

Help & Hope

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Theresa Ireland: Courage Times 10

BY JUDITH KAY

Never underestimate the power of a sense of humor. That is, never underestimate the ability of a quick wit and hearty laugh to pull you past the dark times, lighten your emotional load, and melt away mountains of stress. After all, a sense of humor gives you a healthy perspective on life's ironies. Just ask the experts. And if that's not enough to convince you, just ask Theresa Ireland.

"You have to laugh about life sometimes," says Ireland, an outspoken woman who punctuates her points with a punch line, followed by a laugh that is as deep as it is rich. "A sense of humor has certainly helped me to make it through."

Indeed, Ireland has had her share of challenges to overcome. Struggling with mental illness for much of her adult life, she wandered from state to state, finding and losing one job after another, until finally she found herself incarcerated at Niantic Prison for Women. By the time she was released from prison in 1999, her downward spiral seemed unstoppable. Then, miraculously, it did stop. And, cathartic though it might be, it wasn't her sense of humor that provided the miracle.

"I was released from prison to a halfway house," she recounts. "I was in a very bad way at the time – I was hysterical because my mother had passed away while I was in prison and I wasn't able to go to her funeral. I had

TERESA/NEXT PAGE



Right: 2011 United Way Community Campaign Courage Award winner Theresa Ireland

Below: Rowena Stough, last year's United Way Community Campaign Courage Award recipient and Bert Scott, Chair of the 2011 United Way Community Campaign, with Theresa Ireland.



PHOTOS: BRENDA DE LOS SANTOS PHOTOGRAPHY.

Theresa *from previous page*

so many emotional problems. Then, at the halfway house I was referred to Catholic Charities for counseling.”

The referral was serendipitous. For the first time, Ireland saw a glimmer of light peaking through the darkness. Because at Catholic Charities she found something she had never before experienced: a support system. People who actually cared.

“I felt I was totally alone, and that was one of the things they set me straight on right from the start. They told me ‘We’re your team. We are firmly behind you. You’re life is not going to go unobserved anymore. We’re going to make sure you don’t isolate yourself anymore. You’re not alone in the world.’ That made all the difference.”

Today, twelve years down the road, Ireland remains connected to Catholic Charities...and her life remains transformed. She lives on her own and manages the nitty gritty details of daily life. Of course, life isn’t without its rough spots – among other things, she has suffered through breast cancer and a double mastectomy -- and she still counts on the counseling services of Catholic Charities to help her navigate life’s twists and turns. But Ireland is confident of her wherewithal to successfully clear the hurdles. Because Catholic Charities has also helped Theresa Ireland cultivate two traits that were deep within her all along: courage and strength. The courage to face down her demons. The strength to dust herself off and move forward.

Ireland’s remarkable journey has not gone unnoticed – or unrewarded. On June 20 at a luncheon held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Hartford, her against-all-odds resilience earned the Hartford woman the 2011 United Way Community Campaign Courage Award – an award presented annually to an individual who has shown out-

standing courage and perseverance in overcoming adversity, with help from a local program supported by contributions to United Way Community Investment. Catholic Charities – Archdiocese of Hartford is a United Way Community Investment partner.

“She truly is very courageous,” says Rose Alma Senatore, Director of Charities for the Archdiocese of Hart-



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ford (who also attests to Ireland’s “unbelievable sense of humor”). “For Theresa to meet the challenges that she has encountered is just absolutely terrific. Most people could not do what she’s done.”

Maybe not. Nonetheless, Ireland is determined to help others in need overcome their own challenges. She is a powerful voice on Catholic Charities’ Consumer Advisory Board; she volunteers at Gifts of Love, an Avon-based agency that provides food, clothing and furniture to those in need; she speaks out on the need for better mental health services for those incarcerated; she advises women on how to succeed after they leave halfway houses; she advocates for the poor. And the list goes on.

“I just don’t feel right about taking unless I’m also giving back,” she explains, adding with a laugh, “Besides, they can’t keep me quiet about anything.”

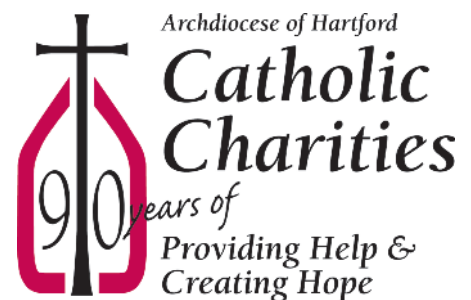
Ireland’s boundless community service activities help her to move forward in her own path to recovery. “Every time she has encountered an obstacle in her life, she has responded not by dwelling on her own problems but by reaching out to help others,” says Paula Mann-Agnew, Director of programs at Catholic Charities. “Theresa’s service to others has been an integral part of her own healing. She is an inspiration to us all.”

For Senatore, Ireland’s volunteer work is the embodiment of Catholic Charities’ mission. “Helping others – is what we’re all about,” she says, “Theresa lives that in terms of giving back. She received and she is giving back and that’s a wonderful thing. That’s what we try to do with those we assist. If they’re grateful for what they receive, they in turn give back to others. Theresa has certainly done that. She really has connected with us.”

And Ireland intends to keep that communication open and flowing.

“Catholic Charities is still the place I go when I can’t figure things out or when I’m struggling with a tough decision. They’re someone to talk things over with...and, besides, they won’t let me get away with anything.”

And then she lets loose that deep and rich laugh. ■



from the CEO

Meet Nineka Tummings

Dear Friends of Catholic Charities,

As I begin my role of Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Charities, it is with humility and honor that I look forward to serving the agency as its leader.

The principal focus of my professional career has been rooted in settings with similar missions founded in the Catholic tradition of service to the poor and those most in need. I strongly believe, upon my own reflections, that our purpose in the world is to “be for others.” And so, I view my new role as a call to service and responsibility, and not solely a position in a hierarchy.

I am grateful for this opportunity and look forward to working with our volunteers and staff, together with making many new friends in my travels throughout the Archdiocese. I am certain the future will present us with both successes and challenges, and together I believe we will be called to use our collective skills to continue to advance our mission and bring help and hope to those we serve.

The mission of Catholic Charities will always remain at the core of what we do, guiding the direction and decisions we make.

Please take a tour of our website (www.ccaoh.org) and learn more about our programs that Provide Help and Create Hope for so many of our neighbors in need in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Lois M. Nesci
Chief Executive Officer



✓Friday December 16 at the
Hartford Marriott Downtown
Help & Hope Breakfast

In August of 2009, during the ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating the transformation of the old St. Joseph Cathedral School into the newly renovated Cathedral Green housing complex, Archbishop Henry J. Mansell walked through each of the stately building’s 28 apartments, blessing them one by one. What the Archbishop didn’t know as he said his prayers over the new two- and three-bedroom units, was that, at the same time, he was also blessing Nineka Tummings.

The blessing was sorely needed. Living in her mother’s cramped apartment on Sigourney Street, things were not looking up for Nineka Tummings as spring rolled into summer in the year 2009. The young, single mother was subsisting on public assistance, as she desperately looked for a job to support herself and her then three-year old daughter, Passion. Then, one day she ran into a downstairs neighbor who mentioned the new apartments soon to open at Cathedral Green. With only a day left until the deadline for applications, Tummings raced over to Catholic Charities’ Asylum Hill Family Center, where she completed the paperwork that would place her name in the lottery for apartments. Then she held her breath.

The day her name was selected for a Cathedral Green apartment was the day Tummings’ life began to change.

“We moved into our new apartment in September 2009 with nothing but our clothes,” she recalls. “But the Family Center is a wonderful resource. They gave us everything: furniture, dishes, silverware, comforters... We pick from toys, books and games that were laid out downstairs in the [Cathedral Green] community room.”

Tummings eventually found a job, but soon had to give it up to spend more time with her young daughter who had developed behavioral issues owing to an abusive relationship with her father. When that set Tummings back financially, Catholic Charities stepped in to help, giving her a \$100 Walmart gift card to buy groceries, paying the electric bill, providing transportation to make sure her daughter made to school every day. And more.



Nineka Tummings and visitors from the Beacon Learning Center.

PHOTO:UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL & NORTHEASTERN CT.

“I know Catholic Charities is there when I need them, but I want to help myself... I want a better life for me and my daughter.”

“I tried to do as much as I can for myself; but when I can’t, [the Family Center] is always there to help,” she says.

When she was ready to return to work, Tummings, who is certified in the field of child care, came across a job working in the youth program at, of all places, Catholic Charities. She landed the job and this past summer worked in the agency’s Summer Survivor program. In September, she will transfer her skills to Catholic Charities’ after-school program.

Tummings enjoys her job...but she has her sights set higher.

“I love working with kids and I hope to go college this fall to become a teacher. I know Catholic Charities is there when I need them, but I want to help myself and I know I need more income. I want a better life for me and my daughter.”

Not that going back to school will be easy.

“I’m taking a big chance by going back to school. But it will be worth it,” she says. “I tell my children – my own children and the children I work with – that we have to take advantage of the opportunities that are before us. We have to try new and different things. I want them to learn to take chances and not settle for life as it is.” ■



Charlie and Pat Shimkus with Carol and Gregory Reid at the 2010 tournament. Pat Shimkus is a member of Catholic Charities Golf Committee.

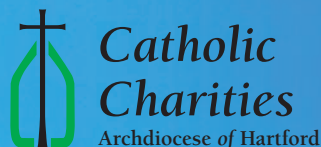
VISION: Individuals, Families and Communities will become Healthy, Self-Sufficient and Productive – Thriving in a Just and Compassionate Society.

MISSION: Motivated by Christ's Social Teachings and Respect for the Richness of Diversity, Catholic Charities exists to Promote the Dignity, Self-Sufficiency and Human Potential of those in need.

The Annual Archbishop John F. Whealon Memorial Golf Tournament

Tuesday, September 20, 2011

**All Proceeds Will Benefit
Special Needs Children**



**Wampanoag Country Club
Wampanoag Drive,
West Hartford**



FORE!

Join us for a full day of golf including buffet lunch at 11:00 a.m., shotgun start at noon, and reception and dinner at 5:00 p.m. on September 20, 2011. Guests who choose not to golf are welcome to join us for dinner only. Honorary Chairperson is the **Most Reverend Archbishop Henry J. Mansell** and special guest celebrity is **Meghan Pattyson-Culmo** (former UConn women's basketball player and CPTV sports television personality).

Join us as a single, twosome or threesome (we'll pair you) or bring your own foursome - cost remains only \$200 for buffet lunch, 18 holes, golf cart, reception and dinner!

"Best One Ball of Four" Format with 100% handicap, hole-in-one prizes, gross and net golf prizes, raffle prizes and great silent and live auction items.

Contact Peter O'Donnell at podonnell@ccaoh.org or (860) 728-2571 to discuss Sponsorship Opportunities -- Tournament sponsorships are available from \$5,000 to \$50.

All proceeds from the tournament will benefit Catholic Charities programs for children with special needs.

Register and pay online at: www.ccaoh.org. ■

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