



NEWS RELEASE

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COMMUNITY MEMBERS RECEIVE JOHN MURRAY AWARD FOR THEIR WORK WITH LOCAL FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Chardon, OH. October 29, 2013 – Four community members were recently recognized for their passionate work on behalf of Geauga families and children at the 7th John Murray Commitment to Families and Children Award reception held at the Geauga Public Library System Administrative Center. The Geauga Family First Council, a collaborative of local agencies and community representatives, sponsors the event.

The 2013 Award winners are:

- Deb Pruce - one of Help Me Grow's original Service Coordinators who has worked for HMG for over a decade serving 40-60 families at any given time. Deb is known for the warmth, kindness and dedication she provides to each of her HMG families.
- Sara Shininger – the Coordinator of Geauga Job & Family Service extensive volunteer programs. Behind the scenes Sara is often the “go-to” person people from all over Geauga call for help because she works magic in pairing churches and business with families in need.
- Tom & Peggy Hannan - the 1st recruits for Geauga Job & Family Services volunteer tutoring program in the Cardinal School District. They've made a conscious decision in their retirement to give back and in 4 years have donated over 700 hours to help Cardinal elementary and middle school students.

“This award is presented on a bi-annual basis to individuals in Geauga County, who have exhibited a continued commitment to Geauga’s families and children, coupled with a special passion for their work,” says Betsy Griffin, President of Geauga Family First Council and the Geauga County Outreach Coordinator for Starting Point, Northeast Ohio's child care and early education resource and referral agency.



Since 2001 Geauga Family First Council has presented the John Murray Award to individuals who “go above and beyond” in supporting and advocating for children and families whether as a direct service volunteer, a board member, a human service professional or some combination of all three. This year the Council received nominations for 10 individuals “all of whom significantly impact the lives of Geauga’s children making the selection process extremely difficult,” according to Nancy Seelbach, the Geauga Family First Council Coordinator.

As Brad Welch, the Council’s Case Services Coordinator, said in his presentation, all of the award winners had several special qualities in common including - quiet effectiveness and an ongoing commitment to Geauga children.

The award is named in honor of John Murray, an original member of Geauga Family First Council and the Geauga County Administrator from 1993 to 1999. “John Murray epitomized the phrase ‘above and beyond the call of duty’”, Jim Adams, the Geauga Mental Health and Recovery Services Board Executive Director recalls. “John was interested in the progress of each child and in his own quite but effective way, pushed Geauga Family First Council and other local agencies and administrators to keep the best interest of each child and family at the heart of their decision-making.” The John Murray Award was established by Council in 2001. Past winners include: Martie & Bob Ballish, Ruth Carlton, and Joann Leach in 2001; Susan Hallums, Judge Charles Henry, and Andrea Pollock in 2003; Deputy Joe Keough, Linda Myers, and former County Commissioner Bill Repke in 2005; Dr. Heng Wang, Lynn Kempf, Wally Waldbauer, and Frank Scarano in 2007; Tracy Jordan, Meredith Myers and Helyne Walker in 2009; and Rochelle Payne and Dr. William Rowane in 2011.

Two other special presentations were made at the reception to retiring County Commissioner Tracy Jemison and Joe Bergant, the recently retired Chardon School Superintendent. According to Ms. Seelbach, both were important voices at the Council table – Joe as a strong advocate for the role schools play in the community and Tracy as a tremendous help in setting up and maintaining Geauga Family First Council’s partnerships.

The Geauga Family First Council is a partnership of government agencies and community organizations committed to improving the well-being of children and families. Through prevention, early intervention and the provision of services which support the entire family the Council is strongly committed to helping remove barriers for Geauga’s children. The Council has helped develop, and currently funds, a wide range of community-based services which include the BRIDGES Program, the Family Stability Program, Geauga Therapeutic Youth Center, and Help Me Grow.

