

HEROES FOR CHILDREN

Fifteen school volunteers named

As the 2006-07 school year gets under way, the State Board of Education honored 15 noted school volunteers in Austin at its Sept. 15 meeting.

Among the volunteers to be honored were moms, dads, grandmothers and grandfathers who serve in various capacities around the state. From providing snacks on testing days to serving on campus and district committees, to fulfilling a family tradition of volunteer service, these individuals all contribute to the betterment of Texas public schools and the students who attend.

The Board established the *Heroes for Children* award program in 1994 to recognize individual contributions to public school education in Texas. Since its beginning, the award has provided a means to recognize Texas residents whose efforts have benefited the public schoolchildren of Texas or who have, in the Board's judgment, been advocates for Texas education.

In **SBOE District 1**, **MARIA DEL SOCORRO GIL** volunteers six days a week in the San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District. Her great commitment to education and her rapport with students, staff and parents is something to be admired. Gil uses her skills to assist with the "cookies and milk" reading nights program at Lamar Elementary School. She also assists with decorating bulletin boards, hallways, the teachers' planning room, the cafeteria and has assisted with the organization of children's festivals.

GRACIE A. BENNACK, the hero for **SBOE District 2**, has put in countless hours as a volunteer and as president of the Parent Teacher Organization at Lyford Elementary School for the past three years. Bennack is at the school almost every day helping both students and staff. She assists teachers with classroom duties, helps supervise field trips, organizes fundraisers and assists with the school's Uniform Thrift Shop. In addition, she has worked many hours with planting flowers during the creation of the school's new butterfly garden.

For **CAROLYN FAIRES**, the hero for **SBOE District 3**, sacrificing a little of her own time and energy was the least she could do to help the drama department at Edinburg High School. So Faires started the Edinburg High School Drama Booster Club and for the past 15 years has built the club and the department into a success with both students

and parents. In addition, Faires is recognized for providing encouragement, unconditional love and support for all students.

NONA JAMES, the hero for **SBOE District 4**, is a well-known Houston volunteer and advocate for education. James has volunteered in the Houston ISD for more than 35 years starting as a classroom mom and then starting the Houston Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPS) program. She has been a room mother, PTA member and served as one of the first Houston ISD special education parent advocates. She founded the Exceptional Kids are People Too!, a community-based organization for parents that focuses on parenting skills and how to be advocates for their children.

At Paredes Middle School in the Austin ISD, the principal refers to **LINDA VELASQUEZ** as an awesome parent volunteer. Velasquez, the hero for **SBOE District 5**, has been a strong and dedicated volunteer working on advisory committees, parent-teacher organizations, district advisory committees and on the Quality of Life and Education for Hispanic Students Task Force. Velasquez works with the Akins Vertical Team, which consists of four elementary schools, a middle school and Akins High School. She was a vital part in the organization of the Akins Vertical Team Showcase that displayed the academics, rich fine arts, and awesome elective course offerings of the vertical team.

For **SBOE District 6**, hero recipient **VICTOR ESCOBAR** is an original member of the Grand Pal Mentoring Program at Krahn Elementary in the Klein ISD. Escobar shows young people that they can make good choices about what they want to do in life. He also uses the program to promote education and show the students that education is the key that opens many doors. Escobar also works with the local Girl Scouts, translates for local library patrons, fills in at the library reading to children and teaches English as a Second Language.

REGINA ROGERS of Beaumont is the hero for **SBOE District 7**. This award has special meaning for Rogers since her father Ben Rogers, a well-known community activist and volunteer, was named as one of the first SBOE Heroes for Children in 1994. Rogers' volunteer work has reached across many levels. She established the *I Have a Dream* program in honor of her late father,

Heroes for Children by State Board of Education

has continual contacts with the juvenile justice system through IEA – Inspire, Encourage, Achieve, and Ben’s Kids, a program that provides breast and prostate cancer screenings for students and adults in the Golden Triangle.

For **WILLIE MAE BURLEY**, the hero for **SBOE District 8**, volunteering is her way of touching the lives of children. Burley is regarded in the Lufkin ISD as a feisty, no-nonsense advocate for education who makes it her personal mission to assist minority students in their efforts to attain higher education. She has been involved in education in some capacity for most of her 82 years. Her contributions have included mentoring in the HOSTS reading program at Brandon Elementary and mentoring in the Gear Up program at Lufkin Middle School.

As the spouse of a retired teacher, **JOHN DAVID CATLETT**, the hero for **SBOE District 9**, says it was only natural to volunteer at Hawkins Elementary School in the Hawkins ISD after he retired from Exxon Mobil. Catlett has worked primarily mentoring children in math concepts and objectives. He has given one-on-one instruction and worked with small groups, he helps with school activities, maintains students materials and helps his daughter’s classroom when called upon.

The hero for **SBOE District 10** is **STAN STANLEY**, a volunteer in the Katy ISD. Stanley is described as a man who has personally touched every area of the Katy ISD and the community with his selfless acts of volunteerism, “lighting the way” for the students, the staff and community members. Stanley is known as the district’s informal “go to” person for any volunteer need that may arise. He takes his role as a volunteer very seriously and views it as his duty to serve as a role model, instilling values and character in our future generations.

BECKY BRONSTEIN has been a volunteer

at Short Elementary School in the Arlington ISD for six years as a tutor, teacher assistant, wildlife expert and horticulturalist. The hero for **SBOE District 11** reads with the kindergarten and first grade students who need extra attention. She

has tutored students in all of the primary grades this past school year, encouraging them to extend their thinking, read more each day and learn their math facts.

The hero for **SBOE District 12**, **CONNIE SAVARD**, has been a parent volunteer at Lee Elementary School in the Coppell ISD for 12 years. This behind-the-scenes worker has used her extensive artistic skills to transform the school’s hallways and cafeteria into a magical place for the students. The kindergarteners enjoy a Fairy Tale Ball in a cafeteria transformed into a magical castle; and students studying Texas history walk through hallways decorated like a frontier Texas town, complete with a general store, bank and post office.

The late **ANTHONY ROBERSION** is the hero for **SBOE District 13**. Roberson’s volunteer work at Runyon Elementary School in the Dallas ISD showed a true compassion and a demonstrated excellence as an advocate for education. This parent volunteer did so much with helping to establish not only a successful PTA at Runyon, but at other Dallas schools as well. He also provided support by assisting teachers with any job possible



Heroes were honored at a ceremony in Austin, celebrating their dedication to Texas schoolchildren. Pictured from left to right: Willie Mae Burley, Stan Stanley, Becky Bronstein, Carolyn Faires, Frankie Millsaps, Maria del Socorro Gil, Linda Velasquez, John David Catlett, Gracie Bennack, Nona James, Victor Escobar and Regina Rogers.

and recruited other volunteers to help with the school’s many activities.

For **FRANKIE MILLSAPS**, affectionately known as Grandma Frankie by the students at Kendrick Elementary School in the Waco ISD, volunteering is just something she loves to do. At 80 years old, the hero for **SBOE District 14** spends most of the day helping with the pre-kindergarten classes. She helps by preparing the snacks, assisting with gathering teachers’ materials, but most of all just giving time, attention and hugs to the children.

The hero for **SBOE District 15** is **CHERYL DECORDOVA**, a volunteer at Central High School in the San Angelo ISD. DeCordova helped charter the San Angelo Parental Rights Organization, whose purpose was to hold the district and the school board accountable for curriculum and financial management of the district. She also served on the TEA Standards Committee for the third-grade TAKS math test; was president of the Central PTO; provides meals for the teachers; provides snacks for students during TAKS testing; chaperones at the school prom; and served as a member of the campus site-based team. ■