

Mendham woman finds time in busy life to help disabled

By PHIL GARBER Managing Editor | Posted: Tuesday, July 26, 2011 12:38 pm

MENDHAM - With a full-time career and six children, nobody would blame Kathryn Godby Oram for taking some private time.

But the Orchard Street professional is not about leisure as evidenced by her work, family and non-profit responsibilities. Most recently, Oram was named to the National Board of Directors of Community Options, a national non-profit organization that buys and develops homes and employment for people with disabilities.

Oram started volunteering with Community Options about six months ago, after meeting the organization's founder, Robert Stack, at a benefit. She said she was intrigued by the group's mission and met with Stack at his Morristown office.

She introduced herself as a Realtor with Godby Realtors, the company owned by her mother, Kathryn and it soon became clear that Oram could bring her real estate expertise to help the organization.

The organization helps people who have recently been discharged from an institution for developmentally disabled people. The people may have autism, Down syndrome or other disabilities. They are people who could live independently with a bit of oversight.

"They can hold jobs and live great lives," Oram said. "All of a sudden they have their own room and their own stuff and a job. To give someone an actual life, it's a pretty great organization."

Economical Plan

Not only does the program help people live productive lives but it is also much less expensive than keeping people in institutions. Oram said the state spends an average of \$300,000 to maintain an individual in an institution while it costs less than \$100,000 a year to place a person in supervised housing.

Unfortunately, there is a huge shortage of supervised housing in New Jersey and the waiting list can be many years.

Oram helps locate appropriate housing and helps Community Options to buy the property.

She said the work has been rewarding and cited one young man from southern New Jersey who was living with grandparents who could no longer provide him adequate care. Community Options was able to buy a house in Forked River where the 28-year-old man and two other people have been housed.

"He's just a wonderful kid," Oram said.

She's also found the other employees and volunteers to be unusually compassionate. One worker invited a client with no relatives to her house for the Christmas holiday.

This year, Community Options has bought six homes around the state and the work has been gratifying to Oram.

"It's been the most fun business I've ever done," she said.

Oram will serve a three-year term on the Board of Directors and will also be a part of the fundraising committee.

Her work with Community Options is Oram's latest volunteering effort. She previously helped at Family Intervention Services in Essex County.

Oram also is on the board of N.J. Heroes, a group formed by the state's first lady, Mary Pat Christie. The group honors state residents who have made a difference.

"We look for everyday people doing awesome things in New Jersey," Oram said.

Oram and her husband, Jeffrey, a commercial Realtor, have six children, including Kathryn, 17; Ryan, 15; Emily, 14; Patrick, 11; Michael, 9; and Ian, 8.