

## Mental Health Awards Presented for 2009

Mental Health America of Northeast Georgia held their Annual Mental Health Awards Banquet on June 30th at Milledge Avenue Baptist Church. The event gives the organization an opportunity to recognize those whose work and support have furthered the mission over the past year.

Recognized for his "Outstanding Service to the Community" was reporter Joe Johnson of the Athens Banner-Herald. Johnson has consistently studied the issue of mental illness in preparing related news stories for publication.

In presenting the award, MHANEGA Director Eddie Whitlock commended the journalist for going above and beyond in his work. He noted that Johnson had attended many meetings of officials, family members and those with mental illness to become better informed about the issues.

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## Rep. Channell Describes Changes to Mental Health System in GA

State Representative Mickey Channell was the guest speaker at the Mental Health Awards Banquet on June 30. Rep. Channell has served in the Georgia legislature since 1992. A graduate of the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business, Rep. Channell serves on several important legislative committees.

Considered an expert on healthcare in Georgia, Rep. Channell's proudest achievement in the State Legislature was authoring the PeachCare for Kids legislation. PeachCare secured affordable health-care services for over 200,000 children of Georgia's working families.

In his presentation to the mental health community, Rep. Channell discussed the state's efforts to improve health care. Agreeing with an assessment by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Representative said that for years, Georgia's health and social service agencies have lurched from crisis to crisis.

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## Mental Health Awards (continued from cover)

Outgoing Board President Ruth Parsons presented a special recognition to Jim Parker for his work as the coordinator of the organization's Social Club. The club has been discontinued temporarily with plans to reform in the future.

In prepared remarks, Parsons said, "Jim Parker has made a career of serving his fellow man. Mental Health America of Northeast Georgia is recognizing him tonight for his 28 years of coordinating the Social Club for the organization.

"During that time--more than a quarter of a century--Jim has arranged events, provided transportation and spent money out of his own pocket to be sure a lack of funds would not keep those who needed to be there from participating.

"The people who took part in the Social Club knew that Jim looked out for their best interests. He genuinely cares for the people whom he serves," Parsons continued. "In giving Jim this plaque, we honor him for his work, but more, we honor him for his compassion."

Board member Pearl McLean gave the "Claire Clements-Hans Peter Dietrich Award for Outstanding Volunteers" to Chris and Carolyn Dehring. The Dehrings have been involved with MHANEGA's Annual Mental Health Benefit for many years. The couple, along with their two children, accepted the award.

McLean, who has served as the organization's secretary this year, commended the Dehrings for their work. She also noted that Dr. Carolyn Dehring has helped the Mental Health America of Northeast Georgia organization by recruiting students from the MBA program at the University of Georgia to volunteer.

Incoming MHANEGA President Laurie Wilburn-Bailey presented the award for Outstanding Mental Health Professional to Samantha Riley of Advantage Behavioral Health Systems. Riley oversees the Peer Support Program at the North Avenue facility for Advantage.

Wilburn-Bailey cited the work that Riley has done with the peers as the primary reason for her selection as award recipient. Riley, along with Advantage staff member Teresa Ruiz, has guided the peers to create a singing group that has performed at public functions including Mental Health Day at the State Capitol earlier this year.

-Eddie Whitlock, Director MHANEGA

This will be the last printed version of our newsletter, moving forward this newsletter will only be available online and through email, unless you specifically request a paper copy be mailed to you. If you would like the newsletter emailed to you please contact our office to provide your email address. If you would like to continue to get the paper copy, please contact our office at 706-549-7888.



## Representative Channell

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The current situation dates back to 1972 when then-Governor Jimmy Carter created the Georgia Department of Human Resources. Over the years, said Rep. Channell, any health service that didn't fit elsewhere fell under DHR.

The department has grown to be unmanageable. "The state auditor cannot tell us where all the money goes," said Rep. Channell.

House Bill 228 was written to address this situation, said Rep. Channell. He then detailed the impact of the bill. Two important changes will deal with mental health services:

1. The Department of Human Resources will become the Department of Human Services. It will continue to operate our state's Family and Children Services. It will also continue to be responsible for child support services and the Division on Aging.
2. A new Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities will now oversee those two areas as well as services for those with addictive diseases. Dr. Frank Shelp will lead the DBHDD.

Rep. Channell noted that in addition to structural problems, there have been funding problems. He said, "Money intended for one purpose often got used for another purpose...In general, health care has been underfunded in Georgia for a long time."

The current recession prompted the Representative to be less than optimistic about immediate improvements to health care. He said that in the long term House Bill 228 will improve Georgia's health care system.

"While I was pleased to play a small role in this reorganization," said Rep. Channell, "the real credit goes to people in this room and many more like you. You have been telling the Governor and the General Assembly for years that this move was necessary. We finally listened."

Dr. Cindy Darden, the CEO of Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, presented Rep. Channell with an award to recognize his service and his contributions to the area of mental health services in Georgia.

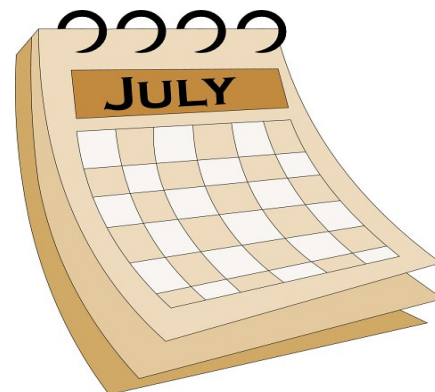
A Greene County native, the Representative currently owns and operates Channell Enterprises, a real estate holding company which he founded in the 1960s.

- Eddie Whitlock, Director

### **IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!**

You can get a membership renewal form from our website at: [www.fightthestigma.com](http://www.fightthestigma.com) or you can contact our office and we'll mail you a membership form!

**IF NOT US, THEN WHO? IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN?**



## What about your voice??

**Our state legislators hear voices. They hear the voices of voters demanding lower taxes. They hear the voices of lobbyists who want state support of special interests. Do they hear your voice?**

**Mental Health America of Northeast Georgia (MHANeGa) is working to be sure that our state's legislators are aware of the needs and the work being done to address those needs.**

**During good economic times, the state's mental health budget did not grow despite an increase in need. During the current harsh economic times, we must be sure that the mental health budget is not cut.**

**The influence that our organization can have is directly proportionate to the number of members we have. Currently we have a little over 100 members. For an organization that represents ten counties, that is not adequate. We should have ten times that number.**

**Visit our website at [www.fightthestigma.com](http://www.fightthestigma.com) and you can contact our state legislators to let them know that those with mental illness need treatment. Join Mental Health America of Northeast Georgia. Make sure that your voice is heard.**

**Click here to print a membership form to join our organization and have your voice heard!**