

Always ready to offer a helping hand

Bank manager Mary Celestre is a board member of Petaluma Ecumenical Housing, Petaluma People Services Center and Rebuilding Together Petaluma

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“Helping people has always been a passion of mine,” says Mary Celestre, “especially the elderly and children.”



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AT A GLANCE

Name: Mary Celestre

Age: 52

Occupation: Branch manager, Summit State Bank

Family: Single, two grown children, one child still at home and three grandchildren.

Been in Petaluma: 10 years

Hobbies: “I love cooking. I spend a lot of quality time with my teenage daughter, and I volunteer for several nonprofit organizations and am on the board of three of them.”

Favorite book: “I don’t have a lot of time to read, so when I do, I usually read newspapers or magazines.”

Favorite Petaluma hangout: Home or work.

Web sites: www.pephousing.org,

www.petalumapeople.org,

www.rebuildingtogetherpetaluma.org

Celestre, who has been in banking for 34 years, says most of her clients are elderly and have become her friends, which led her to become involved with Petaluma Ecumenical Properties.

“PEP Housing provides housing for the elderly, as well as disabled and low-income citizens,” she says. “I started volunteering and attending some of their local events and enjoyed it so much that I kept volunteering. The more I volunteered, the more involved I became. I attended events for years and finally joined PEP’s board six months ago.”

Celestre also sits on the boards of Petaluma People Services Center and Rebuilding Together Petaluma. PPSC offers counseling, referrals for assistance in several areas, rental assistance and senior services, while Rebuilding Together Petaluma is a local nonprofit volunteer organization

that provides home modification and repair services free of charge to individuals and organizations in our community that are in need of some helping hands.

“We have 250 to 300 volunteers,” Celestre says, “and the whole community comes together and goes out to homes of low-income people and does some major work.”

The next “Rebuilding Day” is April 17, when 15 to 20 Petaluma homes are scheduled for repair, and volunteers are always welcomed. An application form is available on the Rebuilding Together Petaluma Web site. Interested parties also can call 765-3944.

“PEP has 12 or so properties in the Petaluma area,” Celestre says, “and we just broke ground on a property in Kentfield.”

As of January 2010, PEP serves 291 residents with an average age of 73 and an average income of \$15,962. The organization was launched in 1978 by a group of clergy who were appalled to discover that many elderly people in Petaluma were living out their senior years in converted garages, storage units and tents without heat or running water.

Celestre finds both her greatest challenge and her bliss in her job as branch manager at Summit State Bank in Petaluma.

“In these (economic) times, I’m growing the branch. My career is exciting to me; it makes me happy to get up and come to work each day. I love my job and the people I work with and work for. I feel it’s really important to love what you do, and I love to energize my employees and teach them to succeed.”

It’s not all work and no play for Celestre, because, she adds, “I’m very passionate about my family. My life has been, and continues to be, my children. I really love just hanging out with my teenage daughter, going to movies, shopping or just sitting around talking.”

What does a work and family-oriented woman who describes herself as “thoughtful, caring, compassionate and deliberate” do when she wants to get crazy? “I took a trip to the Philippines on a moment’s notice,” Celestre confides, then amends, “Well, it wasn’t really a moment’s notice; more like two weeks.”

If she could change the world, what would Celestre do? “I would eliminate the poverty and suffering, both here, where we have so much of it, and in third-world countries,”