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Court honors youth advocate with justice partner award

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Minneapolis, Minn. – The Hennepin County District Court has honored a Twin Cities youth advocate who has dedicated herself to seeking positive outcomes for youth and young families at risk for homelessness, sex trafficking, or involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Judges presented Beth Holger with the Steven A. Pihlaja Justice Partner Award at their bench meeting Monday. Holger is chief executive officer and executive director of The Link, a North Minneapolis-based nonprofit that serves the seven-county metro area. The organization provides housing and supportive services for youth and young families experiencing homelessness; positive alternative programs for youth in the juvenile justice system; and emergency shelter, housing, and supportive services for youth who have been sexually exploited.

The award is named after a judge known for his selfless and effective volunteer work in the community. Judge Pihlaja was appointed to the bench on May 31, 2002, and continued to work while battling cancer. His focus centered on making life better for others—as a judge, colleague, friend, and neighbor. The District Court created the award after Judge Pihlaja’s death in 2008 and has named one recipient each of the last 15 years.

“Beth Holger is a dedicated, effective, and passionate advocate for youth in our community, particularly system-involved youth who have experienced trauma, homelessness, and sexual exploitation,” Assistant Chief Judge Mark Kappelhoff wrote in his nomination of Holger. “She has an unwavering commitment to justice, fairness, and equity. These values have guided her lengthy career advocating for young people.”

Holger is credited for opening youth shelters and drop-in centers, creating youth parent support programs, forming street outreach teams, expanding housing opportunities for youth experiencing homelessness and establishing youth-led advisory boards to help inform and steer the programs offered by The Link.

“I am honored to receive this award, but struggle accepting it as an individual because there are so many people with whom I do this work,” Holger said, addressing more than a dozen family members, friends, and colleagues. “All of you are in this life with me. The social justice progress we have made would not be possible without all of you.”

"Beth is everywhere in our community!" said law clerk Bethany Maski, who also nominated Holger. "She testifies before our state legislators to the need for funding and services for our youth, she is at groundbreaking ceremonies for new youth housing, and she tirelessly advocates and fundraises for youth-related causes." Maski said Holger even rolls up her sleeves to serve meals or clean the kitchen at a shelter if it is short-staffed.

In collaboration with The Link, Hennepin County has expanded the quality and quantity of community-based, trauma-informed, and culturally specific programs for youth. The result of Holger's work is that more youth are being diverted out of the juvenile justice system, resulting in better overall outcomes for youth in the justice system.

About Minnesota's Fourth Judicial District

The Fourth Judicial District consists solely of Hennepin County. Seventy-five full-time judicial officers serve the district, which is the largest of Minnesota's 10 judicial districts. For more information, visit the Web site at www.mncourts.gov/district/4/.

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