



For Immediate Release

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Ohio Nonprofits Receive Excellence Award

Columbus – Each year nonprofit organizations serve thousands in their communities and spend endless hours working on projects to help others and further their mission. **On May 12, 2009**, six Ohio nonprofits received honors at the *Fourth Annual Ohio Nonprofit Excellence Award* luncheon at the Ohio Statehouse Atrium.

The Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations (OANO) sponsors the *Excellence Award* to recognize the creativity, execution, achievement, and overall excellence of a specific project or program completed by an Ohio nonprofit the previous year. Two awards were granted in three regions (northern, central and southern Ohio) for both a small nonprofit (operating budget of \$1 million and under) and a large nonprofit (operating budget in excess of \$1 million).

More than 100 organizations submitted applications for the award. A selection committee comprised of community foundations and past-award winners selected the winners based on criteria such as creativity, execution, achievement, outcomes, and overall excellence of the nominated program.

The winners and a description of their projects include:

Canton Calvary Mission – Back Packs for Kids Program

The mission of Canton Calvary Mission is serving Christ in the heart of the community by creating a safe haven and center for learning as well as providing for the spiritual and physical needs of the community. The Back Packs for Kids Program is a weekend meal program serving youth ages 1-18 in Canton. The children are on free meal programs at school, but many times have no food on the weekend. Children arrive at the mission each Friday afternoon to receive a backpack with items for four weekend meals.

YMCA of Greater Toledo – Summer Bus Fun

The mission of the YMCA of Greater Toledo is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all. The Summer Fun Bus program includes passenger mini-bus shells fully equipped with recreational equipment. The buses travel to neighborhoods to provide recreational programs to disadvantaged youth. They also serve as an information center for parents distributing materials on immunizations and information on public assistance. The Fun Bus project was created after the city of Toledo eliminated summer youth programs, thereby leaving Toledo's center-city youth with no options for the summer. During a twelve week time span, the Fun Bus program served 14, 249 youth in the city's most impoverished neighborhoods.

CASA of Franklin County – Volunteer Recruitment Campaign

The mission of CASA of Franklin County is to recruit, screen, train and support community volunteers to become guardians *ad litem* (GAL) who advocate for the best interest of abused and neglected children in court. After four years of decreased funding from Franklin County, the county increased CASA's funds in 2008. However, the increase mandated the agency also serve 17% more children by year's end, which meant the agency would have to secure many new volunteers. Using a new strategic plan, board member involvement, and increased staff dedication to volunteer recruitment, the agency was able to secure 79 new GALs who helped to serve 736 children in 2008, representing a 20% increase for the agency.

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Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks – Ohio Benefit Bank

The mission of OASHF is to assist Second Harvest Food Banks in Ohio in providing food and other resources to people in need. The Ohio Benefit Bank is a web-based program that simplifies the application for federal and state benefits and provides free income tax filing. Clients work with trained counselors at one of 867 sites state-wide to prepare taxes and applications for work supports. The computer program simultaneously checks eligibility for all government benefits and completes the appropriate applications. Data only has to be entered once thereby reducing caseworker data entry efforts. Studies show from January to October, 2008, the Ohio Benefit Bank more than tripled the amount of benefits it helped Ohioans access from the same time frame the previous year.

Starfire – Starfire U Program

The mission of Starfire is to design and execute community activities for those with disabilities and to create opportunities for volunteers in Greater Cincinnati. The Starfire U program provides relevant and empowering educational opportunities and is designed to parallel a college social experience for young adults who often miss out on experiences that many of their same-age peers learn while attending college. The four-day a week program combines social outings, service projects and community involvement with the goal to increase social confidence, personal responsibility, and self-awareness of the participants. Using measurement tools such as the Life Skills Assessment, staff saw participants gain 12 new social confidence skills, 11-25 learned skills, and 13-17 new self-awareness skills and saw gains in 100% of participants in the first six months.

Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency (C-HCCAA) – Blueprint for Success

C-HCCAA's mission is to improve the quality of life of low-income Hamilton county residents. Blueprint Express is a nine-month construction training program that provides hands-on experience as well as math skills, life skills, financial literacy and academic training to assist participants ages 18-28 in obtaining their GED. Working with the city of Cincinnati, the program selects blighted housing stock in the inner-city to rehab as class projects. Students are given a \$360/month stipend and for a graduation gift, they receive tools, tool box, tool belt, and steel-toed boots. In 2008, 33 youth graduated from the program. Eighty-two percent of the graduates have found work and 90% (without a high school diploma) obtained a GED. The program currently has a waiting list of 100.

More than 250 people attended the luncheon, including nonprofit executives, legislators and corporate supporters. GBQ Partners, an independent accounting and consulting firm, sponsored the luncheon.

OANO is a statewide membership association of nearly 550 nonprofit organizations representing the breadth and diversity of Ohio's charitable nonprofit sector. OANO's mission is to provide leadership, education, and advocacy to enhance the ability of Ohio's nonprofit organizations to serve their communities. Jennifer Eschbach can be reached at 614-280-0233 or jennifereschbach@oano.org.

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