

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Jan Costello](#)
Phone: 217-785-9020, TTY: 1-800-252-8966

September 4, 2001

Older Workers and Their Employers Lauded

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Illinois Department on Aging Director Margo E. Schreiber will host an awards luncheon Wednesday, September 19, 2001 in honor of the state's outstanding older workers and their employers. The noon luncheon, to be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield, is an annual event held in conjunction with **National Employ the Older Worker Week**, September 23-29, 2001.

"These individuals define what it is to be an extraordinary employee," said Schreiber. "They each have a sense of giving that transcends any job duty. They amaze their supervisors, co-workers and the people they serve."

The theme of this year's celebration is, "**Harvesting Experience.**"

Awards will be presented to older workers who are employed in both public and private sector jobs. Included are those funded through Title V of the Older Americans Act, which serves as a bridge for low income seniors who are able and want to enter or re-enter the job market. Awards will also be given to businesses and companies that make it a practice to employ workers age 55 and older.

The 2001 winners are:

Employees of the Year:

- **Ruth F. Beven**, 80, of Homewood was nominated by her employer, Walt's Food Centers of South Holland. Beven is described as, "sharp as a tack, excellent with customers and fellow employees and a very organized worker." Her duties include packaging bakery products, filling bakery displays and waiting on customers. Since having major surgery, Beven works part-time and hopes to again work full-time. Asked why she continues to work, Beven replied, "Work is a morale builder."
- **Patrick J. Nagle**, 70, of Tinley Park, works at the Pediatric Oncology Treasure Chest Foundation in Oak Forest as it's Director of Treasures/Deliveries. The POTCF is a not-for-profit charitable organization which provides comfort and toys to children and teens diagnosed with cancer. When Nagle visits cancer patients to make deliveries, he talks with each child and demonstrates his compassion. His nomination says that his "work comes from the heart and soul....he is a person of compassion, empathy, concern, tenderness and understanding." Nagle's grandson is a cancer survivor and source of great inspiration to his work.
- **Merle Phillips**, 94, of Wheaton works at Addus HealthCare in Wheaton 35 hours a week. She is dedicated to serving others as a Homemaker and is quick to react appropriately in any situation. She successfully saved the life of one client with the Heimlich maneuver. She is always early to arrive and usually walks to the clients' homes in all types of weather, even working when others cannot due to adverse weather conditions. Her nomination states, "Employees half her age are envious of her stamina and gather around her to listen to her life stories." Despite having back and eyesight problems, "her unquenchable spirit makes her a joy to be around." She continues to maintain her own home and remains active in her church.
- **Mildred Thurow**, 85, of Marengo, works at the Illinois Department of Employment Security's Regional Office in Woodstock. Thurow's attendance and dependability are outstanding. Her nomination states that she regularly comes into the office on weekends to get a "jump start" on the next week. "To say the least, her work ethic is unapproachable," wrote nominator Ronald Edgecomb, adding, "She is

absolutely the most proficient person I have known...She is constantly at work, at a pace that would tire any worker..." She is also known for being the most knowledgeable person in the region in areas such as budget and office procedures. Even when she had hip surgery, Thurow wanted to continue working from home.

- **Rose Thompson**, 64, of Chicago, was nominated by the Chicago Department on Aging. She began working in a Title V position in 1996 with the Meals on Wheels program and transitioned into a full-time position with the Foster Grandparent Program the following year. She is responsible for monitoring all the sites where grandparents volunteer, which requires much travel. Her nomination states, "Rose is always punctual, rarely misses a day and is dependable...staff always enjoy working with Rose because they know she will complete the job on time and she can work with anyone. She is a great encourager..." The nomination adds that she also sends cards and visits grandparents who are ill. Last year, she was diagnosed with cancer but insisted that her treatments never interfere with work.

Title V Employees of the Year:

- **Dorothy Cox**, 65, of Madison, was nominated by Community Care Center of Protestant Welfare in Granite City. She is described as a "ray of sunshine" to her co-workers in the Senior Aides Program. Her nomination states, "Dorothy has far exceeded our expectations for her, and we consider ourselves lucky to know her." No stranger to hard work, Cox worked 20 years at KlennWright Cleaners and 23 years at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. She raised four sons and four daughters, and, after losing her husband in 1985, adopted eight sons, seven of whom were born drug-addicted.
- **Connie Clutts-Feirich**, 63, of Carbondale, was nominated by the Carbondale Park District for her dependability and positive attitude. She often volunteers for Carbondale Beautiful and Carbondale Community Arts, both of which share an office with the park district. Even after having surgery, she came to work on crutches and wearing a back brace. She said her job "keeps her going." Her nomination states that "Connie always brings life to our office. She is always so cheerful in the morning and her stories always make us laugh...she is a very inspirational person. You don't find many people like her willing to help in spite of personal obstacles..."
- **Rickie Cravens**, 60, of Fairfield, works in the Career Development Center in Fairfield. He is described in his nomination as a "team player" who pitches in and is always asking, "What can I do to help?" He not only provides assistance to customers individually but greets and assists all 38 developmentally disabled adults at the center. "Rick has touched the heart of all our consumers and staff at CDC," according to his nomination. It also states, "Rick is by far the eldest staff member at CDC yet has better attendance, attitude, willpower and dedication than some and he has never let the fact that he has seizures prevent him from working and furthering his education..."
- **Antonia DeV Vaughn**, 73, of Chicago, works at The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, which nominated her. According to her nomination, "We are truly blessed to have an employee who treats our clients and visitors with the respect and dignity they all deserve. In addition to performing her work in a professional and courteous manner, Antonia can be relied on to perform any task that is given to her with the assurance that it will be done and done well." Despite having cancer, DeV Vaughn maintains a positive attitude and continues to enrich the lives of those she serves. She works in the Lighthouse's Assistive Devices Center and also volunteers for the deaf-blind program.
- **Erich F. Eilers**, 67, of Oak Lawn, works at the Illinois Department of Employment Security in Burbank, which nominated him. According to his nomination, Eilers arrives to work about a half-hour early each day and exhibits a work ethic that is refreshing. The nomination states, "The other employees in the office having only praise for his willingness to assist them." He is an amputee and has overcome cancer, but continues to focus on others and is extremely conscientious about his work and responsibilities.
- **Lavonda Harrell**, 61, of East St. Louis, was nominated by Call for Help, Inc., in Edgmont. She began working at Call for Help last year. According to her nomination, "Lavonda is a hard-working woman. She never says a word of complaint and always leaves an area in much better shape than she found it." She is currently learning office procedures and eager to learn new tasks. While helping in the Youth Emergency Shelter, she has worked in the kitchen, ensuring the children were fed nourishing meals. The children look up to her as an "honorary aunt." Call for Help staff said, "We consider her a perfect example of a mentor to our clients."
- **Magdalen G. Scheid**, 70, of Rockford, was nominated by the Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging for her exemplary attendance record, organization and ability to handle multiple tasks. She is also described as a great team player. She is currently enrolled as an undergraduate at Rockford College and

recently released her first novel, "Out of Ashes," a self-published book based on the life of her great-grandfather. She and her late husband were foster parents to more than 150 children.

Employers of the Year:

- **Call for Help, Inc.** of Edgemont, has a history of recognizing the value and importance of older workers. The agency utilizes the services of such programs as Senior Aids to help older workers. The agency also works closely with local churches and food pantries and provides a centralized location where the churches and food pantries can call to check on when clients were last assisted. When funds are available, the agency also helps seniors with such needs as medication assistance. Call for Help received nearly 1,000 calls in 2000 from citizens age 55 and over requesting information or assistance. The Adult Residential Program assisted older people who were in a crisis by providing a safe haven while reestablishing living conditions.
- **North Central Behavior Health Systems** of LaSalle, was nominated by Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging in Rock Island. North Central has 32 staff members who are 55 years and older, making up nearly a quarter of its workforce. North Central has hired every Title V worker who has enrolled at the agency and prides itself on training and staff development. Whenever possible, the agency arranges transportation for the employee to get to and from work. According to the nomination, North Central "really makes the enrollee feel like they are part of the organization and demonstrates respect for their enrollees. Employees know that they are the most important asset..."

"We're very proud to honor employers who put trust in older workers and demonstrating that older workers are not only up to the job, but often become the most valuable asset in the workplace."

###