

2006

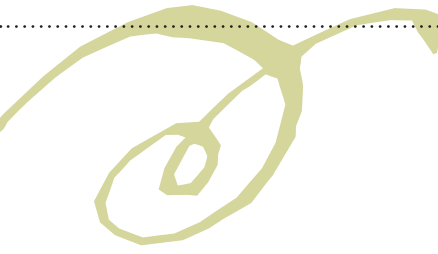


Awards in Human Service

2006 VIRGINIA McKNIGHT BINGER AWARDS IN HUMAN SERVICE

THE McKNIGHT FOUNDATION

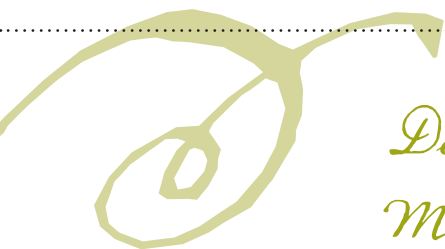
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2006 VIRGINIA McKNIGHT BINGER AWARDS IN HUMAN SERVICE

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Dee Cotten

May Pa Heu

Russ Irvin

Shegitu Kebede

Sarah Mollet

Vivian Peterson

Erik Rodriguez

Jim Soderberg

Jodi Townsend

Patrick Wood

MY GRANDMOTHER BELIEVED WE ALL SHARE

one community. When a member of that community suffers, we suffer together. We struggle together. We support each other. Despite any perceived differences, over time, we succeed or fail as one.

Those recognized for the 2006 Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service understand these principles as well, and they are optimistic about the future. Despite challenges in their own lives, every day they offer their time and their energy to serve our communities and change worlds.

Our awardees recognize that those they serve are not *separate* from our communities; rather, they *compose* our communities. By helping neighbors when they need a leg up, the whole neighborhood gains in strength and unity. Each kind act holds potential to spread in unforeseen ways across a human network of mutual support and hope.

This year's awardees have found courageous and creative ways to serve humanity, from empowering those without resources to encouraging cultural pride and offering an open ear and warm heart to those in need. Their devotion, endurance, and commitment honor the legacy of my grandmother, Virginia McKnight Binger, for whom these awards are named.

On behalf of the Foundation and the awards committee, I extend my sincere gratitude to each of our awardees for their spirit of compassion and humble work on behalf of others.

Erika L. Binger
Chair, The McKnight Foundation



Program

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

710 South Second Street,
Minneapolis
2:30 p.m.
Thursday, November 16, 2006

WELCOME

Christine Ganzlin

PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Erika L. Binger

CHAIR, THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

Mary Robillard

MEMBER, AWARDS COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Erika L. Binger

AWARDS IN HUMAN SERVICE COMMITTEE

Liliane Bilezikian, MINNEAPOLIS

Mark Graves, MINNEAPOLIS

Sue Liedl, TENSTRIKE

Maria Liliana Espondaburu, ST. PAUL

Anita Patel, MINNEAPOLIS

Mary Robillard, DULUTH



DOLORES “DEE” COTTEN spent 40 years helping those in need as a nurse, before financial hardships 13 years ago forced her to live in her car for four months. Since then, Dee has committed herself to helping others attain safe and affordable homes. Today, she lives out her dedication to housing justice as office manager and fundraiser at MICAHA, the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing, a faith-based organization that responds to issues around homelessness in the Twin Cities. In past years, she also has served on a wide variety of Twin Cities committees and boards, including the city’s Senior Citizens Advisory Committee to the Mayor, the Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association’s board of directors, and the Senior Federation’s Affordable Housing Committee.

For more than seven years, Dee served on the board of the Central Community Housing Trust (CCHT); these days, she still helps out with landscaping and painting whenever possible. When discussions get thorny, Dee’s passionate style cuts to the heart of the matter and encourages appropriate and thoughtful conclusions. Contributors to CCHT have been known to disclose, “It’s impossible to say no to Dee!” In addition to her work for affordable housing, Dee has supported community organizing through her work with the advisory team for Restorative Justice’s conferencing for offenders and by helping organize National Night Out activities. She also devotes time to her congregation, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church, and to a food shelf in northeast Minneapolis. Says Dee, “I’ve worked for others all my life, since I was eight years old, so I can’t stop now.”

“Dee is a survivor who turned the hardship she suffered into a passion for helping others who are faced with poverty and misfortune.”

— Joy Sorensen Navarre

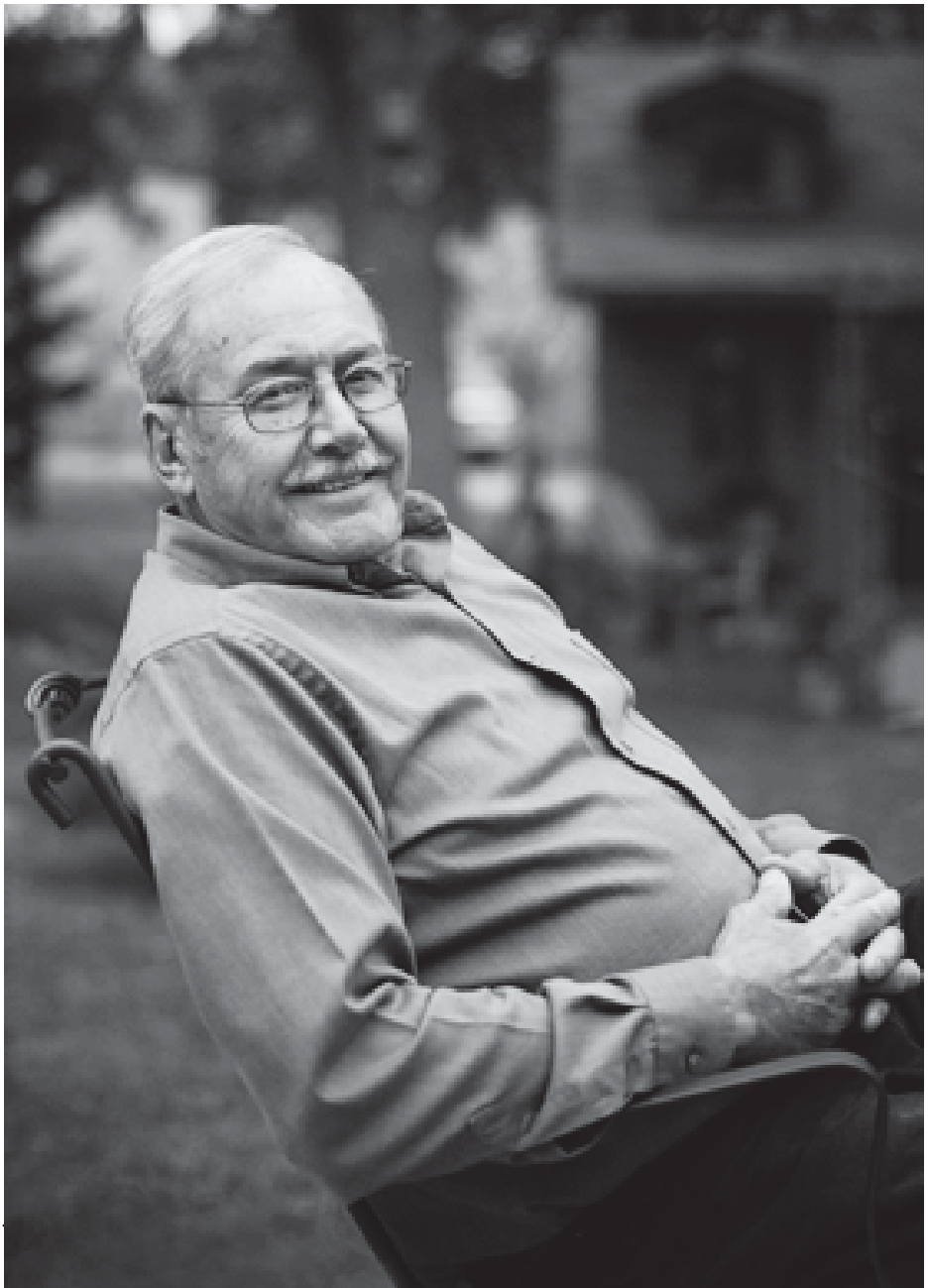


MAY PA HEU, a proud native of Laos, is dedicated to supporting the community around her, and has been a lifelong volunteer and advocate for women and children. For three years, May Pa has served as board chair for Hmong Youth Educational Services in St. Paul, an organization that provides education support for Hmong youth. For the past eight years, she has brought Operation Joy to the Hmong community, collecting holiday toys for children of low-income families; three years ago, she joined the organization's board of directors. She also is active annually in planning efforts for St. Paul RiverCentre's Hmong New Year, encouraging pride and ongoing identity identification among Hmong youth.

When she is not volunteering, May Pa is an employment caseworker at St. Paul's Hmong American Partnership, helping Hmong to grow deep roots in America while preserving their culture. Wherever she perceives a need, May Pa springs to action. Recently, she helped organize students at Arlington High School to advocate more support and parent involvement for Hmong students. A believer in empowering individuals to improve their own lives, May Pa also is a vocal challenger to anyone working to curtail basic human rights. First and foremost, explains May Pa, "I want Hmong children to reach their full potential, to be better citizens, and to have a better life in America." Herself a model of overcoming obstacles through hard work and determination, May Pa's rich life experiences in several parts of the world have required her to learn to speak French, English, Laotian, and Thai, in addition to her native Hmong language.

"May Pa is determined and dedicated to ensuring that Hmong youth are afforded opportunities to excel and parents are empowered to support their children."

— May Seng Cha



RUSS IRVIN'S rule for what he'll be doing tomorrow has long been, "That depends on who calls first with a need." A carpet-layer by trade, Russ volunteers wherever there is a need to cover, and things have only gotten busier since his retirement four years ago. In addition to supporting his family, Russ has devoted countless hours over 15 years at Elim Mission Church in Cokato, Minnesota, working on the church's building and grounds committee and helping with its Awana Youth Program. Over the same time period, he has volunteered on a variety of individual projects at home and around the country, including building houses with Habitat for Humanity, helping with Cokato's food shelf, and making breakfast weekly at a local nursing home.

It's not uncommon for Russ's friends to hear about a storm on the nightly news, and learn the next morning that Russ is heading to the stricken area, putting any personal plans on hold. After Hurricane Katrina, Russ spent three life-changing weeks in Mississippi helping wherever needed. And when the Red River flooded Fargo-Moorhead in 2001, he joined others to sandbag and rebuild. "When I retired," explains Russ, "I wanted to do something that would be a blessing to others." From his help repairing a traveling medical ship for low-income populations in the Caribbean to his home repairs for older people and his unfailing support of neighbors facing personal challenges, it's clear that this retiree has no intention of slowing down any time soon.

"Russ's happy spirit and outgoing personality add sunshine to the day of those around him."

— Wendy Duske



Shegitu Kebede

SHEGITU KEBEDE knows firsthand the challenges faced by single, immigrant mothers. Orphaned at five years old, she married young and immigrated to the U.S. to forge a stable home for her remaining family. But when she split from her physically abusive husband four years ago, Shegitu found herself alone in a foreign land with two children. Employed at the time with affordable housing provider CommonBond Communities in St. Paul, Shegitu regularly met suffering immigrant women who lacked sufficient training to find successful job placement. In their shared experiences, she found a call to action.

Shegitu founded Going Home, Inc., three years ago to provide cleaning jobs for immigrant mothers and other new immigrants. The women usually come to the program with no professional work experience, formal education, or money. Shegitu and her volunteers train them on everything from computers to sewing. After the women work at Going Home for several months, Shegitu helps them attain better-paying jobs elsewhere. Beyond employment training, her team also takes the busy women grocery shopping and to the doctor, arranges for legal aid appointments, and helps with citizenship classes. Shegitu also established the Homework Center over a year ago, to provide after-school activities and homework help to children of her employees and other working immigrant mothers. She raises donations for their children's school supplies. "Long ago, I asked God what my purpose is," says Shegitu, "but I know now. Now I am doing what I was created to do."

"Ms. Kebede gives her own money and time to these women and children and wants to help them shape their own destinies."

— Robert K. McCrea



Sarah Mollet

SARAH MOLLET has a tip for satisfaction in life: “Several mentors have taught me over the years that the best thing you can do for *yourself* is to do something for *someone else*.” Taking the maxim to heart, Sarah has devoted the past several years to working at Camp Heartland, which enhances the lives of children impacted by HIV/AIDS through year-round support, advocacy, recreational programs, and community awareness. Sarah has helped more than 700 youth and families attend the camp at no cost, and she is now the camp’s community fundraising coordinator. A 2005 magna cum laude communications graduate of the University of Minnesota, Sarah has also assisted AIDS awareness seminars and co-founded a campus group to raise funds for the camp while increasing understanding of sexually transmitted diseases.

This year, Sarah collaborated with the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership program to coordinate a seminar at Camp Heartland, designed to prepare Minnesota high school sophomores to become effective, ethical leaders. Ever energetic, Sarah has also coached youth sports and assisted with fundraising for other Minnesota nonprofits. Currently, she volunteers as a cook and housekeeping assistant with Minneapolis’s Clare Housing, which provides stability, care, and affordable housing for those living with HIV/AIDS; and as a facilitator in the Minneapolis Public Library’s New Americans Center Conversation Circle. Even during last year’s holiday vacation, Sarah’s family of eight helped rebuild a church daycare in New Orleans.

“Sarah works tirelessly to reach her goals, and her goals are always selfless. Her gift is finding joy in the service of others.”

— Vicki Ferrence Ray



Vivian Peterson

VIVIAN PETERSON has been helping the elderly for more than 60 years, since she was 12 years old. “Since I was a little girl, this is what I’ve done,” says Vivian. As a youngster, she helped aging neighbors with housework; as she grew up, she even helped community neighbors with child-rearing. These days, Vivian brings elderly community members of Williams, Minnesota, shopping and to the doctor, and she regularly checks in on those with little or no family. Every month, she provides transportation over 30 miles roundtrip to a food shelf in Baudette for those without cars. And for those unable to travel, she picks up the food herself. For more than a decade, Vivian has stopped by several times each week at the LakeWood Care Center in Baudette, to visit and to advocate for services and resources on behalf of those without local family. She also is a hospice volunteer through LakeWood and a member of the Bethany Lutheran Church in Williams.

In the recent past, Vivian has been active with her local adopt-a-grandparent program, and she has served her community as a Sunday school teacher, Girl Scout leader, and 4-H leader. She currently volunteers both in the kitchen and in respite care at the Williams Senior Center, and provides telephone support services to the elderly and other shut-ins through Lutheran Social Services. When Vivian hears about anyone who is sick or lonely, she pays them a visit, takes them for a ride, or brings them a meal. “I can’t stand to see somebody hurting,” she admits. “Laughter goes a long ways.” For Vivian, life’s greatest joy is providing love and support to those who *lack* it, at the times when they most *need* it.

“All her life, Vivian has taken care of others... for her, they have always come first.”

— Julie Knox



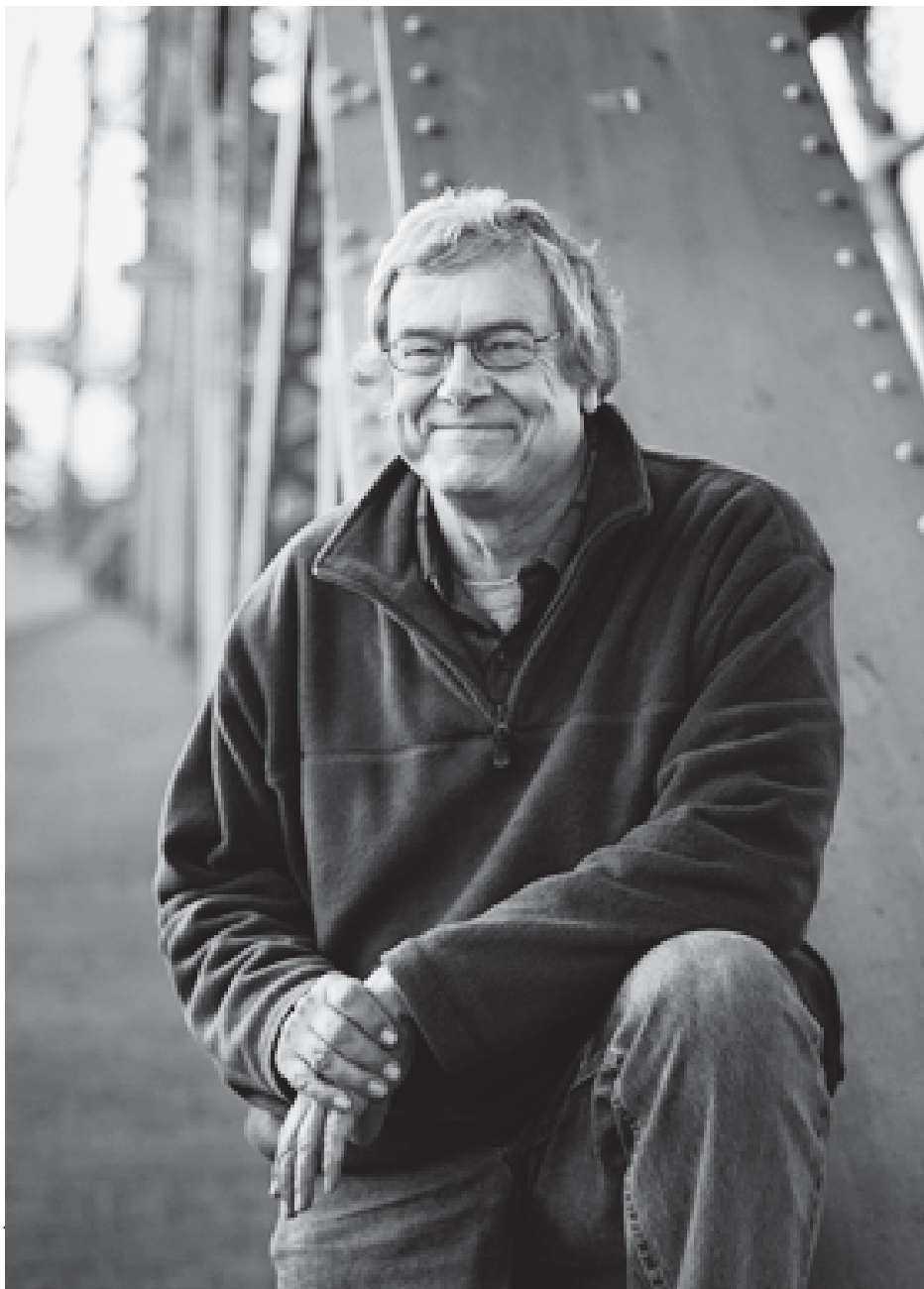
ERIK RODRIGUEZ graduated from Southwest High School in Minneapolis earlier this year, but it's a sure bet the school won't soon forget him. A former student council vice president, Erik emerged at Southwest as a young Latino leader and immigrant advocate, educating students and teachers of all cultures on the role of immigrants in Minnesota and their need for access to higher education. Erik explains, "I feel a need to help everyone in the whole community know that we're all the same, no matter the color of our skin."

Three years ago, Erik helped organize Southwest High's ALIANZA (*Alumnos Latinos Inspirados A Nuevas Zonas Abiertas*), a Latino-based after-school group that works to integrate the school's multicultural communities and to promote legislation that allows access to higher education for all students. Erik also has helped Minnesota's Latino population through community-based programs like *La Escuelita*, a Minneapolis youth organization that offers alternatives to gang life. In three years with the Minnesota Immigrant Freedom Network, Erik has lobbied at the Legislature and traveled often to rural areas to talk about the Minnesota Dream Act, which promises access to higher education and immigrant rights for high school students of immigrant families. Erik also has helped organize youth around pro-immigrant marches and gatherings, and he helped facilitate sex education workshops in the Minneapolis Public Schools through Southwest's Teen Age Medical Services peer group. Determined to serve society as a medical professional in the future, Erik works several jobs currently to help his family and to raise money to continue his own education. Although challenges abound, he hopes to begin studies at the Minneapolis Community Technical College next year.

"Erik has sacrificed his study time and personal time to serve others' understanding of issues and social justice."

— Alondra K. Espejel

Erik Rodriguez



JIM SODERBERG, executive director of Duluth's Churches United in Ministry (CHUM), wants you to know his efforts are fueled by the combined might of an invaluable network of professionals, volunteers, and community partners. Over the past 10 years, Jim has helped guide CHUM to provide increasingly holistic support for the region's most marginalized citizens, always aiming to do so with respect and dignity. Under Jim's leadership, its massive team effort offers comprehensive services through emergency shelters, food shelves, nursing clinics, and more. The scope of support and broad reach of its community partners enable CHUM both to respond to those in crisis and to support those working toward stability and self-sufficiency.

A frequent speaker at CHUM's three-dozen partner congregations, Jim encourages and helps coordinate work to create a community that values all members and is characterized by compassion and a hunger for justice. Jim, a former United Methodist minister, had 20 years prior work experience at social service agencies, including Community Action Duluth, which helps people access services to gain self-sufficiency; and the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, where men charged with domestic abuse receive counseling. His professional life aside, Jim offers a personal insight capable of motivating any community member to action. "In this work, there is self-interest involved," says Jim. "I am a member of this community. I recognize that its health and its well-being help shape my own life."

"Through his quiet and compassionate leadership, Jim Soderberg has dramatically changed the way our community sees its neediest people."

— Jeff Corey

Jim Soderberg

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JODI TOWNSEND volunteered at a therapeutic horse-riding ranch when she was a teenager in Bloomington. The delight on the face of one little girl in leg braces — riding atop one of the gentle giants — made an impression that Jodi would never forget. Years later, when Jodi's daughter faced a health crisis, she decided to investigate therapeutic riding again. Soon she found that same delight in her own daughter's eyes. As a result, Jodi has served since July 1997 as executive director at Majestic Hills Ranch for Children in Lakeville.

Under Jodi's guidance, Majestic Hills takes in mistreated and donated horses, lovingly nurses them to full health, and trains those with the right temperament to work with special needs children. For Jodi, the payoffs include bringing joy and empowerment to children with impaired motor control, autism, and other health and mobility challenges. Well aware of the significant financial strain faced by many of the families, Jodi provides all programs free of charge, supported only through volunteers, grants, and donations. Believing volunteer work to be a therapeutic benefit to *volunteers* as well as to the *children* served, Jodi constantly polls her team to ensure the experience is a positive one for all; many volunteers return year after year. Certified in animal rescue and therapeutic riding, Jodi admits that she gets as much from the programs as the kids do. "Every day," she says, "the kids make me smile." In 2005, over 50 children received hundreds of hours of free service at Majestic Hills Ranch, thanks to Jodi's vision and generosity.

"The special needs horses placed into the program provide so much to the special needs children they serve. Through this methodology, miracles happen."

— CJ Pierson



Patrick Wood

PATRICK WOOD has a history of working on the front lines of Minnesota's homelessness crisis, and has a deep understanding of its complexities. In this work, he believes three things are essential: "Patience, a sense of humor, and a Plan B." St. Paul's People Incorporated supports independent living for people with mental illnesses and other brain disorders. In 1994, Patrick established its Metropolitan Homeless Outreach Project, which helped expand support for the homeless by leaps and bounds. Although he left the agency recently, Patrick spent the last 12 years working through the program to unite housing developers and social service agencies to encourage both the creation of affordable housing and comprehensive services for those experiencing homelessness.

Throughout his career, Patrick has spent many days crossing over railroad tracks and under bridges, building relationships with those who might otherwise avoid the system and devising creative ways to connect them with housing and other social services. Patrick also worked with three state agencies to develop Minnesota's "Business Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness," and currently serves on the state's Ending Long-Term Homelessness advisory council. For four years he has sat on the board of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, which strives to end homelessness through provider training and improved legislation, and he has served the past two years as its regional vice president; he also is chair of the coalition's policy committee, through which board members assist staff to set policy and direction. Aware of the importance of identifying problems as a means to develop solutions, Patrick is currently assisting preparation for the Wilder Foundation's upcoming study on Minnesota's homeless population.

"Mr. Wood's efforts serve as a reminder that kindness, consideration, and compassion can change people's lives."

— Tim Marx

Previous Recipients

SINCE 1985, The McKnight Foundation has honored 230 recipients of the Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service, including this year's honorees.

Previous recipients are listed below:

2005

Said Salah Ahmed
Linda Brown
Wafiq Fannoun
Melvin Giles
Ora Hokes
Beth Holger
Curtis Levang
Larry and Noreen Luck
Sister Jean Thuerauf
Hedwidge "Hedy" Tripp

2004

James Andre
Elsie Dugar
Mahmoud El-Kati
Donna Gillen
Mary Gnerer
Daniel Hawkins
Rayome Clark Koehler
Mary Maas
Margaret McBride
Christine Norton
Kay Trainor
Carol Voss

2003

Cal Appleby
James Dodge
Jayne Frank
Linda Jemison
Cindy Johnson
Nathaniel Khaliq
Nancy Meyers
Rajiv Shah
John Siegfried
Char Thompson

2002

Andrew Benjamin
Martha Cardenas
Bonham Cross
Mohamed Essa
Ann Hooley
Jacqueline Kavanagh
Ed and Fern Ostberg
Ron Schwartz
Margaret Smith
Gail Weigle

2001

Susan Baxter
George Failes
Bertha Givins
Maria Inés Hitateguy
Barb King
Marge Melich
Kristine Reiter
Muriel Simmons
V.J. Smith
Sang Vu

2000

Jean Andrews
Melvin Carter, Jr.
Sylvia Carty
Richard Endres
John and Julie Funari
Hazel Jacobson
Raleigh Kent
George Nelsen
Delroy Schoenleben
Manuel Zuniga

1999

Henry Bruns
Ernesto DelVillar, Sr.
Marcelle Diedrich
Denise Gubrud and
Margarita Reese
Darlene Edwards
Phoenix Hill
Geraldine Hull
Ardis Knutson
Yako Myers
Joyce Segelbaum

1998

Christine Barich
Dawn Glaser-Falk
Joe Huber
Michael Kirk
Kevin L. Perez
Rodriguez
Edwin Reich
Scott Schlaffman
Choua "Mindy" Thao
Georgeanna Toftum
Clorasteen Wilson

1997

Marjory Aldrich
Jim Christy
Dianne Kimm
Allan Law
Sue Liedl
Larry Cloud Morgan
William Radueg
RaeAnn Ruth
Frankie and
Velma Tyson
Peggy Wells

1996

Vivian Blount
Cynthia Hawkins
Gregory Horan
Dale Hulme
Joe LaGarde
Percy and Lillian Olson
Joan Peterson
Jody Porter
Dave Ronning
Georgia Theis

1995

Laurice Beaudry
Dianne Binns
Leonard Gloeb
Fran Heitzman
Algjuan Hixon
Bruce Lubitz
Mary Robillard
Bill Rowe
Pat Schwartz
Jamie Slattery

1994

John Bobolink
Lori Ellis Boswell
Bill Driscoll
Janet Gostanczik
Shirley Ellen Jensen
Art Johnson
James Francis Kelly
Katherine G. King
Forrest R. Osterholm
Fred Rupp

1993

Eileen Bohn
Francisco Caballero
Sandra Gessler
Frank R. Johnson
David Lund
Don Mooney
Tyrone Smith
Art Stoeberl
Sheila WhiteEagle
Eleanore Whitmyre

1992

Peggy Holmes
Bellecourt
Dorothy Bilheimer
Jane Blattner
Eugene Chelberg
Dr. Kenneth and
Grace Covey
Dorothy Haynes
Norma Schlepppegrell
Roger and
Donna Urbanski
Quang Vu
Glen Wilfong

1991

Cynthia Ann Barry
Shirley Benitez
Julia Dinsmore
Dan Edgar
Terry Ford
Alice McHie
Kouthong Vixayvong
Walter White
Marie Wing
Mary Stier Winkels

1990

Ruby Alexander
Dan Celentano
Cheryl Ford
Muriel Gaines
Patrick Hartigan
Tri Dinh Nguyen
Phillip Sayers
Sister Leanore Stanton
John Stone
Diane Williams

1989

David L. Asmus
Lois V. Boylan
Ron Cronick
Phyllis Gross
Loeung Khi
Dana Lehrer
Sister Charlotte
A. Madigan
William O'Connell
Leo Treadway
Diane Ziegler

1988

Jewell Anderson
Willard A. Brunelle
Dollie D. Foster
Carol LaFavor
Kwame McDonald
Rosita Meehan
Marvin S. Moe
Anastasia Sery
Ray Wilson
Winona Wilson

1987

Robert L. Buckley
Linda Byrne
Mary Jo Copeland
Kathy J. Davis
John Fields
Sandra Huff
Mazi E. Johnson
Lou Anne Kling
Norma P. McDuffie
Pat Schmidgall

1986

Barbara J. Colhapp
San Juana Flores
Bernice E. Genereux
Flo Golod
Louise T. James
Maxine M. Kruschke
Robert Russell
Dana Lee Shato
Vernell Wabasha
Dellie Walz

1985

Ruth G. Andberg
Laurie Colbeck
Alieene Davis
Juanita G. Espinosa
Debra Jones
Elaine La Canne
Grace L. Sandness
Lucille T. Silk
Connie Strandberg
Justina Violette

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