

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **The Giving Bee honored as volunteer group of the year**

(Lincoln, Neb.) The Giving Bee received the 2014 First Lady's award for Outstanding Volunteer Group of the Year. This award is presented to a group that strives to make their community a better place to live through a variety of activities or by addressing one issue of primary importance to the community.

Nebraska's First Lady Sally Ganem presented the group with this award on April 11, 2014 during the annual First Lady's Outstanding Community Service Awards luncheon at The Thompson Center on the University of Nebraska Omaha campus. Accepting on behalf of the group was Rachel Sissel, President and CEO of Volunteers of America-Western Nebraska and Board member, Lynne Klemke.

The Giving Bee is a group of quilters whose heartstrings were tugged by the stories of foster care children. Previously in western Nebraska black trash bags were used to scoop the child's clothing and possessions when they moved. In February 2003, Barb Webster, whose love for both children and quilting was well known, drew local women into an organized effort to provide colorful, sturdy bags and quilts for those children being removed from homes.

Obstacles encountered included the need for a location and financial difficulties. Barb Webster provided a building for the quilters with room for cutting tables, sewing machines and stacks of fabric. Later they moved into the basement of an empty Lewellen school. When the Volunteers of America preschool moved to the Oshkosh Elementary School, the empty sunlit room met with their approval. Financial needs also hindered progress. Buckley Trust has provided 3 sewing machines and supplies, U.S. Aprons of Sidney have provided sturdy fabric for bags and donations of fabric, and supplies are from those no longer sewing or through estate closures.

The quilts are as varied as the fabric and the quilters. Pink "fairy" quilts, horse quilts, and brightly colored car/truck quilts fill the table, only to be emptied once again with a call from the Department of Health and Human Services.

As of January 2014, a total of 1,027 quilts and 516 bags have been provided to foster children in the Nebraska Panhandle as well as North Platte and McCook. The quilt and bag travel with the child when he or she is moved to a different home. The Garden County ladies currently committed to this project are Barb Miller, Sue Read, Ruby Rittenhouse, Norma Stokey and Donna Willenberg. In 2013, a total of 3,040 hours was donated to this project. Previous years had similar time donations.

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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