

Leader honored for service

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Sitting on Sue Miller's desk at Family Building Blocks is a small sign with a quotation from anthropologist Margaret Mead.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has," the sign reads.

Miller shared that message Tuesday during a luncheon at Salem Conference Center after receiving the ATHENA Award, which honors individuals for professional excellence, community service and leadership.

"I look at that daily, and I find that for me, that's a huge mantra," said Miller, executive director of the nonprofit organization that provides intervention services for high-risk children and families in Marion and Polk counties.

"In a cosmic sense, we're all in a pretty small field here, whether it's children, adults, seniors, environment, whatever your passion is, we can make a difference. I believe that precept is reflected in all the women who have been nominated for this award, as well as the previous recipients."

Miller was humbled to be singled out from among 10 nominees, all women.

"I've worked with most of the nominees over the years," she said. "We have an amazing group of women in this community who absolutely step forward and make a difference and are committed."

Marion County Circuit Court Judge Pamela Abernethy, a past ATHENA recipient, introduced Miller at the luncheon.

"She is the busiest person I have ever known but has the ability to make you feel like you are the only person in her life when you sit down next to her," Abernethy said. "She listens to people. This is the sign of a true leader."

Miller thanked her staff and the board of Family Building Blocks, asking those members present to stand to be recognized.

"This award is also for you," she said.



Lori Cain | Statesman Journal
Sue Miller, executive director of Family Building Blocks, received the ATHENA Award during a luncheon Tuesday at the Salem Conference Center.

Past recipients

Jayne Downing

Pamela Abernethy

Susana Ghio

Lydia Muñjiz

Candi Phillips

Nominees

Janet Carlson, commissioner, Marion County

Susan Gallagher, co-owner, Gallagher Fitness Resources

Elizabeth Goulard, vice president/chief academic officer, Chemeketa Community College

Carol Green, executive director, YWCA

Marilyn Johnston, human rights specialist, Human Rights and Relations Commission

Vi MacDonald, past president, Salem Women's Military League

Sue Miller, executive director, Family Building Blocks

Judy Schmidt, director of volunteer services, Silverton Hospital

Maureen Thomas, regional director, Oregon

She also thanked her family, including her husband, John, and her parents.

Community Foundation

Kelly Yunker, owner, Power Equipment Systems

"I grew up in a family where it absolutely was an expectation that every one of us give back to the community," she said. "It wasn't a question of whether we would. The only question was how and when. I'll be indebted to my mom and dad forever for instilling that ethic in me."

Her father, Ted Page, is deceased, but her mother, Sally, lives in Peoria, Ill., where she started an arts and science museum 45 years ago and continues to serve on its advisory board.

"This may scare my staff, but she's 91 and still active," Miller said. "Some people never go away."

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