

GIVEAWARD FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE

Braudis is honored with state award for service to children.

story by **Lynn Lofton**

photo courtesy of **Debbie Braudis**



MARSHA BARBOUR presents the Governor's GIVE Award to Debbie Braudis for her outstanding service in children's advocacy. Braudis volunteers her time through CASA in Jackson County.

Dedicated volunteer and Vancleave resident Debbie Braudis was honored this year with a Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence Award (GIVE) for her outstanding service in children's advocacy. She volunteers 175 hours of service each month with the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) in Jackson County.

A judge assigns advocates to work with children who are in the state's foster care system. "We're just run-of-the-mill moms and dads, aunts and uncles who want to help children," Braudis said. "There are so many children who need care and there are a limited number of trained social workers."

Braudis gets to know children and their families, schools, and things that touch children's lives to be a voice in the court for that child. "We work for the best possible outcome for them," she said, "hoping they will be placed in a loving, caring home, and in some cases that may not be the home of their biological parents. We're there throughout the case whether that's six months or three years. We never want to overlook anything."

Volunteering as a children's advocate is a perfect match for Braudis, who with husband Jack reared eight children. A full-time employee at Huntington-Ingalls Shipbuilding, she attends CASA training classes twice a year to remain qualified as an advocate. She also leads fellow CASA volunteers through a mentorship program she established for new volunteers.

"I have not regretted being an advocate at all, even though sometimes the cases are sad," she said. "You feel the pain of the child from an emotional standpoint, but yet feel you're making a difference."