

## **PUTNAM ROTARY CLUB HONORS SEVEN LOCALS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE**

The Putnam Rotary Club recently bestowed Rotary's highest honor on seven local people. The Paul Harris, named for the founder of the Rotary Club, recognizes the behind-the-scenes service of Rotarians and community members.

Bill and Terri Pearsall received the award for their selfless work to help feed the community. They work tirelessly at Daily Bread in Putnam, according to Rotarian Karen Osbrey, who nominated them. The couple is instrumental in the Thanksgiving Baskets that help more than 300 families. They also chair the Empty Bowls fund-raiser and they started the free Thanksgiving dinner for those who would not have a Thanksgiving otherwise. It started at their home more than 30 years ago and when the need grew, the dinner moved to the Congregational Church of Putnam. Along the way they have been members of many organizations including Aspinock and the Arts Council. Bill Pearsall is Putnam's town historian.

Kristen Willis, immediate past president of the club, received a Paul Harris. Rotarian nominator Marc Archambault called Willis a "fearless leader" who didn't let a pandemic stop the club's good works. "Every week was a challenge and every week she rose to the challenge," Archambault said. And the community's needs were met.

Ben Williams, better known as "Big Ben," was awarded a Paul Harris. More than 4,000 acres of open space has been preserved for future generations under his leadership, said Sarah Heminway, director of the Connecticut Audubon of Pomfret Center, who has worked with Williams for many years. He is a proud Marine, she said and a lifelong educator. She added he's instrumental in the creation of the new Audubon center. Williams, in thanking the Rotary, said he was honored. "What we have here is so rare and so precious and the community 'gets it'," he said. He vowed to continue to be a "cheerleader for the natural world."

Emily Barnes, who serves her community through the Putnam Rotary Club's Rotaract Club, as a volunteer "market master" for the Putnam Saturday Farmers' Market, and in many other roles, received a Paul Harris. Rotarian Delpha Very, who nominated Barnes for the award, called her thoughtful and honest. "You always see the real Emily." She spends nearly every weekend in service to her community, she said, as a Rotaract member, the farmers' market master and more. Barnes also takes care of the calendar at Daily Bread --- no small feat.

Rotarian Pam Brown, who nominated Tom Pandolfi for his Paul Harris, recounted Pandolfi's service in Vietnam as a Green Beret and his service to veterans, whether it's guardsmen or reservists or veterans. He was instrumental in the success of the Danielson Veterans Coffeehouse. That organization serves all northeastern Connecticut towns. The group's meetings are now held every week and 40 to 70 veterans take part each week. Pandolfi helps veterans navigate complex issues that plague veterans and was the spark that grew into the Foodshare program that has fed thousands of northeastern people for the last 15 months. Brown said, "He is an example of the Rotary motto 'Service Above Self.'"

Rotarian Rachael Johnston was chosen to describe the contributions of the next Paul Harris winner, her husband Shawn Johnston. She recounted his involvement in the community from an early age including coaching and, at 11, his first foray into politics, licking envelopes for a candidate for state rep. Little did he know, she joked, that he would be a state rep later in life, serving his constituents with independence and integrity for 16 years. Service is a core part of him. After retiring from Eversource after 33 years, he turned right around and joined nonprofits in service to the community.