
For Immediate Release

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Governor Invites Nebraskans to the Step Forward Awards to Honor Volunteers

The Step Forward Awards recognizes exemplary volunteers across the state for their time and service aimed at making our communities better.

- What:** The Step Forward Awards are the most prestigious awards given for volunteerism in the state of Nebraska
- Where:** Lincoln, Nebraska; Register at serve.nebraska.gov
- Date:** Friday, October 6, 2023
- Time:** 11:00 am

Eleven Nebraskans will be honored at this year's Step Forward Awards held on Friday, October 6 in Lincoln. Special recognition will be given to the 2023 Lifetime Achievement and the Jamesena Moore Making a Difference Service Awardees.

The Lifetime Achievement award is the highest honor bestowed upon a Nebraska citizen for their volunteer service. Marah Shai of Gering is the 2023 Lifetime Achievement Awardee and is being honored for her lifelong dedication to helping others not just in Nebraska but around the world.

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 Senator Mike McDonnell for his support in safeguarding Nebraska's commitment to expanding our state's culture of service.

"Volunteers are a vital part of keeping Nebraska communities strong," said Governor Pillen. "I'm proud to be Governor in a state where community service is central to our culture. I encourage all Nebraskans to join us in thanking and celebrating them."

For more information or to register to attend the Step Forward Awards, please visit serve.nebraska.gov. Registration closes September 15, 2023.

2023 Step Forward Award Honorees:

Adult Volunteer: Beverly Hansen – Bertrand, Neb.

Beverly serves on several boards in her community and is praised for her unique ability to assess what challenges affect the quality of life in her area. When she saw that her community was critically lacking in childcare services, she rallied various groups to open a childcare facility at the local church.

Youth Volunteer Leadership: Mattie Kucera – Raymond, Neb.

Mattie serves as the president of her school's Student Council. She volunteers to attend all the school board meetings to ensure the council is engaged and leads the group in completing service projects from serving at food kitchens to collecting coats for those in need. She also supports school athletic events as the unofficial "Assistant to the AD."

Veteran Volunteer: Dennis Hynes, U.S. Air Force – Bellevue, Neb.

Dennis is an U.S. Air Force veteran who has volunteered with Durham Museum for almost a decade. He leads tours and teaches students about the exhibits. He even goes the extra mile by dressing up in costume to engage students in the material. He also organizes a private tour for servicemen from the USS Omaha several times a year.

Senior Volunteer: Rolaine Blaser – Columbus, Neb.

Rolaine has served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate with CASA connection for over 22 years and with the Center for Survivors for 20 years. At the Center for Survivors, she does everything from cleaning to providing childcare for mothers in crisis to fixing up the facility.

National Service: Robert and Helen Arnold, AmeriCorps Seniors – Crawford, Neb.

Robert and Helen are AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers with RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program). They are responsible for countless duties at food pantries and blood drives. They even spearheaded the RSVP Literacy Campaign in Crawford.

Volunteer Group: Wood River Vision 20/20 – Wood River, Neb.

Wood River Vision 20/20 was formed as a nonprofit in 2014. After completing a Community Needs Assessment Survey, they found that community services such as housing, childcare, and a pool were badly needed. They opened an aquatic center in 2018, the Child Development Center in 2021, and helped with a community wide effort to refurbish 11 owner-occupied homes in the community.

Corporate Community Volunteers:

Small Business: Uniti Med – Omaha, Neb.

Uniti Med's Community Outreach Program was created to support employees' desire to give back and engage with the community. Employees are given the opportunity to champion a cause about which they are passionate and utilize business time to volunteer.

Large Business: Thrasher Foundation Repair – Papillion, Neb.

Employees and leadership at Thrasher Foundation Repair believe that it's everyone's responsibility, even business', to advocate for the community. They give back annually through a multitude of partnerships, many of them employee-led, such as building maintenance at the humane society and raising money for school supplies.

Disaster Volunteer: Roger Peek – Omaha, Neb.

Roger has served as a volunteer firefighter for the Irvington Volunteer Fire Department for 30 years and as a member of the Salvation Army Emergency Disaster Services team providing rehab supplies, refreshments, and support to other firefighters working to save lives.

Jamesena Moore Making a Difference Service Award: Senator Mike McDonnell– Omaha, Neb.

Senator McDonnell believes in the power of community service and has supported ServeNebraska by introducing legislation to safeguard Nebraska’s commitment to service.

Lifetime Achievement Award: Marah Shai – Gering, Neb.

At 94 years old, Marah has lived a life full of service. When she was younger, she served in the Peace Corps in the Andes Mountains, as a volunteer at St. Thomas Orphanage, and at a radio station in Alaska. In Nebraska, she has long been heavily involved with service projects through her church and has served at the Scotts Bluff County Volunteer Center for over a decade.

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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, National Volunteer Week, and celebrate volunteer achievements through the annual Step Forward Awards.