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Outstanding volunteers to be honored by Nebraska's First Lady

Volunteers from throughout the state will be honored by First Lady Sally Ganem on Friday, April 12 at the 2013 First Lady's Outstanding Community Service Award luncheon at the Kearney Country Club in Kearney. A total of ten awards will be presented at the event, which is hosted by ServeNebraska, the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission. First Lady Ganem is honorary chairwoman of ServeNebraska.

Award honorees reflect the outstanding spirit of community service in our state. Nebraskans consistently rank among the Top 10 nationally in rates of volunteerism and community engagement. Each year more than half-a-million Nebraskans volunteer in excess of 50 million hours of service. Their time is valued at \$1.2 billion. A major part of why Nebraska volunteerism continues to grow is the vast network of national service members and volunteers across Nebraska who give their time and talent to serve those in need.

The **First Lady's Outstanding Community Service Awards** categories and recipients:

National Service Award: Jessie Gotsdiner and Jenny Wysocky are College Possible Omaha AmeriCorps members who serve as senior coaches at Omaha South Magnet and Benson Magnet High Schools. As coaches they work with disadvantaged seniors to achieve college admission, apply for scholarships and financial aid. This year 69 seniors participated and 100% have applied to college with 75% accepted to date. The students have received over \$120,000 in scholarships, and three who have won the statewide Horatio Alger competition. Jessie and Jenny have truly made College Possible for these students and future graduates.

Outstanding volunteer group of the year: Annie Jeffrey Volunteers, Osceola, is an energetic group of women who give their time, talent and energy to help Polk County build a stronger community. They volunteer at the Annie Jeffrey Health Center thrift shop and, since their inception in 1994, have donated over \$93,000 to the Health Center with proceeds from the shop. The dedicated AJ Volunteers help with other community activities, such as helping at health fairs and assisting local nursing homes. The AJ Volunteers enjoy the gratification that comes from community service and volunteering.

Outstanding volunteer of the year: Col. Jan Kaufman, Lincoln, has spent the last two decades playing secret elf for tens of thousands of Lancaster County children from low-income families. In 1991, she volunteered to start a fundraising auction for Santa Cop, a philanthropy project of the Lincoln Police Union charities. Santa Cop provides toys every Christmas for thousands of children living in poverty in Lancaster County. Jan has applied her professional auctioneering skills in asking businesses and individuals for donations of products and services to make each year's auction a success.

Professional commitment to service, Debra Hartman Award: Wayne Svoboda is the former Executive Director of Volunteer Partners, Lincoln, where he served since its inception in 2002. Under his 10-year leadership, Volunteer Partners has thrived in carrying out its mission to: "Promote and support volunteerism to connect volunteers with nonprofit agencies in Lincoln, Lancaster County and Nebraska. As the agency's lone full-time employee, Wayne successfully implemented specialty programs that served the community in a unique way and focused on youth, emergency needs, corporate volunteers, business professionals, board diversity and training. Wayne has been a true ambassador of community service to the Lincoln community.

Outstanding service-learning program: Sacred Circle service-learning project, Omaha is focused on mentoring that promotes American Indian culture by bringing together University of Nebraska at Omaha Native American Studies students with Native American students at Omaha South Magnet High School. Sacred Circle has seen significant outcomes to the community and increased student leadership through this sustainable program. UNO and South High students have served over 100 hours,

developed mentor relationships and provided a greater connection to culture in the tribal community, and increased graduation rates of participants.

Outstanding student leader: Mikayla Flott of Omaha is a successful achiever and her community involvement is substantial and diverse. Highlights of her recent honors include: Ten Outstanding Young Omahans; National Honor Society Volunteer of the Year; and a member of Creighton University's elite Freshman Leadership Program; and the Dean's List. Mikayla is very active at Creighton. She was recently inducted into Wareham for Women Who Lead, is an officer for the National PanHellenic Council, serves on the New Student Orientation Board, is a C.U. Star tour guide and is the assistant editor for the Creightonian. In total, she has volunteered over 1,300 hours throughout the past 6 years and helped raise almost \$100,000 for her high school, university, and community.

Outstanding community partnership in education: F Street Community Center, Lincoln, is successful because of the dedication of center directors Dorothy Skorupa, Jerry Taylor and Rick Lingard. They are committed to creating a safe, fun, education and recreation-based environment where children, adults and senior citizens come together. In partnership with AmeriCorps members, the center directors have been able to increase the education, fitness and nutrition programs for at-risk youth in the community. The programs help to encourage youth to stay focused, healthy and in school.

Outstanding school volunteer program: Norris Middle School, Omaha is home to a tremendous school volunteer program called Redbird 108. This program is a collaborative effort between the school, Completely KIDS, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Initially targeted for at-risk youth as a method of getting students involved, it has grown into creating service as a way for Norris "Redbirds" to identify themselves. The student-led volunteer group provides support to students and families who are struggling with specific needs. The goal for every student is to complete 40 hours of service and currently students have completed 600 hours. The success of the program is driven by student leadership opportunities.

Outstanding community service project: In 2007, Jordan Somer, Papillion, founded Miss Amazing Inc. at the age of thirteen. The mission of Miss Amazing Inc., is to build confidence and self-esteem in girls and women with disabilities in a positive environment through the skills learned in pageantry. Her hard work, along with many other volunteers, has helped to grow the organization and it is now located in 24 states.

Lifetime achievement in volunteer service: Bill Olson of Oshkosh has been a community volunteer in Garden County for the past fifty years. Bill takes pride in his community, especially when it comes to beautification of the local landscape such as the golf course and parks. Bill often personally donates to community projects. One such project was the design, construction and installation of a sign for the Centennial celebration. He has provided substantial volunteer time and resources for the hospital, nursing home and swimming pool reconstruction. Bill lives to help other people.

To learn more about ServeNebraska's award categories, nomination forms, and past honorees visit www.serve.nebraska.gov. ServeNebraska pursues its mission of mobilizing Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through volunteering, collaboration and national service programs.

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