

## **Carol Ludwig Wins 2019 Laurel Award**

Carol Ludwig, executive director of the Center for Spiritual Care in Vero Beach, accepted the Indian River County Cultural Council's Laurel Award for Volunteer Leadership May 8. The presentation came in ceremonies at Riverside Theater. The award is named for a legend of Vero Beach volunteerism, Alma Lee Loy. It has been given annually since 2013 to a person who exemplifies the spirit of non-profit volunteerism and support of the arts. Following are Ms. Ludwig's acceptance remarks:

I accept this award tonight on the shoulders of many others:

The original group of six who founded the Center in 2000 (Dr. Gregory and Helen Wilson, Richard and Maureen Schlitt, Warren Obluck, and Carol Ludwig); the score of people who have served on our Board of Directors over the intervening twenty years; and the Center's program facilitators and group leaders who have volunteered their time to show up every week to shepherd people in a variety of subject areas. Without all these volunteers there would be no Center for Spiritual Care.

This award represents years of service to artists, musicians and writers at our monthly art exhibitions, chamber music evenings, book launchings, poetry readings and creative workshops. Yet, as dedicated as we are to the arts, we also have similar constituencies in the recovery, mindfulness meditation and caregiver communities.

You may ask, what leads a person to offer twenty years of unreimbursed service to a non-profit? For me, the answer goes back to my high school days in the early 1960s. Then, I read a book called "Markings," the journal of United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, in which he said:

"I don't know who -- or what -- put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer 'Yes' to someone -- or something -- and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life in self-surrender had a goal."

And that began my life of service. After an almost thirty-year career overseas in the United States diplomatic service I was about to transition to...I knew not what.

People told me, "Forget about retiring; embrace re-firing." And that's when I encountered this quote from Pedro Arrupe, sj:

"What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends,

what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

Within a few years, the Center for Spiritual Care was born here in Vero Beach. It offered another avenue for service, to reach out to people in precarious life transitions, difficult personal passages, and offer them individual and small group spiritual growth experiences. Integrating mind, body, spirit and creativity became the hallmark of the Center, and we really haven't looked back to question or doubt that commitment.

The current myth of genuine connection through social media is an illusion. Superficial, random communication can never replace real face-to-face connections and encounters or small, safe community with people who offer respect, appreciation and openness to who we are and as we are.

Volunteering offers people the opportunity to put others above self, to form deep bonds in the community, and to develop a new network of caring friends. It teaches us truths that connect us rather than permitting us to focus on what might divide us. By being present to others, we honor them and show them respect they might not find anywhere else. We tell them, “I see you; I hear you.”

I urge each of you to find that special niche of what you love to do, and then put it at the service of the larger community. I assure you, you will gain far more than you ever give, and you will never regret it.

Finally, thanks to the exceptional man without whose love, support and affirmation I would never have been able to fulfill this commitment, my husband of 45 years, Warren Obluck.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Century theologian, Meister Eckhart, said, “And suddenly you know: It's time to start something new and trust in the magic of beginnings. Be willing to be a beginner every single morning.”

Thank you.