The National Liberty Museum Celebrates Remarkable Educators at 10th Annual ‘Teacher as Hero’ Award Ceremony, Sponsored by State Farm

Ten Educators Honored for Inspiring, Educating and Motivating Students – Brought to Life in ‘Teacher as Hero’ Museum Exhibit

Philadelphia, PA (May 7, 2016) — On May 7, 2016, the National Liberty Museum (NLM) proudly celebrated the winners of its 10th annual ‘Teacher as Hero’ Award, presented by State Farm®, an award presented to 10 Greater Philadelphia area educators honored for standing up for students’ rights, advocating on behalf of troubled students, providing enrichment opportunities for their students, and so much more.

“Each year, our Teacher as Hero Award ceremony gives us the chance to celebrate those exceptional teachers in our region who share our belief that developing the next generation of leaders begins by building strong character and providing civic engagement opportunities for our youth,” said Gwen Borowsky, CEO of the NLM. “We thank this year’s Teacher as Hero winners for being heroes of liberty every day, and invite everyone in the region to stop by the National Liberty Museum to visit our special Teacher as Hero exhibit to learn more about the inspiring actions of these 10 individuals.”

About the Award Ceremony

Now in its 10th season, this year’s annual Teacher as Hero Award ceremony, hosted at the National Liberty Museum in Old City Philadelphia, was emceed by NBC10’s Monique Braxton and featured a special keynote address by Ava Willis Barksdale, Vice President of Philadelphia’s Girard College, in addition to special award presentations by State Farm Representatives. In front of more than 80 education leaders and their families as well as representatives from the National Liberty Museum and State Farm, numerous stories were shared detailing the inspiring actions of the region’s finest and most dedicated educators.

This year, the 2016 Teacher as Hero Award ceremony included brand new award categories, with winners announced as a surprise during the ceremony, and a new program structure. In addition to the eight teachers recognized with the Exceptional Teacher Award, including grand-prize winner Katherine Poerner of Pinelands Regional High School in Tuckerton, New Jersey; Chris Sidoli of Coatesville Area High School in Coatesville, Pennsylvania was recognized with the Caring Classroom Service Learning Award; and Raymond Bunsick of Swenson Arts and Technology High School in Philadelphia was recognized with the Good Neighbor Award.

During the ceremony, NLM CEO Gwen Borowsky, Monique Braxton and representatives from State Farm invited each of the award winners to the stage, sharing their inspiring stories one-by-one. The event culminated with the biggest surprise of the afternoon—when the Museum presented a special Teacher as Superhero Award to Girard College Band and Choir Director, Paul Eaton, honoring all he has done to grow Girard’s music department and for being a longtime partner and supporter of the NLM and its mission.
“At State Farm we recognize the passion to teach during challenging times is a unique gift. As the saying goes, ‘Teachers give you something to take home to think about – besides homework.’ All of these educators’ accomplishments reflect the very best of our area,” said Dwayne M. Redd of State Farm. “As the nation’s largest insurer, our investment in education is tied to our company mission to help individuals realize their dreams. Teachers help children realize their dreams by providing them with a quality education, which helps them become good community citizens and prepares them for the workforce.”

**About the Teacher as Hero Award Winners**

**Caring Classroom Award**
This award is presented to one educator who has integrated community service into the classroom and increased student civic engagement as a result. Criteria:
- This honoree meaningfully incorporates and champions student voice into the service learning process.
- Their students’ deep understanding of the issues they work on can be seen in the impact of their projects.

**Honoree:**
Master Sergeant Chris Sidoli
Coatesville Area High School, Coatesville, PA

**Chris’s story:** Master Sergeant Sidoli incorporates community service into his classroom so thoroughly that it goes hand-in-hand with learning. In fact, his students have accumulated over 790 hours of community service so far this year, including volunteering at Chester County Food Bank, Coatesville Food Kitchen, Coatesville Senior Center, and more.

**Good Neighbor Award**
This award is presented to one teacher who has initiated or teaches driver safety with heart by helping teen drivers to understand that driving is a responsibility as well as a privilege. Criteria:
- This honoree combines hands-on practice with lessons designed to teach the concept of responsible driving.
- Their students’ understanding of the responsibility of driving is evident through their actions and/or testimonials.

**Honoree:**
Raymond Bunsick
Swenson Arts and Technology High School, Philadelphia, PA

**Raymond’s story:** Because of Mr. Bunsick’s encouragement to pursue vocational education after high school, many of his former students are now working in the auto repair industry or holding supervisory jobs in the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Fleet Management. Mr. Bunsick also partnered with State Farm to donate vehicles to six Philadelphia-area families when they were in need.

**Exceptional Teacher Award**
This award will is presented to eight exceptional educators, including one grand prize winner, who leverage their excellence in teaching to make a difference in the lives of their students. Criteria:
- Fosters an appreciation for diversity in the classroom;
- Teaches students how to resolve conflicts respectfully;
- Gives students a deeper understanding of the relationship between rights and responsibilities;
- Honor student voice in the classroom and in public spaces;
- Takes a risk in order to remove an obstacle to a student’s liberty; or
- Incorporates the above concepts in their relationships with colleagues and community members.
Honoree:

**Katherine Poerner – Teach Like a Hero Grand Prize Winner for Exceptional Teaching**

Pinelands Regional High School, Tuckerton, NJ

**Katherine's story:** As an Advanced Placement (AP) history teacher, Ms. Poerner found that few students choose to take her AP history course for fear of its difficulty level. So she decided to challenge her Honors history class (one level below AP) by secretly giving them all AP-level work to prove they had the ability to handle it. Halfway through the year, Ms. Poerner revealed to the students that they had been doing AP work and asked for their support in making the class fully AP. All the participating students finished the year successfully.

Additional Honorees and their Stories:

**Mary Wang**
Academy at Palumbo, Philadelphia, PA

**Mary's story:** This Teach for America alumna made sure her 9th-grade students at Fitzsimons, a struggling high school that has since been closed, had the opportunity to do hands-on science by independently seeking funding for biology laboratory equipment.

**Rachael Sheehan**
Freire Charter School, Philadelphia, PA

**Rachael's story:** This civics teacher connects learning to projects her students will be passionate about, having them create a civil rights museum for the school to process their understanding of the Bill of Rights.

**Dan Collins**
Paxon Hollow Middle School, Broomall, PA

**Dan's story:** A special education teacher, Mr. Collins was nominated by a former student's father who was deeply appreciative to see his son, who they thought might never be able to drive, now driving to his full-time job at a nursing home, where he uses his skills and interests every day.

**Kip Poole**
William Penn High School, New Castle, DE

**Kip's story:** Mr. Poole started the Crop Foundation, a gardening and service program that more than 300 students participate in and also partners with Brae’s Brown Bags to share food with people in need.

**Joseph Arscott**
Bayard Rustin High School, West Chester, PA

**Joseph’s story:** Mr. Arscott engaged his art students in a service project to restore over 500 photos nearly lost when a local family’s house burned down. Mr. Arscott saw this project as both an opportunity to provide help to a family and an opportunity to teach his students a valuable lesson about service to the community.

**Kevin Travers**
Neil A. Armstrong Middle School, Fairless Hills, PA

**Kevin’s story:** This special education teacher has taught his students rhythm, memory, and interpersonal skills by having them participate in Drummers with Attitude, a drum corps that accepts everyone who tries out, integrating each child’s uniqueness into the ensemble.

**Jennifer Wescoe**
Freedom High School, Bethlehem, PA

**Jennifer's story:** This drama, public speaking, and drivers’ education teacher facilitates her students’ performance of diversity-focused plays for younger children. Additionally, her drivers’ education students coined
the term “designated texter” and shared it at a conference in Minneapolis where they designed and facilitated a distracted driving awareness workshop.

About the Teacher as Hero Award Nomination Process
The National Liberty Museum invited fellow educators, school administrators, students, and community members to share stories of teachers who have made a positive impact in the community. Community members were asked to nominate educators who foster an appreciation for diversity in the classroom; teach students how to resolve conflicts respectfully; give students a deeper understanding of the relationship between rights and responsibilities; honor student voice in the classroom and in public spaces; take risks in order to remove an obstacle to a student’s liberty; incorporate the above concepts in their relationships with colleagues and community members; or demonstrate excellence in teaching teen driver safety or an auto safety initiative. After receiving an overwhelming number of submissions, the judging was then done by the NLM’s leadership in consultation with State Farm.

Beginning in late 2016, the stories of these winners will be displayed in the NLM’s Live Like a Hero Gallery for one year, presenting a visually captivating ‘Teacher as Hero’ exhibit for all the public to see.

About the National Liberty Museum
The National Liberty Museum is the only museum in the country dedicated to advancing liberty through fostering strong character and civic engagement. Each year, approximately 70,000 visitors walk through the museum’s front steps and are inspired by its unique 78 exhibits and are given the chance to have a uniquely reflective experience through its collection of glass art. The Museum is actively working to bring liberty to life through outreach opportunities including its Young Heroes Club program, which teaches students about liberty, strong character, and how to live like a hero every day. Thanks to grant support from the John Templeton Foundation, the program has been provided with the resources to now be the strongest and most meaningful Young Heroes curriculum yet.

The National Liberty Museum believes that civic engagement, grounded in strong character, enables liberty to flourish. And that each of us can be a hero of liberty. Because, where liberty lives, people live better.

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