

Haven programs let woman excel



Community Haven Interim President and CEO Marla Doss, Julie Mowery and Development Assistant Anny Barker Scheffler on Mowery's back porch at Community Haven.

PHOTO BY AIMEE CHOUINARD

By AIMEE CHOUINARD

Correspondent

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Julie Mowery has served on committees, been an officer of several service clubs, participated in community projects, raised money for hurricane victims and U.S. troops, won numerous medals for almost every sport there is, been a member of the Girl Scouts and grows her own vegetables.

She dances, sings and creates art. Last month, Mowery turned 50, celebrating her milestone with family and friends following a final baseball game of the season with her Miracle League team, the Haven Rays. At this game, everyone, including Mowery, received a trophy.

Mowery has lived at Community Haven in Sarasota for 45 years. She was one of first students at the Haven's Selby Preschool. At the time, there were virtually no services, schools or therapeutic settings meeting the needs of people with disabilities. Mowery lived in the first group home on the DeSoto Road campus and has lived

with many of the same female residents since then. She lives in the Harmony House, which she shares with seven other women. Four years ago, when the house was being built, Mowery made a request that if there was any wish she could be granted, she would like to have her own bedroom for the first time in her life. Her room is spotless and meticulously organized. She has decorated it with a new bedroom set, special items from her past and medals and trophies from her many achievements. Mowery cooks, sets the table, helps with grocery shopping and watches out for her housemates. She considers her roommates to be her family. "I'm proud of it," Mowery softly said when asked what she thinks of her home. "The house parent helps me out."

Community Haven has three group homes on its 32-acre campus: the Suncoast House for men, built with proceeds from the Suncoast Super Boat Grand Prix races; the Harmony House for women; and the co-ed Friendship House. The campus is also home to the Selby Preschool and Transitions Teen Program. The haven kept the natural landscaping and features nature walk paths, herb and vegetable gardens tended to by the residents and a nursery-horticulture program teaching residents how to propagate their own plants and sell them to the community. According to Marla Doss, interim president and CEO of Community Haven, Mowery is considered the "matriarch of Haven."

Doss, who has worked at Community Haven for 27 years, has watched Mowery make her way through the Kaleidoscope program, where Mowery has created beautiful artwork and participated in theatrical productions; Special Olympics — excelling especially in swimming and now cycling; and the Aktion Club, where she attends biweekly business meetings to develop community service projects.

"I am inspired by Julie because she has overcome so many obstacles in her life and remains very positive and diligent," Doss said. "She is a hard worker and is always appreciative of the opportunities that the Haven has provided her. Julie is not afraid of a challenge nor the path she must go down to achieve success.

"I remember when I first started working at the Haven, I coached the Special Olympics swim team," Doss continued. "Julie wanted to learn how to dive off of the starting block. After several weeks of encouragement and watching others try it, she dove straight away into her lane and began swimming the freestyle. When she reached the other end of the pool, she immediately got out, with a huge smile on her face, and exclaimed, 'I did it, I did it.'"

According to Mowery, her largest project to date was helping wounded soldiers when they returned from Afghanistan. As an officer of the Aktion Club, she spearheaded the creation of a library at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa for the troops.

It provides books, magazines, games and cards. Mowery and the club members buy and make gifts for the soldiers to give their families during the holidays. Mowery travels to Tampa to check on the library. Mowery worked at McDonald's for a year and a half, earning her own paycheck, with which she bought a television, dentures and writing tablets. She attends weaving and exercise classes, is active in the Joy Program at St. Joseph's Catholic Church and has a boyfriend, James Waddell, whom she has known at Community Haven for 20 years. When asked about Waddell, Mowery said, "He's nice."

For nearly 58 years, Community Haven served people with disabilities in addition to meeting critical needs of each person who visits the campus. It is a bright, happy place where the residents greet visitors with smiles and hugs and beam with pride over their accomplishments. Anny Barker Schefler has worked at Community Haven for 10 years. "This is the best way to start your day," Schefler said. "No matter what's going on your life, when you come here and the residents tell you they love you, you can't feel bad." Mowery, when asked about her accomplishments, said she is proud, and she credits Community Haven with her success. "Haven has helped me be a better person," she said