23rd Annual Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day
21 athletes and sports leaders to be recognized
Wednesday, February 4 – 12 p.m. at the Minnesota State Capitol

Some of Minnesota’s most inspiring and influential student-athletes, coaches and athletic leaders will be recognized at an award ceremony on Wednesday, February 4, at the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul. The award ceremony will be conducted in conjunction with the 23rd annual National Girls and Women in Sports Day, a nationwide celebration recognizing the accomplishments of individuals in the promotion and advancement of girls’ and women’s sports. The 2009 ceremony will be honoring 21 individuals who will be receiving awards in five separate categories. Award recipients are nominated by schools, community organizations, recreation centers, and amateur and professional sports organizations. All are invited to attend this special event. Details about award winners are below.

The Marie Berg Award for Excellence in Athletics - Judy Johnson, Bloomington. Although recently retired, Johnson has held the position of teacher, coach, athletic director and principal over her storied career in the field of education. She is directly responsible for bringing girls’ sports to Burnsville in the 1970s after the passage of Title IX. While at Burnsville, she coached tennis, basketball and track and field. Johnson coached her Burnsville basketball team to a state championship and was named Coach of the Year. She later moved onto Minnetonka High School, where she was one of the first female athletic directors in the state. Johnson also served for three years as the color commentator for KARE-11’s televised coverage of the girls’ state basketball tournament. Additionally, she has been active in the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association for girls’ sports, including serving as president as well as on the board of directors for the State High School League.

The Girls’ and Women’s Sports in the Media Award - Mike Bialka, Brainerd Daily Dispatch. The sports editor for the Brainerd Daily Dispatch, Bialka has been a sportswriter for 30 years, covering 11 high schools and a community college. Bialka has been a supporter for equal coverage and staffing for girls’ and boys’ activities and is a strong believer that a competitive girls’ event or feature story is just as interesting as a competitive boy’s event. As a member of the Brainerd Warriors Hall of Fame Selection Committee, he has advocated for women to be included as members of this elite group of athletes. In 1991, Bialka covered Brainerd’s Julie Beasley’s state championship in the Class AA gymnastics vault competition. He has served as president of the Minnesota Associated Press Sports Association and has won numerous awards for writing, editing and design.

The Wilma Rudolph Award for Courage and Inspiration – Karen Casper-Robson, New Hope. Casper-Robson is currently the Campus Administrator at Beacon Hill Presbyterian Homes and Services and is actively involved in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA). She has been involved in the NWBA for the past 30 years, beginning as a player on the local, national and international levels and currently serving as an administrator. Casper-Robson has seen the women’s international teams grow to prominence, winning the gold medal in the last two Paralympics. Throughout her involvement with both the NWBA and the National Wheelchair Athletic Association, she has encouraged, promoted and supported the organizations and the involvement of individuals with disabilities into wheelchair sports programs. Casper-Robson serves on numerous committees in the NWBA and is a member of the Hall of Fame in both the National Wheelchair Athletic Association and the National Wheelchair Basketball Association.

Special Merit Award – Susan Alstrom, Buffalo Lake-Hector. Alstrom is an educator and coach at Buffalo Lake-Hector. She has coached volleyball and girls’ and boys’ track and field for 31 years. She has made numerous trips to the state tournament with her volleyball team and has been named State Coach of the Year twice as well as numerous conference and sub-section Coach of the Year honors. Alstrom was the first girl in Minnesota to receive a state medal in track and field in 1972 when she won state titles in shot and discus. She has participated in three softball national tournaments and has competed in 17 marathons, as well as numerous triathlons and shorter races. Additionally, she has won medals in two Olympic Sports Festivals in team handball and was a member of two national championship teams. Alstrom is a member of the Bemidji State University Athletic Hall of Fame and the Minnesota State Volleyball Association Hall of Fame.

Special Merit Award – Ruth Howe, Bemidji. Howe is a retired professor from Bemidji State University, where she taught in the Health and Physical Education department and coached basketball and tennis. Howe has been a leader in the advancement of curling in the United States. She served as the director of the United States Curling Board in 1989 and helped to write a proposal to the U.S. Olympic Development Committee to receive funding for girls’ curling. Howe has been honored with the Mu Chapter Woman of Achievement Award and the Senior Sports Woman award by the Bemidji Area Women’s Sports Foundation.

Special Merit Award – Vanessa Seljeskog, Macalester College. Seljeskog is the Associate Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator at Macalester College. She has served as both an administrator and coach at the Division III level and currently assists in the management of a 21-varsity-sport program. During her 14-year tenure as Macalester’s head cross country and track coach, she hosted several MIAC Cross Country and Track Championships, coached numerous All-Americans, was named 1999 MIAC Cross Country Coach of the Year and led her 2000 cross country team to an eighth place NCAA national finish. Seljeskog served as the co-meet director for the 1998 and the 2002 NCAA Division III Track and Field Championships and served on the NCAA Division III Track and Field committee. She has also served on numerous committees in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) and has been a longtime member of National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators.

Special Merit Award – Dave and Linda Mona, Edina. Dave and Linda Mona have been actively involved in women’s athletics at the University of Minnesota as well as being advocates for girls’ and women’s athletics throughout the Twin Cities. The Monas served as co-chairs for the 2008 US Women’s Golf Open hosted at Interlachen Country Club in Edina, and Linda co-chaired the 1995 NCAA Division I Women’s Basketball Final Four in Minneapolis. The Monas invested in the Minnesota Monarchs professional volleyball franchise back the late 1980s and have worked with the Girls Scouts organization on sports programming. Linda chaired the University of Minnesota’s Women’s Sports Advisory Board and currently is a member of the Assembly Committee on Academics and the Equity Committee. Dave was the first radio sports talk host to regularly talk about women’s sports and to have female guests. Both have received the Outstanding Achievement Award from the University of Minnesota.

2009 Breaking Barriers Awards

Kris Allen ......................... Rochester Century High School
Jessica Christopherson ........ Minnesota Youth Athletic Services
Brian Hall ........................ Minnesota Park & Recreation Board-Sibley Park
Pam Hennen ....................... Maple Grove Senior High School
Sandra Hillyer................... Lakeville South High School
Bob Ihmolt ....................... College of Saint Benedict
Bill Kane ......................... Case Lake Bena Schools

Diane Nikuenen .................. Kenyon-Wanamingo High School
Marian Norell ..................... Waseca High School
Connie Priezs ..................... Orono School District & Community
Sylvia Schoen ..................... Minneapolis Athena Awards Committee
Patricia Stotzheim .............. Hamline University
Rick Uttech ........................ G-H-EC High School/MN Girl’s BB Coaches Assoc.

YWCA of Minneapolis ......... Annual Women’s Triathlon

Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day is sponsored by the Minnesota Coalition of Women in Athletic Leadership. For more information about the event contact: Kelly Anderson Diercks - diercks@augsburg.edu - (612)-330-1245.