

Florham Park pastor honored by Morris ARC

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FLORHAM PARK — The Rev. Wendy Abrahamson, pastor of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Florham Park and a resident of Madison, received The ARC/Morris Chapter's Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor bestowed by the non-for-profit organization, in late May.

Recognized at the annual Awards and Volunteer Recognition event at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum in Morris Township, Abrahamson has served as treasurer of the organization for the past three years and has been on the Board of Directors since 2004.

Her career began back in the early 1980s with the Sussex County Chapter of The ARC, where she rose through the ranks to lead the agency's residential department, before leaving that position to serve as executive director of Skylands, another Sussex County agency that specializes in serving people with autism. Along the way, she served on numerous boards and committees, before returning! to school in the 1990s to secure her theology degree and be ordained as a Lutheran minister.

In receiving the award from Wendy Utberg, the organization's president, a stunned Abrahamson recalled being scorned by fellow elementary school students more than 40 years ago for playing with her fellow students who were in special education classes in her local school in the Midwest. She recalled that from that day on, she would not stand by when witnessing injustice to people with disabilities.

More Honorees

In addition to Abrahamson's recognition, more than 100 guests were on hand to recognize other outstanding service to people with intellectual and related developmental disabilities. Eight other individuals and organizations were recognized for their work in support of The ARC/Morris, whose



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Wendy Utberg, left, president of The ARC/Morris Chapter, presents the Rev. Wendy Abrahamson of Madison, pastor of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Florham Park, with the ARC's Distinguished Service Award in late-May ceremonies at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum in Morris Township. The minister received the highest honor bestowed by the non-for-profit organization for her lifetime achievement in supporting the ARC's mission: the care, support and advancement of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

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Award winners included Gary Genovas with the Bill Sackter Citizenship Award, Mark Stephenson with the Professional of the Year Award, and the Community Living Education Project at Rutgers University with the Media Excellence Award.

New Jersey Special Olympics Area 3 Committee was also recognized with the agency's Distinguished Community Service Award. Geoff McGrane received the Best Friend Award, while the Waradzyn Family won the Family/Guardian Award. Jennifer Yeager received the Teacher of the Year Award, and Betty Lunn was presented with the 2015 Volunteer of the Year Award.

Volunteers and volunteer groups were also acknowledged for their contribution to the agency. They included local councils of both the Knights of Columbus and the Masons, as well as other social and civic organization such as the Randolph Lions Clubs. Local foundations and a number of churches and schools in the area also were acknowledged for their work with the not-for-profit agency. Individual volunteers also were thanked for the thousands of hours of time contributed to the organization.

Officers

Prior to the awards ceremony, the annual meeting of the organization took place, highlighted by the election of officers and directors. Gwendolyn Utberg of Randolph Township was elected as president, Katherine Cascioli of the Towaco section of Montville Township as first vice president, Barry Levine of Denville as second vice president, the Rev. Wendy Abrahamson of Madison as treasurer, and Tom Horn of the Long Valley section of Washington Township as secretary. James Gallagher of Rockaway Township will serve as immediate past president of the organization. Two directors were re-elected to the Board, including Walter Bender of Long Valley and Larry McEntee of Mount Olive.

The not-for-profit agency has been serving people with special needs and their families for more than 60 years. Services include residential and day programs for adults; therapeutic recreation for all ages; and support and respite for families. For information, call (973) 326-9750, ext. 211, or visit www.arcmorris.org.