

## CLUB NEWS – Escapee Honored as Senior Citizen of the Year

From Escapees RV Club

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Ray Gearing (left) with Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, when Fuller flew into Livingston in Oct. 2005 to break ground on a new Polk County build.

Ray Gearing, Escapee #12742, was honored by the Livingston-Polk County Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 29, 2009, as its Senior Citizen of the Year for 2008. He was recognized primarily for his work to establish an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity in Polk County. His efforts for Habitat began in Aug. 2001 when he and his then-friend Susie Dunaway convened a steering committee to determine how to go about establishing an affiliate and who would be involved. Nineteen months later, the affiliate was officially a part of Habitat for Humanity on April 1, 2003.

The first house was started in Dec. 2003, and the new owner took possession in Mar. 2004. Many Escapees worked on the house, and Escapees have worked on every house since. In fact, two of the eight homes built to date have been funded with Escapees' donations and built with Escapees' labor. Ray served the new affiliate as its president for the first three years after affiliation. For the past three years, he has served as its volunteer executive director.

In addition to his work for Habitat for Humanity, Ray is an active Rotarian, and he served as president of the Livingston Rotary Club in 2007-2008. He has mentored a Livingston student for nine years through his senior year at Livingston High School. He is a Commit For Life blood donor to the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center, and he participates in blood drives and highway cleanups at Rainbow's End.

He and his now-wife, Susie, live permanently at Rainbow's End, although Ray traveled full-time with his previous wife, Ruth, until her illness brought them to the Escapees CARE Center in 1996. Ruth died in 2003 with Alzheimer's disease.

Professionally, Ray spent 40 years as a Presbyterian minister, serving churches in Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. He retired from the ministry in Little Rock in order to become a full-time RVer. He still preaches on occasion at a local Presbyterian church and is called upon at the park for memorial services sometimes. He has four daughters, nine grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren scattered across the country. One of his daughters remarked, "You have set the bar pretty high for retirement!"

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