



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Public Health leaders honored

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Public Health Association recently recognized persons from across the state who have demonstrated exceptional merit during the past year in the field of public health. The following individuals were presented awards at the association's 59th Annual Meeting and Health Education Conference at the Embassy Suites in Montgomery April 9.

The Anne M. Smith Public Health Nurse of the Year Award was presented to **Cathy Wright, R.N.**, clinic nurse at the Hale County Health Department. The recipient of this award must exemplify the mission of public health nursing in Alabama, that is "to assure conditions in which individuals, families and communities can be healthy utilizing the unique expertise of public health nurses to assess, plan and implement programs which promote health and prevent disease."

Mrs. Wright has been a clinic nurse for nearly 25 years, and remarked that she is amazed that she is now seeing the fourth generation of health department patients. She is described as "a valued voice to her peers" and "a true example of selfless service to her patients, the agency and her community." In addition to her dedication on the job, she volunteers for other activities such as speaking to various groups and serving on the Hale County Children's Policy Council.

The Frederick S. Wolf Award was presented to **Dr. Bill Goetter** of Fairhope. This award was established in 1982 to recognize an individual who has been active in public health at the local level for more than 10 years; who has demonstrated efficiency, dedication and professionalism in delivery of public health services; and who has provided unselfish community services in areas unrelated to public health.

Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Goetter led the effort to establish the Alabama Free Clinic, a medical clinic in Baldwin County that offers free services to those who cannot afford health care. He worked with State Rep. Walter Penry who sponsored a bill providing liability protection to medical volunteers rendering uncompensated services that resulted in passage of a law. He met with local physicians, hospital administrators and others to form partnerships to staff the clinic, has been instrumental in its success, and still serves on its board of the first established free medical clinic in Alabama.

Nominators wrote that Dr. Goetter is "committed to making Baldwin County a healthier place to live," "his commitment and dedication are unsurpassed," and "he does not care who receives the credit" as he often serves behind the scenes.

Dr. Goetter was the major driving force in opening the **Alabama Free Clinic**, and under his leadership, AFC received the Dr. Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence in Public Health. This award was established in 1987 to honor Dr. Myers for his accomplishments by recognizing an individual, group or organization that, through excellence in work, has made a significant impact on some aspect of public health in Alabama.

AFC began offering services to the low-income and indigent people in Baldwin County in 1995. For the first few years, AFC operated with a 100-member volunteer staff of clerks, nurses and physicians. Today, the AFC has three locations with a full-time director and two nurses. Physicians, nurses, hospitals and laboratories all donate their time, effort and services to meet the medical needs of AFC clients. AFC provided approximately \$750,000 in free medical treatment and services to the citizens of Baldwin County in 2014, served 1,228 patients, and provided nearly \$740,000 worth of prescription medication savings. AFC has recruited and expanded its services to include pulmonary diagnostics, perpetual care, wound care, dental care, and has laid the foundation for the launch of eye health/vision services—all at no charge to the clients.

The D.G. Gill Award is intended to honor an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to public health in Alabama. The Alabama Public Health Association presented this award to **Denise Pope** of Public Health Area 7. The D.G. Gill Award was the first award established by the association and was done in 1967 to honor former State Health Officer Dr. D.G. Gill.

Mrs. Pope has devoted more than 30 years to serving WIC participants at both the clinic and area levels. Letters of support commended her for her dedication to her work. One remarked, “She is one of those special people that has the talent to do the behind-the-scenes work to make a project or meeting come together.” She has served as a subject matter expert for the WIC Crossroads Management Information System. This 8-year project involved collaboration with four states to design and develop an electronic WIC record that met the needs of the Alabama WIC program. Mrs. Pope worked countless hours on this project not only in the design phase, but also by piloting the project. She assisted with training and statewide implementation.

Over the years, Mrs. Pope has been involved in innovative ways to provide accessibility to the WIC program by those who need it most. Her area was one of the first to provide hospital-based WIC certifications, mobile WIC clinics, after hours clinics, and church-based WIC clinics. One supporter noted, “Mrs. Pope is truly a problem solver with compassion for the people she serves and for her colleagues with whom she shares a workplace. Mrs. Pope does not view her job to be just the nutrition director, she sees herself as a team player for the department.”

Noelle Ahmann, with the Communications and Social Marketing Division, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, was presented the Virginia Kendrick Award. This award is given annually to an individual who has provided notable service to the people of Alabama while serving in a supportive position in the field of public health.

In her position as marketing specialist, Ms. Ahmann produces professional quality work that results in clear, informational, promotional and educational materials that are essential to assure people have the knowledge they need to be alert to public health issues, services, recommendations, requirements, and disease and injury prevention interventions. Supporters praised her for enabling others to do their jobs in promoting healthful behaviors to a wide range of audiences. Letters of support stated, “She is dedicated and works smoothly with others to

balance the goals of programs with the communications methodologies that must be utilized in her work.”

Commander Melissa Ann Morrison was presented the Guy M. Tate Award, an award given annually to a public health employee, group or agency with 10 years or less in public health for outstanding current or recent service or contribution to public health. CDR Morrison has had a substantial impact on the health and safety of Alabama’s citizens as she carries out her duties as a Career Epidemiology Field Officer with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention assigned to the Alabama Department of Public Health.

CDR Morrison began her current assignment in Alabama in May 2009 during the second week of the H1N1 influenza response. Since then, she has been involved in several joint federal and ADPH public health emergency responses, including investigation of health impacts of an extended weather-related water shortage, the Alabama tornado outbreak in April 2011, investigation of potential patient exposure to strontium, and assessment of community exposure to mercaptan. Most recently, she was responsible for coordinating ADPH Ebola planning efforts and was deployed to CDC headquarters to serve on the State Coordination Task Force.

Two former association leaders and office holders were inducted into the Alabama Public Health Association Hall of Fame, Class of 2015: **Ross Hudson** of Scottsboro and **Albert Woolbright, Ph.D.**, of Montgomery. The Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the enhancement and advancement of the association.