

May 2009 Edition, The Heart Line

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2008 Governor's Volunteer Awards



Sixteen groups and individuals from across the state were honored for their volunteer contributions on May 8 at a ceremony in Frankfort.

Former Governor Martha Layne Collins and Miss America 2000 Heather French Henry presented the 2008 Governor's Awards for Outstanding Volunteer Service at the Governor's Mansion.

The annual awards program is coordinated by the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) in the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS).

Governor Steve Beshear said the group of honorees has earned great appreciation. "Volunteers are the pulse of any community," he said. "Our commonwealth is much richer for the service of these volunteers."

CHFS Secretary Janie Miller congratulated the recipients for putting others first. "It's very humbling to hear about their efforts and then meet the people behind these successful projects and partnerships. Showing our thanks today is just a small way to recognize the impact of their service."

The Governor's Office launched the volunteer awards program in 1975. Since 1995, KCCVS has administered the program.

Awards in 11 categories were chosen by a panel of independent judges with experience in volunteerism and/or service. This year, there were ties in two categories. Three additional achievement awards were also presented.

Merrill A. Winchester, M.D., of Stearns received the Lifetime Achievement Award.

A list of award winners and their nominators follows.

Challenge Award

Mark Neblett, Mount Washington
Nominated by Sheila Stanton

Corporate Award

Kentuckiana Roofing, Louisville
Nominated by Rob Locke

Director of Volunteers Award

Jenny Yee Greber, Newport
Nominated by Karen Berger-Ducat and Susan Bushey

Faith-Based Group Award

Church Under the Bridge, Inc., Lexington
Nominated by Dr. Wendy Stivers

Faith-Based Individual Award

Brittany Nicole Richardson, Florence
Nominated by Renee McClanahan

Lifetime Achievement Award

Merrill A. Winchester, M.D., Stearns
Nominated by Jennifer Duckett

National Service Group Award

Jeffersontown High School JROTC cadets,
Louisville
Nominated by Marie M. Swanson

National Service Individual Award

Francesca Pribble, Louisville
Nominated by Helmer Duverge

Nonprofit Organization Award (Tie)

Knox County UNITE Coalition, Barbourville
Nominated by Claudia Gibson Greenwood

St. Vincent Mission, Inc., David
Nominated by Joyce Mitchell

Volunteer Service Award

Edward Kirby, Louisville
Nominated by Keith Hosey

Youth Volunteer Service Award (Tie)

Katlyn Marie Farris, Louisville
Nominated by Jimmy Wallace

Erin Oakley, Cadiz

Nominated by Brenda Southwick

Make A Difference Day Awards

Make A Difference Day Traveling Award (DCBS Region)

Eastern Mountain Service Region

Make A Difference Day Traveling Award (AmeriCorps Program)

MSU Corps, Morehead
The Learning Corps, Owensboro

CHFS Press Release 5-14-09

Visit the KCCVS Web site at www.volunteerKY.ky.gov for descriptions of the recipients, photos and more information about the Governor’s Volunteer Awards.

2009 AmeriCorps Week



Governor Steve Beshear proclaimed May 9-16 AmeriCorps Week in Kentucky.

As part of the annual observance, AmeriCorps programs across Kentucky sponsored special events to promote community service.

Governor Steve Beshear said AmeriCorps members are leaders who bring to light the positive effects of service.

“AmeriCorps Week is an opportunity for the people of Kentucky to salute AmeriCorps members, past and current, for their powerful impact. It’s also an opportunity to thank AmeriCorps community partners who make programs possible and to bring more Americans into service,” he said.

In Kentucky, AmeriCorps is administered by the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) in the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

Last program year, AmeriCorps members recruited and supervised more than 10,500 community volunteers in Kentucky, demonstrating the program's value as a force multiplier.

Since the Kentucky AmeriCorps program was launched in 1994, more than 4,000 Kentuckians have taken the AmeriCorps pledge to "get things done for America," serving almost 6.5 million hours to improve the lives of vulnerable citizens, strengthen the education system, protect the environment and enhance public safety.

The current economic downturn means more Americans are facing hardships; and volunteering and national service are needed more than ever.

"AmeriCorps members make lasting contributions to the people and communities they serve," said Eileen Cackowski, KCCVS executive director. "AmeriCorps members deserve the recognition of AmeriCorps Week to make more people aware of the priceless service they perform, and to promote the opportunities AmeriCorps offers to members."

This year, two AmeriCorps programs, SUCCESS Corps and FRYSC Corps, partnered on the Build-A-Bed project during AmeriCorps Week.

Members from the two programs and other community volunteers built, sanded, and finished twin-size beds to deliver to children in need around the state. In addition, "bedtime bags" containing items such as twin-size sheets, pajamas, bedtime books for kids, nightlights, pillows, blankets, and teddy bears were delivered along with the beds.

During the year, both programs support families of local students. SUCCESS Corps members encourage increased school readiness and greater parental involvement in education, and FRYSC Corps members serve through local Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSC) as literacy tutors for students in kindergarten through high school.

With recent passage of federal legislation expanding AmeriCorps service, there was even more to celebrate during this AmeriCorps Week.

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act is bipartisan legislation that reauthorizes the Corporation for National and Community Service and engages more Americans in service. The Act includes a major expansion of AmeriCorps to focus on critical national issues of education, health, clean energy, veterans and economic opportunity.

AmeriCorps members may serve one or two years. Upon completion of their service, members are eligible for an education award of \$4,725 that can be used to pay back student loans or cover tuition costs. Kentucky AmeriCorps members have received more than \$14.3 million in education awards since the program began.

For more information about Kentucky's AmeriCorps programs or AmeriCorps Week projects, call toll-free (800) 239-7404 or visit the KCCVS Web site at www.volunteerKY.ky.gov.

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Visit the KCCVS Web site at www.volunteerKY.ky.gov for photos and more information about AmeriCorps Week.

Commissioner Spotlight: Janet Gates

By Shannon Ramsey, KCCVS Media and Publications Specialist



Since Governor Steve Beshear appointed Janet Gates to the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) in 2008, she has been an active and dedicated member, serving on numerous committees and participating in all the commission's events.

Born and raised in Tennessee, just south of the Kentucky border, Gates now lives in Frankfort. She is the director of the Senior Companion Program (SCP) sponsored by Blue Grass Community Action Partnership, funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service and local United Way agencies. She is active in her community as well. She has coordinated and recruited volunteers for various projects and organizations, including the Kentucky Folklife Festival and the Frankfort Area Homeschool Alliance. She has also received grants for statewide oral history projects.

Gates holds a bachelor's degree in medical social work with a minor in psychology from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Prior to becoming the SCP director in July 2006, she spent 15 years as an oral historian/oral history transcriptionist.

In 1986, she married folklorist Bob Gates, who whisked her off to Louisiana, where he directed the Louisiana Folklife Program for two years before moving to Kentucky to become director of the Kentucky Folklife Program. They have two children: Robert Jr., a junior at Western Kentucky University and Madelyn, a junior at Frankfort High School.

Gates believes in the interconnectedness of all people and all living things, the power of the human spirit, and that all things are possible. It's easy to see that her life's ambition is to assist those who need help the most and to support those around her in knowing that each person is special and unique. She also believes strongly that we are blessed to live on this planet and that we have an obligation to care for and nurture Mother Earth and her shared bounty.

Her experience as an oral historian and her love for her grandparents instilled a great passion and respect for older people. She values their wisdom and life

experiences and benefits from being connected with more mature adults. She cites these as some of the reasons she accepted the SCP director position.

"I believe we suffer as a people when we disregard and fail to embrace this or any segment of our population," Gates said. "One of my goals as a commissioner is to encourage people of all ages to see their worth and to know that they can make a difference by giving of themselves to others."

Gates also credits her mother and her mother's strong, unshakable faith in God for shaping her childhood. She was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness at age 20, which taught her the importance of nurturing her body, mind and soul by surrounding herself with wholeness and goodness in the form of healthy food, pure water, positive thoughts and loving people. Gate's triumph over her illness put her in touch with the "green" movement and the importance of taking care of the earth.

"I also learned, firsthand, the powerful knowledge that one person, just one small act, can truly make a positive difference," Gates stated. "Through the teaching, example and guidance of many family members, educators, mentors and friends, I have come to realize the importance of now and that we only have this very moment to take a stand for what is right and to be love and to share love."

In her leisure time, she enjoys reading, relaxing, enjoying the wonders of nature, sharing good times with friends and family, exercising, cooking and listening to music.

KCCVS embraces the passion Gates brings to the commission and her strong, yet humble, spirit.

"I am proud to be a KCCVS commissioner and support AmeriCorps because of its transformative power for members and the communities and people they serve," Gates said. "AmeriCorps provides life changing and life affirming opportunities, and instills a lifelong spirit of service."

Gates believes that the AmeriCorps spirit of service is what the planet needs to move beyond the challenges we face today. She views her role as a commissioner to promote these lofty ideals and bring people together to make the world a better, stronger, more positive and caring place to live.

Disabilities Corner: HEART Act

By Lanny Taulbee, KCCVS Disabilities Coordinator



H.R. 6081, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act of 2008, was signed into law on June 16, 2008, by then President George W. Bush. This legislation provides assistance to veterans and allows tax benefits and incentives for military personnel.

The HEART Act also makes AmeriCorps programs more accessible to people with disabilities. Included in this law was a provision that excludes AmeriCorps benefits from being counted as income for purposes of eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

SSI, a needs-based program, is a federal program that provides a monthly cash benefit to low-income individuals who are aged, blind or have a disability. Prior to the passage of the HEART Act, receiving an AmeriCorps living allowance could make an individual ineligible to receive SSI. The new law directs the Social Security Administration to disregard AmeriCorps benefits for purposes of SSI eligibility.

The HEART Act excludes "any AmeriCorps benefit (whether cash or in-kind)." This includes the living allowance, health insurance, childcare, and education award and any related interest payments. The exclusion of AmeriCorps benefits took effect for benefits payable after Aug. 16, 2008.

However, the HEART Act does not apply to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) recipients. SSDI, an insurance program, is another federal program administered by the Social Security Administration that provides money to individuals with disabilities based on payments made into the insurance program. There are separate laws and regulations for SSI eligibility and SSDI eligibility, so each must be addressed independently.

Even though the HEART Act does not extend to SSDI, it does remove a significant barrier to AmeriCorps participation for SSI recipients. Efforts are already underway to eliminate this barrier for SSDI recipients as well.

The passage of an "income disregard" regulation for SSI recipients that choose to participate in AmeriCorps programs was not a small feat. People involved in national service and community volunteerism across America collaborated to provide Congress with statistics and stories of personal triumphs and tragedies of SSI recipients with disabilities who chose to participate in AmeriCorps.

Many of these AmeriCorps members unknowingly jeopardized their eligibility for SSI as well as other needs-based resources. Many lost their benefits, not only while serving their term of service, but long after their service was completed. Many were required to repay thousands of dollars in overpayments.

I answered the call in Kentucky for information by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) as the disabilities coordinator for the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS). By working closely with members of CNCS, disabilities coordinators from other states and the Kentucky AmeriCorps programs, I was able to play a key role in this effort by collecting and distributing vital information to Congress for consideration during deliberations of the HEART Act.

During the National Conference on Disabilities Inclusion and National Service in 2008, I received a Special Recognition Award for those efforts and was recognized by David Eisner, the CEO of CNCS, for leadership in making national service more accessible to all Americans by providing crucial information that informed members of Congress of the unintentional barriers in place for people with disabilities who attempt to participate in national service.

With the passage of the HEART Act of 2008, many more people with disabilities receiving SSI now have the opportunity to participate in national service and community volunteerism. With one battle won, another is on the horizon. Efforts are underway to complete the task of removing unintentional barriers for individuals with disabilities who wish to participate in national service and community volunteerism by addressing the same barriers with SSDI recipients. For more information visit the following Web sites: Corporation for National and Community Service, www.nationalservice.org; AmeriCorps, www.americorps.org; and view Kentucky's current AmeriCorps programs at www.volunteerKY.ky.gov.

"I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver."

- Maya Angelou, American writer and entertainer (1928-)

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