

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 30, 2017

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10 Volunteers and Organizations Honored with ServeNebraska Step Forward Awards

Ashland, Nebraska – Lieutenant Governor Mike Foley presented the state’s most prestigious community service awards to 10 volunteers and organizations from across Nebraska at ServeNebraska’s 2017 Step Forward Awards banquet Friday. Personally selected by Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, finalists demonstrated leadership, innovation and dedication to service that addresses community needs.

“When Nebraskans ‘Step Forward’ and work together in the best interest of others, they are strengthening the communities and families that make our state unique,” Foley said in his address to finalists. “The volunteers and organizations we honor today make Nebraska stronger through their generosity and goodwill.”

Ruth McKinstry of Lincoln received the esteemed lifetime achievement award. Individuals selected have forever changed their communities, state, nation, or the world with their volunteer service and action. McKinstry began volunteering to serve one meal a week to homeless citizens at Matt Talbot Kitchen & Outreach more than 25 years ago. Under her leadership, the program grew to 800 volunteers, serving three meals a day. She continues to serve on the organization’s board of directors.

TD Ameritrade of Omaha was awarded the distinguished Friend of ServeNebraska award. The company provided critical support for the agency’s vision of creating a statewide website that connects volunteers to each other and to the agencies that need their help. The result was NebraskaImpact.com, one of the first initiatives rolled out as part of the Nebraska 150 Celebration. Registration gives volunteers a personal volunteering “dashboard” where they can track their volunteer time and add it to state totals, earn “badges” for service, and follow organizations or opportunities that interest them.

Justin Evertson of Lincoln was named adult volunteer of the year. Evertson gives more than 400 hours annually planting trees, mulching, weeding, pruning and raking Waverly parks, school grounds and other public landscapes. In 20 years, he has secured \$100,000 in grant funds and planted more than 1,000 trees and shrubs. He gathers school students, boy scouts and other community groups in special events focused on outdoor education, environmental preservation and community cleanup.

Cooper Bates of Wilber received the youth volunteer leadership award. Bates serves as president of Wilber-Clatonia Future Business Leaders of America, an organization dedicated to community service and promoting student leadership. He had donated more than 400 hours to Saline County projects, including “Pink Out Week” for breast cancer awareness and organizing a trick-or-treat food drive for the local school’s back pack program.

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The volunteer group award was presented to Union College in Lincoln. For 37 years, the institution has hosted Project Impact in September. The program introduces students to the importance of service. In 2017, students gave approximately 10,000 hours of service to more than 100 local charities. Since 1981, when the program began, more than 21,500 volunteers have completed more than 131,000 hours of service.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska was named corporate community volunteer. In addition to a longstanding tradition of support for United Way of the Midlands, the company's employees are consistently finding thoughtful ways to give back to Omaha and other communities across the state. For the 2017 Day of Caring, about 300 staff members volunteered at 24 different agencies, making up one-third of the total number of participants.

The award for national service volunteer was presented to Martin Macias, Jr., of Omaha, a recent AmeriCorps member with Goodwill Youthbuild, an organization that provides education and trade skills in the process of building homes for low-income families. He also works with youth in Stay in School/Stop the Violence, Boys Town Health Fair, Girls, Inc., Heart Ministry Center, Black Police Officers Association of Omaha Easter Egg Hunt, and the Family Housing Advisory Christmas Village.

Jim Cada of Lincoln has been named veteran volunteer of the year. He served in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970 as staff sergeant, Company B, 39th Engineer Battalion. Cada is chairman of the Nebraska Veterans Home Board, Nebraska Veterans Council, the Governor's Task Force on the Eastern Nebraska Veteran's Home and serves on the Governor's Veterans Advisory Commission. He's has been involved in numerous veterans organizations and the Nebraska Bar Association, including the organization's Veterans Pre-trial Release Program.

The disaster volunteer recognized for 2017 is Reynolds Davis of Lincoln. Davis is the former executive director of the amateur radio club that provides thousands of hours of volunteer service annually. He has personally volunteered for the American Red Cross, community events and storm spotting. He was vice chair of Red Cross volunteer organizations active in disaster, a classroom volunteer for Junior Achievement and leader of the Southeast Nebraska Medical Reserve Corps.

The Lincoln Journal Star Neighborhood Extra has been named community media partner. Neighborhood Extra reports local news, focused on building neighborhoods and community awareness, including in-depth features during National Volunteer Month. The publication is a resource for the service community, bringing together volunteers and organizations in need of assistance, focusing on the work of local agencies and promoting VolunteerLinc's listing of volunteer needs.

ServeNebraska's Step Forward Awards program was organized in coordination with the Nebraska 150 Celebration. The Nebraska 150 Foundation, Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission and the Celebrating Nebraska Statehood Board were recognized at the luncheon. Their leadership and inspiration mobilized hundreds of volunteer participants through the Nebraska Impact Initiative.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska, AAA – The Auto Club Group, Mallette Farms, Midlands Mentoring Partnership, Bennie and Jamesena (Jamie) Moore and Searcy Group Home Real Estate sponsored the event.

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About ServeNebraska

ServeNebraska is governed by a 20-member, bipartisan board appointed by the Nebraska governor. Its mission mobilizes Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through collaboration, volunteering and national service. ServeNebraska oversees AmeriCorps programming, hosts the state's most prestigious volunteer awards, the Step Forward Awards, and provides training and technical assistance. To learn more, visit www.serve.nebraska.gov.

About Nebraska Impact

The Nebraska Impact Initiative is one of a series of efforts launched for the state's year-long 150th statehood celebration. Using the modern web console available at www.NebraskaImpact.com, volunteers are empowered to connect with each other and with organizations in need of service to make a greater impact on their communities in 2017. The effort will total statewide volunteer hours annually to demonstrate Nebraskans' deep-seated commitment to service.

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