

Press release

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Outstanding social commitment: Six voluntary workers from various federal states honoured as 'VDW ambassadors 2020'

Trans-regional voluntary initiative *Verbundnetz der Wärme* honours work by daily helpers and supports them with €5,000 each.

Leipzig, 15 October 2020. They are indispensable in the day-to-day lives of many people. Whether in senior care, the social sector, sports clubs or as volunteer tutors – thousands of volunteers achieve exceptional things every day, providing care to fellow human beings, giving their time and supporting them on a daily basis. To honour their outstanding commitment, six volunteers from various federal states were singled out as 'VDW ambassadors 2020' by trans-regional voluntary initiative *Verbundnetz der Wärme* (VdW). The awards, which take place annually and come with a prize of €5,000 were handed out today, Thursday, 15 October 2020 in a virtual ceremony. The aim is to also encourage others to step forward for voluntary work.

The awards this year go to Elke Engel from Schkeuditz, Saxony, Matthias Neutzner from Dresden, Ronny Krimm from Mösthinsdorf in Saxony-Anhalt, Annett Melzer from Halle/Saale, Volker Düssel from Erfurt and Elli Brusch from Gadebusch in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

"The meaning of life lies in togetherness," said the former Minister-President of Brandenburg, citing former Minister for Social Affairs Regine Hildebrandt, expressing immense gratitude to all those honoured. "The coronavirus pandemic has made clear how important voluntary work is and how it holds our society together. It is those who work as volunteers that give our lives ever more meaning and content."

As patron of VdW, Platzeck selected this year's ambassadors in advance jointly with a jury. The trans-regional initiative based in Leipzig aims to promote voluntary work in Germany and to support the indefatigable daily helpers, both financially and in boosting their profile. The organisation's sponsor is the VNG Foundation, which pools together the support of charitable and social activities of Leipzig energy group VNG AG.

VNG Executive Board Member Bodo Rodestock stresses the importance of voluntary work: "Voluntary work is an expression of humanity and an indispensable support for our social interaction," he says. "The ambassadors honoured this year are exemplary of this humanity. They are role models for us all. If we can contribute via our initiative to encouraging more people to emulate these role models and engage in volunteering, that makes us proud and gives us motivation."

Due to coronavirus, the naming ceremony this year took place online. Many prominent patrons also congratulated *Verbundnetz der Wärme* on the nomination of 'VDW ambassadors 2020'. These included **Reiner Haseloff**, Minister-President of Saxony-Anhalt, **Matthias Platzeck**, **Barbara Klepsch**, Saxon State

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Minister for Culture and Tourism, **Birgit Keller**, President of the Thuringia State Parliament and **Jan Holze**, Chairman of DSEE, the German foundation for social commitment and voluntary work.

The video recording of this year's award ceremony for 'VDW ambassadors 2020' is accessible online at <https://www.verbundnetz-der-waerme.de/ernennungsveranstaltung2020>.

'VDW ambassadors 2020' – an overview:

- Elke Engel Deutscher Kinderschutzbund Ortsverband Sachsen e. V. | Helping young and old people, community and vocational education and student assistance | Schkeuditz (northern Saxony) | Saxony
- Matthias Neutzner (b. 1960) | Initiative MEMOCARE PACEM. Gesellschaft für Friedenskultur | Heritage and local history, historic preservation and memorials | Dresden | Saxony
- Ronny Krimm (b. 1980) | Mösthinsdorfer Heimatverein e. V. | Heritage and local history | Mösthinsdorf (Saalekreis) | Saxony-Anhalt
- Annett Melzer (b. 1969) | Klippel-Feil-Syndrom – Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderung and Benachteiligung e. V. | Social assistance | Halle (Saale) | Saxony-Anhalt
- Dr. Volker Düssel (b. 1942) | Schutzgemeinschaft Deutscher Wald Landesverband Thuringia e. V. | Environmental protection and civic commitment | Erfurt | Thuringia
- Elli Brusch (b. 1948) | Seniorenbeirat Gadebusch | Helping young and old people, social assistance | Gadebusch (Nordwestmecklenburg) | Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Background:

Verbundnetz der Wärme is a trans-regional initiative that focuses on promoting volunteer work in Germany and on supporting the indefatigable daily helpers both financially and publicly by making them visible. The organisation's sponsor is the VNG Foundation, founded in 2009, which pools together support for charitable and social activities by Leipzig group VNG AG. The initiative was launched in autumn 2001 under the patronage of the late Dr. Regine Hildebrandt. Approximately 220 voluntary workers are now members of *Verbundnetz der Wärme*. Each year, six different people are selected from different regions and awarded the title of 'VDW ambassador'. A photo exhibition is also held alternately in the home towns of the award-winners. The patron is Matthias Platzeck (MdL), former Minister-President of Brandenburg.

The VNG Foundation, sponsor of *Verbundnetz der Wärme*, was founded in 2009 and pools together the charitable and social activities of VNG AG. The foundation promotes charitable and social projects in the areas of art, sports, culture, science, education, social issues, foundations and university activities.

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