



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355 (office)
Gerardo Cardenas	312/814.3158 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.8193 (DCEO)

GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF THE ANNUAL GOVERNOR'S HOME TOWN AWARDS

SPRINGFIELD – The hard work and dedication of thousands of volunteers across Illinois whose efforts have greatly improved the communities in which they live were acknowledged today at the 23rd annual Governor's Home Town awards in Springfield. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Jack Lavin, who represented the Governor, was joined by a host of other state and local leaders to recognize their outstanding achievements and to present one winner with the celebrated Governor's Cup award.

“I want to thank the countless numbers of people from Alton to Zion who give of their time, talents and resources to improve the quality of life in their communities. I especially want to congratulate the winners of the Home Town awards whose efforts went far beyond expectations. As we continue to do everything we can to ensure state government better serves the people of our state, the grassroots work they do will continue to be our strongest asset,” Governor Blagojevich said.

Thirty-seven projects were honored this year. Volunteer judges reviewed and ranked applications based on local need, volunteer participation, project continuity and results. After an initial review that narrowed the applications to a maximum of ten in each population category, the judges visited those communities and then selected one project from each category to compete for the coveted Governor's Cup - a traveling silver trophy presented to the community whose efforts were deemed most representative of the spirit of Illinois volunteerism.

The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) administers the Governor's Home Town Awards Program.

“By taking leadership roles in their communities, and getting involved in the projects that matter most to their families, neighbors and friends, these volunteers are building stronger, more vibrant communities that are in better position to attract investment, support growth, create new jobs and encourage innovation. This awards ceremony is a chance for us to recognize the extraordinary work they've done, and to simply say thanks,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

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The 2004 Governor's Cup winner is Kankakee County's Garden of Prayer Youth Center. The Garden of Prayer Youth Center provides support to youth and their families in the area via four programs - Life on the Farm, My Second Home, Teen REACH and Family Focus. Poverty often serves as an impetus for crimes committed by juveniles, school dropout and abuse. The Garden of Prayer Youth Center, a faith-based volunteer organization, seeks to address the needs of children and families in crisis by providing counseling programs, emergency housing for homeless youth, structured educational and recreational programs. With each passing day, the Center continues to make great strides in improving lives and giving hope to many youth and families in the area.

Each of the award winning communities receive a road sign and plaque recognizing its efforts, and the Governor's Cup winner receives a unique road sign that proclaims its status as the overall winner.

A complete list of all of the winners follows. Within each population category, winners can come from five possible project categories: general, youth involvement, veteran involvement, senior citizen involvement and economic development.

2004 Governor's Home Town Award Winners

Category I (Communities with populations up to 2,600)

General - Panama - The community erected a monument to the coalminers who founded the village and suffered great losses in their perilous line of work.

General – Manito – More than 100 community members came together to build a new, state-of-the-art aquatic center to replace the old and dilapidated one that had served as a social center for the town.

*Youth Involvement – Jerome - Volunteers from the Jerome Police Department, local businesses, community leaders and parents joined forces to collect candy, costumes, pumpkin pails and door prizes for the students of Pleasant Hill Elementary School.

Category II (Communities with populations between 2,601 – 6,300)

General - Hawthorn Woods - The Hawthorn Woods Women's Club - The Women's Club buys gift certificates and collects items to offer as Christmas gifts to local shelters that aid victims of domestic abuse and the homeless throughout the year.

General - Putnam County - Putnam County Food Pantry - This pantry, with the help of many in the community, exists to feed low-income families and anyone needing assistance living within the county. In its seventeen years, it has never had to turn anyone away.

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*Veteran Involvement – Farmington - The Farmington American Legion Post - With the community's help, Post 140 raised the funds needed for the granite for a war memorial and gathered more than 2,000 names of area veterans from the Civil War, WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Lebanon, Granada, Panama and the Persian Gulf War.

Category III (Communities with populations between 6,301 and 16,000)

General - Washington County - After a former resident and nature lover donated 40 acres to the county to be used for a nature preserve, high school biology and botany students and Eagle Scouts have begun identifying many of the native plant and animal species at the site.

General – Wauconda - The United Partnership for a Better Community - In an effort to efficiently identify and meet the needs of Wauconda residents, organizations joined together to layout goals, and now meet monthly to plan and organize upcoming events that will improve the community.

Senior Citizen Involvement – Bartonville - Celebration Senior Services - Organized by volunteers, this group has been great for seniors as sixty plus seniors meet weekly to socialize, eat and learn new life skills.

Senior Citizen Involvement - Hickory Hills - A group of volunteers came together to offer free meals to seniors once a month and now serve more than 600 seniors.

Youth Involvement - Hickory Hills - In an effort to raise funds for a Youth Commission and a Senior Task Force, residents decided to recreate the “Haunted City Hall” and people young and old came out in droves to make it a success.

*Youth Involvement – Bartonville - Youth Alive - This group is a faith-based teen ministry program that offers teens a safe place to “hang out” and have fun every Wednesday evening, keeping teens off the streets and giving their lives some direction.

Category IV- (Communities with populations between 16,001 and 18,000)

Youth Involvement – Godfrey - Community Cultivators - Group created a local “Discovery Garden” to educate children about where food comes from and the effort that goes into cultivating it.

Veteran Involvement - New Lenox - Through various fundraising efforts and support from the community, a monument honoring all area veterans since the War of 1812 was erected on Veteran’ Day, 2003.

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General - Mt. Vernon - Citizens wanted to make their community a safer and cleaner place to live, so they started an annual citywide clean-up day.

*General - Bond County- The Utlaud Health Services Auxiliary - This group committed to raising \$500,000 over three years to help Memorial Hospital expand. Through its efforts and the community support, it will reach and possibly surpass its goal this year.

Category V (Communities with populations between 18,001 and 23,000)

General – Charleston - Eastern Illinois University’ Student Body President organized a community service project that saw more than 300 students come together to paint local residents' homes.

Youth Involvement - Franklin Park - Community volunteers created the annual “Kids on Wheels Day,” where members of the community donate bikes and skateboards, promote bike/skateboarding safety, man various booths and a safety obstacle course.

Youth Involvement – Lisle - The area’s youth created Character Counts! Youth Flag Rally, an event that brings teens of different backgrounds together for a simple cause: a rally and car wash to raise funds for the local American Red Cross.

Senior Citizen Involvement – Bloomingdale - Senior Citizen Advisory Council - This group created Senior Day Fair to showcase the many services available to seniors.

Veterans Involvement - Lake Zurich - Community held fundraisers to raise enough money to dedicate a memorial to the area’s veterans.

Economic Development - East Peoria - The community hosted the 2003 National Softball Association Super World Series, and dedicated proceeds of the event to support the local youth softball and baseball programs, and scholarships for underprivileged youth.

*Economic Development – Bellwood - Locals created The Bellwood Youth Job Initiative that works with local businesses to find employment opportunities for teens.

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Category VI (Communities with populations between 23,001 and 37,000)

Youth Involvement – Freeport - Residents created The Winneshiek Children's Summer Theater program to provide children, ages 9 to 13, an opportunity to learn about theater and gain confidence in themselves over a two-week period.

Youth Involvement – Roselle - Roselle residents raised the needed funds to build a baseball diamond for people with physical or mental disabilities.

Veterans Involvement - Blue Island - Blue Island American Legion Post 50 and other volunteers worked together to create a lasting memorial to Vietnam veterans.

General – Westmont - Six volunteer groups were developed to improve services and communication between the public and the Westmont Fire and Police Departments.

*General - Rolling Meadows - A community group called WINGS decided to build a “safe” home that could serve 500 women and children annually, and was able to break ground with the help of many volunteers and fundraising efforts.

Category VII (Communities with populations between 37,001 and 100,000)

Senior Citizen Involvement - Palos Township - Residents created a Senior Advisory Board that helps the Palos Township Board address issues of importance to the senior citizens, including transportation and health services.

General - Adams County - With the help of its volunteers and community support, the Adams County Chapter of the American Red Cross was able to raise almost \$2 million to put toward the purchase of a new headquarters that will allow them to efficiently and effectively meet and respond to the region's changing needs.

*General - Des Plaines - Residents created a Citizens Police Academy to promote interaction between the police and the community and has proven to be invaluable to the Des Plaines Police Department.

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Category VIII (Communities with populations over 100,000)

General - Kane County - Volunteers opened up TCHP in the heart of Kane County, a free health clinic that offers acute and chronic care services and a diabetic clinic to low-income residents who lack health insurance.

General - Wheeling Township - Residents from Elk Grove Township, Palatine Township, and Wheeling Township joined forces to create a mobile dental clinic to provide dental care and prevention education for those without dental benefits.

Senior Citizen Involvement - Champaign County - A couple of senior citizens joined forces with several policemen to start the TRIAD/S.A.L.T. program, which works to reduce the number of seniors victimized by various scams and other criminal activities, as well as enhance the delivery of law enforcement services to them.

Economic Development – Springfield - The community has rallied around the city to raise money and volunteer time and expertise to revitalize the city in time for the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial.

Youth Involvement - Will and Grundy Counties - The Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Will and Grundy Counties- This group decided to address the needs of “latchkey” kids by creating a mentoring program in which high school and college students are matched up with elementary students once a week to help with homework, play games, and develop friendships.

*Youth Involvement - Kankakee County - The Garden of Prayer Youth Center - This group seeks to address the needs of children and families in crisis by providing counseling programs, emergency housing for homeless youth, structured educational and recreational programs.

***Indicates nomination as Governor's Cup Award Finalist**

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