilities in the mid 1980’s. During that time she was the first in the nation to obtain both optometric and audiology treatment in a facility impacting all residents with an emphasis on those who due to physical and medical condition were unable to transfer to a private office, enrollment for the mentally challenged adults living in facilities in local school programs, admission/financial assistants for disable adults residing in facilities to a University and developed a Social Work In-Service guide. She has always been a strong advocate for the implementation of holistic care and when sharing her experience with others as a learning tool she cheerfully says “I was culture change before culture change was cool.”

The National Cernoria Johnson Memorial Advocacy Award will be presented to Ms. Kathie J. Gately at the awards ceremony during the National Coalition of Citizens for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR) annual conference on October 25th in Washington

DC. Cernoria McGowan Johnson (1909-1990) was appointed in 1974 to set up the National program of Nursing Home Ombudsmen, a task that she accomplished within a span of about three years. The award in her honor is presented each year to someone whose work has had national impact or is a model for national excellence and who exemplifies accomplishment in his or her chosen field.