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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

4-H Volunteers Honored with County Salute to Excellence Awards

Delaware 4-H recently honored six volunteers as recipients of 2007 Salute to Excellence awards—three for a Lifetime of Service to 4-H and three for Volunteer of the Year. Hard work, excellence and dedication to the 4-H organization are the criteria on which these honors are based. Recipients are evaluated on their demonstrated ability to work with young people, their dedication to youth empowerment, the recruitment of 4-H volunteers, the advocacy of the 4-H youth development movement, and professional attitude, character and morals.

The county winners of the Lifetime Salute to Excellence awards are Ann Blackmore of Middletown (New Castle County), Betty Jo VanKavelaar of Wyoming (Kent County) and Ellen Vanderwende of Bridgeville (Sussex County).

Blackmore was cited for her “enthusiasm and dedication to the 4-H organization and the county program.” The organizational leader for the Heavenly Hooves 4-H Club, Blackmore has horses and sheep on her farm, where 4-Hers spend many hours learning about the care of livestock. When lambs are born in spring, any of her 4-Hers who wants one receives an animal to care for and raise for county and State Fair competition. Blackmore started a club Horse Bowl Team that began winning competitions early on because of the 4-Hers’ knowledge of equine history, composition, horseback riding and horse care.

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VanKavelaar, who has served as a 4-H volunteer for more than 30 years, was honored for “supporting, promoting and engendering leadership in the 4-H program.” Starting as an organizational leader at the club level, VanKavelaar soon involved herself in county and state associations including as a judge in 4-H competitions and raising funds for Kent County 4-H. One such fundraiser is the Kent County Basket Auction, which has raised in excess of \$120,000 to support the 4-H Foundation and Kent County programming. On the Kent County Extension advisory board, VanKavelaar has provided insight and suggestions to improve Extension programs. VanKavelaar also was chosen as a state Salute to Excellent winner and has been nominated for national recognition.

Vanderwende, a 4-H volunteer for 38 years, began her involvement in the 4-H organization first as a parent and later as an organizational lead for the Dublin Hill 4-H club. When nominated for the Lifetime Excellence award, Vanderwende was cited for “encouraging 4-Hers to get involved in leadership roles and to act as decision makers.” Many of her former 4-Hers have gone on to become productive leaders and active participants in community affairs. 4-H is a family affair for Vanderwende. Her children and grandchildren all have been members of 4-H.

The winners of the county 2007 Volunteer of the Year awards are Karen Gouge of Newark (New Castle County), Carol Fleming Dover (Kent County) and Jodie Gravenor of Millsboro (Sussex County).

Gouge was honored for her “caring, devotion, thoughtfulness and patience, qualities that serve to inspire and motivate youth.” A stint as a volunteer parent led to organizational leader for Cow Pals Cloverbuds Club. Cloverbuds are 5- to 7-year-olds who participate in pre-4-H activities. The club has flourished under her leadership. Gouge is also involved in regular 4-H (8- to 19-year-olds) for the Porter House Gang 4-H club, for which she takes a role in community service activities, local community events and winter workshops. Gouge also takes the 4-H message and an understanding of agriculture to the public through programs such as the chick education project in school classrooms.

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Fleming, a project leader for seven years, encourages club members to be active at county and state levels. She promotes 4-H and encourages teens to participate in County Junior Council. Fleming currently is serving as president of the Kent County 4-H Leaders Association before which she was vice president and secretary. She serves on the Kent County Leadership Association, Kent County Extension Advisory Board, State Leader Forum Planning Committee, Kent County Order of Link member.

Gravenor, an organizational leader for four years, is an “enthusiastic, energetic and dependable” member of the 4-H family. Greatly involved in service, she has involved 4-Hers in such activities as Relay for Life, Adopt a Family, Katrina Hurricane survivors, coastal cleanup and nursing home visitations. She is the Sunshine chairperson for the Sussex Leaders Association and chairperson for several county events, including the horse show, photography contest, talent show and Younger Member Leaders Forum. Gravenor has taken part in the Northeast Leaders Forum, New Leader Orientation and four state Leaders Forum. Cypress Heart and Hands 4-H Club. Gravenor also was chosen as a state Salute to Excellent winner and has been nominated for national recognition.

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