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May 2, 2011

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Five Public Health Awards Recognize Efforts of Students, Community Leaders

Five awards were presented by the Anoka County Board of Commissioners in April to community leaders who have gone the extra mile. This year, the public health award selection committee, comprised of public health professionals and community volunteers, picked five award winners, all connected to schools, who demonstrate leadership and success in creating solutions to public health problems.

The 4H Youth Teaching Youth programs were selected for the work they do to engage teens with younger kids in 4th, 7th and 8th grades. They are able to influence younger youth when it comes to making healthy choices about alcohol, tobacco and relationships. Leadership for the program for the past 23 years has come from the University of Minnesota Extension—Anoka County.

The award was presented by Anoka County Commissioner Westerberg at an April county board meeting to several high school students representing the program from high schools in Coon Rapids, Anoka, Andover, and St. Francis, including Kaylin Livermore, Elizabeth Blakemore, Carly Mecl, Sara Vincent, Ben Mei, Rachel Dorn, Shauni Goss, Lauren Novak, and Andrea Johnson.

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Five Public Health Awards Recognize Efforts of Students, Community Leaders – Add 1

“Youth Teaching Youth programs are outstanding examples of the success that can be found when schools, community businesses and University of Minnesota Extension—Anoka County work together,” Commissioner Westerberg said.

A second youth led initiative to be recognized was the Blaine High School Students for Tobacco Free Parks, represented by Abby Veloske, Leah Vogel, Shawna Larsen, Brittany Jacks, and Chelsea Simon. The group tackled a public policy issue about tobacco use in city parks. After several months of making their case, the young people were invited by the city to collaborate on a proposal that worked for the city and met the goals of the youth group.

Commissioner West found the students to be inspiring.

“I’m so pleased to see we have young people who believe in and are using the democratic process to have their voices heard,” Commissioner West said.

An individual award went to Elizabeth Eaton, from Centennial Schools. She contributes to student wellness and success in many ways, Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah explained. She is a truancy advocate for students at the high school. The peer leadership program she launched is now the largest in the state. She also is a student assistance coordinator and a chemical dependency counselor. Her good works go outside of the school buildings, too. A quarterly brown bag lunch developed under her guidance brings members of the faith community, school and county staff together to discuss trends, needs and strategies for addressing them.

“What a dynamo!” said Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah. “Thanks, Elizabeth for all you do.” Reid Mortensen, Whitney Willemsen, and Jennifer Flavin—all from Anoka-Hennepin Community Education—shared an award this year. Through their efforts, thousands of families in the Anoka Hennepin School District have been empowered to make healthier food choices.

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Five Public Health Awards Recognize Efforts of Students, Community Leaders – Add 2

Using funds from a Statewide Health Improvement Program grant (SHIP), one of many efforts they promoted focused on the benefits of breakfast and how it affects educational achievement, classroom behaviors, reduced absenteeism and memory retention.

Commissioner Carol LeDoux was impressed with the results.

“I’m told one middle school experienced an increase from 30 students per day eating breakfast to 350 students per day,” Commissioner LeDoux said.

Another individual award went to Barry Scanlan, a prevention specialist in the Anoka Hennepin School District. He works on prevention efforts around bullying, suicide, homelessness, and more. Scanlan’s fingerprints can be seen on several important initiatives designed to help families experiencing the loss of a loved one or hardships during the downturn of the economy. His tireless efforts have brought people together with a marriage of churches, school district, county mental health agencies, local hospitals, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE), and other groups, to look at issues of mental health and wellness.

Commissioner Matt Look summed up the connection between Scanlan and the other award winners.

“If there’s a common theme to Barry’s work—and really to the efforts of all our award winners today—it’s collaboration makes the community stronger,” Commissioner Look said. The public health awards were established in 2006 to recognize and honor citizens in Anoka County who devote their time, energy and talents to improving public health in our communities. The awards are presented each year in April, which is nationally recognized as Public Health Month. The awards are an opportunity to recognize collaboration between county staff and community members, according to Commissioner Dan Erhart.

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Five Public Health Awards Recognize Efforts of Students, Community Leaders – Add 3

“The efforts we recognize each April complement the work done by a dedicated workforce in the Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services Department,” Commissioner Erhart said. “Our staff and these community leaders strive everyday to protect and promote the health and safety of our communities.”

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Photos / Cutlines:



Rina McManus, director of Anoka County’s Community Health and Environmental Services Department (left), and Anoka County Commissioner Andy Westerberg (right) congratulate members of the 4-H Youth Teaching Youth programs represented by Andrea Johnson, Shauni Goss, Carly Mecl, Sara Vincent, Rachel Dorn, Ben Mei, Elizabeth Blakemore, Kaylin Livermore, and Lauren Novak.



Rina McManus, director of Anoka County’s Community Health and Environmental Services Department (left), and Anoka County Commissioner Robyn West (right) congratulate members of the Blaine High School Students for Tobacco-Free Parks represented by Shawna Larsen, Abby Veloske, Leah Vogel, Chelsea Simon, and Brittany Jacks.

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Rina McManus, director of Anoka County's Community Health and Environmental Services Department (left), and Anoka County Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah (right) congratulate Elizabeth Eaton for receiving a Public Health Award.



Rina McManus, director of Anoka County's Community Health and Environmental Services Department (left), and Anoka County Commissioner Matt Look (right) congratulate Barry Scanlon for receiving a Public Health Award.



Anoka County Commissioner Carol LeDoux (left) and Rina McManus, director of Anoka County's Community Health and Environmental Services Department (right), congratulate Whitney Willemsen, Jennifer Flavin and Reid Mortensen.