



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

For Immediate Release:

October 18, 2006

CONTACTS:

Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355
Gerardo Cardenas	312/814.3158
Andrew Ross	312/814.8193 (DCEO)
Mark Harris	312/814.0095 (DCEO)

Gov. Blagojevich announces the winners of the 2006 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 25th annual Governor's Home Town Awards in Springfield. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Director Jack Lavin, who represented Governor Blagojevich, 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.

"Illinois is filled with dedicated people who are committed to strengthening their communities and undertaking projects and initiatives that make a real difference in the lives of others. The Home Town awards are an opportunity for us to say thank you to the hardworking people across our state that contribute to improving the quality of life in their communities in very meaningful ways. As we strive to make Illinois a better place to live and work, it is efforts such as these that will keep our state moving forward," Gov. Blagojevich said.

Forty-six 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 twelve 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, Senior Citizen Involvement and Clean-up/Beautification, among others. 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 a better position to attract investment, support growth, create new jobs and encourage innovation. This awards ceremony is a chance for Governor Blagojevich to recognize the extraordinary work they've done and to simply say thanks," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

(more)

The 2006 Governor's Cup winner is **Champaign County's Center for Women in Transition**. The center recently added a third home, which will allow them to serve more families and expand the educational components of their program. The center provides a valuable and much-needed service to women and their children in the community who are without homes and the necessary support to get ahead in life. Successful program participants are able to work through the program, learn valuable life skills and obtain full-time employment and permanent housing. Roughly 70 percent of the center's residents successfully complete the program. With the dedication of committed volunteers, women and their children are getting the help they need to succeed.

"I especially want to congratulate the Center for Women in Transition in Champaign County. Through its hard work and generosity of spirit, the center provides shelter and support for women and children that help them put their lives back on track. Its efforts are a testament to the people who strive to make a difference in the lives of others everyday and inspire 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.

2006 Governor's Home Town Award Winners

Category I (Communities with populations up to 2,000)

Project Category: Unit of Local Government, Community Organization

1st Place - Governor's Cup Finalist

Clean Up/Beautification: Village of Elwood, Children's Garden Project – ABC Garden - Building on a successful volunteer community project that was established in 1997, the Children's Garden Project has proven to be a wonderful example of an ongoing, recognized feature in the community. Made up of a number of specialty gardens, the Children's Garden is a focal point of the community. The renovation of one of the project's original gardens, the ABC Garden, has once again demonstrated the strength of community volunteerism in Elwood. The renovation of this garden would not have been possible without the donation of time and money from this dedicated group. Now, the Children's Garden has become the pride of Elwood.

Contact: Donna Banas - 815/423-6112

1st Place

General: Village of Equality, Equality Salt Days – The Village of Equality has experienced a number of changes in the past two decades. From the 1987 consolidation of its schools with three others in Gallatin County to the phasing out of its coal mines in the early 1990s and the departure of many young people in search of jobs, the Village of Equality felt they were losing its community identity. In early 2005, a group of 30 volunteers convened to revive the community's identity by working to bring back its Salt Days festival, which hadn't been held for nearly 13 years. The event was held in August 2005 and was a tremendous success. Thanks to a network of committed individuals and organizations, this event has not only led to a number of additional community projects, but has also sparked a renewed commitment to community revitalization in the Village of Equality.

Contact: Beth Wargel - 618/926-5496

(more)

2nd Place

General: Village of Brownstown, Brownstown High School Booster Club Concession Stand – Attendees at Brownstown High School baseball games can now enjoy the games a little more, thanks to the overwhelming efforts of a group of dedicated community volunteers. Due to a lack of school district funding, the school's baseball field was without a permanent building to house a much-needed concession stand, permanent restrooms and field equipment storage area. To address this need, a group of dedicated community volunteers launched an effort to make this dream a reality. The Brownstown Sports Booster Club now has a permanent facility that can be used for various sporting events and fundraisers.

Contact: Ron Gould - 618/283-9120

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: Village of Scales Mound, Scales Mound Recreation Association – Twenty-five years ago, the Village of Scales Mound was without a recreation association or ball parks for the community. Thanks to a group of committed residents and community members, the Scales Mound Recreation Association was founded. It is going strong and continuing to expand its offerings entirely through the donations of time and money from a large group of community volunteers and Association members. Scales Mound now has a recreational park where community members can enjoy sporting events, annual fish fries and more.

Contact: Colleen Stadel - 815/845-2418

2nd Place

Parks & Recreation: City of Mt. Carroll, The Friends of the Waukarusa – Thanks to a group of concerned residents, Point Rock Park is now a thriving recreational center for Mt. Carroll residents and visitors. While the park had fallen into disrepair and was underutilized over the years, The Friends of the Waukarusa saw an opportunity to restore it as a central attraction for the city. In addition to the immediate goal to restore the park, the "Friends" group saw an opportunity to promote tourism and economic development down the road. The group and its community supporters have demonstrated a strong commitment to both of these goals that is paying off. Point Rock Park is now home to a disc golf course, cleared hiking trails and picnic areas, and is host to a number of community events and activities. The efforts of the "Friends" group has also encouraged other volunteer activities in the community.

Contact: C. David Vidler - 815/244-7209

Category II (Communities with populations between 2,001 – 5,000)

1st Place

Clean Up/Beautification: Village of Gilberts, Village of Gilberts Earth Day Clean Up – This event was inspired by a local resident's concern with trash that had built up in her subdivision during the winter. The resident approached the Village Board with the idea of an organized clean up effort for the subdivision. This idea cascaded into a Village-wide event, which was scheduled to coincide with Earth Day. The Village donated all of the necessary equipment and supplies and 20 residents volunteered to participate in the event. This event brought members of the community together for a common goal. As a result of its success, the Village Board plans to continue the tradition with an annual event that will serve to increase the spirit of volunteerism, as well as pride in the community.

Contact: Sam Boytor - 847/428-2861

(more)

1st Place

General: City of Aledo, Aledo Sesquicentennial – The seed for an Aledo Sesquicentennial celebration was planted in 2003 when members of the Aledo Area Chamber of Commerce and Aledo Main Street realized the milestone was approaching. It was agreed that a weekend event that coincided with both a home football game and the Aledo Main Street's Antique Days event would be a great way to celebrate the town for its past and its present. As a result of countless community volunteers and organizations over a two-year period, the September 2005 event was a resounding success. Many of the improvements that were undertaken in preparation for the Sesquicentennial celebration remain in the community and will be a lasting reminder of what a community can accomplish together.

Contact: Annette M. Speer - 309/582-5145

2nd Place

General: City of Marshall, Marshall Public Library – The Marshall Public Library, together with the Marshall Main Street Program, successfully applied for its third Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition since 2000. The "Key Ingredients: America by Food" exhibition offered a thought-provoking look at the historical, regional and social traditions that merge in everyday meals and celebrations throughout the country. Planning for this project was undertaken months before it was displayed in the library and involved the dedication of more than 125 community volunteers. This kind of unique cultural opportunity is not often available to residents of small communities such as Marshall. As a result of the exhibition, the community has seen an increase in tourism and library use and there has been an increased awareness and interest in Marshall and its rich history.

Contact: Nancy Claypool - 217/826-2535

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: City of Aledo, Aledo Central Band Shell – The small town of Aledo is host to several festivals and events throughout the year and utilizes its central park for many of these functions. Entertainment for these events has traditionally taken place on a portable stage. However, with the establishment of an Aledo Community Band in 2001, there was a need for something more permanent for the community. Thanks to the generosity of many local residents and organizations over a nearly four-year period, the dream of creating a permanent band shell structure for Aledo's central park became a reality in 2005. This project represents a strong commitment to community and will allow the City of Aledo to continue to increase the level of the performing arts in this community.

Contact: Rusty Ruggles - 309/582-8305

1st Place – Governor's Cup Finalist

Youth Involvement: City of Nokomis, Nokomis Park Renovation – This project sought to reconstruct the city's historical pagoda, which was constructed at the Fred B. Johnson Park in 1888 and subsequently torn down in 1957 due to disrepair. The idea grew out of desire to bring back a sense of pride for the community and to recreate a community meeting place as it was in the early 1900's. The project would not have been possible without the tremendous support of many local volunteers and organizations. This project has also led to other projects that have enhanced the beauty of the park. The dedication of the pagoda project was in line with the City's sesquicentennial celebration in July.

Contact: Judy Beaman - 217/563-7774

(more)

Category III (Communities with populations between 5,001 and 10,000)

1st Place

Clean Up/Beautification: City of Waterloo, Downtown Waterloo Beautification Project – While this project began as a simple beautification project for downtown Waterloo, it quickly took on a more significant purpose. Downtown Waterloo, the county seat for Monroe County, has a rich history. This project was an opportunity for the community to come together to restore and preserve the ages. Thanks to all of the dedicated volunteers, their donations, and the generosity of the city, county, and members of the community, this project was able to light the town square with antique-style streetlamps, provide benches along the Memorial Walk, and restore a historic fountain that had been inoperative on the courthouse lawn for many years. These improvements have also restored a sense of community pride for the residents of Waterloo.

Contact: Debbie Ruggeri - 618/939-5300

1st Place – Governor's Cup Finalist

General: Stark County, Stark County Rural Mental Health Initiative – In 2003, Stark County experienced a series of tragic events that ultimately sparked a group of concerned citizens to form a mental health task force for the area. The Stark County Rural Mental Health Initiative was created in response to what appeared to be a lack of knowledge about and access to appropriate mental health resources for the small county community of just over 6,300 residents. The group has been successful in reaching its goals to increase access to mental health services, provide education to community members on a number of mental health concerns, including suicide, depression, and other mental illnesses, and improving the mental health advocacy system that serves the communities of Stark County. These efforts continue as the group works with the Illinois Department of Human Services to develop a strategic plan for the future of mental health services for Stark County.

Contact: Carrie Titus - 309/853-1533

2nd Place

General: Village of Stone Park, Stone Park Public Safety Department – The Village of Stone Park created the Stone Park Public Safety Department in an effort to strengthen the Village's ability to respond to public safety concerns. This diverse group of volunteers offers their time and expertise to help the community. The Public Safety Officers receive training in a variety of areas that are useful to the police, fire, and public works departments, and they serve to augment existing public safety agencies. The Department currently has 26 volunteers that have donated approximately 5,000 hours over the past year. The program is designed to be responsive to community needs and will continue to recruit additional volunteers to expand the program.

Contact: Deputy Chief Louis V. Fatta - 708/450-3215 ext. 302

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: City of Waterloo, Monroe County Veteran's Memorial – The seed for the Monroe County Veteran's Memorial project was planted after a local teacher, interested in introducing her students to the significance of Veteran's Day, had to plan a field trip to another community to view a memorial. The idea resurfaced at a Waterloo Park District Board meeting where it began to take hold. Goals set to cover the cost of constructing the memorial were quickly met and exceeded thanks to the tremendous dedication and support of community volunteers. The Veteran's Memorial has potential to grow in the future and an ongoing paver project has been established to allow for the purchase of granite engraved paver bricks to honor and recognized veterans. This memorial will continue to honor past, present, and future veterans for many years to come.

Contact: Joann Harlin - 618/939-7428

(more)

2nd Place

Parks & Recreation: City of Spring Valley, Spring Valley Walleye Club's Joint Restocking Program – This program is the result of a unique partnership between Spring Valley and other Illinois and regional organizations. The program not only serves to promote the Spring Valley community, but also provides support for Illinois fisheries projects. Each year volunteers work many hours to put on the Spring Valley Masters Walleye Circuit Tournament. Tournament-caught fish are taken to the LaSalle hatchery where the milt and eggs are harvested to help in sauger (a cousin to the walleye) population recovery efforts in Illinois. This project has resulted in a number of cascading successes. Thanks to this partnership and the dedication of its many volunteers, Illinois River sauger populations have rebounded tremendously, a conservation fund has been established that will help fund additional fisheries-related projects, and Spring Valley continues to make a name for itself as the “Sauger capital of the World.”

Contact: Debb Ladgenski - 815/664-2753

1st Place

Senior Citizen Involvement: City of Mascoutah, Mascoutah Historical Society – For many years, the Mascoutah Historical Society utilized various small spaces to display historical artifacts, without a true home for a museum. All of this changed when a local business owner offered them a 19th Century building as a gift. The Mascoutah Historical Society received the title to the building in June of 2003 and immediately began its long campaign to renovate and restore the old building in preparation for the new museum. Two years of hard work and dedication from numerous community members and organizations resulted in the Mascoutah Heritage Museum, a symbol of success and volunteerism for the community.

Contact: Carol Klopmeier - 618/566-2567

1st Place

Veterans Involvement: City of Princeton, Flags of Freedom – The Flags of Freedom project was born from the desire of two local veterans to pay tribute to those serving in the armed forces, both past, present and future. The idea was to create a display consisting of a large United States flag in each of the four quadrants of the intersection of Interstate 80 and Illinois Route 26 – the gateway to the City of Princeton. With the help of a dedicated group of volunteers, the project quickly gained momentum and became a reality on September 10, 2005, when the Flags of Freedom dedication ceremony was held, during the Princeton Homestead Festival, in front of an audience of 3,000. Nearly 250 volunteers banded together to make this highly-praised and respected project a reality.

Contact: Jack Scott - 815/875-4027

2nd Place

Veterans Involvement: City of Flora, World War II Memorial – This World War II Memorial was inspired by a group of veterans who felt that there was a need to provide recognition in the community for those veterans who fought in World War II. Roughly 2,300 Clay County residents fought in the war, and a brick was laid for each of these veterans, inscribed with their name and the branch of service they served in. The entire effort was made possible through generous donations and supportive community volunteers. The result is a historically significant memorial that the community can be proud of. The memorial has already proven to be a large draw to the City of Flora and to Clay County.

Contact: Charles E. Briscoe - 618/662-4319

(more)

1st Place

Youth Involvement: Edwards County, West Salem Grade School Warriors Rampage – The West Salem Grade School’s Warriors Rampage newspaper was created in response to deficient language arts test scores in the local high school. With oversight from their advisor, students handle all of the newspaper’s responsibilities from selling advertisements for the paper to researching and laying out stories for each issue. The Warriors Rampage has become a unique and positive link between the students and the members of the West Salem community. However, this successful student-led volunteer project reaches far beyond improving test scores and writing skills – it provides students with a sense of responsibility and pride and an experience that they can take with them wherever they go. The community has shown their strong support for this ongoing project, which has proven to be a win-win situation for all involved.

Contact: Robert W. Brucher - 618/445-2814

Category IV- (Communities with populations between 10,001 and 17,000)

1st Place

Clean Up/Beautification: City of Pontiac, Pontiac Storm Sewer Project – The purpose of the Pontiac Storm Sewer Project was to heighten the public’s awareness of a growing environmental problem – non-point source pollution. For the past seven years, students from the Pontiac Junior and Senior high schools, along with their teachers, parents, and other community volunteers, have taken to the streets to stencil warnings on local storm sewer drains. The purpose of these warnings is to educate the residents of Pontiac about the connection between humans, their actions and the pollution of their local rivers and streams. This project demonstrates the commitment to environmental stewardship through education and action.

Contact: Paul Ritter - 815/844-4633

1st Place – Governor’s Cup Finalist

General: Campton Township, Corron Farm Historic White House – Thanks to a group of dedicated volunteers and continued community support, a piece of Campton Township’s history and natural heritage has been restored. The Corron Farm’s historic “white house” was purchased by the Township under its Open Space Program. The now-restored house stands as a testament to community cooperation and an inspiration for future restoration projects. The long-term goal for the white house is to make it a museum under the Kane County Historical Society so that it can serve to educate visitors about the rich history of the area. This restoration project has allowed for the preservation of some of the natural heritage in an area that is experiencing rapid transformation from farming to residential development.

Contact: Neal Anderson - 630/377-5705

2nd Place

General: Village of Richton Park, Community Cable TV Committee & Richton Park Presents All About Us! – In a world where media far too often highlights negative events, a small group of volunteers decided it was time to shift the focus and start recognizing the everyday positive happenings in their community. The first step of this project was the formation of the Community Cable TV Committee in 2003. Since then, the Committee has worked together to produce a monthly cable television show that promotes and helps educate residents and viewers from outside the Village about the people, places and things in and about Richton Park. The project has successfully created 34 monthly shows, which have generated exposure for the Village, its residents and the business community. The efforts of the committee’s dedicated volunteers have instilled a sense of pride in the community.

Contact: Karen Gromala - 708/481-8950 ext. 109

(more)

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: City of Centralia, Centralia Skate Park – This project was undertaken in an effort to provide Centralia’s youth with an appropriate venue for skateboarding. While skateboarding has often been associated with juvenile crimes like vandalism and fighting, many youth enjoy this serious and creative sport and have not had the appropriate place to show their creativity and energy. Thanks to the support of the city council and the dedication of numerous volunteers, Centralia’s youth now have a skate park, which will not only help keep kids out of trouble by providing them with a place where they can hone their skating skills, but will also give them a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Contact: Garrett Anderson 618/533-7623

1st Place

Senior Citizen Involvement: City of Taylorville, Senior Citizens of Christian County – The Senior Citizens of Christian County has been around for more than 25 years. It was established in response to a large and growing senior citizen population in the county. The goal of this organization is to allow seniors to “age-in-place” and reduce the need for restrictive care. Thanks to the longstanding dedication and effort of its volunteers, the group has continued its success and is now providing more than 200,000 contact service and program units to Christian County seniors each year. More than 850 individuals volunteer with the group each year, which has allowed for the creation of new services and the continuation of existing services that enhance and enrich the lives of seniors in Christian County. This program provides more than just services to the seniors of the community; people of all ages are developing volunteer habits, learning the value of respect for an older generation, and building on a strong sense of community.

Contact: Alice Benton - 217/824-4263

1st Place

Veterans Involvement: City of Pontiac, Livingston County War Museum and Education Center – The Livingston County War Museum and Education Center was born from the need to honor American veterans and provide a “living history” museum to display military keepsakes. The City of Pontiac generously provided the necessary space in the Old City Hall building where the museum now serves as home to the hundreds of donated and loaned military artifacts. This project would not have been possible without the dream of the late Dal Estes, a veteran and Pontiac resident, and the dedication and support of the City, community and all of the project’s volunteers. The museum continues to fulfill the dream of its founder to educate visitors about the service of our veterans, but also serves as a draw for tourists to Pontiac.

Contact: Robert M. Karls - 815/844-3396

2nd Place

Veterans Involvement: City of Country Club Hills, Vietnam Moving Wall Display – 2005 – This project involved bringing a Vietnam Moving Wall memorial to Country Club Hills to raise awareness of military veterans’ issues and to recognize the service these veterans provide. The Veterans Commission initiated the process to bring The Wall display to their town in 2000. More than 400 volunteers participated in various aspects of this project, which came to fruition in August of 2005. The Moving Wall, a half-sized replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., attracted a number of visitors and resulted in an increased awareness of the Veterans Commission and actually generated many new volunteers for the commission. While the memorial wall was on temporary display, a permanent memorial was created that allows individuals to purchase memorial bricks, imprinted to commemorate veterans and others, to be placed on permanent display in the city.

Contact: Ernest Powell - 708/206-1117

(more)

1st Place

Youth Involvement: City of Washington, Veteran's Memorial – The need for this project was determined when a Washington Eagle Scout candidate noticed that his city was lacking a visible memorial to honor veterans. The creation of a veteran's memorial became the focus of his Eagle Scout Project. As a result of the dedication and hard work of this Eagle Scout candidate and more than 100 community volunteers, the City of Washington is now home to a highly-visible veteran's memorial, which includes an AH1 Cobra helicopter from Fort Drum, New York as its centerpiece. The memorial, located in Washington's Lincoln Park, represents nearly three years of hard work and perseverance. The City of Washington can be proud of Eagle Scout Eric Ingram and his dream to bring recognition to American veterans in Washington.

Contact: William E. Brunk - 309/444-2556

2nd Place

Youth Involvement: Village of Barrington, Barrington Chess & Yury Shulman International Chess School – The Barrington Chess Program was established 1998 in response to a need to provide students with alternative activities to traditional athletics. The program has flourished since its inception and has proven to be more than just an extracurricular activity – it fosters volunteerism, leadership and service to the community and teaches students about equality. Through its tournaments and other program activities, students and others involved with the group have reached out to its community, as well as the international community. The chess club generously donates event proceeds to a variety of local and international charities. The dedication of all involved has inspired other schools to form chess clubs of their own. As a result of this group's efforts, Barrington has been successful in attracting a world renowned Grandmaster of chess from New York to establish himself in the community.

Contact: Dr. Kiran Frey - 847/382-5410

Category V (Communities with populations between 17,001 and 22,000)

1st Place – Governor's Cup Finalist

General: Union County, Historic St. Anne's Church – The restoration of the long-vacant St. Anne's Episcopal Church began in 2001 when the derelict property was deeded to the non-profit organization, Promoting Appreciation of Structural Treasures (PAST) of Union County. The project's goal was to restore the church and make it available as a community center that could be used for events like weddings, receptions, community group meetings and other activities. The project has been solely funded and executed through a strong volunteer network with some work professionally hired through community donations and successful grant applications. This project has not only restored the historical church, but has provided the people of Anna with a community center and a sense of pride in Union County's history and architecture. The church is now a focal point for the community and a site for numerous events. As a result of its work on this project, the PAST group has received many inquiries about restoring other historic buildings.

Contact: Linda Hileman - 618/833-8745

2nd Place

General: City of Macomb, Volunteer NOW: Macomb Area Volunteer Center – Volunteer NOW is a project that was developed to improve inter-organization cooperation and communication among the many volunteer service organizations in order to facilitate, improve and promote volunteerism in the Macomb area. The project has proven to be a successful collaborative effort between the City of Macomb and Western Illinois University's Volunteer Services office. As a result of this partnership, both groups are cooperating to better meet the needs of their communities and, in turn, their individual programs have been enhanced. They are meeting their objectives to connect volunteers with community needs and to enhance and build capacity for volunteerism in the community.

Contact: Gerald E. Carlson - 309/833-1318

(more)

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: City of O'Fallon, The O'Fallon Rotary Nature Center – This project was undertaken in response to the anticipated population growth of O'Fallon and the desire to plan appropriately for green space in the community. Prior to the construction of the O'Fallon Rotary Nature Center, the community did not have a natural habitat facility available. Thanks to the commitment of community volunteers and organizations and generous donations, this community dream became a reality in May of 2005. The center is a focal point of the community and will provide a venue for community educational and recreational activities and events for years to come.

Contact: Dave Snyder - 618/624-4353

1st Place

Veterans Involvement: Clark County, Veterans Memorial – The Veterans Memorial located on the Clark County Courthouse Square was completed in 2002. It commemorates Clark County veterans from World War I, World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The current project sought to expand this memorial to honor veterans of the war in Iraq. This expansion project received full support from the Clark County Board and now not only honors the veterans from the past century, but will also recognize present and future generations of Clark County veterans. The Iraq Memorial was appropriately dedicated on Veteran's Day, November 11, 2005.

Contact: Darrell Bays - 217/822-8009

Category VI (Communities with populations between 22,001 and 40,000)

1st Place

Clean Up/Beautification: City of Round Lake Beach, Round Lake Management Commission – In response to learning about a coordinated national effort to encourage the formation of local voluntary lake cleanup partnerships, a group of volunteers banded together to establish the Round Lake Management Commission. The Commission was created as an intergovernmental agreement between three local Villages who share a common watershed. Each year, during National River Clean Up Week, the Commission holds a lake clean up event where dedicated volunteers work together to clean up six miles of beach front parks, shoreline and channels of Round Lake. It plans to continue its efforts to not only keep Round Lake safe and clean, but to educate the public and build awareness of appropriate care and management of Round Lake.

Contact: Jeneen Smith-Underwood - 847/740-6026 ext. 353

1st Place

General: Village of Roselle, AIMS Mentor Program – Adults Involved in Mentoring Students (AIMS) was created as an approach to providing adults, including seniors, with a meaningful way to serve the community. The school community was very open to the idea of establishing a mentoring program for their schools. AIMS mentors provide support for children in single parent families, encouragement for students who are shy, confidence-building activities for those who do not participate in after-school activities and simple social interaction for those children who just need someone to listen to them. The program continues to grow every year and has proven to be a win-win opportunity for the entire community.

Contact: Ken Black - 630/529-9383

2nd Place

General: City of Granite City, Food Program – The Granite City Food Program was established under the existing Community Care Center in response to a growing community need to not only provide canned goods, but also hot meals to those who do not always have a place to prepare their own. The food program has continued to serve increasing numbers of the community's homeless and underprivileged. The Center utilizes more than 2,000 volunteers each year to serve the community. In 2005 alone, the Food Program provided food and meals to nearly 30,000 individuals who otherwise would have gone without. Thanks to the continued hard work and dedication of the volunteers, the Community Care Center continues to be able to help those in need.

Contact: Melba Boyd - 618/876-8770

(more)

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: City of East Peoria, Eagle Landing Fine Art Festival & Sale – When the City of East Peoria first opened its new RiverFront Park in December 2003, Illinois Art League officials saw an opportunity to provide exposure for the new park, while also improving the venue for its annual Eagle Landing Fine Art Festival and Sale, which had been held in a shopping center parking lot in Peoria for the previous 13 years. The event, the first of its kind for East Peoria, was a success thanks to the dedication of 80 volunteers and the generous contributions from the community. The festival not only provided exposure for the new park and various art media, but also included involving children in art through hands-on activities, attracting local and regional artists to the event, and ensuring that a variety of artwork would be available for display and purchase. The 2006 festival was also held at the RiverFront Park and plans are underway for the 2007 festival.

Contact: Jill Peterson - 309/698-5437 ext. 29

1st Place

Veterans Involvement: Village of Glendale Heights, Veterans Memorial Park – Veterans Memorial Park began as a vision with the local VFW membership who desired a location to hold formal memorial ceremonies. This vision, together with the Village's desire to provide an educational experience for community residents and visitors, became a reality in 2005 when the park officially opened on Memorial Day. The finished product is a well-planned space, born of community vision that will provide Glendale Heights and surrounding communities with a place to congregate, to contemplate history, and to honor and remember.

Contact: Cecelia Sullivan - 630/260-6060

1st Place – Governor's Cup Finalist

Youth Involvement: Village of Lisle, Lisle Teens with Character – This project was established out of a strong desire on the part of Lisle teens to form an organized teen service group for its community. Without a formal service group, Lisle teens didn't have a coordinated system through which they could link with volunteer opportunities in the community. After working to formally establish the group, its set the goals to make a difference, to demonstrate that youth are a vital part of a community with a lot to offer, to promote teen leadership roles in the community, and to help each member of the group reach their potential, discover their talents, and build character. The Lisle Teens with Character is the first group of its kind in Lisle and DuPage County. The students are committed to community service and character-building and hope to continue serving as role models for other teens.

Contact: Katie Straub - 630/305-4336

1st Place

Youth Involvement: City of Danville, AMBUCS Challenger Baseball – The AMBUCS Challenger Baseball League is designed for children with developmental and/or physical disabilities. This project was undertaken after the Danville Chapter of AMBUCS had the opportunity to take a baseball team to participate in the C-U Kiwanis Challenger Baseball League in Urbana. The parents and children were so impressed with the program that they wanted to start a league of their own. In the summer of 2004, that dream came true. Since then, the program continues to grow offering more and more of Danville's youth with disabilities the opportunity to experience the excitement of playing baseball. This project wouldn't be possible without the dedicated volunteers, who work with the children to provide whatever assistance they need to actively participate in the league. The program provides a rewarding experience for all involved.

Contact: Lori Lyons - 217/469-7655

(more)

Category VII (Communities with populations between 40,001 and 100,000)

1st Place

General: Hanover Township, Astor Avenue Community Center – After much hard work and dedication on behalf of volunteers and township officials, Hanover Township will soon be home to an on-site community center that will provide a safe, welcoming gathering place that can offer hope for community pride. Nearly four years in the making, the center opened its doors October 7, 2006, and is beginning to provide a diverse community with access to services that would otherwise be inaccessible. The mission of the Youth and Family Services, the organization charged with oversight of the center, is to prevent juvenile delinquency and promote positive development in young people. This mission is accomplished through a number of family services that help contribute to a strong and healthy community environment. This project would not have come to be without the dedication of its more than 125 community volunteers and support from Hanover Township. The community has rallied together to make this center a reality and have continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to its future success.

Contact: Kathy Fox - 630/483-5799

2nd Place

General: Stephenson County, Freeport/Stephenson County Visitors Center – This project represents a successful partnership between a number of city, county, and state organizations and a dedicated group of community members. Whereas Freeport was once a thoroughfare for visitors traveling between Chicago and Galena, the completion of a bypass in 1989 reduced visitor traffic to the area considerably. In response, the quest for establishing a visitors center for Freeport began. The goal of the visitors center is to help return Freeport to a destination where the casual and weekend traveler could spend some time and enjoy the attractions and amenities provided by the city, county and region. Thanks to a group of organized and dedicated community members and groups, the Freeport/Stephenson County Visitors Center project became a reality. The hope is that the center will continue to bring in visitors and allow for the return of tourism for the region.

Contact: Robert Skurla - 815/233-1356

1st Place

Senior Citizen Involvement: McHenry Township, Senior Computer Classes – This successful program was created in response to a McHenry Township survey conducted by the Senior Advisory Council. While other computer classes existed via the community college and library, costs were often prohibitive to the seniors in the community. Thanks to the efforts of the council, six computers were donated for use at the Township Senior Center. More than 300 seniors responded to the media release announcing the availability of the classes, which resulted in a waiting list. The classes have been successful in connecting McHenry Townships' seniors with technology. Without a dedicated group of volunteer instructors, this opportunity would not be possible.

Contact: Donna A. Schaefer - 815/385-5605

1st Place

Veterans Involvement: City of Des Plaines, Support Our Troops Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #2992 – This project developed from a desire to show support to the men and women serving in the armed forces. Volunteers from the VFW, the Knights of Columbus and other community organizations worked together on a number of "Support the Troops" events in the community. The VFW purchased phone cards to be sent to the troops overseas and initiated a coupon-clipping program. Coupons are sent each month to the troops for use at the commissaries. The group then initiated a letter-writing campaign through the local library. This success was followed by the adoption of a unit in Iraq, which quickly turned into a number of programs where donated goods were collected to send to the troops. All-in-all, 300 packages were shipped overseas to provide much-needed items to the troops. Items that were not able to be shipped were donated to local food pantries and taken to local veterans hospitals. As a result of a number of volunteers and their efforts, more than 2,000 pounds of personal care and food items were collected and shipped overseas, in addition to the many letters and coupons that were shared with the troops. In addition to the tangible results of their efforts, all volunteers involved with this project benefit from knowing they have made a difference in the lives of those serving our country overseas.

Contact: Steven Schaefer - 847/452-6991

(more)

Category VIII (Communities with populations over 100,000)

1st Place – Governor’s Cup Winner

General: Champaign County, Center for Women in Transition – This project involves the expansion of a much-needed community shelter for women and children in Champaign County. The Center for Women in Transition recently added a third home to its center, which will allow them to serve more families and expand the educational components of their program. The center provides a valuable and much-needed service to women and their children in the community who are without homes and the necessary support to get ahead in life. Successful program participants are able to work through the program, learn valuable life skills, and obtain full-time employment and permanent housing. Roughly 70 percent of the center’s residents successfully complete the program. Without the dedication of committed volunteers, these successes wouldn’t be possible. Unfortunately, the need for these services remains strong, but, thanks to the center, women are getting the help they need to succeed.

Contact: Vicki Stewart - 217/359-6500

2nd Place

General: City of Chicago, American Red Cross of Greater Chicago Team FireStoppers: Team FireStoppers was started in an effort to reduce the incidence of residential fires, the single most prevalent disaster affecting the seven-county area served by the American Red Cross of Greater Chicago. Four communities on the south side of Chicago were identified as having relatively high numbers of fires in single-family homes and selected to participate in the program. Volunteers with the Team FireStoppers project worked with 400 families to create a fire evacuation plan and to discuss fire prevention and safety tips for the home. Participating community residents also received a number of educational and prevention-related materials through the program. In addition, homes received a free comprehensive furnace inspection from a licensed HVAC contractor. This successful program has served as a national model for other American Red Cross chapters to adopt.

Contact: Martha Paterson - 312/729-6100

1st Place

Parks & Recreation: City of Peoria, Hook A Kid on Golf Program – This program developed from an existing junior golf program through the Peoria Park District. “Hook A Kid on Golf” fit in so nicely with its existing program that the district decided to replace its old program and align with this national program to provide its youth with more opportunities. Part of this process involved partnering with the Peoria School District. As a result of this partnership and the dedication of volunteers, this program provides participants with the tools to play the game of golf, while also giving them tools to become better citizens. Beyond golf, the program incorporates presentations from local police officers, business owners, employees, and others volunteers that bring children in touch with other aspects of the community and help provide them with a foundation on which they can build their future.

Contact: Meridith Deverman - 309/689-3329