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Governor Announces Winner of Virginia Hart Award

Governor Jim Doyle announced today that Joan Sanzen, Constituent Relations Director for the Department of Health and Family Services, is the winner of the 2005 Virginia Hart Special Recognition Award. The Virginia Hart award is given annually to a woman in state government in honor of exemplary performance in public service that improves the quality of life for Wisconsin citizens. Ms. Sanzen was honored at a ceremony in the Assembly Chambers of the State Capitol this afternoon and was presented with her award by Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton.

"This award recognizes women in state service whose contributions to clients, co-workers, or the public may not be highly visible, but are substantial," Governor Doyle said. "Joan Sanzen certainly fits that description. She plays a vital role at DHFS, helping constituents through some of the most challenging times of their lives. She has been an unsung heroine to many, and is truly deserving of this honor."

At DHFS, Ms. Sanzen provides support to those struggling with life challenges and with social services systems, helping her clients meet their basic needs for services such as food stamps and health care.

"Joan's work to help our constituents solve problems they may have with the Department is immeasurable," DHFS Secretary Helene Nelson said. "Joan helps so many different people everyday in countless ways, and she approaches her work with determination, creativity, a caring heart, and respect for the people she serves."

Also receiving honorable mentions at today's event were Holly Audley, Judith Blazek, and Laurie Prochnow, all employees of the Department of Corrections; and Savitri Tsering of the Department of Health and Family Services.

The awards were given in honor of Virginia Hart, Wisconsin's first woman cabinet member. Virginia Hart served as Secretary of the Department of Regulation and Licensing, chairperson of the Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations, and as chairperson of the Labor and Industry Review Commission. Upon her retirement from state service in 1983, friends and colleagues established a fund in her name for recognizing a woman in Wisconsin state service each year.

The Virginia Hart Special Recognition Award is administered by the Office of State Employment Relations.