



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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CONTACTS:

| | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Abby Ottenhoff | 312/814.3158 |
| Rebecca Rausch | 217/782.7355 |
| Gerardo Cardenas | 312/814.3158 |
| Mica Matsoff | 312/814.8199 (DCEO) |

Gov. Blagojevich announces the winners of the 2007 annual Governor's Home Town awards

City of McLeansboro's Kids' Kingdom Playground/Park wins 2007 Governor's Cup for successful creation of children's park

SPRINGFIELD— Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced the winners of the Governor's Home Town Awards, a recognition given to people across the state for who have worked to improve the communities in which they live. Forty projects were recognized at the 26th annual awards ceremony in Springfield this afternoon. On behalf of the Governor, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Opportunity Returns Central and Southeast Regional Manager Julie Moore, joined by a host of other state and local leaders, recognized the outstanding achievements and presented one winner with the celebrated Governor's Cup award.

"Every year a new class of volunteers stands out as the work that they do every day, helps hundreds of people in their communities. The Home Town Awards are an opportunity for us to say thank you for their hard work which helps improve the quality of life for communities across Illinois," Gov. Blagojevich said.

The forty projects honored today came from a rigorous judging process. Initially, volunteer judges reviewed and ranked applications based on local need, volunteer participation, project continuity and results. From those rankings, the applicants were narrowed down to forty projects. Judges visited those communities and then selected one project from each population category to compete for the coveted Governor's Cup. The Governor's Cup is a traveling silver trophy presented to the community whose efforts were deemed most representative of the spirit of Illinois volunteerism.

The projects were judged within their population size as well as an assigned 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.

"Every year it is important to take time to recognize those that dedicate their time and creativity to making their communities better. Their work not only improves the quality of life for community members, but also makes their region more attractive for business and development. I join the Governor

in applauding these winners and their selfless work to improve their communities," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

The 2007 Governor's Cup winner is the **City of McLeansboro's Kids' Kingdom Playground/Park**. The citizens of McLeansboro came together in June 2006 to accomplish one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks in its recent history. The challenge was to transform a small local park into what is now known as Kids' Kingdom. Mayor Dick Deitz worked closely with the architect to create the perfect playground. A generous donation from The Bobbye and Jerry Sloan (a local sports hero) Hand in Hand Association would fund the project. The planning took approximately six months from beginning to end. Once all the materials were in place, operating with the motto, "Big Kids Working for Little Kids," volunteers numbering in the thousands put the park together in just five short days. The ribbon-cutting ceremony took place on a Sunday evening and children and adults alike declared the project a smashing success.

Each of the award winning communities receives 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 will be distributed separately.

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2007 Governor's Home Town Award Winners

Category I (Communities with populations up to 2,500)

Project Category/Unit of Local Government/Community Organization

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

Village of Princeville, Akron-Townhouse School - In late September 2003, a chance conversation led to the idea that the last remaining one room school house in Princeville should be saved for historical purposes. A committee was soon formed and, with the help of the Historical Association of Princeville as a sponsor, the school house was moved to its new location. The work to refurbish the little school house took 3½ years and was extremely physical. As work moved along on the structure, the committee received aid from four local unions who donated their skills and materials. Without their help, the project would have been nearly impossible to complete. Through auctions, donations, and an ongoing fundraiser, the committee was able to furnish the school house appropriately with desks. The old building is now restored and resting on its new site. School children are now able to take part in educational days where they learn what it was like to be in school back then. The school house is truly a badge of community honor.

Contact: **Kathryn German**
309/385-4602

2nd Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Assumption, GFWC Assumption Woman's Club Railroad Park: The beautification of the Assumption Woman's Club Railroad Park has been ongoing since 1918. With the 100th Anniversary of the Woman's Club celebration approaching, the Club had some work to do. They needed to update the flower beds and redo some landscaping. The Club was approached by local Boy Scouts looking to complete their Service Project. It was a match made in heaven. After 750 hours and the help of other volunteers, the project was looking good. The Club also received support and donations from the entire community. The Assumption Community Pride Association (ACPA) hosted a Christmas event to raise money. In the end, the Railroad Park continues to be a beautiful centerpiece for the town. The Boy Scouts received their service project award in February 2007, and the community has been brought together.

Contact: **Trudy List**
217/226-3526

1st Place – General- Governor's Cup Finalist

City of Ellisville, Ellisville Warning Alert System: Working together as a community from June of 2004 to April of 2007, the City of Ellisville achieved their mission to install a Warning Alert System to protect their citizens from storms. The mission to raise money was headed by the Ellisville Goal Getters, along with help from the Ellisville Firemen, Ellisville Senior Citizens' Club, and the Ellisville MWA Camp. As word spread about the project, the Ellisville community banded together to host successful fundraisers and ice cream socials. In November of 2005, the city applied for a grant to complete their goal of raising \$16,000 toward an updated alert system. After qualifying for the USDA Small Rural Communities Grant in 2006, the city had their siren in place by April of 2007. Thanks to the community pulling together to reach their goal, the City of Ellisville will now be protected.

Contact: **Bonnie Powell**
309/293-4751

1st Place - General

Village of Viola, Viola 2006 Sesquicentennial: Hosting a 150th year celebration for a small town like the bedroom community of Viola is no small task. The project began in 2004 as a mere question by the Viola Chamber of Commerce. Was there a need or interest in a Sesquicentennial Celebration? After seven public meetings, the question had been answered. Yes, the community wanted Viola to be recognized for their accomplishments over the years. Through the efforts of numerous committees, sub-committees, and volunteers, the Village of Viola raised the money needed to hold the Sesquicentennial. Thanks to the efforts of over 700 volunteers and a \$10,000 donation, the Village of Viola will benefit from this celebration for years to come.

Contact: **Harold Morrison**
309/596-2033

1st Place - Parks and Recreation

Village of Equality, Ohio River Scenic Byway Visitors' Center: In the last ten years, the Village of Equality has experienced a depressed economy, rising unemployment and a loss of residents to this area. All these factors combined led to business' failure and a loss of sales and property tax. To fight this downward spiral, the Gallatin County Tourism Committee (GCTC) was formed in 1998, composed almost entirely of senior citizens. Since then the Committee has worked with the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Village of Old Shawneetown to bring life back to their community through tourism. The GCTC's most recent efforts have been towards the promotion of the Ohio Scenic Byway and the erection of a new Visitors' Center. Through collaboration with local and state entities, and after many setbacks and delays, the Village obtained the monies to build a Visitors' Center on the historic "Opry House" site, which was active in the early 1800's and 1900's. The Ohio River Scenic Byway Visitors' Center was opened in October 2006. This site welcomes tourists and provides them with information about attractions in this part of the state, creating benefits to area businesses for years to come.

Contact: **Mark York**
618/276-4642

1st Place - Veterans Involvement

Village of Germantown, Germantown Veterans' Memorial: When the Village of Germantown City Council decided in early 2003 there was need for a permanent monument to honor their veterans, they had no idea the amount of support they would receive. While the Village has always been proud to take their turn in hosting the annual Veterans' Day celebration to honor their World War II and Korean Veterans, they still wanted to do more. After forming a committee to develop the project, a design was soon selected. The Germantown Park Board provided a beautiful location. Only one question remained: how to raise the funds for materials and construction. It became clear that collecting the names of all the veterans and selling paving bricks in their honor was the best way to collect the needed monies. The project involved all of the town's citizens and countless volunteers. In all, over 800 bricks were sold. The Village now has a memorial for their Veterans that will stand for generations.

Contact: **Gerald Kohnen**
618/523-9915

1st Place - Youth Involvement

City of West Salem, Buzzard Bait: Just mention the name "Buzzard Bait" in the town of West Salem, Illinois, and faces light up, smiles broaden, and enthusiasm exudes. The Buzzard Bait program was born from three men's desire to teach outdoor education at West Salem Elementary School in 1976. Thirty years later, the Buzzard Bait program not only teaches children about nature, but also builds character, self-esteem and trust. The volunteers who organize, staff, and prepare for this event are an absolute necessity. Without them, the children would be unable to experience the camp and all it has to offer. Community support is an important part of what makes the program so successful. The tangible results from Buzzard Bait include students' enthusiasm to try new things and self-confidence. Students who attend the camp also show more interest in science and writing.

Contact: **Robert Brutcher**
618/445-2814

Category 2 – Communities with a Population of 2,501 – 5,900

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Marshall, Harlan Hall: The centralized location of Harlan Hall in the City of Marshall made it the perfect building to utilize as a much-needed Community Center. This would become a place where seniors could gather, as well as a venue for business meetings, workshops, wedding receptions, and reunions. Volunteers and assistance from local businesses get all the credit for this huge undertaking, which took place from June 2006 to May 2007. City officials supported the project, as well, by allowing employees to work in bad weather. The rejuvenation of Harlan Hall will have a long term impact on the City of Marshall, as residents now have a place to conduct business and celebrate special occasions. The impact will also be felt by downtown retailers and restaurants now and in the future.

Contact: **Mayor Kenneth R. Smith**
217/826-8087

1st Place - General

City of Brees, Breese Sesquicentennial: The need for a Sesquicentennial celebration in the City of Breese stems from the city councils desire to honor the commitment of the community to preserve history and to reflect on the roadmap that put the City where it is today. Planning was a critical element in the success of this event. The committee and its volunteers sprung into action. A decision was made to allow only city organizations to serve food and drink. These groups would have the opportunity to capitalize on the success of the event and, in turn, draw money into their own businesses. Each organization and their staff worked countless hours over the weekend, making the Sesquicentennial a huge success. It was a community-supported event that resulted in a wonderful weekend for all.

Contact: **Timothy Schleper**
618/526-7151

2nd Place - General

City of Carlinville, Carlinville Christmas Market: In 1990, prominent Carlinville resident Danley Vlasich read an article about Christmas traditions in Germany. The tradition of hosting a Christmas Market was stuck in her mind. This would be the perfect way to boost tourism and economy in Carlinville, along with the town's spirit around the holidays! The Carlinville Christmas Market Foundation was created. The foundation is staffed solely by unpaid volunteers who plan every aspect of the event each year from research to publicity/advertising and set up. With help from local professionals and community support, the Carlinville Christmas Market is celebrating its 18th year! To date the festival draws as many as 10,000 people and creates approximately \$1 million in revenue. The goal of the Carlinville Christmas Market Foundation today is to increase the quality of the event. If only for a few days, people come and enjoy an old fashioned town-square holiday celebration.

Contact: **Lea Hudson**
217/854-3552

1st Place - Parks and Recreation

Village of Coal City, Campbell Memorial Park/Gerald V. Pierard Gazebo: The inspiration to build the Campbell Memorial Park was born from two tragedies: the demolition of the historic Campbell House in 2002, and the death of the beloved Mayor in 2003. The late Mayor Pierard's family donated \$5,000 to begin the creation of the park with the construction of a gazebo. Local concrete businesses, contractors, and unions volunteered their labor and materials and the project was underway. The next step was to plan for the dedication of the park. On August 17, 2006, a dedication and quasquicentennial (125 years) was held. Thanks to support from local residents and volunteers, there was food, music and entertainment. Campbell Memorial Park will always be a reminder of how the future can co-exist with the past for the Village of Coal City.

Contact: **Pamela Noffsinger**
815/634-8608

1st Place - Senior Citizen Involvement

City of Mascoutah, Espenschied Chapel Project: A group of concerned citizens came together to prevent the demolition of the Espenschied Chapel. The Chapel is a significant structure supporting the claim of "Historic Mascoutah". The Mascoutah City Cemetery Chapel Committee, Inc., was formed. So began their plea to save the structure from demolition, and gather the resources to renovate and restore the structure to its original state. As no city funds could be used for the restoration, community support was important and grew as the project progressed. After much hard work and enthusiasm, the volunteers completed the restoration of the Chapel. The City of Mascoutah now has a beautiful historic venue to host many community events for generations to come.

Contact: **La Vern Anderson**
618/566-2780

1st Place - Youth Involvement – Governor's Cup Winner

City of McLeansboro, Kids' Kingdom Playground/Park: The citizens of McLeansboro came together in June 2006 to accomplish one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks in its recent history. The challenge was to

transform a small local park into what is now known as Kids' Kingdom. Mayor Dick Deitz worked closely with the architect to create the perfect playground. A generous donation from The Bobbye and Jerry Sloan (a local sports hero) Hand in Hand Association would fund the project. The planning took approximately six months from beginning to end. Once all the materials were in place, operating with the motto, "Big Kids Working for Little Kids," volunteers numbering in the thousands put the park together in just five short days. The ribbon-cutting ceremony took place on a Sunday evening and children and adults alike declared the project a smashing success.

Contact: **Mayor Dick Deitz**
618/643-2723

Category 3 – Communities with a Population of 5,901 – 10,000

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Greenville, City-Wide Beautification: The Greenville Women's Club (GWC) was officially formed in 1974. The Club became an extension of the city in making decisions concerning the renovation and restoration of downtown buildings. After accomplishing that task by the early 90's, the GWC turned its efforts toward city-wide beautification. A Beautification Committee was formed in 2006. For the first time there was a budget. From the business community standpoint, over \$9,000,000 has been spent on city-wide beautification since 1992. Numerous clubs, businesses, and volunteers helped make the 5-year city-wide beautification plan a reality. The outstanding support and dedication enabled the city to paint and restore businesses, plant trees and flowers, and even decorate the town for the holidays. It was truly a community-wide effort. The beautification of Greenville has been described as a Norman Rockwell painting. This small town has become an inspiration to other small towns working to achieve the same goals.

Contact: **Lucille Ireland**
618/664-0903

1st Place – General

Village of Itasca, Itasca Police Department Citizen Volunteer Program: While the Village of Itasca officially has a population slightly over 8,000, this number grows to more than 50,000 during the work week due to the numerous local and manufacturing businesses located there. Policing the community sometimes became a challenge due to budget, staff shortages, and retirements in the department. The traditional police department struggled, which sparked the beginning of a new approach to policing the Village through the formation of the Itasca Police Department Citizen Volunteer Program. Goals included the creation of a Citizens Police Academy (CPA) and to establish a more positive link between the local police and the community. From the newly-trained citizens, came several volunteer programs designed to serve the public. In 2007, the program had 52 volunteer members and a high approval rating from the community. The citizens of Itasca are now an integral part of crime prevention, thanks to some "outside the box" thinking and dedication to their community.

Contact: **Chief Scott Heher**
630/773-1004

1st Place - Veterans Involvement

Village of Island Lake, Island Lake Veterans' Park Beach House Patio: A local Boy Scout, the Village of Island Lake, American Legion, V.F.W., and various civic organizations came together to create a park to memorialize the veterans who fought for our freedom. This project began in the early 2000's. In 2006, a local Boy Scout earned his Eagle Scout ranking by planning and overseeing the building of a patio to complete the park's Beach House. Many volunteers donated their time and effort. The project is an ongoing success story. This was meant to be a community project from the beginning. The Village of Island Lake now enjoys their park and all it has to offer.

Contact: **Donald Verciglio**
847/487-0334

1st Place - Youth Involvement – Governor's Cup Finalist **City of Hoopeston, Hoopeston Youth Town Hall Project**

In 2005, a documentary aired entitled “Country Boys.” The story of two high school boys struggling for identity and opportunity in a small, poverty-stricken town in Kentucky directly paralleled the environment in Hoopeston. The documentary was viewed as a tool to teach at-risk youth, and a partnership was formed between WILL (who aired the documentary), the City of Hoopeston, and the Hoopeston School District. The goal of the Youth Town Hall Project was to identify youth struggles and give teens a chance to voice their concerns. Adult leaders met regularly for one year to identify solutions. Hoopeston youth were directly involved in planning and leading the initiative, giving them a sense of belonging to the community. Surveys conducted by 13 youth brought light to issues such as unemployment, drugs, and alcohol. A one-on-one mentoring program helps keep young people in school, improve their grades, and decrease the use of drugs and alcohol. The Town Hall initiative has had a long term impact on the community. The youth of Hoopeston have a voice and work to better their community and themselves for the first time.

Contact: **Shannon Ruh**
217/283-7873

2nd Place - Youth Involvement

City of Wauconda, Wauconda Fitness Initiative: The Wauconda Fitness Initiative began as a pilot in 2005 by The Youth Committee of the United Partnership due to the growing problem of childhood obesity. The goal was to increase knowledge about good nutrition and physical activity among 5th grade students. Health problems associated with poor fitness and obesity had become a growing trend in Lake County. A plan was developed and presented to the school board by team leaders. Final approval was gained and the program began as promised. During the 2007-08 school year, the program will be presented to 900 students. The knowledge these children receive will improve and impact their quality of life today and for years to come.

Contact: **Nancy Burton or Julie Mayer**
847/526-3610

Category 4 – Communities with a Population of 10,001 – 17,000

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

Village of Westchester, Westchester Community Image Council, Ltd.: After decades of poor planning, the Village of Westchester formed the Westchester Strategic Economic Development Plan. The plan was drafted to create economic development opportunities for the Village. Business support and growth, local tax base, and an overall improvement in the quality-of-life in Westchester were all part of their goal. Creating a community that would attract a younger generation was important as well. The Westchester Community Image Council was charged with leading the project. The Council members are volunteers from business owners, local institutions, and residents. All of which are committed to improving Westchester. The Council has completed many successful clean-up and beautification projects in 2006-2007. Community pride has been re-instilled in Westchester.

Contact: **James Lange**
708/404-5923

2nd Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Pontiac, Storm Sewer Stenciling/E-Waste Program: In the City of Pontiac, like many other cities in Illinois, there was a problem with non-point source pollution. These are contaminants and pollutants to water that cannot be attributed to one particular source. The Pontiac Storm Sewer Stenciling Project attempts to reduce or eliminate pollution by stenciling warnings on storm sewer drains. The hope is to promote environmental stewardship as each community sees visible improvements from the “Do Not Dump” warnings. High school students, teachers, and local community members were the primary volunteers for the stenciling project over the last seven years. The town is free of all trash, potential electronic waste (through the E-Waste Program) and the sewers are marked as a daily reminder of the hazards of pollution.

Contact: **Paul Ritter**
815/844-4633

1st Place - General – Governor’s Cup Finalist

Village of Richton Park, Neighbor to Neighbor Giving Thanks Luncheon – Diversity Workshop: In the

1980's, the Village of Richton Park felt they needed a way to monitor and prevent housing discriminations based on race, creed, age, and disabilities. The Human Relations Commission (HRC) was called upon to help monitor the Village's Fair Housing Ordinance. The HRC researches complaints alleging housing violations and all duties pertaining to the ordinance. They create and publish a neighborhood newsletter that reaches all households and businesses within the Village. HRC even has a motto, "Proud Past, Bright Future." There are eleven members of the HRC who, along with volunteers from the community, work tirelessly to maintain unity, togetherness, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. The HRC has been proactive in creating committees and initiating several annual community events to educate and raise awareness. The Neighbor to Neighbor luncheon is the biggest event. HRC has put forth a great effort in making Richton Park a premier community and a wonderful place to call home.

Contact: **Vera Brooks**
708/481-8950

1st Place - Parks and Recreation

Cuba Township, Pepper Family Treehouse: The Pepper Family Treehouse was designed as a community-based project with the goal of building the first totally-accessible treehouse in Illinois. The treehouse was designed to accommodate those with special needs; those individuals who would never experience nature from a treehouse setting. The Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association partnered with the Barrington Park District and found the perfect location. After approval of a design from Forever Young Treehouse and a permit from the Village, the project began. The fundraising campaign was matched dollar-for-dollar by the Pepper Construction Company up to \$200,000. With its completion in September 2006, the treehouse did not debut until the Citizens' Park grand opening in Spring 2007. The Pepper Family Treehouse and this community will be a benchmark for future projects relying on volunteers.

Contact: **Patrick McCord**
847/304-5295

Category 5 – Communities with a Population of 17,001 – 19,000

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

Village of Cary, Cary Pride Day: Giving back to the community was important to the Village of Cary. There was no better way to do that than to have a day dedicated to community pride! Cary Pride Day was born in 2004. Since its inception, this annual spring event has given area youth and other members of the Village the chance to participate in community service projects. Projects range from picking up litter, painting playground equipment and landscaping. The 2007 event involved over twenty different projects! The community is now shining. The Cary Pride Day Awards Ceremony is necessary to recognize outstanding residents who have made significant contributions. With support from local schools, the park district, and the McHenry Conservation District, the Village of Cary is committed to making this event grow and serve the community well into the future.

Contact: **Ashley Kleckner and Tim Boivin**
847/639-0003 x133

1st Place - General – Governor's Cup Finalist

Union County, Union County Museum: Establishing a museum in a city or town is no small task, but that is exactly what the Historical Society of Union County did. The goal was to obtain or construct a building which would be able to house a collection of Native American artifacts, pottery, and historical documents donated to them by the Cobden Museum. A historically-significant structure by the name of The DuBois Building was selected as the site of the new museum. The Society worked several years to bring the building up to code. The final push came in 2005, with volunteers working diligently to finish the restoration, catalog, and pack the artifacts. A \$5,000 matching grant was used to complete the project. The Union County Museum officially opened in June, 2006. The preservation of a historic building and a place to view valuable artifacts is priceless to the community.

Contact: **Patrick Brumleve**
618/893-2067

1st Place - Parks and Recreation

City of Palos Hills, Turkey Shoot-Out: The Palos Hills Community Resource & Recreation Department offers a wide variety of activities for the community. Wouldn't it be nice to have an event or activity that all ages could participate in, some thought? Yes, it would! That is how the Palos Hills Turkey Shoot-Out came to be. The Friendship Festival is held in the summer, so it was decided that the Shoot-Out would take place in the fall. Participants, both young and old, gather on this day to test their skills on the basketball court. Thanks to the generosity of local businesses and city government, the event is free. Volunteers from the community are the backbone to running the event smoothly, especially when there are 100 participants. The results are a free, fun-filled activity for the entire community. The Village looks forward to hosting this event annually with such outstanding support from the community.

Contact: **Edward Jung**
708/430-4500

1st Place - Senior Citizen Involvement

City of Palos Hills, Palos Hills Senior 39'ers: Palos Hills established the Palos Hills Senior 39'ers as a way to combat their senior citizens' vulnerability in the community. Seniors make up a significant portion of the population and many are without telephones for use in emergency situations. The Senior 39'ers collect previously- owned operating cell phones and accessories and then donate and distribute them among seniors in need. It is a mutual and beneficial partnership with the local phone store, Cell Air Communications. This 9-1-1 cell phone program is innovative and operates strictly by volunteers and is advertised in a quarterly newspaper. Volunteers exhibit the true spirit of giving through training for the seniors. They teach the seniors how to operate the cellular phone and go through mock call situations to ensure their knowledge. The City of Palos Hills has provided an answer for those seniors without phones. This free-of-charge service is truly a life-saving tool.

Contact: **Teri Szablewski**
708/430-4500

1st Place - Veterans Involvement

City of Palos Hills, Veterans' Day in the City of Palos Hills: The veteran's motto, "We sacrificed everything in the hope of making a better world," provided the inspirational words Palos Hills used to designate a Veterans' Day Ceremony to honor their local veterans. Volunteers are instrumental in planning the programs and proper protocol for each ceremony. One suggestion was for volunteers to organize a "Commemorative Brick and Tree Program." A family could commemorate a loved one with a \$50 donation towards a brick. Certificates are given to each family, as well as an invitation to the next ceremony. The town was excited! The city council has been supportive by donating flags and yellow ribbons for each ceremony. The commemorative tree planted by a local State Senator and State Representative stands for strength, protection, and the will to survive even in the harshest elements, just like our military. Through support from local bands and the Stagg High School chorus, the event is filled with fun music and entertainment! Over 2,000 people attend Veterans' Day in the City of Palos Hills every year. The sense of patriotic pride in this community is impossible to miss.

Contact: **Mary Jo Vincent**
708/430-4500

1st Place - Youth Involvement

City of Palos Hills, Joel M. Tomas Memorial Scholarship: A scholarship program to attend college, a university, or a trade school, offered to individuals regardless of age or grade point average is hard to come by, but not if you live in the City of Palos Hills. The need for such a scholarship was obvious as companies downsized or moved out of state. The citizens of the community needed a place to go for financial assistance. Joel M. Tomas was a life-long teacher and supporter of education in the community. It was in his honor that the scholarship program came to be named the Joel M. Tomas Memorial Scholarship. Awarded each January to one or more residents, eight scholarships totaling over \$10,000 have been awarded to date. Volunteers are the difference between success and failure in all programs and events held to raise money. Thank you is not enough to show the City's gratitude for all of their efforts.

Contact: **Mary Jo Vincent**
708/430-4500

Category 6 – Communities with a Population of 19,001 – 26,000

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Geneva, Geneva Beautification Committee: In the mid-nineties, historic downtown Geneva was threatened by the rapid growth of the Fox Valley area and related competition from retailers. These factors, combined with the loss of a parking lot, concerned the community greatly. A beautification committee was formed to combat the problem. A plan was developed to create landscaped planting areas. The committee soon grew to over 150 volunteers who maintained the forty-six refurbished areas. Thankfully, materials for planting in all seasons were donated by local businesses. Additional fundraising and a \$5,000 matching grant from the City helped complete and maintain this worthwhile project. The historic City of Geneva is a premier destination place and, thanks to a dedicated committee of volunteers, it shows.

Contact: **Alderman Dorothy Flanagan**
630/232-7494

2nd Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Jacksonville, Jacksonville Main Street: The Jacksonville Main Street program started as a way to tackle the many problems facing its downtown area. The loss of business, demolition of buildings, and tree disease had destroyed much of the downtown streetscape. The area was barren and devoid of any visual appeal. Murals were seen as the best solution to restore some appeal to the empty walls. The design committee consulted the Letterheads, an international group of sign painters. Their “Wall Dog” type of art was exactly what was desired. The group would create the murals in exchange for artist supplies and accommodations. After 18 months of planning, the “Wall Dog” extravaganza took place in June 2006. Nine murals depicting Jacksonville’s colorful history and a gold leaf door for the library transformed downtown from drab to fab! The project was a success, thanks to the efforts of over 100 volunteers, donated materials, and support from area businesses. The project has inspired a renewed interest in developing downtown Jacksonville and created a beautiful walking tour for anyone who visits the city.

Contact: **Judy Tighe**
217/245-6884

1st Place - Senior Citizen Involvement – Governor’s Cup Finalist

Village of Westmont, Westmont Convalescent Center: It is no secret that the residents of the Westmont Convalescent Center (WCC) are an active group! So when the Resident Council Board voted to take on Special Olympics as a project, it was no surprise. Hosting bake sales and selling arts and crafts helped raised money for the event, as well as raising community awareness of those with disabilities. WCC residents collected money on their own to help support the cause, they even competed against each other for fun! When the presentation of money raised was made to the Special Olympian during the Torch Run, the WCC residents had raised over \$600. The Special Olympics torch is called the “Flame of Hope.” This truly represents what the seniors at the Westmont Convalescent Center wanted to accomplish.

Contact: **Pat Hiscox**
630/960-2026

Category 7 – Communities with a Population of 26,001 – 40,000

1st Place - General – Governor’s Cup Finalist

Village of Glendale Heights, Family Health and Safety Fair: The Family Health and Safety Fair was created to fill a gap in the growing community of Glendale Heights. Information and awareness about community-wide services was lacking among the population. The Parks and Recreation Department has been the host facility since 1999, encouraging their “Stride for Life” Program. This program encourages children to exercise. All areas of the community support the fair by providing programs and clinics during the annual event, from the local police department, to school districts, and even local hospitals. This ever growing community has been brought together through a common need, communication. Now celebrating its 10th year of commitment to the community, the program’s legacy has changed the lives of thousands and continues to improve the quality of life for local residents.

Contact: **Cecelia Sullivan**
630/260-606

2nd Place - General

City of Danville, Reader's Route: In 1984, the City of Danville was becoming increasingly aware of a growing literacy problem in the community. An alarming number of students did not complete eighth grade or receive high school diplomas, leading to under-education in the adult population. The Reader's Route was created as a partnership between the Adult Basic Education Literacy Program and the Danville Public Library to help area residents help themselves. Volunteers work diligently to ensure participants meet their individual needs and goals. Volunteers who tutor one-on-one are key to helping these adults transform their lives. To date, Reader's Route has served thousands of adults by teaching them how to read and write; many, in fact, go on to receive their GED. Fundraisers and donations from area businesses keep this program alive. Local radio stations and newspapers generously provide free advertising, which lists tutoring and training dates. Erasing illiteracy altogether is the goal of Reader's Route. With the ability to read comes the ability to participate in life.

Contact: **Scott Heatherton**
217/443-8785

1st Place - Parks and Recreation

City of Urbana, Victory Park Re-development: Victory Park is one of Urbana's older neighborhood parks. It was named for Victory Gardens in WWI and WWII. Prior to the re-development project, the park had not undergone any major upgrades to equipment or amenities since 1980. In 2005, the park district was approached with a request for updates to the park. Monthly meetings began and the Victory Park Master Plan was developed, which completely re-designed the park. The Park District staff received an OSLAD Grant to fund the majority of the project, with the remaining amount coming from a Community Development Block Grant. Residents of the neighborhood and the community were directly involved, giving the project an extra boost of energy! Volunteers worked countless hours to plan and execute the re-development, including building a playground in one day! The park, which will be finished in 2008, has already begun to inspire homeowners and businesses in the historic area to make improvements. There is a genuine renewed sense of pride in the neighborhood.

Contact: **Ellen Kirsanoff**
217/367-1536

1st Place - Youth Involvement

Village of Mundelein, Mundelein AfterSchool Coalition: After school programs are a beneficial part of communities across the country. Studies show that students participating in after-school programs excel at math and reading, as well as there being increased classroom participation and reduced school absence. With its creation in 2004, the Mundelein AfterSchool Coalition promised to promote healthy after school alternatives, encourage youth to learn and thrive, and to prevent crime with its programs. Surveys provided the coalition with answers as to what students would like to do after school. After two years of successful events, the 2006-2007 class of Mundelein High School added members to the Coalition from area middle schools. Momentum picked up and teamwork was pursued by all of the students. The results of the program are highly-visible projects, classroom incentives, character-building and a sense of accomplishment among students.

Contact: **Chief Raymond Rose**
847/968-4600

2nd Place - Youth Involvement

City of Highland Park, The Firehouse Youth Center Hot Dog Cart: The Highland Park Firehouse Youth Center opened in 1978. This flagship center is available to students after school, during the summer and school holidays. The Center offers many programs and activities, some with a nominal fee. When it was learned that some students could not afford the fees to participate, something had to be done to allow these students the same opportunities. The Firehouse Youth Center Hot Dog Cart was created to raise money for a scholarship fund. The cart was set up at the annual summer street sale. Students volunteering from the center experienced the value of helping others. The project also became a tool for teaching business and communication skills. Enthusiastic volunteers and annual support from a local grocery store make this event possible. The community supports the project by purchasing hot dogs and donating to the Youth Center. The cart raises over \$1,000 each year. Youth who receive the scholarships have the opportunity to grow and learn through positive professional interactions.

Contact: **Gina Haske**
847/433-3090

Category 8 – Communities with a Population over 75,000

1st Place - Clean Up/Beautification

City of Rockford, Rockford in Bloom: The “City of Gardens” was created in 1999 to inspire a community recovering from an all-time high in unemployment. The garden would be a reminder of just how important beautification in a community can be. Rockford loves a challenge, so when the opportunity arose to participate in the America in Bloom national competition in 2005, the City “rose” to the occasion. Through the hard work and efforts of hundreds of volunteers participating in the city-wide beautification, Rockford in Bloom earned a first place award that year. They knew they had started something great. In 2006, the City entered the international competition and earned special recognition as one of the top five cities in their category. Through the Communities in Bloom efforts, Rockford has promoted neighborhood pride through beautification. Rockford is fast becoming a “City of Gardens” and it is proud.

Contact: **Ruth Miller**
815/987-1689

2nd Place - Clean Up/Beautification

Cities of Champaign and Urbana, Boneyard Creek Community Day: The Boneyard Creek is a tributary in Champaign-Urbana. Much of the drain-off from the two cities is received by this waterway. Boneyard Creek has undergone major changes over time. Changes have occurred due to increased population, construction of roadways, and pollution. Since 1947, efforts have been made to rid the creek of pollution with some success, but more needed to be done. In April 2006, the first Boneyard Creek Community Day was launched. Three hundred volunteers from the community and students from the University of Illinois came together to restore Boneyard Creek. They removed garbage and invasive, non-native plants, and marked storm sewer inlets with medallions reading, “Dump No Waste.” The project was completed within one day and left the volunteers excited to return for next year’s event. This annual event is now held on Earth Day each year; perfect for a beautification project like this.

Contact: **Brad Bennet and Barb Stiehl**
217/384-2316

1st Place - General – Governor’s Cup Finalist

Champaign County, Illinois Radio Readers: In 1978, the Champaign Women’s League started a free program called the Illinois Radio Readers. The program was created to serve primarily the vision impaired and those with dyslexia. The program began with a grant from the Illinois State Library, along with donated broadcast space from the University of Illinois. There was an estimated 2,250 people who qualified for the program. Currently, the Illinois Radio Readers serves over 375 people, which requires the help of many dedicated volunteers. Volunteers read newspapers from all over the region live each day. There is no budget for advertising therefore volunteers act as the PR assistants and fundraisers. To date, there is only one paid employee for the program. Donations from individuals, clubs, and organizations help keep the program alive. The Illinois Radio Readers are doing all they can to make the disabled feel a little less different from everyone else.

Contact: **Vicki Ford**
217/359-6500

2nd Place - General

Village of Schaumburg, Schaumburg’s 50th Anniversary: The Village of Schaumburg celebrated the 50th Anniversary of its incorporation in 2006. In developing a year-long celebration, the committee, comprised completely of volunteers, had a goal to educate, engage, and energize the public about the community’s history, as well as its many programs and services. The event would be a celebration of community and civic pride! A 1950’s theme was selected and an extensive list of activities was developed. The village board provided the budget and local newspapers donated advertising space. Volunteers created a calendar to highlight the events to be held during the year-long celebration. Their dedication and knowledge provided the community with many successful activities throughout the year. Support from community organizations and businesses also contributed

to the overall success. In all, 275,000 people took part in the 50th Anniversary celebration. The benefits of this one-time event will be remembered for years to come.

**Contact: Jennifer Malta
847/923-4708**