

## **Governor's Hometown Health Heroes**

### **Don "Red Dog" Gardner**

Lawrence

Awarded: August 2006

#### **About Red Dog:**

Don "Red Dog" Gardner was the first recipient of the Hometown Health Hero award. Each summer since 1984, Gardner and a troupe of fellow volunteers have offered a thrice daily 45-minute workout -- known as Dog Days -- to the public at KU's Memorial Stadium. The 6 a.m., noon and 6 p.m., Monday through Thursday sessions bring area residents of all ages and activity levels to Memorial Stadium for a brisk stretching, calisthenics and aerobic activity workout.

The happening has grown from six or seven athletes in the '80s into a community event with an average attendance in the morning and evening of more than 450 people. The activity is free and open to the public.

"Don Gardner and his commitment to helping Kansans maintain a regular physical activity schedule epitomizes the leadership and qualities that make a Hometown Health Hero," Gov. Sebelius said in announcing the award winner. "Don's selfless gift of time to the community of Lawrence is a true labor of love that can't be matched."

### **Waldo McBurney, 1902-2009**

Quinter

Awarded: November 2006

#### **About Waldo:**

Ralph Waldo McBurney, usually known as Waldo, was said

to be the oldest worker in the United States. Up until the age of 106, Waldo worked as a beekeeper in the city of Quinter. He died on July 8, 2009

A native of Quinter, McBurney was raised on a small farm that helped establish his lifetime philosophy of being active, eating healthy and maintaining a positive outlook. Says McBurney, "Genetics are important, but lifestyle is the more important factor. We don't get to choose our parents, but we select our lifestyles."

After careers in teaching and public service, when most individuals were slowing down, McBurney was just warming up. At age 65, he engaged in long-distance running followed by entering state, national and international competitions at 75. He still owns 90s and 100s age-group track and field records for running, long jump, discus and the shot put set at competitions such as the Senior Olympics and World Masters games in New York, England, and Puerto Rico.

McBurney has remained self-employed for more than 40 years, maintaining a small office in downtown Quinter where he manages a 100-colony bee-hive operation for sales of Kansas-grown honey, and sales of his self-published book, "My First 100 Years."

"Waldo McBurney is living proof that Kansans can engage in regular physical activity, eat a healthy diet and avoid tobacco that results in an unsurpassed quality of life," Governor Sebelius said in announcing the award winner. "Waldo is truly a gift to our state, and an inspiration to live a healthy life."

**Kristey Williams**

Augusta

Awarded: October 2007

### About Kristey:

Kristey exemplifies personal as well as community health leadership. An Augusta native, Williams was elected mayor of Augusta in May 2007 with a campaign promise of being motivated to make a difference in community health and well-being. Williams' promise was backed-up by her track record.

In spring 2002, Williams raised more than \$130,000 to create Play Park Pointe, a community park that encourages physical activity opportunities for Augusta youth and families. Under Williams' leadership, the park was constructed in six days as community residents and businesses donated time, equipment and materials to complete the project.

In June 2006, Williams spearheaded another Augusta revitalization project, 'Save Our State Street' (S.O.S.). S.O.S. worked to improve the appearance, walkability, and accessibility of downtown Augusta through a \$1.5 million Kansas Department of Transportation grant and by raising \$200,000 for the project.

She's been described by community members as "extremely enthusiastic and optimistic" as she has also touched hundreds of lives in her community through her aerobics class, preparing runners for races and conducting holiday walking tours through Augusta neighborhoods.

"Mayor Williams embodies the Kansas 'can do' spirit through her efforts to make positive changes in her community," Governor Sebelius said in announcing the award winner. "Her leadership is a great gift to her community and our state."

**Dr. Jack Wortman**  
**Hutchinson**

Awarded: October 2007

**About Jack:**

A local physician practicing over 30 years in the Hutchinson community, it's easy to understand why Dr. Wortman would be regarded as a local health hero. Yet, what truly makes Dr. Wortman's journey heroic is that his local health advocacy actually increased upon his retirement at the end of 1995. It was then that he discovered the freedom to pursue his multiple health avocations with all the determination and zeal previously devoted to his professional career.

Dr. Wortman has served on a number of boards in the Hutchinson community including Health Care, Inc., Hutchinson Community Foundation, Hospice, Inc., Reno County Health Department, Community Health Coalition, Anti-Tobacco Use Coalition and the Personal Health Initiative Team (PHIT). In that capacity, he has been instrumental in providing start-up and sustaining funding for several local health advocacy initiatives including a local smoking ban.

Dr. Wortman's health advocacy also extends to his willingness to be an example for others who face similar health challenges. As a diabetic, Dr. Wortman has counseled fellow diabetics using his stories of his own challenges with weight loss and developing a physical fitness regimen, the side effects of oral medications, and "keeping it real" about the struggle to resist sweet treats.

His vast garden is visible from one of Hutchinson's main streets and grows as a testimony to his commitment to healthy eating. Of course, maintaining it also provides a regular contribution to his physical activity. He is generous

about sharing his abundant harvest with others, notably the senior living apartments across the street from his home.

"Dr. Wortman is a reminder that we have a lifelong responsibility to personal health and being of service to our fellow Kansans," Governor Sebelius said in announcing the award winner. "May we all follow Dr. Wortman's example in using our talents and abilities to better ourselves and others."

### **Jeanine Kempker**

Leavenworth

Awarded: December 2008

#### **About Janine:**

Janine Kempker, educator and principal of Anthony Elementary School in Leavenworth, is a pioneer in school health programs, although she's too humble to truly feel comfortable with the accolade. Low-key, pragmatic, and dedicated to her students and staff, Kempker had a challenge on her hands when she took over Anthony Elementary.

Struggling to hold it together, Anthony was not unlike other schools out there today. Low academic scores, poor attendance, rife with behavioral issues, high teacher turnover, and a disenchanting surrounding community led to a bad reputation and bleak future.

In response, Kempker went back to the basics: nutrition and exercise. "These kids couldn't focus on learning or manage self-discipline because they were missing the right balance of fuel to make it through the day," says Kempker. "We just wanted to get them the tools they deserved."

In 2003, Kempker created the "Eat, Exercise, Excel" program which turned the school struggling with low academic performance into one that achieved excellence rankings and a 95% reduction in office referrals—all in a year, largely by emphasizing fitness and nutrition.

On the fitness front, Anthony's students get almost an hour of activity every day through three 30-minute PE classes per week and a daily 45-minute structured recess, during which students rotate between three different games (participation is mandatory).

This active break is a hit among the kids. And teachers have noted numerous benefits, including increased attentiveness after breaks and less bullying during recess.

Another innovation: Lunch is eaten in classrooms amid a family atmosphere that emphasizes conversation. "The noise level is low, making this the ideal time for teachers and students to build positive relationships," Kempker says.

Also, daily recommended dietary allowance (RDA) vitamins are available to students (with parental permission), a program used by 70 percent of school families.

Benefits of the program have included increased academic scores; increased attendance and teacher retention; reductions in both obesity and anti-social behavior; and improved physical fitness.

Anthony garnered a HealthyKansas HealthySchool designation in 2007 and national recognition in September 2008 from Health Magazine as one of the Ten Healthiest U.S. Schools.

"The work Principal Kempker has done to improve the health

of students in Leavenworth is a great example of the impact schools can have on public health," Governor Sebelius said in announcing the award winner. "The Eat, Exercise, Excel program is an innovative approach to teaching kids to not only eat and exercise better, but live better."

## **Brenda Pfizenmaier**

Ottawa

Awarded: December 2008

### **About Brenda:**

As the Nutrition & Diabetes Education Director for Ransom Memorial Hospital of Ottawa, Brenda Pfizenmaier has dedicated her professional career to promoting healthy habits. Yet, what makes Brenda a health hero is her prolific dedication and infectious enthusiasm in encouraging others to live healthier, happy lives.

Pfizenmaier is herself a devotee of good nutrition and physical fitness, yet also possesses that special gift of making what appears impossible to be very relatable and very attainable.

Pfizenmaier has connected one-on-one with literally thousands of people in the Ottawa community to personally and positively impact their mindset about health and wellness.

In addition to teaching aerobics, volunteering with the Franklin County Diabetes Association and piloting a grant-funded exercise and nutrition program for seniors, Pfizenmaier takes the time to mentor her students, colleagues, friends and neighbors.

Infusing her positive, effervescent spirit into her coaching style, Pfizenmaier relies on a personal touch to encouraging

health, sending personal notes of encouragement and even making 5:00 a.m. accountability phone calls to her students as she herself is on the way to teach her aerobics class.

"Leaders in every community can make an impact on public health," Governor Sebelius said in announcing the award winner. "Brenda is an example of how one person truly can make a difference in the lives of others to ensure Kansans have the information and encouragement they need to live healthy and productive lives."