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**CONTACT:**

**Kimberle Hall, 402-471-6228**  
**[kim.hall@nebraska.gov](mailto:kim.hall@nebraska.gov)**

## **First Lady Sally Ganem recognizes Omaha volunteers for community service**

(Lincoln, Neb.) Nebraska's First Lady Sally Ganem presented community service awards to Carter Fangmeyer for Outstanding Student Leader, OPS/UNO Aquaponics Service Learning Program Partners for Outstanding School Volunteer Program, and College of Saint Mary-Occupational Therapy Program for Outstanding Service Learning Program, on April 11, 2014 during the annual First Lady's Outstanding Community Service Awards luncheon ceremony at The Thompson Center on the University of Nebraska Omaha campus.

Carter Fangmeyer of Andersen Middle School in Omaha, has two passions that have evolved into helping many others; developing a way to keep children more connected to their deployed military parents, and diabetes community education and research.

Carter's father recorded a message that was sewn inside teddy bears he gave to Carter and his brother before he was deployed. The brothers began a fund-raising effort, and Operation Voices and Love (O.V.A.L.) was born, to purchase and make bears for other children in the same circumstance. Since 2012, this grass-roots organization has provided nearly 3,000 bears for military families.

At the age of 9, Carter was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. He has been a great role model for newly-diagnosed patients. He has been instrumental in raising \$30,000 for the American Diabetes Association through recruitment, individual, and large group efforts. Carter also volunteers for Operation Christmas Child and LemonAide for Africa, through his school and church.

The Omaha Public Schools and University of Nebraska Omaha Aquaponics Service Learning Program represents the very best of school, campus, and community collaboration. This program includes elementary, middle school and college students working collaboratively with Whispering Roots, an urban-farming nonprofit providing locally grown food for socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

The adaptability of the program is evident in the variety of programs and classrooms involved in OPS. Since 2011, 193 UNO students and over 1,000 OPS students have participated, serving countless hours to build and maintain school aquaponics systems, harvest produce for donations to food pantries or homeless shelters, and teach Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics concepts to new classrooms joining the program.

Students also serve their produce to their own school's afterschool community. For some students, it's the first time they've tasted fresh produce.

The Occupational Therapy Program at the College of Saint Mary is setting a new gold standard for how service is integrated on campus and in the community. This program has incorporated service across its curriculum. Students receive an introduction to service-learning and its benefits, through undergraduate and graduate courses.

The service-learning component allows students to practice leadership skills in complex social settings, engage in systematic reflection, develop critical thinking and builds their capacity for cultural competence. Students then take full ownership of developing service projects that have long-term benefits for the community. Since the fall of 2007,

Occupational Therapy service-learning courses have provided more than 139,000 hours of service through many community projects. Each semester, 10 to 20 community organizations benefit from this exemplary program.

For more information about the First Lady's Outstanding Community Service Awards, visit ServeNebraska at, [www.serve.nebraska.gov](http://www.serve.nebraska.gov).

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