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MEDIA RELEASE

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90 year old volunteer praised for his work with inmates

When most people are already retired, Joseph Clarke was just picking up steam. In his seventies, he began volunteering at the Newport News City Jail. That was seventeen years ago. Clarke, now 90-years old, continues to dedicate his time to help a population that often goes ignored.

On Thursday, October 20th, Clarke was singled out at the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner as the '*2011 Volunteer of the Year*' for his years of service.

Clarke volunteers weekly to teach self-esteem. He sits in a jailhouse classroom surrounded by as many as eight inmates. What he does means a lot to the incarcerated men. Inmate Harold Taylor said, "When you come in to encourage us, you build up hope. In the hood, so to speak, all we've got is drugs, guns, and money. That's not hope. That's destruction. You teach us how to *not* be destructive. You teach us hope. At least you teach me hope."

Most of the 45 inmate programs offered by the Newport News Sheriff's Office are facilitated by some 120 volunteers. In addition to self-esteem, programs include, but are not limited to, money management, brick masonry, substance abuse counseling, English as a second language, GED, and building bridges with books--creating an audio CD with parents reading to their children.

(photo from appreciation dinner attached) Pictured left to right: State Sen. John Miller (D-1st District), Joseph Clarke, Councilman Joe Whitaker, and Sheriff Gabe Morgan.

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For more information, contact Lt. Kathleen Carey at 757-926-8747 or 757-813-6139.