



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 29, 2018

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2018 ServeNebraska Step Forward Award Winners & Finalists Announced

The ServeNebraska Step Forward Awards recognize these outstanding volunteers for their time and service.

Every day, volunteers provide essential support in their communities. The ServeNebraska Step Forward Awards recognize these outstanding people and groups for their time and service. Award winners and finalists are selected by the governor in tribute to the significant contributions made within the state through volunteerism.

This year's Step Forward Awards was held on October 26th at Quarry Oaks Golf Club in Ashland, NE. The awards have 9 categories celebrating our great volunteers throughout the State of Nebraska. Categories include: Adult Volunteer, Corporate Community Volunteer, Disaster Volunteer, Lifetime Achievement, National Service, Senior Volunteer, Veteran Volunteer, Volunteer Group and Youth Volunteer.

Adult Volunteer - WINNER: Loren Eichelberger

Loren has been a Fillmore County CASA volunteer for almost seven years and travels a rural area over 3,000 miles to ensure that CASA families get their needs met. He finds resources whether needs are for home renovation; transportation, entrance fee and a glove to play baseball, or nice clothes for school. Loren has advocated for eight children and three families this past year. He still finds time to be a Teammate mentor, volunteer at this church and Royal Kids Camp.

Adult Volunteer - Finalist: Andrew Boellstorff

Andrew has volunteered for Defy Nebraska since 2016 serving on its Advisory Group in Lincoln. In addition, he volunteers for business coach day hours and the business competition/graduation days. He listens, provides encouragement, and provides sound advice related to employment and the incarcerated business ideation. Andrew is adaptable, a recruiter, and often brings a calming presence to new volunteers entering prison for the first time.

Adult Volunteer - Finalist: Nicole Mitchell

For over ten years, Nichole has been actively engaged in changing lives in her community especially with youth. Annually she goes on a missionary trip abroad with her church to learn how others live. These first-hand experiences help her broaden and enhance the global perspective of the youth she encounters while serving as a volunteer head basketball coach to 6th grade girls. She also uses her experiences and skills serving on the Human Relations Board in Omaha.

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### **Youth Volunteer - WINNER: Jorja Boller**

Ten-year-old Jorja for over three years has been volunteering at Good Samaritan Society Nursing Home and/or Assisted Living in Beatrice averaging 80-120 hours each year. She volunteers at least two hours every Wednesday but comes more frequently during the summer. She created her own fundraiser, "Gifts for Grands" to raise funds to purchase every resident and others at Good Samaritan Christmas gifts. Jorja helps with bingo, baking, crafts and reading with the residents and mentors her six-year-old sister, who visits with the residents.

### **Youth Volunteer - Finalist: Emily Obert**

Emily, a Wahoo high school student with the heart of a servant leader, keeps the need of her community and world in her focus something she has been doing since 7th grade. During middle school she packed weekend meals in backpacks for low-income students and organized health kits for Lutheran World Relief. Her high school volunteer

activities included Junior Mates, Cornhusker State Games, United Nations, and organizing a giving tree for a needy local family.

**Youth Volunteer - Finalist: Chandler Schelkopf**

Chandler, an Eagle Scout from Geneva, has developed several community projects. Among them are Little Free Pantry, a free-standing cupboard that houses food and hygiene item to help needy individuals, the Kindness Rock Campaign spreads love through inspirational messages on rocks that are anonymously delivered to those needing up lifting; and Night of Books provides youth in Filmore County a free book to call their own.

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Volunteer Group - WINNER: Norfolk Panther JOOI (pronounced joy) Clubs

The JOOI Clubs are comprised of students from the Norfolk middle, junior and senior high schools, who are diverse in age, social economic status and ethnicity. For nearly 17 years students have experienced varied volunteer opportunities ranging from “Youth Saluting Veterans”, “Teens in the Driver Seat”, “Dinners to Go”, retrieving coins out of a wishing well for childhood cancer, to teaching elementary children “Being Different Makes You Special”. The JOOI (Joy) Clubs, described by an assistant principal at Norfolk Jr. High as the “character education program”. Clubs are comprised of students from the Norfolk middle, junior and senior high schools, who are diverse in age, social economic status and ethnicity. The students usually serve between 3-4,000 cumulative service hours each year. Members pay dues and raise the funds necessary to do a project.

Volunteer Group - Finalist: Bellevue Together

An all-volunteer nonprofit that is laser focused on helping make the good life better for Bellevue Public School students and families who have limited financial resources. A special project of the group is its Back-To-School event. This year 54 families and 250 students were treated to lunch, fun games and prizes. They also received new back packs, new school supplies, five new outfits including shoes and underwear, haircuts and manicures to ease the back-to-school stress.

Volunteer Group - Finalist: Project Homeless Connect Lincoln

For ten years over 200 volunteers annually put on Project Homeless Connect, a one day, one stop event for the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness to get their essentials met. Between 350-450 guests are well-feed and assigned a volunteer to help them get assistance with medical and dental care, housing and social service needs, haircuts, veteran’s services, counseling and more. Mobility issues, language or literacy challenges are addressed as well.

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**Corporate Community Volunteer - WINNER: Black Hills Energy Ambassadors**

Over the past year Black Hills Energy’s Ambassadors have volunteered nearly 2,500 hours in over 40 communities to improve the lives of those in their communities with their own energy. They served with local fire departments, worked with 100 service organizations, partnered with regional food banks to distribute food to pantries, started backpack programs in schools with underserved populations, served Meals on Wheels, and raised over \$11,000 for disabled veterans in Western Nebraska.

**Corporate Community Volunteer - Finalist: Omaha Public Power District (OPPD)**

Providing hope and mentoring is what 77 mentors from OPPD do for Partnership 4Kids, a unique college bound program serving over 6000 youth from Pre-K through college growing up in poverty. This hope comes in the form of securing enough books for each elementary program child to take a book home, warm winter coats, career tours of

their facilities and paid summer employment and internships. OPPD is there and present for these youth.

**Corporate Community Volunteer - Finalist: Wolf Auto Ogallala**

Wolf Auto Ogallala is a true community partner. They raised funds for Ogallala High School, Relay for Life, Back Pack program, CASA, SCIP, Royal Camp, Rotary, and over 50K in less than a month for five families that lost everything in the Lake Mac fire. They volunteer at Car Seat Check-Ups and concerts. Events they sponsor are diaper, school supply, clothing, and furniture drives, car washes, garage sales, and silent auctions with the proceeds benefiting the Ogallala community.

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National Service Volunteer - WINNER: Breadbasket RSVP Volunteers

Charlotte Kriz and her RSVP team, Marcia DeHaven, Wendy Fairchild, Helen Kent and Betty Witte, are addressing food insecurity at the Breadbasket in Chadron, Nebraska. They provide a weekly distribution of bulk food donated by the local Safeway. Through teamwork, commitment, and service with compassion, they ensure that food makes it way to the needy; and is delivered with respect providing an avenue for the recipients with other needs to share. Most of their clients are low income, but some have fallen on hard times and have medical or other expenses that prevent them from getting the nutritious food they need.

National Service Volunteer - Finalist: Nic Nealy and Jamison Willis

AmeriCorps members, Nic and Jamison, working as a team with the Nebraska Conservation Education Fund served six communities in Northeast Nebraska to engage citizens in environmental stewardship. They used a holistic approach that was creative, innovative, and inclusive. It included holding monthly educational programs, establishing volunteer teams in each community, and initiating partnerships with more than 40 organizations, focused on more than conservation.

National Service Volunteer - Finalist: Ray Rose

Ray is an AmeriCorps RISE (Rural Improvement for School and Employment) Specialist. He revamped Mentoring Works formerly Big Brother Big Sister application process in Hastings, collaborated with D-2 Center, U-Turn, and Metro Area Youth Services (MAYS) to identify and mentor at-risk youth. Ray facilitated RISE Groups three times a week at Blackburn and Omaha South High Schools. His Evidence Based approach has been incorporated into the RISE curriculum.

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**Veteran Volunteer - WINNER: Dell Moninger**

Dell served 13 years in the Army Reserves, including one year in Iraq. While he was in Iraq he was NCO in charge of refueling station for six months before going out on the road delivering supplies. He received the Bronze Star for his service in Iraq. When VFW Post 3576 was in jeopardy of closing due to lack of member participation, Dell became commander. Membership since has exceeded 100% of the goal. He has implemented new and exciting ideas such as a monthly newsletter that goes to all VFW members and is funded by ads from local businesses.

**Veteran Volunteer - Finalist: Arthur Jones**

Arthur is a 90-year-old retired marine who served in the Korean War and Vietnam. He has served on a military honor guard for 28 years participating in over 170 funerals, volunteers at the Veterans Administration and St. Mark's Lutheran Church helping serve funeral meals. Arthur is a member of the Elks and VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) sharing his time and talents with these organizations on a regular basis.

**Veteran Volunteer - Finalist: Heidi McKenna**

Heidi, a 21-year Air Force veteran, for the past three years has been a volunteer at HETRA. During this time, she has put in over 1000 hours in helping at the barn multiple times per week. She helps individuals with disabilities ride horses as part of their therapy and with the care and grooming of the therapy horses. Heidi, also, serves on the Volunteer Committee providing feedback and helpful insight to the volunteer coordinator.

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Disaster Volunteer: MyPI Nebraska Instructors

Soni Cochran, Joy Mac, Wilma Gerena, Tom Guilford, Leo Lark and Bruce Marxsen (posthumously) are being recognized for their work with MyPI Nebraska, a program of the Nebraska Extension in Lincoln. These instructors created and implemented an educational experience to prepare teens for emergency preparedness. Nine teens graduated from the program in May 2018. Each teen has worked with seven families to prepare emergency communication plans and disaster kits.

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**Senior Volunteer - WINNER: Janyce Warneke**

Janyce is 79 years young. She came out of retirement and volunteered to teach third grade at the Zion Luther School in Plainview, so one teacher would not have to be responsible for four grades; and has agreed to continue to do so for the 2018-2019 school year. This was not the first time she answered her church's call to serve as she filled in as the school's volunteer principal for the 2000-2001 school year. Janyce is patient with her students, listens to them, and is quick to give a hug when they need a boost. Janyce is the founder of the Plainview Teammates Chapter and mentors a student. Other volunteer activities include the Plainview School Foundation and the Plainview Klown Doll Museum.

**Senior Volunteer - Finalist: Sally Reinert**

Sally, a retired high school instructor; is dedicated to eliminating litter. Her philosophy of educating and tasking youth in communities to lead the charge in eliminating waste-including changing behaviors has created a legacy of informed decision makers with an understanding of the related consequences. Other community involvement includes Leadership Dakota County, South Sioux City Chamber of Commerce, and Keep Northeast Nebraska Beautiful.

**Senior Volunteer - Finalist: Kay Schweitzer**

Kay has been volunteering for Habitat for Humanity of Lincoln since 1998. She has helped with multiple Women's Build. Kay shows up at the Habitat office every Monday bringing with her, her "you can do anything you put mind to" attitude, which has enabled her to overcome technology challenges the office setting has presented. She is helping Habitat bring safe and affordable housing to low income families and helping families realize their dream of home ownership.

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Lifetime Achievement - WINNER: Tom Scott

Tom has been building and changing his community hour by hour having served 10,000+ hours during the past 22 years for Habitat for Humanity of Lincoln. He is generous, gracious and humble and does not draw attention to his accomplishments. He has become the "go to" man on construction related matters. Habitat builds three days a week regardless of the weather. Tom is always the first on site.



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Lifetime Achievement - Finalist: Kathy Murphy Buschkoetter

Kathy, a volunteer in her community for 25+ years, developed an annual health fair that has occurred for the past 21 years and a monthly Lunch and Learn course that benefits the entire community covering topics from sex trafficking to how to use a patient portal. She ensured they were accessible to all regardless of economic status. As a medical provider she made sure her patients got needed prescriptions and transportation to nearby medical facilities often paying out of her own pocket.

Lifetime Achievement - Finalist: Sheryl Kastanek

Sheryl has spent her life working tirelessly for the betterment of Wilber and its occupants. She has coached the youth Czech Bessada Dancers for 20 years. Currently, she is President of the Chamber of Commerce and directly involved in the Annual Czech Days celebration. As President on the local NRD revitalization committee she has worked diligently to keep this project going with grant proposals and mitigating between governmental organizations and local citizens.

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“Being able to recognize the hard work of so many of our citizens in Nebraska who volunteer to make this state a great place, is such an honor. ServeNebraska is so pleased to collaborate with the Governor's office and to host the Step Forward Awards and meet all of the wonderful individuals who serve this great state,” states Cathleen Plager, Executive Director.

**About ServeNebraska**

ServeNebraska, the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission coordinates and supports community involvement by Nebraskans that address the needs of our communities. We coordinate AmeriCorps programming, celebrate volunteer achievements through quarterly and annual Awards, provide training and technical assistance, and work to ensure that those with disabilities are fully involved.

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