

Claudia Lennhoff: Closing Remarks 2015

Good evening again.

I hope you all enjoyed the awards presentations and the slide show this evening.

We are so happy to be able to celebrate with you tonight. It is so important to take some time every now and then to reflect and celebrate. And to gather our energies for the every day work that there is to be done, and for the ongoing struggles and the struggles yet to come.

As I think about tonight's award recipients, and all of you, I think about how necessary it is that we do all the different things that we do – the day to day work, whether it is paid or volunteer work; the work of having a vision and trying to implement it; the work of caring about what happens to people; the work of collaborating to try to create something new – to make something that is whole and is greater than the sum of its parts. I also think about how important it is to be courageous, determined, driven by an impulse of compassion and the desire to work for the greater good, for justice.

Collaboration is not easy. Collaboration is a nice buzzword thrown around a lot. But I want to tell you why collaboration is so difficult.

It is so difficult because so many of us who provide human services and health care are doing it on a shoe string budget and still always having to tighten our belts.

Asking us to do an extra thing, to stretch ourselves out a little bit thinner while we're worrying about our organizations' survival and

our ability to continue to provide the services that we know people depend on, is a tall order.

It is also a tall order to ask us to do something that is outside of our routine or our normal practice – we have schedules to keep, tasks to get done, and we already don't have enough time and resources to do the things that are in our standard practice or operation.

But we do it anyway. We do it because we want to help make our community healthier and stronger and we want to improve the lives of people.

We do it because we follow the better impulses of our human nature – the impulse toward compassion, toward justice, and toward love. And we can do this because we are courageous.

As legendary civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis said, "If not us, then who? If not now, then when?"

He also said that we should "make good necessary trouble."

This year's award recipients symbolize exactly the kind of work ethic, action, collaboration, commitment, leadership, and courage that it takes to make our community a healthy community for all.

But what are organizations, if not collections of individuals working toward a particular purpose. It takes leadership within organizations – the kind of leadership we have celebrated tonight – to move the organizations to collaboration, to a vision of working together in ways that at times might seem at odds with the day to day purpose and goals of that organization.

Moving us toward justice, toward a more compassionate and caring community comes down to the values, the vision, and the actions of individuals. It comes down to those individuals working together in collective action. That is how we make things happen.

It also takes continuity, hard work and patience, and letting our better angels guide us. That is what will get us there – and, as the proverb says, if we want to go far, we must go together.

So, where do we want to go over the next year?

We of course, want to continue to build on all that we, together, have created, so that we can care for all of our community members.

But we're going to have to fight against the budget cuts the Governor is making to human services. As someone else said, these cuts are hurting those among us who can least afford the pain.

And we're going to have to win the struggle to protect the Mahomet Aquifer from toxic contamination. Our lives and the lives of future generations of Central Illinois residents depend upon us to be victorious in this struggle.

I want us to be bold and determined and courageous in these struggles.

I want us to be audacious and fierce and confident, and I want us to do the hard sustained work that it will take.

I want us to be like Muhammad Ali when someone was thinking about fighting him – he said, "If you even dream about beating me, you better wake up and apologize."

But as this evening has demonstrated, sustained efforts, not giving up, going together – that is how we go far.

Continuing the work requires all kinds of support and involvement.

Before I close, I want to make a special appeal to those of you who can, to consider making a special contribution to our William Mueller Sustaining Fund.

Bill loved CCHCC deeply and was always looking ahead and concerned about our financial future so we could be around for a long time to continue the work that matters. Please consider making a contribution in honor of Bill and in support of our organization.

And speaking of Bill, I'd like to close with Molly Ivins quote that he was very fond of.

Molly Ivins said, "So keep fightin' for freedom and justice, beloveds, but don't you forget to have fun doin' it. Lord, let your laughter ring forth. Be outrageous, ridicule the fraidy-cats, rejoice in all the oddities that freedom can produce. And when you get through kickin' ass and celebratin' the sheer joy of a good fight, be sure to tell those who come after how much fun it was."

Thanks for making it fun, y'all. Please keep doing what you do and we'll get where we need to go.

Thank you and good night.