

TRIBUTE TO WINI YUNKER

• Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to a fine Kentuckian, Wini Yunker, as she prepares to serve the Peace Corps in the Ukraine.

Choosing to serve in the Peace Corps is an admirable decision for anyone to make but, especially for Ms. Yunker, who is making this decision later in life. At a time in her life when most people are beginning to think of retirement and slowing the pace of their lives, Ms. Yunker is instead boldly venturing out on a new journey. She is reaching high for a new goal that will not only make a lasting impact on her own life, but also on the lives of those she leaves the country to help.

Ms. Yunker enters the Peace Corps with the benefit of a lifetime of learning and preparation, making her an ideal candidate for service. She completed the necessary academic requirements by earning a college degree, and further earned a master's degree from the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky.

The Peace Corps was created in 1961, by President John F. Kennedy, and is an international service organization dedicated to helping developing countries. My wife, Elaine L. Chao, headed the Peace Corps from 1991 to 1992, and it was under her tenure that service programs in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine, began. We take great personal pleasure that Ms. Yunker, a fellow Kentuckian, will be working in a service program Elaine helped create. Elaine's leadership of the Peace Corps made us both acutely aware of the kind of committed, hands-on approach to service that participation in the Corps entails. We applaud you, Ms. Yunker, for accepting the challenges the Peace Corps will surely present you over the next two years. The commitment you have made is admirable and your passion to serve others is an example to us all.

Congratulations, Ms. Yunker, on your acceptance into the Peace Corps, and thank you for your enthusiastic willingness to serve. On behalf of myself, my wife, and my colleagues in the United States Senate, I wish you the all the best.

Madam President, I ask that a Louisville Courier-Journal article from January 18, 2000, be printed in the RECORD. The article follows:

[From the Louisville Courier-Journal, Jan. 18, 2000]

WOMAN REJECTED IN '61 GETS INTO PEACE CORPS

(By Chris Poynter)

NICHOLASVILLE, KY.—Thirty-nine years ago, the Peace Corps told Wini Yunker no.

She didn't have enough education, the Peace Corps said.

But it has now learned that you don't tell Wini Yunker no.

She graduated from college at age 58. She learned to ski a year later.

At 60, she earned a master's degree from the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky.

Now, at 65, she's set to leave her home in Nicholasville to finally join the Peace Corps. At the end of the month, she'll join 30 other Peace Corps volunteers who are teaching Ukrainians how to run a business in a free-market democracy, rather than under communism; the country was a republic of the former Soviet Union until 1991.

Yunker, born and raised in Nicholasville, just south of Lexington, said she's joining the Peace Corps because she wants a challenge, enjoys teaching and will feel good about helping a country become more democratic.

"I'm ready for a new phase in my life," she said.

The response is typical Yunker, who zigs when others zag. She's never been one to sit around and wait for life to come to her.

Some of her relatives think she's insane for leaving the comfort of her home and family to spend two years in an emerging democracy, where the winters are brutally cold.

Her brother-in-law tried to discourage her, sending her this rhyme: "If you have any sense in your brain, you will stay away from the Ukraine."

Yunker is one of a number of senior citizens who are joining the Peace Corps, which since its inception in 1961 has been populated mainly by freshly minted college graduates. The volunteers dedicate two years of their lives to working in developing countries.

When the Peace Corps was created by President John F. Kennedy, few members were senior citizens. This year, 7 percent—476—of the volunteers are over 50. Brendan Daly, a spokesman for the agency, said that figure has hovered between 6 percent and 8 percent in the 1990s, in part because seniors are more active and more educated than ever and are looking for something unusual to do.

In some respects, senior volunteers are better prepared than younger people. They have a wealth of life experiences to share and are enthusiastic about becoming part of a new culture, Daly said.

"They may not be the youngest in years, but they are the youngest in heart," he said.

Yunker definitely fits that description. Three years ago, she and her only child, 22-year-old Joe, rappelled off the scenic cliffs of Red River Gorge in Eastern Kentucky.

A colleague at work nicknamed her "Flash" because she's always darting around the factory at Sargent & Greenleaf in Nicholasville, which makes high-security locks for banks, vaults and safes.

Yunker will officially retire on Friday, after nearly 17 years with the company. But last Friday, the 160 employees came together to honor Yunker, a silver-haired woman who always wears a cheerful smile and is known for her long, dangling earrings.

Yunker is the administrative assistant to company President Jerry Morgan. Morgan told the employees Yunker will be missed. And he noted she had raised her son in a single-parent home but still found time to earn two degrees, volunteer for the United Way and teach in a literacy program, Operation Read.

He presented her with a gold watch before she took the microphone. She cried at times as she read from a prepared speech, and some co-workers dabbed tears from their eyes.

Yunker preached about the importance of education and encouraged the company's em-

ployees to take advantage of its program that pays for college tuition if they maintain a B average.

That's how Yunker earned her marketing degree from Spalding University. Every third weekend for four years, she would drive about 70 miles to downtown Louisville, where she stayed in a dormitory and studied as part of Spalding's weekend program.

The entire Sargent & Greenleaf factory helped her earn her degree, she said. Workers in the manufacturing, sales and engineering departments aided her with homework, and Patsy Gray, the woman who hired her, proofread and edited her term papers and essays.

While she was a student at Spalding, Yunker remembered that day in 1961 when she was living in Washington and went to Peace Corps headquarters to inquire about joining. The Peace Corps was the idea of President Kennedy who, while campaigning in October 1960, proposed an international volunteer organization. Since then, more than 155,000 Americans, including 1,079 Kentuckians, have traveled across the globe, helping people in villages, towns, and cities with education, health, transportation, business and other needs.

Yunker remembers being disappointed when she was turned away in 1961 because she didn't have a college degree. So, after graduating from Spalding, she called to see if the Peace Corps still existed. When she learned it did, she began planning to join in seven years, when she would retire and her son would be old enough to live alone. A Peace Corps official suggested she earn a master's degree in the meantime. She did.

In 1998, she applied to the Peace Corps and had her employers and others write letters of recommendation. Last October, she learned that she had been accepted, but with some conditions.

For health reasons, she had to have three of her teeth, which had been capped, either replaced or removed. She chose removal to save money. She also had to have a bunion removed from one foot.

About the same time, Yunker decided to stop coloring her gray hair black. "I just decided I can't continue to be that vain if I'm going to be in a foreign country," she said.

On Jan. 31, she'll fly to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, and take a bus to Cherkassy, a city of about 300,000 where she'll live with a family for four months while studying the language and culture eight hours a day. Then, she'll go to a university—she doesn't know which one or where—to teach business.

Her biggest concern is learning the language. She's not worried about the teaching. For six years, she had volunteered for Operation Read, and she recently taught English to a Korean immigrant who lives in Nicholasville.

"When we started in June, she couldn't speak English at all. And of course, I don't speak Korean," Yunker said. "And now, we can talk about even personal things and have conversations on the phone."

Velma J. Miller is among Yunker's co-workers concerned about her living in Ukraine.

Miller said Yunker, a longtime friend, is the kind of person who brought fresh flowers, food and cards when Miller was undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer in 1998.

When Miller learned that Yunker had to have three teeth removed, she pulled her aside in the restroom and asked, "Wini, do you reckon that God's trying to tell you not to go?"

Yunker said her only worry is her five siblings, all of whom are older. She made each promise not to get sick while she was away.

Likewise, Yunker's son is worried, but also excited for his mother. Joe Yunker, an emergency medical technician in Jessamine County, said he knows that being a Peace Corps volunteer is one of his mother's life dreams. He's heard about it since he was 11. "My mom can do anything," he said.●

"SAINT" RITA

● Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, earlier this month, the Burlington Free Press chose for its 1999 Vermonter of the Year, a woman who is widely recognized as the guardian angel of the homeless in Vermont, Rita Markley. For as long as I have known her, Rita has been a passionate, articulate, and very vocal advocate for our most needy residents. She has raised awareness that even in Vermont, there are people without a roof over their heads, and most importantly, that these people have names, and faces, and that many of them are children. They could not have a better defender. I would like to have printed in the RECORD the text of the Burlington Free Press article announcing the selection of Rita as Vermonter of the Year, and offer my congratulations and sincere thanks to our very own "Saint" Rita Markley. I ask that the article be printed in the RECORD.

The article reads as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, Jan. 1, 2000]

COTS DIRECTOR IS OUR VERMONTER OF THE YEAR

(By Stephen Kieman)

They are the problem the world's richest country pretends it doesn't have. Curled up in doorways, or killing time on street corners, they are the vision more fortunate Vermonters have learned to look past.

In a booming economy, they are the bust. Amid records on Wall Street, they sleep on Main Street.

They are the homeless. And Rita Markley does not look past them. She does not pretend they do not exist. Most of all, she does not stop believing in them.

As director of the Committee on Temporary Shelter, the largest program for helping homeless people in Vermont, Markley provides them with shelter, and then a way up.

For her exemplary advocacy on behalf of homeless people, for her unstinting attention to an urgent social issue, and for her success in building a more aware and compassionate community, Rita Markley is The Burlington Free Press Editorial Board's choice for Vermonter of the Year.

A NEW PROBLEM

COTS began providing shelter on Christmas Eve, 1982. Homelessness in Vermont is that recent a phenomenon. Last year more than 4,000 Vermonters lacked housing at some point. Most of them turned to COTS.

In 1999, COTS provided 10,723 bed nights to people who otherwise would have slept in a car or on the street. COTS also gave shelter to nearly 300 families—including 534 children.

Indeed one of Markley's achievements has been educating Vermonters about who homeless people are. Granted, some are the bothersome substance abusers who elicit little

sympathy, but that is a shrinking proportion.

Many homeless people are veterans. Many are victims of the national trend to close mental hospitals and other institutions, who have not subsequently received sufficient community services.

Mostly, the homeless are people that Vermonters in good homes interact with all the time—at restaurants, at cash registers, in hotels. Though this work formerly paid enough to support people, today a full-time job is no guarantee of a place to live.

Of the families who needed COTS last year, half had at least one person working. Yet wages at entry level jobs have fallen so far behind the cost of living in Vermont, the number of homeless families has quadrupled in only four years.

Meanwhile the federal government, which used to build affordable housing units by the tens of thousands, has stopped. Urban renewal programs have demolished low-income housing, worsening the supply shortage.

Housing development has focused on higher priced homes; the state's median house selling price rose 20 percent this decade, placing a solution farther out of reach.

The Clinton administration has responded by expanding rental assistance money. But in Vermont, roughly 1,000 people eligible for these funds face a major obstacle: no eligible apartments available. Burlington has it worst, with a vacancy rate near zero.

MORE THAN SHELTER

Markley came to COTS as a part-timer who wanted to write fiction. Now she is a full-time champion of people who otherwise would not have a voice—or a place to go.

COTS offers much more than a meal and a bed, though. It provides a continuum of services: health care, child care, job training, coaching for interviews, help with school, summer programs for children, mental health counseling, and on and on. For those who strive, these programs are a strong ladder into good housing and greater opportunities.

Most importantly, COTS offers its clients hope—that they can escape dependency and attain self-sufficiency. "Rita believes in the resourcefulness of the human spirit," said United Way executive director Gretchen Morse. "She never falters on that."

It works. Seventy percent of the people who complete COTS' training programs have a job and stable housing a year later. A new effort to link apartment hunters with landlords who accept federal subsidies has found 40 individuals and 60 families a place to live—even in this no-vacancy market.

COTS has therefore earned the national accolades that have poured in from advocacy groups and the U.S. Department of Housing.

COMPASSION, ABILITY

With so serious a problem affecting so vital a need of a population growing so quickly, you might expect their strongest advocate to be strident or self-righteous. In Markley's case, a better description would be jokester chocaholic.

Yes, she is capable of speaking with passion at COTS' annual candlelight vigil. Yes, she is articulate in the Statehouse and before community leaders. And yes, sometimes she is angry about Washington's indifference to the people who are not sharing in the nation's prosperity.

But Markley uses irreverent humor to protect her from the sometimes grimness of her task, and to thwart burnout. She is quick to praise others, and effusive in her thanks.

As a result she has made homelessness something Vermonters cannot ignore. Some

180 businesses support COTS financially or with in-kind services. Some 1,500 Vermonters walk for COTS each May. That means Markley is helping cultivate compassion across the community, a good deed that extends far beyond the mission of COTS.

It also means COTS has steadily diminished its reliance on government's help, now receiving two-thirds of its funding from other sources. Services are not tailored to the eligibility requirements of some grant, but to what a homeless person actually needs.

Markley draws on a wealth of skills in her work. Sometimes she is the passionate advocate. Sometimes she is the skilled policy wonk. Sometimes she is the light-hearted comic who brings chocolate to a potentially controversial meeting.

Sister Lucille Bonvouloir, a founder of COTS, tells a story that reveals a seemingly bottomless reservoir of compassion and ability. A woman came into COTS in the 1980's and no one could communicate with her. Everyone wondered why the woman would not speak. Then Markley entered the room, and in a matter of minutes they had struck up a lively conversation.

In Russian.●

TRIBUTE TO THE EMPLOYEES OF CATERPILLAR

● Mr. COVERDELL. Madam President, every once in awhile, we are reminded that all the important issues we are working on pale in comparison to the countless acts of charity and compassion that occur all across America on a daily basis. I want to recount for my colleagues one such act, which occurred in my home state of Georgia, appropriately enough, during the holiday season—an act that puts a human face on the compassion that is innate in the American people.

A.J. Bentley III, 3½ years old, is a constituent of mine who is dying of brain cancer. While A.J.'s prognosis looks bleak, the disease has not taken away his passion and fascination with tractors, farm and earth moving equipment—the kind which Georgia is blessed to have plenty. Upon learning of A.J.'s terminal illness, our office contacted the good people at Caterpillar to see what they could do to lift the spirits of a dying boy and his family. Caterpillar reacted without hesitation and pulled out all of the stops. First, Caterpillar offered to have A.J. tour their plant in Peoria, Illinois so he could see first hand how all the equipment was built and how it worked. Unfortunately, A.J.'s medical condition prevented him from being able to fly to Illinois. Plan "B" was to have A.J. visit the Forest Products Division of Caterpillar in LaGrange, Georgia. On the day his dream would be fulfilled, A.J. was not feeling well and unable to make the 1 hour drive to LaGrange. Undeterred, the people of Caterpillar would not let A.J.'s illness keep them from fulfilling his dream. Because everyone at the LaGrange plant wanted a chance to help, there was a lottery that day in LaGrange.