



Crusader gives 'Spirit of Caring' awards

Oct 19, 2007 @ 08:00 PM

**By Geri Nikolai
RRSTAR.COM
ROCKFORD –**



Crusader Clinic honored three volunteers, a physician, a service club and a health-care organization at its 35th anniversary awards night Friday.

The “Evening in Autumn” event, at Giovanni’s Restaurant, drew 500 people and raised about \$90,000 for Crusader, which provides health care for low-income families and individuals at its West State Street and Broadway clinics in Rockford, and in Belvidere and Freeport.

“Spirit of Caring” awards, initiated in 1992, are given each year to people who show their concern for others through volunteer work. This year, a category was added for organizations. Fourteen people and five groups were nominated. Winners are:

Jerry Paris, whose nominator cited his “unswerving commitment to help mankind and the Rockford community.” He has been active with Rosecrance Health Network, Alpine Kiwanis, Temple Beth-El, Northern Illinois Hospice and Partnership for Cures.

Richard Nordlof, who recently purchased the New American Theater building so it can continue to be used by and for the community. Nordlof has held board positions with Rockford Symphony, Coronado Performing Arts Center, SwedishAmerican Hospital, Mendelssohn Club, and Rockford College.

Vern Cassens, whose nominator said Cassens is one of the “number of guys who seldom get recognition for their efforts.” Cassens has donated his time and expertise in finance and accounting to the Rockford health-care community including SwedishAmerican, Rockford Council on Affordable Healthcare, and the Crusader Health Foundation.

Cosmopolitan Club of Rockford, which adopted Crusader’s diabetes program in 1994.

Since then, \$302,425 has been raised for the program by the club, the Cosmopolitan Diabetes Foundation and the Mid-States Federation Clubs.

This year's Distinguished Humanitarian Award, for excellent medical service, went to Dr. Ed Okeson, a family practitioner at Crusader Clinic for 20 years, for displaying the "servant leadership" qualities that Crusader stands for. The award is named after Dr. Forrest Riordan III, who began doing volunteer work at Crusader in 1998 and continues to offer his skills as an orthopedic specialist.

Another award that is new this year, the "On the Bus Award," went to SwedishAmerican Health System for working with Crusader for many years to improve medical care to people who might otherwise go without care. SwedishAmerican has led the way through programs in obstetrics and internal medicine.

Crusader, founded in 1972, served more than 42,000 individual patients last year, about one in every five Rockford area residents. More than 800 new patients register each month. In 2006, Crusader physicians delivered 980 babies, about 25 percent of the infants born in Winnebago County.

Crusader services are available on a sliding fee basis. For details, call 815-490-1600 or log on to crusaderclinic.org.