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**Governor Invites Nebraskans to Help Honor Volunteers at the Step Forward Awards**

The Step Forward Awards recognizes volunteers for their dedication to making Nebraska communities better through service.

- What:** The Step Forward Awards are the most prestigious awards given for volunteerism in the state of Nebraska  
**Where:** Omaha, Nebraska; Register at [serve.nebraska.gov](http://serve.nebraska.gov)  
**Date:** Friday, October 4, 2024  
**Time:** 11:00 am

Volunteers from 12 categories will be honored at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Step Forward Awards held on Friday, October 4, in Omaha. The Mentorship Step Forward Award will be given for the first time this year in honor of ServeNebraska's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Special recognition will be given to the 2024 Lifetime Achievement and the Jamesena Moore "Making a Difference" Service Awardees.

The Lifetime Achievement award is the highest honor awarded to a Nebraskan for volunteer service. This year's Lifetime Achievement honoree is Rick Wimer of West Point, honored for his 37-year membership of the West Point Rescue squad as well as his involvement in a multitude of community boards, foundations, and events.

The Jamesena Moore Making a Difference Service Award was named in honor of founding ServeNebraska Commissioner, Jamesena Moore. The award was created in 2019 as a part of the 25th-anniversary celebration of ServeNebraska. This year's award will go to Former Nebraska State Senator, DiAnna Schimek for her support of ServeNebraska and AmeriCorps through the introduction of several pieces of legislation.

"Service is a part of Nebraska's culture, and it helps make our state such special place to live and raise our families," said Governor Pillen. "I look forward to meeting this year's honorees at the Step Forward Awards Luncheon, and I encourage everyone to join me in thanking them for their outstanding commitment to service."

For more information or to register to attend the Step Forward Awards, please visit [serve.nebraska.gov](http://serve.nebraska.gov). Registration closes September 15, 2024.

## **2024 Step Forward Award Honorees:**

### **Adult Volunteer:** Gretchen Mack – Omaha, Neb.

Gretchen has served on the RESPECT Board of Directors for over a decade and plays crucial roles on the organization's Silent Auction Committee and Education Committee. RESPECT is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing bullying and teen dating violence in schools. She is also active with organizations such as Project Harmony, the Nebraska Cancer Center, and more.

### **Youth Volunteer Leadership:** Keirah Montiel – Papillion, Neb.

Keirah is a dedicated high school senior who serves as president of the Papillion Mayor's Youth Leadership Council and actively organizes various service activities. She is also involved in community events such as the Black History Celebration and the city's Annual Easter Egg Hunt; and is praised for her leadership, mentorship, and advocacy skills.

### **Veteran Volunteer:** Verne Hickok, U.S. Army – Cairo, Neb.

Verne is a U.S. Army Veteran who is a very important part of the Cairo community. He serves on the Cairo Senior Center and takes on many tasks at the center from dishwashing to serving. He provides his famous root beer floats at all community events free of charge and is a huge fan of all the local high school's sports teams!

### **Senior Volunteer:** Deb Zobel – Ashland, Neb.

Deb is being honored at the Step Forward Awards for starting the Nebraska Nurse Honor Guard (NNHG), an organization which gives tributes to nurses at their funerals and memorial services. Over the last five years, they've provided over 500 tributes across the state.

### **National Service:** Mildred Moody, AmeriCorps Seniors – Gering, Neb.

Mildred has been an AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandma for over 25 years! She credits her involvement in the program, and the friends she made there, with helping her through the grief she experienced after losing her husband. During her time as a Foster Grandma, she has made a positive impact on hundreds of children in the Gering community and surrounding area.

### **Volunteer Group:** Blue River Arts Council – Crete, Neb.

The Blue River Arts Council was founded in response to the closing of the last theatre in Saline County in 2018. They raised funds, acquired the building and renovated the space to be used by the entire community. They have since hosted community events like art shows and music events to revitalize the Crete community.

## **Corporate Community Volunteers:**

### **Small Business:** NebraskaLand Bank – North Platte, Neb.

NebraskaLand Bank sets an excellent example for businesses who want to be a valuable part of the community they serve. In addition to their everyday business, they operate programs like Project Blank to provide employees with opportunities to use their skills to serve the community and to reward employees for volunteering.

### **Large Business:** Lincoln Industries – Lincoln, Neb.

Lincoln Industries has been partnering with Junior Achievement for many years to provide monetary and volunteer support in classrooms across Lincoln. Employees use their expertise to deliver lessons in literacy, career readiness and entrepreneurship. The business also provides each employee with 8 hours of paid volunteer time off to incentivize service.

**Disaster Volunteer:** Cyndralynn Meredith – Seward, Neb.

Cyndralynn serves as a member of the Southeast Nebraska Medical Reserve Corps and in addition to completing medical and emergency communications training, she helps with medical response for event such as the Cornhusker State Games. She volunteers 30-40 hours of her time each month and is a valuable member of the team.

**Mentorship:** Sally Harms – Wisner, Neb.

Sally has been mentoring with TeamMates for well over a decade and has mentored five students during that time. She goes above and beyond by helping them to apply for college, travelling long distances to meet with each of her mentees weekly and supporting them even after they've gone on to college.

**Jamesena Moore Making a Difference Service Award:** Former Nebraska State Senator DiAnna Schimek– Omaha, Neb.

Senator Schimek has been an avid supporter of ServeNebraska and AmeriCorps programming since the 90s when she introduced multiple pieces of legislation to safeguard and maximize service opportunities and benefits in Nebraska.

**Lifetime Achievement Award:** Rick Wimer – West Point, Neb.

Rick Wimer has served on the West Point Rescue Squad for 37 years and been president for 21 of those years. He leads the 10-member squad in responding to approximately 350 calls per year and personally responds to over 100 each year. He is a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran and is well known in West Point for his tireless commitment to helping out all members of the community.

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**About ServeNebraska**

ServeNebraska, the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission, coordinates and supports community involvement by Nebraskans to address the needs of our communities. We coordinate AmeriCorps funding and programming, Nebraska Volunteer Week, and celebrate volunteer achievements through the annual Step Forward Awards.