



2011 *Virginia Mc Knight Binger*

# AWARDS

IN HUMAN SERVICE

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

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**THE McKNIGHT FOUNDATION, A MINNESOTA-BASED FAMILY  
FOUNDATION, SEEKS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE  
FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS. THROUGH  
GRANTMAKING, COALITION-BUILDING, AND ENCOURAGEMENT  
OF STRATEGIC POLICY REFORM, WE USE OUR RESOURCES TO  
ATTEND, UNITE, AND EMPOWER THOSE WE SERVE.**



**JEFF COREY** *Duluth*

**JOAN JARVIS ELLISON** *Pelican Rapids*

**JOANI ESSENBURG** *Minneapolis*

**SY VANG MOUACHEUPAO** *St. Paul*

**FARTUN OSMAN** *Woodbury*

**HELEN SKUTLEY** *Corcoran*



## Statement by Board Chair

**W**hen facing challenges, we often turn to our neighbors—sometimes for their support, other times to lend our own. In that equation, it can easily be said that the six recipients of our 2011 Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service regularly give more than they receive.

This has been a tough year for many Minnesotans. Communities statewide are weathering a devastating recession, lost jobs and wages, and increased demands for social services and support. With resources so tight and needs to be met all around, it might seem tempting to hunker down, stay close to home, and protect our own. However, our six awardees have taken a different approach.

Despite myriad obstacles in their own lives and competing demands for their time and energy, our 2011 human service awardees bring life to the spirit of compassion that Virginia McKnight Binger imbued in the awards that today bear her name. Our honorees remind us that we each hold responsibility for the well-being of those around us; if *we* have unmet needs, perhaps we have a *neighbor* with even greater needs. By helping them, we exercise some measure of control to strengthen our entire community when it needs us most.

And if we are tempted to “protect our own” in times of trouble, maybe that’s not such a bad thing. I suspect that’s just what our six honorees would say *they* are doing—they are protecting and empowering their elders, their neighbors, their children, their communities. We just need to remember, as our awardees do, that within each of our communities, “our own” are all around us.

These remarkable people reflect the values behind all McKnight’s work, and our belief in the individual as the foundation on which all successful societies rest. On behalf of The McKnight Foundation and the awards committee, I commend these awardees for their boundless compassion and humble work on behalf of others.

**ROBERT J. STRUYK**  
**CHAIR, THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION**

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## *About the Awards*

**T**he Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service are an annual tradition at The McKnight Foundation. The awards reflect the Foundation's deep belief in the virtue and power of compassion. Since its inception, this honor has gone to 265 Minnesotans, including this year's group. Each recipient has given time and effort to help others with no expectation of material reward. Each exemplifies the life-changing difference one person can make through service.

In 1985, the Foundation created the Awards in Human Service, which were renamed 10 years later in tribute to Virginia McKnight Binger. Mrs. Binger served the Foundation for nearly 50 years as a board member, as president from 1974 to 1987, and then as honorary chair until her death in 2002. Although William L. and Maude L. McKnight established the Foundation, it was the compassion and personal generosity of their daughter that set the standard for such work.

Like Virginia McKnight Binger in her time, the recipients of these awards are acutely aware of others' needs. Each was nominated in confidence by someone familiar with their work. Nominees live and volunteer in Minnesota and show commitment to helping others achieve a better life. All nominations were researched and independently evaluated.

The Foundation invites nominations annually. Beginning in April, a committee of volunteers who are active in various human service fields evaluates the nominations and recommends finalists to the Foundation's board of directors. Each approved awardee receives \$10,000. For more information about the program, visit the Foundation's website at [www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org).

**PROGRAM**

*The McKnight Foundation*

710 South Second Street, Minneapolis  
12:00 to 2:00 p.m.  
Friday, September 9, 2011

*Welcome*

Kate Woford, PRESIDENT  
Angie Theisen, AWARDS COMMITTEE

*Presentation of Awards*

*Awards in Human Service Committee*

Jolene Anderson, ST. PAUL  
Linda Lares, ALBERT LEA  
Patrick Moore, MONTEVIDEO  
Diane Rauschenfels, DULUTH  
Angie Theisen, WAITE PARK  
Dan Wilson, CROOKSTON



Jeff Corey

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When Northern Communities Land Trust (NCLT) hired Jeff Corey as its sole employee in 1998, he told the board: “We need to put a plan in place to have 100 homes in the next 10 years.” This goal was ambitious, since at the time the NCLT was on the brink of closure with just eight homes in its portfolio. Fast forward to 2011—the Land Trust just celebrated the completion of its 200th home in the Duluth area.



During Jeff’s tenure, NCLT has used the community land trust model to help families with low to middle incomes purchase homes for substantially less than market value. When they sell the homes, they are able to keep their initial investment, plus one-third of the increase in market value during their time as owners. NCLT maintains ownership of the land and the remaining value, creating a cycle of permanent affordable housing. “When our families sell their homes there is often a significant financial return for them *and* the homes remain affordable for the next buyers,” said Jeff. “Without the Land Trust many of these families would be caught in the rental cycle and wouldn’t be able to put down roots in the neighborhood.”

Under Jeff’s leadership, NCLT has redeveloped two blighted buildings into housing for homeless veterans; partnered on an innovative multi-family project to bolster one area; and created Common Ground Construction, a company that provides jobs to individuals with low incomes and renovates homes for NCLT.

When asked how NCLT has impacted the community, Jeff replied, “I don’t know where to start. There are so many families who flourish in our homes that there are miracles all around. The Land Trust program is a springboard for families to move in a positive way and to give back to the community.”



*“Through Jeff’s leadership, quiet determination, and deep commitment to social justice, hundreds of families who otherwise could not afford it now own beautiful, safe, updated homes.”*

—Lynn Goerdt, professor of social work and Northland Foundation board member

# *Joan Jarvis Ellison*

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Joan Jarvis Ellison and her family have always loved books. When they moved to Pelican Rapids in 1980, they were surprised to learn that it was the largest community in Minnesota without a library. Six years later, when a group of women began fundraising to build a library, Joan immediately joined. She also helped form a Friends of the Library group to support the library by raising funds and doing public relations, as well as to bring cultural opportunities to the community.



“We held fundraisers, wrote grant requests, and wrote letters asking for donations,” said Joan, who first served as fundraising chair and acted as the organization’s president for most of the next 20 years. By 1989, the committees had raised enough money to build a 3,100-square-foot library with books (most of them donated) on every shelf. While the community embraced the library, an influx of immigrants and refugees was also occurring in Pelican Rapids, and Joan saw an opportunity to use the library to educate the different parts of the community about each other. “We devised programs to bring the new immigrants into the library,” said Joan. “We ran a bilingual story time for the children with translators from the different ethnic groups. We also created programs to teach the old time Pelican residents about the new immigrants.”

Over the past 20 years, the many diverse programs spearheaded by Joan in partnership with the Multicultural Committee have flourished. So has the library, which has expanded to three times its original size. The library has also become a meeting place, which Joan sees as the best outcome. “Community is built one smile, one interaction, one conversation at a time,” she said. “If enough people care, we can create a community in the most profound sense of the word.”

*“Joanie is one who both cares and creates. In building the library, she became a community builder, moving the town from mostly tolerating its diverse population to truly making them feel part of the community.”*



—Dianne Kimm, *Lutheran Social Service Refugee Program*

*Joani Essenburg*

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**J**oani Essenburg's family moved to the East Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis in 1990. Facing some of the city's toughest challenges, the area had become known for gangs, drug dealers, and prostitution. According to U.S. Census data, about 40 percent of its children live in poverty.

Joani was determined to meet her neighbors to connect and listen—and did so in simple, yet impactful ways. She asked to borrow a cup of flour or sugar. She baked cookies and when kids started causing trouble on the block, she invited them in for a treat. Block parties started with neighbors, and soon the Essenburg house became a meeting place. Joani began Kids Club in 1996, with the help of her husband and a neighbor, Nettie, where every Thursday night 25 kids would gather in their basement for games, stories, and snacks.

A few years later, Joani launched an after-school and summer program, and in 1998 the Banyan Community was formed as a nonprofit. "We named it after the Banyan tree; long branches reach out from a center trunk and drop vines to create another tree," said Joani. "The energy of the Banyan begins at the roots with the community, and then is lifted upward, helping youth grow by connecting and supporting families."

The Banyan Community has flourished. In 2000, they bought and renovated a house to create a home for all Banyan's programs. In 2007, the Banyan Community Center opened around the corner from the Banyan House. The Banyan Community has nurtured hundreds of kids; its high school participants have achieved a 100 percent graduation rate and more than a dozen have gone on to college. "We see the transformation," said Joani. "Parents are now acting rather than reacting; elders are admonishing rather than cursing; youth are discovering their light. In short, helplessness has been replaced with hopefulness."



*"Joani is the light in the East Phillips neighborhood. The Banyan kids and families know they can call on her at any time and she will be there for them. Without Joani, the community would not have the hope it has today."*

—Lori Nissen, *HS Driven*

*Sy Vang Mouacheupao*

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**S**y Vang Mouacheupao came to the United States in 1976 as a refugee from Laos. Her family moved to Minnesota in 1980, and though she had no formal education, she quickly learned to speak English and was the first woman employed with the Lao Family Resettlement Program. It was here that other Hmong women started sharing their stories of domestic abuse. “My clients would show me their bruises,” said Sy. “They wanted to come home with me.”



Not knowing about battered women’s shelters or other resources, Sy secretly took in several women. “I knew that if I didn’t help them, no one would,” she said. In the Hmong culture it is almost unheard of that anyone other than an immediate family member would intervene on behalf of these women. However, once she learned about the American laws protecting victims of domestic violence, she found her way into the court systems to advocate on their behalf. “My passion is to help women and children who can’t help themselves,” said Sy. Over the past 20 years, Sy has transformed traditional Hmong cultural systems by challenging and teaching women, children, and men about the American legal system and connecting women with the resources to become self-sufficient.

Many Hmong women credit Sy for saving their lives. In one chance encounter, a woman approached Sy at an event. When Sy didn’t recognize her, the woman said, “Remember? You carried me on your back. You taught me to walk.” Thinking back to her days in the Laos jungle, where children often carried the babies and toddlers on their backs, Sy still couldn’t place this young woman. “Are you a relative?” Sy asked. “No. You took me to a shelter,” she said. “You saved my life. Now I am working. I have my children, and I am really happy.”

*“Sy’s courage and determination to better the lives of Hmong women and children is not only her career, but is at the core of her values, guiding all of her interactions.”*



—Kathy Mouacheupao, *Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (E.D. Emeritus)* and Sy’s daughter



*Fartun Osman*

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**W**hen Fartun Osman was a little girl growing up in Somalia, very few girls went to school and even fewer played sports. “Girls had to cook, clean, stay home, get married, and raise a family,” she said. Fortunately, Fartun’s mom and dad allowed her to attend school, and with 10 brothers, she was also allowed to play soccer with them. “My teachers told me they didn’t think I was a girl,” she said. “I was a girl acting like a boy.”

Fartun’s athletic prowess eventually landed her a position on Somali’s national basketball and national track and field teams. When she immigrated to the United States in 1994 to escape the civil war in her native country, she saw the same social and cultural norms denying young Muslim girls the opportunity to pursue educational and leadership opportunities in America. She realized that sports might be a way to help Somali girls build confidence and leadership skills. She left a job at a financial institution to become a bus driver and gym teacher and started coaching basketball in the evenings and on weekends. Even as a single mother with four children of her own, Fartun finds time to coach basketball and mentor youth and their parents at three separate organizations, including the Urban Youth Leadership Connection/MN Thunder P.L.U.S., Higher Ground Academy Charter School, and Somali Youth Development Organization in Minnesota.

Since 2005, Fartun has coached more than 500 girls, ages eight to 18. Many of these girls have gone on to college and are now giving back to the community as doctors, lawyers, photographers, and filmmakers. “I tell them to get an education first,” said Fartun. “No one can take it away from you. Then believe in yourself, be a leader, and help young girls the same as you.”



*“Fartun is driven by the pure conviction that Somali Muslim girls should aspire to expand their horizons and make a difference by shaping their community and the world around them.”*

—Jean-Paul Bigirindavyi, Urban Youth Leadership Connection

# *Gelen Skutley*

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**F**or more than 30 years, Helen Skutley has served as the volunteer director of the Hanover Area Food Shelf. According to Helen, “It started out very small. It was a cupboard in the kitchen of the church.” Today, that small kitchen cupboard has grown into a full operation that serves approximately 230 families each month, including more than 350 children.

One of Helen’s overarching goals is to make the experience a positive one for the families who use the food shelf and to provide a total level of confidentiality. “It’s hard for people to come to a food shelf,” Helen said. “Patrons will say, ‘I hate begging for food.’ I tell them, ‘You’re not begging. We’re here for you. Once you’re back on your feet, turn around and give back.’ And that’s what they do.”

Helen coordinates more than 60 volunteers each week who contribute to this vital service. She also arranges for pickup and delivery of food items—more than 19,000 pounds per month; ensures that the storage of items is managed professionally and safely; sees that the delivery of food to families is done in a caring and confidential manner; and promotes the food shelf through speaking engagements at local businesses and churches. Recently, she also worked with St. Paul Lutheran Church, where the food shelf is located, to open a Community Clothes Closet, a service that offers free clothing to families in need.

“Helping others is my passion,” said Helen. “I get back so much more than I give, and I have the satisfaction that the food shelf is doing well—not because of me, but because of the community and our terrific volunteers.”



*“When touring the Hanover Food Shelf, I was overcome with the importance of the services Helen helps to provide. She is an active advocate to the many families she serves, offering hope to those impacted by our recessionary downturn.”*



—Mayor Martin Waters, City of Hanover

# Previous Recipients

**S**ince 1985, The McKnight Foundation has honored 265 recipients of the Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service, including this year's honorees. Past recipients are listed below:

**2010** Abdi Ali • Jerry Fleischaker • Dan Hunt • Peg Johnson • Cynthia McArthur • Berlyn Staska  
**2009** Nancy Guenette • Mohamed Hassan Osman • Ken Porwoll • John Poupart • Linda Riddle • Renee Tomatz  
**2008** Ibrahim Ayeh • Isaac Combs • Robin and Starla Krause • Jimmy Longoria • Patricia Melody • Steve O'Neil  
**2007** Ada Beh • Johanna Christianson • Virginia Clark • Bernice Cowl Gordon • Charlnitta Ellis • Rachel Kincade • Darcy Knight • Barbara Lewis • Mary F. Nelson • Mark Ochu  
**2006** Dee Cotten • May Pa Heu • Russ Irvin • Shegitu Kebede • Sarah Mollet • Vivian Peterson • Erik Rodriguez • Jim Soderberg • Jodi Townsend • Patrick Wood  
**2005** Said Salah Ahmed • Linda Brown • Wafiq Fannoun • Melvin Giles • Ora Hokes • Beth Holger • Curtis Levang • Larry and Noreen Luck • Sister Jean Thuerlauf • 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 • Darlene Edwards • Denise Gubrud and Margarita Reese • 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 Schleppegrell • 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 • Locung 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

## **VIRGINIA MCKNIGHT BINGER AWARDS IN HUMAN SERVICE**

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR: Tim Hanrahan

WRITER: Susan Guck

DESIGN: 5 by 5 Design

PHOTOGRAPHY: Mark Luinenburg

PRINTING: Reflections

The McKnight Foundation is committed to the protection of our environment. This book was printed on paper containing 100% post-consumer fibers using soy inks. Wind energy credits were purchased for its production. Additionally, we partner with printers and use papers that are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified. The FSC standards represent the world's strongest social and environmental systems for guiding forest management and the use of paper resources toward sustainable outcomes.

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## **ABOUT THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION**

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, coalition-building, and encouragement of strategic policy reform, we use our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve. The Foundation's grantmaking priorities include support of child and youth development, the region and communities, the arts, the environment, and scientific research in selected fields. The Foundation's primary geographic focus is the state of Minnesota.

Founded in 1953 and endowed by William L. McKnight and Maude L. McKnight, The McKnight Foundation had assets of approximately \$1.9 billion and granted about \$96 million in 2010. More information and program-specific grantmaking guidelines are available at [www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org).



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## THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

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