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First Lady to Celebrate Volunteer Excellence

Lincoln, Neb. – For each of the past four years, Nebraskans have been highlighted in major national studies for their strong tendency to volunteer. For each of those years, Nebraska has ranked second only Utah in the rate of volunteerism. This excellence is evident on a smaller scale too. On April 9, 2010 First Lady Sally Ganem will honor individuals and groups for their excellence in volunteer service at the First Lady’s Community Service Luncheon. This luncheon is part of the Governor’s Conference on Volunteerism being held April 8 & 9, 2010 at the Downtown Omaha Doubletree Hotel and Executive Meeting Center, 1616 Dodge Street, in Omaha. This year’s honorees are:

First Lady’s Community Service Awards

<u>Award Category</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Community</u>
Lifetime Achievement in Volunteer Service	Chuck Scripter	North Platte
Outstanding Community Partnership in Education	Garden County Elementary Breakfast Volunteers	Oshkosh
Outstanding Community Service in Ecology	Ken Minnig	Bassett
Outstanding Community Service Project	United Methodist Ministries	Omaha
Outstanding Adult Service-Learning Leader	Crystal Rhoades	Omaha
Outstanding Student Service-Learning Leader	Esther “Queen” Tucker	Omaha

Nebraska Impact Awards

Debra Hartmann Award (Professional Staff Excellence in Promoting Volunteerism)	Deb Daily	Lincoln
Outstanding Volunteer of the Year	Elaine Croston	Humboldt
Outstanding Volunteer Group of the Year	Lincoln Amateur Radio Club	Lincoln
Excellence in National Service	Gunnar Riis	Rushville

A brief highlight of each honoree is below.

First Lady’s Community Service Awards

CHUCK SCRIPTER: LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT IN VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Chuck Scripter has volunteered with the North Platte Area Retired Senior Volunteer Program for 12 ½ years, accumulating more than 16,000 hours of volunteer service. Chuck also volunteers at a variety of organizations in North Platte including:

- Habitat for Humanity - serving on the local board and volunteering internationally;
- Teammates - serving as a mentor
- Boys and Girls Home - providing mentoring to troubled youth,
- Lincoln County Jail and “Youth for Christ” program – helping youth not affiliated with a church
- Red Cross Disaster Action Team - deployed for local and international disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and bombings. Deployments have taken Chuck to Grand Forks ND, Houston TX, Taos NM, Pensacola FL, Picayune MS, Slidell LA, Greensburg KS, and internationally to Mexico, Romania, and El Salvador.
- AARP – serving as a general volunteer
- Drivers Safety - training new Drivers Safety Program Instructors and teaching Student Driver’s Safety classes.
- Veterans Transportation Van – driving veterans in North Platte to VA Doctors’ appointments in Grand Island.

GARDEN COUNTY ELEMENTARY BREAKFAST VOLUNTEERS: OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Garden County Elementary Breakfast Volunteers Penny Vincent, Marilyn Erb, Fern Robinson, Tom Sullivan, Rosella Jessen, and Alice Lee Patterson have provided a safe and nurturing environment for students before school for more than ten years as money is not available in the school budget to provide additional staffing to meet this critical need.

Each school day morning, volunteers arrive at the school to greet the children. They assist younger students with getting their breakfast and make conversation with the junior high age children while they wait for their school bus to arrive. The volunteers stay with the junior high students until they get on their bus and with the elementary school children until they go to their classrooms.

The Garden County community has a very high poverty rate (greater than 64%) and high mobility (greater than 31%). The Garden County Elementary Breakfast volunteers fill a critical need for many of the school's latch-key children. These children need quality time with responsible adult role models to engage them in healthy conversation with caring adults. The volunteers' compassion for these children is witnessed through active listening and concern for each of the students' safety and well-being. They know students by name and interact on a personal level with each student commenting on good manners and behavior. These interactions and relationships have immeasurable positive impact on the community's youth.

KEN MINNIG: OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE IN ECOLOGY

In 1994, Ken Minnig newly retired, volunteered to re-forest Bassett, Nebraska. Ken developed an ordinance to form the City Tree Board. With the assistance of a Nebraska Forester, they inventoried all of the public trees and began the process of eliminating unhealthy ones to be replaced with new trees. Since that initial effort, Ken and the City Tree Board have planted over 1,083 trees and shrubs of 57 different varieties. Annually, Ken still adds mulch, prunes, repairs, sprays, and mows. He does whatever is necessary to maintain the trees in the parks as well as along the Cowboy Trail and Nature Trails.

Ken also began an Arbor Day program at the Bassett Grade School and every year he has provided educational materials for the children. Students participating in this program have assisted in planting a tree annually since 1994.

Ken and his team have attended tree care seminars and assisted many residents with advice on their private trees. The Tree Board established a cost-share program to assist homeowners in planting trees on private property. Ken applied for the first Tree City USA Growth Award and 2009 marks the 11th year Bassett has received this award.

Ken designed and built a Memorial Kiosk in the city park, which contains a map of trees planted, species and memorial information. One example of the legacy he has left for the community of Bassett is evident by nine little Blue Spruce trees he planted in the corners of the parking lot at the Bassett City Park when he began the program – today those trees are well over 30 feet tall and add beauty to the park. Ken's work to beautify his community has been a labor of love and will be enjoyed by future generations to come.

UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES: OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

United Methodist Ministries believes strongly that youth leadership is the key to making broad change on community needs and issues. Youth in service have a passion for change and when given the opportunity can lead and educate others on the value of continued service to the community. It is that belief that has led to the development of a successful Global Youth Service Day model.

United Methodist Ministries Global Youth Service Day bring youth from the metro-Omaha and surrounding rural areas together to accomplish one significant group service project. The goal of the day is to engage youth in a fun project that will foster a mindset of continued service to meet potential community needs and provide solutions to ongoing issues. In the past three years over 320 youth have participated in United Methodist Ministries Global Youth Service Day. Teams of youth from across Nebraska have participated in the program representing such communities as Omaha, Auburn, Gretna, Ord, Giltner, and Fremont.

CRYSTAL RHOADES: OUTSTANDING SERVICE-LEARNING ADULT LEADER

Crystal Rhoades is a committed, concerned and caring community volunteer. She is a lifelong resident of Omaha who attended Central High School and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She is passionate about her community's well being and has contributed over 1,400 hours of volunteer service to environmental issues to lead removal each year over the past six years.

She is Assistant Executive Director for the Neighborhood Center, responsible for supporting and empowering neighborhood leaders to find solutions to crime, safety, housing and health issues. She has worked on the Mayor's Afterschool Advisory Board, The Bright Futures Advisory Board, the Tree of Life Committee, Omaha Action Group for Lead Safety and the Omaha Chamber's South Omaha Redevelopment Project. She serves as President of the Metropolitan Community College Board of Governors. Crystal also routinely organizes youth and adult volunteers for the IMPACT Graffiti Removal Project and enlists volunteers from a wide variety of agencies and businesses as well.

She is a champion of service-learning programs and believes that putting students in the community in real work conditions provides them with an advantage when competing in the workforce. She has supported the efforts of faculty and students in service-learning classes and events. Students in service-learning programs are put to work in the community giving their knowledge and time to those who are physically or financially unable to help themselves.

ESTHER "QUEEN" TUCKER: OUTSTANDING SERVICE-LEARNING STUDENT LEADER

Esther "Queen" Tucker is a student at Metro Community College (MCC) serving as the Volunteer Coordinator. Even though she did not have the family support to achieve her highest potential, she has always strived to do remarkable things. She said she always wanted to be a mom and she has raised seventeen foster kids. She is also the godmother to thirty two children. She reminds one a little like the Little Old Lady who lived in a Shoe... no children of her own, yet very devoted to her extended family.

Through her involvement in MCC's Student Government Council and the Service-Learning Office she created the Volunteer Corps. It was started in February 2009 with a goal of recruiting 30 members. One year later she has over 200 members actively involved in community and college events. Over 6,000 hours in community service have been provided to programs like: Bridge to Success, African American Achievement Council, churches, medical clinics and other institutions of higher learning. Recently MCC was awarded President Obama's Higher Education Community Service Award confirming the importance of the Volunteer Corps' contribution to the college and the community.

In 2008, she started the STAR Community Program. This program provides guidance and direction for children and young adults enabling them to step away from the "hood" mentality and become role models of leadership for others. She has given a great gift to her community—a gift of caring. She also serves as an AmeriCorps member with the MMI AmeriCorps at the Munroe Meyer Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Impact Awards

DEB DAILY: DEBRA HARTMANN AWARD

Deb Daily has a passion for her work and gives 200% all of the time. Her tireless dedication is expressed in countless hours assisting low income families through the Center for People in Need. Last year she took on the demanding job of overseeing the renovation that resulted in a new Conference and Job Education Training Center in addition to her normal job as Director of Operations.

Deb's commitment to helping those who live in poverty sets her apart. She provides them with basic goods and helps them toward self-sufficiency. From ten years at the Lincoln Action Program to the last seven years at the Center for People in Need, she is tireless in advocating for low-income families and expanding services and resources. One of the ways she accomplishes this is by recruiting and training volunteers. Last year community volunteers gave over 16,000 hours of service to the Center.

Deb gives selflessly of her time in other ways besides her 60+ hour work week. She is on the Steering Committee and presently serving as Treasurer on the Executive Committee for Clinic With a Heart; a member and past chair of the KENO Advisory Board; past chair of the Family Violence Council; active member in the Nebraska Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition; Community Liaison for the Head Start Policy Council; a member of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Substance Abuse Action Coalition; and past co-chair of the Food and Hunger Coalition.

ELAINE CROSTON - VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Elaine is a retired teacher who lost her husband several years ago. She has been volunteering at the People's City Mission in Lincoln every Thursday and Friday for well over a year. She drives in from Humboldt Thursday morning, stays overnight on Thursday with her daughter in Syracuse, and drives back to Humboldt at the end of her day on Friday. She begins at 9:30 a.m. both days and rarely leaves before 5:00 p.m. She helps open mail, totals donations, and enters donor data into People's City Mission system.

She also works with men from the Men's Shelter and the Curtis Center program providing GED training, resume writing training and reading one-on-one tutoring. The classes and one-on-one tutoring she provides to the Mission guests are invaluable to the process of obtaining marketable skills needed to get hired and become independent. These men provide many challenges to her, yet she is undeterred by them. No task is too small as Elaine pitches in with any cleaning, organizing and other duties she is asked to do. Elaine will have provided 1,000 hours of service to the Mission by April 2010.

LINCOLN AMATEUR RADIO CLUB: VOLUNTEER GROUP OF THE YEAR

"When all Else Fails" describes the nature of the Lincoln Amateur Radio Club (LARC). The 300 member Lincoln Amateur Radio Club stands ready to provide communications at any time. Snow storms on December 9 and December 23, 2009 caused the usual volunteer drivers for Tabitha's Meals-on-Wheels program to cancel. Tabitha asked Lincoln/Lancaster Emergency Management for help and the 4-wheel drivers associated with the LARC were activated. After the Christmas day blizzard, LARC was again activated to move key medical personnel to and from local hospitals and care centers. On March 15, 2009 when a computer failure in the 9-1-1 center severed communications with Lincoln Fire & Rescue, club members were called in at 2:30 AM to provide critical dispatch information.

Lincoln/Lancaster County Emergency Management deployed tornado spotters five times in 2009. All spotters are FCC licensed amateur radio operators who receive annual training by the National Weather Service. In 2009, 184 'ham' radio operators were trained as well.

In 2009, 198 Club members provided 4,270 volunteer hours to the community by providing communications when asked 28 times. They helped with the Lincoln Marathon (33 volunteers – 174 hours), the Nebraska State Fair (89 volunteers – 1,923 hours), and the Cornhusker State Games (83 volunteers – 919 volunteer hours). They also helped the University Sertoma Club with their Oak Creek bike fund-raiser, KFOR's Operation Santa Claus and monitored the walking route for the annual CROP walk, the YWCA Triathlon and Lincoln's annual Trail Trek.

GUNNAR RIIS: NATIONAL SERVICE CATEGORY

Gunnar Riis, a native of Denmark, followed his brother to the United States and Nebraska in 1947. He served his new country by joining the Army and serving in World War II and the Korean War. He then joined the National Guard after returning from Korea.

After his retirement in 1993 from the National Guard, he continued serving his country by volunteering with numerous organizations through his church, United Blood Services, and the Rotary club. He expanded his volunteer experiences by becoming a member of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Sheridan County in 1995.

Over the years, Gunnar's dedication and appreciation of fellow veterans became evident by the service he provided to many offices including the Nebraska State Commander of the American Legion. Presently, he is a liaison to the Hot Springs, SD, Veterans Hospital and the Nebraska District 1 American Legion. In this capacity, he works toward meeting the physical/mental rehabilitation needs for young veterans returning home from the Middle East. He also participates in various events that provide entertainment for veterans both locally and at the Hot Springs Veterans Hospital. During this time, Gunnar has served some 2,000 veterans and provided 3,222+ volunteer hours.

In 2000, Gunnar assumed full responsibility as Rushville's Historical Museum's curator where he has provided 4,900+ volunteer hours in updating exhibits and buildings as well as insuring the grounds are maintained. He also provides docent services to visitors/tourists that visit the museum. The museum can receive up to 700 visitors/tourists a year. Gunnar's dedication and pride in Sheridan County/Rushville is ever present in his service to the community and through continued efforts to raise and inspire patriotism.

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