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Sixth Annual ServeNebraska Step Forward Awards

The ServeNebraska Step Forward Awards recognize outstanding volunteers in the state of Nebraska for their time and service.

Who: Award honorees are selected by Governor Ricketts in tribute to the significant volunteer contributions made throughout our state.
What: 2020 ServeNebraska Step Forward Awards
Where: Virtual Event; Register at serve.nebraska.gov
Date: October 29, 2020
Time: 6:00-6:45 PM

15 Nebraskans will receive honors at this year's Step Forward Awards being held on Thursday, October 29. In the interest of safety, the awards will be held virtually and the public is invited to attend free of charge. Appearances at the event will include Governor Pete Ricketts and the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Awardee, Dr. Tom Osborne.

Special recognition will be given to the 2020 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 to the community. Rita Shipley is being honored with this award for her unyielding support and devoted service to her hometown of Ulysses, Neb.

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 goes to Senator Tony Vargas for his ongoing support of AmeriCorps in Nebraska and for his work in championing legislative bill 477 into law.

Due to the unprecedented challenges facing our state and country this year, four extra awards will be given in the disaster category to show due thanks to those who volunteered in response to the COVID pandemic. "We hope that the public will join us in honoring these wonderful volunteers for the outstanding service they provide for our communities. Our state truly wouldn't be what it is without selfless people like them," said Cathleen Plager, Executive Director. "We're honored to be able to partner with the Governor's office to recognize them the way they deserve."

For more information and to register to attend the Step Forward Awards, please visit serve.nebraska.gov

2020 Step Forward Award Honorees:

Adult Volunteer: Kendra Feather – Scottsbluff, Neb.

Kendra is a volunteer who is extremely dedicated to serving the people of Western Nebraska through helping to organize fundraisers. She is also committed to rallying more volunteers and helping the elderly of Scotts Bluff County get the things they need through home delivery programs.

Youth Volunteer Leadership: Joseph Zhong – Omaha, Neb.

Joseph is a student at Millard North High School in Omaha and a very talented musician. He is determined to bridge the gap between the elderly and young communities in Omaha through music. His Joy of Music group visits retirement homes to bring much-needed entertainment to the residents.

Veteran Volunteer: Dick Harrington – Bellevue, Neb.

Dick is a U.S. Air Force Veteran and volunteers with many veterans' assistance programs in the area. He also volunteers with the Radio Talking Book Service providing audio readings for people with disabilities that make them unable to read. Dick is one who is committed to serving those most vulnerable in our community.

Senior Volunteer: Dr. Mike Eppel – Lincoln, Neb.

Dr. Eppel has been involved with Lincoln Literacy for over a decade. After retiring from a career in gastroenterology in 2016, he found a way to put his expertise to good use in his volunteer work. He spearheaded the CNA Prep Course program at Lincoln Literacy which has been a huge success.

National Service: Frances Gonzalez and Sharon Bartlett – Chadron, Neb.

Frances and Sharon are AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Volunteers. True to RSVP volunteer spirit they are always ready to serve their community in any way they can. They are involved in more service projects than you could count including organizing the Feed a Hungry Senior program.

Volunteer Group: Rotary 14 – Lincoln, Neb.

At 250 members, Rotary 14 is a group that gets a lot done for their community. They are involved in many charitable projects across Lincoln and their impact has reached far beyond Nebraska's border. Together they serve 10,000 hours every year.

Corporate Community Volunteers:

Small Business: BD Construction – Kearney, Neb.

BD Construction encourages its employees to volunteer in their community, and they lead by example. They have lead and completed several charitable projects in Kearney. They are committed to making sure their business gives back to the community of which they are proud to be part.

Large Business: Union Bank & Trust – Lincoln, Neb.

Union Bank & Trust puts a heavy focus on taking care of the community they serve. Throughout the year, they provide opportunities for their employees to do charitable work. They also utilize their resources to provide services like Shred Day, free of charge.

Disaster Volunteers:

Adult Disaster Volunteer: Jan tenBensel – Cambridge, Neb.

Jan is the chairman of the Nebraska Ethanol Board and went out of his way to gather the resources and manpower needed to organize a project that provided sanitizer to those in our community who needed it most. His project protected essential workers and kept our state going.

Youth Disaster Volunteer: Taylor Cumblidge – Lincoln, Neb.

Taylor entered her senior year of high school this fall. When schools closed for the COVID pandemic, Taylor used the extra time to do what she could to help. She is committed to making sure that people in her community get the nutrition they need to stay healthy and weather the pandemic.

Disaster Group Volunteer: Dakota County Voices for Food Council – South Sioux City, Neb.

Dakota County Voices for Food Council was faced with a tough challenge when Dakota County was struck with one of the worst outbreaks of COVID-19 in the state. But they met that challenge head-on and overcame all the obstacles to get food to those who needed it.

Corporate Disaster Volunteer: Green Plains – Omaha, Neb.

Green Plains, headed by CEO, Todd Becker, selflessly donated materials that were needed to make sanitizer available to essential workers during the pandemic. Without crucial materials provided by Green Plains, the project couldn't have achieved the overwhelming success it did.

Disaster Innovation Volunteer: Matthew Spaustat and PPE for NE – Papillion, Neb.

Matthew sought out a way to help with the pandemic and concocted an innovative plan to provide much-needed PPE for Nebraska's healthcare workers. His quick action in getting a system set up to create and deliver face shields to medical professionals is an inspiration to us all.

Jamesena "Jamie" Moore Making a Difference Service Award: Senator Tony Vargas – Omaha, Neb.

Senator Tony Vargas has been a loyal supporter of AmeriCorps for a long time. As an AmeriCorps Alumnus,

he believes in its potential to make America better. Nowadays, he advocates for AmeriCorps members' interests in the Nebraska Legislature. Senator Vargas led Legislative Bill 477 until it was signed into law by Governor Ricketts. Now that the bill is a law, AmeriCorps members will be able to make their education award go further. Senator Tony Vargas has truly made a difference in the lives of current and future AmeriCorps members.

Lifetime Achievement Award: Rita Shipley – Ulysses, Neb.

Rita Shipley has lived most of her life in Ulysses and has made it her mission to keep the town thriving. For over 50 years, she has made sure that the people in and around the town have a place to congregate to maintain the community's spirit. Further, she is determined to preserve the history of the town and is the go-to when anyone wants to learn something about Ulysses. Her undying commitment to her home and passion for doing what she can to preserve this special place for future generations makes her well-deserving of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award.

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About ServeNebraska

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