



PAT HOUGHTON HONORED BY STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION

Pat Houghton has always prided herself on doing a good job. When she retired as Director of Amador County Mental Health in 2002, she kept right on doing a good job.

Well aware that the county lacked the resources to offer adequate counseling for seniors, Pat applied for and got a small grant from Area 12 Agency on Aging. She used the money to get special training at the Center for Healthy Aging in Santa Monica and founded the local Senior Peer Counseling Program. Five years later, with the help of Mary Pulskamp of County Behavioral Health Services, she's still coordinating the program.

In December, the California State Rural Health Association honored Pat as one of four California rural champions in community leadership at its statewide conference. The other three champions were recognized for what they accomplished as part of their jobs. Pat's award is particularly outstanding as she volunteers her time to administer the Senior Peer Counseling Program and provide supervision and training.

The majority of the 29 other senior peer counseling programs in the state operate under the auspices of and receive support from a county health department or other public agency. The local program operates under the wing of Amador County Senior Citizens, which provides space and insurance, but thanks to Pat's volunteer efforts, the free services are available to local seniors on a yearly budget of less than \$1,000.

Most of the money is used for additional training for volunteer peer counselors. The Amador County program currently has 11 peer counselors but more are needed; Pat says she has a waiting list of seniors needing counseling.

Another class for new volunteer counselors begins in February. The 22-week training teaches participants how to listen and how to approach a situation in a way that will help local seniors to solve their problems.

No previous experience in mental health is necessary. Senior men and women who enjoy working with others and have time to share may call 296-4963 for more information or to sign up for the training.