Press Release – Leading Lights 2012 Award Winners CONTACT: Kymn Davidson-Hamley

**April 13, 2012** – **CORRECTED & UPDATED VERSION**

**Leading Lights of NRV Honors Volunteerism**

NRV Non-Profit Coalition honors and awards model volunteer leadership in NRV

**Christiansburg, VA**/ Over 200 Leaders from New River Valley’s non-profits and government-service institutions honored fifty-five local volunteers nominated for and the five winners awarded the prestigious Leading Lights NRV volunteer award. Four years ago area non-profit organizations teamed up with the Virginia Tech German Club Alumni Foundation (GCAF) to create the Leading Lights NRV recognition program to recognize and award NRV volunteers from all sectors that make community-changing impacts and serve as models to inspire others. $1,000 is donated on behalf of each award winner to the to the NRV charity of their choice.

The inspiring guest speakers for the event were John E. Dooley, Ph.D., Zetta Nicely, and Fran Rooker. Andy Morikawa officiated the event. Ms. Nicely, a Radford University studying to obtain her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology, shared a story and even sang a song to encourage people to put their hands to work on the things in front of us now. She commented that we age not promised any opportunities beyond what is in front of us now. Ms. Fran Rooker, Founder of Brain Injury Services of SWVA and the Jason Foundation, and an inaugural recipient of the Leading Lights award, spoke second. Ms. Rooker reflected on how personal tragedy had changed the concept of volunteerism for her and her family, and how when you do good, it comes back to you many times over. John Dooley, recently named COO for the Virginia Tech Foundation, expressed his deep thanks to everyone for their contributions to the New River Valley, and commented on the purpose of life isn’t to be happy, but to matter. Mr. Dooley shared his personal concept of exceptional moments in life which he related to the first time he visited the Grand Canyon, calling them “Grand Canyon moments”. And, he said, we were here tonight to celebrate Grand Canyon volunteer moments and volunteers.

All nominees must be current residents of the New River Valley, or currently enrolled in schools in the New River Valley. Winners are selected based on their strong community involvement, proven leadership, demonstrated lifestyle of dedicated, continuous, long-term involvement to our community, and creativity in initiating and implement ting projects that lead to a better quality of life.

The 2012 Leading Lights award winners are Community: Gerard “Jerry” Higgins, Radford; Rebecca Rees, Blacksburg; Lindsay West, Blacksburg; Collegiate: Analise Adams, Blacksburg; Youth: Anne Marie Keppel-Benson, Blacksburg.

**Other nominees for the 2012 honored at the event were:**

**Community**: Dawn Barnes, Dr. Logan Brooke, Gary Brumfield, Joseph Chase, Kathryn ‘Kate’ Delaney, Sharon Duncan, Mike Dunn, B.J. Flack, Deena Flinchum, Elizabeth Foster, Henry Ingram II, Thora Jo Jervey, Bob Job, Arlean Lambert, Frank Lau, Julie Ann Ligon, Angela Little, Mary Lough, Jo Martin, Donna Morgan, Dale Mull, Dale Nottingham, Steve Pond, Minnis Ridenour, L. David Roper, Mike Rozenzwig, Sharon Scott, Pat A. Shelor, Paul Smeal, Brenda Springer, Sally Anna Stapleton, Karisha Summers, Jo Ellen Taylor, B’easy Thompson, and Dorothy Williams.

**Collegiate and Youth**: Jason Forsyth, Laura Froggart, Kyle Gardiner, Justin Graves, Jessie Gunter, Kristin Haas, Danny Hazelwood, James T. Lee, Nicholas Mason, Alexandra Miley, Joel McCormick-Goodhart, Emily Wilkinson, and Timothy Worles.

The Major Sponsor of the event was the German Club Alumni Foundation. Flood Light Table Sponsors were: The Blacksburg Breakfast Lions Club, Center for Student Engagement & Community Partnerships at Virginia Tech, The Community Foundation of the NRV, Courtyard by Marriott, , German Club Alumni Foundation members: T.O. Williams, Craig Nesbitt, Bert Poole, Mark Wigginton, Craig Balzar, Andy Scherzer; Tony Asselin, CPA and Mike Eggleston, REALTOR in honor of the Lions Club, MOOG Components, Dr. George and Mildred Smith

The Leading Lights Steering Committee is: Dick Arnold, Gail Billingsley, Coleman Brittle, Wayne Campbell, Renee Cloyd, Kymn Davidson-Hamley, Teresa Dickens, Pat Huber, Whitney Johnson, Bill King, Wayne Muhammad, Andy Morikawa, Annette Perkins, Rhonda Poindexter, Dr. George Smith, Charles Warren, Lewis Webb, Jessica Wirgau. The Leading Lights Selection Committee is: Pat Ballard, Paula Downs, Morris Fleischer, Wat Hopkins, Carol Johnson, and Bill King.

**Highlights of Five 2012 Leading Lights Award Winners**

**Youth Award: Anna Marie Keppel-Benson**. Anna is known for her gift of inspiring others to join her as she engages in her ‘responsibility’ to give to others, and work for justice in the world. She initiated a group at Blacksburg High called the “Goodness Gorillas” which has since morphed into THE most popular official club called ‘Random Acts of Kindness’ that has over 50 members. Through this organization, Anna Marie has helped organize over 40 specific projects that have impacted others both locally and globally. She also logs volunteer time as President of the BHS Student Anti-Genocide Coalition, President of the National Honor Society, and Captain of the BHS Cross-Country and Track Team.

**Collegiate Award: Analise Adams.** A leader among leaders, Analise leads her peers in service projects locally and abroad with the SERVE living/learning community program at Virginia Tech. Analise has made a significant impact on SERVE as she has mentored more students and led more service projects than anyone else inspiring scores of other students to follow their own passions and seek social change within their communities. Not satisfied with her tremendous work in this area, college student Analise is in her seventh year of serving as a volunteer leader with the YoungLife program in Floyd, and in her third year of volunteering with the RAFT Crisis Hotline at New River Community Services is now a Crew Chief.

**Community Award: Gerard ‘Jerry’ Higgins.** Jerry’s multi-decade long leadership role as President with the Radford/Fairlawn Daily Bread and Meals On Wheels programs has been critical to their success. Meals On Wheels would have ceased to exist in the early 2000’s had Jerry’s leadership not taken the helm and helped it flourish into the program it is today. The Daily Bread program also serves a hot meal, Monday-Friday, to over 140 people a day and distributes USDA groceries to qualified applicants. Wanting to reach more children in our community, Jerry started a backpack program with local Kiwanis chapter. Each week they fill backpacks with healthy snacks for our 40 in need pre-schoolers to take home each weekend. Jerry’s motto is “Helping others isn’t just the right thing to do – it’s the only thing to do.” Jerry has also served his community by volunteering with the Christiansburg Kiwanis Club, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Montgomery Regional Economic Development Commission, and Boy Scouts among others.

**Rebecca Rees.** Rebecca has distinguished herself with her critical leadership to the “To Our House” project and has served as the Chairperson for that Steering Committee. Her leadership called attention to a community need for shelter for local homeless men. She has provided assistance with program development, implementation, and direct service to the ‘To Our House’ project for over three years providing the foundation necessary for the success of this grassroots effort that now involves 30 local churches and has assisted me than 30 homeless men during the first two seasons of operation. Rebecca also serves on the community benevolence committee of her church, and has served as a volunteer for the Blacksburg High School Band.

Lindsay B. West. Lindsay began volunteering for community groups when she moved to Blacksburg in 1962 and has been a dedicated volunteer to many NRV organizations and is now celebrating her fiftieth year of committed service to the NRV. She was the founding Chair of the Lyric Council and founding President of the Community Foundation of the New River Valley. Lindsay has been chair of the Lyric Council for six, non-consecutive terms. She has also been at the helm of other NRV service agencies including the Montgomery County Board of Social Services, New River Community Action, New River Valley Workshop, and YMCA of Virginia Tech. She has volunteered with many others including the Chamber of Commerce, AAUW, League of Women Voters, and various PTAs. Lindsay exemplifies the servant leader by seeing needs in the community and going to work on them. The projects she has undertaken are infused with a mission driven culture and the organizational tools to be successful. The community is a richer place for her service.