Alabama Rural Health Association recognizes rural health champions

In celebration of Rural Health Week, Oct. 30 through Nov. 5, the Alabama Rural Health Association recognized several of Alabama’s rural health champions through a public ceremony on Friday, November 4.

The Alabama Smoke Alarm Initiative was recognized with the **Billie Gilliland Exceptional Contribution to Rural Accident Prevention Award.** This award is given annually to individuals and organizations in recognition for their efforts to prevent rural accidents. It is named in honor of Billie Gilliland, the wife of State Trooper Chuck Gilliland of Butler in Choctaw County. Mrs. Gilliland was a rural health champion who worked tirelessly to assure that the residents of Choctaw County had quality healthcare available locally. Mrs. Gilliland was tragically killed in a motor vehicle crash while traveling to Mississippi to talk with a physician about practicing in Choctaw County.

This initiative, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was established in 1998 to reduce fire deaths and injuries in high-risk areas. Fire departments in high-risk counties are invited to submit a competitive application to begin a smoke alarm initiative in their communities.

Since October 2001, the initiative has partnered with 15 local fire departments in nine counties. Participating fire departments include the Brent, Clayton, Corinth, Dollarhide, Forest Home, Newell, Notasulga, Providence and Mount Pisgah, Thompson Cornerstone, Warrior Stand, Wedowee, and York Volunteer Fire Departments as well as the Brundidge, Livingston, and Tuskegee Fire Departments.

To date, in-home fire safety education has been provided to over 5,000 households and nearly 3,500 smoke alarms have been installed. Because of these efforts, there have been 43 documented instances where lives have been saved because of working smoke alarms.

The initiative is administered by the Injury Prevention Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health in conjunction with the State Fire Marshal’s Office. For more information on the Alabama Smoke Alarm Initiative, please visit [www.adph.org/injuryprevention](http://www.adph.org/injuryprevention), or call 1-800-252-1818.

Pictured above are Deputy State Fire Marshal Scott Pilgreen, Bob Grantham, Keith Guthrie, Amanda Calhoun, Alonza Ellis, Lt. Governor Lucy Baxley, Samuel Pritchett, Mary Till, Dennis Stripling, Jerry Pow, and Terry Peeler.