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Gov. Blagojevich announces the winners of the 2005 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 24th annual Governor's Home Town Awards in Springfield. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) 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.

"The Home Town Awards is our opportunity to say thank you to the dedicated citizens across our state whose commitment to improving the quality of life in their communities continues to make Illinois a world-class place to live and work. As we continue to do everything we can to ensure state government better serves the people of Illinois, the grassroots work they do will continue to be our strongest asset," Gov. Blagojevich said.

Forty-nine 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 population 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.

While each community was grouped into a corresponding population category, each Home Town award winner also was assigned a broad project category. Project categories include Parks & Recreation, Veteran's Involvement, Youth Involvement and Economic Development among others. Of note, this year an additional category was added to recognize outstanding community volunteer efforts in the field of homeland security. In his most recent state of the state speech, Gov. Blagojevich made the development of the homeland security industry a new priority of his administration. Since that time, the Governor has launched a variety of initiatives designed to create jobs and economic growth by making Illinois a center for innovation and product development in the homeland security industry, including the formation of a Homeland Security Market Development Bureau (HSMD) housed in the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

(more)

The Illinois 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.

The 2005 Governor's Cup winner is **Adams County's Camp Callahan**. Camp Callahan is a not-for-profit organization based out of Quincy that serves mentally and physically challenged youth and adults. Camp Callahan provides them with a traditional, week-long summer camp experience. Campers participate in crafts, swimming, boating, horseback riding and other activities and, through charitable donations, the camp is available at no cost to the camper. A volunteer Board of Directors and many local volunteer groups support the camp's programs.

"I especially want to congratulate this year's Governor's Cup Winner: Camp Callahan. Through its hard work and generosity of spirit, Camp Callahan provides a wonderful experience for mentally and physically challenged adults and kids that will never be forgotten. The work it does represents volunteerism at its finest and is an inspiration to us all," Gov. Blagojevich added.

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.

2005 Governor's Home Town Award Winners

Category I (Communities with populations up to 1,900)

Project Category/Unit of Local Government/Community Organization

General: Herald's Prairie Township, Herald's Prairie Community Center - As Herald's Prairie continued to grow, the need for a community center that could accommodate hundreds of people for such events as elections, meetings, a historical museum, and social gatherings became more evident. The community united to raise the funds needed to purchase the old Herald School gym (formerly the Marlin Store and post office) and quickly restored it for use as a voting place prior to a consolidated election. Moving forward, it hopes to continue improving the center by adding a playground and small park. The community now feels a great sense of pride when it looks at and uses the new Community Center.

Contact: Linda L. Johnson - 618/962-3203

***Food Pantries/Meals: Barry Township, Barry Food Pantry** - Pike County has the second highest poverty level in the state. Recognizing this fact, the community joined forces with government agencies and non-profit organizations to open a food pantry. As the food pantry grew, so did a need for other personal items. Once again, the community gladly rallied around the call for such items, knowing that it was helping those in need.

Contact: Lillian B. Bowen - 217/335-2838

Historical Society/Sites: Towanda, Towanda Sesquicentennial – This had become an eye sore over the years. A village of only 550 people, citizens offered their time and donated money and resources to recreate the band stand that once stood as the village's focal point. On July 4, 2004, the community came together to celebrate the

Sesquicentennial and christen the bandstand. The community looks forward to hearing band concerts and holding public functions at this beautiful new structure.

Contact: Linda Potts - 309/728-2384

Homeland Security: Gardner, Community Homeland Security - Fire, Police and Emergency Services all must be prepared should a potential terrorist attack occur on U.S. soil. Learning and teaching the latest techniques for dealing with such situations, however, can be quite expensive. The Gardner Volunteer Fire Department held fundraisers and reached out to the community to teach it how to react to potentially dangerous situations. Many in the community attended these events to say 'Thank you' for the fire department's efforts.

Contact: Randy Wilkey - 815/237-0110

Parks & Recreation: Mounds, City of Mounds Ballpark - Most residents of Mounds City live under the federal poverty limits. Kids who wanted to play T-ball and baseball had to travel 10 to 20 miles to play on teams in the next town. Four dedicated fathers, who wanted to offer kids an alternative to getting into trouble, decided to build a ball field in their own town. Thanks to the long hours and dedication they put toward the project, the city had a large ball field in 2002. The field was so well used that the four fathers and other members of the community decided in 2004 to create a smaller T-ball field. Through the support of fundraisers, team sponsorships, and the donation of equipment, materials and manpower, you can now hear parents cheering as their little ones run around the bases.

Contact: Eugene Kennedy - 618/745-9429

Veterans Involvement: Walnut, Veterans Memorial Park - When Walnut saw its high school relocate outside the community, the town's people knew something must be done to help them regain pride in the community. At that time, it was decided to reconstruct a memorial to all of Walnut's veterans. With the support of businesses and volunteers, black granite tablets listing more than 1,000 names of those who served from the War of 1812 through the Iraq conflict were erected like spokes of a wheel. Each heading lists the dates of the war and the President at the time the war began. A great sense of pride has been renewed.

Contact: Nancy Ohda - 815/379-2214

Youth Involvement: Gilberts, Village of Gilberts Skateboard Park - In 2002, Gilberts conducted a poll to learn what services and recreational amenities its residents wanted. They found that many were looking for activities for older kids and that a skateboarding facility was highly ranked. Local area businesses and town members, including several teenagers, participated in the planning and construction phases. As the town rallied around this project, it was clear that the teenagers had the knowledge and skills to determine the correct equipment needed for the park. The end result is a challenging park that allows the town's kids to enjoy themselves and hone their skateboarding skills. This project proved to be a great experience for all involved.

Contact: Cheryal Callahan- 847/428-2861

Category II (Communities with populations between 1,901 – 5,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: Hardin County, Keep Hardin County Beautiful Campaign - Hardin County's main source of economic development is tourism. Unfortunately, the county also had a problem with trash strewn across its highways. In an effort to beautify the area and make it more attractive to tourists, the Hardin County Main Street launched a "Keep Hardin County Beautiful-Please Don't Litter" campaign. Volunteers and residents worked together to clean up the highways and county roads. They picked up trash, mounted signs and raised awareness of the problem of littering. The impact has created great pride and efforts will continue to keep the area beautiful.

Contact: Todd Carr - 618/287-2761

Economic Development: Hardin County, Hardin County Web site - In an effort to market the community, the Hardin County Main Street turned to technology. Through support from local government and businesses, a Web site was developed that showcases all that Hardin County has to offer from events to lodging to businesses. It has helped the community generate more interest in tourist attractions, as well as business development activities.

Contact: Todd Carr - 618/287-2761

General: Nashville, Community Center of Nashville - When the elementary school moved into its new building, the community decided to convert the old school into a civic center. A non-profit organization was created and fundraisers were held. The school was purchased and volunteers set about to repair the old building and get the civic center up and running, which now houses a Community Center where many services are offered to the community. There are also plans to offer health screenings, food, a clothing pantry, WIC, heating and cooling assistance, and other classes and events that will benefit young and old alike.

Contact: Bob Miller - 618/327-8572

***Parks & Recreation: Monee, Monee Parks & Recreation** - Over the last few years, Monee has seen its population grow rapidly. With this growth has come the need for recreational and social activities. Volunteers united to create the Monee Parks & Recreation Commission with the goal of developing fun and exciting activities for everyone in the community. Since the Commission's inception, there have been a number of sponsored events, activities, programs and classes. People are coming out and having fun as they get to know their neighbors. Kids are meeting and making new friends. The neighborhoods are alive and attracting more residents to the area.

Contact: Lynette DeRose - 708/534-2706

Youth Involvement: Gibson City, Community Acting Up - Gibson City has deep roots in athletics, but little in the way of other activities for kids. Knowing this, a group of theatrical-minded volunteers decided to create a theater program for children. The program allows children ages 7 through 15 an opportunity to open up and explore theater. Children get involved in all levels of a production and come to develop a voice of their own.

Contact: Ann Spangler - 217/784-5654

Category III (Communities with populations between 5,001 and 8,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: Inverness, North Park Black Walnut Savanna Restoration - Inverness decided to restore the woods on the eastern edge of North Park to a savanna, the ecosystem prevalent in the area prior to European settlement. The idea was to provide a nature area where residents could enjoy the wonders of nature. The Inverness Park District, together with many volunteers from the community, set about to remove heavy brush and invasive species, and plant white oaks, native grass and flower seeds. The result of these efforts has been the emergence of native wildlife not seen in the area for decades.

Contact: Edward R. Vrablik - 847/358-2265

General: Waterloo, Porta Westfalica Festival's Silver Anniversary - In 1980, Waterloo formed a partnership with Porta Westfalica, Germany through the Sister Cities program. The idea was to advance global understanding of various cultures through opening up of one's home to residents of the sister city. Each year, with the help of a dedicated staff of volunteers, Waterloo holds a parade and festival celebrating its partnership with Porta Westfalica. This year marked the 25th anniversary of that partnership.

Contact: Debbie Ruggeri - 618/939-5300

Food Pantries/Meals: Braidwood, Community Care Center - While at a free community Thanksgiving dinner, members of the community noticed that there were a number of needy families present. In December 2003, a group of volunteers created the Community Care Center with the goal of wiping out hunger in their area. After extensive research on how to create and run a food pantry, obtaining donated food and household items from businesses and non-profit organizations, and recruiting volunteers to help work the center, the Community Care Center opened its doors in October 2004. Since then, they have seen the number of clients they serve rise, but thanks to the community support, they are able to service each and every family that comes to them for help.

Contact: Mayor Wayne Saltzman - 815/458-2333 ext. 211

Historical Society/Sites, South Beloit, Bushnell-Wheeler House - The Bushnell-Wheeler House, an Italian Villa built in 1856, stands on ground traveled by important historical figures, such as Presidents Zachary Taylor and Abraham Lincoln, Confederacy President Jefferson Davis, and Major Robert Anderson, the man responsible for surrendering Fort Sumter. The city of South Beloit bought the house in 1984 with the intention of tearing it down. In an attempt to save the house and restore it to its original beauty, the South Beloit Historical Society was

formed in September 1991. The historical society purchased the house the next year and began restoring it with the help of many dedicated community volunteers. It now serves as museum that offers a glimpse into life in the 1800s.

Contact: John Patrick - 815/389-1514

Parks & Recreation: Mascoutah, Leu Civic Center, Inc, Window Replacement Project - Leu Civic Center, Inc., a United Way Agency that serves the youth of Mascoutah, Scott Air Force Base and the surrounding areas, offers a variety of social, cultural, recreational and civic programs. Over the years, the windows in the building became cracked, broken, were falling out and termite infested. Unfortunately, the Leu Civic Center could not afford to replace the windows, so the Leu Civic Center Fundraising Committee organized various fundraisers. With the community's support of these events, the center was able to raise the funds needed to replace all the windows.

Contact: Patricia G. Peek - 618/566-2175

***Veterans Involvement: Spring Valley, Richard A. Mautino Memorial Library Veterans Wing** - The Richard A. Mautino Memorial Library was in need of more space and upgrading to comply with ADA standards. The library had received some grants from the state, but they did not cover the entire cost of constructing an additional wing. At this point, the Veterans of Dominic O'Berto Post 182 stepped in to help; they donated \$200,000 and an anonymous donor matched the Post's contribution. The only stipulation the Veterans gave the library was that the construction had to be completed in 2004. In June 2004, the new wing was complete, housing an expanded adults room, a new children's library and a meeting room available for public use.

Contact: Debb Ladgenski - 815/664-2753

Category IV- (Communities with populations between 8,001 and 17,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: Palos Heights, "Adopt-A-Tree" Program/Classic Car Event - When Palos Heights decided to cut all flower planting and beautification efforts from its already tight budget, the Beautification Committee took up the cause. Calling on support from businesses, organizations and residents, the committee set about planting and maintaining trees and flowers lining the streets. Soon they noticed people slowing down to admire the lawns and scenery. They recognized that beautiful tree and flower-lined streets were bringing more traffic to local businesses. In 2004, they added the Classical Car Event as a way to inspire residents and neighbors to come out and enjoy the beauty around the city.

Contact: Glenn Kramer - 312/287-6949

Economic Development: Pontiac, Route 66 Association of Illinois, Hall of Fame and Museum - When word got out that the Dixie Truck Stop, home of the Route 66 Association of Illinois Hall of Fame, had been sold, Betty Estes, City of Pontiac Tourism Director, approached the Mayor and City Administrator about finding a new, permanent home for the Association. After much discussion, it was decided that the old, abandoned fire station would be rehabilitated into a museum and visitors center for the Association. Volunteers pulled together to "fix up" the Association's new location, gather items and set up displays, and collect donations and loans. Finally, the museum opened early in 2004. Within its first six months of operation, more than 6,000 visitors - coming from 43 states and 21 countries - passed through its doors.

Contact: Robert Karls - 815/844-3396

Food Pantries/Meals: Richton Park, Senior Citizen Advisory Committee's Commodities Program - Richton Park's Senior Citizen Advisory Committee was organized in February, 2002. During one of its monthly meetings, the Committee was informed that some residents of Cedar Ridge - a 200-unit apartment complex for low-income seniors and the disabled - were having problems getting food and were sometimes going hungry. The Committee reached out to The Pantry of Rich Township for a solution. As a result of these discussions, the Senior Citizen Commodities Program was conceived. Through the program, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as meat and canned goods are sorted, packed and distributed by Committee member volunteers to those Cedar Ridge residents in need.

Contact: Karen Gromala - 708/481-8950

Historical Society/Sites: Monmouth, Wyatt Earp Birthplace Historic House Museum - Wyatt Earp, the world's famous "Old West" lawman, was born in Monmouth, on March 19, 1848. However, nothing had been done to honor his birthplace home until volunteers organized and started operating the Wyatt Earp Birthplace Historic House Museum in 1986. The Wyatt Earp Birthplace non-profit corporation operates the home entirely with volunteer assistance from the community and the Chamber of Commerce. The home is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is open by appointment, and annual celebrations of Earp's life and times are held on the grounds. Tourists from 49 states and more than 30 foreign countries have visited the home.

Contact: Melba Matson - 309/734-6419

Parks & Recreation: Island Lake, Converse Park Playground - The Village of Island Lake has experienced significant population growth over the past decade, with many young families moving into the area. Although blessed with more parks than most towns, parents saw the need for a multi-function, handicap-accessible playground in Converse Park, located along the main highway that passes through Island Lake. The Converse Park Playground was envisioned as a place where younger siblings could play while older siblings participated in baseball or soccer on adjacent fields. Residents formed a non-profit organization and spent five years fundraising and organizing. These efforts culminated in a five-day building event held in early June 2004, involving more than 800 volunteers from Island Lake and beyond. Residents, local businesses, schools, church groups and scouting organizations all volunteered their time, energy, materials and money to make the Converse Park Playground Project a reality. The playground has become a major focal point for community activities and a source of community pride.

Contact: Kora M. Smith - 847/484-0300

Senior Citizen Involvement: Country Club Hills, Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT) -

For the past seven years, the City of Country Club Hills Police Department has been fortunate to have a group of senior volunteers who work as liaisons between senior citizens and the law enforcement community. Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT) is a group of 20 seniors who make daily calls on seniors living alone, assist during emergency weather situations, participate in city events and make follow up calls to seniors that have been the victims of crime to offer support. In 2004, SALT also began hosting "Senior Safety Seminars" to discuss and educate seniors on public safety issues, as well as current events. These seminars have been an enormous success. Without the volunteer support of SALT members, these services would not otherwise be possible.

Contact: Teri O'Donnell - 708/798-3191

Veterans Involvement: Mt. Vernon, Veterans Memorial Project - With the leadership of three Southern Illinois military veterans and with a groundswell of support from the local community, a group of volunteers formulated a plan to construct a memorial honoring the veterans of Jefferson County. A committee composed of various veterans groups, active military personnel, individual veterans and interested citizens turned the dream into a reality. The group worked tirelessly to raise the necessary funds to purchase a monument and place it on the grounds of Veterans Park in Mt. Vernon, a location chosen for its beautifully kept grounds, spacious lawns and easy access. The project was totally supported by volunteers and citizens who appreciate what the memorial represents and who take great pride in keeping the area a beautiful place of remembrance.

Contact: David Keen - 618/244-1071

***Youth Involvement: Barrington, Barrington Chess Program** - The Barrington Chess Program was established in 1998 as an alternative extracurricular activity for students who did not participate in sports, and has grown into an internationally recognized community program. In 1998, a fourth-grader from Barrington Community School District 220 won a national chess tournament but felt isolated and embarrassed, as no one in his community seemed to play chess. His principal asked him to start a chess club at the school, and, shortly thereafter, several other schools followed suit, including Barrington High School. Parents, teachers and student volunteers run weekly chess club meetings, as well as training programs and tournaments. In addition, a percentage of the proceeds from each tournament is donated to a featured charity. The Barrington Chess Program has created and sustained a diverse learning environment involving all age levels, cultural backgrounds and races, while helping local youth discover their potential as leaders through volunteerism.

Contact: Dr. Kiran Frey, M.D. - 847/382-5410

Category V (Communities with populations between 17,001 and 25,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: Romeoville, Parent Appreciation Day - Parent Appreciation Day is an initiative that was established to foster community pride and to encourage Romeoville's youth to show their appreciation to parents, caregivers and adults. On the second Saturday in August, kids volunteer their time to wash cars for free. Sixty volunteers participated in the August 2004 event and the project has received exceptional support from the community and local business establishments. In addition, many parents and caregivers who did not know each other have built new friendships through their childrens' annual participation. Parent Appreciation Day has helped bring the community closer together by creating a climate of mutual appreciation and respect through a creative demonstration of gratitude on the part of Romeoville's youth.

Contact: Alonzo Stewart - 815/302-7202

Economic Development: Crawford County, Agriculture Development Association - Lincolnland Agri-Energy, ten Crawford County citizens who are mostly farmers, organized themselves in 1999 to explore ways of increasing agricultural profitability in that region. Crawford County agriculture has struggled in recent years and suffered a devastating drought in 2002. Furthermore, declines in net farm income and increases in unemployment posed serious problems for the Crawford County economy. With the support of the community, and other public and private organizations, the cooperative efforts of this Crawford County Agricultural Development Association culminated in the construction of the Lincolnland Agri-Energy plant in 2004. This ethanol plant is already delivering a significant economic boost to the area in the form of new jobs and a positive return on investment for plant shareholders.

Contact: Gayle Kite - 618/584-3338

General: Roselle, Stepping Stones for Women of Domestic Violence, NFP - Nationwide, domestic violence has been declared an epidemic. In March of 2002, nearly 100 concerned citizens met at the Trinity Lutheran Church in Roselle to determine if something could be done to address the problem in their area. Volunteer surveys were completed and a steering committee of 15 was formed to determine next steps. Following a series of interviews, the committee decided to partner with the Bridge Communities organization to provide transitional housing for victims, as well as public education services, and Stepping Stones was born. Volunteers contribute a number of services to Stepping Stones, including transportation, basic necessities, fundraising and professional services. The program's first family graduated from the program at the end of May 2005. For the last two years, thanks to Stepping Stones and its volunteers, this family has had a safe place to live and has grown to be independent and self-sufficient.

Contact: Diane Eckert - 630/894-3506

Food Pantries/Meals: Palos Hills, Pennies From Heaven! - During the holiday season of 2004, the Palos Hills Community Resource & Recreation Department started a fundraiser called "Pennies From Heaven" designed to help a local food pantry located at the Moraine Valley Community Church. A large container was placed at the Community Activity Center where residents could stop by and fill the container with their donated pennies. The fundraiser was such a success during the holidays that it has been extended to a year-round effort. Every three months, pennies are cashed in for currency at a local bank, the proceeds donated to the food pantry and a sign is posted to show everyone how much was collected. Pennies From Heaven have enabled the food pantry to keep its shelves stocked and has enhanced community involvement by showing that even a little contribution can go a long way to help the less fortunate.

Contact: Mary Orlowicz - 708/430-4500

Historical Society/Sites: East Peoria, 20th Annual East Peoria Festival of Lights - For 20 years, the City of East Peoria has celebrated the holiday season through the Festival of Lights. This month-long festival not only provides a way for East Peoria and Central Illinois residents to celebrate the season, but also infuses the East Peoria economy by attracting visitors from throughout the Midwest. The festival also fosters community spirit, as hundreds of volunteers are needed to make this a successful event. Volunteers are the backbone of the Festival of Lights. Approximately 400 volunteers - ranging in age from teens to senior citizens - constructed floats and displays, collected admission fees, handed out information at the displays and provided general support at the

2004 event. During its 35-day run in 2004, it is estimated that nearly 125,000 people attended the Festival of Lights.

Contact: Jill Peterson - 390/698-5437 ext. 29

Homeland Security: Libertyville, Community Emergency Response Team Trailer - In July 2003, the Village of Libertyville was struck by a microburst that caused widespread damage to the southern portion of the Village. The storm damage, coupled with a major power loss, taxed the Village's emergency responders to their limits. Following the microburst, a major flood overtaxed local emergency response capabilities again. These two events prompted Libertyville to develop Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and a Citizen Corps. During the fall and winter of 2004, a total of 48 volunteer CERT members received training. In addition, a CERT equipment trailer was purchased with the proceeds from an annual fundraiser. This trailer will enable the team to respond to emergencies more effectively and will also enhance the response capabilities of the police and fire departments. Libertyville now has the additional personnel and equipment to better protect the Village from disasters, whether they be man-made or natural.

Contact: Kevin J. Bowens - 847/362-2430

Parks & Recreation: Palos Hills, The Community Resource and Recreation Department - With the help of numerous volunteers, the Palos Hills Community Resource & Recreation Department not only provides recreational activities for residents, but also serves as a resource for the concerns and needs of the community. The Department is designed to be a central, one-stop shop for many different types of assistance, ranging from emergency services to billing questions to transportation services. Volunteers are the backbone of the operation. Approximately 300 volunteers, young and old, provide assistance by teaching classes, staffing information booths, cooking and serving at events, compiling resource lists and helping with miscellaneous office and clerical work. The Department could not offer as much assistance or as many programs and services without the help of these dedicated volunteers.

Contact: Mary Jo Vincent - 708/430-4500

Senior Citizen Involvement: Palos Hills, Have A Heart For A Veteran - With renewed military operations in Iraq, the Palos Hills Senior 39'ers organization wanted to do something to help and honor American veterans. The group contacted a local veterans hospital to discuss the effort. Based on that conversation, the 39'ers decided to make "ditty bags" for the 120 men and women in the Extended Care Unit at the Edward Hines Jr. Veterans Hospital. The "ditty bags" - a naval term for bags that hold sewing and personal care supplies - were constructed by members of the 39'ers and filled with personal items donated by the membership and local businesses. Approximately 50 members of the Palos Hills Senior 39'ers participated in this project and each of the 120 veterans in the Extended Care Unit received a ditty bag. The effort was recognized by all as a tangible and meaningful way to show appreciation to those veterans who fought decades ago to preserve the freedoms all citizens enjoy today.

Contact: Teri Szablewsk - 708/430-4500

***Youth Involvement: Westmont, Junior Citizens Police Academy and Children's Safety Day Camp** - A joint effort of the Village of Westmont Police and Fire Departments, the Safety Camp is geared toward 8-10 year olds, while the Police Academy is geared toward junior high school students. In the Safety Camps, children learn a variety of lessons about fire safety, water and pool safety, and bike safety, among other topics. The Police Academy teaches students about the many different aspects of law enforcement and what a police officer does on a daily basis. Both programs allow for positive, non-confrontational interaction between the emergency personnel and the children participants. Furthermore, volunteers are involved in almost all aspects of both programs and help with everything from coordinating materials and setting up the rooms to answering questions during the sessions and helping with demonstrations. Showing what volunteerism actually is has become an integral part of both programs.

Contact: Tom Mulhearn - 630/968-2151

Category VI (Communities with populations between 25,001 and 50,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: St. Charles, Downtown St. Charles Partnership - This project is the first of many projects that aim to stabilize and beautify the shoreline along the Fox River. With the help of a stream biologist from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Downtown St. Charles Partnership drew upon its volunteer membership to plant 1,600 water willows along the Fox River in 2004. This project is just one part of a multi-faceted effort to restore the River Corridor and promote the Fox River as the centerpiece of St. Charles's cultural and economic prosperity.

Contact: Rosemary Mackey - 630/513-5386

General: Carol Stream, Carol Stream Christmas Sharing Program - The Carol Stream Christmas Sharing program is a Village-sponsored, volunteer-driven holiday assistance program that began more than 25 years ago. It provides all participating families with a complete holiday meal, which includes a ham, potatoes and fresh fruit, as well as a variety of nonperishable food items. To further brighten the holiday experience, all families with children receive new toys that are hand selected by volunteers to be age and gender appropriate. At the program's inception, only a few families were served. During the 2004 holiday season, the Christmas Sharing program served 288 families, including 618 children.

Contact: Mindi Thomas - 630/871-6280

Homeland Security: Bridgeview/Justice, Bridgeview/Justice Emergency Services and Disaster Agency - Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the president's call for Americans to get involved with local civil defense, the Villages of Bridgeview and Justice collaborated to form the Bridgeview/Justice Emergency Services and Disaster Agency (ESDA). The purpose of the ESDA is to help relieve pressure on the Fire and Police departments in times of emergency that pose a significant public safety or health threat. The Bridgeview/Justice ESDA is made up of many community volunteers who are organized and trained by a special group of ESDA personnel. Through the efforts of the volunteers, the Bridgeview/Justice ESDA provides its communities with enhanced emergency response capabilities, as well as access to local, county and state ESDA resources.

Contact: Martin G. Vilimek; 708/458-3158

***Youth Involvement: Carbondale, Boys & Girls Club of Carbondale** - Every community needs a safe place where kids can spend their free time in productive ways, and Carbondale is no exception. The tragic shooting deaths of two local teenagers at an unsupervised party several years ago inspired a small group of community members to volunteer their time establishing just such a place. Those community leaders formed the non-profit organization Carbondale Community Teen Center, Inc., which formally became the Boys & Girls Club of Carbondale in the Fall of 2004. Through local, state and federal grants, partnerships with existing community agencies and services, and with contributions from members of the community, the Boys & Girls Club of Carbondale now offers a full range of life-enhancing experiences to kids ages 6-18, in a safe, productive learning environment.

Contact: Randy Osborn - 618/457-8877

Category VII (Communities with populations between 50,001 and 80,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: Des Plaines, Lake Park Memorial Pavilion - The City of Des Plaines had three veterans memorials that had fallen in disrepair and were practically unknown to the general population. In an effort to honor servicemen and women from Des Plaines, a group of volunteers, coming from each branch of military service and military organization, set out to correct the memorial problems. They moved two of the existing memorials from their former locations to more high traffic and visible locations. They also raised funds to restore and improve the band shell that had been given to the park district, returning it to its former status as a Memorial Pavilion for the community to enjoy. All of their efforts were achieved in just ten months, fourteen months ahead of their own schedule.

Contact: Steven Schaefer - 847/452-6991

General: Bloomington, Compassion Center-Until recently, Bloomington had a homeless problem of which very few were aware. Through the hard work of community leaders, businesses and local officials, a day time homeless shelter was built for the city's homeless. More than 300 volunteers helped with the construction of the new shelter. They installed all of the necessities; showers, washers and dryers, even a big screen TV. GED classes, life skills teachers, counselors and job/housing benefits specialists are now available on site for the people that need these services the most.

Contact: Karen Zangerle - 309/828-1022

Food Pantries/Meals: Des Plaines, Self-Help Closet and Pantry of Des Plaines - Since 1971, the Self-Help Closet and Pantry of Des Plaines has been helping the less fortunate in the area. Through its more than 30 years, four moves and countless volunteers, the pantry is still going strong. In fact, the Self-Help Closet and Pantry is so successful at gaining donations that it does not have to purchase food from other pantries, as many smaller pantries do. It truly is a community effort.

Contact: Debra Walusiak - 847/375-1443

***Senior Citizen Involvement: Adams County, Together We Can! Camp Callahan** - Camp Callahan is a not-for-profit organization based out of Quincy that serves mentally and physically challenged youth and adults. Camp Callahan provides them with a traditional, week-long summer camp experience. Campers participate in crafts, swimming, boating, horseback riding and other activities and, through charitable donations, the camp is available at no cost to the camper. A volunteer Board of Directors and many local volunteer groups support the camp's programs.

Contact: Sandy Callahan - 217/641-4903

Veterans Involvement: Orland Park, Support Our Military-Past and Present - The Support Our Military-Past and Present project is designed to provide service and support to veterans who have served and are currently serving our country. Volunteers participate in such activities as sending care packages and cards to the troops overseas, sponsoring family support group meetings for military families and holding community events dedicated to honoring Orland Park's members of the military.

Contact: Mary Shanahan - 708/403-6155

Youth Involvement: Palatine, Yellow Ribbon Support Group - The Yellow Ribbon Support Group volunteers perform a variety of activities, all in support of our troops serving overseas. They collect donations from area churches and community groups to send to the troops overseas. They also sponsor support groups for families that have members serving in the military. In addition to participation by local merchants, volunteers come from local grade and high schools, college students, teachers and Girl Scout troops.

Contact: Richard and Patricia McCoy - 847/359-2429

Category VIII (Communities with populations over 80,000)

Clean Up/Beautification: Chicago, Friends of the Chicago River - The Chicago River was once a quiet, meandering stream filled with wildlife. Once Chicago grew into a metropolis, the river fell into disrepair and was neglected for many years. That is, until the Friends of the Chicago River got organized and decided to return the river to its original state. With the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the work of 15 volunteers, the Friends of the Chicago River North Center Neighborhood Project created an oasis of sorts in the midst of the city. They stabilized the riverbank and installed lunkers to make the shoreline less steep and more inviting to the residents of the Chicago River neighborhood.

Contact: Maggie Cline - 312/939-0490

***General: Vermilion County, The HALO Project** - The HALO Project is a community initiative of the Provena United Samaritans Medical Center Foundation. The Foundation recognized that collaboration and partnership are necessary to the success of building a healthier community. On the strength of their many partners and the more than 1,000 volunteers, the HALO project was able to make several community development projects a reality, including a painting blitz to beautify houses in Vermilion County and leadership training for neighborhood associations. Overall, the HALO Project is helping the residents of Vermilion County create a healthier community.

Contact: Kathy Richard - 217/442-6587

Historical Society/Sites: Champaign County, Champaign County Museum-RSVP - Champaign County has a rich history that had never been fully told. Thanks to the efforts of volunteers and community leaders, visitors can now learn about Champaign County by visiting the Champaign County Museum. Appropriately located in the oldest building in Champaign County, the Cattle State Bank, the museum walks back through time. Volunteers have worked tirelessly to not only gather up artifacts that had been spread around the county, but to care for them and design displays for them. The museum has also become an activity center, by providing programs for children and school groups, as well as producing publications about the history of Champaign County.

Contact: Paul Idleman/Vicki Stewart - 217/359-6500

Youth Involvement: Downers Grove Township, Township of Downers Grove Peer Jury Program - The Township of Downers Grove Peer Jury Program seeks to provide an alternative method of dealing with juvenile offenders without referring them to the juvenile court system. Since its inception in 2000, the program has trained 124 students from five different public high schools in the Township of Downers Grove. The success of the program was so great that a 3rd peer jury site had to be selected in 2004. The program has also become a model for other peer jury systems around the state.

Contact: Lori A. Wrzesinski, MA - 630/968-6408

*Indicates nomination as Governor's Cup Award Finalist