



**EMBARGOED until 8 p.m.
on Monday, June 29, 2015**
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Gov. Rick Snyder honors 40 Michigan volunteers

10 winners announced at June 29 celebration in Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids – To honor exemplary volunteer service in Michigan, Gov. Rick Snyder presented the 2015 Governor's Service Awards to ten winners during Monday night's annual celebration. The winners were selected from 40 finalists who were also honored during the event, titled "An Evening with the Stars," at Frederik Meijer Gardens in Grand Rapids. *(The full list of winners is below)*

The five finalists in each of eight categories were recognized at the Governor's Service Awards to acknowledge their commitment to solving community issues through volunteerism. This year's winners included individuals, businesses and nonprofit organizations and were chosen from more than 160 nominations submitted by friends, relatives and colleagues.

"It's a great honor to celebrate these extraordinary volunteers and organizations and highlight their dedication to their communities," Snyder said. "While we could only recognize 40 of them tonight, there are more than 2 million Michigan residents who donate their time and efforts to bettering their communities. Volunteering is rewarding for both the volunteer and those they serve – I encourage all Michiganders to get involved in some type of volunteer activity."

Two special awards also were presented by the Council of Michigan Foundations. The Russell G. Mawby Award for Philanthropy was awarded to William H. Smith of Farmington Hills. The Community Foundation Philanthropy Award was presented to Donna Niester of Port Huron.

Main Street Dueling Pianos, a Grand Rapids-based group, joined the governor in honoring the nominees by performing for the audience. Also participating in the night's festivities were the 2015 Governor's Service Awards sponsors. The 2015 corporate sponsors include Ford Motor Company Fund as the presenting sponsor, as well as: AT&T, Butzel Long, Comcast, Comer Holdings, Consumers Energy, Council of Michigan Foundations, Delta Dental, Diplomat Pharmacy, Dow Chemical Company, DTE Energy, Farmers Insurance, Firekeepers Casino, General Motors Flint Operations, Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit, Greenstone Farm Credit Services, Jackson National Life, Lear, Masco, Meijer, Michigan Nonprofit Association, NSF International, Reformed Church in America, and Wolverine Worldwide.

The 2015 Governor's Service Awards were presented to:

The Governor George Romney Lifetime Achievement Award for Volunteerism to Lorraine Knuth of Hopkins. The award honors an individual who has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to community involvement and volunteer service.

Lorraine began a life of service at a young age. Throughout her 89 years, she has dedicated countless hours to others. She never settled on one way to serve, she found several. For 21 years Lorraine served as a 4-H leader. For 18 years, she volunteered at the Allegan General Hospital, helping with blood drives, fundraisers and other projects. She served at Bronson Hospital, helping care for Intensive Care Unit babies. Lorraine and her husband have volunteered at the Allegan Historical Society for 21 years and counting. She has also contributed time to Loaves and Fishes, Meals on Wheels and has helped mentor Vietnamese families, shopped for the elderly, served various roles at her church and mentored elementary school children. Lorraine has impacted so many lives, the hours are hard to count. She received a 4,000 hour pin from Allegan General Hospital, contributed 300 hours to ICU babies, and served 4,000 hours shopping and delivering for the elderly. However, it's not about numbers for Lorraine. Asked about how many hours she's served, how many people she has helped or the money she has invested in others, she humbly responds, "Oh, I don't know. I don't keep track of that stuff."

The Volunteer of the Year award to Debra Howe-Wierenga. This award honors an individual who strives to improve the lives of neighbors, friends, community, or congregation. Debra finds no greater reward than helping families with children find housing. She started volunteering by hosting homeless families in her own home, but discovered she could do more. Debra started working with organizations and made connections with landlords to advocate for families that needed a home, but who often had poor credit and housing history. Since December 2013, Debra has helped place 25 families into permanent housing and said nothing brought her greater joy than seeing children running around their new home with excitement. She didn't stop there, however, as she also provides mentoring to help families adjust to their new lives. Debra has served 2,610 hours in various roles of homeless housing programs. Through Debra's service, the Partners in Housing program purchased and rehabbed nine homes. She also worked with her church to raise money for an additional five homes. "It's so rewarding and such an exhilarating experience knowing and seeing the difference I can make in the families' lives," Debra said.

The Corporate Community Leader Award to Grande Mere Inn in Stevensville (*small company*) **and Farmers Insurance** (*large company*). This award honors businesses that demonstrate excellent corporate citizenship by giving back to their community through corporate volunteer programs, monetary contributions, in-kind gifts, and employee-driven volunteer service.

Grande Mere Inn in Stevensville is a family-owned and operated restaurant in the business of providing food not just to paying customers but to various local organizations and events. They began sharing food and the talents of their 45 staff members as a way to be involved in the community after opening in 1980. Ongoing donations include: prepare and serve a full dinner to the Juvenile Center Christmas Party, host the annual meeting of the Child and Family Services of Michigan, prepare and deliver Thanksgiving dinner for both the local soup kitchen and a runaway shelter, and donate a three-course lunch for students in the Alternate Education Program followed by a tour of the restaurant and discussion of the restaurant business as a career choice. They also host a yearly fundraiser for the Readiness Center – opening on their day off, donating the food and drinks, and with staff donating their service. This event has raised \$536,000 over 17 years. Grand Mere Inn also donates food, staff labor or gift certificates to many other organizations each year. Other donations have included toys, mattresses and even a "Choking Charlie" Heimlich maneuver practice mannequin.

Farmers Insurance in Grand Rapids is committed to community involvement at the corporate and employee level. A sampling of the organizations employees raised funds for or donated volunteer hours to include: Kids Food Basket, Meals on Wheels, Safe Haven, Camp O'Malley, American Red Cross,

Toys for Tots, DeVos Children's Hospital toy drive, Family Promise, Junior Achievement, March of Dimes, Special Olympics, United Way and Habitat for Humanity, among many others. Farmers also offers a Volunteer Incentive Program, providing employees four hours of paid leave to volunteer in the community as well as earn \$250 for an organization by volunteering at least 25 hours in a year. The company also donated \$64,510 in corporate contributions to local community organizations during the past year.

The Mentor of the Year award to Tom Hickman of Nunica. This award honors an individual who has made a significant difference in a child's life over time through mentoring. Tom was paired with Jake in 2010 after both reached out to Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lakeshore. The pair has been together ever since, meeting every week over sweet tea and cola at the local McDonalds, attending athletic events, participating in community service projects, going to movies and appearing on TV to help recruit mentors. Before meeting Tom, Jake was shy, overweight and mostly kept to himself playing video games. Now, Jake is active in football and track, mentors a younger football player, and has changed his outlook on life. When sports became more important than grades, Tom explained that education comes first and helped Jake raise his grades from D's to A's and B's. Tom attends Jake's games and teacher conferences, and helps whenever needed. Says Jake, "Tom is not my Big, he is my best friend and the nicest, most caring person I've ever met. Every kid needs a man like Tom."

The Outstanding National Service Program Award to Huron Pines AmeriCorps. This award honors an extraordinary organization that provides a high-quality national service program which yields a significant impact in its community. Huron Pines AmeriCorps is a program designed to place highly-skilled individuals with local organizations around northern Michigan that are striving to conserve natural resources. The Huron Pines project has grown from nine AmeriCorps members in 2007, to 20 members this year serving with 15 conservation organizations. Each year Huron Pines AmeriCorps members engage volunteers in local service projects, educate youth and adults on the importance of environmental conservation, and conduct conservation projects improving acres of land and miles of stream. In 2014, 1,188 volunteers contributed 6,468 hours through removing invasive species, building trails for recreational use, and planting native species. Members also educated 8,144 youth and 4,621 adults on conservation topics through workshops and events. Huron Pines AmeriCorps members helped enhance 527 miles of river and restore 303 acres of public land.

The Outstanding Volunteer Program Award to Friends of Grand Rapids Parks. This award acknowledges the importance an organization or club makes in community life. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP) is a citizen-led organization dedicated to identifying park projects, mobilizing residents and generating resources to protect, enhance and expand Grand Rapids' 1,900 acres of parks and public spaces. Since its founding in 2008, FGRP has engaged more than 7,100 volunteers – including local neighborhood groups, park-users, large and small businesses, schools, churches, city agencies and other non-profits – to clean up parks, install amenities, plan special events, fundraise and more. The volunteers have planted 400 trees, built and repaired playgrounds, resurfaced basketball courts, removed invasive species, built ice rinks, built two outdoor fitness centers, and organized a winter festival. In summer 2014, FGRP partnered to host a free summer movie series in a local park, generating attendance of more than 19,000 throughout the series. During 2014, 969 volunteers served 3,992 volunteer hours on 38 park projects.

The Senior Volunteer of the Year award to Clarenda Webb of Detroit. This award honors a senior citizen who has taken action to make her or his community a better place to live. Clarenda has been working to improve her community since moving to North Rosedale Park in 1976. Since retiring in 2008, she has devoted a minimum of 30 hours a week to the Grandmont Rosedale Development

Corporation (GRDC). GRDC's mission is to preserve and revitalize five Detroit neighborhoods, and Clarenda plays a critical role as co-chair of both the Crime Prevention and Vacant Property task forces. She organizes monthly neighborhood meetings, coordinates community cleanups, builds relationships between partner organizations, fundraises, and advocates for code enforcement. In 2014, Clarenda led her teams to document 150 vacant properties, organize 211 clean-ups of abandoned homes, successfully advocate for demolition of 30 dangerous structures, and provide foreclosure prevention outreach to 130 homeowners. Her greatest strength is connecting people with the resources they need. She is the first to greet new neighbors, publishes her cell phone so neighbors can call with concerns, and keeps up to date on the best tactics in property maintenance and crime prevention. By helping residents help themselves, Clarenda is making sure her neighborhood will remain self-sustaining for generations.

The Youth Volunteer of the Year award to (tie): Cameron Doan of Ludington and Hunter Gandee of Temperance. This award honors individuals age 21 or younger who have already begun making a significant difference in their community by volunteering.

Cameron believes every child deserves a bedroom they can be proud of. After hearing about a ministry providing beds to low-income families, Cameron, 17, wanted to take it a step further. He realized that while the group provided beds, the bedroom was not always in the best condition. Cameron submitted "A Bedroom of Their Own" proposal to the ministry because he knew that children having a special place of their own could help them build self-esteem. The group accepted the proposal and Cameron manages the bedroom remodels from start to finish. He has completed five projects during the past three years and has another one in the works. Each project requires about 75 hours of Cameron's time and costs \$150-\$200. He manages a handful of volunteers and is responsible for collecting donations and materials for each project. Cameron has also participated in mission trips with his church, assisted in hurricane disaster relief, helped feed the homeless at the community shelter and mentors youth.

Hunter watched as his younger brother, born prematurely at 32 weeks, struggled with Cerebral Palsy. Hunter, 15, knew he wanted to help him and anyone else who had the neurological disorder. Hunter made it his mission to raise awareness. First, he ordered and sold green wristbands for Cerebral Palsy Awareness Day at his school to raise \$350, which he donated for research at the University of Michigan. Then in June, he decided to carry his 8-year-old brother, Braden, 40 miles from Temperance to Ann Arbor to help raise awareness of the disorder. He marketed the event to get the community involved and recruited others to walk with him. The brothers struggled with fatigue, blisters, heat and rain during their two day hike, but made it to the University of Michigan with a large crowd cheering them on. The NBC Nightly News covered the walk, and the story of the event received 1.6 million views online. Because of the walk, \$15,000 has been donated to U of M's Cerebral Palsy Research Consortium on Hunter and Braden's behalf.

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BACKGROUND

The **Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC)** utilizes service as a strategy to address the state's most pressing issues and empowers volunteers to strengthen communities. The MCSC's signature programs are Michigan's AmeriCorps, Mentor Michigan, Volunteer Michigan, and the Governor's Service Awards. Since 1991, the MCSC has granted more than \$100 million to communities for volunteer initiatives. These funds have leveraged more than \$85 million in local funds and engaged more than one million people in service. In 2014-2015, the MCSC is funding 25 Michigan's AmeriCorps programs at more than 300 service sites, and providing assistance to more than 250 mentoring organizations statewide through Mentor Michigan. The MCSC is also funding My

Brother's Keeper –Michigan grantees. The MCSC is part of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Photos of the winners receiving their awards will be available after 10 a.m. on Tuesday, June 30. Please contact Jessi Adler at (517) 335-1013 or (517) 230-9923 or adlerj@michigan.gov.