

President recognizes local surgeon's volunteer efforts

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By Rebecca Layne

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WINCHESTER- The president of the United States had a message for Dr. Matthew Karen.

"Your volunteer service demonstrates the kind of commitment to your community that moves America a step closer to its great promise," reads the congratulatory letter on the wall of Karen's office at 2055 Valley Ave.

Karen, 44, a facial plastic surgeon at Exclusively Faces Cosmetic Surgery and Spa, recently received the bronze President's Volunteer Service Award for giving from 100 to 249 hours to The Laurel Center - a local domestic and sexual-abuse shelter for women.

Since 2003, more than 1.5 million presidential awards have been presented to worthy volunteers.

"I was pleasantly surprised," Karen said.

He has donated time and money to The Laurel Center for seven years. This year, he estimates, the time amounted to about 20 hours per month.

He has served on the center's board of directors for four years and is its vice president.

Over the years, Karen has raised thousands of dollars for the daily operations at the center, soliciting donations and recruiting participants for its 5K Walk for Women, which raises awareness about domestic and sexual violence.

The most recent walk generated \$6,000 to \$7,000.

"If we didn't do this, it wouldn't survive," he said. "With the economy the way it is, the capability to take care of these people is limited."

Karen is also working with the board to fund a new building for the center - \$2.1 million has been raised for the \$4.3 million facility.

He balances his volunteer time with his job, his wife Santa D'Alessio and their four children, including 3-year-old twins.

Karen said The Laurel Center tracks volunteer hours and submits the names of qualified volunteers for the award.

"It's an honor," he said. "It's nice to know people see you're trying to do something nice for the community. But if I didn't get the award, I'd still do it."

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