



Main Story / 12.21.07

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Every Entry's A Winner In Unity House's 2007 Holiday Tree Trimming and Expression Contest

AUBURN – “Each year we do this, the entries get better and better and it gets harder and harder to judge and declare winners,” said Unity House Executive Director Joyce Williams, referring to the agency’s annual holiday tree trimming and expression contest and the competition and results it generates among Unity House’s departments and employees. “This year there were so many incredible entries from all our sites that entered, it was just about impossible to choose winners.”

The agency event, now in its 15th year, began as a tree-decorating contest among agency sites with members of Unity House’s Board of Directors acting as judges and visiting and scoring each site’s entry. Judges awarded first, second, and third place and honorable mention awards to the winning entries, Williams said. About five years ago, she said, the agency’s Auburn Day Habilitation program staged a 20-minute play featuring day hab consumers and family members acting and singing that represented as much of a holiday expression as sites’ tree-decorating efforts. It was that performance, she said, that gave birth to the idea of expanding the experience of a tree-decorating contest to include an additional expression of the holiday spirit. Many site entries have exercised that option in their efforts and now create outstanding tree displays complemented by displays expressing various holiday themes and ideas. That has led to the judging of entries in either a tree-decorating or holiday expression category, as well as a category combining both contest elements, she said.

Williams added that part of the competitive spirit put forth by various sites was perhaps due to the prizes awarded first, second, and third place and honorable mention winners, who enjoy a day off with pay for winning, experience an agency-paid team lunch for placing second, receive agency sweatshirts for placing third, and participate in an agency-paid site pizza party for earning honorable mention.

This year’s judging, conducted by Williams, agency Deputy Executive Director Liz Werner, Director of Human Resources Cathy Becker, and Tompkins County Assistant Director of Residential Services Louis Pelino, took place on December 18, 19, and 20.

This year’s winners: **First Place tree-decorating**, Administrative Support team and its tree theme ‘People We Support’; **Second Place**, Pine Tree IRA and its tree theme ‘Gifts of One Another’; **Third Place**, Fayette Street IRA and its tree theme ‘Blue Christmas’; **Honorable Mention**, Mental Health Support Services IPRT and its tree theme ‘Ho Ho Ho Pros.’ Holiday expression category winners in 2007 are: **First Place**, Mental Health Supportive Apartments program and its expression ‘Aliens’; **Second Place**, New Life IRA and its expression ‘Candy Lane’; **Third Place**, Mental Health Independent Housing and its expression ‘wonderland’; **Honorable Mention**, Unity Employment Services-Syracuse and its theme ‘Under the Sea.’