



NEWS RELEASE
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Missouri Afterschool Director Honored as an Afterschool Champion in Nation's Capital

*Parents, Educators, Students, Afterschool Leaders
Urge Congress to Increase Afterschool Funding, Help Expand Science, Technology,
Engineering and Math Programming*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Afterschool Alliance today honored Sherry Comer, Afterschool Services Director for the Camdenton R-III Schools in Camdenton, Missouri, for her support for afterschool programs at the “Breakfast of Champions,” a gala event in Washington, D.C. featuring *FIRST* Robotics founder Dean Kamen. Comer has been a leader for afterschool in Missouri and worked tirelessly to educate policy makers about the important role that afterschool programs play in educating children about science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). She was one of just nine state champions from around the country honored at the Breakfast for supporting and working on behalf of afterschool programs. The Missouri AfterSchool Network nominated her for the honor.

Comer served as the Chair of the Missouri AfterSchool Network for three years, while also acting as an Afterschool Alliance Afterschool Ambassador, increasing support for afterschool programs in Missouri among the public and policy makers. As the Afterschool Services Director for Camdenton R-III Schools, she strongly supports and helps oversee the school district’s *FIRST* Robotics team and has accompanied the students to the State Capitol to talk to policy makers about how important afterschool programs are in improving STEM education.

“Sherry understands how important afterschool programs are, not only to children and families, but to our communities and our society as a whole,” said Teresa Foulkes, Director of the Missouri AfterSchool Network. “She also recognizes that these programs can play a unique role in getting our youth excited about and engaged in the sciences and math, and has helped champion the *FIRST* Robotics program in the Camdenton school district as an excellent vehicle for helping educate a generation that can excel in these fields.”

The “Breakfast of Champions” is part of the tenth annual *Afterschool for All Challenge*, sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance, which brings together hundreds of parents, educators, children, program directors and advocates from around the country for a series of events and meetings with Members of Congress. Following the Breakfast, participants fanned out across Capitol Hill to meet with Members of Congress and talk to them about the importance of afterschool programs and expanding opportunities for kids to engage in STEM activities in those programs. This year is The Year of Science in Afterschool.

“Afterschool programs are a lifeline for working families, they keep kids safe and – most important – inspire them to learn. These programs are uniquely positioned to provide hands-on and real-world STEM learning opportunities,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “It’s no secret that our nation has some serious catching-up to do when it comes to math and the sciences. We know that afterschool programs are successful in getting children excited about the sciences. That excitement and interest has been shown to be a better predictor than good grades or test scores of who will pursue careers in the sciences. By offering children the opportunity to try robotics, CSI, rocket-building or constructing wind turbines, afterschool programs are developing future computer programmers, forensic scientists and engineers.”

Other state champions honored at the *Afterschool for All Challenge* are: Agnes Quiñones, Education Consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education; Nancy Volpe, Consultant-Youth Programs/America’s Promise, CVS Consultant, Pathways to Pharmacy and President, Volpe Communications in Kansas; Kathleen Straus, Board Member, Michigan State Board of Education; R.T. Rybak, Mayor of the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota; Vaughn L. McKoy, President, PSEG Foundation, New Jersey; Kyle Stewart, Executive Director, Alliance of New York State YMCAs, Inc.; Carmen M. Medina, Chief of the Division, Pennsylvania Department of Education Bureau of Teaching and Learning, Division of Student Services; Mark H. Emery, Administrator for After-School Programs, Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia.

The 2011 *Afterschool for All Challenge* is sponsored by: United States Tennis Association, Peavey Electronics, NAMM, Open Society Foundations, Cable in the Classroom, National AfterSchool Association, Clever Crazes for Kids, and Arnold and Sandra Grant. Additional funding is provided by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, Time Warner Cable, the Noyce Foundation and jcpenny.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.