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Four locals named Health Care Heroes

Back Mountain residents are among 24 health care professionals acknowledged by The Times Leader for their work in the health care profession.

By REBECCA BRIA
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Four Back Mountain residents were recently named Health Care Heroes for 2009 by The Times Leader.

Juan J. DeRojas, M.D., and Cheryl A. Fuller, Ph.D., both of Dallas; Diane O'Brien, FNP, of Shavertown; and Susan Sordoni, M.D., of Harveys Lake, were among 24 health care professionals acknowledged as Health Care Heroes.

Health Care Heroes recognizes extraordinary men and women within the health care profession who are helping to shape the future through their work and community involvement in North-eastern Pennsylvania.

Honorees were nominated by friends, colleagues and anonymous people. A Times Leader panel reviewed the nominations to determine who would receive the distinction of Health Care Hero.

The Health Care Heroes were honored at an awards ceremony on Thursday, Nov. 5 at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs in Plains Township.

Juan J. DeRojas, M.D.

Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Juan J. DeRojas, M.D., became a surgeon to serve people.

"I grew up with it," DeRojas said. "When I was a kid (my dad) would take me to the hospital and I'd go in the operating room with him and watch him. I was awed by it and what surgeons do."

DeRojas' father, of Mountain Top, and his late grandfather, both named Juan, were surgeons in Cuba before they fled the Castro regime. DeRojas and his family came to the United States in 1961 and his grandfather came in 1968.

The 55-year-old DeRojas received his Bachelor of Science degree in biology from LaSalle College in 1976 and his medical degree from Temple University School of Medicine in 1980.

A U.S. Army veteran, he served as a trauma surgeon in Operation

Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Landstuhl, Germany and in Iraq. He was a member of a forward resuscitative team that performed resuscitative surgery on the front lines to save lives.

"Our job was to take care of the critically injured people who needed immediate surgery," DeRojas said. "Probably in my professional career it is the most gratifying thing I've done."

Currently working as a general surgeon at Surgical Specialists of Wyoming Valley in Plains Township, he says about 80 percent of the surgeries he does are vascular to correct corroded arteries, perform bypasses and operate on veins.

The most rewarding part of being a surgeon is helping people solve their health problems with surgery, says DeRojas. The most challenging aspect, he says, is doing a good job.

"To understand that someone has come to you trusting their life and their health and they put it in your hands, I think it's an awesome responsibility and very challenging," he said.

DeRojas is also the father of five children: Alma Maria, 29; Juan Carlos, 27; Michael, 22; Christopher, 21; and Patrick, 19.

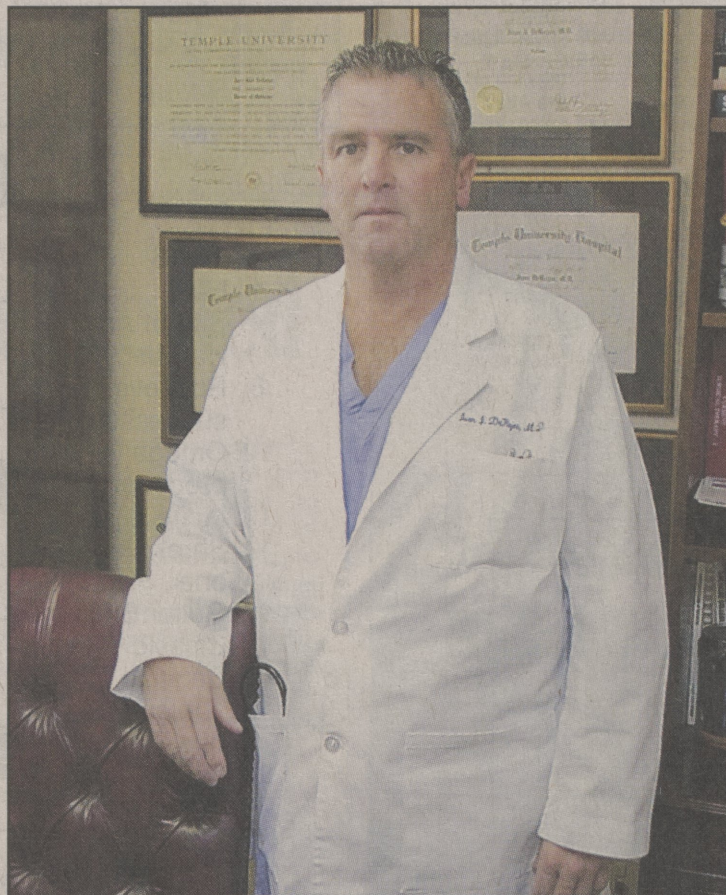
"(I'm) honored that somebody would nominate me for this," DeRojas said. "I don't look at myself as a hero. There are a lot of heroes out there that do their job everyday and nobody knows about them."

Cheryl A. Fuller, Ph.D.

Cheryl Fuller's students know her class means much more than sitting in a chair and listening to lectures.

From May through September, Fuller, an adjunct professor in the nurse practitioner program at Misericordia University, and her students visit Culver Camp in Ross Township once a week. The camp is home to migrant workers who come to the area during the growing season. Fuller and her students perform routine check-

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JUAN J. DEROJAS, M.D.



CHERYL A. FULLER, PH.D.



DIANE O'BRIEN, FNP



SUSAN SORDONI, M.D.

CELEBRATING THANKSGIVING AND PATRIOTISM



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Cassidy Ford was dressed as the Statue of Liberty and Dominick Rizzo as Uncle Sam in the annual second-grade Thanksgiving Day program at Dallas Elementary School, which had a patriotic theme this year.

She lives here but you can also see her on TV

By REBECCA BRIA
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In just 30 minutes, Eileen Carlin had to convince as many people as possible to sign a petition to pave the Key West beaches in Florida.

Carlin's task was one of several challenges she had to complete while on the TLC reality show "Help Wanted" in 2003. She was one of five contestants selected to compete for the title of honorary mayor of Key West. Although she did not win the show, Carlin is grateful for the experience.

"It was just a lot of fun," Carlin said. "It made you think on your feet, but basically it's a game; it's a show and it was just fun. And it's also not bad to have on your resume because people in the industry know they audition for that."

The 59-year-old Dallas woman is a former school teacher who has been acting throughout her life.

Carlin grew up in Wilkes-Barre and graduated from Coughlin High School in 1967. In college,



Eileen Carlin lives in the Back Mountain but spends time acting in New York City.

she double majored in education and theater at Mansfield University.

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