



SCOTT MUSSELL / Courier Staff Photographer

Hattie Holmes, a paralegal at Iowa Legal Aid in Waterloo, was recently honored for her 30-plus years of service.

Longtime Legal Aid advocate honored

By **JEFF REINITZ**
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WATERLOO — For three decades, Hattie “Delores” Holmes has been helping Waterloo’s needy navigate the maze of bureaucracy for agencies designed to help them.

“I just really like doing it. It’s good to help people,” said Holmes, 59. “It makes you feel good.”

As a paralegal/advocate at Iowa Legal Aid’s Black Hawk County office, Holmes has assisted hundreds of people in receiving their disability, Medicaid and Social Security benefits.

Her co-workers recognized Holmes’ 31 years of service during a fundraiser for the organization last week.

“She works with a population of folks who would burn out most attorneys in a few years. But she has persisted and is a true advocate for persons with low income, for persons struggling to deal with disability, and who are struggling with agencies whose rules are not

always crystal clear,” said Vivian Betts, an attorney with Iowa Legal Aid.

Born in Florida, Holmes’ family moved to Waterloo when she was young. She graduated from East High School in 1965 and landed a job as a secretary with Black Hawk Legal Aid Society in 1975 after finishing at the former Gates Business College in Waterloo.

Black Hawk Legal Aid later merged with the organization that would become Iowa Legal Aid.

Managers noticed Holmes had people skills and a unique insight into the agency’s clients and moved her into a paralegal and advocate role.

“In my job, I try to treat all the clients like I would like to be treated, with dignity and respect,” Holmes said.

Holmes described the work as challenging. She talks with people “one on one” most of the day, and budget restrictions mean she isn’t always able to help everyone who needs it.

She is well-regarded by the administrative law judges she works with and fields inquiries from attorneys when it comes to the topics of disability and Medicaid law, Betts said.

Her late husband, Mannie Holmes, followed a similar track before his premature death following a stroke in 1999.

Mannie Holmes was a social worker and worked in the substance abuse unit at the Iowa Mental Health Institute in Independence and at Area Education Agency 7 before teaching at Wartburg College in Waverly. He also chaired the Peoples Community Health Clinic.

Hattie Holmes has three grown children and three grandchildren.

In her spare time, she plays piano for Payne AME Church and knits. She also enjoys television shows like “Walker, Texas Ranger” and the classic “Gunsmoke.”

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