



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Health District names Public Health Heroes

LAS VEGAS –The Southern Nevada Health District announced its annual Public Health Heroes, recognition given to individuals or organizations whose efforts positively affect the health and well-being of the community. This year’s winners will be honored at the April 23 Southern Nevada District Board of Health meeting.

The 2009 Public Health Heroes are:

Public Health Flight/99th Aerospace Medicine Squadron/Nellis Air Force Base

The Public Health Flight/99th Aerospace Medicine has contributed significantly to the health of Southern Nevadans as it continues to work closely with the health district’s epidemiology, TB, STD and vector control teams to investigate or control outbreaks. The squadron’s support of public health is reflected in its willingness to provide assistance.

In 2008, Public Health Flight tested, counseled and managed more than 2,500 active duty service members, their families and retirees during the hepatitis C outbreak. Its team members have assisted the health district during large-scale illness outbreaks like the 2004 casino norovirus outbreak, and assisted the health district give flu shots during large immunization clinics.

Public Health Flight has participated in preparedness drills and exercises with the health district to ensure that a community-wide and comprehensive response is undertaken in an emergency. The health district has also been invited to participate in several major Air Force exercises as well. Public Health Flight staff regularly attends monthly surveillance meetings at the health district to share information and approaches to the investigation and control of infectious diseases.

Quest Diagnostics Laboratories – Las Vegas

Quest Diagnostics Laboratories – Las Vegas is recognized as an excellent public health partner for its continued assistance and partnership with health district efforts whether it is routine disease surveillance or an outbreak investigation. Quest assists the health district produce an annual report that helps determine antibiotic resistance patterns in the area and it is the only Southern Nevada laboratory that provides reportable test results electronically to the health district on a daily basis. This allows staff to identify and take steps to end a potential outbreak more quickly and more efficiently.

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Public Health Heroes – add one

Its greatest assistance comes during health district outbreak investigations. In 2008, Quest served as a partner as the health district planned its response to the hepatitis C investigation by putting together a team to create customized testing panels to assist patients and ensure they received the most efficient testing. Quest also reported to the health district statistics on the number of HIV and hepatitis tests performed during the three month period following the hepatitis C outbreak announcement, allowing the district to assess the magnitude of testing in the community. For eight months in 2007 and 2008, Quest provided daily reports of all mumps testing, a process that was prepared by manually searching databases, to assist the district to control an outbreak, and during an investigation at a long-term care facility, the labs' rapid turnaround enabled the health district and the CDC to offer quick guidance to the facility necessary to remediate the situation. And finally, in 2008 Quest's informatics department helped to create a unique report to assist the investigation into cases of Legionella in Clark County.

Ruben Saavedra, MD

Dr. Saavedra is the medical director of the Community Outreach Medical Center.

He has worked with the nursing division for many years and in 2008 he provided assistance to the district's office of HIV/AIDS/STDs to help manage the ongoing syphilis outbreak. In addition, he has worked with health district staff to provide HIV and syphilis testing, referrals and discharge planning within the Clark County Detention Center, City of Las Vegas and North Vegas jails to ensure that patients with HIV and STDs receive appropriate counseling treatment and follow up.

Dr. Saavedra serves as the medical provider for the health district's new Refugee Program, which helps protect the community from infectious diseases that might be endemic in countries around the world. In this role, Dr. Saavedra provides care to these patients who are at risk for secondary infections.

This year's awardees have all shown tremendous initiative to ensure the conditions necessary to protect the health of Southern Nevada residents and visitors. All are well-deserving recipients of the Public Health Hero Awards.

Public Health Heroes are nominated by health district staff members for their efforts in supporting one or more of the 10 Essential Public Health Services:

1. **Monitor** the health status to identify and solve community health problems.
2. **Diagnose and investigate** health problems and health hazards in the community
3. **Inform, educate and empower** people about health issues.
4. **Mobilize** community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.
5. **Develop policies and plans** that support individual and community health efforts.
6. **Enforce laws and regulations** that protect health and ensure safety.
7. **Link** people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.
8. **Assure** competent public and personal health care workforce.
9. **Evaluate** effectiveness, accessibility and quality of personal and population-based health services.
10. **Research** for new insights and innovative solution to health problems.