



THE VIRGINIA BEACH
Beacon



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Danette Crawford, left, founder of the Virginia Beach-based Joy Ministries, hands information about the fifth annual Mother's Day Celebration to Zenia Th and her daughters, Ashley and Courtney, at their Bayside neighborhood. This year's event will be May 8 at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott.

A MOTHER'S TOUCH

Danette Crawford does her best to make sure area mothers have a happy Mother's Day. Her Joy Ministries holds a yearly celebration for single mothers, widows and military wives whose husbands are deployed / PAGE 12

MOTHERING MOTHERS ON THEIR DAY

Some mothers bear their burden for 365 days a year without much help. One local group says "thank you"

BY LAINE M. RUTHERFORD
THE VIRGINIAN PILOT

Danette Crawford believes that all mothers should be celebrated on Mother's Day.

Not just the woman with the doting husband and adoring children who buy cards, flowers and gifts.

But the single mom who is working one or more jobs to support her family, helping with homework and trying her best to solve the problems and dilemmas, which, at times, can seem insurmountable.

And the widowed or senior mother whose children are grown and are celebrating their own Mother's Day, sometimes far away, sometimes forgetting that once a mom, always a mom, no matter what the age.

Crawford also remembers the military wife, handling everyday life at home while her husband is deployed. Often, she's in the area without family to help celebrate, without her spouse to help the children bring her breakfast in bed, without someone to say, "You're a great mom. Keep up the good work."

Crawford's belief in the value of all moms is so strong that she's arranging to have as many of these women as possible at a Mother's Day Celebration held in their honor. And to show how much she believes in these women, Crawford is literally giving them the red carpet treatment.

As founder and president of Joy Ministries, a Virginia Beach-based evangelical outreach ministry, Crawford teaches and preaches to all.

However, there's a special place in her heart for single mothers, a role she knows well



Danette Crawford, founder of Joy Ministries, will hold the fifth annual Mother's Day Celebration for single mothers, widows and military wives whose husbands have been deployed. This year's event will be held this coming Sunday at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott.

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/ THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

as the sole caregiver to her daughter, Destiny Joy, 6.

The free Mother's Day Celebration began in response to a conversation Crawford had with a young, widowed mother who was in graduate school with her at Regent University.

"She told me about her son who wouldn't have anything to do with her," said Crawford, an ordained minister who holds a master's degree in social work.

"It made me think of my first Mother's Day as a single mom, and all I could think of was how alone this woman must feel."

Crawford said God spoke to her that night and told her what to do: honor the mothers who might be forgotten, show them there are people who care. And, Crawford added, God spoke to her again and told her to do it first-class.

"Originally, I was going to do a chicken dinner for \$5 a plate. But after God spoke to me, I knew I needed to honor them and esteem them, because there's no one else in their lives to do it."



PHOTO COURTESY JOY MINISTRIES

Volunteer Adrienne Chou presents carnations to participants at the 2003 Mother's Day Celebration sponsored by Joy Ministries.

The first year, after six weeks of planning, 150 attended the celebration in Hampton. The next year, the size doubled, and the group crowded the Founders Inn. The third year, more than 1,100 walked down the 170-foot red carpet at the Virginia Beach Pavilion.

Last year's honorees grew to more than 2,000.

Crawford moved the cel-

ebration to the Waterside Marriott this year due to construction of the new Virginia Beach Convention Center. Registration will be capped at 1,500 because of space considerations.

Crawford, the Joy Ministries office staff and a group of volunteers that will number almost 200 on Mother's Day

WANT TO HELP?

Contributions are needed to help pay for dinners, transportation, activities and a gift. Sponsorships range from \$65 for a single mother and her children to \$2,500 for a neighborhood.

Call the Joy Ministries office at 420-2625, or send contributions to P.O. Box 65036, Virginia Beach, Va. 23467.

work for six months to make sure the event is elegant and memorable.

In addition to dinner, attendees are treated to music, an inspirational message and a gift of a scripture verse or Crawford's videotapes to take home with them.

And, while the day focuses on mothers, children aren't forgotten. As a single mother herself, Crawford is aware of the difficulties of finding

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child care on a holiday such as Mother's Day.

"We're not here only for the single moms, but for the fatherless children as well," she said.

Pre-screened volunteers care for children 4 and younger during the meal, while those 5 and older eat with their moms. After dinner, the children are taken to another room and entertained with clowns, videos and an evangelical message suited for their understanding.

The Mother's Day Celebration is not just a Joy Ministries event, but a community event as well.

"We have at least 10 bus loads coming in and lots of vans, and they come from all over the area - Hampton,

Newport News, Norfolk, Suffolk, as well as the Beach."

A bus of 47 mothers will head to the dinner from Jamestown Commons, a senior citizens apartment complex in College Park.

"So many of our women have nobody to share the day with, and no transportation to get anywhere, so it becomes kind of a forgotten day around here," said Audra Hirst, Jamestown Commons' activities director.

"This celebration is a nice way to fellowship with each other, make new friends and get out for a special afternoon."

Hirst, as she has for the past three years, will give up her own Mother's Day celebration to attend the event.

"All I can say is that when you get to the dinner, you feel like you're back home. There are no strangers there, just friends," she said.

On the bus ride home, after the dinner, Hirst notices the expression on the faces of the Jamestown Commons residents.

"You see so many smiles, smiles you don't see every day," she said.

Another bus filled with mothers will come from Friendship Village, a subsidized housing community on Birdneck Road, where the

majority of the apartments are headed by single women.

"She is an integral part of our community and our outreach," said LaMont Timmons, chief executive officer and founder of SGM Inc., which provides community programming at the site. "She's really a godsend to us."

Joy Ministries also extends its other outreach programs to the community.

They include the Single Mothers Life Group, a support group; the Back to Work program, which assists women in buying new clothes and acquiring skills needed for employment; the Summer Reading Camp, a literacy program; and the First Day Challenge, which provides school supplies for hundreds of children.

"Our goal here is to offer a hand up, not just a hand out," Crawford said. "Everything we do here is to build these women and children up, because so many of them have been knocked down their whole lives."

Crawford shares her message locally, preaching at churches and speaking to a variety of organizations. She also hosts a television program, "The Abundant Life Broadcast," which airs locally at 7 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays on Cox INSP Channel 39.

Donations received from viewers of Crawford's television ministry help pay for the Mother's Day Celebration, as do sponsorships from local businesses and organizations. But the event is expensive to put on, according to Crawford, who declined to name the amount.

"No matter how much it takes, I'll keep doing it because I've seen so many people whose lives are radically changed from this."

Added Crawford, her voice lowering to a husky whisper and her eyes filling with tears, "It doesn't matter how much it costs, because it's so much more than just a one-time dinner."

Reach Beacon correspondent Laine M. Rutherford at lmrvab@aol.com.



Joy Ministries staff members Rebekah Martin, left, Danell Hurtado and Doris Dunekack hold a few of the gifts that will be given out at the fifth annual Mother's Day Celebration. Joy Ministries is sponsoring the event along with various churches and businesses.

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WANT TO GO?

What: Joy Ministries' fifth annual Mother's Day Celebration for single mothers, widows and military wives whose husbands are deployed.

Where: Norfolk Waterside Marriott

When: 4:30 p.m. May 8

Cost: The event is free, but space is limited. Registration deadline is 4 p.m. Wednesday.

More info: For reservations and more information, call 420-2625, or visit www.joyministriesonline.org



PHOTO COURTESY JOY MINISTRIES

Participants in Joy Ministries 2003 Mother's Day Celebration open their gifts.