

Familiar face takes top CHAC position



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by: Pam Eubanks | Managing Editor

EAST COUNTY — Over the last 27 years, Marla Doss' name has become synonymous with assisting individuals with special needs.

Whether forging new grounds in independent living for disabled adults, raising funds for programs or raising awareness on behalf of the special-needs community, Doss has long been an advocate for disabled children and adults through her work at Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities.

She first came to the organization in 1985 as its director of community living and later worked as development director. Her new title, however, makes her the official face and voice of the organization.

CHAC's board of directors named Doss president and CEO July 19.

"I look at our clientele and truly believe they are the voices that no one hears," said Marla Doss, president and CEO for Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities. "It's up to us to be the voice of the disabled in the community."

"It's a huge position," said Doss, who has served as CEO in an interim capacity since October. "I'm honored to serve. It's a journey with the people I love.

"Community Haven gets into your blood," she said. "We are a family — the staff, children, teens and adults and the board of directors. All of the members of this family play a huge role in the success of Community Haven, helping clients move toward a more independent and prosperous life."

Doss, who has done everything from mopping floors to attending black-tie events on behalf of CHAC's clients over the years, has forged new ground for the organization, helping to add at least a dozen day programs for adults and to expand its vocational training opportunities over the last few months.

Doss is working hard to meet newly identified community needs, as well as to plan for the organization's financial future, as it prepares for the long-term care of its resident clients and other needs.

Specifically, she's hoping to find a way to "bridge the gap" for teenage children who are dealing with autism spectrum disorders and social integration issues that emerged as a result of being addicted to drugs upon birth.

Doss hopes to add a second phase to Haven Industries, CHAC's vocational training program that partners CHAC's clients with local businesses who need packing, assembly and other work completed. More space, she said, is needed to accommodate the demands for service.

And, lastly, Doss said she is eager to move forward with the construction of an additional nine-bed, co-ed group home on campus, which is being paid for by a CHAC family.

Doss' love for Community Haven and its clients has only grown stronger over the years.

"What's there not to love?" Doss said. "As you drive in every day, it's an honor (to be here). It's a little piece of heaven. I love it with all my heart."