

Volunteers 'worth their weight in gold'

Student, retired teacher among those recognized for selfless acts

By **JOHN REYNOLDS**

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Apr 23, 2009 @ 11:48 PM

Last update Apr 24, 2009 @ 10:53 AM

A second-grader who oversees his school's recycling program and a retired teacher who helped start a camp for low-income children were among the dozens of people recognized Thursday for their volunteer efforts.

The ceremony, which drew about 275 people, was a joint effort of the Junior League of Springfield and the University of Illinois at Springfield.

The Springfield Good as Gold ceremony was so named because organizers believe volunteers are "worth their weight in gold."

Jack Flesner, 8, a student at Our Savior's Lutheran, received the Youth Volunteer Award.

He started working with the recycling program at his school when he was in kindergarten and now coordinates a small group that makes sure that the school's recycling bins are emptied on schedule.

He said he started volunteering because he saw that someone needed to step forward.

"Recycling helps our earth," he said. "People need to recycle because if they don't, it will all go into landfills."

Dena Flesner, Jack's mom, said her son is always willing to lend a hand.

"When they have school events, he will help them get everything dumped. He sweeps the floor in the gym and he sweeps the floor in the cafeteria. He helps them wherever they need help," she said.

John Woods, a retired language arts teacher from Lanphier High School, received the Distinguished Volunteer Award for his work with Camp Care-a-Lot.

The camp, in existence for about 15 years, is for youths ages 6 to 10. The camp has traditional camp activities such as swimming but also teaches the kids how to get along with each other.

"We do quite a bit with helping the work on things like anger management and getting along with their peers," Woods said.

The other nominees for the Distinguished Volunteer Award were: Jennifer Allender, nominated for her adaptive dance program at Dance Creations Dance Studio; Richard Corkery, nominated for his leadership and involvement with the St. Joseph's Home; Kenneth Page, nominated for his involvement with the Springfield public schools; and Shana Stine, nominated for her work for an orphanage outside Nairobi.

Kelly Thompson, director of the Volunteer and Civic Engagement Center for UIS, said she hopes the Good as Gold ceremony will become an annual event.

"We are working together to recognize our local volunteers who are giving back to the Springfield community. It's really important to recognize the good things that are going on," Thompson said.

Many of the volunteers were associated with community groups, and others were students at UIS.

Close to 50 people received "Heart of Gold Awards" for work with agencies such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters or Sparc.

Woods said he was honored to be included in the group. "I'm still in disbelief. I'm very much honored," Woods said.

John Reynolds can be reached at 788-1524.

Heart of Gold Award recipients

Randi Alexander, Thomas Armstead, Eloise Baird, Elizabeth Bishop, Floyd & Bobbi Blackard, Mervin Brennan, Jodie Brubaker, Lisa Brunson, Daniel Cadigan, Latosha Caldwell, Dennis & Sharon Chrans, Laura Coffey, Karen Finney, Samuel Gulle, Lynn Handy, Jeanne Harris, Jeanne Harvill, Helen Healy, Gloria Henkle, Michael & Barbara Hickey, Michelle Higginbotham, Linda Hinds.

Alia Hollenbeck, Tricia Hopkins-Price, Jennifer Isringhausen, Howard Kang, Mary Lawrick, Dannyl Madura, Coleton Meseke, Jill Meseke, Sister Josine Mondloch, Bailie Parfitt, Helen Peters, Joseph Richiusa, Amanda Roberts, Therese Romanelli, Diamond Ross, Steve Roth, Donna Schechter, Noel Scott, Chad Underwood, Debbie Waters, Patricia Wilken, Patricia Wright.

Other award recipients

*Graham Elementary School Lunch Bunch Mentoring Group, which won the Organization Agent of Service Award. Members of the group are: Daniel Cadigan, Darrell Clark, Andre Jordan, Leroy Jordan, Melvin Jordan, Jonathan Lackland and Edward Pinn.

*Craig Pelka, UIS Star Student Award

*Allie Beams, Junior League of Springfield Outstanding Community Service Award.

*Mary Caroline Mitchell, UIS Star Staff Award.

Copyright © 2009 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted.