



**VOLUNTEER
LOUISIANA**



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VOLUNTEER LOUISIANA ANNOUNCES 2023 CHAMPIONS OF SERVICE

BATON ROUGE, La. – Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser and Volunteer Louisiana are proud to announce the nine 2023 Champions of Service. The annual Champions of Service Award recognizes outstanding volunteers from seven geographic regions across the state, plus an outstanding AmeriCorps member and group volunteer program.

“Volunteerism shows the strength of Louisiana’s character and the resilience of our spirit,” said Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser. “I am proud to help honor the achievements of our service champions while encouraging others to become active volunteers in their communities. These volunteer champions are the finest examples of what I mean when I tell people that in Louisiana, we treat you like family.”

The 2023 Champions of Service award winners are:

- **Hope Bazer - Northwest Champion:** Hope Bazer has been a dedicated volunteer at The Arc Caddo-Bossier's GREAT Program in Keithville for 18 years. The GREAT program offers equine-assisted services to children and adults with disabilities through therapeutic horseback riding, equine-assisted learning, and summer camp programs. Hope helps with all aspects of the program, including horse care, leading or side walking during lessons, special projects, workshops, daily operations, and summer camp. Hope is the definition of a team player who is mission-driven, compassionate, and shows integrity and accountability. She is known for being both a source of knowledge and a comforting presence for student participants, volunteers, and program staff.
- **Christopher LeGuin - Northeast Champion:** Chris serves as the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1809 Commander in Monroe. He dedicates his nights and weekends to growing the organization, maintaining its facilities, and hosting veteran events for the community. Chris is known for rallying his officer board to raise funds for the VFW Post’s Relief Fund to provide for the needs of local veterans. Whether it is helping veterans impacted by a natural disaster, organizing a toy drive for families in need, or coordinating volunteers to visit the North East Louisiana War Veterans Home each week, Chris is always ready to lend a hand and proud to have the opportunity to serve others.
- **Willie Mae Kennedy - Central Champion:** Councilwoman Willie Mae Kennedy's leadership and others-first mentality are ever-present across the city of Leesville. She is known for offering her time, effort, wisdom, and resources to her hometown and surrounding communities. Her volunteer service spans numerous organizations and efforts too numerous to name. Examples include marshaling school supplies for students in Vernon Parish, supporting Jubilee Park and city beautification efforts, keeping alumni connected to historic Vernon High School, visiting seniors in assisted living or patients at Byrd Regional Hospital, and much more. In joyful times, routine times, times of commemoration, times of grief, and times of peril, her compassion and love for her community are constantly present through her service to others.

- **Lisa Namikas - Greater Capital Area Champion:** Lisa serves through Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, where she is known for her fierce and lifelong commitment to helping people fleeing persecution and torture across the globe. Since 2017, Lisa has assisted with the safe arrival of hundreds of refugee families. After the United States pulled out of Afghanistan, Catholic Charities staff were spread across the state supporting hurricane recovery efforts amid new requirements imposed by COVID-19 restrictions. Lisa stepped in with fresh energy and an uplifting spirit to facilitate the safe arrival of 47 Afghan refugees. She raised funds to house them in furnished apartments and coordinated a team of volunteers to welcome them at the airport. She continues to support them in getting established in Louisiana.
- **Amy Sins - Greater New Orleans Champion:** Chef Amy Sins became determined to pay it forward after losing everything when the levees failed following Hurricane Katrina. Recognizing the need for better coordination during the first 14 days after a disaster, she formed the non-profit organization, "Fill the Needs", to provide aid to those affected by natural or man-made disasters. She brings a unique approach to humanitarianism using her Southern charm and expertise in food and hospitality. Her work as a leader in the disaster relief community has helped thousands of people and delivered millions in aid to victims of tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, and war.
- **Audry Spencer - Southwest Champion:** Audry Spencer is a retired educator serving with Empowering the Community for Excellence (ETCFE) in Crowley. After spending 38 years in the Acadia Parish School System, Audry had a vision of supporting students at risk of not moving on to the next grade. Using her retirement fund, she opened an educational center in her grandmother's two-bedroom home serving 20 students in its first year. Over time, Audry's dedication to volunteerism and commitment to helping children in her community led to the expansion of ETCFE's location and programming. Today, the organization operates a free four-day-a-week after-school program that partners paid certified teachers with 100 low-income, under-achieving students in small-class settings.
- **Rose Westphal - Southeast Champion:** Rose served her community over the last 15 years through the Good Samaritan Ministry in Slidell. The all-volunteer organization runs eleven programs assisting with everything from providing basic needs such as diapers, formula, and emergency food to interviewing clients for financial aid to keep utilities connected, evictions prevented, and much more. Rose comes in daily to provide structure, key personnel support, and in-depth knowledge to community clients and a network of over 125 volunteers. Wherever a need exists, Rose is there to provide innovative solutions, compassionate care, and personal connection.
- **Dimitri Celis - AmeriCorps Champion:** Dimitri is a Serve LA AmeriCorps member at Recirculating Farms, a non-profit collaborative of farmers, educators, and activists committed to building an equitable food system in New Orleans. He believes urban agriculture, in all its different forms, is a great way to reconnect people with the environment, healthy food, and their community. Thanks to his thoughtfulness and ability to think outside the box, Recirculating Farms spearheaded an active food collection and re-distribution program. The organization now collects unsold or irregular fresh food from markets, farmers, and restaurants. Then puts it in community refrigerators or makes it into products that go out to the community members with low healthy food access.
- **Rebuilding Terrebonne, Lafourche and Grand Isle Volunteer Team - Volunteer Group Champion:** Throughout 2022, volunteers working with Bayou Community Foundation's housing recovery programs in Terrebonne Parish, Lafourche Parish, and Grand Isle contributed over 50,000 hours of service to providing repairs and new construction of homes for south Louisiana

families who lost everything during Hurricane Ida. Over 350 families are now back in their homes thanks to the tireless efforts and dedication of these volunteers, many of whom were personally affected by the storm themselves. Together, they are providing the hearts and hands that are helping Louisiana revive our bayou communities.

“These deserving champions are an inspiration to us all, and a reminder of the power of individuals to affect positive change in Louisiana,” said Judd Jeansonne, Executive Director of Volunteer Louisiana. Volunteer Louisiana, along with Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser and the Volunteer Louisiana Foundation, will honor the award winners through an award ceremony on April 18, 2023. Those interested in learning more about the 2023 Champions of Service, should follow along on the Volunteer Louisiana [Facebook](#) page.

Volunteer Louisiana, located in the Office of Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser, manages 17 AmeriCorps State programs, promotes volunteerism, and coordinates spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers in times of disaster. It is supported by grants from the federal agency, AmeriCorps. To learn more about the AmeriCorps State programs or for more information on Volunteer Louisiana, visit www.VolunteerLouisiana.gov.

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