

# 2013 Torchbearer Recipient - Heart of Indiana Virginia O'Connor

The *Heart of Indiana Torchbearer Award* is given to a woman who has opened her heart and mind to the needs of humanity. Virginia (Ginny) O'Conner is a Hoosier woman who has used her position within the healthcare field to create partnerships and aid some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Ginny received the *Heart of Indiana Award* for demonstrating commitment to philanthropic service, social change and the spirit of hope. At the age of 18 she began at St. Mary's School of Nursing where she worked with the nuns, learning their leadership skills and value for the well being of others. Her passion for serving people's needs has made her a highly regarded family advocate.

In 1971 Ginny helped launch St. Mary's Dental Initiative, which has served over 100,000 children. Most of the youth who receive service from this initiative have no other means of dental hygiene. In addition to the health benefits, the St. Mary's Dental Initiative helps children gain increased self-esteem, leading to better social integration.

Ginny also played a large role in establishing the Mobile Outreach Clinic which now has a full-time staff serving the Evansville-Vanderburgh County School System in 1990. The Mobile Outreach Clinic includes an asthma camp, comprehensive nutrition and exercise program. As an employee of the local county schools in 2010 she partnered with St. Mary's again to secure a \$1.2 million grant to implement similar nutrition and exercise programs in seven at-risk schools. These programs have had a great influence on over 7,500 children.

Following her formal retirement Ginny helped organize a volunteer team of retired nurses to assist patients after being discharged from the hospital. The St. Mary's Avoidable Readmission Team (SMART) contacted over 4,500 patients last year to assess and lend a helping hand to those who were experiencing complications at home. SMART found that nearly half of discharged patients were not complying with physician's instructions and needed further assistance.

Ginny continues to do volunteer work with SMART and other health related programs, making a positive impact on the lives of others every day. Her humble, yet assertive and diligent approach has enabled her to establish these impactful healthcare initiatives over the years. Ginny O'Conner's work throughout Southern Indiana has set an example others everywhere to follow.



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