



For immediate release:
September 13, 2004

Contact: Deborah Kelly, 302-633-2501
302-784-0490 pager

Children's Department Celebrates 21st Birthday; Recognizes Community Advocates

WILMINGTON _ Governor Ruth Ann Minner and Secretary Cari DeSantis presented awards to community advocates from across the state as part of the Children's Department 21st birthday celebration dinner tonight at the Hotel duPont. More than 100 persons attended the event which helped raise money for an endowment fund for children in crisis in Delaware.

"Delaware's transformation into today's effective, proactive children's services system did not happen overnight," said Governor Minner. "Back in 1983, the State created integrated child protective, juvenile rehabilitation and mental health services through The Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families. As a state senator at that time, I was able to lend my support to consolidate these government agencies under one roof. I am prouder still that in the last few years we have made significant progress toward truly fulfilling the ideal of children's services. We know we could not have made this progress alone and as part of our birthday celebration we wanted to recognize those extraordinary individuals who have joined us in making a difference in the life of a child."

Governor Minner presented the top award of the evening to **Senator Harris B. McDowell III** of Wilmington and former senator **Myrna Bair**. Other individuals and organizations recognized were **Muriel E. Gilman**, community activist; **Joseph Dell'Olio**, Child Inc.; **Kathy Devine**, Children's Department; **Janice Mink** and **Catherine Hamill**, Grassroots for Citizens; and, **Sussex Inter-Agency Council for Children and Families**. (*See attached for awards details.*)

Proceeds from the dinner will support the 21st Century Children's Fund at the Delaware Community Foundation. This endowment fund created by the state and community provider partners will address the special needs of children that are beyond the Department and non-profit partners' current resources and would celebrate the important role that children play in the life of the Delaware community. The fund will support activities that contribute to children being able to keep pace academically and socially: after-school programs, academic tutoring, enriching cultural experiences, community center activities, summer camps and other educational needs.

"Many children receiving services in our state have a variety of physical and mental health as well as social, emotional, and developmental needs," Secretary DeSantis said. "The Children's Department and our dedicated partners across the state work hard every day to meet these needs by providing basic care, shelter, treatment, and support. However, we know that more support is needed for children and their families to truly realize their potential and thereby overcome poverty and disadvantage."

On any given day, the Children's Department provides services to approximately 8,200 children who have been abused, neglected, are dependent, have mental health or substance problems, and/or have been adjudicated delinquent by the Courts. For more information, please visit <http://www.state.de.us/kids/>.

Delaware Children's Department Awards 2004

GOVERNOR'S AWARD

This award is presented by Governor Ruth Ann Minner to individuals or organizations whose dedication and leadership have led to a significant improvements in services and supports that have made a difference in the lives of children who have experienced abandonment, abuse, adjudication, mental illness, neglect or substance abuse.

Recipients: Honorable Harris B. McDowell III, Senator, First District (1976-present)

Honorable Myrna Bair, Senator, Fifth District (1980-2000)

Senators McDowell and Bair were original champions leading the way for the creation of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families in 1983. During our 21st birthday celebration, we recognize these two leaders who had the foresight, visionary leadership and commitment to advocate for a single, cabinet-level agency that would be responsible for administering child protective services, mental health services for children, and juvenile justice services to better serve children and families in Delaware. Their contribution is felt even today as the Children's Department continues its transformation into an effective, modern children's services system.

Harris B. McDowell, III – Senator McDowell has been in public office since 1976 serving as Majority Whip (1981-82, 1987-88, 1991-93, 1997-99) to Majority Leader from 2003 until the present. He chairs the Children, Youth and Family Committee and recently co-sponsored a bill clarifying investigation and treatment caseload standards for the Division of Family Services. He also is a member of the Child Protection Accountability Commission.

Myrna Bair, PhD - Dr. Bair is the director of the Women's Leadership Program, Institute for Public Administration, College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. She was the founder and president of the Women's Leadership Center and the Delaware Chapter of the International Women's Forum. From 1980-2000, she served as a State Senator, in the Fifth District in Delaware, and from 1984-1998, as State Senate Minority Leader. Dr. Bair was inducted into the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame in 2001 and has served in a variety of leadership positions.

CABINET SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

This award is presented by Cabinet Secretary Cari DeSantis to an individual whose exceptional leadership and dedication to improving the life of children who have experienced abandonment, abuse, adjudication, mental illness, neglect or substance abuse has inspired a culture of excellence among peers.

Recipient: Muriel E. Gilman of Wilmington

Mrs. Gilman, a longtime youth advocate, has been active in the community for many years. She has spent countless hours working toward enlightening her peers and community leaders to address the problems that children in crisis experience. Her professional career has included serving as a consultant to the University of Delaware, College of Health & Nursing Services, and executive vice president of United Way of Delaware. Mrs. Gilman serves on the board of directors of Children and Families First, Delaware Community Foundation and many others. Along with her late husband Marvin S. Gilman, she has been recognized for exemplary service to benefit the community.

THINK OF THE CHILD FIRST AWARDS

These awards are presented to an individual or community organization in each county who has demonstrated street level leadership and whose dedication has improved the lives of children in that community who have experienced abandonment, abuse, adjudication, mental illness, neglect or substance abuse.

New Castle

Recipient: Kathleen Devine of Seaford

Kathy is an inspiration to her co-workers and students at Silver Lake Treatment Center where she works as a special education teacher instructing up to 24 children, ages 12-17, who have emotional challenges. Through her more than 12 years of service, she has always sought to implement innovative initiatives and provide exceptional services. To improve the education of her students, Kathy has secured seven grants from MBNA totaling over \$54,000. She created a poverty awareness project that had her students crocheting blankets for a homeless shelter,

collecting canned goods for the food bank and creating awareness radio addresses, bookmarks and magnets. She also initiated a "Laws of Life" project which used the internet and other technologies to engage students in collaborative educational projects. Kathy forged a partnership between Par-Tech, a program from the Department of Education that supports the technological needs of Delaware schools, and Silver Lake for donations of laptops to help students with their homework. She even uses her own resources to buy rewards and supplies to reinforce learning in the classroom. Kathy is a valuable member of the Department who makes a difference every day for children with emotional challenges.

Kent

Recipient: Grassroots Citizens for Children

Catherine Hamill and Janice Mink, both of Newark

Cathy and Janice have spent countless hours standing up for the rights of children in order to make their lives better. Over the years the two women have developed expertise in children's issues by identifying the problems, studying what is causing the problems and then working endlessly to find solutions. Grassroots Citizens works for at-risk children and children's rights in Delaware by reaching out to individuals, communities and government organizations to advocate for children and families. Their efforts include testifying in Washington and before the Delaware General assembly, serving on many task forces and commissions relating to the protection of children, holding annual fundraisers and seeking grants so every child can receive the services they deserve. They successfully advocated for passage of Safe Arms for Babies; April to be declared as Child Abuse Prevention Month; establishment of a Community Notification Task Force regarding sex offenders; creation of a procedure to expedite reviews by the Child Death Review Commission; and, revamping of the Child Abuse Registry to become the Child Protection Registry. Their energy and persistence helped create the Office of the Child Advocate in 1999. Their extraordinary efforts and high visibility in the state house in Dover have led the way in making our system and procedures in dealing with children the best they can be.

Sussex

Recipient: Sussex County Inter-Agency Council for Children and Families

For nearly a dozen years, the Sussex ICCF has been a formidable force in the community. The council provides a local forum for interagency collaboration focusing its efforts on developing and strengthening the education and services provided to children, youth and their families in Sussex County. The members share information and work at the local level on issues that get in the way of effective interagency collaboration. The council meets monthly through the school year to offer information on services and resources and allow members opportunities to explore strategies and the necessary actions to overcome barriers to family and student success, both in school and the communities. This committee emphasizes a collaborative effort including school district representation that models how to work in a system of care environment and is an asset in a community that struggles with scarce resources.

SHIRLEY CUPERY COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AWARD

The advocacy community suffered a tremendous loss with the passing of Shirley Cupery in 2003. Shirley worked tirelessly to bring the light of social justice to every aspect of child welfare. Not only did she serve the interests of children for more than 30 years, she gave her fellow advocates the benefit of her wisdom and experience. In honor of Shirley's lifelong efforts, an award will be presented to a youth or adult who has advocated policies or programs that have made a positive impact on the well-being and safety of Delaware's children.

Recipient: Joseph Dell'Olio of Wilmington

Joe Dell'Olio, executive vice president of Child, Inc. and Shirley Cupery were known as the "team," always in the center of advocating for children. Together they organized a Coalition Against Child Abuse bringing together non-profits across the state and lobbied for legislation that set caseload standards for social workers. Joe has been involved in major reform movements and legislation on behalf of Delaware's children. He has served on countless committees and task forces. He has worked to reduce child victimization, help at-risk families and victims of domestic violence, find safe homes for children, abolish juvenile death penalty and reform the foster care system. Twenty-one years ago, Joe played a strong role in the creation of the Delaware Children's Department and is recognized for his contributions.