



Illinois Department on Aging

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Department on Aging Announces Senior Hall of Fame Inductees and the Governor's Unique Achievement Awards

Seniors recognized for their community service

SPRINGFIELD — The Illinois Department on Aging announced this year's Senior Hall of Fame and Governor's Unique Achievement Awards. 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, 75 people have been inducted into the Hall of Fame which includes this year's awardees.

The 2009 Illinois Senior Hall of Fame and Governor's Unique Achievement Awards will be presented by Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) Director Charles D. Johnson during a special ceremony, sponsored by Walgreens, on Wednesday, October 14, 2009, at the Governor's Mansion, in Springfield.

"We are pleased to honor these older adults who work to help better our communities. They are an example that we can each do something to improve our communities." said Director Johnson.

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

The 2009 inductees into the Illinois Senior Hall of Fame are:

Doris Clark, 94, of Jacksonville, is the winner in the labor category. Clark has been a strong advocate for older people since she retired in 1981. She was one of a small group of people who established *AFSCME Illinois Retirees Chapter 31* to fight for retiree rights. Clark became the president of the statewide organization and also served on the International Board of *AFSCME*. Retirees from across the state would call her with nowhere else to go to figure out issues about insurance, pensions and Social Security. Steven Regenstreif, Director of *AFSCME Retirees*, said for nearly 20 years, Clark helped other chapters to grow and develop through the example of Chapter 31. During her tenure as Chair of the Council, the membership grew dramatically – from less than 100,000 to a roster of nearly 250,000 retiree members.

Jo Ann Dinello, 67, of Darien, is the winner in the Community Service Category. She regularly visits the sick and helps at nursing homes and hospitals. Dinello volunteered for the Literary Awareness Program and served as a Brownie and Girl Scout Leader. She started a ministry program that provides meals for homebound individuals and transportation for older adults. She organized a sunshine group to send cards to homebound seniors. She set up the *Medical Lending Closet*, at the Darien Police Station, for people to get free donated medical equipment like wheelchairs, walkers and canes. Dinello also founded the *We Care Program*, in 2003; to date more than 1,000 packages have been sent to soldiers serving in the Middle East.

Dr. Marian Kneer, 85, of Plainfield, is the winner in the Education category. Kneer has devoted her entire life to education and athletics and continues to serve her community. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Illinois State University (ISU) and went on to earn a doctorate in physical education from the University of Michigan. As a softball player in the 1940s while playing for the *Caterpillar Dieselettes*, Kneer was referred to as the "world's greatest softball catcher." She is in the *Illinois Softball Hall of Fame*, the *ISU Hall of Fame* where a stadium is named for her, and the *Coaches Association for Girls and Women Hall of Fame*. In the early 1970s, Kneer pioneered the inclusion of women's sports in Illinois High Schools which was two years before the passage of the Title IX Education Amendment. She is an author of several articles and books including *Softball: Slow and Fast Pitch* which is currently in its eighth edition.

Harry Louis Wolf, 80, of Waterloo, is the winner of the Performance Arts category. In 1939, at the age of ten, Wolf joined the Monroe County Farm Bureau as a cornet player. During World War Two, Wolf founded the Waterloo German Band and after serving four years in the Marines, he enrolled in the Pennsylvania State Teacher's College where he received a degree in education. Wolf spent 34 years teaching and was named *Outstanding Musician*. Wolf has performed for Presidents Johnson, Nixon and Reagan and countless other leaders and dignitaries. He's been all over the world and has donated musical instruments to poor musicians. He was awarded the German government's highest honor to an American, the Deutschland Medal. Wolf was nominated by the city of Waterloo where he can be found still performing.

The following are the winners of the Governor's Awards for Unique Achievement (nominated by Area Agencies on Aging):

Joel Cowan, nominated by the Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging. Cowan works in Health Systems Research at the University of Illinois' College of Medicine, at **Rockford**. Cowan and his staff administered the Association of Area Agencies' goal for Livable Communities Initiative for Rockford. They conducted interviews and prepared reports on the project. They also profiled the communities of Mt. Carroll, Dixon and Oregon that the Area Agency selected as part of the initiative.

The Honorable Eugene Siegel, Mayor of Chicago Ridge, nominated by AgeOptions. Mayor Siegel began service in 1975 and has been reelected to the part time post since that time. He has provided senior citizen events from his campaign fund over the years and created a solvent tax base by being instrumental in the Chicago Ridge Mall, in 1981, and the Commons of Chicago Ridge, in 1988. His administration also boasts village improvements such as a senior citizen center, creation of full-time fire department/paramedics, and establishing a Youth Service Bureau. Mayor Siegel's most recent accomplishments include the Public Works Facility located in the Industrial Park, and the new *Eugene L. Siegel Municipal Complex*.

The City of Carthage was nominated by the West Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. Selected for its exemplary commitment to seniors and persons of all ages, Carthage has several accomplishments to note. The city donated land for the Area Agency to develop a 10-unit, low-income elderly housing complex; designed a TIF District to include a hospital and nursing home campus and to pave the way for a supportive living facility; wrote and received two grants for housing rehabilitation from the Illinois Housing Development Authority; improved access to the Carthage Senior Center; received a grant to develop safety routes for school children; provided water and sewer infrastructure for a new state of the art hospital facility and more. The City of Carthage is also developing walking trails that are safe and accessible for seniors.

The City of Lockport and Lockport Township, nominated by the Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging. Lockport is the tenth fastest growing county in the country. Lockport Township has long supported elder independence by underwriting the operation of a daily transportation system; providing \$10,000 annually for home-delivered meals, with \$1,500 allocated for emergency meals; partially financing senior recreation programs through the Lockport Park District's Senior Center. Lockport built affordable senior housing and the township donated defibrillators to senior sites. They established a medical closet where seniors borrow wheelchairs and walkers, and a communication system to disseminate emergency information to older adults.

The City of Marion was nominated by the Egyptian Area Agency on Aging. Located at the crossroads of Interstate 57 and Route 13 in Williamson County, the City of Marion has worked diligently to improve the quality of life for its citizens. With a population of 17,000, the city has been recognized by *Boom Town USA Magazine* as one of the fastest growing towns in Southern Illinois due to the quality of health care, recreation, and educational options. Marion is very aggressive in the area of economic development, and continues to attract new businesses. The city has been working with the *Southern Illinois Coalition for the Homeless* and *Habitat for Humanity* to encourage building in the city.

The City of Peoria was nominated by the Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. In 2008 and 2009, the Area Agency conducted interviews with community members and officials in Peoria to learn the needs of older residents. Respondents shared their assessment based on ten sets of questions on topics such as health and human services, housing, public safety, recreation and more. The number of favorable responses received across all dimensions of questions led to the nomination of Peoria. The river city received very high marks indicating that families and older residents are well served with housing, transportation, public safety, civic engagement, workforce, recreation, emergency preparedness and lifelong education.

Main Street Community Center, Edwardsville, was nominated by the Area Agency on Aging of Southwestern Illinois. Although this non-profit agency offers many programs for intergenerational groups, it is open to all members of the community. Established in 1974, the Center provides a warm, pleasing environment to socialize, exercise, dine, play and learn. The Center has become known for its innovative activities and helpful services. The Board of Directors of the Center fully supported the Livable Communities Initiative. With little direction and tremendous enthusiasm, they lead the community in focus groups and had multiple conversations with civic leaders. Currently they are in the process of making recommendations that Madison County will include in its Comprehensive Plan.

The Maturing of Vermilion County Team was nominated by East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. Elected officials, citizens and professionals from **Vermilion County, (the cities of Danville and Hoopston)** make up the team which is coordinated by CRIS Senior Services. The team assessed the county's preparedness and identified three winnable issues to foster livable communities for all ages: economic development, health and human services, and housing. The Area Agency commends the team for responding to these challenges. For example, the city of Danville has initiated a Renaissance program to rehabilitate and restore existing housing in the West Downtown neighborhood and Hoopston is working with the Illinois Housing Development Authority and private developers to build 25 units of new affordable single-family housing beginning next spring.

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