

VOLUNTEER OF THE WEEK

Profile

NAMES:

Thomas and Bonnie Hays

VOLUNTEERS WITH:

Southeastern Pa. Chapter of the American Red Cross
Merion Fire Company of Ardmore

HOMES:

Wynnewood

Though Thomas and Bonnie Hays volunteer for different organizations, their efforts intersect and complement each other. In September they were honored by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross by receiving its Sam and Dotty Kind Award, awarded specifically to couples for volunteer service and fund-raising efforts. Tom Hays has put his business know-how to work on behalf of the Red Cross chapter. Bonnie Hays is an active volunteer for the Merion Fire Company of Ardmore and serves on the board and as a fund-raiser. "The Red Cross and the fire departments across the region work in tandem and are great support systems for each other," says Dave Schrader, the chapter's director of communications. The Red Cross follows fire departments and helps out when their work is done by providing, in Tom Hays's words, for "the emotional support, medical care and spiritual care" of those who have suffered losses due to fire.

The Hayses' strong attachment to the Merion Fire Company has a tragic element. Three years ago this month, their 25-year old son, Tom, a volunteer firefighter with the company, died of a seizure he suffered immediately after fighting a fire. The company appeared in force at the funeral to honor its comrade and carried the casket on one of its fire trucks.

Tom Hays, an engaging and friendly man, is the chairman of the Audit Committee of the Red Cross chapter, a "key role," says its CEO, Tom Foley.



PETE BANNAN/Main Line Times

During his six-year term the chapter has undergone 13 audits by different authorities, and there was, Foley says, "not a single [negative] finding, which is remarkable.

"He's never afraid to speak up about where we've been, where we're going and how to get there," Foley adds.

Hays, while expressing pride at his record, lends an additional perspective: "The audit chairman, believe me, is the most thankless job, so they gave that to me," he says with a grin.

A native of Minneapolis, Hays earned his accounting degree from the University of Minnesota; he was, he says, a confirmed bachelor until he "fell head over heels over Bonnie." After working for the Arthur Andersen accounting firm and 3M, he moved to the

Philadelphia area to work in litigation for Penn Central. In 1993 he co-founded a turn-around company that helps distressed companies survive. He has become an acknowledged expert in the field, and has helped develop the body of knowledge on which it relies. Hays chaired the Turnaround Management Association and was inducted into the Turnaround, Restructuring and Distressed Investing Industry Hall of Fame.

Hays's Narberth-based firm, NachmanHaysBrownstein, has been busy in these economically tough times though ironically he has found that people avoid him at cocktail parties because they don't want others to know that he knows them.

A native of Villanova, Bonnie Hays graduated from Radnor High School and

attended Centenary College in northern New Jersey. In addition to her work with the Merion Fire Company, she has been active with the Wynnewood Civic Association and two local garden clubs as well as the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Since Tom travels a lot for work, she says, it is "really important for us as a family to have a community."

The Hayses have been married for 32 years and live in Wynnewood. Their son, Tim, is a mechanical engineer and a volunteer for the Narberth Fire Company. He and his wife are expecting a daughter, the Hayses' first grandchild, in March. Their daughter, Rebecca, is a senior at George Washington University, majoring in environmental management.

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross has over 12,000 volunteers and, following its mission, must prepare to respond on short notice to any number of disasters that may or may not occur, from one that affects a single person to those that threaten an entire region. Last year the chapter responded to 750 disasters and provided food, clothing and shelter to more than 10,000 people from Philadelphia and the surrounding four counties. The chapter also housed 885 people, including 306 children, for an average three-week stay at Red Cross House, a one-of-a-kind short-term housing facility and service center for victims of disaster, in West Philadelphia.

"The people who are doing the one-to-one really make the difference," Tom Hays says. "I'm involved so they can make the difference."

The Web site for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross is www.redcrossphilly.org. The Merion Fire Company's is www.merionfireco.org.

Volunteers — and donations — are welcome at both organizations.

If you would like to suggest a volunteer, contact Joel Fram via e-mail at frambook@aol.com.