

Suburban philanthropy group honors DuPage Co. givers

By Jake Griffin | Daily Herald Staff

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A Hinsdale couple and five other DuPage County residents are being honored by the West Suburban Philanthropic Network.

In addition, Naperville-based My Chef Catering and the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation are being honored with group awards.

Michael and Katherine Birck of Hinsdale will be named Philanthropists of the Year at the network's special Philanthropy Awards Luncheon May 26 at Abbington Distinctive Banquets in Glen Ellyn.

The Bircks are being recognized for a lifetime of educational endowments and health care service. Michael Birck is the chairman and co-founder of Naperville-based Tellabs, and Katherine Birck retired from nursing in 2005. Both serve on a number of boards in the education and health care fields.

"We are not certain our philanthropic activities quite qualify as award winning, but we strongly believe that 'giving something back' is essential for those able to do so," Michael Birck wrote. "Helping other is a source of satisfaction, today more than ever."

Wheaton's Kendall Ciesemier is receiving the network's Philanthropic Leadership Award. The 17-year-old began working to raise money for African AIDS charities when she was 11. Ciesemier organized her fundraising efforts while recovering from two liver transplant operations in 2004.

H. Dennis Smith is being recognized as the group's Nonprofit Executive of the Year for his work as CEO of the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Smith has been with the food bank for 11 years. Jim Durkan will receive the Professional Grant Maker of the Year award for his work with Hinsdale-based Community Memorial Foundation, which focuses on community health improvement. Durkan's agency works with 27 communities in western Cook County and southeastern DuPage.

Phyllis Muccianti of Addison is being recognized with the Nonprofit Volunteer of the Year award for her work with Metropolitan Family Services. Stephanie Walsh of Villa Park will receive the WSPN Distinguished Service award for her efforts with the Easter Seals of DuPage.

The West Suburban Philanthropic Network was founded in 1988 to offer support to development professionals and advance philanthropy. For more information on the banquet and the award winners, visit wspnonline.com.