

Volunteer of the Month Rev. Dr. Shelley Best

When you work in the “non-profit” world, especially as a minister, the line between paid professional and “volunteer” can get really fuzzy. And when you’re there long enough, your efforts can gain a life of their own.

So it’s not surprising that Shelley Best who spends so much of her time now as President and CEO of the Conference of Churches in Hartford as well as director and curator in chief of **the 224 Ecospace** at 224 Farmington Ave should be recognized by the Village for Families & Children with the Champion for Children Award. First given in 2001, the award is intended to recognize an “individual [that] has dedicated considerable time, talent and leadership to projects, work, activities that align with the mission of The Village – to build a community of strong, healthy families who protect and nurture children. These efforts go beyond the scope of his or her normal professional/civic responsibilities.”

Shelley began her work life with a degree in communications working for CT Mutual Life Insurance Co. in her early twenties, but even then her “volunteer” work was as an activist.

In fact it was her leadership and community development work that made the O’Neil administration offer her the position of Assistant Regional Director of DCF, and that at the age of 26. From there she became the Assistant Director of Public Information, staying through to the Rowland administration. It was this day-to-day experience seeing the plight of so many of the disadvantaged children in DCF that caused her to transition to the ministry. First with an MA from Hartford Seminary and later a Masters in Divinity from Yale, and finally a Doctorate in Divinity from Hartford Seminary.

When she accepted the position of President and CEO of the Council of Churches in 2001, her day-to-day duties required more administration work, but concern and caring for children and those responsible for them has never been far from her heart or mind.

So even as she continues to reinvent the formerly empty Hartford Courant Arts Center into **the 224 Ecospace** she continues her commitment to children, families and the resources they need to succeed and prosper. Teens who are enrolled in programs there often show up hours early just to have a place to hang out, because they feel comfortable there. That’s the sort of volunteering we appreciate here in Asylum Hill.

For more information on The 224 Ecospace go to <http://the224.org> or <http://www.conferenceofchurches.org/v2/> For more information on the Village for families and Children go to <http://thevillage.org>

