

## **Housing network honors Schenectady woman**

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SCHENECTADY — A woman who previously wandered the city streets at night on and off for about six years because she had no place to go is being honored by Supportive Housing Network of New York State as a tenant of the year.

Bethesda House Executive Director Margaret Anderton said Karen Connaught, 50, was chosen as one of two tenants of the year in the state because her story represents a commonality among so many homeless people that others often don't understand — that the homeless often lead normal lives until one or two things go awry. Bethesda House is a nonprofit, nondenominational organization in Schenectady that provides services for the homeless and working poor.

Connaught now lives in the Bethesda House's federally subsidized Lighthouse facility in the Mont Pleasant neighborhood that allows people to put their lives back together while pursuing work, school or other activities.

Connaught, a divorced mother, was working as a certified nursing assistant when she was laid off from her job in 1996. Her unemployment ran out, and she didn't know how to investigate her other social service options. She has three grown daughters, but they couldn't take her in permanently. So she would sleep and eat at Bethesda House on Liberty Street, and then walk the streets at night. Bethesda House got her into the Lighthouse program in 2003 after she was arrested for resting inside a grocery store.

Anderton said Connaught, who suffers from mental health issues, was once completely silent and anti-social. She now jokes with Bethesda House staff, has renewed her relationship with her daughters and grandchildren and has helped the organization do its yearly count of homeless people.

Connaught received the award recently at a Supportive Housing Network gala in Manhattan.

"It makes me feel happy," Connaught said about the award. "People are afraid of homeless people. They shouldn't be."