

THE JANE LACHAPELLE MCCARTY UNITY IN DIVERSITY AWARD
Presented on January 17, 2005 by the Rev. Roger Bertschausen
to Juan “Mito” Kudaka

I want to begin our award presentation by saying a few words about Jane LaChapelle McCarty, for whom we recently named this award. Jane died since our last King celebration.

We decided to name the award after Jane because her life so wonderfully embodied the work of Toward Community and the dream of Dr. King. Jane believed passionately in connecting people across the racial, religious and other divides that so often separate us from one another. A founder of Toward Community eleven years ago, she did much to get Toward Community off to a good start. She pitched in wherever there was a need; because she never sought out the limelight, a lot of her work was quiet and behind-the-scenes. But without her contributions, I don't think Toward Community would have lasted even five years.

One of her passions in Toward Community was the annual “Celebrate Diversity” picnic, now one of our three signature events each year. Jane started the picnic because she saw it as a great vehicle for bringing people together. Her work on the picnic was classic Jane: quiet, effective work with the goal of connecting people.

When I think of the goals and ideals of Toward Community, I can't help but see Jane's beautiful and kind face, looking at all her neighbors with a welcoming smile and with an open heart and open hands. This is why it is so very fitting to name this award after Jane.

We are honored to have many of Jane's family in attendance tonight. I would like to invite them to stand, and invite us to show our appreciation to them for all that Jane did to move the Fox Cities toward genuine community...

And now we turn our attention to this year's award. Once again we received many wonderful and worthy nominations for the Unity in Diversity Award. You can find a list of the nominees in the program.

The winner of this year's award has done much to bring our increasingly diverse community together. First as a volunteer and now also in his role as the Cultural Diversity Coordinator for the Appleton Police Department, he has built many bridges. It is a great honor to present the Jane LaChapelle McCarty Unity in Diversity Award to Juan “Mito” Kudaka.

Mito's contributions to our Fox Cities community are far too numerous to give you a comprehensive list tonight. I will lift up one of his most significant volunteer accomplishments prior to taking the position with the Police Department: his role as one of the key organizers of Latino Link.

In this past year, he has been especially busy building bridges both in his job and above and beyond his job. He has joined the Executive Committee of Toward Community as Corresponding Secretary, for example. He also joined the inaugural Board of the Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center.

Arguably his most significant contribution this past year was his leadership in the effort to help the newly arrived Hmong refugees get settled here. With his characteristic can-do spirit, Mito quickly put together communication tools to coordinate the work. He also was the instigator and a key leader in organizing a warehouse to take in furniture donations (including 80 mattresses Mito secured from a church group in Utah). Without him, the Fox Cities Hmong Resettlement Warehouse wouldn't have happened. As Lo Lee of the Hmong-American Partnership concluded in his nomination, "Mito has worked tirelessly with area agencies and the Hmong community to make the resettlement process a smooth transition."

Mito also brings sensitive mediation skills to his bridge-building work. In the wake of the recent hunting incident in Sawyer County, for example, Mito acted as a mediator between the Hmong community and the dominant culture and opened up lines of communication that are, again in the words of Lo Lee, "imperative for living through this tragedy and restoring intercultural harmony."

Mito is a thoughtful, passionate, calm, welcoming, energetic, creative, visionary and effective leader in the effort to make our Fox Cities community welcoming and inclusive. He is a very deserving recipient of the Jane LaChapelle McCarty Unity in Diversity Award.