

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 16, 2011

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Governor to Honor Points of Light Award Winners

Lincoln, Neb. – Governor Dave Heineman will present the Nebraska Governor's Points of Light Awards at a ceremony in Warner Chamber at the State Capitol in Lincoln on February 16 at 10:30 a.m.. The awards are presented quarterly in recognition of volunteers who give their time, talent and energy to help Nebraskans build stronger communities. This quarter's winners:

YOUTH Category: Taylor Grace – Omaha

As a junior at Platteview High School in Springfield, Nebraska, Taylor Grace has organized over 100 volunteers to participate in a beautification project at the Omaha Salvation Army Lied Renaissance Center campus and established an on-site vegetable garden. She has over 200 volunteer hours logged for both projects. Through her outreach efforts for community donations towards the vegetable gardens she has kept the annual budget to under \$50.00. The produce from the gardens is available to those using the campus Food Pantry and residents of Durham Booth Manor, the senior housing center. Taylor is very deserving of the Governor's Point of Light Award, and an outstanding volunteer in the Omaha community.

ADULT Category: Bill and Evonne Williams – Omaha

Bill and Evonne Williams were recognized for the Governor's Point of Light Award for their tremendous effort in organizing Operation Airlift which became "Heartland Honor Flights". In total, more than 1,500 Nebraska WWII veterans were flown to Washington D.C. to see the WWII Memorial on the National Mall for the first and possibly the only time. Bill and Evonne were the organizers and the fundraisers for the Heartland Honor Flights dedicating their time, energy and commitment to managing every aspect of the Flights.

They recruited volunteers or "guardians" throughout the State to help them orchestrate pre-flight dinners with WWII musical performances, slide-shows of the men and women while in service, their hotel and travel accommodations, and arranged the presence of dignitaries including the Governor Heineman and other special guests. Each trip was a full 24 hours and included making arrangements for chartering planes, securing buses, meals, mobility and personal needs. Every veteran received a fanny pack filled with disposable cameras and water bottles for their tour. Following the last Heartland Honor Flight the Williams' hosted a reunion for all of the veterans and volunteers.

One of the guardians stated that Bill and Evonne are amazing people and their volunteer efforts have made an enormous impact on more than just the veterans. The veteran's families and the guardians know they have been blessed to participate in this once in a lifetime opportunity.

GROUP Category: Mourning Hope Grief Center Volunteers – Lincoln

Since 1994, Mourning Hope volunteers have been gently guiding bereaved youth toward the right path. All involved with Mourning Hope operate with a crystal clear, singular purpose – to bring comfort and support to children, teens, young adults and their families following the serious illness or death of a loved one. During the initial 11 years, Mourning Hope operated as an exclusively volunteer-ran organization. Currently, the Center functions with only two half-time staff and has served nearly 2,400 community members this past fiscal year. This program would not exist without its cadre of dedicated and trained volunteers which is why they are most deserving of the Governor's Point of Light Award.

Death does not discriminate and tragedy can strike at any time. Six percent of children under the age of 18 will experience the death of a parent, one in five will experience the death of an immediate family member, and approximately 90 percent of youth will experience the death of someone significant in their lives before graduating high school. Following the death of a loved one, finding someone who understands often makes the difference between going down the right or wrong path in life. Statistics show that children with unresolved grief are far more likely to drop out of school, engage in substance abuse, attempt suicide, commit crimes, or develop a psychiatric disorder.

Mourning Hope's volunteers offer new ways of approaching problems and help youth to trust again in what for many seems to be an unsafe and uncaring world. Their extraordinary efforts have a lasting, long-term impact in assisting young people to mourn, develop, and flourish as they move forward. They help counter the sense of isolation many bereaved children experience by providing encouragement to not only accept support for themselves, but also to help others. These volunteers offer a compassionate environment that can rekindle their love for life and living.

Each quarter, Commissioners from ServeNebraska review award nominations and make final recommendations to the Governor. The Points of Light awards are sponsored by Woodmen of the World.

To nominate individuals and groups for the Governor's Points of Light Awards who have made a difference through volunteerism, visit the ServeNebraska website at www.serve.nebraska.gov or call 800-291-8911 or 402-471-6228.

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

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