

Houghton takes 'seniors helping seniors' award

Jaffrey resident is a 2015 Vaughan recipient

By Nicholas Handy

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JAFFREY — Cheshire County's 2015 recipient of the Vaughan Award, which recognizes seniors helping seniors, Owen Houghton, said his mother's passion for helping others will always stick with him.

"I recall her saying at 88 that she was still young enough to drive the little old ladies around town," said Houghton, 78, of Jaffrey. "My mother was a great example of volunteering all the way to the end of her life."

That volunteering spirit always stuck with Houghton, who accepted the Vaughan Award on Monday, recognizing his commitment to helping seniors in the Monadnock region.

The State Committee on Aging and EngAGING NH gives the Vaughan Award to one recipient in each New Hampshire county who exemplifies outstanding leadership and volunteer work among residents over 60.

"I'm very honored and humbled to be receiving this award," said Houghton in an interview Tuesday. "In some ways, I feel like I'm not old enough to accept this award."



Owen Houghton poses with Governor Maggie Hassan after receiving the 2015 Vaughan Award.

Houghton has a long track record of helping seniors in the community, through a number of groups and projects. He co-founded and has an integral role in Monadnock at Home, a Jaffrey nonprofit that works with seniors to help them live independently in their own homes. He is a volunteer driver with Red Cross, providing rides for seniors to medical appointments, community gatherings and more.

He is also past chair of the New Hampshire State Committee on Aging and volunteers at the United Church of Jaffrey's food pantry. With an education in counseling psychology, Houghton also devotes many hours to community counseling in senior care management and caregiving, and has written a number of articles for local newspapers addressing challenges that seniors face.

"Owen's recent work in community caring and Monadnock at Home are a good showing of his forward thinking," said EngAGING NH Co-chair Barbara Salvatore, who used to serve with Houghton on the State Committee on Aging. "He really is someone who has made a difference in his community and across the state."

Monadnock at Home Board of Directors Vice-Chair Russ Armstrong wrote the nomination letter for Houghton. According to Armstrong, it was a no-brainer to nominate Houghton for the award. After all, Armstrong said he thought Houghton had previously won the award.

"He's so selfless," said Armstrong. "There is no part of the greater Jaffrey region where he hasn't helped someone in need."

Many throughout the region are quick to point out Houghton's knack for helping the community. According to State Rep. Frank Sterling (R-Jaffrey), Houghton has been instrumental in helping to get the Jaffrey Community Center project off the ground.

"He's a great guy," said Sterling. "I really can't think of a more deserving person to win the award."

In addition to helping out the elderly throughout the area, Houghton also says he has recently developed a passion for helping with food and hunger-related issues in the community. In addition to helping out with his church's food pantry, Houghton also assists with the church's free community suppers.

"As a longtime member of the Justice and Peace Ministry, I was exposed to some of the more hidden problems in the community," said Houghton. "Hunger and food have become standout issues for me."

When not volunteering, Houghton spends his free time golfing and serving as a caregiver for his wife, Norma, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2010. Houghton brings his wife to Monadnock Adult Care Center in Jaffrey three times a week and is actively involved in helping her with day-to-day activities.

“Owen cares,” said Select Board Chair Don MacIsaac, who golfs with Houghton and considers him a friend. “Whether it’s his family, friends or this town, he just cares. He really is a model for what volunteering should be.”



Houghton is heavily involved in the care of his wife, Norma, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2010.

Staff photo by Nicholas Handy