



*Judy Kays Thomas*

*Tulsa Retired Educators Association*

2010~2011 OREA  
Volunteer of the Year

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In nominating Judy Kays Thomas for OREA's "2010-11 Volunteer of the Year" award, Donald M. Barnum, Co-President of the Tulsa Retired Educators Association, says that "Judy is the personification of what voluntarism represents at its best. She has a genuine concern for others, is totally committed to the benefits possible through voluntary activities and projects, and is creative and enthusiastic in everything she undertakes."

Making these words even more meaningful is the fact that Judy Thomas was diagnosed with colon cancer in mid-winter 2010, requiring her to begin a regimen of chemotherapy. At the time, she was serving as president of the Tulsa REA and president-elect of the Assistance League of Tulsa. Throughout this time she only missed one scheduled meeting and was determined to thrive in spite of her own personal health battle.

"Armed with her laptop," said Barnum, "she fulfilled her responsibilities from her hospital bed. Her cancer now in remission, Judy Thomas has used her experience as an opportunity to assist others who face similar challenges. When asked about her illness and how she has coped, her response is 'you do what you have to do.'"

Judy Kays Thomas is the President and CEO of Assistance League of Tulsa, an all-volunteer non-profit organization which is part of the National Assistance League. The mission of the Assistance League is 'to empower the most impoverished in our community, clothe needy students and meet essential needs of the most vulnerable, and exemplify the core values of commitment, accountability, leadership, respect and self-esteem.'

An important project of the Tulsa chapter is "Operation School Bell," founded in Tulsa in 1977 to provide clothing for children in need. From humble beginnings, the program today provides new clothing and shoes, a hygiene kit and a book to over 2,000 elementary school children from 81 Tulsa area elementary schools representing 12 Tulsa area school districts. Thomas has contributed to the success of Operation School Bell in many ways, including developing formulas based on low income data to equitably provide clothing to the neediest students.

Also through the Assistance League, Thomas established the “Book for Students” program, she chairs the grant writing team, participates in the Tulsa Public Schools “Partner in Education” program, presides at board and chapter meetings, collaborates with University of Tulsa faculty and students, and speaks at meetings of financial planners and other organizations. Moreover, she participates in “Tulsa Builds,” the “Oklahoma Center for Non-Profits,” and “National Philanthropy Day.”

Further demonstrating the breadth of her volunteer activities, Thomas has served as a member of the administrative board of the Boston Avenue Methodist Church and Co-President of the Heritage Class. She served this year as immediate Past President of the Tulsa Retired Educators Association, which previously honored her with its prestigious “Very Important Member” award.

Although a committed volunteer before her own personal battle with colon cancer, Judy Thomas learned how to help colon cancer patients successfully negotiate chemotherapy and develop strategies to deal with the treatment’s side effects. She is a motivator, challenging and encouraging others to cope with their own illness and to be able to face the future with confidence.

Strength in the face of her own adversity, compassion for others in theirs: Judy Kays Thomas is the 2010-11 OREA “Volunteer of the Year.”



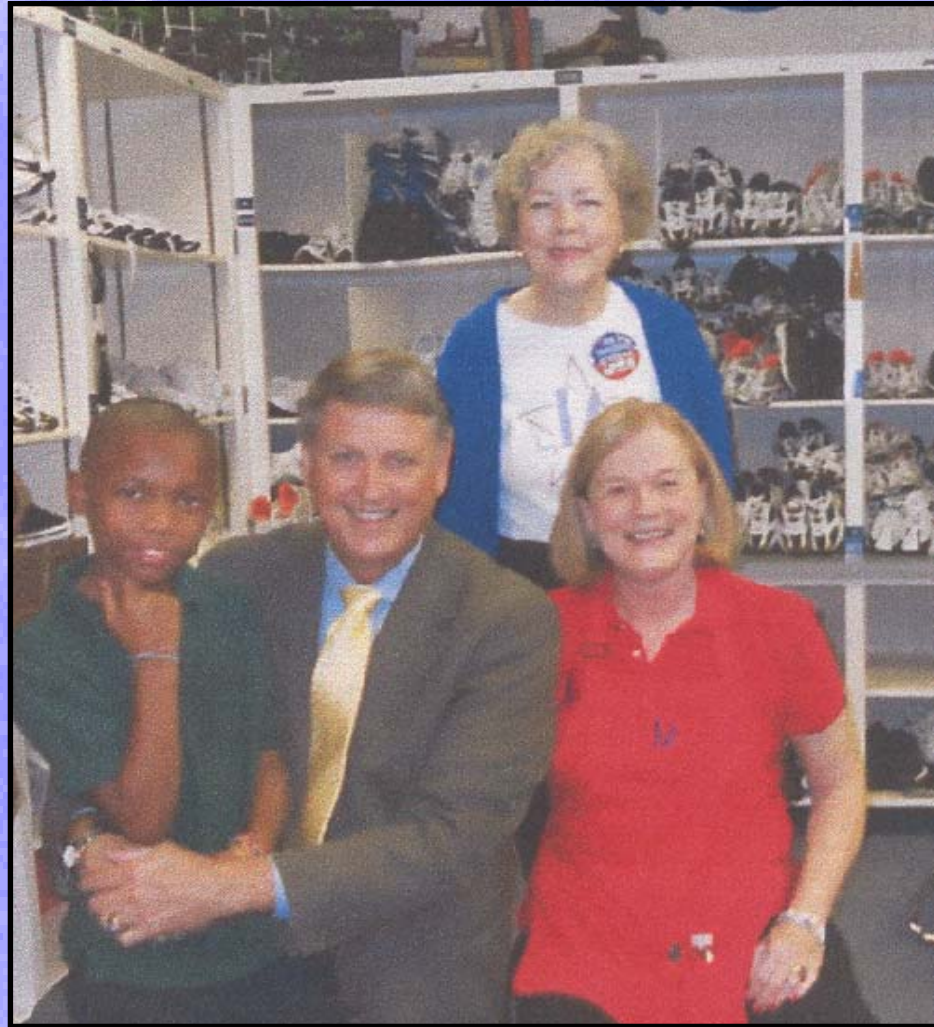


# Highlighted In...

- ★ Tulsa People
- ★ Tulsa World
- ★ OETA
- ★ A Channel 8 Interview



**National Assistance  
League Delegate**



# Operation School Bell



**Grant for 10 Violins  
To Roy Clark Elementary - Union**



# Gail Richards Award for Mental Health Association