

RARE Foundation honors Bloomfield Hills residents as 'Everyday Heroes'

Robert Dickman can't help being an "everyday" hero.

The Bloomfield Hills man, who co-founded the Salvation Army's William Booth Legal Aid Clinic with his wife, Ellen, feels so blessed in life that he has "an obligation to give back to the community what I was given by God."

"We got involved in legal aid because we've always been social activists. We've always volunteered with projects in the community," Dickman explained. "Twelve years ago we were introduced to the Salvation Army and we got to speaking with them and it was determined that they could use our services. We could provide legal services to impoverished people."

They opened their doors as an independent clinic inside the Salvation Army's Harbor Light Center on the Cass Corridor in downtown Detroit. Six years later, they became an arm of the Salvation Army, serving clients in its drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs at Harbor Light and Booth Service Center ever since.

"We now have received grants so that we can reach out to the broader community and see folks from Oakland and Macomb counties," said Dickman, one of two full-time lawyers at the clinic. The staff includes his wife, who has business administration experience, a secretary and law school students who volunteer in exchange for credit and a semester grade at their law schools.

The couple's dedication landed them a RARE Foundation "Everyday Hero" award this week.

"Ellen and I feel very humbled by the award. We just do what we feel we're supposed to do," he said, describing their work.

The RARE (Recognizing Achievement Rewarding Excellence) Foundation gives awards annually to ordinary individuals in the workplace



Robert and Ellen Dickman of Bloomfield Hills were honored by the RARE Foundation in Troy for founding the William A. Booth Legal Aid Clinic.

who inspire and change the lives of others.

Troy attorney Gil Cox, Jr., established RARE in 1999 with a mission of "character education through role models."

The Everyday Hero program is designed to reinforce important values and give young people "real world" role models.

The Dickmans and other award recipients were honored at the Foundation's annual dinner Thursday, Sept. 28 at the Gem Theatre in Detroit.

They were:

■ Dr. Gregory Auner, Wayne State University professor and Livonia resident.

■ Marjane Baker, retired Plymouth-Canton Schools teacher and a South Lyon resident.

■ Ritchie Coleman, public safety coordinator for Pittsfield Township and an Ann Arbor resident.

■ Ed Deeb, president of the Michigan Food & Beverage Association and a Bloomfield Hills resident.

■ Scott Taylor, CEO of National Logistics Management & Artisan Associates, a Northville resident.

■ Mike Thomas, director of



Ed Deeb of Bloomfield Hills was honored by the RARE Foundation in Troy.

Partners Plus, Henry Ford Community College and University of Michigan Dearborn School of Management and a Detroit resident.

■ Rhonda Walker, news anchor and founder of the Rhonda Walker Foundation, a Detroit resident.

The Dickmans' legal clinic serves a two-fold purpose: It aids people at or below the poverty level with legal issues and it helps law students gain valuable experience.

Dickman modeled the idea after the University of Detroit Law School's Urban Law Clinic, where he volunteered as a student in the 1960s.

"The students love the program because they carry their own caseloads. They aren't just file folders. They don't just file papers," he explained. "They do interviews with clients. They're taught to draft complaints. They handle divorces and custody matters. And when it goes to court they will handle it themselves — under an attorney's supervision."

"Not only is it help for us but it facilitates their education and creates lawyers with an empathy for needs of the people in the community."

Sharon Dargay