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Farm Rescue Honors Longtime Volunteers with Annual Service Award

Ervin Geisler and Jeff Preston Named as 2024 "Good Samaritans"

HORACE, N.D., March 17, 2025 - Farm Rescue, a nonprofit organization that provides free planting, haying, harvesting, commodity hauling, and livestock feeding assistance to farm families who have experienced a major illness, injury, or natural disaster, has honored Ervin Geisler and Jeff Preston with its annual Good Samaritan Award.

The Good Samaritan Award was created in 2016 to honor individuals who support Farm Rescue with the compassionate heart of the Good Samaritan. That support may include a generous contribution to further the mission of the organization, serving as an ambassador for the nonprofit, or going above and beyond as an Angel in Blue volunteer to help farm families in crisis. Beginning in 2019, Farm Rescue began recognizing two honorees with this annual award.

Geisler and Preston's combined service to Farm Rescue spans nearly a quarter century. Through their dedication, hard work, and leadership, these volunteers have helped grow the organization's impact in rural communities, as well as its base of supporters. They have touched the lives of many farm families throughout Farm Rescue's 20-year history and inspired other volunteers to follow in their footsteps.

Ervin Geisler was born in Chicago, IL, and is known amongst different factions of friends as either "Erv", "Red", or "Rusty". When he was around nine years old, his family moved from the inner city to a small, nearby farm, where his love of agriculture first began to grow. Summer vacations were always spent in North Dakota, where Geisler's father would assist his uncle on the family farm near Hamberg, ND. These trips spawned some of his fondest childhood memories, but he also admits to causing a bit of trouble during their visits. Following high school graduation, Geisler attended the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, before completing his degree in education at DePaul University. During his collegiate years, he also began serving in the U.S. Marine Corps before joining the Army National Guard. Geisler continued his military career for 26 years and eventually retired as a lieutenant colonel. He also achieved a master's degree in education, and served as a junior college professor, high school teacher, and football and wrestling coach. In addition, Geisler launched his own snow removal company. The business started small with a single Jeep, but grew to over 300 employees, including many military veterans. Geisler met his wife, Rosemary, as a teenager and they began dating during their sophomore year of high school. The couple was married in 1968 and have remained in the Chicago area ever since. Geisler continues to be an active member of his community, including 35 years of volunteer service with Holy Family Catholic Church in Inverness, IL, where his wife has also served as parish manager for more than a decade. In 2008, Geisler was watching a CNN segment about a nonprofit called Farm Rescue and its founder, Bill Gross. Memories of his childhood summers in North Dakota came rushing back and he was inspired to get involved. Geisler says it was also a means of penance for the trouble he caused in his youth. He served on his first volunteer crew in the spring of 2008 and immediately fell in love with the mission. Geisler has continued this Good Samaritan work for almost two decades and has been involved in nearly every type of service the organization offers. He has also been a dedicated Farm Rescue ambassador, attending trade shows,

conventions, and fundraisers to promote the nonprofit's work, recruit additional volunteers, and secure new business partnerships. Geisler is now entering his 18th year of service with Farm Rescue.

"I was totally blown away when my name was announced as an honoree of this year's Good Samaritan Award," said Geisler. "This organization is very close to my heart. When you get to know these families and truly make a difference for them, it's an incredible feeling. I look forward to joining so many other worthy recipients of this award, and it's another great way to honor my father and uncle's legacies."

Jeff Preston was born in Fargo, ND. His father enjoyed a long career at John Deere, which resulted in several moves for the family throughout his childhood years. The Prestons spent time in Grand Forks, ND, Jamestown, ND, Des Moines, IA, and finally, Minneapolis, MN, where Jeff earned his high school diploma. He returned to his birth city to attend North Dakota State University, majoring in agricultural mechanization. While attending college, Preston also began working for a local John Deere dealership. He met his wife, Vicki, while she attended nearby Concordia College. After graduation, Preston accepted a full-time position with John Deere in Syracuse, NY, while Vicki began teaching in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. The couple maintained this long-distance relationship until their marriage in 1983. Soon after, Vicki joined Jeff in Pennsylvania for his latest position with Deere. Throughout his 38-year career with the company, Preston and his family would make stops in Syracuse, NY, eastern and western PA, Columbus, OH, Kansas City, MO, and Moline, IL, before his eventual retirement. Jeff and Vicki have two daughters and four grandchildren. Following his professional career, Preston remained close with several John Deere colleagues, including Mark Baumgarten. The friendship started during their shared time at NDSU and continued to grow throughout adulthood. Baumgarten had been volunteering with Farm Rescue for several years and encouraged Preston to sign up. He served on his first planting assistance crew in the spring of 2017 and never looked back. Although most of his in-field volunteerism has been focused on planting, Preston has also been a tremendous asset to the organization behind the scenes. His knowledge and expertise have aided in the creation of volunteer schedules, training materials, and operational protocols. He also represents the nonprofit at numerous promotional events each year, growing awareness for its mission. Preston is now entering his 9th year of service with Farm Rescue.

"I'm very honored and humbled to receive this award," said Preston. "I'm not one for notoriety or recognition, but I'm thankful to be in such great company amongst past recipients. It's fulfilling to assist folks who truly need it, and we've received many follow up calls from families thanking us for the help they received. Volunteering with Farm Rescue is something I look forward to every year."

"Erv Geisler and Jeff Preston exemplify the 'Good Samaritans' that make our mission a success," said Bill Gross, Founder and President of Farm Rescue. "We are forever grateful for their commitment and selflessness in serving farm families during their greatest times of need."

Previous recipients of the Good Samaritan Award, include Agnes Liudahl of West Fargo, ND, Reuben Liechty of Jamestown, ND, the Engelstad Family of Las Vegas, NV, Gene Spichke and Warren Zakopyko of Kief, ND, Erwin "Smokey" Wright of Minot, ND, Bill Krumwiede of Voltaire, ND, Charlie Bartsch of Velva, ND, Garry Deckert of Bismarck, ND, Kenneth Chyle of Auburn, KY, Mark Baumgarten of Bettendorf, IA, Emil Baranko of Waukegan, IL, and Michael Wilson of Bettendorf, IA.

About Farm Rescue

Farm Rescue was founded in 2005 and has helped nearly 1,200 families since its inception. The organization's mission is to help farmers and ranchers who have experienced a major illness, injury, or natural disaster by providing the necessary equipment and volunteer labor to perform time-sensitive services. Applications for assistance are currently being accepted and can be obtained at farmrescue.org or by calling 701-252-2017.

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Photo: Farm Rescue volunteer, Erv Geisler of Barrington Hills, IL
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Photo: Farm Rescue volunteer, Jeff Preston of Bettendorf, IA
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Photo: 2024 Farm Rescue Good Samaritan Awards
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