



Panhandle
Public Health District

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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Awards luncheon honors four Panhandle businesses with Governor's Wellness Award and PPHD's Retiring Director with Leading Light Award

Four Panhandle businesses were honored with the Governor's Wellness Award at yesterday's Panhandle Safety & Wellness Conference & Awards Luncheon in Gering.

- **Garden County Health Services and Oregon Trail Eye Center, PC** received the Sower Award. The Sower Award is a stepping-stone to the Grower Award and are planting the seeds for wellness.
- **Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC)** received the Grower Award for growing the seeds for wellness at their organizations.
- **Box Butte General Hospital (BBGH)** received the Harvester Award. This award is for businesses that are reaping the benefits of an advanced wellness program, a developed wellness culture, and can demonstrate high-quality outcomes.

"We're always proud to partner with these organizations to create environments that support employee health and well-being. Together, we're making strides in preventing chronic diseases and promoting access to healthier options including education on mental health, suicide prevention, and substance misuse," said Nicole Berosek, Organizational Wellness Coordinator.

Here's a sampling of how these organizations are leading the charge:

- **Garden County Health Services**, includes a 10-bed Critical Access Hospital, a 40-bed nursing home, a Rural Health Clinic, and an EMS service. In the past three years, they have enhanced community wellness by partnering with the local school district to provide mental health services through a licensed clinical social worker. They have also joined an Accountable Care Organization to improve wellness efforts for Medicare patients by identifying and managing chronic health issues early. Additionally, their ambulance service offers free lift assistance to help community members who have fallen, with assessments to check for injuries.
- **Oregon Trail Eye Center, PC** exists to provide high quality, technologically advanced, extensive eye care to patients of all ages through a multi-specialty team approach. They provide structured activities and challenges to promote physical and mental health in an individual and team environment. The challenges promote friendly competition with fun prizes and bragging rights. They also provide an area to bring and eat lunches in a community setting and offer onsite vaccinations.
- **Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC)** employees enjoy a variety of in-person and digital health-focused challenges and small incentives year-round. The Cougar Strides Wellness Program is a team of twelve individuals representing the staff and faculty from our three

campus locations. The wellness program at WNCC is a year-round program that provides wellness activities and creates a welcoming and inclusive environment for all. Over the past three years, the Cougar Strides wellness team has strived to establish a wellness-minded culture with activities for everyone, no matter the fitness level, age, or experience. Our team works hard to support the overall purpose and mission of promoting the physical, financial, social, and emotional wellbeing of our work community.

- **Box Butte General Hospital (BBGH)** has always seen value in employee wellness, and it has been evolving for nearly three decades. They have a very robust program, using as many internal resources as they can. They implement a one-on-one coaching model for employees. The holistic model and program structure is highly supported by research obtained from Gallup and includes the following areas: Financial, Career, Social, Physical, and Community Wellbeing. BBGH has culture and supportive strategies in place allowing “non- employee associates” to participate in the program. They have two financial resources: Dave Ramsey’s Smart Dollar program and QPA Financial Fitness for Life. Organizationally, they provide one promotion, event, challenge, or education opportunity for each element of wellbeing per month. These are organized, planned, and implemented by members of our Wellness Champions. Members of the Wellness Champions also serve on sub-committees representing each element of wellbeing and meet monthly.

A fierce public health enthusiast was honored with the 7th Leading Light Award. Kim Engel was public health before there was public health in the Panhandle. Prior to 2001 when Nebraska created a statewide infrastructure for public health, Engel was working with a diverse group of healthcare and human services agencies from around the area referred to as the Panhandle Partnership. She was an integral leader among this coalition and as they pioneered the first Panhandle Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan, this work and vision positioned the area to create a public health system in the rural, Nebraska Panhandle because until up to that point, there was no formal system. This laid the important foundational groundwork for what is now Panhandle Public Health District.

Kim leads with transparency and integrity. Her resolute service not only reflects a deep understanding of public health challenges but also underscores an admirable commitment to creating positive and lasting impact. Kim is planning her retirement for January 2025. The impact she’s made to help grow the next generation of healthcare, human service, and public health professionals will be replicated for generations to come.

“I am deeply honored to receive the Leading Light award as I retire, reflecting on the wonderful team I am leaving behind. This recognition not only celebrates my journey but also acknowledges the dedication and contributions of my incredible team. Your support has been invaluable, and I am truly grateful for our shared accomplishments. As I move into the next chapter of my life, I carry your spirit of teamwork and excellence with me. Thank you all for believing in me and for being part of this remarkable journey,” Engel shared.

The council will have a nominating process for the Leading Light recipient to be honored at next year’s conference.

For additional information about worksite wellness, visit www.pphd.ne.gov/pwwc.html or call Berosek at 308-279-3496. The Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council is proudly part of Panhandle Public Health District. The Council specializes in supporting employers in the Panhandle region. We recognize that

many employers support a diverse and remote workforce and offer innovative ways to overcome the challenge of working with a virtual team. We understand that many of our employers do not have full-time wellness resources and work to provide resources and training to make running a worksite wellness program as easy as possible.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle community.

Governor's Wellness Award:

Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC) – Grower Award:



Left to right: Kathy Ault, Terri Allen, Maureen Galen, and Jenny Keener.

Box Butte General Hospital – Harvester Award:



Left to right: Nicole Schnell, Dan Newhoff, Peggy Hinman, Brook Shelmadine, Cassidy Hoffmann, and Dr. Brian Shelmadine

Leading Light Award: Kim Engel



Left to right: Paulette Schnell, Erin Sorenson, Megan Barhafer, Kim Engel, Jessica Davies, Dezarae Brandt, Sara Williamson, and Tabi Prochazka



Kim's family