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## Heroes in our midst

### American Red Cross honors three local women

*By Katie Lovett*

**Features Editor**

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Three locals will be recognized by the American Red Cross Northeast Chapter as "heroes" for their contributions to their communities, during a breakfast at the end of the month.

Among those set to be honored during the annual awards ceremony are: Kathleen Bailey, of Newburyport as a "community hero"; Heather Douglas, a teacher at Triton Regional Middle School, as an "education hero"; and Elissa Al-Chokhachy, RN, of Amesbury, as a "health care hero."

The heroes are friends, neighbors, colleagues and service members who choose every day to make a difference in the lives of others, according to the Red Cross.

Bailey is being recognized for her enormous involvement in the city she moved to only several years ago.

She was the chairwoman of the Yankee Homecoming celebration in 2009 and ran for the city's Charter Commission last year, earning the most number of votes of all of the commissioners.

"When they called, I was a bit overwhelmed by it," she said. "I just do what I do, and I enjoy doing it. I never thought about getting an award for it."

Bailey said she's always been active in communities where she's lived. She's always lived in cities that are larger than Newburyport, and when she arrived here, she decided to get involved.

"Always, even as a child, I felt, 'Don't just sit there, do something.' I guess that's my motto."

A member of the Exchange Club of Greater Newburyport, Bailey organized a movement to bring the Field of Honor fundraiser to the city's Bartlet Mall last Sept. 11.

Bailey also led efforts at the Newburyport Pentecostal Assembly to fill shoeboxes with gifts for children and seniors. The filled boxes were donated to the Family Connection Health and Education Services and the Council on Aging in Newburyport.

"I want to be here forever, so my feeling is, why not help keep it the place that I love and add to it if I can," Bailey said.

Douglas, a seventh-grade social studies teacher at Triton and New Hampshire resident, spearheaded her school's Service Learning program to teach the students about hunger.

In her efforts, Douglas went "above and beyond the call of duty," Triton Regional Middle School Principal Jared Fulgoni wrote in his nomination letter.

"Mrs. Douglas recognized that power and energy that lies within her students, could, with some effort and direction, be harnessed to help those in need," he wrote.

The program developed into "Canary" during the month of January, when the school vowed to "can" hunger in the community. The school held a monthlong food drive for the Pettengill House in Salisbury, while incorporating the food drive and the lessons of hunger in all of the students' classes — and even the lunch program.

More than 3,000 food items and \$500 were collected and sent to Pettengill's food pantry.

"I didn't even know that such an award existed," Douglas said. "I'm very happy to be recognized in this way for the work that I did, but there were a lot of people involved in this effort. A lot of teachers, a lot of school administrators, a lot of students ... This was really a very, very big effort."

Al-Chokhachy, a hospice nurse from Amesbury, is being lauded for her decades of work in the health care field.

She has encountered numerous stories of awareness by people as they near their deaths, after-death communication and near-death experiences, Al-Chokhachy said last year. She released a collection of those stories in an account, "Miraculous Moments: True Stories Affirming That Life Goes On."

Al-Chokhachy is a graduate of New England Baptist Hospital School of Nursing and Boston College School of Nursing. She has worked as a hospice nurse, private-duty nurse and health care counselor and is board-certified in hospice and palliative care nursing.

In 2009, she earned her master's in thanatology, the study of death, from Hood College in Maryland.

Kimberly O'Hare, an office manager for the Red Cross Northeast Chapter, said the nominations all come from within the communities.

"It's completely community outpouring," she said.

This year's nomination pool was the largest the organization has received to date, O'Hare said.

"We are fortunate to live in a community with so many real heroes," she said.

The breakfast is sponsored by National Grid, Eastern Bank, Northeast Health System, Temkin Financial Group, North Shore Community College, Beverly Rotary Club, Anthony & Dodge PC, Axcelis Technologies, Beverly Cooperative Bank, Capital Hotel Management, Distrigas of Massachusetts LLC, First National Bank of Ipswich, Meridian Associates, Structured Solutions Inc., R.B. Strong Excavating & Sewerage, R&L Associates Inc., Endicott College and Kiwanis Club of Beverly.

IF YOU GO

What: Ninth annual Heroes Breakfast

When: Thursday, March 31, 7:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Where: Danversport Yacht Club, Danvers

How: To purchase tickets, call the American Red Cross of Northeast Mass at 978-922-2224 or visit [northeastmassredcross.org](http://northeastmassredcross.org).