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Leaders Receive Honors for Envisioning Healthy Fatherhood Three awards presented at Minnesota's "birth-to-three conference"

Saint Paul – Minnesota's statewide fatherhood advocacy organization announces winners for the **2010 Excellence in Fatherhood Awards**. The awards honor individuals, programs and institutions that make outstanding contributions to fatherhood policy and practice in Minnesota. The following awards were presented by the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network on January 14, 2010 in Alexandria, Minnesota. Over 400 family professionals, educators, and fatherhood advocates attended the conference where the awards were presented.

The award for **Individual of the Year** was presented to **Dr. Gar E. Kellom**, the Director of the Men's Center for Leadership and Service at St. John's University. Under Gar's leadership, the Men's Center seeks to work for justice and to better the lives of men and women through innovative programs, scholarship and community service. Gar is a pioneer, nudging us toward healthier notions of manhood and masculinity. Over the years, he has led men's discussion groups, retreats, and service trips around the US and internationally. He has helped launch national discussions about men's spirituality, health, and community service. He promotes anti-sexism, anti-violence, and an understanding that masculinity can be humble, generous, and caring.

The award for **Program of the Year** was presented to the **FATHER Project, a program of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota**. A highly innovative program formed in Minneapolis in 1999, the FATHER Project offers services for low-income dads to help them support their children financially, emotionally and physically. Through individualized case management, the program offers holistic services in fatherhood skills development, employment and training, child support services, family law, and GED completion. Staff served 380 fathers in 2009 with 229 of those representing new starts who completed the comprehensive enrollment process. The FATHER Project brings together some of the best services, partners and staff to create an exceptional experience for the fathers and families who enter its doors.

The award for **Policymaker of the Year** was presented to **Mark J. Ponsolle**, the Director of the Human Services Division in the Office of the Ramsey County Attorney. Mark's work motto, "feed the babies", reflects his belief that human services must focus on the wellbeing of our youngest citizens. Through his personal commitment to innovative policies, pilot programs, and a desire to make government work well, Mark sets a high standard for other Minnesota counties to follow. In addition to his county duties, he works on legislative and policy issues with state legislators, county commissioners, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and the Minnesota Supreme Court. As his nominators state, "Mark is about doing the right thing for the families we serve."

Longer descriptions of the 2010 award winners are available online at www.mnfathers.org/awards.html.

The Excellence in Fatherhood Awards have been presented by the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network since January 2005. The awards are presented annually at an awards ceremony at the Minnesota Fatherhood Summit, the statewide conference of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network. In 2010, the Minnesota Fatherhood Summit was hosted in combination with the Strong Foundations Conference, the state's birth-to-three conference, January 13 – 15, 2010 in Alexandria, Minnesota.

The **Minnesota Fathers & Families Network**, a statewide intermediary nonprofit agency, is leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood. MFFN enhances healthy father-child relationships by promoting initiatives that inform public policy and further develop the field of fatherhood practitioners statewide. Learn more online at www.mnfathers.org. A list of two-dozen past Excellence in Fatherhood awardees is available at www.mnfathers.org/awards.html.

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Minnesota Fathers & Families Network

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