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## Pastor honored with humanitarian award

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*Monmouth County Human Relations Commission Chairman Darryl Hughes, from left, and the Rev. Terrence K. Porter pose with Melissa Teasley and Marguerete Teasley Graves during the Earl Thomas Teasley Humanitarian Award presentation in Freehold March 10. KEITH HEUMILLER*

**‘A candle loses none of its light by lighting another candle.’**

**This motto, engraved on the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission’s (HRC) annual Earl Thomas Teasley Humanitarian Award, is a fitting tribute to the legacy of both Teasley and the Rev. Terrence K. Porter, who received the honor last week.**

**Porter, pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church in Red Bank since 2003, acknowledged the enduring influence of advocates like Teasley in accepting the fourth annual award from the HRC on March 10.**

**“There is an old African proverb that says you need to sit on an old mat to weave a new one,” Porter said. “And so, it is on the back of people like Earl Teasley that I serve in the community of Red Bank. I am humbled.”**



*The Rev. Terrence K. Porter speaks about community solidarity at the dedication of Unity Way in Red Bank in May 2009.*

**One of Monmouth County’s most passionate advocates for social justice and community development, Porter has helped create many new economic, housing, educational and social service programs throughout the past 11 years.**

**From adding an additional service for Hispanic congregants at Pilgrim Baptist to coordinating with local nonprofits and businesses to deliver meals to homebound residents, Porter has made community service a priority.**

**Pilgrim Baptist’s annual Community Work Day draws more than 100 local volunteers for various projects each year, while congregation members and leaders have donated hundreds of thousands of dollars since 2003 to crisis intervention efforts, scholarships and other programs both here and throughout the world.**

**One of Porter’s most substantial achievements is Cedar Crossings, a 36-unit affordable housing community in Red Bank that broke ground in 2010 and has since helped more than 25 local families become homeowners.**

**As president of the Red Bank Affordable Housing Corp., Porter spearheaded the multimillion dollar development and has helped secure low-cost mortgages for dozens of qualified applicants.**

**HRC members said Porter’s work closely resembles the passion and advocacy of Teasley, a former commission chair and beloved counselor and assistant professor at Brookdale Community College who passed away in 2010.**

**According to Teasley’s sister Melissa, Porter is the ideal recipient for an award in her brother’s name.**

**“Anybody can receive an award. It’s what you are going to do with that award,” she said while joining in the accolades for Porter last week. “And you have already begun to do what you have been called to do. You are so very deserving.”**

**Melissa Teasley remembered her brother as a fierce warrior against all forms of discrimination and a tireless advocate for even his most troubled students, many of whom he personally reached out to when they were on the verge of dropping out.**

**“It didn’t matter the distance, it didn’t matter the cost. He was always very generous,” she said. “Without even batting an eye, he gave all.”**

**Saying he was honored and humbled by the award, Porter thanked the HRC and Monmouth County officials for supporting his scholarship programs, educational initiatives and other community development efforts both locally and across the globe. He also thanked his congregation for supporting a pastor who is “so radically different from the norm.”**

**“I don’t know if I do anything that makes a difference,” he said. “But I like to think that every now and then, as we do God’s work, somebody will be impacted for good.”**

**Porter also discussed his latest effort, a new health clinic in Haiti that will be officially dedicated in May. Shortly thereafter, Pilgrim Baptist plans to open a new church in LaCajou, Haiti, that will include a “Grains of Grace” food program and educational support to the community, he said.**

**“If we as Americans don’t help others around the world, who will?” he asked.**

**During the ceremony, HRC members also presented Porter with official commendations from the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the state Senate and Assembly.**

**A joint legislative resolution, sponsored by state Sen. Jennifer Beck, Assemblywoman Mary Pat Angelini and Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande, (all R-Monmouth), commended Porter for creating “a standard of excellence to enrich others who would serve humanity with compassion and love.”**

**The freeholders officially declared March 10 “Reverend Terrence K. Porter Day” in honor of Porter’s service, and in response, the charismatic pastor jokingly said he would use it as a free pass to break the speed limit on the way home to Scotch Plains.**

**“I am going to pull that out when I get pulled over,” he said.**

**Porter also thanked the Teasley family, expressing admiration for a man who, as the youngest of eight children, graduated Edgewood Regional High School in three years, earned a master’s degree at Columbia University’s Teachers College and then returned to New Jersey to serve his community.**

**“It says a lot for the character of this man,” he said of Teasley. “He has made a difference, and that is why his legacy will always live on through the commission.”**

**An advocate for gay rights, racial equality and social justice at all levels, Teasley wrote a passionate, open letter in 2008 calling on all Monmouth County residents to remember the decades of struggle that won the nation’s current freedoms.**

**“I had a dream in which a huge tidal wave covered the building where I was vacationing,” Teasley wrote. “I remained safe and dry inside, but it was frighteningly disastrous outside. Just before I had awakened, I started to see leaks coming into the building from small cracks in the foundation, and I then knew that it was only a matter of time before my safety turned to pure peril.**

**“The danger in the climate we are in today is that this regression away from respect and appreciation for diversity is slow and subtle, chipping away at the core of a foundation that has taken extraordinary efforts to build,” he added. “We need all hands on deck.”**