

**Name of Nominee:** Winnie Colley

**Title:** Senior Center Specialist

**Place of Employment:** Golden Age Hobby House (Neighborhood Centers Inc.)

**Name of Nominator:** Deborah Turkleson

**Relationship to Nominee:** Supervisor

Winnie Colley has been employed by Neighborhood Centers for 16 years, but she has worked at Hobby House for about 35 years. Winnie was also nominated for this award by one of her volunteers, but I felt I needed to second this nomination and provide even more explanation about her excellent work with seniors.

At a recent meeting for the staff of Harris County senior centers at the Area Agency on Aging, senior center managers were asked how long they had worked with seniors. Winnie Colley had the longest tenure of anyone in the room (and probably of anyone in the county) of working in a senior center. It takes a very special person to provide the care and support for so many seniors for so many years.

Although Winnie is scheduled to work 30 hours per week for Neighborhood Centers, she is often at the center as a volunteer on her own time. This facility is owned by a Methodist Church and keeps its doors open much longer than the 30 hours it is funded by Neighborhood Centers. Winnie is often at the center early in the morning, late in the evening, on weekends and on many holidays.

After Hurricane Ike, when many residents in the Third Ward did not have power, Winnie was at Hobby House, cooking meals for the community on the center's gas stove. We found out that the seniors at Hobby House were enjoying turkey and dressing with all the trimmings while the seniors at our other centers were making do with shelf stable meals! These seniors were sorry to see the power come back on and have to return to our regular meal service.

The seniors at Hobby House have been known to have sleepovers with Winnie providing overnight supervision and companionship as well as cooking breakfast for everyone the next morning. Winnie does not choose between having holiday celebrations with her family or with her seniors. She just has the party at her house and invites the seniors, or she does the cooking at the center and invites her family.

In the mostly African American Third Ward neighborhood, one of Winnie's clients was a white man without a family. This gentleman had health and financial problems and needed someone to look after him. Winnie became the man's legal guardian and made sure that he received the benefits and health care that he needed. She found a nursing home for him after he had a stroke. Winnie still cares for the man as if he is part of her family and regularly visits him at the nursing home.

Winnie is an excellent employee at Neighborhood Centers. Her activity calendars for the center are always full of interesting and helpful activities. The Hobby House facility does not qualify for our Enhance Fitness classes because the rooms are too small, so Winnie leads an exercise class for the seniors using a videotape. Winnie is always at the center and can be counted on to help out at any of our other centers if someone is sick or on vacation.

Winnie serves about 45 to 50 seniors daily at Hobby House. Many of them have been clients at the center for over 20 years. One of her seniors has attended Hobby House almost every day for over 35 years. The daily hot lunch, interesting programs and connection to resources are definitely important to our clients, but it is Winnie's loving attention that keeps them coming to the center.

Winnie Colley has definitely demonstrated a commitment to older adults by her 35 years in the service of senior citizens and is most deserving of a Get Ready for Life Award.

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**Name of Nominator:** Theresa Phlegm

**Relationship to Nominee:** Friend & Volunteer

I have known Winnie for over 10 years, and have been privileged to work closely with her for the last 8 years. My mother has suffered with Alzheimer's for the past 18 years. When she was first diagnosed, I was married with children and working and felt that I could not afford to stop working. My aunt told me about Hobby House and said that it would be a good place for my mother to attend during the day while I was working. My aunt took my mother to the center and signed her up. Being afflicted with the disease at an early age of 54 she wanted her independence, and struggled hard to maintain it. This was good most of the time and bad at others. Bad, when she wanted to leave when she wanted to. Anyone who has the responsibility of caring for an elderly parent knows it is not easy to find a place this is willing to enroll someone who has the capacity for wandering. Winnie was willing to give my mother a chance before she said no. My mother began attending the center and began to bloom like a flower. Before coming to the center she was at home, day in and day out, lying on the couch, watching television. Daily I dressed and feed her and off to the couch she would go. Leaving her house for work I would cry because of the mundane existence she was living. I said to myself many times "I rather be dead than to live like that." At the center my mother is happy and enjoys getting out of the house and fellowshiping with her peers. A couple of times my mother attempted to wander and Winnie would patiently and lovingly talk to her and make her laugh. Because of Winnie's love and patience with my mother she never wandered again. She loves Winnie and loves going to the Hobby House. There are so many other things Winnie has done that are above and beyond the call of duty.

Winnie has helped and is helping seniors who have lost track of their families over the years. She is helping seniors who are poor, sick, hungry, in need of shelter, cold in the winter, hot in the summer, in need of clothes, medical attention, transportation, assistance with getting benefits, etc. The list goes on. She not only refers them to an agency or organization for assistance, but walks them through the process-on the clock and off the clock. She does not stop because it's time to get off. You never get the feeling she is doing what she does because of it's her job. She does what she does out of her love for God and people. I need to mention that if you needed it she would give you the shirt off her back.

We had a senior name Linda who had lost track of her family. Linda was poor, sick, hungry, confused, in need of shelter, heat in the winter, AC in the summer, clothes, medical attention because she suffered with epilepsy and kidney failure, transportation to get to the hospital, and dialysis and help getting her disability. Winnie helped her with all these issues; including locating Linda's family. Today, Linda's family has been located. Her family came to the center to reunite with their lost loved one. Winnie organized a heart-felt reunion and in the end Linda's family took her home to live with them. Linda is now in the care of her family because Winnie went beyond the call of duty. There are so many more instances such as these- but I cannot tell it all. I believe Winnie Colley deserves to receive the Ready for Life award.