

NEWS RELEASE

October 11, 2011

For immediate release

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Three Panhandle businesses were honored by the governor last week for high levels of participation, leadership support and behavior change in their individual agency. Box Butte General Hospital, Chadron Community Hospital, and South Platte Natural Resource District were each honored with the Governor's Excellence in Wellness Awards at a Grower's Level. Governor Dave Heineman and Dr. Joann Schaefer, chief medical officer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, presented the awards at the first Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council Awards Luncheon in Gering Thursday.

Box Butte General Hospital was cited for a variety of programs to increase physical activity and overall wellness, addressing numerous topics such as safe drinking water, cycling, walking, tobacco cessation, safety, golf, nutrition and cholesterol. BBGH's Chief Executive Officer Dan Griess and eight members of his Wellness Champions' Team accepted the award from the governor and Dr. Schaefer.

Harold Krueger, CEO, accepted the award on behalf of Chadron Community Hospital. The hospital has a five year old wellness program with 70% employee participation. All employees are eligible for benefits such as on site fitness equipment, yearly lab profiles, confidential employee assistance programs, walking routes at all hospital facilities, formal group exercise sessions with a personal trainer, healthy vending machine options, immunizations, a lactation room for nursing mothers, assistance with smoking/nicotine cessation and various fun programs rotated on a monthly basis to encourage healthy living.

Krueger said the hospital's greatest achievement is the reduction of smoking to 12% of employees, compared to a Panhandle rate of nearly 20%.

"We all recognize the costs associated with employee illness gradually erode the organization's financial stability, not to mention the pressures applied to co-workers and frontline managers. Secondary to the employer's side, illness takes the same toll within the employee's own home. If we can keep our employee diseases-free, the benefits become immeasurable to both the employee, their family and to our workforce."

"A healthy employee is a happy, productive individual who casts the wellness glow onto other employees and the patients we serve. It's one of the best benefits we can give to our employees and to our own future. It just makes sense."

The South Platte Natural Resource District addressed wellness goals such as harmful substances, increased physical activity, fruit, vegetable and water intake and community participation in giving. Ongoing program evaluation and monitoring saw 100% of employees participating in their annual health risk assessment. The NRD also hosts ongoing lunch 'n learns, with regional and statewide wellness initiatives on topics like colorectal cancer and walking. They have also begun an annual employee (wellness) recognition ceremony.

Receiving the award on behalf of the NRD was Keith Rexroth, chairman of the board of directors and Linda Suhr, wellness coordinator.

In addition, eleven organizations from the region were named as visionaries for their commitment towards a regional, full-service worksite wellness council. Visionaries and their designated representatives on the council are:

- Box Butte General Hospital in Alliance (Mike Nerland),
- Cabelas (Nicole Fornander),
- Chadron Community Hospital (Krueger),
- City of Chadron (Lynn Mathis and Sandy Powell),
- City of Gering (Carrie Havranek) ,
- Gering Public Schools (Lisa Frahm),
- Gordon Memorial Hospital (Shelley Beguin),
- Memorial Health Center in Sidney (Tammie Brunkow),
- Northwest Community Action Partnership (Karen Eisenbarth),
- Platte Valley Companies (Angela Haug and Crystal Smith) and
- Western Nebraska Community College (Dr. Todd Holcomb).

A third award presented at the luncheon was the Safe Community designation, an international designation through the World Health Organization and National Safety Council. The Nebraska Panhandle joins a network of only 11 communities in the United States that have demonstrated leadership in safety promotion and injury prevention. Receiving the award on behalf of the many organizations and people dedicated to making the Panhandle a safe place to live, learn work and play included the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services, Panhandle Public Health District, the Rural Nebraska Healthcare Network and Scotts Bluff County Health Department.

For additional information about worksite wellness, visit pphd.org/pwwc.html or call Davies at 308-487-3600, toll free at 866-701-7173, extension 101 or Martha Stricker at 308-630-1559. The Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council is a partnership between Panhandle Public Health District and Scotts Bluff County Health Department. The council offers extensive membership benefits to help build evidence-based worksite wellness initiatives for local organizations.