

Nursery from A1

for family relief.

“You have touched so many lives because of your dedication to building bridges with love. You are amazing,” said Roberston, also thanking sponsors, the school district, staff and volunteers.

Next, the Good Neighbor Award was presented by Director of Programs Crystal Morrison to her father, Randle Kersey, for his six years of volunteering.

“He has made the neighborhood a better place,” she said. “It’s been an honor to work side by side with him.”

Following a slideshow of the organization’s history and community involvement, Colleen Stewart, board member and the organization’s first program director, recalled the organization’s humble beginnings with only a handful of members in 1994.

From this modest start, Stewart remembered how the group grew in size and found a permanent location due to community support, despite the nonprofit struggling in its early days.

“This community is full of wonderful people,” she said.

Heather Murphy, first executive director of Family Relief Nursery, then spoke of her good fortune to approach her role in the organization as a blank canvas. The freedom enabled her to realize her visions for the organization in the community, which included respite care and opening satellite offices in Drain and Creswell.

“Most people don’t get that opportunity and I will be forever grateful

for that opportunity,” she said. “We worked together to build something that was so very special.”

Next, Cindy Vitelli, former executive director, reflected on her time with the organization, sharing the memory of trying to come up with the name for the fundraiser event.

“When I answer the phone, the first thing I hear from a client when they say, ‘I need help,’ and we say, ‘Yes, I can help you,’ is a sigh of relief,” Vitelli recalled.

She commended the compassion and devotion from staff at the nursery.

“Their dedication to give parents the tools to build skills for a stable and healthy environment is truly amazing,” she said.

Vitelli retired on Friday after 18 years of working with the organization.

Diane Hazen, another former executive director, then praised the leaders that had been on stage.

“They were responsible for helping Family Relief Nursery earn a reputation as an organization that provides quality care, services and outcomes that demonstrate we are accomplishing our mission to keep children safe and strengthen families,” Hazen said.

She also thanked the community and took pride in the group’s growth to its current nine therapeutic classrooms and three sites in the area.

“I am proud that so many children’s life trajectories will change for the better,” said Hazen.

Current Executive Director Whalen then took the stage, honoring Vitelli and Hazen for their



Family Relief Nursery staff and leaders gathered on stage after the annual Sigh of Relief benefit at the Cottage Grove High School on June 25.

years of service.

“I’m humbled to follow in the footsteps of these amazing women that have done pioneering work in Cottage Grove, Creswell and Drain,” she said.

Lastly, the audience heard from 25-year-old guest speaker Channelle Nelson, who shared her personal experience with Family Relief Nursery.

“I went from being me-based to being mom-based,” Nelson said in praise of the organization.

Nelson’s life trajectory took a turn on October 1, 2015, when Umpqua Community College near Roseburg, Ore. was the scene of a school shooting. As an attending student at the time, the event traumatized Nelson, causing her to become depressed and anxious in crowds.

“As a parent, I went through the motions,” she said. “I wasn’t living.”

Later, she gave birth to her daughter, whose extreme illness as an infant exacerbated Nelson’s stress.

“I had no idea where to

go. I had no idea where to turn,” she said.

Then, in a fortuitous turn, Nelson ran across a Family Relief Nursery outreach event in Yoncalla. After explaining her situation to the staff, she was immediately taken into the fold of the organization and provided with much-needed respite care.

“That gave me the opportunity to have a break — to be able to get myself in order, to have some shut down time, to get back in to the work force,” said Nelson, adding that the respite care allowed her to make the interests of her children a priority.

“I was finally given the safety and support that was needed to be the best mom that I could be and to be confident and to be able to start building my life as I needed it,” she said.

Amid this upward turn, however, Nelson then lost her youngest child.

“At this point I really shut down,” she said.

Through the traumatic loss, Nelson said Family

Relief Nursery was there again to offer more relief when she wasn’t able provide care as a parent. In addition, she attended a parenting class where instructors guided her back to a pathway of confident parenthood.

At Christmas that year, the group utilized the Christmas for Kids organization and brought presents for Nelson’s children, a gesture Nelson said was more motivation for her to overcome her struggles.

Then, when this year’s snow storm left Nelson and her children without power, Family Relief Nursery provided her

with blankets, clothes and a place to shower.

Nelson expressed her gratitude for the impact the group’s safety net had on her and her children.

“My children were isolated and had little involvement with other children their age,” she said. “Now we are completely different from when we started. We are a family now – and one that I am proud to be a part of.”

Nelson finished by praising the organization.

“It does effect the community. It does effect people,” she said. “And it is important.”

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