



STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR PAT QUINN

To: All Media

From: Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn (o) 312-814-5220

What: Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn will present 2007 Environmental Hero Awards to 23 Illinois residents, schools, and groups to honor their commitment to environmental health and protection in the Land of Lincoln.

When: 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 27, 2007

Where: 15th Floor Blue Room
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph St.
Chicago

**Lt. Gov. Quinn honors 23 with Environmental Hero award,
saluting their dedication to protecting the environment**

"The public policy of the State and the duty of each person is to provide and maintain a healthful environment for the benefit of this and future generations. Each person has the right to a healthful environment."
Article XI – Illinois Constitution

(CHICAGO) – On **Thursday, Dec. 27, at 1:30 p.m.**, Lt. Governor Pat Quinn will present the 2007 Environmental Hero Awards to 23 individuals, schools, and groups in recognition of their commitment to environmental health and protection.

The awards ceremony will be held in the **15th floor Blue Room of the James R. Thompson Center, Chicago.**

"I am proud to honor these environmental heroes and the hard work they have done to protect the health and well-being of people all across the Land of Lincoln," Quinn said. "These individuals, and the organizations and municipalities they represent, are fine examples of good environmental stewardship, and teach us all that we have the power to make our state a better, cleaner place."

The 2007 Illinois Environmental Hero award recipients include:

- **Shari Walsh and Alyssa Fliege**, both of Lombard, lobbied the General Assembly to pass the Dam Safety Initiative, which authorizes the state to place safety warning signs at dams and waterways in Illinois. After Alyssa lost her father in a dam accident in 2006, Alyssa and her mom, Shari Walsh, sought to provide an avenue for her loss, and the two have since become advocates for dam safety.
- **Naomi Davis** of Chicago founded a collective called "Blacks in Green" (BIG), whose goal is to create green economic development in African American communities and include lush greenways and energy efficient affordable housing. "Blacks in Green" not only helps the environment, but also improves the economic well-being of the people within the community.
- **Al Raby High School for Community and Environment** on Chicago's West Side designed, built and planted a native Illinois woodland garden to replace the unsightly concrete at the main entrance of the school. The garden is named after Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai, an environmental and political activist who was the first African woman to be receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Ms. Maathai was on-hand to dedicate the garden and praise students' efforts to mitigate global warming by planting trees and native gardens.

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- **Mark Beorkrem** of Farmersville was a critical advocate of the Mississippi River for more than 20 years through his participation with the Army Corps of Engineers on the Mississippi River. Beorkrem's efforts led to the protection of thousands of acres of Mississippi wetlands, brought in millions of dollars in grants and project funding for environmental projects in the Mississippi Valley, and helped establish important environmental programs such as Bald Eagle Days, which draws thousands each year to learn about the needs of the river. Beorkrem passed away in November. His wife, Vernie Beorkrem, will be accepting the award on his behalf.
- **Bob and Louise Freeman** of Godfrey co-founded the Piasa Palisades Group of the Sierra Club in 1972 and advocated for the protection of the region's natural areas, including the Piasa Palisades State Park. The Freeman family is a cornerstone of the conservation community in the greater Alton area, and has worked tirelessly behind the scenes for 35 years to ensure that parks remain areas of natural beauty. Louise had been the treasurer since 1991 of the Piasa Palisades Group Executive Committee until her death in October 2007.
- **Searle and Sue Wadley** of Antioch worked with the Liberty Prairie Conservancy to create a conservation easement on property they own along the Fox River, ensuring that it remains a natural area. Ten years ago the Wadleys brought the 100-acre property that sits between three publicly protected sites – Gander Mountain Forest Preserve, Chain O'Lakes State Park and the Peat Lake Natural Area. The easement will ensure that the area will remain natural and pristine.
- **Marge Cline** of Chicago was known as "Rivermom" among her friends and colleagues due to her love of paddling and being on the river. In 1949 she first picked up a paddle, and for the last three decades she has trained thousands of paddlers in the Chicago area. Cline was an active member of the Chicago Whitewater Association and was also honored by Paddler Magazine for being one of 100 "Paddlers of the 20th Century" who have made a difference. Cline passed away this year. Her daughter, Kathy Ullrich, will be accepting the award on her behalf.
- **Thomas J. Waters Elementary School** of Chicago is dedicated to connecting students with the environment through an e-waste recycling project. Students researched e-waste and decided to promote community awareness about the issue. They held a community e-waste pickup and were able to properly dispose of hundreds of computers, printers, cell phones, and batteries. The school has also adopted a portion of the Chicago River to help improve wildlife habitat and prevent erosion.
- **Angela Mason** of Chicago coordinates the Chicago Botanic Garden's Green Youth farm program, which offers students the opportunity to learn about organic farming and horticulture through hands-on teaching. The program began in 2003 with 13 students and has now grown to encompass more than 45 students who successfully sell their products at farmers markets in North Chicago.
- **Virgil I. Grissom and Prairie View Middle Schools**, both in Tinley Park, have been trying to restore ecological balance to Midlothian Creek, which runs near the schools. Gifted students at both schools have been collecting water samples while studying the creek, and have determined that the unhealthy condition of the creek is due to the destruction of native plants. Students and faculty plan to work with local and state officials to see that steps are taken to help restore the creek.
- **Gary Mielke** is the Kane County Recycling Coordinator and has raised the county's recycling participation from 40% of households to approximately 90% through a municipal curbside recycling program. Mielke of Wheaton is a one-man department and has now turned his attention to getting people to recycle more than just newspapers and glass; he has set his sights on encouraging people to recycle harmful chemicals, batteries, and other non-traditional items at a drop-off location.
- **Mike Mieszala**, a Warren Township High School teacher, has been organizing river clean up days with area high school students for more than 10 years. At this year's "It's Our River Day," a statewide celebration of our rivers that promotes recreation, conservation and education about Illinois rivers, Mieszala gathered 60 students to attend. In future years, he hopes to get more Lake County high school students involved with the River Day event and his local river cleanups.
- **Kathy Reiland** of McHenry placed a conservation easement on a portion of her property, which is adjacent to Waichunas Wetland. The Reiland easement protects a major portion of Griswold Prairie, a McHenry County National Area Inventory site, and Reiland also plans to build a wildlife observation deck that will overlook the marsh for the enjoyment of nature lovers.

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- **Robert Richmond** of Bolingbrook has begun leading an effort to help the Will County Forest Preserve remove invasive plants from the Keepataw Forest Preserve, but this is not the first environmental project the Lockport Township High School sophomore has undertaken. Richmond previously constructed and placed artificial habitats at Turtlehead Lake in Cook County. He also implemented a recycling project at Tampier Lake to remove hazardous fishing line from the lake and educate the public on how to properly dispose of monofilament line.
- **River Prairie Group Water Sentinels**, founded in 1999, issued a 2001 report, “Troubled Waters of DuPage County,” that documented pollution levels and helped spur the efforts now underway to clean up Salt Creek and the DuPage River system. The group monitors the streams in DuPage County with water quality sampling and continues to issue reports documenting pollution problems and highlighting solutions.
- **Ken Schaefer** of Des Plaines helped Cumberland School create a rain garden in 1999, seeding native plants and replacing a quarter acre of grass that previously flooded after rain. The successful rain garden created by Schaefer and Cumberland School helped launch Lt. Gov. Quinn’s Rain Garden Initiative, which provides grants for this low-cost, environmentally friendly method of improving water quality while preventing flooding and drainage problems.
- **Loren Hughes** of Paris has maintained 274 bluebird boxes in Edgar County to help revitalize the eastern bluebird population in Illinois. In the past 50 years, the bluebird population in Illinois has decline 90% due to the disappearance of dead trees and wooden fence posts. Hughes has counted more than 700 bluebirds while maintaining bluebird boxes where the birds can nest.
- **Denise Mitten**, “Million Trees” project coordinator for Living Lands and Water in the Quad Cities, is attempting to plant one million native hardwood trees along riverbanks in the next 10 years. The efforts will help stop erosion and keep litter from the rivers.
- **Pete Schiel**, the Kankakee Assistant Superintendent of Utilities, has helped make the Kankakee Wastewater Treatment Facility (KWTF) run on 53% renewable energy, thus reducing energy costs and the facility’s environmental footprint. Currently, the facility runs on two forms of renewable energy – hydroelectric power and anaerobic digestion – but Schiel is exploring other renewable energy sources in hopes of making KWTF run on 100% renewable energy.
- **Andilee Warner** of Carbondale is known as the “compost queen” of Southern Illinois University for starting a composting facility at the university where earthworms are used to digest 1,000 pounds of food per day from the residence halls. The process, known as vermicomposting, is a pilot project between the recycling center and the university’s agriculture department. It has been successful as a means of reducing waste.
- **Dave Wetzel** of Decatur converted his 1986 Volkswagen Golf to run primarily on recycled vegetable oil, which he picks up weekly from a dining facility that uses it for frying food. Wetzel was also instrumental in winning passage of SB 267, which amends the motor fuel tax law to curtail government interference regarding alternative fuels, such as vegetable oil. The amended tax law took effect August 17, 2007.
- **Michael Wolff** of Makanda passed away on April 11, 2004 after a 10-month battle with a rare form of cancer, and his dying wish was to protect the wetlands that he loved. After his death, Bob and Lynn Wolff also of Makanda, established the Michael Wolff Memorial Foundation to accept donations for the Michael Wolff Memorial Wetland, located in the Cache River State Natural Area. Wolff loved the outdoors as a child and made his passion a career, working to improve waterfowl habitat as an employee for the Missouri Department of Conservation.
- **Mary Jo Adams** of Carlock is restoring 55-acres of her property to its natural state – a floodplain field. When Warner and her husband purchased the property along the Mackinaw River 20 years ago, all the open fields were planted with corn and soybeans. With the assistance of the Illinois Buffer Partnership, she was able to begin restoring the damaged ecosystem.

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