



2013 VIRGINIA  
McKNIGHT BINGER

AWARDS IN HUMAN SERVICE



THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION



# ABOUT THE AWARDS

The 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 277 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 work in

Minnesota and show commitment to helping others achieve a better life. All nominations were researched and independently evaluated.

The Foundation accepts nominations year-round. Beginning in May, 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).

## OUR MISSION

**T**he McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, collaboration, and strategic policy reform, we use our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve.

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

# AWARDEES

SUNNY CHANTHANOUVONG Elk River

BRIAN MOGREN Minneapolis

KIM RANDOLPH Duluth

FATIMA SAID Winona

CHERYL STEEVES Chisago City

ERNESTO VELEZ BUSTOS Owatonna

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# PROGRAM

## THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

710 South Second Street, Minneapolis

12:00 to 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, August 14, 2013

### WELCOME

Kate Wolford, PRESIDENT

Terry Kalil, AWARDS COMMITTEE

### PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Erika L. Binger, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### AWARDS COMMITTEE

Miguel Garate, AUSTIN

Terry Kalil, DETROIT LAKES

Sue Liedl, BEMIDJI

Rich Smith, CAMBRIDGE

Erik Torch, DULUTH

Daniel Yang, MINNEAPOLIS

*2013 Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service*

# STATEMENT BY BOARD CHAIR

**F**or their selfless contributions without thought of reward, we honor these six individuals with our 2013 Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service. These good people represent a fraction of the nominations received for this year's awards, from among the thousands of Minnesotans who work year in and out as volunteers and nonprofit professionals. This group joins 271 awardees who have been recognized throughout our program's 29 years.

The call to serve comes in different forms. Some are inspired by an influential leader, while others follow the paths of parents or act on their own convictions to help a neighbor or right a wrong. The outcomes they achieve are even more varied and powerful: leadership and a path forward in underserved communities; safer homes, better educations, and other life-sustaining resources; and independence empowered by both hard work and needed supports.

Each year I am humbled by the exceptional individuals we meet through the Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service. The awards' creator, known affectionately as "Ginnie" by friends and family, would have been pleased to know our honorees. They work tirelessly, with unfailing commitment — just as she did — to improve our communities by helping the most vulnerable among us. I know Ginnie would embrace them as colleagues in this work, not strangers.

As we celebrate these six individuals' impressive accomplishments, deep dedication to humanity, and community engagement, these awards also remind each of us to listen for our own call to serve. Listen, and be prepared to act. Every Minnesotan has potential to make a positive difference, one person at a time. On behalf of The McKnight Foundation and the awards committee, I commend these six model citizens for leading the way with their inspiring commitment to helping others.

TED STARYK

BOARD CHAIR, THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

# SUNNY CHANTHANOUVONG





## SUNNY CHANTHANOUVONG

is executive director of the Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota. Formed by ethnic Lao refugees in 1981 to respond to the emerging needs of newly arrived Lao refugees who were not Hmong, the Center provides services for youth, adults, and elders around employment, health, housing, citizenship, and culture. From his central leadership role, Sunny explains, “In my community, we don’t have a lot of people working in nonprofits or government,” he said. “If I’m not there to help, nobody’s going to be there. I try to be a good role model.” Beyond his long days at the Center, Sunny is also a volunteer, a member on several boards, and a facilitator and advocate for his community.

After more than 20 years of service, Sunny is committed to never turning away someone in need. Minnesota is home to the country’s third-largest ethnic Lao population — wholly different in language, history, and culture from our state’s large refugee Hmong population. Recognizing little representation in state government, Sunny feels personally driven to ensure his people have access to critical services and health care. The community is particularly plagued by Hepatitis B, which is preventable by vaccination but, if left untreated, can

lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer. Concerned by stunning numbers afflicted with Hepatitis B, Sunny approached the University of Minnesota to research the issue. In 2010, a study of 300 Lao participants was conducted, screening for Hepatitis B while educating about vaccines and prevention. As a side benefit, the study also exposed many treatable cases of high blood pressure and diabetes in the community. Sunny helped set up programs to raise awareness around these health issues as well, including tips for healthier cooking and eating habits. Sunny says these efforts are paying off, “I’ve helped bring these services to my community, and I believe people are really benefiting.”





“Sunny is an inspirational and tireless leader within the Lao community. He is a knowledgeable and articulate voice, expressing the needs of those he serves.”

—Carlos Gallego, Think Small

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# BRIAN MOGREN



## SINCE BRIAN MOGREN

moved to north Minneapolis 15 years ago, he has been a dedicated community contributor. During much of that time, Brian worked around his advertising job at Target Corporation to volunteer as much as possible. By 2008, his commitments and desires to achieve more on the north side had grown so much, he felt called to end his 25-year career with Target to fully concentrate his creative skills, energy, and passion in his community.

A week after leaving his job, Brian and the Sisters of the Visitation Monastery of Minneapolis transformed his very own house into an urban retreat center and house of hospitality, renamed St. Jane House. Today, the place flourishes with neighbors and visitors coming regularly to find respite, share meals, enjoy life, celebrate diversity, grow spiritually, and conspire for good. Brian is committed to creating a world where all people experience themselves as being seen and valued for who they really are, and are empowered to pursue their deepest desires for themselves and the world. This led him to create Alafia Place, an emerging nonprofit providing quality, affordable housing, and personal and professional development for community leaders who are dedicated to making a difference on

the north side. Among the residents is Mary Johnson whose organization From Death to Life unites families impacted by homicide for healing and reconciliation. Brian serves on Mary's board and provides space at St. Jane House for her healing groups and other meetings.

Alafia Place and St. Jane House have become environments of collaboration and support for those working hard to transform the community. "Collaboration is a huge thing for me," said Brian. "I get really excited about the possibilities that come from working together. I love connecting people to do that."





“Brian dared to dream a brighter future for north Minneapolis, a community he calls home, and took bold actions to begin to fulfill those dreams. He is a life changing spirit of hope in a community space that is so often needing it.”

—Austin Aho, Friends of the Mississippi River and Stand Up MN

# KIM RANDOLPH





## KIM RANDOLPH HAS WORKED

has worked at Churches United in Ministry (CHUM) homeless shelter for the past 25 years. “When I look back, it’s hard to believe it’s been that long,” she said. “It’s never boring here.” Kim is the Stabilization Services Director at CHUM. Every day, she and her colleagues help guests get back on their feet through permanent housing, employment, and other life-sustaining services. Grounded in deep compassion, Kim has a well-regarded reputation for being calm and firm, grace under pressure. Her colleagues often comment on the long line outside her office door. From the time the center opens at 9 a.m. until she goes home at night, people are often lined up and waiting to talk with Kim.

In the time Kim has been at CHUM, she has seen drastic changes in the causes of homelessness in Duluth. Over the past few decades, Kim has seen government assistance programs lose their funding while hundreds of affordable housing units have been torn down to make way for commercial expansion in the city. Kim has also observed an increase in synthetic drug use, which she credits for the recent spike in the number of people seeking CHUM’s shelters. The contexts and backgrounds of the people she has seen come in and out of CHUM

have changed over the years as well. When Kim started at CHUM a quarter century ago, she rarely witnessed women and families requesting a place to stay. In 2012, however, a third of CHUM's guests were women. And 75 families were sheltered.

Throughout all the years Kim has spent doing this challenging work, she hasn't lost her passion for CHUM or for helping people. "When everyone else has given up on these folks, CHUM is providing support," she said. "I'm really proud to be working here."





“Kim is guided by a strong inner compass  
and deep compassion tempered by  
a clear, unromanticized understanding  
of human nature.”

—Robyn Weaver, CHUM volunteer

# FATIMA SAID



## IN 1993, FATIMA SAID AND

and her family fled their home in Bosnia as war refugees. Without speaking any English, she arrived in Rochester, Minnesota, with two suitcases and hope for a better life. Fatima's hope was rewarded by a community with open arms and the support her family needed dearly to carry on. Twenty years later, still grateful to all those who helped her family through their transition, Fatima has made it her life's mission to do the same for other newcomers.

As the Executive Director of Project FINE, a small nonprofit in Winona that educates and integrates newcomers into the community, Fatima helps immigrants and refugees accept the past and work through the stages of their new lives. Fatima knows exactly what they are going through and how hard it can be to ask for help. Understanding that it was the help and support she received upon first arriving that gave her the confidence to keep going, she strives to provide the same for others. With boundless energy and a spirit that touches everyone who comes into contact with her, Fatima works tirelessly on behalf of others toward a better world for all.

When newcomers first arrive in southeastern Minnesota, Project FINE is there to help find housing and food. The organization teaches immigrants about finding jobs, educating their children, applying for health care, and anything else they might need. After establishing themselves for a few years, Fatima says clients often come back to Project FINE looking for help to start putting down even deeper roots, perhaps seeking loans for homes, college tuition, or starting a small business. “I’m so happy when they’ve reached this stage of their new lives,” she said. “They’re feeling proud about being members of this community and are starting to give back. It’s a pure joy for me.”





“Fatima is a devoted advocate for immigrants and refugees. Her vision is contagious; she sees possibilities and promise where others see frustration and disappointment. She inspires us to be better people.”

—Connie J. Gores, Southwest Minnesota State University

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# CHERYL STEEVES





## FOR 10 YEARS, CHERYL STEEVES

coordinated housing for families and people with disabilities. She enjoyed connecting people with safe, stable homes, and yet knew many of the people she helped had more needs than she was able to serve. So when she saw an opportunity to make a more holistic difference in women's lives, she seized it as director of Sarah's... an Oasis for Women.

Sarah's provides support and resources for women who have survived significant trauma. Cheryl and the other staff create a safe and caring space for women to develop life skills toward self-sufficiency and community participation. A central mantra is "You come here in order to leave." When a woman arrives at Sarah's, Cheryl sits down with her to explore and set her goals for the next stage of her life. "It's amazing how clear every woman is about her goals and what she wants to accomplish," said Cheryl. "Every woman who comes to Sarah's is very determined to move on."

Cheryl loves to share the story of a woman nicknamed "Raine." An immigrant from Asia, Raine came to Sarah's after escaping an abusive marriage. She had enrolled in nursing school, but life's challenges had prevented her

from becoming a successful student. Then everything changed. At Sarah's, Raine thrived as a student and learned other valuable life skills, including cooking. Early on, Raine avoided the kitchen because her husband's family had always criticized her as a terrible cook. "Those types of remarks can be real barriers for people," said Cheryl. But because another central mantra at Sarah's is, "You can do it," Raine received lots of encouragement and eventually discovered her own genuine culinary talent, which she still shares today with the women at Sarah's.





“Cheryl’s calm, kind, and thoughtful personality, coupled with extensive experience working with the challenges women face, enables her to be a powerful force helping residents make changes in their lives.”

—Mary Hunt, Sarah’s Advisory Council

# ERNESTO VELEZ BUSTOS



## ERNESTO VELEZ BUSTOS

moved to Minnesota from Mexico as a teen to live with his father. A few years later, he was attending a southern Minnesota community college when he noticed a posting for a community organizing position with Centro Campesino. He felt encouraged to apply, thinking it might be good practice toward applying for future jobs. Turns out Ernesto didn't need the practice — 10 years later, he continues to serve proudly as Centro Campesino's executive director.

Centro Campesino is a community organizing, education, and advocacy nonprofit working to improve the lives of southern Minnesota's Latino and migrant community. "At the end of the day, our goal is that the Latino community has the tools and knowledge to take care of the social issues and problems they face in our communities," Ernesto said. He and his staff are the voice for their community's often voiceless members, working to create solutions for widespread problems. Ernesto has helped migrant workers to improve living and working conditions and trained groups of high school students to become community organizers. This past spring, Centro worked with students to coordinate campaigns across the region in support of the Minnesota

Dream Act. Among its provisions, the law allows students to pay in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities if they meet certain requirements, regardless of immigration status. Ernesto's students met and shared their stories with state legislators. In May 2013, the bill was signed into law.

Such victories motivate Ernesto's work. He loves inspiring others to commit to meaningful efforts, especially students. "It's really rewarding when students tell me they look up to me. They ask me how I got where I am because they want to do what I do one day," he said. "That provides me with the energy to really want to do this more and more."





“Ernesto is a very rare find.  
He never hesitates to speak up,  
build relationships, gain allies, and fight  
injustice on behalf of his community.”

—Suzanne Murphy, City of Minneapolis

# ABOUT McKNIGHT

## VIRGINIA McKNIGHT BINGER AWARDS IN HUMAN SERVICE

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The McKnight Foundation is committed to the protection of our environment, a philosophy that underlies our practice of using paper with postconsumer waste content, and where possible, environmentally friendly inks. 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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The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, collaboration, and encouragement of strategic policy reform, we use our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve. Program interests include regional economic and community development, Minnesota's arts and artists, early literacy, youth development, Midwest climate and energy, Mississippi River water quality, neuroscience, international crop research, and community-building in Southeast Asia. Our primary geographic focus is the state of Minnesota, with significant support also directed to strategies throughout the U.S. and in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

Founded in 1953 and endowed by William and Maude McKnight, the Minnesota-based Foundation had assets of approximately \$2 billion and granted about \$85 million in 2012. More information and program-specific grantmaking guidelines are available at [www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org).

## PREVIOUS RECIPIENTS

Since 1985, The McKnight Foundation has honored 277 recipients of the Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service, including this year's honorees. All past recipients are listed online at [\*\*www.mcknight.org/awards\*\*](http://www.mcknight.org/awards).



**THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION**

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