



*Strong Organizations ... Strong Youth*

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## News Release

October 19, 2011

For Immediate Release

### **U.P. Service Awards recognize outstanding volunteers**

**MARQUETTE** – Outstanding volunteers throughout the Upper Peninsula were honored during the third annual U.P. Service Awards program at the U.P. Nonprofit Conference in Marquette Oct. 7.

The awards were given by the U.P. Volunteer Network and sponsored by Superior Health Partners to recognize exemplary volunteer efforts in the categories of youth, under 21; adult, ages 21-54; senior, ages 55 and above; volunteer program, and business community leader.

Honorees were presented with plaques during the luncheon program in the Great Lakes Rooms of the Bottum University Center at Northern Michigan University.

“Volunteers in the U.P. give of their time and talent without expecting praise or recognition,” said Linda Remsburg of the U.P. Volunteer Network. “They are making a real difference in their communities. The U.P. Service Awards program is a way of thanking them for their commitment to service and honoring their accomplishments across the peninsula.”

The Keweenaw Heritage Center is the honoree in the program category, which acknowledges the importance of clubs or organizations in driving volunteer activity.

The center’s board of directors relies solely on volunteers to preserve and interpret the culture of the Copper Country through the preservation of the former St. Anne’s church building, a National Historic Landmark, and development of historical exhibits, performances and other educational activities. Volunteers have transformed the structure from near ruins in 1992.

More than 20 volunteers serve as hosts and interpreters five days a week and many weekends during tourist season. The program committee oversees 24 annual events, celebrations, concerts and lectures.

The Keweenaw Heritage Organist Guild donates its services for noontime music on the center’s 1898 organ which was painstakingly moved, cleaned, painted and repaired by volunteers. The development committee has raised more than \$1.1 million for re-adaptation, preservation and programming of this Copper Country jewel.

Philip Gardiepy-Hefner of Iron Mountain, a staunch advocate for people with HIV/AIDS, is the honoree in the adult category.

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When Gardiepy-Hefner moved to the U.P. 19 years ago, he was stunned to find few, if any, support services for people with HIV/AIDS in the area. In response, he started an AIDS hotline, support group, speakers bureau and AIDS fund, all of which he continues to manage today.

In addition to his fulltime job as the training coordinator at Northpointe Behavioral Healthcare, Gardiepy-Hefner holds three part-time jobs and donates his paycheck from all three to the AIDS fund which currently helps 15 people pay for expenses such as rent, utilities, and medication.

Gardiepy-Hefner is a Red Cross CPR instructor, chairs the board of directors of the local domestic violence shelter, and is active on the local community collaborative board and homeless/housing committee.

GiGi Polich-Van Doren of Iron River is the honoree in the senior category. Polich-Van Doren retired from a 32-year career in Florida as a state child welfare administrator and returned to her native home of Iron County in 2008 where she continues to serve the public – as a volunteer.

Polich-Van Doren serves 32 hours a week as the community coordinator and board liaison for Iron County Samaritan Counseling Centers, which provide outpatient mental health and family counseling. She was instrumental in establishing the centers' administrative headquarters and first satellite office. After clients receive counseling, she refers them to the appropriate community services. She is currently fundraising to set up a support program for children affected by domestic violence.

Polich-Van Doren serves on the Iron County Child Abuse and Neglect Council, assisting with the organization's annual parenting fair and awareness event. She also teaches parenting classes to nine families referred by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Riece Ward, 14, of Sault Ste. Marie is the honoree in the youth category. Ward is a leader whose service inspires his peers to serve, too.

Ward was among the first to join the Junior Working on Wellness (WOW) service group when it was formed at Sault Area Middle School last year. AmeriCorps VISTA Abby Baker, who facilitates WOW, thought she would be lucky to get 10 participants, but the group grew to 30.

“I truly believe over half came because Riece thought it was cool,” said Baker.

Ward was a driving force behind WOW's Smash for Cash fundraiser, which brought in \$500 to help needy families heat their homes. He also helped raise \$4,000 to buy books for children in need by helping organize a Basketball for Books event and dinner. Ward worked a 15-hour day taking tickets, refereeing and keeping score followed by serving dinner and washing dishes.

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Ryan's Jewelry of Sault Ste. Marie is the honoree in the business community leader category, which recognizes for-profit businesses that demonstrate exemplary corporate citizenship by giving back to their community through volunteer programs, monetary contributions, in-kind gifts or employee-driven volunteer service.

Ryan's Jewelry strives to be a good community servant as evidenced by a simple act of kindness.

Shortly before Christmas 2009, owner Erika Craven heard about a 19-year-old hospice patient who wanted a special gift for his mother, and without hesitation she offered to help. She took several items to his home, spread them around his bed, described each piece and asked if there was one that would make the perfect gift for his mom. He had no idea of the price, but it didn't matter because Craven was not charging him. He beamed as he chose a bracelet with room for an inscription.

Craven had the piece engraved with the son's message and delivered on Christmas Eve. The young man died just hours after presenting this most special gift to his mom on Christmas morning.

The U.P. Volunteer Network builds the capacity of U.P. organizations to connect citizens with meaningful service opportunities that meet critical community needs. In addition to promoting volunteerism and recognizing volunteers, the Network provides volunteer management training to nonprofits and is the administrator of UPvolunteer.org, which matches volunteers with opportunities to serve.

The Network is led by the Great Lakes Center for Youth Development in collaboration with U.P. 2-1-1, United Way of the Eastern U.P. Volunteer Center, and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP) across the U.P.

To recruit volunteers or to find opportunities to volunteer, visit [UPvolunteer.org](http://UPvolunteer.org) or call Remsburg at the Great Lakes Center for Youth Development toll free at 877-339-6884.

### **Photo Cutline:**

2011 U.P. Service Award recipients were presented with plaques during a luncheon program at the U.P. Nonprofit Conference in Marquette October 7. From left are Philip Gardiepy Hefner, Adult Award honoree; Riece Ward, Youth Award honoree; GiGi Polich-Van Doren, Senior Award honoree; Erika Craven, Business Community Leader Award honoree; Phyllis Locatelli and Jean Ellis of the Keweenaw Heritage Center, Volunteer Program honorees.

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