

Award winner serves a need

By Paula Seligson August 1, 2014



The Johnston County Community Foundation presented the 2014 Hobart award to Dr. Norwood Williams, center. He donated his gift to Serve the Need in Johnston County. Royal Williams, left, is president of Serve the Need, and Francis Hobart is the award's namesake.

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About the award

Norwood Williams is the seventh winner of the Frances Finch Hobart Award For Voluntary Community Service, presented annually to "an individual from Johnston County who has demonstrated a commitment to serving his/her community, resulting in a stronger community in which to live, work and enjoy life." It is named for Frances Finch "Frankie" Hobart, a longtime volunteer in Johnston County. For more information, call the N.C. Community Foundation at 919-828-4387 or visit nccommunityfoundation.org.

The Johnston County Community Foundation presented the 2014 Hobart award to Dr. Norwood Williams, center. He donated his gift to Serve the Need in Johnston County. Royal Williams, left, is president of Serve the Need, and Francis Hobart is the award's namesake. When Dr. Norwood Williams sees a need in his community, he can't sit idle.

And when he saw the effects of the 2008 recession in his home county, he stood up to make a difference by founding Serve the Need in Johnston County.

Last month, that effort earned Williams, 80, the Hobart Award for Voluntary Community Service from the Johnston County Community Foundation.

Sitting in his home in Clayton, not far from the farm he grew up on, Williams recalled what he said when he won award. "We can live six weeks without food, we can live six days without water, we can live six minutes without oxygen, but we can't live six seconds without hope," he said. "And I hope that this organization has given hope to thousands."

Serve the Need provides a number of services. Its website hosts a directory of private and government resources in Johnston, ranging from soup kitchens to counseling centers. Also, the nonprofit builds handicap ramps at the homes of needy Johnstonians, and it helps people with their household bills when they can't make ends meet. An annual Thanksgiving meal feeds hundreds.

Williams co-founded the nonprofit and was its president for two years. Royal Williams, the current president, described Norwood Williams as a visionary. “He’s the one that says, ‘Why can’t we do it?’ ” he said. “And he believes in inclusion, diversity in terms of race, cultures and things of that nature. That drew myself and others in, because here’s a guy who was open to all peoples’ ideas as opposed to just his.”

Norwood Williams is best known nationally for his work as a psychologist. He spent 20 years in private practice in Maryland, where he counseled children, and he founded halfway houses for people with mental disabilities. Also, he led a task force that wrote the 1980 G.I. Bill, which focused on education and rehabilitation services for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and illnesses stemming from exposure to Agent Orange.

Williams began his career as a ward attendant at Dorothea Dix Hospital. He then served in the Korean War, where he had his first experience in serving food to the needy. Every night, villagers who lived nearby would break into the base and steal from the food tent.

“I said, ‘Well, OK, they’re not breaking into any other place except the cook’s tent,’ ” Williams recalled. “Why don’t we say to them, after supper each day, all the food left over you can have? That was the solution.”

Williams said he is always trying to come up with ways to help people, a habit born of growing up on a farm in a rural county. One of 12 children, he attended Wilson’s Mills School, which had no chemistry lab and a library with fewer than 50 books. He then left home to compete against kids whose high schools had considerable resources.

“You’re always trying to work a little harder, and that had been my goal, but if you’re going to get ahead, it’s got to be education,” Williams said.

He went on to earn his undergraduate degree in psychology and counseling from Atlantic Christian College, now Barton College, in 1958. He received his master’s degree in counseling from N.C. State University in 1960 and his doctorate in psychology and special education from Catholic University in Washington, D.C., in 1969.

Williams moved away in 1963 but returned to Johnston County in 1995. He helped found the Wilson’s Mills Alumni Association, which awards a scholarship every year.

A common theme in Williams’ volunteer work is building bridges – he tries to connect people to agencies to make the most of available resources.

Williams said he was surprised to win the Hobart Award. “I didn’t even know I’d been nominated,” he said. “I’d like to be like the wind. You can’t see me, just see my results.”

As the winner, Williams received \$750 to donate to the charity of his choice. He chose, of course, Serve the Need. To learn more about the nonprofit, visit servetheneedjc.org or call 919-359-8548.



Norwood Williams with STNinJC members: Tom Ricks, Lloyd Barns, Lew Humphrey, Royal Williams, Kristin Williams, Sharon Castleberry, Bill Moran, Larry James. Mr. Hobart, the husband of Frankie Hobart, is pictured second from left.