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Area Resident Reflects on 25 Years Advocating for Children

BY JANET ROSE

For the past quarter of a century, Cheyenne Mountain resident Trudy Strewler Hodges has been an eloquent voice, promoting the work of the Court Appointed Special Advocates, CASA.

Reviewing her own childhood, Hodges reflected, “Mother used to say that I was born with a special kindness and compassion, always reaching out to siblings, and other children, listening, trying to right the wrongs and little injustices.”

Hodges continued, “My parents modeled that for me. They were very caring people. We always had pets that I loved. Still, I was more into people, assisting the underdog, those who didn’t have a life of privilege as I had experienced growing up.” Hodges’ hometown was Duluth, Minnesota. She completed her freshman college year at the University of Minnesota. Later, she would earn a BA in organizational management at Colorado Christian University and an associate degree in social work at Pikes Peak Community College.

As a young married woman,



CASA executive director Trudy Strewler Hodges celebrates her 25 years with the nonprofit as well as the organization’s 25th anniversary this year. Photo Courtesy of Heather Sams Fine Portraits.

Hodges faced the challenge of welcoming home a husband who returned from the Vietnam War with a severe brain injury. The years following were devoted to the care of their two daughters Rebecca and Kellan, and her totally disabled husband. They moved to Colorado Springs in 1973 to make use of the base privileges here and to obtain proper medical care for her husband by commuting to Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver. The surge of war casualties, however, often left a deficit in medical resources. Hodges became schooled in the art of advocacy as she sought to obtain the best care for his special needs. The frustration and difficulties encountered provided an unexpected “great experience with lasting skills.”

Eventually, Hodges devoted herself to many years of volunteer service: El Paso County Department of Human Services; a foster care and adoption agency; and, at Saint Francis Hospital, as the coordinator of volunteers. Hodges said, “These varied experiences helped me to identify my own personal interests.”

Meanwhile, the Junior League of Colorado Springs was looking for another project that would benefit the community. Two members, Cheyenne Mountain residents, educator/librarian Judy Barnett and attorney

Donna Dell’Olio were selected as co-chairs of the research committee to examine all possibilities. The Court Appointed Special Advocates or CASA program had already taken shape throughout the country, proving an advantage to both the court system and the children. Dell’Olio remembered approaching the highly respected Judge John Gallagher for his opinion on such a venture here. “His immediate reaction was one of approval and encouragement,” said Dell’Olio.

The committee, with Barnett and Dell’Olio, wrote a proposal to the El Pomar Foundation who granted \$12,000 in matching funds and launched CASA. Barnett served as CASA board president for the first three years. Hodges was hired first as the parttime CASA volunteer coordinator and, 18 months later, hired as its first executive director. Dell’Olio can still remember the interview with Hodges 25 years ago. “I was impressed not only by the candidate’s resume, but more, by her gentleness and tactfulness which would be invaluable working with trained, supervised volunteers who bear so much responsibility within a professional legal court system,” she said.

Barnett has referred to Hodges as “Mother Casa.” “Trudy is the visionary. She’s used her incredible skills

Continued on page 18



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**Trudy Strewler
Hodges**

from page 6

to mobilize the program, to form collaborations with other like-minded nonprofits, and has nurtured CASA in its continuing growth,” said Barnett.

Hodges, on the other hand, remarked, “I cannot claim to have accomplished this alone. Honestly, it’s a joy because it’s really about a team working together, changing lives and the culture for the better.” Looking to the future, Hodges stated, “We’re seeing more extremely tragic, escalating levels of child abuse, neglect, and violence. This is hard on volunteers. We face more challenges than ever before. More volunteers must be recruited to meet the needs of the children and the families.”

In her personal walk, Hodges describes herself as a “voracious reader of fiction, biography and history.” With her husband, Dennis Hodges, an engineer and former CASA volunteer of long ago, Trudy said, “We love to walk the neighborhood, the lake at The Broadmoor, hiking trails or skiing at Breckenridge, and visiting family and grandchildren. One day, I’ll get back to oil painting which I used to love doing. Dennis is my support system and has brought joy to life.”

In matters of faith, she said, “I place priority on Christian values which have been my guide through life. This belief system is incredibly important to me, and often I am praying for our children and their volunteer advocates.”

In celebration of its 25th Anniversary, this month CASA of the Pikes Peak Region will honor its volunteers, supporters, court judges, and all those who have advocated for the well-being of 10,000 El Paso County and Teller County.

janetrose30 @ yahoo.com

Events

Saturday, August 16 - “Hot Summer Nights: Music on the Labyrinth.” Final concert featuring Oklahoma folk singer and guitarist Dean Phelps. Outdoors on the south side of First Christian Church, 16 E. Platte Ave. at 6:30 p.m. Bring a blanket or chair. In case of inclement weather concert will move inside. A free will offering will be taken. For more information call 633-8888 or email organist@firstchristiancos.org.

Monday, August 18 - Fifth Annual Diabetes Summer Barbeque. Sponsored by the Diabetes Community Center (DCC) and the American Diabetes Association, the event is a great way for people living with diabetes, along with their families and friends to meet others in the community who also live with this disease. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. Council Grounds Pavilion in Palmer Park from 6 - 7:30 p.m. For more information about DCC or this event contact DCC at 473-7808 or email info@dccccolorado.org or visit www.dccccolorado.org.

Friday, August 22 – Broadmoor Community Preschool 7th Annual Lemonade Stand. Parent volunteers and preschool students will be making and serving glasses of lemonade to raise funds to support the school. Broadmoor Community Church, 315 Lake Ave. from 3 – 6 p.m.

Saturday, August 23 – 1st Annual Murder Mystery – The Good, the Bad and the Guilty. Benefiting the Southern Colorado Band of Brothers an Sisters and the Disabled Vets to help build Veteran Community (Raised Bed) Vegetable & Herb Garden. Tickets: \$40/each or \$70/couple. V.F.W., 430 E. Pikes Peak Ave. Doors Open 5:30 p.m. Costume prizes awarded. Silent auction. Visit www.magicalproductionsllc.myevent.com for tickets and information.

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**Cheyenne Mtn. H.S.
TEAM PHOTOS PAGE**

Cheyenne Mountain High School Baseball



Photo Courtesy of Lifematch Photography

Names Not In Order: Kevin Paulson, Matt Reynolds, Nick Lacayo, Blake Stachel, Triston Strickland, Chris Garcia, Dominic Craparotta, Jeff Kohl, Mitchell Lucas, Cole Daniluk, Jack Seaton, Cody McCurry, Gage O'Neil, Jordan Bieber, Evan Castle, Mike Levar. **COACHES:** Mark Swope, Dennis Bates, and Tom Joerger.

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- Toddler Time for one- and two-year olds; Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m.
- Paws to Read for emerging readers; Wednesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.
- Storytime for ages three and up; Thursdays at 10:30 a.m.
- Early Literacy Play Group for ages five and under with an adult; Fridays at 10:30 a.m.
- Tea & Cookies with Local Author Glen Vollmecke; Monday, Aug. 18 at 2 p.m.
- Mystery Book Club; Wednesday, Aug. 20 from 2 - 3 p.m.
- Senior Social; Monday, Aug. 25 from 10:30 a.m. – noon