



## Media Alert

For immediate release

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### **Project Cornerstone Names Countywide “Volunteers of the Year” *School-based volunteers and school staff honored at annual celebration***

Project Cornerstone’s annual Volunteer Appreciation event on Tuesday, May 17 honored the nearly 2000 adult volunteers who generously donate their time to deliver Project Cornerstone’s School Partnerships programs in schools throughout Silicon Valley:

- The *Asset Building Champions (ABC)* program brings parent volunteers into elementary school classrooms, using children’s literature to address the difficult topics of bullying, teasing, and peaceful conflict resolution as well as the importance of family support, friendship, and healthy decision making. After reading a story aloud to the children, the parent volunteers lead discussions and hands-on activities that reinforce the story’s lesson. Teachers, parents, and students alike enjoy the lessons and activities that make it easier for children to talk about ways to handle common problems and concerns.
- *Cultural Heritage Asset Programs (CHAPs)* empowers parents from different cultures to share stories of their heritage in classrooms while promoting positive values such as cultural pride, tolerance, and healthy decision making. The most popular CHAPs program is the Spanish-language *Los Dichos de la Casa (Los Dichos)* program, which enables Spanish-speaking families to share their language and heritage with the entire class, promoting positive cultural identity in students of the same background and increased cultural competence for classmates of different backgrounds. Other CHAPs programs are available to support for Chinese, Indian, Korean and Vietnamese cultures.

In addition to the volunteers in these established programs, Project Cornerstone presented awards that recognize and honor the many administrators, teachers, and volunteers whose school-based efforts help create caring, vibrant learning communities where all students are supported to thrive and achieve.

#### ***Volunteers of the Year***

This year, Project Cornerstone honored four Volunteers of the Year. Three of these volunteers—Karen Frederick, Myrna Pettengill, and Betty Verhoeven—were recognized for their outstanding assistance in administering Project Cornerstone’s recent survey of more than 47,000 elementary, middle, and high school students in more than 200 schools and 26 districts in Santa Clara County. The survey results will be used to help the community to celebrate successes, identify opportunities for improvement, and develop new, effective strategies to address these opportunities based on best practices in positive youth development. Project Cornerstone has begun meeting with participating schools to review their survey results and will continue to do so throughout the year.

“Karen, Myrna and Betty coordinated every aspect of distributing nearly 50,000 surveys to schools all over the county. They also ensured that the surveys were returned, and organized them to be shipped for

processing. Their efforts helped Project Cornerstone and all of our partner schools gain important new data about Silicon Valley students,” says executive director Anne Ehresman.

Soma McCandless of Cupertino was also named Volunteer of the Year. Soma has served as the ABC lead at West Valley Elementary School since the program began there four years ago. Her commitment to supporting the parent volunteers at West Valley has led to the program’s success. But Soma’s work doesn’t stop at the boundaries of her own school—she has mentored ABC leads at other schools to help them achieve the same success on their campuses, and when the principal moved to an elementary school in a different district, Soma helped recruit and train ABC leads and volunteers there.

This year, Soma attended a cyberbullying workshop held by the Anti-Defamation League, and was inspired to incorporate what she learned about this important issue into the ABC program. She created a supplemental curriculum for the ABC program that addresses “digital citizenship” and cyberbullying with lesson plans to accompany the books in all three years of the program. And, she attends training sessions for all ABC leads to share the supplemental curriculum and provide support for incorporating this valuable and timely information into their efforts at school.

“Soma’s outstanding work in the ABC program is surpassed only by her initiative in helping the program remain current by addressing one of today’s fastest growing issues—how kids behave and treat each other online. Project Cornerstone and the parents and families of Silicon Valley will truly benefit from her efforts,” says Lori Maitiski, ABC Program Coordinator.

### **Trailblazers Awards Presented to District Staff**

The Trailblazer Award honors individuals who develop innovative programs to meet the unique needs of their schools and districts This year’s Trailblazer recipients are the following:

- After participating in the “Take It Personally” (TIP) parent study group at Fisher Middle School, **Michal Ramon** decided to create an ABC curriculum that met the developmental needs of children at the Addison-Penzak Jewish Community Center Preschool. With fellow preschool parents **Susan Freiman, Lara Panish, Rebecca Silberstein, Stacy Tobin, and Kathy Yu-Wallerstein**, she worked with Project Cornerstone to develop a preschool curriculum, and sought permission of the preschool director to begin the pilot program in January. As a result of their efforts, Project Cornerstone can now offer a developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum to Silicon Valley preschools.
- After volunteering in the ABC program at Noddin Elementary School in the Union School District, parents **Lisa Granberry, Sherine Zaky Johnson, and Marydonna Malaccorto** wanted to continue meaningful parent engagement s their students moved to middle school. Working with principal Erik Burmeister, they adapted the Second Step curriculum about avoiding bullying and resisting risk behavior to create the MPower program at Union Middle School.
- Following the success of the Chinese CHAPs program at Ruskin Elementary School in the Berryessa Union School District, the program volunteers wanted to extend the program to reflect the many different cultures at the school. Under the leadership of principal Nora Ho, volunteers **Rita Chang, Susan Lee, Silvia Leon, Srividua Raghuraman, Caroline Wong, and Annie Yuan** lead the way in delivering monthly lessons using Project Cornerstone CHAPs curriculum that support Chinese, Indian, and Latino cultural heritage as well. as well. Volunteers from different cultures deliver the program in teams of two, further modeling cross-cultural understanding in the classroom.

“Project Cornerstone success in schools is furthered by the ingenuity and commitment of these exceptional volunteers,” says School Partnerships Director Linda Silvius. “I’m so glad to have the opportunity to recognize them as the trailblazers that they truly are.”

Other awards presented included the “Principal’s Lunch Box,” awarded to principals who pioneered Project Cornerstone programs in their districts or who moved to new schools and brought the developmental assets framework with them, and the Volar Adelante (“Soaring Forward”) awards presented to school-based volunteers who develop innovative asset-building programs and strategies that meet the unique needs of their communities.

***About Project Cornerstone***

Project Cornerstone is committed to helping every child feel valued, respected, and known. We are building a community where all adults support children and youth so they find their spark and thrive. Project Cornerstone works within the YMCA of Silicon Valley and with over 200 community partners and schools to intentionally build in youth the positive relationships, opportunities, values, and skills—known collectively as “developmental assets”—that provide the foundation for a healthy, successful future.

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