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Volunteers live to serve

By Carly Lanich



Noblesville Community Engagement Manager Cindy Benedict (front, from left), Becky McGriff, Julia Nicholson, Glen Schwartz and Angela Opalinski of BlySky Cares Initiative; Noblesville Common Council president Rick Taylor (back, from left), Darren Peterson of Peterson Architecture, Anita Hagen, Michael Firks, Becky Horton of the Boys & Girls Club of Noblesville Auxiliary and Noblesville Chamber of Commerce executive director Bob DuBois. The Times photo by Carley Lanich

Six volunteers and two organizations were recognized today during the 2015 City of Noblesville Volunteer Awards.

The awards ceremony gives the city an opportunity to recognize volunteers who oftentimes serve the community "under the radar," said Cindy Benedict, Noblesville's community engagement manager, who announced the individual winners during the Noblesville Chamber of Commerce breakfast at Mustard Seed Gardens in Noblesville.



Noblesville High School senior Lydia Knoll (middle) has earned the Noblesville Chamber of Commerce scholarship presented by Chamber executive director Bob DuBois (left) and Chamber director of business development Mary Noble (right). Knoll, the daughter of Fred Knoll (second from right) will attend the Indiana University Kelley School of Business in the fall. Photo provided by the City of Noblesville

Here are this year's recipients:

Corporate Volunteer: Peterson Architecture

Peterson Architecture, founded by Darren Peterson, initiated Noblesville CanStruction in 2013, which has raised \$10,000 and has donated 9,000 non-perishable food items to the Noblesville Township Trustees Office. The company also hosts an annual food and clothing drive and has played a role in revitalizing downtown Noblesville's alleyways through various art shows, music programs, wine tastings and more. Peterson himself began the Noblesville Main Street Thursday Market in 2013 and was a co-chairman of last year's inaugural White River Celebration.

"It is important to be connected to the community at many levels," Peterson said. "Noblesville has been good to us even during tough times and it is important to say thank you and return the gifts of living and working here."

All Around Volunteer: Anita Hagen

Anita Hagen, who served as the first president of the Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank in Noblesville, was nominated by fellow volunteers for her continued involvement with the food bank. The Harvest Food Bank has distributed more than 235,000 pounds of food to local pantries due largely in part to Hagen's frequent dedication to ensuring local food pantries are stocked.

"This is a community effort," Hagen said. "It's just wonderful to work with people on a team and to have people be so generous."

Faith-Based Volunteer: Becky McGriff

Spending more than 25 hours a week planning and leading practices, McGriff is the founder and "chief organizer" of the Body in Training Track and Cross-Country Club. With an organization of 168 athletes as young as age 5, McGriff emphasizes the parallels drawn between runners' spiritual lives and athletics. She challenges the athletes to learn a new scripture every week.

"It's an unexpected honor," McGriff said. "Because I do this because I love it. I think that the kids learn so much about discipline in running that carries over to other parts of their life, particularly their spiritual life."

Youth Volunteer: Michael Firks

Growing up Firks held a deep interest in law enforcement, so much so that as a senior at Noblesville High School, Firks has become known as Captain Firks of the Noblesville Police Explorers. After committing more than 250 hours of service to events such as the Noblesville Fourth of July parade and festival, the Hamilton County 4-H Fair and the Noblesville Street Dance, Firks will be attending college next year in Florida.

"I just like to grasp every opportunity to volunteer that I can," Firks said. "It means a lot to me to be rewarded for my volunteer work."

Mayor's Choice: Dallas Wisehaupt

A volunteer for Noblesville West Middle School and a tutor for the Step Up Programs of Noblesville Youth Assistance Program, Wisehaupt is dedicated to improving the lives of middle school students throughout Noblesville.

NYAP Early Intervention Advocate Joy Petty, who accepted the award on Wisehaupt's behalf, said, "There is no way to measure the number of lives that Dallas has touched or continues to touch on a daily basis by his volunteerism."

Nonprofit Volunteer Program: Boys & Girls Club of Noblesville Auxiliary

With membership growing to 2,121 youth, the Noblesville Auxiliary of the Boys & Girls Club combines fundraisers, sponsorships and donations to provide high-quality programs of a low-cost for the youth of Noblesville.

Becky Terry, the Boys & Girls Club's executive director and who nominated the Club, said, "The activities they are involved with change on an annual basis but their commitment to the Club and the kids never waivers."

The Club also awards scholarships to students in the Noblesville area.

Dr. Earl Brooks Outstanding Environmental Volunteer: Glen Schwartz

Volunteering 20 hours a week, Glen Schwartz has devoted more than 200 hours to beautification projects through his involvement on the Keep Noblesville Beautiful board of directors and the advisory board of the Jackson Township Trustee's Office. Schwartz began volunteering after fire fighters saved his life in a car accident in 1985.

"I got an e-mail that says, 'You have not lived until you have helped someone that cannot do their work,'" Schwartz said. "And I live by that."

Lifetime Volunteer: Julia Nicholson

A frequent volunteer at Summer Trace retirement home, Nicholson has been serving Noblesville since 1975 when she began directing Bible school programs. She is now actively involved in many other volunteer programs, including the Good Samaritan Network of Hamilton County's Thanksgiving program and Meals on Wheels.

Nicholson, who was inspired by her own mother to work in retirement homes, said, "It's very humbling."