

Ermine Laurence
2008 Opal Durant
Granbury Woman of the Year Award Recipient

Ermine Laurence has served the indigent of Hood County for more than 25 years. At a point in her life when many people decide to relax and take it easy, Ermine took on a new and daunting challenge. In 1983, after retirement from Montgomery Ward where she worked in the Traffic Department, Ermine became the director of Granbury's well-known and respected charity People Helping People.

People Helping People began as the Lake Granbury Interchurch Agency. With Ermine's vision and hard work, the fledgling agency not only succeeded, it grew to an organization that today provides about 615 needy people per month with food and clothing. Their record is laudable. They give their clients good clothes to help them feel better about themselves and look their best as they apply for work. Each year they purchase shoes and provide school supplies for children. They supply food to those in need. And anytime there is a crisis in Granbury—floods, fires or other disasters—People Helping People is there to lend a hand.

Ermine has an amazing ability to raise funds, seeking donations from churches, businesses and organizations to keep the agency in operation year after year. Her philosophies and attitude toward the indigent are well known at the agency: "Encourage children to strive to get out of poverty. Do not judge people by what they drive or wear. Bad things happen to good people—people may just be down on their luck."

Ermine has a special affinity for single moms since she was once in that position. She also understands sacrifice. When her husband died, her children wanted her to keep the family home in North Richland Hills. She realized that to keep People Helping People open, she would have to make a long daily commute. She moved into one room with minimal furnishings since her time was spent taking care of others rather than caring for her own personal possessions. Later, Ermine was blessed with the opportunity to move into a church member's home where she could continue her work without the daily commute.

Ermine has worked tirelessly for 25 years coordinating the agency and its volunteers as well as identifying the people who need their donated supplies of food, clothing, money for utility bills and medicine. She has organized a kitchen staff to distribute food, office help to keep records and a receiving staff. As nominee for this award, she has received many compliments from those she has helped.

Granbury is blessed that Ermine heard the call to service 25 years ago when her pastor announced the need for someone to head People Helping People. She recognized God's hand in the direction her life was to take. And for the past 25 years, she did all this as an unpaid volunteer!