



JB Pritzker, Governor  
Paula A. Basta, M.Div., Director

One Natural Resources Way, Suite 100, Springfield, Illinois 62702-1271  
Phone: 800-252-8966 • 888-206-1327 (TTY) • Fax: 217-785-4477

## PRESS RELEASE

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### CONTACT:

Mike Dropka 312-909-9046  
[Michael.Dropka@illinois.gov](mailto:Michael.Dropka@illinois.gov)

## IL Department on Aging Announces 2020 Senior Hall of Fame Inductees; Presents Governor's Engaging Aging Awards *Over 600 attend Department's first-ever virtual symposium*

**Springfield** – The Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) is proud to announce the 2020 Senior Illinoisans Hall of Fame Inductees. **The department hosted a virtual symposium with over 600 attendees Thursday** that took time to recognize special contributions made by older adults in the categories of community service, education, performance / graphic arts, and the labor force. The recipients of the Governor's Engaging Aging Award were also acknowledged during the ceremony.

Specifically, the ceremony took place during the department's one-day symposium focused on COVID-19, its impact on older adults, and the Aging Network. The department's first-ever virtual symposium included recognized leaders and panel discussions led by members of the Aging Network that provided an opportunity for those who administer and provide senior services with the most front-line information available so that they may better serve and advocate for our most vulnerable residents during this public health emergency. Topics presented included *Adaptability & Creativity during COVID-19*, *Grieving the Loss of Normal Life in the Face of Pandemic(s)*, and *Mindfulness: The Art & Science of Cultivating Resilience*.

"It is a true honor to recognize older adults and organizations across the state that have made a significant impact on their community," said Paula Basta, Director of IDoA. "Our 2020 inductees 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."

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.

The recipients of the Governor's Engaging Aging Award are nominated by the 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.

*The 2020 Senior Illinois Hall of Fame inductees are:*

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Respect for yesterday. Support for today. Planning for tomorrow.  
[www.illinois.gov/aging](http://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)

**Patricia Long, 80, of Gillespie, is the 2020 inductee for the Education Category.** Former high school English teacher at Staunton Community Unit School District #6, Patricia spent over 52 years of her career motivating young adults in academic excellence. Patricia exemplified a love for learning in the classroom that was inspirational and instrumental in preparing all her students to achieve their goals and dreams upon graduation from high school. She had an incredible ability to draw out the best of every student that came her way, and instilled a drive and passion in her students, by ensuring her lessons were enjoyable and energizing. Beyond her passion for teaching, Patricia has a love for animals and has volunteered countless hours working at the local Benld Adopt-a-Pet no-kill animal shelter.

**Vivian Mitchel, 84, of Morton Grove, is the 2020 inductee for the Labor Force Category.** Vivian has been an energetic worker and supportive community builder for the entirety of her adult life. Serving in various professional roles, she spent many years working at Oakton Community College, where she founded the *Emeritus Program*; an umbrella for multiple senior programs and services with the motto “Older people are healthier when they have a purpose”. Later in her career, Vivian worked tirelessly at the North Shore Senior Center planning and executing memorable day trips, play acting classes, entertainment luncheons, and the Super Senior Day. Her commitment to value and excellence helped ensure that her programs and activities were enjoyable, meaningful, and successfully promoted fellowship among those individuals most in need.

**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.

**Shirley Webb, 83, of East Alton, is the 2020 inductee for the Performance / Graphic Arts Category.** Shirley joined Club Fitness in 2014 because of physical activity limitations that began affecting her daily routines. In just a year’s time, Shirley went from having difficulty climbing stairs on her own, to becoming a member of USA Power Lifting, and transforming into an international professional weight lifting competitor. She has become an inspiration to many, motivating peers at the gym, older adults in her community, and individuals across the globe on the benefits of staying active and healthy. Shirley is an advocate for exercise and encourages others to recognize the importance of having a regular fitness regimen at any stage of life.

*The 2020 Governor’s Engaging Aging awardees are:*

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**Senior Services Associates, Inc., of Kane, Kendall, and McHenry Counties**, nominated by AgeGuide. At the onset of the pandemic, Senior Services Associates began making weekly wellness calls to older adults and enhanced their outreach program by delivering food boxes, personal care products and activity kits to client doorsteps to keep them engaged and healthy. Senior Services Associates transitioned their Friendly Visiting program to Friendly Visiting phone calls to ensure older adults are able to maintain essential connections with their volunteers. SSA also began a new program which provides free tablets to isolated seniors with two years of Bluetooth Internet, so they can easily access their many social programs and classes. Micki Miller, the Executive Director, leads her team with compassion while supporting and encouraging all of the great work the agency is doing.

**Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP)**, 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.

**Land of Lincoln Legal Aid**, nominated by AgeSmart Community Resources. Whether it is protecting seniors and persons with disabilities from fraud, or advocating for social justice and individual rights, Land of Lincoln has always gone above and beyond in providing services to those who need them. Land of Lincoln Legal Aid empowers older adults and teaches them to be strong advocates for themselves leaving a lasting impact. The entire team at Land of Lincoln works tirelessly and can always be counted on to help solve challenges that older adults and persons with disabilities face. The organization, with Greg Shevlin as the President of its Board of Directors, is trusted in the communities they serve, and there is never a doubt that if within their abilities, they will assist and follow through to solve any problem large or small.

**Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency**, nominated by Midland Area Agency on Aging. Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency, one of the EMA's in Midland Area Agency on Aging's five-county area, continues to go above and beyond normal duties, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jefferson County EMA are the first ones to offer to assist in any way they can. The agency goes above and beyond in offering to help, and all Midland has to do is send an email, knowing that Jefferson County EMA will respond immediately. Whether it is a webinar, a training, local meeting, water shortage, or extreme weather warning, this group is one of a kind and well deserving of recognition. They are among the first to help Midland Area Agency on Aging and the seniors in the area. It is a pleasure to see such a wonderful partnership work in Jefferson County! Congratulations to Steve Lueker, County EMA Coordinator, and his wonderful team!

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**Cook County Sheriff's Office**, nominated by AgeOptions. When the pandemic began in the middle of March, AgeOptions was able to solicit the support of the Cook County Sheriff's Office to help them deliver shelf-stable, frozen and hot meals to their clients. Seniors were getting hit especially hard by the virus, shutdowns, shelter-in-place orders, and increased demand for home delivered meals. Officers would fan out all over Suburban Cook County to deliver meals; from Hanover Park to Ford Heights. At first older adults were surprised to see the officers, but they soon came to expect and rely on their new temporary home delivered meals drivers. Special thanks to Lieutenant Yolanda Collins-Watson, Patrick Flannery, and Katie Walsh who coordinated the work with the Cook County Sheriff's Office. These individuals were a virtual control tower operation, connecting officers with home delivered meal routes across 130 communities!

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](http://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](mailto:aging.ilsenior@illinois.gov).

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