For once, Pauline Rhoades was the center of attention. It was standing room only at the Yankton Elks Lodge in Yankton Sunday when local groups and citizens got together to honor Rhoades, a tireless volunteer involved in numerous civic activities, as Yankton’s 2008 Citizen of the Year.

“It’s a very humbling experience to be singled out,” a visibly moved Rhoades told the crowd. “I really prefer doing things with a group and with a team. However, I’ll take the hit for everybody today.”

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan publisher Gary Wood presented Rhoades with the Citizen of the Year plaque, which read, “Yankton’s Citizen of the Year, Pauline Rhoades, in recognition of her high standard of leadership, honor and patriotism, and service to the community and people of Yankton.”

“There’s not really much more that can be said,” Wood said.

Sunday was also proclaimed “Pauline Rhoades Day” by both Gov. Mike Rounds and Mayor Dan Specht.

Specht thanked Rhoades for her work in literally dozens of organizations, including the Yankton School District Foundation, for which she serves as executive director; Trinity Lutheran Church; Sons of Norway; Relay for Life; the Yankton Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors; and the Riverboat Days Committee, for which she has served as chairwoman.

To the delight of those in attendance, Rhoades also received two whips to go with her reputation as being able to whip organizations and boards into shape.

Numerous family members, friends and colleagues were on hand Sunday to discuss their experiences working with Rhoades and to wish her the best.

Paraphrasing Peanuts creator Charles Schulz, Joanne Christensen, coordinator of volunteers and outreach ministries at Trinity Lutheran, said, “The people who make a difference in our lives are not the ones with the most credentials, or the most money, or the most awards. They simply are the ones who care the most. Thank you, Pauline, for making a difference in people’s lives by caring, sharing and giving of yourself in so many different ways.”

Rhoades’ daughter, Melanie Ryken, said she knew her mother had been nominated for the award several times, and was glad she was finally being honored.

Ryken said that when her mother was told about the award in December, “I could see all of the emotion she was feeling. She was very excited, overwhelmed, humbled, probably a little embarrassed, but mostly, she was speechless. And for those of you who know Pauline as well as I do, that doesn’t happen.”

Also in attendance were members of the Briest family. Charley Battery’s Sgt. Corey Briest, who was severely wounded in Iraq, became a direct beneficiary of Rhoades’ work when she spearheaded a drive to raise funds to build a handicapped-accessible house for him and his family.

“She is always there,” said Corey’s wife, Jenny Briest. “She is like a second mother and grandmother to us.”

Upon receiving the award, Rhoades invited members of her family and the Briests — who she said were family to her — to stand and be recognized.

“We all encounter people in our lives that show up at just the right times to propel us to be better versions of ourselves,” Rhoades said. “They accept us for who we are and encourage us to act on our lives. I have been blessed to have many such individuals in my life: My family, pastors, teachers, neighbors, people in my church, Charley Battery soldiers, people I have served on boards and committees with, and yes, many, many children.

“I believe we are all called to serve,” she said. “We need to be aware of opportunities that may present themselves and take advantage of them. Make it something you are passionate about, for you can make a difference.”

The Yankton Citizen of the Year Award is sponsored by numerous organizations, including the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan.