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News Release

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Department on Aging hosts 23rd Annual Elder Rights Conference during Elder Abuse Awareness Month

Outstanding workers & volunteers recognized at the conference in Lincolnshire

LINCOLNSHIRE – The Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) hosted its 23rd Annual Elder Rights Conference this week at the Lincolnshire Marriott. The conference was held during *Elder Abuse Awareness Month* as part of the state’s efforts to increase awareness about elder abuse. Experts shared experiences with professionals in the field, in effort of finding better ways to work together and extend resources. Today, at the conference, IDoA awarded individuals from around the state for their commitment and service in the area of elder rights.

“We all share the common mission of protecting the rights of older adults to ensure they are free from abuse, neglect and exploitation. This conference is an opportunity to foster new partnerships with other advocates who are equally committed to the same mission. It is through these collaborations that we develop a more unified approach to assure the health, safety and welfare of older adults in Illinois,” said IDoA Director Charles D. Johnson.

Topics for the conference, held July 15-17, included: *Resolving Disputes in Assisted Living Facilities, Building Skills for Long-Term Care Advocacy; Exploring the World of Financial Elder Exploitation; Building Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Abuse in Later Life; Reverse Mortgages and Mortgage Scams and Broker Scams and Predatory Lending; Elder Rights and Person-Centered Approaches to Care.*

Today at the conference, IDoA hosted the 2009 Elder Abuse and Ombudsman Awards Luncheon, recognizing some of the state’s exceptional public servants who have put a great deal of time and effort into helping older adults live their lives to the fullest.

There were two winners for the *2009 Outstanding Long Term Care Ombudsman Award*. Stasia Miller and Phil Gillespie tied for the recognition. Yvonne Anderson is the *2009 Outstanding Elder Abuse Caseworker*.

Phil Gillespie – Winner of 2009 Outstanding Long Term Care Ombudsman Award – volunteers up to 30 hours per month through the Shawnee Alliance for Seniors Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, in Carterville. He is willing to travel to any of the 81 facilities which encompass a 4,558-mile geographic territory. Gillespie has been instrumental in creating the Southern Illinois Pioneer Coalition, recruiting volunteers and developing projects including a “pen pal” program matching volunteers from churches with residents in facilities.

Stasia Miller – Winner of 2009 Outstanding Long Term Care Ombudsman Award – is a supervisor at the Senior Services of the Center for Prevention of Abuse, in Peoria. She helped develop in-service training for aging awareness sensitivity. And since May 2008, more than 25 trainings have been given to 582 individuals, including staff from area nursing homes in the six counties the program serves. Miller also helped to develop a Culture Change Coalition to promote change in long term care facilities in six counties.

Long Term Care Ombudsman Honorary Certificates were presented to the following:

Mary Louise Curry, of Illinois Community Advocates for Residents' Empowerment (I CARE), in Springfield, has been volunteering for the ombudsman program for 16 years. As a retired teacher, she has developed skills allowing her to work effectively with all people. Curry is known by staff, residents and family members as someone they can trust. She diminishes stress and has improved the lives of many residents.

Elaine Gilbert, of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, works as a Lake County volunteer. She regularly puts in up to 20 hours each month and works tirelessly. She knows every resident and has worked on nearly 100 cases. Gilbert has counseled and educated many residents, who were threatened with discharge, to ensure they receive proper medications.

Susan Hriljac, with DuPage County Senior Services, in Wheaton, volunteers at Westmont Convalescent Center. She shares her legal expertise, provides clarity and support to peers and ombudsman staff through her clear, concise explanations of often complicated regulations, laws and issues. She holds a Juris Doctorate as well as a degree in geriatric nursing. Hriljac is credited with bringing stability during staff transitions and ensuring that the civil and human rights of residents are upheld.

Jesse Kartus, with DuPage County Senior Services, in Wheaton, has endeared himself to residents and the Resident Council Advisory board. He has not missed a month of volunteering since his first visit in 2006 and maintains a healthy working relationship with all residents, staff and administration. Kartus has been successful on all areas of the mission including advocacy, education and upholding confidentiality.

The *2009 Outstanding Elder Abuse Program Caseworker Award* and *Honorary Certificates* were presented to the following:

Yvonne Anderson – Winner of the 2009 Outstanding Elder Abuse Program Caseworker Award – is a supervisor with the Visiting Nurses Association, in Rockford. She is active on the Illinois Violence Prevention Collaborative and the 17th Judicial Circuit Court Elder Abuse Committee. She was instrumental in having a shelter designate a room for senior victims. Anderson recently completed a project to assist nurses to accurately assess abuse in their patients, developed a tool nurses can use in their interviews, and established a system to collect and recycle old cell phones for use by clients.

Elder Abuse Program Caseworker Honorary Certificates were presented to the following:

Shannon Finch, with Solutions for Care, in North Riverside, eagerly accepts time-consuming cases needing legal assistance or court work and has built successful relationships with law enforcement, attorneys and medical staff in the communities where she serves. Clients are receptive and feel comfortable with her. And she is also an effective communicator with aggressive abusers. Finch volunteers time after work to conduct elder abuse presentations at health fairs and other venues.

Sarah Jackson, of the North Shore Senior Center, in Northfield, interfaces exceptionally well with clients and their families. Always taking into account self-determination, she considers a client's safety and least restrictive environment, while she maintains relationships that support the client. Jackson is someone staff can depend upon for guidance, collegial support and to lend a listening ear when discussing challenging cases.

Vanesa Klimunda, with Solutions for Care, in North Riverside, dedicates a great amount of time working with clients, their abusers and families to provide resolutions. She has an innate ability to have clients openly discuss their feelings and emotions. She has the ability to meet emergency situations and locate needed contacts efficiently. Klimunda speaks both Spanish and Czech which is a tremendous asset to her clients.

Sarah Powell, of Senior Services of Central Illinois, in Petersburg, sets out to help her clients no matter the situation. She has been working with clients with physical and mental illnesses and helps them get their medication under control. She is credited with having her clients receive restitution as a result of financial exploitation. Powell is the elder abuse caseworker for Mason, Menard and Logan counties and also comes to the Springfield office when needed.

Elizabeth Thompson, of the Southwest Suburban Center on Aging, in LaGrange, always works toward the client's goals, but she is also sensitive to the illness of the abuser. She uses her experience as a case manager to work with elder abuse cases and is adept at using the Community Care Program, emergency home response, respite care and legal advocacy to help her clients. Thompson's calm approach and professionalism are assets to the agency and elder abuse program.

For more information about Elder Rights, including Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention, log on to the IDoA website at www.state.il.us/aging or call the Senior HelpLine at 800-252-8966 (or TTY for the hearing impaired at 888-206-1327.)

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