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Dept on Aging Announces Senior Hall of Fame Inductees; Presents Governor's Unique Achievement Awards

Seniors honored for service and commitment to community

SPRINGFIELD – The 2008 Illinois Senior Hall of Fame and Governor's Unique Achievement Awards were presented recently by Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) Director Charles D. Johnson during a special ceremony at the Governor's Mansion.

The Illinois Senior Hall of Fame was created in 1994 to honor Illinoisans age 65 and older who excel in four categories: Community Service, Education, Performance and/or Graphic Arts and the Labor Force. Since then, 68 people have been inducted into the Hall of Fame.

The Governor's Award for Unique Achievement recognizes groups, individuals and programs that make a positive impact on the lives of seniors in the state. They were nominated by Area Agencies on Aging throughout the state.

"These individuals and organizations we honor have worked to better our communities and our state," said Director Charles D. Johnson. "They are special older adults who lead by example to live better and work harder to leave a lasting mark for positive change."

The 2008 inductees into the Illinois Senior Hall of Fame are:

- **Gerald Keck (Flanagan, IL)** age 68, the winner in the education category, taught for 45 years in Flanagan elementary and high schools and has shared his musical talents for 41 years in church. He directed children's plays in the Pontiac Park for 25 years. Keck's love of music and his talent emerged early on; he began playing the organ in church at age 14, and became choir director before he graduated from high school. He went on to play music during college at Illinois State, and later taught in Flanagan. The school board created a full-time music instructor position, which Keck held until he retired just two years ago. His wife, Jean, is also a fine musician and they have often worked together as a team. Keck was nominated for the Hall of Fame by the Livingston County Retired Teacher's Association.
- **Ramon H. Mason (Morton, IL)**, 90, the winner in the labor force category, practiced law for more than 50 years until this past July 1. He began his career after receiving his bachelor's and law degrees from the University of Illinois in Champaign, and later attended post-graduate classes at Harvard Law School. Mason served the residents of the area for decades as the attorney for the school board and district and other community entities for years. He practiced his profession with ethics, dignity and compassion. He is a philanthropist and activist, having co-founded We Care, Inc., a social service agency providing meals and transportation to those

in need, and Project Daybreak, a pioneering adult day service. Mason is a Korean War veteran, and a veteran of World War II who was involved in the invasion of Japan. Mason was nominated for the Hall of Fame by his son, Craig T. Mason.

- **John Podmajersky, II (Chicago, IL)**, 86, the winner in the performance category, has a steadfast commitment to the idea that the quality of an environment is its community. Podmajersky revolutionized the real estate business, defining success not by a profit but by the quality of the community, even when it came at the expense of monetary gains. An offspring of his philosophy is the Chicago Arts District, as well as his establishment of the Annual Pilsen East Artist's Open House. His ambitious work has established lasting bonds between diverse socio-economic groups. A book titled "Urban Spirituality" is dedicated to Podmajersky's visionary views of improving the urban environment. Podmajersky was nominated by Alderman Danny Solis.
- **Richard G. Steele (Morris, IL)**, 72, is the inductee in the community service category. Steel was a radio announcer since from 1964 until his retirement in 1999. He still keeps his hand in radio, however, by hosting a popular talk show every Sunday for WCSJ radio in Morris. The main part of the program is to highlight local events and organizations. He tirelessly promotes youth sports and healthy living. Steel ran for County Board in 2002 and was elected to the board with the highest vote ever. As a board member, he serves on committees ranging from the environment and health to Route 66 and the Emergency Food and Shelter Board. He's helped to raise over \$100,000 for underprivileged children, and moderates two events each year to help domestic violence and child abuse victims. He has worked to help United Way, Operation St. Nick, the Veteran's Assistance program and the Grundy County Corn Festival. Steele was nominated by Vicki Surman.

The following are the winners of the 2008 Governor's Award for Unique Achievement:

- **Whiteside County Senior Center** - nominated by the Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging. This senior center was floundering before a meeting was convened of the center's funders - Northwestern AAA, United Way and the Whiteside County Board. This team saw the need to revitalize the center and worked to make that happen. Key to the success was the board of directors of the Lee County Council on Aging and the Council's Executive Director, Roxanne Bauer, who has more than 28 years of experience in the field. Under her leadership, funding has been restored. The agency was restructured and new staff hired. Customer service became a priority and there is now strong oversight. Through Bauer's hard work, seniors and people with disabilities in Whiteside, Lee and Ogle Counties have an improved quality of life.
- **Village of Oswego Senior Advisory Commission** - nominated by Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging for mobilizing local public and private resources to design a congregate dining experience which meets the needs and social expectations of changing senior populations. What began as a pilot project is now a full-fledged congregate meals service welcoming more than 100 persons twice a week. There is a bounty of supportive fun activities throughout the days, all hosted by the Commission. Food, nutrition and socialization are the results of the Oswego Senior Advisory Commission's hard work and determination.
- **Alzheimer's Association, Central Illinois Chapter** - nominated by Central Illinois Agency on Aging. This organization, based out of Peoria, has a strong commitment of service to caregivers and persons suffering from Alzheimer's disease and has a long history of innovation through its programs and services to the community. With a recent and sizable monetary gift, including retired executives of Caterpillar, Inc., the Central Illinois Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association is opening the Lee L. Morgan Education Center, a state-of-the-art center with new technology,

classroom with screens, ample seating, microphones, and room enough for 80 family caregivers to comfortably attend programs at the local office in Peoria.

- **Coles County Council on Aging, Mattoon** - nominated by East Central Illinois Agency on Aging, is led by Executive Director Dee Braden. Braden and the Council are honored for their vision, innovation and collaborative partnerships with the public and private sectors in developing the new \$7.5 million LifeSpan Center. This center will serve as an intergenerational community center for the people of Coles County. The Council identified compelling needs and the potential benefit of consolidation into a new, central facility located just north of Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center in Mattoon and adjacent to the Dial-A-Ride program in the county. After ten years of planning by the Council, the target date for the move is the end of this month.
- **Hazel Mills (Quincy, IL)**, 81, was nominated by the West Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. Mills has devoted her life to helping others. She is busy seven days of the week with her volunteer work and she also works part-time at a funeral home. Mills is a graduate of Blessing Hospital School of Nursing and spent more than 40 years in the profession. She remains active at the hospital restocking supplies, answering the phone, filing and working at the information desk. She is active with the Salvation Army, the Quincy Supportive Living Center, and other organizations. She always puts others first. After a flood earlier this year, Mills caught a shuttle to Hull, Illinois, to volunteer preparing and serving food to the flood workers.
- **Litchfield Veterans Coalition** - nominated by Area Agency on Aging for Lincolnland, for its “Pies and Lies” program. Spearheaded by Will Tackaberry, Ray Kellenberger and Bill Cope, members of American Legion Post 436, the program was initiated to visit veterans in local nursing homes. The goal of the program is to entertain and talk with the veterans on a regular basis. The first meeting was held at Heritage Manor in Litchfield where staff member Mae Morton served pie and coffee to the group and told them to “relax and tell your war stories and lies.” At each meeting DVDs are shown and military memorabilia is displayed to serve as a catalyst for conversation and reminiscence.
- **Seniors Caring for Seniors Program at Gibault Catholic High School in Waterloo** - nominated by Area Agency on Aging of Southwestern Illinois and is comprised of a group of seniors from the high school. Through the use of surveys provided by the Area Agency and personal research, this program addresses the challenges posed on a community with a growing number of elders. The project focused on eleven different aspects of living for the elders. Students developed recommendations using their survey findings, research and conversations. Recommendations were then presented to the Waterloo City Council, which is now implementing the recommendations to help elders in the area. Students Anna Mannino, Sara Yates, Kate Ramlose, Jon Wolf, Jeff Harrison, Tom Funfsinn and teacher Jim Corsi were instrumental in the program.
- **Keith Brown (Centralia, IL)** was nominated by Midland Area Agency on Aging. He runs the local meal site which offers congregate and home delivered meals. Under Brown’s direction, the site is now active with dances, bingo and exercise classes as well. It has a Wii (“we”) computer video game for the seniors to use as well as a computer.
- **Bernice Gossett (Bridgeport, IL)** has been employed by the **Lawrence County Senior Citizens** since 1989. Throughout the years, she has become an icon of Southeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging, which nominated her. She is now the Office Manager and is familiar with all the ins and outs of every position in the agency. She trains new employees and fills in positions as needed. Gossett paves the way for other employees and sets a standard that is hard to duplicate. Recently, Bernice was recognized for her 20 years of service to the Senior Health Insurance

Program and also by the Illinois Department on Aging during its Older Workers Recognition this year.

- **Phil Gillespie (Carterville, IL)** was nominated by the Egyptian Area Agency on Aging for helping to establish and lead the Southern Illinois Pioneer Coalition, which promotes culture change in long-term care facilities in southern Illinois. After retiring from management in business retail, Gillespie volunteered as an Ombudsman with Shawnee Alliance for Seniors for the last eight years. He quickly learned the need to bring a culture change into long term care facilities. He then encouraged his church, First United Methodist Church in Carterville, to “adopt” a long term care facility. Gillespie joined forces with the Regional Ombudsman and helped organize the first coalition meeting in the area in 2004. The result is that more residents of nursing homes are feeling connected. Gillespie also initiated a “Pen Pal” program which engages volunteers from the church and residents who share letters and holiday cards.
- **Sandra Johnson (Evanston, IL)** was nominated by AgeOptions, and has served as a social worker, Director of Social Services, and, Executive Director of the North Shore Senior Center. The North Shore Senior Center stands as a nationwide example of a 21st century senior center. Johnson led the effort to identify a previous warehouse, raise millions of dollars, oversee the conversion and create cutting edge programs to put in this magnificent place. Examples of the programs are a “Memory Camp” which was recently highlighted by the American Society on Aging in a publication on brain health; a professionally operated fitness center developed with an exercise physiologist; and the conversion of an office building to the current site for an adult day service.

For more information about program services to assist older adults in Illinois and their caregivers, call the Department on Aging Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966 or for TTY (hearing impaired use only) call 1-888-206-1327.

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