

Super Stars are Honored by Coos County Friends of Public Health

By Tom Orsi, Vice President of CCFoPH

The Coos County Friends of Public Health honored Public Health Super Stars on Tuesday, May 10 at their 14th Annual Recognition Luncheon. The awards were presented to individuals and groups who have shown outstanding dedication to improving health in Coos County.

The first two people recognized were people from Coos County's history. Coos County had the FIRST public health department in Oregon starting in September, 1922. That means that Coos Health & Wellness is celebrating its 100th year as a county public health department. **Elizabeth Campbell Bickford, RN** and **Everett Mingus, MD** were instrumental in getting the health department established in September of 1922.



Pam de Jong played the role of Elizabeth Campbell Bickford, who was the county health nurse, telling the attendees how she travelled by boat, horse, and log train to all of the towns and over 90 schools throughout the county.



Eric Gleason played the role of Dr. Everett Mingus, the County Health Officer who solicited the funding to help pay for the establishment of the health department in 1922. He told us about health conditions and challenges with quarantine efforts. (photo: from left, Eric Gleason, Deputy Director of Coos Health & Wellness, and Anthony Arton, Public Health Director)

The award presentation to the historical characters was followed by recognition of groups and individuals who provided outstanding assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The **Coquille Indian Tribe** was recognized first, for having delivered 7,000 vaccines to the broad Coos County. The Coquille tribe had access to vaccines before other groups, and drew from its culture of potlatch to share those vaccines with the broad Coos County Community. Tribal chair, **Brenda Meade**, accepted the award on behalf of the tribe.

Bay Cities Ambulance was recognized next, for their role in our COVID response by providing community rapid testing in various locations in Coos County and for handling vaccines in long term care facilities and for seniors at their residences. They also provided an ambulance and responders at the covid vaccine clinics. **Daisy Zimmerman** accepted the award for Bay Cities Ambulance.



The **Coos Bay Fire Department** was recognized for not only providing their fire station as a venue for drive through vaccine clinics, but also for providing assistance with intake and registration. Their facilities provided an ideal setting for these clinics. Fire chief **Mark Anderson** accepted the award.

The next group of awards went to individuals who provided COVID response assistance as volunteers for the Medical Reserve Corps or as employees of Coos Health & Wellness.

Reneé Menkens and Kat Burgess are Medical Reserve Corps volunteers who were key to making the drive through vaccine clinics work in multiple Coos County locations, and aboard ship for over 300 foreign sailors. They were recognized for their extensive contributions to Public Health, even beyond the COVID response. (Renee: left in photo)



Lena Hawtin, from Coos Health & Wellness, was recognized for her work at the vaccine clinics as well as for her role in managing the COVID vaccine for the county and helping to supervise and assist the COVID investigations and contact tracing. (Lena is in the front row of photo.)

Becky Fairhurst (left, back row) and **Kelsey Orr** (right, back row) were recognized for their accomplishments in contact tracing to slow the spread of the pandemic. They put in long hours in investigating cases and were frequently mentioned by the Oregon Health Authority as some of the best investigators in Oregon. They were also recognized for volunteering at the vaccination clinics.

Other ‘Super Stars’ were recognized for their ‘non-pandemic’ contributions to Public Health.



John Lemos was recognized for his work at the **Kids HOPE** center. He volunteered hours of his time in helping accomplish the center’s mission of reducing child abuse through community awareness, intervention, and to provide support for healing and victim justice. HOPE is an acronym for “Healing, Outreach, Prevention, and Education.” John also is a volunteer co-facilitator in the Kid’s HOPE Center’s Darkness to Light curriculum.

Stephanie Polizzi, of the OSU Extension Service, was applauded for her tireless work to improve nutrition for people living in Coos County. Stephanie leads a nutrition education crusade that starts with extensive research to support educational material (which she also creates), and then concludes with the implementation of the training, including training health coaches to extend the training reach.



Alissa Pruess was recognized for her work in several areas. She has studied and developed plans for addressing the health needs of homeless mothers and children. She has also developed resources to support reproductive health. Her research helped identify health gaps and needs, and she has created tools to fill those gaps. Recently she designed *The Coos Sex Talk* Website (thecoossextalk.org) to make reliable and accurate sex education available to the community. Alissa is also active in other areas, and is the new president of the Zonta Club of the Coos Bay Area.



Barbara Van Slyke was recognized for being the driving force behind the establishment of the Waterfall Clinic. As a nurse at Bay Area Hospital, she realized that there was no neighborhood health clinic for low income or homeless people in Coos County. She started by treating patients at a table at the Gospel Mission in Empire, and that care grew into the Waterfall Clinic. Barbara served on their board until 2014, and continued nursing at the Bay Area Cancer Center until 2020.

More than 80 people attended the recognition celebration at the Black Market Gourmet. The Coos County Friends of Public Health’s mission is to promote public health in Coos County through enhancement of local public health services. Activities include fundraising, education, advocacy, and volunteering. www.ccfoph.org