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**Department of Defense Announces Recipients of
2012 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award**
*Fifteen Employers Receive Nation's Highest Honor for Supporting
Guard and Reserve Employees*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense agency, announced today the 15 recipients of the 2012 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award. The Freedom Award is the DoD's highest recognition given to employers for exceptional support of Guard and Reserve employees. These employers distinguished themselves from the 3,236 nominations received from Guardsmen and Reservists, or family members acting on their behalf.

The 2012 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award recipients are:

Employer

Basin Electric Power Cooperative
Caterpillar Inc.
Citi
Crystal Springs United Methodist Church
Delta Air Lines
Gary Jet Center
iostudio
Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety
L-3 Communications
Nyemaster Goode
Port of Seattle
Siemens Corporation
Tennessee Valley Authority
Uniform Color Company
Verizon Wireless

Location

Bismarck, N.D.
Peoria, Ill.
New York, N.Y.
Crystal Springs, Miss.
Atlanta, Ga.
Gary, Ind.
Nashville, Tenn.
Kalamazoo, Mich.
New York, N.Y.
Des Moines, Iowa
Seattle, Wash.
Washington, D.C.
Knoxville, Tenn.
Holland, Mich.
Basking Ridge, N.J.

Freedom Award recipients stand out by going above and beyond what the law requires of Guard and Reserve employers. They go to extraordinary lengths to support their military employees through both formal and informal initiatives. The 2012 recipients have provided such outstanding support as special hiring and career development programs for Guard and Reserve members; maintaining an open door policy for deployed employees' family members in need of assistance; and forming internal veterans' networks that maintain contact with deployed colleagues, organize care package drives, and advise managers on issues related to employing members of the military.

"On behalf of the Secretary of Defense, I thank the 2012 Freedom Award recipients for taking such exceptional care of the Guard and Reserve members they employ," said Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, Jessica L. Wright. "Our military could not meet today's national security demands without the Guard and Reserve, who in turn could not provide such dedicated service without the cooperation of their employers at home. These Freedom Award recipients have distinguished themselves nationally for their remarkable efforts, and we greatly appreciate their unwavering support."

A selection board comprised of senior DoD officials, business leaders and prior awardees selected the 15 recipients. Since 1996, only 160 employers have received the Freedom Award. The 2012 honorees will be recognized at the 17th annual Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award Ceremony in Washington, D.C. on September 20th.

For more information about the Freedom Award and this year's recipients, visit www.FreedomAward.mil.

About ESGR and the Freedom Award:

The Freedom Award was instituted in 1996 under the auspices of ESGR to recognize exceptional support from the employer community. In the years since, 160 employers have been honored with the award. Established as a DoD agency 40 years ago, ESGR develops and maintains employer support for Guard and Reserve service. ESGR advocates relevant initiatives, recognizes outstanding support, increases awareness of applicable laws, and resolves conflict between service members and employers. Paramount to ESGR's mission is encouraging employment of Guardsmen and Reservists who bring integrity, global perspective and proven leadership to the civilian workforce.

For questions or interviews regarding the Freedom Award, please contact Beth Sherman, ESGR Public Affairs, at 571-372-0705 or by email at ESGR-PA@osd.mil.

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