

United Way Honors Central Kentucky's Volunteers

The community's top volunteers were honored at the Central Kentucky Volunteer Awards recognition breakfast, coordinated by United Way of the Bluegrass and sponsored by Lexmark. The Central Kentucky Volunteer Awards have honored individuals, groups and organizations in the Bluegrass for 24 years. The event was hosted by Dave "Kruser" Krusenklous of WVLK. Andy Shae, general manager for the Lexington Legends, delivered the keynote address to the packed crowd at Hyatt Regency Lexington.

"It's uplifting to see so many volunteers who make such a difference every day here in Central Kentucky," said Sarah Mills, interim president of United Way of the Bluegrass. "All of the nominees deserve our congratulations and our thanks."

Fifty three nominees were recognized in the following categories: Individual Service Award, Youth Individual Service Award, Group Service Award, Youth Group Service Award, Family Award, Corporate Award, Nonprofit Award, Faith-based Award, Lexmark Volunteer of the Year Award, United Way Service Award and Lifetime Service Award. An independent panel of judges had the difficult task of choosing the top nominee in each category.

Among many wonderful nominees, Ann Thompson was chosen as the winner of the Lifetime Service Award as someone who has dedicated her life to serving others. Overcoming challenges in her own life, Ann became a teacher of physically and sight-impaired students, devoting all of her time and energy to them. She produced Braille books on her own time so that her students could read, study and learn. She located a music teacher who could transcribe music, allowing her pupils to perform in the marching band. Ann drove them home when they needed a ride. She even supported many of them financially and emotionally, sending them to summer camps and other activities. In her retirement, she volunteers for God's Pantry Food Bank and Central Christian Church, caring tirelessly for anyone who needs her.

Debbi Morris was recognized as the winner of the Individual Service Award. Debbi has been a volunteer at the Ronald McDonald House for more than six years in addition to many other nonprofits. Every Wednesday, Debbie shops for food, picks up another volunteer and then prepares lunch for 40 - 50 people at the house. After cleaning the kitchen, Debbi delivers leftover food and supplies to the Hope Center, Hope Lodge, Salvation Army, Lexington Rescue Mission, Habitat, the Humane Society or whoever else is appropriate. In addition, she works on fundraisers, networks and restructured the volunteer appreciation event as a board member.

Lexmark award James Maupin with the Lexmark Volunteer of the Year Award for his work on behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bluegrass, Habitat for Humanity, KET and Lexmark's United Way campaign. James has been a Big Brother for three years through Lexmark's corporate mentoring program at Deep Springs Elementary and now serves on the board of directors for the organization. He has been instrumental in raising money through the bowl-a-thon for kids and recruiting new volunteers to become mentors. James is an outstanding role model to his three young children and others in the community. The Lexmark Volunteer of the Year Award is given annually to a Lexmark employee for exceptional volunteer service.

This year, United Way of the Bluegrass honored Dr. Thomas Young as one of its most outstanding volunteers with the United Way Service Award. Young is a physician who believes that the health and well-being of children are linked to their parents' physical, emotional and social health and their child-rearing practices. When the community supports the needs of families, the family is better able to meet the demands of parenting. Dr. Thomas Young brought these core beliefs to the United Way of the Bluegrass Success By 6 Leadership Council and was a visionary in the area of early childhood education. While chair of the council, he spearheaded the charge of the Early Learning Opportunities Act grant, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and was successful in literacy and school readiness efforts. Dr. Young shares the common value of education to improve the quality of life for our children, youth, families and community with United Way.

The Youth Individual Service Award winner, Shelby Donovan, wants the clients of Eastern State Hospital to know someone cares about them as a person and not just someone struggling with mental illness. She treats the clients with respect and dignity. After helping one patient find the proper comfortable clothing for treatment, Shelby received a tearful hug. She shows compassion beyond her years and uses her positive attitude to impact the staff, volunteers and other patients at the hospital. She has now accumulated 255 hours of service, all while attending Scott County High School.

The first College Student Award was awarded to Wesley McSparin, who has become a best friend to memory loss patients at the Best Friends Center. Wes spends afternoons regularly interacting with patients one-on-one. He engages in meaningful conversation, goes for walks, plays games or just escorts them where they need to go. The staff of the center says Wes has a knack for doing difficult things with ease and is invaluable to the socialization of this special population.

The College Group Award went to a group of 17 students from the University of Kentucky who are known for their

passion and commitment to serve. The University of Kentucky Center for Community Outreach Board of Directors are only required to spend five hours working for the organization, but in spite of their busy college lives each member increase that hour commitment exponentially. This group oversees seven programs that connect the UK campus with various community populations. They also house the hugely popular UK FUSION that sends 1,400 volunteers out for a day of service, the 24-hour dance marathon for the UK Pediatric Oncology Clinic DanceBlue and sent 50 students and staff members across the country for Alternative Spring Break.

The efforts of 168 high school sophomores coming together create murals through the Kentucky Hugh O' Brian Youth Leadership Seminar, winner of the Group Youth Award. These students represent high schools from across the state and recognize volunteerism as the heart and soul of their organization. Collectively, they invested more than 1,400 hours of service, completely 14 murals to help revitalize the Third Street corridor of Lexington.

The Family Award was awarded to Dr. Rankin and Ruthi Skinner, his brother Donnie and wife Roberta, son Ian and wife Jill, and daughter Erin and husband David. The Skinner family has actively volunteered for countless organizations their entire lives including outstanding work with the Dental Health Initiative in Clark County and abroad in Ecuador. They fundraise, organize and train volunteers, communicate with school leaders, gather and distribute toys to patients and ship supplies to the locations. In addition to traveling frequently to Ecuador to demonstrate oral health techniques and provide direct care, the Skinner Family organized a day where every dentist in Winchester took a day off to work in Clark County Schools, applying dental sealants to 3,000 students in one day.

The Group Award was given to the Disabled American Veterans Transportation Network. Made up of seven vans and 30 drivers, these volunteers transported just under 4,000 veterans a total of 231,668 miles last year. The drivers pick the veterans up at their home or a central meeting point, then transport them to the Veterans Administration Medical Center for care. Drivers must wait until everyone is finished with their appointments before leaving to drive them home, often meaning 10-12 hours days for these volunteers. This group understands that without them, some veterans may not receive the medical care that they need due to a lack of transportation.

Clark Material Handling Company was awarded the winner of the Corporate Award. Their mission is to build the best forklift in the world while planting seeds of goodwill along the way. Clark employees fulfill this mission by providing support of their time, talents and money to organizations, projects and initiatives that reflect the goals and values of the company. They have a team of employees who volunteer to oversee the corporate donations and philanthropy work. Last year, 582 community service hours were logged, serving at least 5,835 people at 16 different organizations.

Nathaniel United Methodist Mission, the winner of the Faith-based Organization Award, is a group who offers a free health clinic, dental clinic, charitable pharmacy, optical clinic, veterinary clinic and tutoring for adults and children. Nathaniel United Methodist Mission also operates a God's Pantry Food Bank location, holds diabetic nutrition and disease management classes, ceramic classes and hosts Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and summer programming. They are also helping with the transition associated with the Newtown Pike Extension Project by providing couches, beds, bedding, dishes, kitchenware, linens and towels to the residents of Irishtown and Davis Bottoms. They estimate the annual volunteer hours at over 6,000 annually.

For over nine decades, Baby Health Service has cared for children who may have otherwise fallen through the cracks of the healthcare system. For this, they have been named the winner of the Nonprofit Organization Award. Baby Health Service has three paid employees, but the majority of the medical care is generated by volunteers. In a typical week, 50-60 children are seen at the clinic. Sick children begin arriving at 7:30 in the morning and are seen by the doctors, nurses and nurse practitioner at the clinic. Each physical, immunization, lab test, x-ray and prescription given is free of charge to these families.

"This week is National Volunteer Week," said Mills. "Take a minute this week and thank those you know who give of their time and talents."

For more information about volunteer opportunities in Central Kentucky, call United Way 2-1-1 or visit www.uwbg.org/volunteer.