

2022

# MINORU YASUI COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARD NO LONGER A SECRET

**Maryanne Flynn**, current MYCVA committee member and past recipient, once said that the Minoru Yasui Community Volunteer Award was “one of the best kept secrets.” This award celebrates volunteers in our community that make a difference. These volunteers touch the lives of so many with their time, their skills, their energy, and their passion.

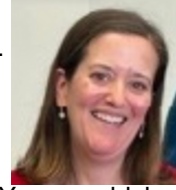
**Minoru Yasui** was a Japanese American. He was one of thousands of Japanese Americans that endured curfews and internment during World War II. Coming to Denver after the war, Yasui passed the Colorado Bar with the highest score recorded that year. He spent his career helping other Japanese Americans as well as other minorities. He was a strong political activist and fought for civil rights. He valued inclusivity and integrity. He acted with vision, perseverance, and compassion.

In 1976, the city of Denver established a monthly Community Volunteer Award in his honor. As a result of this award, more than \$986,000 has been given to 516 nonprofits. In 2022, the Minoru Yasui Community Volunteer Award celebrated ten extraordinary volunteers.

We began in January at a mobile food distribution site with We Don't Waste, honoring **Jimmy Cole**. Cole was an Eagle Scout. While he faced struggles in his own life, he decided that giving back to the community was important. Arlan Preblud, founder of We Don't Waste described Cole, “Once you find a volunteer that is exceptional, they become almost a part of your staff because you don't have to train them every time they come to work. They do it with compassion, understanding and with a commitment that they are embracing the mission. Jimmy volunteers because of what is in his heart.” Cole concluded, “It is my belief that every human deserves food on their table, no matter their background, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, or immigration status. It has been amazing to work with an organization that shares the same values.”



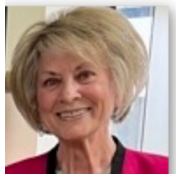
February brought us to Urban Peak and **Terri Taylor**. According to Taylor, “Urban Peak is just one of those organizations that gets under your skin in the absolute best possible way. You get involved and you just don't want to walk away.” She has volunteered there for almost 25 years. Urban Peak provides services focused on one of the most vulnerable populations in our community; people ages 15-24 who are experiencing homelessness. Dick Thomas, Urban Peak past board chair and current board member added, “Urban Peak would not be the vibrant organization it is today without her involvement. You would be hard-pressed to find a candidate more devoted to the Colorado homeless community than Terri Taylor.”



**Dr. Amelia Ashmann** was our March recipient. For the past 46 years, she has been an extraordinary advocate for the Filipino community. Ashmann received her medical degree and board certification in the Philippines. She came to the U.S. and passed the equivalent boards and began practicing. In 1976 she came to Denver and began her volunteer journey. Ashmann was motivated as she saw the need to promote culture, education, charity, and science among the Filipino community. She also wanted to educate children to appreciate their heritage. For more than 40 years, she opened her clinic on Saturdays, providing care and consultations for seniors in need. Giselle Rushford, one of Ashmann's nominators added, “Ashmann is truly a volunteer at heart because what matters most to her is not personal glory, but the building of community and the betterment of people's lives. In her own modest and humble way, Ashmann has achieved significant gains not only for Filipino Americans and Asian Americans, but for all Americans.”



“How can I help?” was the question that **Vicki Thomas** asked. The Listen Foundation provides support for and assists children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. It shares a proven speech, language and listening therapy method to help children achieve a life of independence. Beginning with a rebranding campaign, Thomas worked tirelessly for nine years bringing the organization to a new level of professionalism in terms of organizational structure, community awareness and public image. Her energy resulted in significant growth in funding, program development and the number of children and families served. According to Pat Greenway, executive director of the Listen Foundation, “Every volunteer makes an impact, but occasionally, you are blessed with a volunteer who develops and grows your organization in permanent ways. That individual for the Listen Foundation is Vicki Thomas.”



For more than 10 years, **Lana Lopes** has served as the organizer and driving force behind the Food Bank of the Rockies mobile distribution site at Colorado Community Church. “Lana's impact on the Denver community has been significant” according to Kate Budd, FBR's mobile pantry rep. “Last year alone approximately 6,500 households and 24,000 individuals were served. More than 500,000 pounds of food was distributed.” Thanks to Lopes' leadership, volunteers stayed. Ayinde Russell, pastor of local outreach at Colorado Community Church added, “Lana leads humbly with endless encouragement, with keen insight and with unmatched hard work. She is an amazing example of selfless giving.”



**John Andriola's** New Year's resolution brought him to Big City Mountaineers in 2018. He discovered the nonprofit that gives underserved youths experiences in nature and immediately connected with the mission. By providing free, fully outfitted, and professionally led backpacking trips, Big City gives youths ages 8-18 the opportunity to connect with nature to develop personal strength, skills, and resilience. Andriola became part of the board, updating the technology systems, providing pro bono legal advice and consulting and was instrumental in updating BCM's human resource infrastructure. During changes in leadership, he took on additional day-to-day operational responsibilities. David Taus, executive director added, “His willingness to take on tasks that needed doing has been a key ingredient in BCM's ability to continue to thrive and succeed.”



**Laura Moran** was a special education teacher for visually impaired students. She began her volunteer career as a side walker in the equine-assisted therapy program at Promise Ranch. Founded in 2009, Promise Ranch provides equine-assisted activities and therapies for people with disabilities and/or other therapeutic or rehabilitative needs. The ranch relies on the support of 150 volunteers. Moran works to support the therapists during classes and connects beautifully with clients. She shows exceptional dedication, whether it be painting stalls, fixing fencing, or helping with barn chores. She never refuses any request for help. At her ceremony, Moran said, “When I found out I had received this award, I watched all the videos about Minoru Yasui. He said, 'Never give up!' I took that to heart. What can we do to continue serving and how can we help those with challenges? Promise Ranch is a sanctuary for me, for our horses, our clients and our volunteers. Miracles happen here.”



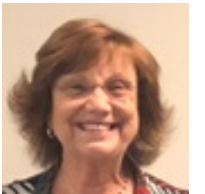
**Bill Nagle** had a 31-year career with the Denver Police Department serving as a captain, deputy chief of administration and commander. Since his retirement four years ago, Nagle has logged almost 400 hours with Volunteers of America. VOA is a nonprofit faith-based organization dedicated to helping people in need transform their lives. Nagle volunteered for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, educating people of all ages about the opioid crisis. He delivers Meals on Wheels during the winter holidays. He also helped develop Camp Postcard, (Peace Officers Striving to Create and Reinforce Dreams.) This free weeklong camp benefits 11- and 12-year-olds and is held at the YMCA of the Rockies. For many of these youths, this is their first camp experience. Bradley Craddock, director of volunteer services for VOA said, “Bill is so passionate about all he does and so generous with his time and talents. He is an essential part of camp. His generosity and kindness have made our camp what it is today. He has served the community his entire life and, in his retirement, he continues to give back.”



**Don Neufeld** represents the epitome of what we all hope for in humanity,” according to Dr. Malcom Tarkanian of the Stout Street Eye Clinic. The Stout Street Eye Clinic is part of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. They provide eyeglasses, medications, and medical care for people with diabetes, glaucoma, and other eye diseases. They are staffed by volunteer ophthalmologists, optometrists, opticians, and others. For the past twelve years, Neufeld, an optician, has helped hundreds of patients. Neufeld is not only extremely knowledgeable, but more importantly, his compassion, respectful manner, and the way he cares for the most vulnerable patients are an inspiration for everyone at the clinic. According to Nancy Sanchez, program director, “Don's courage strengthened our commitment and lifted our spirits during the hardest times of the pandemic. He continually inspires us to do more and do it better.”



**Cathy Schmidt** is a retired social studies teacher who has volunteered with Giving Heart Englewood for the past seven years. Giving Heart has multiple programs providing services to the community. They include a computer lab, internet access for research or classes, a Resource Room where guests can earn vouchers for clothing, hygiene and other basic needs, a mailing site where folks can receive mail, applications and benefits, assistance with driver's licenses, birth and death certificates and job readiness. In addition to all this, lunch is served each Tuesday and Thursday. Schmidt has been actively involved as a resource navigator. Upon receiving the award Schmidt said, “Giving Heart is a totally volunteer organization. Things get done because people show up. It is important to be able to look someone in the eye, treat them with dignity and honor and recognize them as fellow human beings on the journey of life.”



**Martin Luther King Jr.** wrote, “Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?” From an Eagle Scout helping to distribute food to those struggling with food insecurity, to an 80-year-old optician helping homeless people with their vision needs, the recipients of the Minoru Yasui Community Volunteer awards in 2022 make a difference. Their spirit, their kindness, compassion, and dedication to the mission changed people's lives. And as most admit, their lives have been changed as well. Volunteers matter.

This most special award is no longer a secret! It is a celebration. Recipients of the Minoru Yasui Community Volunteer Award receive a \$2,000 grant, which they donate to the nonprofit of their choice. If you would like to learn more about this award, nominate an exceptional volunteer or donate to this award, visit [www.minyasui.org](http://www.minyasui.org).

