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2010 Fairfax County Volunteer Service Award Winners Announced

Fairfax, VA - The United States is a nation of many traditions. Together, we gather around the table for Thanksgiving each November. We watch our home team's opening game with the same hopefulness. Our eyes are all turned toward the skies on July fourth. But traditions are more than shared experiences. The American character is one built of tradition. Where would we be without the spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership that characterized the earliest settlers? Volunteering is another deeply valued American tradition; those who keep this custom alive were honored at the Fairfax County Volunteer Service Awards on April 23, 2010.

Volunteer Fairfax and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors recognize the age-old tradition of volunteering each year with the annual award ceremony to celebrate the devoted groups and individuals in the community who make a difference through their commitment of long hours, selfless service and great accomplishments. More than 500 volunteers, nonprofit organizations, corporate, government, and community leaders attended this year's ceremony at the Fairview Park Marriott. Earl Stafford, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Stafford Foundation, serves as the ceremony's keynote speaker, and ABC7/WJLA-TV Anchor Cynné Simpson emceed the program. Various government dignitaries were also in attendance, including United States Congressman Gerry Connolly, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova, State Senators Chap Petersen and Patsy Ticer, State Delegates David Bulova, Jim Scott and Mark Sickles and finally Chairman Cathy Smith and members from the Fairfax County School Board.

Volunteers were nominated in three categories: a competitive Volunteer Service Award; a Community Champion award, for outstanding community leadership, which is submitted by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors; or a noncompetitive Benchmark award for the number of service hours performed in a calendar year. Of the 82 nominees, the following 11 individuals and groups won a Fairfax County Volunteer Service Award in the competitive categories.

Award Category: Adult Volunteer (250 hours of service and over)

Kevin Takegushi won the award for Adult Volunteer 250 hours of service and over for his dedication to tutoring youth. Twice a week, Takegushi can be found volunteering as a tutor with the Mott Computer Clubhouse Math Thinker Program. Known for his white cane and white board, Takegushi has provided an encouraging environment for children who need assistance with their math homework. Although he has suffered from life threatening brain injuries that left him legally blind, his desire to help others never ceased. His positive attitude about life and passion for teaching mathematics are great assets for the members of the Clubhouse, and the program itself. He doesn't give students answers easily; rather he challenges them and helps them understand the concepts of math. Over the last year, student's grades have increased, as have



their confidence levels in math. One parent explained that thanks to Takegushi, her son is more focused on completing his math homework.

Alvaro Luna, Manager of the Mott Computer Clubhouse, says "I have never met someone like Kevin who has such a deep understanding of civic responsibilities. His big heart has allowed him to overcome his physical limitations in order to help others."

The jammed packed ballroom rose to their feet in applause as Takeguchi slowly made his way on stage to receive his award. Although his physical disabilities were noticeable to everyone in attendance, his driving spirit, which does not allow anything to hold him back, was what shone through the most. Guests could not help but tear up during one of the most memorable moments of the ceremony.

Award Category: Adult Volunteer (250 hours of service and under)

Campbell "Cam" Gibson won the award for Adult Volunteer 250 hours of service and under in recognition of his efforts to assist adults in obtaining a high school diploma. For the last two years, Gibson has been a volunteer with Fairfax County's Volunteer Learning Program, tutoring adults in math skills to prepare them to pass the GED test and obtain their high school completion certificate. During his short time with the organization, Gibson's impact on his students has been significant. Since 2007, he has tutored 74 adult learners – 12 individually, and 62 within the math and GED preparation classes in South Fairfax County. Gibson is strongly committed to students' learning and growth; he accommodates his student's schedules and has been available all days and times of the week to work with them. If he notices a student needs extra help, he will recommend extra tutoring time to make sure they are prepared to pass their exam. When new students begin the program, they frequently request Gibson, as he has gained positive word of mouth in the community from his students.

"Cam's dedication to his students and volunteering has shown from the start," says Volunteer Learning Program Instructional Specialist Lori Baker. "While all of our tutors are wonderful and committed to their work, some tutors are simply exceptional. Cam Gibson is one of those exceptional tutors."

Award Category: Adult Volunteer Group

The Digital TV Volunteer Team won the award for Adult Volunteer Group for assisting the elder community in transitioning to digital television. In late 2008, Fairfax County's Department of Family Services, Adult and Aging Division, recruited a team of seven adult volunteers to assist the elderly and those with disabilities, with the transition from analog to digital television. From January to June of 2009, more than 200 people called the DTV hotline and received one-on-one assistance in their homes from the Digital TV Volunteer Team. Volunteers would install converter boxes and educate the residents about the transition, along with the equipment they were receiving. Although most of the installation cases were one time visits, several resulted in two or three trips, as many would forget how to use the converter box remote control. Throughout the entire



process, the volunteers were very patient and eager to help out in the community. The group served more than 750 hours of volunteer time to some of the most vulnerable residents of Fairfax County.

Grace Starbird, Director of the Area Agency on Aging, says, "The Digital TV Volunteer Team gave something of value to those they served, but the dedication and commitment of the volunteers shows that it was a meaningful experience for them as well. These volunteers are examples of a caring community at its best."

Award Category: Corporate Volunteer Group

Excella Consulting won the award for Corporate Volunteer Group for increasing the capacity of Homestretch. Excella Consulting has the belief that a corporation, like a private citizen, has a responsibility to invest in the health and well being of its community. For the last year, employees of Excella have partnered with Homestretch through its volunteer program, ImpaX. By focusing on a single cause and partnering with a single nonprofit, the employees maximize their impact and feeling of accomplishment. During 2009, the employees donated almost 1,500 hours of service assisting in tasks such as reorganizing the storage unit, painting offices and client homes, and creating a client tracking database. The employees also donated nearly \$25,000 to sponsor the Excella Learning Center at Homestretch, which will be used to help families gain the skills they need to obtain self-sufficiency.

"Excella Consulting has demonstrated commitment to a nonprofit that should serve as a model for other companies to follow," says Christopher Fay, Executive Director of Homestretch. "We are astonished at the breadth and depth of their commitment to the work we do at our organization."

Award Category: Family Volunteer

Renee and Sean McGinnis won the award for Family Volunteer on behalf of their years of dedicated service to the Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program. Each week the McGinnis' make a trip out to the farm to provide much needed assistance. Whether cleaning horse stalls or assisting with riding classes, the mother-son duo is always ready to help. Over the last five years, the organization has watched Sean McGinnis grow up to be a kind, young man. The support and encouragement he has received from his mother has taught him to become self-reliant and confident in his volunteer work.

Linda Aikey, Assistant Director of Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding says, "I love seeing Sean and Renee at the farm. They have such a love for life, and they share so much with our program. Sean will tell you that he is a volunteer, donor and rider, and is proud of each. Renee has raised a son with a giving heart and for that we are very grateful."

Award Category: Senior Volunteer



Dr. Ibrahim Baroum won the award for Senior Volunteer in recognition of his devotion to rehabilitating the incarcerated. The primary goal of mentoring is to safely and positively affect the lives of the mentees. Over the last 10 years, Dr. Barsoum has impacted 43 inmates at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center through his volunteer work with Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources of Fairfax County, Inc. Every week, he visits his mentees to talk and provide information on topics ranging from obtaining a driver's license to tattoo removal, as he believes with support his clients can make positive strides in their lives. Dr. Barsoum's ability to converse in Arabic, a language not commonly heard in the facility, allows him to connect to a population that would otherwise be ignored. To show his support, Dr. Barsoum will also go to the court house for sentencing or reconsideration to show the inmate someone is there for him. Additionally, he has connected with the families of the inmates and provided them with gifts during the holiday season.

"Ibrahim is the kind of volunteer that you can always rely on," says Fran Furman, Volunteer Coordinator of OAR, "If he is asked to help out, he makes himself readily available. No questions asked. Ibrahim recognizes the needs of the offender population and gives selflessly to assist offenders as they begin the transition to a crime free lifestyle."

Dr. Barsoum was not hard to miss with his bright smile and warm eyes as he walked on stage. His son followed closely behind with a camera trying to snap a shot of his father and Chairman Sharon Bulova, showing how this award ceremony is not just a chance for volunteers to be recognized for their hard work but also a time for family members and friends to celebrate the achievements of their loved ones.

Award Category: Youth Volunteer

Simrun Soni won the award for Youth Volunteer for impacting the lives of those served by Shelter House and the American Red Cross of Arlington County. For two years, she participates in a tutoring program with Shelter House each week, working with a Spanish-speaking student who was suffering in school because he could not easily understand the English language. Her diligence and patience with the child resulted in improvements in all of his classes. This is one example of the 150 students she has impacted during her time with the organization. Although soft-spoken and polite, she has been described a powerhouse of leadership, impact and creative intelligence. While Soni is very busy with school and tutoring each week, she also volunteers with the Red Cross of Arlington County by participating in the Meals on Wheels and Shopping with Seniors programs.

Victor Dooley, Community Coordinator of Shelter House, describes Soni as "an inspiration, not only to the people who witness her service, but to those of us who hope that her generation remembers how one person can change the world for so many."

Award Category: Volunteer Program



Homestretch won the award for Volunteer Program on behalf on the needs the volunteers meet for the organization daily. With the capacity to house up to 120 families a year, there is no wonder why Homestretch depends so much on its volunteers. Whether preparing apartments for new families, tutoring children served by the program, or assisting with tax documents, volunteers who work with the organization are always busy. Although the Volunteer Program of Homestretch is still young, the organization has created relationships with more than 17 local companies and numerous groups and individuals who are dedicated to creating a better life for the clients they serve. The value of volunteer service to Homestretch has been measured to exceed \$500,000 a year, including professional and non-professional expertise and labor. Homestretch has a success rate of 80%, in which eight out of 10 families attain self-sufficiency within two years. This outcome would not be possible without the dedication of the volunteers.

Christopher Fay, Executive Director of Homestretch, says, "Our clients are the ones whose lives are changed by the volunteers of our organization who give their time and talents to help. Without the Volunteer Program, Homestretch would not be what it is today."

Award Category: Youth Volunteer Group

The McLean Local Heroes won the award for Youth Volunteer Group in recognition of their continued service to the Falls Church/McLean Children's Center. The McLean Local Heroes is composed of seven young women who share the goal to address the needs and concerns of its community by providing the talents and services of local teens. For the last year, the group has conducted multiple volunteer service projects, including the preparation and performance of an hour long talent show every Friday night at the Falls Church/McLean Children's Center. Along with sharing their talents, the high school juniors also help around the Center by washing toys and preparing small projects for teachers to use during the upcoming week. As an organization, the young women of The McLean Local Heroes foster a sense of social responsibility and are a prime example for other teens to follow.

Janet Willner, Parent Coordinator for the McLean Local Heroes, says, "Each girl in the McLean Local Heroes has given innumerable hours of work to this worthy endeavor. They have empowered themselves by setting a lofty goal, and seeing their project through. It is a great pride knowing these fine young women."

Award Category: Rising Star

Zack Sanders won the award for Rising Star for consistently demonstrating incredible commitment, dedication and passion in his volunteer efforts through the McLean Community Center. At 15 years old, Sanders has devoted more than 800 hours of service as a light and sound technician, DJ, and event coordinator. As a behind the scene volunteer, Sanders creates light shows for weekly fifth and sixth grade dances and coordinates an annual "Open Mic" fundraiser for abused women and children.

Julie Rasmussen, Executive Director of the McLean Community Center, says, "When Zack offered to volunteer with us four years ago, I'm certain no one realized the depth of talent, enthusiasm and commitment



to service that someone so young could have. Zack's keen mind, maturity, sense of responsibility and dedication to the welfare of others has enabled him to provide invaluable services."

Sanders' hard work and dedication gives the McLean Community Center an opportunity to provide a more vibrant and inviting place for children of all ages to spend time together. The Center and County look forward to seeing what comes next from this rising star.

Excited cheers of joy came from the two happiest people in the room, Sanders' parents, as he walked onstage to receive his award. After the ceremony, Sanders said "It's really a huge honor...to be recognized, especially in the company of so many wonderful nominees." Sanders also thanked his parents for all of their support and assistance in getting him where he needed to be to in order fulfill his commitment to the McLean Community Center.

Award Category: Lifetime Achievement

Betty Powell won the award for Lifetime Achievement in honor of her legacy of dedication to recreation in Fairfax County. Her relationship with Fairfax County began more than 40 years ago as a paid staff person with the County's Department of Recreation. After retiring, Powell continued by volunteering her services for the last 17 years with the Department's programs, and has been a well known volunteer through her work with the Fairfax County Youth Football League, the Woman's Club of Fairfax and Celebrate Fairfax. Fondly known as "Memaw," Powell's efforts include the scheduling of 7,200 youth athletes who compete in 33 different teams around the region, coordinating of more than 1,500 volunteers for the Celebrate Fairfax June festival, and raising of \$15,000 in scholarships through the Woman's Club annual fashion show.

Barry Feil, President and CEO of Celebrate Fairfax, says, "Betty's efforts have strengthened our organization. Her drive to help others has been an example that our next generation of volunteers can use as a guide. Betty's spirit, generosity of time and energy, and commitment to community are things you cannot teach someone. Simply put, Betty is special, and we love her for that!"

Powell was pleasantly caught off guard when her name was called and the audience rose to their feet in admiration. Astonished by the recognition, Powell could not keep the tears of joy from gracing her face as she accepted the Lifetime Achievement award. She represents the beacon of hope that a tradition such as volunteering can truly be kept alive with a motivated and dedicated heart.

Established in 1993, the Fairfax County Volunteer Service Awards serve as a community-wide celebration of volunteerism. The ceremony recognizes individuals, groups and organizations from Fairfax County whose dedicated efforts, in a wide array of realms, set them apart in the volunteer sector. Over the last 17 years, Volunteer Fairfax has recognized more than 1,800 individuals, families, civic groups and companies for their commitment to the community.



Volunteer Fairfax is building a better community through service. As a respected leader of community volunteerism for more than 35 years, Volunteer Fairfax connects individuals, youth, seniors, families and corporations to volunteer opportunities at more than 900 organizations in the metro area. The Center has worked with more than 50,000 volunteers since its inception and has helped give more than 500,000 hours of volunteer service back to the community through its programs such as VolunteerFest[®], Give Together: A Family Volunteer Day, the emergency response program and business services for corporate volunteers.

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