



For Immediate Release
October 12, 2015

Media Contact:
Monica Hassan, (916) 323-7646
PressOffice@CaliforniaVolunteers.ca.gov

2015 California Governor's Volunteering & Service Awards, Hoffman Prize, & National AmeriCorps Swearing-In

Eight Honorees to Receive Prestigious Awards for Impacting Communities, and Hundreds of New AmeriCorps Members to be Sworn-In

Sacramento, Calif. – On October 15, 2015, California will be presenting the 2015 Governor's Volunteering and Service Awards, and the Hoffman Prize to honorees that have gone above and beyond in the world of service and volunteerism. In addition, hundreds of the more than 7,600 new members in California will be sworn-in as a new year of service has begun.

"It's a privilege to be able to recognize these amazing men and women who are dedicated to volunteerism and service," said Karen Baker, California's Chief Service Officer. "These remarkable honorees are making our communities better and stronger and it is our pleasure to present them with these awards."

Chief Service Officer Karen Baker will present the awards to the honorees on the West Steps of the Capitol in Sacramento at 10 AM. The 2015 Governor's Volunteering and Service Award winners and the Hoffman Prize winner are the following:

Hoffman Prize – Susan Portugal, Bank of America's Senior Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility Philanthropy Director

The Hoffman Prize recognizes an exceptional California business executive who demonstrates outstanding and impactful work fostering volunteerism in his or her local community, the State of California, the nation, and the globe. Susan Portugal is responsible for key employee engagement initiatives including the company's nationally recognized global volunteer program and United Way Campaign. Under her direction, Bank of America Community Volunteers have driven more than 2 million hours annually of volunteerism by employees across the globe – from America to Singapore, India, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Her leadership led to the company successfully achieving this impressive milestone, which gained national recognition as a top organization within Points of Light Foundation's Civic 50 annual ranking. Susan is responsible for the company's national United Way Campaign, through which Bank of America employees pledged \$18.6 million to support thousands of nonprofits across the country in 2014. Additionally, under Susan's leadership, the company has made advances in integrating its volunteerism as a key component of broader corporate social responsibility initiatives, including campaigns focused on hunger, military, and financial education.



California’s Volunteer of the Year – Donna Johnson, East Porterville

This award honors an outstanding Californian whose volunteer service is exemplary and inspirational. Donna Johnson, known to her East Porterville neighbors as the “Water Angel,” saw a need to bring attention to the disaster the current drought has become in her community. Donna worked with local businesses to collect donations of water, paper products, and containers to be used for storing water. She purchased pallets of water with her own funds and began delivering families bottled water to their doorsteps. She went door-to-door introducing herself and offering drinking water along with her smile. Donna developed routes and delivery schedules to deliver her gift of water. Her list of water recipients has grown to nearly a hundred households. The increasing need only fueled her desire to help. As a result of her efforts, over 80 countries and dozens of both local and national media outlets have taken an interest in the small community of East Porterville. Response efforts increased as local agencies, governments (Federal, State and Local), non-profit organizations, and the faith-based community, began a coordinated relief effort that has resulted in further development of both short and long term water solutions.

Catherine Milton California AmeriCorps Member of the Year – Sara Kokkeleberg, Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership/Eastern Sierra Land Trust

This award honors a California AmeriCorps member who has made a substantial impact to his or her community. Sara Kokkeleberg has made a substantial impact to her community through her work and through her incredible attitude and personality. Sara’s work on the Eastside Pollinator Garden Project has been exemplary. Through her dedication, expertise, and organization, she has been the main reason the project has been so successful. In just two short seasons, she co-created the project, which included promoting and educating our community about the importance of pollinator-friendly habitats, generating funds for this project in her service term, and certifying 37 gardens in the first year, with another 20 in progress for this year. Through this project, Sara has helped broaden the Community Connections Program and has provided outreach to many youth groups and community members, instilling them with an appreciation for the Eastside that she has discovered. Sara has exhibited professionalism, excellent communication skills, the ability to assimilate new information quickly, and how to then teach others this information. Due to her engaging personality, many members of our community have increased their engagement with gardening, land conservation and volunteerism.

California’s Governmental Agency of the Year – LEAP (Lake Evacuation and Animal Protection) [Under Lake County Animal Care and Control Department]

This award honors an outstanding state, county, or city agency or department that has demonstrated a remarkable dedication to engaging volunteers. LEAP (Lake Evacuation and Animal Protection), under the Lake County Animal Care and Control Department, worked tirelessly for 120 hours with nearly no rest to evacuate and shelter 400 large and small animals from the explosive Rocky Fire, which burned 69,438 acres and destroyed 96 buildings, including 43 homes. Some of the notable animals rescued included an Italian-speaking parrot named Rupert who would wish his temporary caretakers ‘good night’ each night, and an exceptionally heavy tortoise that volunteers needed to help lift so it could be evacuated.

**California's Disaster Volunteer Program of the Year – San Bernardino County CERT (Community Emergency Response Team)**

This award honors an outstanding California disaster volunteer program that has demonstrated an unwavering service commitment to the local community. San Bernardino County CERT has strengthened countywide preparedness by coordinating a comprehensive program where residents receive CERT training, attend subsequent training throughout the year, and utilize this training in significant contributions of service during actual disasters. Two new unincorporated programs, four municipal programs, and one campus CERT program have been newly created, with another seven unincorporated programs and six municipal programs being revitalized. Additionally, a Spanish-based preparedness curriculum, Listos, has been delivered by CERT volunteers in two communities, training over 150 Spanish-speaking residents in its first year. This extensive training helped with the ability to activate CERT volunteers, most recently during the Lake and North Fires. Eight different CERT programs were activated; utilizing 83 CERT volunteers to donate 1,636 hours of volunteer service.

California's Nonprofit of the Year – ElderHelp of San Diego

This award honors a California nonprofit that has shown an extraordinary ability to leverage volunteers in service to their organization. ElderHelp of San Diego delivers direct services to seniors through dedicated volunteers. Through their services, they help seniors save thousands of dollars each year. Their services include free in-home services, which replace expensive services offered by home care agencies, as well as constant monitoring combined with strong health advocacy to keep seniors out of expensive nursing homes. Last year, ElderHelp assisted 5,592 seniors, either through direct services or by providing resources, and expect to serve thousands more in the future. In addition, ElderHelp services contribute to cost containment for the healthcare industry by providing continuing care, reducing hospital days for clients by nearly one-third, and preventing hospital readmissions due to falls by 91 percent. ElderHelp volunteer visits and caring assistance make a significant difference in reducing loneliness and isolation by two-thirds, as shown through impact studies. Another vital service ElderHelp provides is a ride service called Seniors-A-Go-Go, which provides transportation for seniors from home to the store, to doctors or therapy appointments, or even to movies and social outings. Last year alone, ElderHelp volunteers logged over 10,000 hours serving seniors in the community.

California's Foundation of the Year – Syar Industries Foundation, Napa

This award honors a California-based foundation that has made a successful investment in service and volunteering models in addressing community needs. Syar Industries Foundation has valued civic involvement by encouraging employees, customers and foundation awardees to increase volunteerism. In the past, Syar Industries' employees have participated in numerous days of service or holiday opportunities. To highlight a few, employees have participated in coat drives, fundraisers, women shelters, and many others. Syar and their subsidiaries host annual drives to produce toys and coats for local families. Syar understands that an agency cannot successfully deliver on their mission without the funding for the sustainability of strong volunteer programs. Syar Industries Foundation provided the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership's Napa office funding in the amount of \$29,000 each year for three years to provide Service Enterprise Initiative (SEI) training to nonprofit agencies in Napa County. The funding resulted in expanding SEI to Napa County with 13 local agencies in the first funding year. The generous three-year commitment provided by the Syar Foundation in support of this project has been instrumental to early success.

**California's Business Volunteer Program of the Year – AT&T California**

This award honors an outstanding California business with an innovative, high-impact employee volunteer program. AT&T has taken steps to encourage students to successfully complete high school and go on to college or a career. Their Aspire Mentoring Academy provides flexible options to mentor students, designed to work around our employees' schedules. Last year in California, AT&T employees attended 70 work and school events, impacting 5,800 students including over 26,000 hours of mentoring. AT&T has also taken steps to assist in drought relief efforts. In 2014, the leadership of AT&T California asked employees to reduce water usage, including a reduction in the washing of AT&T's California fleet of more than 15,000 vehicles, reducing facility landscape irrigation by half, and turning off all decorative water fixtures in buildings. Last year, AT&T reduced water use in California by almost 10 percent, equaling approximately 70 million gallons. Furthermore, AT&T supported a team of five robotics students from a Fresno Elementary school, nicknamed the "Fab 5," who wanted to improve the way people learn about water conservation. They researched and conceived a mobile application to help local residents track their water use in real-time using their mobile device. AT&T's \$25,000 contribution, along with support from the City of Fresno and the Fresno Chamber of Commerce Foundation, provided full funding to develop and deploy the app in the City of Fresno. This commitment also jumpstarted additional fundraising efforts, now being led by the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, to support a public education and marketing campaign to promote use of the app among residents.

California Volunteers is the state office that manages programs and initiatives to increase the number of Californians involved with service and volunteering, including the state AmeriCorps program and the management of volunteers and monetary donations during times of disasters. For more information, please visit www.CaliforniaVolunteers.org.

AmeriCorps is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund, and leads the President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.

###