

# Club honors volunteer, editor (photos)

## De la Rocha aided victims of storms; Patrick a key woman in local media

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PHOTOGRAPHER: STACEY LAUREN-KENNEDY

ALL THAT GLITTERS Annual Fashion Show

SCOTIA — Kelly de la Rocha found herself filled with self-doubt as she stood on a Mississippi beach staring down at scattered wreckage from people’s lives that had washed ashore after Hurricane Katrina.

The volunteer from Glenville was on her first mission trip to the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast in January 2006 and was having difficulty identifying what skills she’d lend to the monumental task of rebuilding. But that doubt slowly changed into optimism as she began to lend a hand whenever it was needed.

By the end of her trip, de la Rocha helped hang drywall and rewire one of the homes being rebuilt. And more importantly, she provided a shoulder whenever a victim from the storm needed one to lean on.

“I came home knowing, without question, that I brought hope to someone’s life,” she recalled Sunday at the Glen Sanders Mansion in Scotia.



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But de la Rocha, a reporter for The Daily Gazette, didn’t rest on this achievement. Over the next six years, she volunteered on a number of national and international relief efforts where she simply offered to help.

Then in September 2011, her work was needed far closer to home following Tropical Storm Irene. With communities reeling from the catastrophic flooding in the Schoharie Valley and along the Mohawk River, de la Rocha rolled up her sleeves again to aid the recovery effort.

On Sunday, the tireless volunteer was among a pair of successful female role models recognized by the Schenectady Business and Professional Women’s Club at its annual fashion show and scholarship fundraiser

on Sunday. Also awarded with the organization's Woman of Distinction honor was de la Rocha's editor, Gazette Editor Judy Patrick.

Cyndie Powell, the chairwoman of the event, was the one who nominated de la Rocha for the award. She said she approached the volunteer after recognizing some of the incredible work she was doing in flood-devastated communities, including her creation of TimeShare Volunteers, a Facebook page dedicated to coordinating volunteers for the relief efforts.

What Powell didn't realize was that de la Rocha's aid to the flood victims was just a fraction of the work the volunteer had been doing throughout the community over the years. This included volunteering at the Schenectady Inner City Ministry's food pantry, with 4-H, and on the board of Cornell Cooperative Extension in Schenectady County.

"I knew only a thimble full of what Kelly was doing for the community," she told a crowd of nearly 250 people.

Patrick's designation comes during the same year she was named editor of the Gazette. Elana Alvarez, a club member and its former president, said she nominated Patrick because she is among the few women to rise to a commanding position in the news media.

"She is one of the few women in the United States who have the honor to be editors," she said.

Earlier this year, Patrick was presented with the Excellence in Career Achievement Award from the Women's Press Club of New York State. In accepting the Woman of Distinction honor, she discussed the important role education plays in molding successful women.

"Education, as we all know, is the key to empowerment," she said.

Patrick also discussed the role of the news media in exposing problems that impact women and the community alike — issues such as the high teen pregnancy rate in Schenectady and the relatively bleak 58 percent graduation rate at the city's high school.

"Shining a light on a problem is always a good way to begin fixing it," she said.

Patrick also discussed evolution of women in the newsroom and how it has improved since she started reporting at the Gazette's Amsterdam bureau in 1982. Still, she said women only account for 36.9 percent of the workforce in newsrooms across the country and that they're more likely to get a job copy editing than as an editor or reporter.

The fundraiser helped raise more than \$8,500 in 2011 for scholarships given to women from Schenectady County seeking higher education. Powell said the goal this year is to top this figure by at least \$1,500 — something that should be within reach given the record number of people who turned out for the luncheon and fashion show afterward. "We've grown it by leaps and bounds," she said.

