

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 12, 2014

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Founder of “Willie’s Closet” receives Governor’s Points of Light award for volunteer efforts

Lincoln, Neb. – Willie Shafer has been keeping students in school for the past eleven years by donating clothing to local schools when unplanned accidents occur in and out of the classroom. She is a retired English and journalism teacher from Lincoln Public Schools who knows the importance of supporting harmony, attention and comfort in the classroom, especially for young students who are forming life-long learning habits.

Governor Heineman and First Lady Sally Ganem honored Willie, Wednesday, February 12, 2014 for her volunteer efforts with the Governor's Points of Light adult award at a ceremony in the Warner Chamber at the State Capitol. The awards are sponsored by ServeNebraska and presented quarterly in recognition of volunteers who give their time, talent and energy to help Nebraskans build stronger communities.

Willie’s vision for how she could help had humble beginnings. Willie started collecting donated clothing in her home for those occasional accidents including: wet socks from snowy hills during recess, spilled milk on a sweater, or wet pants from a rainy slide...for little cold hands that had no gloves and a heavier coat for a child who had none. She provides hats to keep little ears from frost bite and warm turtlenecks for students with asthma.

Willie’s list of comforts has expanded over the years as well as her tireless search for willing sponsors. Now housed in the Saratoga Elementary School basement, ‘Willie’s Closet’ sustains 68 schools providing 1,900 service hours per year. Funding for her project comes from willing organizations who believe in the students and the project. Willie and her band of five volunteers open the “store” twice a month for the nurses and health technicians who are encouraged to take what they need for their schools.

For Willie coordination of this effort is a full-time job from August to May in setting up speaking engagements, procuring financial and clothing donations, purchasing, ordering and organizing clothing, screening school requests and supporting her community volunteers. Willie’s tireless smile bespeaks her enthusiasm to keep these students in school and comfortable. She makes a positive difference in the lives of these students.

To nominate individuals and groups for the Governor’s Points of Light Awards who have made a difference through volunteerism and service, visit the ServeNebraska website at www.serve.nebraska.gov. The next nomination deadline is March 15, 2014.

ServeNebraska pursues its mission of mobilizing Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through volunteering, collaboration and national service programs.

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