

Barry Presented 2011 Unsung Hero Award

On Friday, March 4, Linda Barry, special education teacher at Grafton High School, received the 2011 Unsung Hero award presented by the Central Massachusetts Department of Developmental Disabilities Citizen's Advisory Board.

The award was presented at the Annual Citizen Advisory Board's Legislative Breakfast held at Clark University in Worcester.

Mrs. Barry was nominated for the award by Grafton residents Richard and Cynthia Bissell whose son Eric is a Junior at Grafton High. The award was presented to Mrs. Barry by nominator and Keynote Speaker Richard Bissell.

"Mrs. Barry goes above and beyond the call of duty on a daily bases," said Bissell. "She is an excellent teacher who also has a natural 'instinct' for what individual students need. This is a gift that cannot be taught."

In addition to the Unsung Hero Award, Mrs. Barry was presented with a citation from the Massachusetts House of Representatives, presented by Representative John P. Fresolo, for her "dedication to individuals with disabilities and their families."

Mrs. Barry also received a citation from the Massachusetts State Senate presented by Jason Palitsch, representing Senator Mike Moore.

The DDS Central Region Citizen Advisory Board holds an annual Legislative Breakfast in order to bring legislators, provider agencies, DDS staff, individuals and families together to discuss issues facing people with developmental disabilities. It has been a tough couple of years for DDS due to the current economic problems and statewide budget cuts.

Department of Developmental Disabilities Commissioner Elin M. Howe spoke of the challenges faced by the department in order to provide much needed services for children and adults with intellectual disabilities in the face of budget cuts and staff lay-offs. "Of most

concern to all of us, barring none, are the cuts to our family support services account," said Howe.

In his Keynote speech, Richard Bissell discussed the importance of family support funding.

"We are talking about a very small amount of money, compared to the cost of residential placement," he said. "Families are saving taxpayers millions of dollars by caring for their children and adult children at home. A small amount of family support money can be the difference between a family surviving or not."

The theme of this year's Legislative Breakfast was "Where Are We Going?", with a large question mark. Will the funding be there in order for people with developmental disabilities to live with dignity as productive citizens in our communities or will we return to the dark ages of neglect? It has been said that a community, a state, a country and in fact the world should be judged by how well we support our most vulnerable citizens.



Linda Barry with her Unsung Hero Award.



(From left to right) Front Row: Jonathan Carlson, Marika Jelovcich, Linda Barry, Eric Bissell, Brendan Griffin, Taylor Dee, and Representative John P. Fresolo. Back Row: Richard Bissell, Aaron Bissell, DDS Commissioner Elin M. Howe, and Jason Palitsch representing Senator Mike Moore. Visit us at our website www.thegrafftonnews.com and click on our PHOTOS link.