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PRESS RELEASE

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IL Department on Aging Recognizes Sangamon County Resident; Organization *Presents 2020 Senior Hall of Fame; Governor's Engaging Aging*

Springfield, IL – The Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) is proud to announce Springfield resident Evelyn Brandt Thomas as its 2020 Senior Hall of Fame inductee for her commitment to community service, and the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) as its 2020 Governor's Engaging Aging awardee for their commitment to providing services for our older Illinoisans. IDoA Director Paula Basta took time to recognize them at a recent one-day virtual symposium focused on COVID-19, its impact on older adults, and the Aging Network - attended by over 600 individuals.

Specifically, Evelyn Brandt Thomas, Hon. DHL, 97, of Springfield, is the 2020 inductee for the Community Service Category. Evelyn has consistently been an advocate for communities in central Illinois through her support of agriculture, education, and numerous other causes. Beginning with co-founding BRANDT Consolidated (formerly known as Brandt Fertilizer) with her younger brother Glen, Evelyn made a commitment to assisting Illinois farmers adopt new and profitable technologies for their operations. In 2014, Evelyn established The Educational Center for the Visually Impaired (ECVI) in Springfield, to improve the quality of life for individuals who are blind or visually impaired - providing education, training and development opportunities through innovative services and programs. Her humble dedication to empowering her community has led her to receive an incredible number of awards through the years, however even today, Evelyn continues to provide monetary and voluntary support to countless charities, scholarships, and non-profit organizations.

The Senior Illinoisans Hall of Fame was created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1994 to honor Illinois residents ages 65 and older for their personal achievements in four separate categories. Since then, 125 people have been inducted into the Hall of Fame including the 2020 inductees. Thomas is one of four inductees for 2020. She represents the Community Service category. The other three are: Education, Graphics and Performing Arts, and Labor Force.

The Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) was nominated by AgeLinc (Area Agency on Aging for Lincolnland). Together, along with IDoA, and IDHS' Division of Developmental Disabilities and Division of Rehabilitation Services, IATP developed a new program (Illinois Care Connections) that provides technology devices such as iPads or Tablets to older adults and persons with disabilities who are socially isolated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to help facilitate social connections with family and friends. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the IATP staff volunteered their time as Friendly Callers for AgeLinc's telephone reassurance program that is geared towards seniors that are socially isolated or lonely. They provide additional assistance without hesitation when requested, including making individual materials (such as flyers) handicapped accessible, and making their facility available as a large meeting space to host important groups such as I4A. We are confident that IATP, and Executive Director Willie Gunther will continue to go to great lengths to meet the needs of seniors and those with disabilities.

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Respect for yesterday. Support for today. Planning for tomorrow.
www.illinois.gov/aging

The Illinois Department on Aging does not discriminate in admission to programs or treatment of employment in programs or activities in compliance with appropriate State and Federal statutes. If you feel you have been discriminated against, call the Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966; 1-888-206-1327 (TTY)

The recipients of the Governor's Engaging Aging Award are nominated by the 13 Area Agencies on Aging. The award recognizes groups and organizations who lead by example and have gone above and beyond to make a positive impact in the lives of our older Illinoisans this past year.

"It is a true honor to recognize Evelyn and the Illinois Assistive Technology Program for their service to their community," said Paula Basta, Director of IDoA. "They are dedicated individuals whose contributions reflect the agency's principles of respecting yesterday, supporting today, and hoping for tomorrow. We thank them for their commitment and generosity."

Current and previous award winners can be viewed [on our website](#). Created in 1973, IDoA strives for efficient and effective access to services that prevent premature nursing facility placement and maximizes the state's 2.7 million older adults' ability to remain as independent as possible within their community. For more information about programs and services to assist older adults in Illinois, their families and caregivers, log on to the department website at: www.illinois.gov/aging or contact the **Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966 (hearing impaired call 888-206-1327)** or by email aging.ilsenior@illinois.gov.

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