

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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Three businesses honored with the Governor's Wellness Award and a Chadron woman receives Leading Light Award at recent Gering awards luncheon

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

Banner County Schools received the Sower Award for planting the seeds for wellness at their school. Chadron Community Hospital and Health Services and Panhandle Public Health District received the Grower Award for growing the seeds for wellness at their organizations.

"The Governor's Wellness Award recognizes businesses that have planted and nurtured a culture of wellness within their organizations," said Governor Pete Ricketts. "I applaud these employers for implementing innovative and effective worksite wellness programs. Their efforts help grow a healthier population in Nebraska."

In the past year, award recipients increased the percentage of people meeting Surgeon General Guidelines for Physical Activity by more than 11%, reduced tobacco use by 19%, and increased those meeting fruit and vegetable consumption guidelines by 4%.

"We are always so proud to work with these organizations to create environments supporting employee health and well-being. They've made marked strides towards the prevention of devastating and costly chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some types of cancer," said Jessica Davies, Assistant Health Director.

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

- **Banner County Schools** has made great strides with their wellness program including providing a healthy vending machine for their employees, walking at school, wellness incentives, standing desks for the secretary and bookkeeper, and a salad bar.
- **Chadron Community Hospital and Health Services** has had many great accomplishments including a 39% increase in participation of Health Risk Assessments, improved their physical activity score by four points, a 9% tobacco use rate (less than half of state and national estimates), and all of the facilities are tobacco free.
 - They provide smoking cessation products to employees and their families at no cost to help them quit, developed a lactation policy to formally support employees and/or visitors with clean comfortable rooms with outlets and refrigerators for breast milk storage at all the hospital and all outlying facilities, and they serve fruit infused water every Wednesday for staff and visitors.

- **Panhandle Public Health District** believes in modeling good health and well-being to the residents they serve. The wellness program provides health screenings for employees and their immediate family, a breast-feeding friendly worksite, healthy food at all company-sponsored functions, paid break time to encourage physical activity and walkable campus promotions, sit-to-stand and walking workstation options, flex-time, employee assistance program, and access to a number of wellness challenges.

In addition to the Governor's Wellness Awards, the Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council created the Leading Light Award in honor of Annie Loutzenhiser, ***"for her dedication and leadership to employee health and well-being in the Panhandle."***

Annie joined the Council advisory committee in 2013, and sadly passed away in July 2018 at the young age of 44 after a courageous battle with cancer. She was honored with the first Leading Light Award posthumously.

Rachel Johnson, Volunteer Services Director at Northwest Community Action Partnership (NCAP), was surprised with the 2019 award for leading the charge for wellness at her workplace. Rachel's coworkers compiled a beautiful video tribute in her honor with coworkers, family, and friends sharing stories of her individual, organizational, and community impact.

Karen Eisenbarth, NCAP Director said, "Rachel is an ambassador for our organization and advocate in our community for social change, particularly food insecurity. She has enriched the lives of so many and we are so excited to have her as a part of our team and to nominate her to receive this award!"

For additional information about worksite wellness, visit www.pphd.org/pwwc.html or call Davies at 308-487-3600 extension 101. 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.