

Red Cross honorees lauded for their extraordinary service

By Lexie Heinle / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Saturday, March 14, 2015 1:00 am

An Air Force officer collecting food for veterans and a cancer victim who organized blood drives in the midst of her illness were honored Wednesday at the 15th Annual Heroes in the Heartland luncheon.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Mark Phillips was awarded the Public Servant Award, and Nadine Kenkel was posthumously awarded the Gift of Life Award at the event held by the American Red Cross Nebraska/SW Iowa/Kansas Region.

Phillips organizes the Help a Hungry Hero food drive, which benefits the Omaha Veterans Food Pantry. The drive has raised nearly \$5,000 in canned goods.

Kenkel, who died in August of ovarian cancer, became a blood drive coordinator in her hometown of Earling, Iowa, after her diagnosis. With her help, the community tripled its blood donations.

Midwest Blood Services Region Executive Tricia Quinn said the program “draws attention to everyday heroes in our community.”

The First Responders Foundation in Omaha received the Commitment to Community Award for its support of police and firefighters. The foundation helped fund items such as a thermal imaging camera for the police helicopter, \$32,500 for DNA testing and 926 appreciation lunches. The foundation also is partnering with the Red Cross and the Omaha Fire Department to install hundreds of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in homes in south Omaha.

President Ray Somberg said the police and firefighters “deserve our respect, appreciation and support.”

Pilger Fire Chief Kory Koehlmoos received the Disaster Relief Award for his actions during a tornado in June. Koehlmoos placed himself in the path of danger to manually sound the tornado sirens, alerting residents moments before the tornado struck.



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Gary Bren, chair of the Omaha American Red Cross board of directors, far left and Jill Orton, Midwest Blood Services region executive, far right, present the 2015 Heroes in the Heartland awards. From left, the family of Nadine Kenkel, Pilger Fire Chief Kory Koehlmoos, Tony Hubert, Staff Sergeant Mark Phillips and First Responders President Ray Somberg were the recipients.

The Call to Action award was presented to Tony Hubert, who stopped to help a woman who had her leg severed in a car accident in September. He used a belt as a tourniquet to slow the bleeding and kept the woman conscious until paramedics arrived.

The luncheon drew more than 600 people. The organization was hoping to raise \$130,000 at the event.

In addition to the five awards, the group recognized nine area students for essays about their heroes. Of the almost 750 essays entered into the contest, the winners were Ta’Vion Anderson from Morton Magnet Middle School, Claire Donahoe and Keegan Towey from St. Cecilia’s Cathedral School, Elijah Eitmann from Treynor Middle School, Alyssa Haley from Platteview Central Junior High School, Aleah Killion from Glenwood Middle School, Alaycia Neel from Gretna Middle School, Grace Wegner from Shelby County Catholic School and Caitlyn Thomas from Christ the King School.