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Opinion/Editorial

Huntington, WV: Prestera Center recognizes the significant contributions of Joan E. Ross, a long-serving member and past president of the Prestera Center Board of Directors. Joan Ross passed away in early May 2021. Our collective hearts are broken at the news of the passing of a true friend of behavioral health and one of West Virginia's very best advocates. Her family members have our most sincere condolences as they also experience the void left by Joan Ross.

Joan Ross joined the Prestera Center Board of Directors in the 1980's while she was the Executive Director of Southwestern Community Action Council (SCAC). At that time, it was rare to see a woman in charge of leading a large organization. Equally as rare, Joan Ross became the President of the Board of Directors for Prestera Center. At that time, Prestera Center was not providing many services to severe and persistently mentally ill individuals and Joan Ross wanted to expand services and housing options available for those with mental illnesses. She took it upon herself to write a grant application for Prestera Center that won funding for permanent housing (apartments) from US Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It later became Evergreen Apartments. Thanks to her advocacy efforts and determination, today, Evergreen Apartments provides permanent housing and support for 19 adults with severe mental illnesses. Prestera has continued to expand permanent housing options for adults with mental illness to live successfully in the community and enjoy the freedoms that most of us take for granted.

Joan Ross (and others) helped establish a West Virginia chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) and later helped establish the West Virginia Alliance for the Mentally Ill. These alliances are support groups and advocacy platforms for families with loved ones that suffer from a severe and persistent mental illness. So many families in our community have been comforted and supported by these groups. In appreciation for her efforts, Prestera Center bestowed the coveted Michael Prestera Award of Excellence on Joan Ross in 1997 and named an apartment building in her honor that serves people with severe and persistent mental illness.

Our community has lost a true champion for mental health services, housing for mentally ill and support for families. A past CEO at Prestera Center, Robert H. Hansen, noted about Joan Ross, "She was a pleasure to work for, her heart was in the right place. She wanted Prestera Center to be the best mental health center in West Virginia." As we consider her contributions, we sincerely wish we could thank her just one more time.

Since 1967 Prestera Center has been leading the way in mental health and substance use treatment, recovery and supportive services at fifty-five locations across eight counties in West Virginia. Each year Prestera Center's 550 staff members strive to provide high quality care to eighteen thousand adults, children and families, regardless of ability to pay. For more information on Prestera Center, visit online at www.prestera.org, like us on Facebook or call toll free (877) 399-7776.

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