

Vermont Council on Rural Development 2010 Community Leadership Award

Our award this year is given to Albert and Marcia Perry of Richford.

Richford is a small community located along the northern border. It is a former mill town, often cited for its struggles with employment, education and poverty. But Richford has another side, one of committed citizens working together to bring ideas and vision to reality. Albert and Marcia Perry are at the forefront of this side of Richford.

Albert and Marcia have been married for over 50 years. That in and of itself is worthy of an award. They have seven grown children and twenty grandchildren.

Marcia Perry grew up in Glens Falls, New York. She is known as a passionate, effective advocate for the low income residents of Richford and Franklin County. She became a member of the Richford Health Center in 1991 and became president in 1992. She guided its transformation into Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH), which has offices throughout Franklin County and serves 7,000 Vermonters with high quality healthcare.

NOTCH is a model for Vermont and the nation on how high quality health care can be delivered to those who need it most. People are healthier, communities are healthier because of her work.

Marcia has served on the boards of the Vermont Community Loan Fund, the Northwestern Medical Center, and the Bi-State Primary Care Association. And she has been the manager of the Richford ambulance service for over 10 years.

Albert is a lifelong resident of Richford. He was educated at Richford High School, the University of South Carolina and the Naval War College. He is a decorated retired naval officer, a former nuclear submarine captain.

Albert was a driving force behind VCRD's Community Visit in Richford in 1998, the first community visit done by VCRD. Albert helped to shape the framework and process of Richford's visit and that model is still used today.

Albert was a member of the Vermont House of Representatives for seven terms, serving on the Agriculture and Transportation Committees.

Albert's memberships include the Lions, Knights of Columbus, American Legion, VFW, Missisquoi River Basin Association, Northwest Medical Center and Northwest Vermont Public Transit Network. He is a founding member of the Richford Economic Advancement Corporation, and now serves as Secretary focusing on recruiting new members.

Marcia and Albert were founding members of Richford Renaissance Corporation, a nonprofit affordable housing organization; Albert currently serves as the President, Marcia as Secretary. Together Albert and Marcia can be credited with the success of several important projects for Richford, the most visible being the renovation of the Main Street Mill. This former Sweat-

Comings furniture plant had been vacant since 1996. With the help of many partners, it is now the home to affordable apartments, the Richford Health Center and Mac's Market. Albert and Marcia were both tireless in their work to ensure this project became a reality. The Main Street Mill is a beautiful multi-story, 47,000 square foot example of their ability to identify a local need and work to turn a vision into reality.

Marcia is an accomplished musician who had expected to be a concert pianist. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from college but didn't flinch from work in a co-op dorm that prepared women to be home makers. She managed a house and family that moved 22 times during Albert's Navy career. When others describe what it is like to work with Marcia, they say she expects a lot of those she works with, but expects even more of herself. She is a compassionate teacher and a good listener. She sees the humor in life and can celebrate the small successes.

I've had the pleasure of working with Albert on more than one vexing project. I always knew when he disagreed with me. Not because he told me so, but because he asked me crucial questions which forced me to reconsider my position. His Naval career inspired their children; three are navy Academy graduates and one a navy pilot. In the House of Representatives Albert was known as a legislator who could bridge competing ideas. He was supportive of the success of others and would vote according to his conscience and ideals, even if it was unpopular. Because of his ability to inspire others he is a powerful force to have on your side.

Despite all of their time working on difficult and often frustrating projects, Albert and Marcia remain idealistic and convey a hope for possibilities of the future, and that hope is contagious.

When I asked people who know them well why they are successful I heard many of the same answers. Their intentions are honorable. Their work is tireless. Their successes are many. They dream. They listen. They work hard.

They are undeniably successful in their individual efforts and either one of them alone is deserving of our award. Any community would be pleased to have one of them working on their behalf. Richford, Franklin County and Vermont are grateful to have them both, and we are all better for it.

Please join me in thanking and honoring Marcia and Albert Perry.