

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma: Deckert, Nine Oklahoma 'Champions of Health' to Receive Honors



OKLAHOMA CITY, Oct. 6 /PRNewswire/ -- State Board of Health member Dr. Gordon H. Deckert has been chosen as the Champion of Oklahoma Health, the highest recognition in the Champions Health Awards. Deckert was selected from more than 300 individuals and organizations nominated for their efforts to improve Oklahoma's health status.

Deckert was chosen for his visible, sustained leadership on state public health issues. He led the effort to create the Oklahoma State Department of Health's State of the State's Health Report, an annual health report card for the state. Produced since 1996, the report compiles statistics and other data about state health concerns, ranging from tobacco usage to obesity. Deckert is a David Ross Boyd Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Oklahoma, is the author of "Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine," and recently retired from clinical private practice.

Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin will present the "Champion of Oklahoma Health" award to Deckert at the Champions of Health Awards, Oct. 27, 6:30 p.m., National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. The event features Olympic champions Bart Conner and Nadia Comaneci presenting the keynote address.

The Champions of Health awards are sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma State Department of Health, the Oklahoma Hospital Association, the Oklahoma Osteopathic Association, the Oklahoma State Medical Association and its Physicians' Campaign for a Healthier Oklahoma.

As Champion of Oklahoma Health, Deckert receives a grant of \$2,500 to award to an Oklahoma health improvement organization or project of his choice.

Champions selected from nine categories also will be honored and each awarded a \$1,000 contribution to their organization or program:

- **Champion of the Uninsured - Bedlam Community Health Project, Tulsa** -- Initiated in August 2003, the Bedlam Clinic's objective is to provide access to primary and specialty health care, free of charge, to indigent and uninsured individuals. Through an innovative campus and community partnership, the project operates using volunteer health care professionals and donations from local industry. A free after hours clinic operating two evenings each week is the core project, providing more than 10,000 patient encounters. Through this unique model, the cost per patient visit is about \$36, compared with the cost of an average emergency room visit -- \$300, or an average primary care visit -- \$75-\$200.
- **Education and Awareness Champion - Schools for Healthy Lifestyles, Oklahoma City** -- Schools for Healthy Lifestyles was formed in 1997 to combat Oklahoma's declining health status by focusing on students, their families and educators. Currently working in 24 central Oklahoma schools, the program promotes physical activity and fitness, provides nutrition education and awareness, tobacco use prevention, and safety and injury prevention. The program was founded by the Oklahoma County Medical Society, the Oklahoma City County Health Department, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the Oklahoma City Public Schools.
- **Champion of Health Care in Rural Oklahoma - Oklahoma State University Telemedicine** -- Dr. John Fernandes, president of the OSU Center for Health Sciences, recently wrote, "Those who choose to live outside the metropolitan area should not be penalized by being denied access to effective, convenient health care" The OSU Telemedicine network, established in 1994, allows physicians to consult or examine patients from a remote location. Today OSU manages and operates 24 telemedicine sites in Oklahoma, along with 20 distance-learning locations that help doctors stay up-to-date when they choose a rural practice.

- **Minority Health Champion - Choctaw Nation Preventive Health Services** -- Choctaw Nation Preventive Health Services provides health care and health care education for more than 32,000 Native Americans and their families in 10.5 counties in southeastern Oklahoma. They also serve all citizens in western LeFlore, southern Latimer, eastern Pittsburg and northern Pushmataha counties, regardless of race. The Choctaw Nation's programs focus on prevention of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other conditions prevalent in the community. Through health assessments, coordination of community coalitions and education, the Choctaw Nation Preventive Health Service provides vital health improvement resources for the area.
- **Professional Health Care Champion - Dr. Don Wilber, Midwest City** -- Dr. Don Wilber, a pediatrician at the Oklahoma City Clinic in Midwest City, is being recognized for his volunteer efforts to improve children's immunization rates. Dr. Wilber has served as chairperson of the Oklahoma State Immunization Advisory Committee since 1993. As chairperson, he has led successful efforts to add the Hepatitis B vaccine to school and day care requirements. He currently is a driving force behind the Oklahoma State Department of Health's "OK By One" campaign to promote on-time immunization of infants under one year of age.
- **Legislative Health Champion - Oklahoma State Senator Angela Monson** -- Senator Angela Monson has served in the Oklahoma State Senate since 1993. A nationally noted advocate of health care reform, Sen. Monson is a member of the steering committee of the Reforming States Group, a Milbank Memorial Fund health care initiative, and serves on the board of Families USA Foundation. Recently she accepted an invitation to serve as National Advisory Committee member of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's State Coverage Initiatives program. In 1998, Sen. Monson was appointed to the National Advisory Council to the National Health Service Corps by then-Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, and later chaired that council until 2002. She has authored a substantial amount of health reform legislation, and has been an advocate for affordable, accessible health care for all Oklahomans.
- **Ageless Hero - Lucille R. Fancey, Coffee Creek Riding Center for the Handicapped, Edmond** -- At age 84, Lucille Fancey operates the therapeutic riding center for the handicapped that she founded 28 years ago. Specially designed games and exercises target areas of need, while the horses provide freedom and enjoyment for disabled riders. Her center serves 140 students per semester, with each requiring one to three volunteers to assist them in their classes. Over the years, many of these volunteers have chosen careers in education and health-related fields, influenced by their experiences at Coffee Creek. In addition to operating the therapy center, Mrs. Fancey teaches English riding and jumping lessons to the non-disabled. She was Master of the Lost Hound Fox Hunt until retiring her pack of hounds at age 80. Mrs. Fancey advocates that an active lifestyle contributes to physical and mental well being, as well as long life.
- **Health and Medical Media Champion - LeAnne Taylor, KOTV-The News on Six, Tulsa** -- LeAnne Taylor, KOTV-6 reporter and morning show host, was diagnosed with breast cancer in Fall 2003. Also a wife and mother of two children, ages 4 and 12, LeAnne didn't miss a day of work through her four months of chemotherapy, followed by 33 radiation treatments. LeAnne began sharing her story with her audience when her treatments led to hair loss. She kept her sense of humor by acquiring a wardrobe of wigs evoking personalities including Dolly Parton, Tina Turner, Marge Simpson and many others. LeAnne appeared with a closely shaven head on the cover of this September's TulsaPeople. Her public education efforts about early detection, which began long before her personal ordeal, have firmly positioned LeAnne as an outstanding spokesperson for breast cancer awareness.
- **Corporate Health Champion - Chesapeake Energy Corporation, Oklahoma City** -- This Oklahoma employer of 1,300 has woven fitness into the daily routines of its employees and is reaping the benefits. With an absenteeism rate of just 1.1 days per year, as compared with a national average of 6.2 days (CCH Incorporated - Oct. 16, 2000), their commitment to keeping employees and their families healthy and fit continues to expand. The company operates a 40,000 square foot corporate fitness center, an on-site restaurant/cafeteria with healthy meal choices, a "Good Health Benefit" of \$600 per employee and family member for preventive health care and screenings, employee assistance program, running and cycling clubs, on-site Weight Watchers class and more.

In addition to the nine Champions of Health, three programs were chosen for Awards of Merit and a \$500 grant: Oklahoma Alliance on Health or Tobacco - Oklahoma City (Education and Awareness), Harper County Turning Point—Laverne (Rural Health Care), and Comanche County Memorial Hospital - Lawton (Corporate Health Care).

Event sponsorships are available, and tickets may be purchased for \$20 each. Sponsorships benefit The Oklahoma Caring Foundation, Inc., and its Caring Vans mobile immunization program. For more information about sponsorships or to RSVP for the banquet, visit <http://www.bcbsok.com> or call 1-866-876-4376.