John Bentley Champion for Children 2019 – Lakes Region

John Bentley has been a tireless partner with the Andover and Merrimack Valley School Districts, SAU #46, for many years. With his overall volunteer and philanthropic efforts, John consistently thinks of how he can help the students and community of the Merrimack Valley School District. From educational initiatives to basic needs, John has a positive impact on the MVSD community of learners. In 2007 John and his wife suffered the devastating loss of their daughter Katie at the age of 4, but from that suffering came a special dedication to the children and school district. To honor his daughter, he established The Katie Bentley Lilac Project – a tax exempt, non-profit organization that promotes the planting of lilacs in public locations throughout NH. He also speaks to 4th graders in the MVSD each year about this project and connects lilacs to NH History, he also spearheads a Coats for Kids program to make sure that any student that needed a Winter coat would have one. He reached out to individual and corporate donors to get coats for kids and their families. At the same time, John organized places to keep the coats with a goal of having a location in each of the eight schools around the District. He works to help alleviate the school lunch debt of needy families by finding donors, which led to support of the Backpack Program through the Friends of Forgotten Children which provides backpacks full of food. He has also led 26 blood drives since 2007, collecting 1,400 units of blood for pediatric patients. Randy Wormald, Assistant Superintendent of SAU #46, remarked, “The above mentioned qualities do not begin to touch on everything that John Bentley brings as a Champion of Children to the Merrimack Valley School District. His unwavering dedication to improving the lives of all students is truly admirable. Sheriff Scott E Hilliard, Sheriff of Merrimack County stated, “I can think of nobody better suited to be a recipient of this fine award than John Bentley, he does things quietly with no fanfare and asks for nothing in return. John Bentley is a man of compassion and caring; a true Christian.