



Park and Recreation Department Honored Volunteer Program Participants

Awards Recipients recognized for their contributions to the City's Park System

For Immediate Release:

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DES MOINES, IOWA – Wednesday, January 25, 2017 – Winners of the 2016 Des Moines Park & Recreation Department Volunteer Awards were announced at last night's January Park and Recreation Board meeting. This year's winners - selected by a Volunteer Recognition Selection Committee were:

- Susan Noland, Lifetime Achievement Award
- John Bissell, Volunteer of the Year
- Wells Fargo, Corporate Group of the Year
- Parks Area Foundation, Volunteer Group of the Year
- Dr. Mike Eberle, Friend of the Year
- Paul Wiezorek, Coach of the Year
- Ganesh Ganpat, Volunteer Supervisor of the Year
- Carlton Peterson, Special Volunteer Award

Lifetime Achievement Award-Susan Noland

Susan Noland, a local artist and business owner, has been an active member of the Des Moines Park and Recreation Board, since 2004. For over a decade, Noland has been instrumental in developing important partnerships with a variety of groups, including conservation organizations and building support for our department. Noland volunteered as Park Board Chair, Urban Conservation Committee chair, liaison to the Grays Lake and Meredith trail advisory committee, a liaison to the Friends of Des Moines Parks Foundation Board, and a variety of ad-hoc and appointment committees. Since her appointment to the board in 2004, Noland has brought enthusiasm, connections and varied experiences as an artist, gardener, and community service volunteer. We honored her with the 2016 Lifetime Achievement award for the thousands of hours of volunteer leadership and her unwavering advocacy over the years.

Volunteer of the Year-John Bissell

John Bissell has volunteered for many years sharing his knowledge of birds with visitors to Gray's Lake Park. The programs provide a short walk and time outdoors in nature. His strong passion for bird watching can be seen each year as he volunteers for thirteen weeks of these bird watching sessions, from March through May. He engages young and old, new participants and seasoned birdwatchers alike. Bissell's initiative and ownership of the lunchtime birding series is to be commended and is a step towards our mission of Helping Des Moines Live Well, Play Hard and Protect the Earth.

Corporate Volunteer Group of the Year-Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo is committed to encouraging a stronger community where their employees live. They believe one of the most important contributions their team members make is using their professional skills and knowledge to help

organizations such as the City of Des Moines. Their commitment as sponsors of events such as Earth Day Trash Bash is supplemented with hundreds of corporate volunteers in our historical Ewing Park Lilac Arboretum weeding, restoring the Children's Forest, cleaning trails, planting flowers in Union Park, improving our waterways, cleaning and raising thousands of veteran's headstones, transplanting flowers in our Greenhouse, installing playgrounds and painting basketball courts. We honored them for their corporate care, compassion and commitment to our community in 2016.

Volunteer Group of the Year-Parks Area Foundation

The Parks Area Foundation (PAF) focuses on community improvement projects with a strong emphasis on education about our rich history. PAF has two National Historic Districts of which they have been working to renovate, restore and make streetscape improvements. This volunteer-led group has volunteered time to meet with City representatives every other week for the past two years and have worked hard to raise funds and support for a new Riverview Park. PAF has raised more than \$40,000 to redevelop Riverview Park into a new public space and entertainment venue. PAF volunteers hosted nine free concerts during the 2016 summer, as part of their Rendezvous on Riverview concert series, to help provide positive programming for the park and neighborhood. We honored them as the 2016 Volunteer Group of the Year for their initiative and work on neighborhood and park revitalization.

Volunteer Friend of the Year-Dr. Mike Eberle

Dr. Mike Eberle is a champion for our parks system. For the last eight years, he has served in many different capacities for the Friends of Des Moines Parks (Friends). Eberle's leadership, as President of the Friends, has ensured even outlying neighborhood parks have seen improvements, such as new equipment, when City budgets were not available. The Friends have raised more funds for our Parks and Recreation programs, while he was on the board, than any other time in their history. Eberle led the efforts to organize and implement the signature Friends of Des Moines Parks annual golf fundraiser. This event has raised approximately \$85,000 to support the Parks and Recreation Department. Eberle's energy and creativity has helped him find grant and private donor support. For his tireless work toward the betterment of our community, we honored Dr. Mike Eberle with the 2016 Friend of the Year award.

Coach of the Year-Paul Wiezorek

Paul Wiezorek has coached, in our youth sports leagues, for most of the past 20 years. During this time, Wiezorek coached each of three of his children and has returned this year to coach his grandson. Wiezorek has led his teams to several successful seasons as a youth basketball and youth flag football coach. Wiezorek is passionate and dedicated to teaching youth, not only about sports but about life as well. He has coached for many other programs through the years, including the Grandview Little League for eight seasons. Wiezorek led his team to the fifteen-year old Little League World Series. He has also coached spring baseball at East High School and middle school flag football. Wiezorek has reached thousands of kids and taught them many valuable athletic skills and life lessons.

Volunteer Supervisor of the Year-Ganesh Ganpat

Ganesh Ganpat increased volunteer engagement in our cemeteries in 2016. Projects have included the Adopt a Block program, Memorial Day assistance, veterans headstone raising, cemetery clean-ups and headstone recordings. Ganpat encourages staff to utilize volunteers in all aspects of their division from customer service to flag retirement. He worked with the Abigail Adams Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution organization to secure \$27,000 to fund pioneer infant headstone installation at Woodland. Cemetery volunteers make improvements that protect historical resources, honor those that have passed and ensure their memories live on. In 2016, over 600 cemetery volunteers, with Ganpat's leadership, donated more than 2,600 hours. The value of their service was over \$61,000.

Special Volunteer Award-Carlton Peterson

Carlton Peterson, Retired President, Hamilton's Funeral & After Life Services was appointed to the Des Moines Citizen Cemetery Advisory Committee (CCAC) in 1995. For more than twenty years, he has volunteered to provide input and direction for pricing/fees, numerous capital projects, and the addition of cemetery products options, such as niches, in-ground cremation cemetery blocks and single upright headstone blocks to the City Council. Carlton's leadership through the CCAC advanced cemetery efforts and because of his leadership, our municipal cemeteries are one of the only in Central Iowa that provide a wildflower scattering area. We recognized Peterson's more than twenty years of volunteer service and leadership on the Cemetery Advisory Committee.

The City of Des Moines Volunteer Award program recognizes volunteers for their commitment and service to the Parks and Recreation Department. In 2016, we had over 5,370 volunteers donating 36,879 hours of service (valued at \$868,870). They removed more than 40,000 pounds of litter, brush, tires and debris from our parks on Earth Day alone. They grow plants to beautify our City parks and public spaces, distribute hundreds of toys to families in need, record our City's history, build playgrounds and more. Volunteers enrich our community in so many ways. For more information about volunteering, visit www.dmparks.org, email parksvolunteer@dmgov.org or call (515)237-1386.

Digital photographs are available and may be requested by emailing parks@dmgov.org or calling (515)237-1386.

For more information contact the City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation at (515) 237-1386.

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