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## Her goal: Teach others to celebrate diversity

*CLARE MULLANEY  
RANDOLPHROXBURY THIS WEEK*

Elaine Johnson of Kenvil loves to watch things grow. From helping the homeless and creating mentor programs for high school students to fighting for fair-housing legislation, Johnson never gives up on her passion to help others.

On June 3, she was elected chair of the Morris County Human Relations Commission for 2009/2010. The organization sponsors projects and programs aimed at educating and informing the community about diversity and issues of bias.

"I believe in their mission," Johnson says. "The more people are educated, the more likely they are to understand different cultures."

In the past year, Johnson had been active with Morris County Human Relations' Housing Committee, which, she says, is among the most active committees in the commission. As chair of the committee, Johnson and her team organized a breakfast honoring local landlords for their efforts and presented a seminar on fair housing.

In the coming year, Johnson hopes to get Morris County Human Relations involved with the Prosecutor's Youth Summit, a program aimed at educating children and teens.

"That's what it's all about," Johnson says. "Educating the youth."

Along with her other board members, Johnson hopes "to continue to educate commission members about fair-housing laws and other local issues," she said.

Johnson also serves as the vice chair of the County College of Morris Board of Trustees. She says each trustee is required to serve as a member or officer of at least one committee.

Although Johnson has been involved with numerous councils during her 10 years of work with the college, she is the current chair of the Personnel Committee and the Minority Retention Committee. She also serves as the vice chair of the board. In the past, she has been board secretary and board treasurer.

"It's just an awesome involvement, because I get to work with youth," Johnson says. "It's a big responsibility, and I appreciate that I have the opportunity to get involved and make that difference in the community."

For five years, Johnson has been working for Homeless Solutions, an organization dedicated to creating continuous aid for the homeless from shelters to independent housing. She serves as its director of programs and services.

"I'm a volunteer at heart, and it's wonderful to work with people for a job," she says.

She became involved with Homeless Solutions because she "was looking for a population that (she) hadn't dealt with," she says. After working in the business world for more than 22 years, she wanted a challenge.

Johnson says many guests coming to the shelter have experienced setbacks, whether it's job loss, a death in the family or an abusive relationship. The Homeless Solutions staff works individually with the guests, showing them how to become self-sufficient.

"Each Homeless Solutions guest who leaves one of our shelter programs as a contributing member of the community is a success story, and there is no greater job satisfaction than knowing I have played a role in assisting someone in overcoming a crisis and turning his or her life around," she says.

Johnson is most proud of her work with the youth ushers at Calvary Baptist Church in Morristown as secretary of the Usher Board. She trains the ushers to ensure that church services are well organized and conducted in an orderly fashion.

"It keeps me focused and grounded," she says. "I love to watch them grow spiritually, emotionally and mentally. I am so blessed to have the opportunity to have a positive impact on our youth and marvel at their contributions to our society."

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