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Levis receive AARP award for community service

By [Emily Crisman](#)

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

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Hixson residents Tom and Barbara Levi are being recognized for lifetimes of devotion to helping the environment as well as neighbors in need by the AARP Soddy-Daisy Chapter, which is presenting its Anderson Award to the couple at Soddy United Methodist Church Tuesday, Nov. 24 at 2 p.m.



Emily Crisman

Hixson residents Barbara and Tom Levi are the recipients of the AARP Soddy-Daisy Chapter's Anderson Award for their community service efforts in environmental conservation, disaster relief and emergency food assistance.

"We find we're healthier if we're giving," said Barbara Levi, a teacher for 30 years at Red Bank and Soddy-Daisy high schools. "Everyone works so hard to get all these things and reach these goals they have, but it's not nearly as rewarding as helping somebody who really needs it."

Both 77, the Levis are Soddy-Daisy natives who grew up living on Soddy Lake, where they first developed their love for the outdoors, which is now the driving force behind much of their community service.

"Most everything we're involved in has to do with the environment," said Barbara Levi. "We love and appreciate nature and the outdoors and the beautiful scenery in Tennessee."

When strip mining began several decades ago, the Levis became heavily involved with the environmental activism group Save Our Cumberland Mountains. Along with their parents and grandparents, the Levis owned property on Flat Top Mountain and lobbied in Nashville to help pass state laws to protect their surface land from owners of the rights to the minerals below.

“It was a really big problem in Tennessee at the time,” said Barbara Levi of strip mining.

She explained that the technology emerged in the 60s, and descendants of those who purchased mineral rights to Tennessee plateaus in the 1700s began seeking profit through strip mining the area to the dismay of the surface landowners.

“It was never a problem until our generation, and we started getting laws passed in the 80s and 90s through grassroots efforts,” she said.

Previously most residents of Flat Top and Mobray used well water, and many of those wells became dry due to strip mining.

“Barbara and I worked long and hard to get water to those areas,” said Tom Levi. “That area now is thriving because of the water source, which opened up a whole new corridor for expansion for rural homes.”

The Levis have also worked closely with the North Chickamauga Creek Conservancy, for which Barbara Levi served as president for two years and currently sits on the board.

“There needs to be a concerted effort to keep conservation moving in the direction of linear parks so they will be available for future generations,” said Tom Levi, who physically worked on the trail that reaches across the 30-mile stretch of the conservancy that goes through Soddy-Daisy and helped build its five bridges. “There needs to be a place for people to go to get some peace and serenity.”

He also devotes himself to those in need, volunteering for years at Memorial Hospital as well as assisting with recovery from natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the tornadoes that occurred locally last spring.

Tom Levi is also very passionate about his work with the Soddy-Daisy Food Bank, where he has volunteered for the past 10 years and picks up food from area grocery stores each week to be distributed by the food bank to North Hamilton County.

“It’s made me realize that out here in Soddy there are truly deserving people who need our assistance,” he said.

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