

## Remarks County Commission Meeting June 13, 2003

### NC Governor's Volunteer Service Awards

Thank you Mr. Chairman and commissioners. We appreciate the opportunity to present the North Carolina Governor's Volunteer Awards for Gaston County to 8 recipients for the outstanding volunteer efforts in our community. My name is Barbara Yarbrough, and I am the County Awards Coordinator for these awards through the lead agency, United Way of Gaston County. With me tonight to assist in presenting the awards is Andrea Stephens, President of United Way.

Our recipients tonight demonstrate that you are never too young, or never too old to change lives through volunteer efforts in our community. I find it especially promising that several of our recipients work with young people who we know are our future.

I will introduce each recipient and ask them to come forward to receive their award certificate and pin.

Our first recipient is **John Philip Bombardier** but I believe most people know him as Flip. He was nominated for extraordinary commitment to mentoring or educating youth and in the lifetime achievement category.

Flip has volunteered his time as a mentor for the students of Gaston County Schools for nearly three decades at York Chester Middle School. His nominator Tammy Hubbard points out that Flip treats his students like young adults, not as children. In addition to his own role as a mentor, he has recruited new mentors to the program and helped them gain confidence in their roles. Tammy also says that he has also been a mentor to her -- offering friendship, encouragement, and support. Thank you Flip for your many years of service at York Chester.

Our next recipient **Aubrey Iona Bridges** was also nominated for her extraordinary commitment to mentoring or educating youth.

Aubrey performs various roles as a volunteer at Tryon Elementary School assisting with a Coke bottle cap program that brings extra funds to the school, and she assists in the library. Perhaps her greatest asset is her ability to work with students despite having a disability. Aubrey is nonverbal and uses a device to speak. She has made presentations to fifth grade students at Tryon Elementary as they begin reading the book *Wonder*. She shares with them what it is like to live with a disability. Aubrey has told her story in over 200 presentations, sharing with the community at large, better ways to be inclusive to all students and community members. Megan LeFevers, principal at Tryon Elementary, states that Aubrey has taught our students to be tolerant, accepting, and to see others for their gifts and not their labels. Aubrey, what a blessing it is to have you here tonight as we recognize you for the special service you provide.

**Kaitlyn Dockery**, our youngest recipient is receiving the Governor's Volunteer Service Award tonight for outstanding dedication to volunteering with or for animals.

Kaitlyn has developed her own service project named "Kaitlyn's Heart For Pets." She collects pet supplies at school and church that are needed by the Gaston Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Clinic such as blankets, pet toys, pet food and treats and , pet beds, and treats. Kaitlyn works to make money to buy pet supplies and has placed donation boxes at WA Bess Elementary School and her church to help gather donations.

Laura Clark, principal at W.A. Bess tells us that she also volunteered with the school's Books & Buddies program, personally earning money to purchase and donate over 80 books and stuffed animals, and additionally, helping with donations for a family who had lost their home during a house fire. Kaitlyn also participates in numerous other mission projects and community projects. I find it especially wonderful to see someone so young taking volunteerism so seriously. I know that we can expect great things from Kaitlyn in the years to come. Congratulations Kaitlyn.

**Rebecca Lipka** was nominated in extraordinary commitment to mentoring or educating youth and in the lifetime achievement category.

Becky has spent more than 30 years serving and volunteering for Girl Scouts in Gaston County. Although her primary focus is Gaston County, the organization's footprint is 40 counties and very much of what Becky contributes is to the benefit of girls and adults in other counties as well. She is a troop leader to a multi-age level group of girls and works with adult leaders in other Gaston County troops for training and mentoring. Becky also designs, plans and organizes events that serve 100's of youth and adults. Becky uses her people and leadership skills to organize, mentor and sets an amazing example for girl and adult Girl Scouts. Congratulations for your lifetime achievement to Girl Scouts.

Our next recipient is my friend, **Rev. Dr. Joan Martin**

Joan has served the residents of Gaston County since 2004 in many capacities. Joan is an ordained Presbyterian minister and currently serves as the Chaplain at Covenant Village in addition to her numerous examples of community involvement with leadership roles in many areas, including but not limited to

Gaston Clergy and Citizen's Coalition, Heart Society of Gaston County, Interfaith Trialogue of Gaston County, CaroMont Health Professional Advisory Group, Rotary Club of Gastonia, Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce, Gaston County Schools, Gaston Hospice, Professional Women's Association, Association of Professional Chaplains, Presbytery of Western North Carolina. Joan has such a big servant heart and ever-present smile. Thank you Joan.

**Richard Ruhlman** also serves the youth in our community.

In her nomination of Dick, Annie Anthony refers to him as "her favorite octogenarian" Dick has worked with students both during the school year as well as volunteering his time during summer sessions, working with struggling at risk readers, both traditional and ESL students. Unlike most volunteers who work with students about 1 hour per week, Annie points out that he works at two Title I schools reading and mentoring 7 second graders. Because he is so invested in these children's lives, he also attends special events at the school with his students, making sure they know they are supported not only academically but otherwise. Annie says he exudes patience (something I'm not very good at) and kindness when working with his students. He makes reading fun, never hesitating to take on the most challenging students. Annie points out that Dick also serves as a Guardian ad Litem and as a GAL myself, I know firsthand the amount of work that is involved in being an advocate for fragile children who have had to be removed from their home. Thank you Dick for all you do to help change the lives of our children.

**Heather Vernitsky** is the energizer bunny at Springfield Elementary who is receiving the Governor's Volunteer Service Award tonight.

Springfield volunteer supervisor Miranda Buchanon says that more than once, visitors to the school have asked "Does she work here"? The answer is yes, but she is not on the payroll, spending three or more days a week at school. As president of the PTO, Heather's efforts have transformed the culture of the school in a major way. For the past two years, Heather has headed many fundraising activities to support small and large projects at the school including sale of popcorn, cookie dough, and butter braids, and Halloween Boo-gram and Valentine's Heartgram suckers which students purchased to send to their teachers and classmates. To raise other funds, she designed school logo tee shirts and hoodies for sale. Now here's another great idea she implemented. Parents wishing to escape waiting in the car pick up line have been able to purchase raffle tickets for a Fast Pass to jump the line, with two winners from each grade level selected each nine weeks. Another raffle in collaboration with the local fire department allowed a student to be "Fireman for a Day" with lunch and more. The largest fundraiser that Heather has accomplished is the creation of the Santa Shop where she and her elves set up a student-friendly store for family and friends. No student is left out as they participate as a guest of the PTO. While focused on the needs of the children, she doesn't forget about the staff with regular treats, and refurbishing the Teachers' Lounge. The list goes on and on with what she has spearheaded at Springfield. Wow Heather, you make me tired just thinking about all of your volunteer efforts. Thank you and congratulations.

Jaimie Whyte is receiving the Governor's Volunteer Service Award for his work with VSA for his work with underserved youth through the Dream Center.

Jaimie has consistently been a part of the after-school program as a volunteer. He has come twice a week, every week to lead an after-school sports club. Lacy Barrier, volunteer supervisor, reports that Jaimie goes above and beyond to be there for the students in his clubs. In addition to coming twice a week, he also has given up several Saturday mornings to coach a soccer team and be at the games to support the children. Additionally, he makes sure all students have transportation to games and brings extra snacks for the kids. Thank you Jaimie and Congratulations.

I would again like to thank all of our award recipients and thank the Commission for helping us honor these dedicated individuals.