

The Bridge

KENTUCKY'S CONNECTION TO RURAL HEALTH ISSUES


Fall 2018


Kentucky AgrAbility program evolving to meet new needs



 **KORH**
Kentucky Office of Rural Health

County library teams with co-op to bring telemedicine to veterans

Three Kentucky organizations awarded opioid response program grants

 Center of Excellence in Rural Health



Dear Readers,

As a child, I can fondly recall my grandfather Pap Lewis declaring, “You keep hammerin’ on that rock and one day you’re going to crack it.”

Please allow me to be very clear: Pap was not a student or follower of Jacob Riis, the nineteenth century social reformer and writer who is credited with lines similar to those that came from Pap Lewis’ lips. Nor was Pap Lewis uttering these words in rebuke or reproach.

Instead, in his own simple way, Pap Lewis was encouraging everyone to do their best and to be persistent — to continue to work at something, whatever it was, despite the obstacles, despite the setbacks.

Were Pap Lewis still around today, and were he able to see the health crises we face in rural Kentucky, I am certain he would tell everyone — from community organizers and clinicians to health care administrators, researchers and even policy makers — to “keep hammerin’ on that rock.”

If you were short on optimism, after reading the newspaper headlines that seem to appear on a nearly daily basis — headlines like “Burden of lung cancer pushes Kentucky’s cancer rates to nation’s highest” and “Kentucky’s childhood obesity an epidemic” — you might just conclude that Kentucky’s health challenges are unwinnable, that the commonwealth is plagued by a series of problems that are too big to be solved. You might just walk away with your hands raised in defeat.

Luckily, our state isn’t short on those who are willing to fight, those who are willing to dedicate their time, their talents and their treasures to help effect change among the many health-related challenges facing rural Kentuckians. In this current issue of *The Bridge*, for instance, we highlight the work of:

- Kentucky AgrAbility, which, since the 1990s, has provided education, on-site assistance and networking services to help farmers and other agricultural workers with disabilities get the technologies and services they need to succeed.
- The staff at KentuckyOne Saint Joseph London, who, when presented with the results of a community health needs assessment, elected to start a community garden to help address the need for better diet and nutrition in the region.
- And, individuals like Mark Neff, the outgoing president and CEO of St. Claire Healthcare in Morehead, who helped to transform a regional hospital into an integrated health system, and Scott Seitz, a National Health Service Corps-funded nurse practitioner who practices at Powell Family Health in rural Stanton.

And, those folks aren’t alone — not by a long shot.

Many of you have your own stories, too — stories about the work being accomplished within your own communities to transform status quo. These are the types of stories that have, since 2015, found a home in the pages of *The Bridge*. And, we’re always on the lookout for new stories — stories that highlight best practices and innovative solutions to the health-related problems faced by our rural friends and family. Your successes serve as models for communities across the state. So, if you have stories to share or ideas for stories, please reach out to us so that we can let others — across rural Kentucky and beyond — in on the good news.

Eradicating health problems doesn’t happen overnight. And, it definitely isn’t easy work.

But, if, like my Pap Lewis used to say, we “keep hammerin” away at these problems, one day we will “crack that rock.”

Yours,

Ernie L. Scott
Director
Kentucky Office of Rural Health



The Bridge

KENTUCKY’S CONNECTION TO RURAL HEALTH ISSUES

A pedestrian bridge in Cumberland Gap National Historical Park in Middlesboro, Kentucky.
Photo by Ron Jent.



Contents

- 4 Kentucky AgrAbility program evolving to meet new needs
- 6 County library teams with co-op to bring telemedicine to veterans
- 8 The Architect at St. Claire: Mark Neff’s decades-long efforts to transform a rural regional hospital
- 10 Three Kentucky organizations awarded opioid response program grants
- 12 National Health Service Corps Spotlight: Scott A. Seitz, Powell Family Health
- 13 Saint Joseph London community garden feeds region

The Bridge is published on a quarterly basis through a joint effort of the University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health and the Kentucky Office of Rural Health. This edition is funded in part by federal Health Resources and Services Administration Primary Care Office grant funds.

The *UK Center of Excellence in Rural Health* was established in 1990 to address health disparities in rural Kentucky, including a chronic shortage of health professionals and residents’ poor health status. The Center accomplishes this through health professionals education, health policy research, health care service and community engagement. The Center serves as the federally designated Kentucky Office of Rural Health. The program provides a framework for linking small rural communities with local, state and federal resources while working toward long-term solutions to rural health issues.

The Kentucky Office of Rural Health, established in 1991, is a federal-state partnership authorized by federal legislation. The KORH receives support from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy in the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The mission of the KORH is to support the health and well-being of Kentuckians by promoting access to rural health services. The KORH assists clinicians, administrators and consumers find ways to improve communications, finances and access to quality health care while ensuring that funding agencies and policymakers are made aware of the needs of rural communities.

The statements and opinions contained in the articles of *The Bridge* are solely those of the individual authors and contributors and not of the University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health, the Kentucky Office of Rural Health, its affiliates or funding agencies.

KENTUCKY AGRABILITY PROGRAM EVOLVING TO MEET NEW NEEDS

Kentucky AgrAbility staff installed accessible raised beds earlier this year at the Beacon Apartments in Nicholasville. The project was part of Kentucky AgrAbility's new efforts to show how gardening can improve peoples' "quality of life."



Article by Michael McGill, Rural Project Manager, Kentucky Office of Rural Health

Since its founding in 1993, Kentucky AgrAbility has sought to help farmers and other agricultural workers across the state who face obstacles — due to injury, illness or disability — that limit their ability to continue working.

This United States Department of Agriculture-funded project, one of nearly two dozen similar projects operating across the country, is probably best known for offering "direct services" to farmers: meeting with them face-to-face, touring their operation, identifying any barriers to their work, brainstorming possible solutions and helping to get those solutions realized.

A farmer suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and compressed discs, for instance, might gain assistance in adding extra steps to his tractor, extending the mirrors on his tractor to keep him from having to rotate so much in his seat, and adding automatic hitches to his balers, among other things.

But, as the number of farmers and agricultural workers across the state continues to decline and the average age of farmers continues to increase (now 58, nationally), the focus of Kentucky AgrAbility's efforts is evolving a bit: Project staff are looking at ways to broaden just what "Cultivating Accessible Agriculture" — the project's motto — means by trying to open the doors of agriculture to new audiences, bringing farming and its benefits to others

who haven't been traditionally served by the office.

Finding and training new farmers

Mike Lewis, Kentucky AgrAbility's project manager, understands the realities of farming as an occupation in Kentucky and across the country.

He comes from a family of farmers. He's worked in farm advocacy. And, he's been farming on land in both Madison and Rockcastle counties for years.

"[O]ur customer base is diminishing," he says.

Lewis says that one of the consequences of that drop in farmers is "the future of food stability in this country."

That concern has led him to begin seeking out and training new farmers among segments of the population that have not traditionally been associated with farming — people with limitations and disabilities.

In the past year, for instance, students from the Stewart Home & School, a residential school in Frankfort for students of all ages with intellectual disabilities, have begun receiving training in farming methods through a partnership between Kentucky AgrAbility and Kentucky State University's College of Agriculture. An initial field trip taken by Stewart Home students to KSU's Benson Research and Demonstration Farm, to visit AgrAbility's demonstration gardens there — raised beds that are accessible to everyone — sparked an interest among students.

Lewis says that three Stewart Home students now work on the college farm and two others are employed in farm-related work off campus, including one at an area winery.

These students are "doing something meaningful and making an impact in the community," he says.

At the same time, Kentucky AgrAbility staff are working to get more of the state's veterans who are dealing with injuries, illnesses or disabilities involved in farming.

It's a personal project of sorts for Lewis: He is a U.S. Army veteran who enlisted at age 16 and served for five years. His brother suffered a debilitating brain injury while serving in Afghanistan with the U.S. Army Special Forces.

Lewis founded Growing Warriors, a nonprofit devoted to equipping, assisting and training veterans in agriculture production. The group has started community gardens, established training programs for unemployed veterans, and assisted veterans in securing grant monies to support farming operations.

In 2017, Lewis and AgrAbility have partnered with Growing Warriors to co-host workshops for an intended veteran audience on general topics (beginning farmer training) and more specialized topics (blueberry cultivation).

AgrAbility staff have also established two garden sites at an inpatient rehabilitation facility on the

Veterans Administration hospital campus on Leestown Road in Lexington. Lewis plans to go there about once a month — beginning in the spring — to teach a horticulture class.

Lewis says he is currently seeking funding for the development of a garden to be built between two new housing units on the VA campus. The garden would provide those new residents — patients who are seeking treatment for traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as amputees who are seeking rehabilitation — with vocational rehabilitation during the day and in their downtime.

"Even if they're not interested in farming, they still have to learn how to keep books ... so there's a lot of practical, vocational stuff that we can teach them in a farm setting," Lewis says.

"A very healing endeavor"

While he was working in agriculture advocacy, Lewis says he came to the realization that "agriculture, in itself, is a very healing endeavor."

"It's something that once people do it ... they understand the value ... because it is [all about] you — you plant the seed, you nurture it, and you grow it, and then it nurtures you," Lewis says.

While Kentucky AgrAbility has traditionally been focused on the economics of farming — training farmers and helping them to stay active following illness or injury — its work is also moving into an entirely new direction: what Lewis calls the "quality of life" side of farming.

"How are we making sure that our aging population still has access to the outdoors and can garden and get their hands in dirt and receive the therapeutic benefits that come along with that?" he asks. (Those benefits include, among other things: increased self-esteem, decreased social isolation, increased social engagement and participation, improved overall sense of well-being, decreased feelings of depression, memory activation, reduced pain, and the prevention of fractures and increased bone density.)

The answer, Lewis says, is bringing accessible gardens to them.

Earlier this year, Kentucky AgrAbility partnered with the Jessamine County Extension Office and with Blue Grass Community Action Partnership to erect raised beds at the Beacon Apartments, a community for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, located in Nicholasville.

continued on page 14



Students from the Stewart Home & School help to assemble raised beds at the Benson Research and Demonstration Farm at the Kentucky State University in Frankfort.

COUNTY LIBRARY TEAMS WITH CO-OP TO BRING TELEMEDICINE TO VETERANS



Article by Mary Ann Barton

The Jackson County Public Library teamed up last year with a Veterans Administration hospital and the People's Rural Telephone Cooperative (PRTC) to bring telemedicine to its local veterans.

The new service for veterans, dubbed the "Virtual Living Room," means that local veterans can now head over to their county library to meet via broadband with their doctor, saving a day's worth of travel.

The library, located in McKee, is wired by PRTC for gigabit internet, delivering speeds 100 times faster than traditional internet service. It's unusual for the area, which is located in the heart of Appalachia, surrounded by mountains and woodlands. PRTC used a \$20 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utility Service, a \$25 million grant and loan from the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act and \$5 million in capital funding to spread 1,000 miles of fiber in Jackson and neighboring Owsley counties. The co-op serves more than 18,000 customers in those counties and is expanding into Clay and Lee counties.

"The library, for 44 years, has strived to provide services to the citizens of our county," said Malta Flannery, the library's assistant director, during last year's ribbon-cutting. "It's wonderful to know that our little library, in such a small county, is the first ever to pilot a project like this."

When veterans schedule appointments with the VA, an email is triggered to Jackson County Library Director Ashley Wagers. Library staff assist them with logging onto the computer and helping them with the camera. The veterans are then given privacy so they can speak with their doctor.

"Reliable, affordable, high-speed internet service makes rural communities stronger by connecting them to distant cities, services and the rest of the

world," said Keith Gabbard, CEO of PRTC.

The project got off the ground with a Smart Rural Community Grant from the Rural Broadband Association, headquartered in Arlington County, Virginia. The grant was used to create a comfortable, private area in space donated by the county library.

"I love that this project was bringing together all of the best elements of Jackson County — a great communications company and team, government folks who were empowered to get something done and a local community that came to rally behind folks in their community who have served our country — and now don't need to travel for hours to get some basic medical and mental health support," said Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of the Rural Broadband Association.

PRTC worked with the local Veterans Affairs Medical Center to connect them with the library and local veterans.

"They came to us to share with us that they had the broadband and the support of the community — it was a win-win situation," said Tuyen Tran, associate chief of staff at the Lexington VA Medical Center.

One of the barriers to care at the VA Medical Center is that so many veterans live in rural areas, he noted.

"About 60-plus percent of our veterans live in rural areas and getting access to good quality health care is difficult," Tran said.

Tran said the VA would like to replicate the program to help other rural veterans.

Wagers said the library hopes to increase its work with the VA to get the word out to more veterans in the region about the service at their library.

Reprinted with permission from the County News, ©2018, a publication of the National Association of Counties, Washington, D.C.

Kentucky's



The Community Stars initiative, sponsored by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health, shines a spotlight on individuals and organizations working every day to close gaps, open doors, address challenges, and develop solutions through collaboration, education, innovation and communication. Kentucky's six Community Stars have been nominated by a member of the staff of the Kentucky Office of Rural Health, by a community member, or by a peer. The Community Stars are included in an electronic publication – found at <http://www.powerofrural.org> – released on November 15, 2018, National Rural Health Day.

THE ARCHITECT AT ST. CLAIRE: Mark Neff's decades-long efforts to transform a rural regional hospital

Article by Michael McGill, Rural Project Manager, Kentucky Office of Rural Health



Mark Neff says he's a social worker at heart — he's always wanted to do good.

He earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work.

His first job out of graduate school was as a social worker at St. Joseph's Medical Center in South Bend, Indiana.

His current job as president and CEO of St. Claire HealthCare in Morehead has him doing "social work every day," he says — everything from education to counseling to support.

He even jokes that when he retires at the end of January he might "open up a private counseling service, work two days a week, just for fun."

But, in his more than two decades-long tenure leading St. Claire, Neff has perhaps been a bit more of an architect or builder than a social worker: He has helped to transform a rural regional hospital into an integrated health care system which includes, among other things, a hospital, a brand new \$28 million multi-specialty medical pavilion, an outpatient center, homecare services, and retail services, as well as a training program for medical students interested in a future in rural practice.

"Obviously these aren't things that I did on my own," Neff says. "But, we've done a lot of things. Nobody

stands and walks around or points [these things out]. But I've been here a long time, so I should have done something."

He adds modestly, "I get more credit than I deserve."

Growth opportunities

When it first opened its doors in 1963, St. Claire Hospital had 41 beds, nine nurses and six physicians.

Today, St. Claire HealthCare, which encompasses St. Claire Regional Medical Center and all of its services, operates the largest rural hospital in northeastern Kentucky with 159 beds and employs more than 1,300 staff members — including more than 100 medical providers. St. Claire is now the largest employer in the region.

Neff says that one of the things that attracted him to the job at St. Claire back in 1995, was the kinds of growth opportunities that appeared possible.

Early in his tenure, Neff says that he and other hospital staff noticed a key regional gap in services: home infusion care, considered to be a cost-effective method of delivering intravenous treatments to patients in their own home, was missing.

So, in 1997, St. Claire joined with Our Lady of Bellefonte Hospital in nearby Ashland to start a small company, Infusion Solutions, to fill the gap in both hospitals' service regions.

And, later, St. Mary's Medical Center and Charleston Area Medical Center, both in West Virginia, joined the operation as well. All four hospitals share any profits produced by the company.

Another opportunity for growth appeared in 2005 when Cave Run Clinic, the lone surgical group in Morehead, was experiencing difficulties recruiting new staff after the retirement of long-serving providers. The practice also didn't have the capital to maintain its building or to purchase new equipment.

Discussions between the group and St. Claire officials commenced. And, St. Claire's board decided to merge the surgeons into the medical center.

"That was ... an on-going, dramatic sort of strategic decision," Neff says. "From our position, it was, 'You either decide to employ them, or they're probably going to break up and leave.' Our responsibility is to provide for the needs of the region and that would be hard to do without surgeons."

And then, about six years later, the Morehead Clinic, a multi-specialty group in town, faced similar struggles. Again, negotiations began between the group and St. Claire, and, that group's providers also became employees of the hospital.

"And from that point forward, we essentially employed 100 percent of our physicians," Neff says. "In those days, there were examples of that — you'd be talking about Geisinger in Pennsylvania or Mayo, or Cleveland. Not a whole lot of places had moved to that point yet; many more have now, obviously.

"So, that whole transition was, at least for me personally ... [was] a heck of an experience working through all of that and hopefully making it work on the backend, which it has."

More recently, in 2016, St. Claire was invited to join the Kentucky Health Collaborative, a group of 10 health care systems from across the Commonwealth that are, collectively, seeking to raise standards of care, addressing the state's poor health statistics and working to reduce the cost of care through greater operational efficiencies.

St. Claire is the smallest of the group's members, which include Appalachian Regional Healthcare, Baptist Health, and UK HealthCare, among others.

"It really could have significant benefits, I thought, strategically," Neff says. "We don't really want to join a system, we like our independence. But if there are benefits to the group — purchasing, other things

— that is a mechanism to kind of get us in there, so to speak, without having to become part of [a larger health care system], who all knock on our door periodically and say, 'Why don't you come join us?'"

His response is always, "We're good."

Says Neff, "It's been a whole variety of growth opportunities that were really meeting the needs of this rural region...[that] kept it exciting."

Long-standing relationship with UK

St. Claire's relationship with the University of Kentucky has been key to the facility since long before Neff first arrived.

From its earliest days, for instance, St. Claire was a residency site for UK medical students.

And, the St. Claire-UK relationship is something that Neff has worked to strengthen and expand.

In 2002, for instance, St. Claire was faced with the need to replace aging, capital-intensive equipment in its Morehead Cancer Treatment Center. UK was, at the time, beginning to build radiation treatment centers in Eastern Kentucky. Neff contacted and persuaded UK officials to assume operation of the Morehead facility.

"[T]hey came in and they replaced all of the equipment," Neff says. "That was ... say \$5 million that they spent on capital that I didn't have to spend, because I've got lots I can spend it on."

Later, in 2010, St. Claire was faced with challenges in staffing OB-GYN positions.

Medical malpractice rates were on the rise. And, one of the hospital's OB-GYNs decided that the current climate was so risky that he couldn't afford all of the malpractice insurance he needed. He decided to quit.

His partner also decided to step down — he retired.

"And we were actually in a position of saying, 'Can we continue to do OB here with that malpractice environment, with that personal liability insurance environment going crazy?' And we were employing them [OB-GYNs], so it was gonna be on us," Neff says. "At the same time, that was really the reason the hospital was started — it was the OB need. You know, somebody had to go 65 miles to Lexington or 70 miles to Ashland [to see an OB-GYN before St. Claire].

"For this place to say we were going to stop doing OB would be a crisis of conscience."

continued on page 15

THREE KENTUCKY ORGANIZATIONS AWARDED OPIOID RESPONSE PROGRAM GRANTS

Article by Kevin Fleming, Rural Project Manager, Kentucky Office of Rural Health

Three Kentucky organizations have been awarded a Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Planning (RCORP-Planning) grant for 2018 from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, part of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

The federal grant — which was presented in September to 95 organizations — supports treatment for and prevention of substance-use disorder (SUD), including opioid-use disorder (OUD), in rural counties with the highest risk. The grant program required that applicants be part of a consortium consisting of four or more separately-owned public or private entities.

Funding from the grant is to be used to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with opioid overdoses in high-risk rural communities by strengthening the work of consortiums in prevention, treatment and recovery efforts.

The RCORP-Planning grant supports one year of funding.

Kentucky's three recipients are:

Marcum and Wallace Memorial Hospital (lead applicant for Project HOME) — Healing, Empowering, and Living Program

To achieve the goal of reducing morbidity and mortality rates associated with opioid overdoses in rural Estill, Lee and Powell counties, Marcum and Wallace Memorial Hospital is utilizing its long-established consortium known as the Project HOME Network. In addition to the hospital, consortium members include the three county health departments, the region's community mental health center (Bluegrass), three federally qualified health centers (White House Clinics, Juniper Health, Inc. and Kentucky River Foothills), three rural health clinics (Children's Clinic, Mercy Health Clinic and Estill Medical Clinic) and a regional substance-use disorder treatment organization (Westcare).

Project HOME will use its funding to develop the Healing, Empowering and Living Program (HELP), a holistic intervention and recovery program aimed at addressing the opioid epidemic in East Central Kentucky.

Marcum and Wallace CEO Susan Starling said the funds will help the consortium members to explore and pilot several initiatives — including a peer recovery support program and a possible bridge clinic within the hospital's emergency department.

"This funding is a potential game changer in how we treat substance-use disorder at the local level," said John Isfort, director of the Project HOME Network.

Laurel County Health Department — Laurel County Rural Communities Opioid Response Program

The Laurel County Health Department-led Laurel County Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (LCRCORP) includes partners from targeted sectors of the community working together to identify resources, programs, gaps in services, workforce capacity concerns, leadership development opportunities, and, ultimately, to create a strategic and sustainable plan for the county.

The LCRCORP will focus on opioid use and disease outbreak, child fatalities caused by neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), and the implementation of evidence-based harm reduction programs..

Two pilot projects will be supported by LCRCORP throughout the life of the grant: the first establishes a community health worker in a primary prenatal-care setting as a way to reduce the incidence of infant deaths related to NAS, and the second involves the implementation of an evidence-based harm-reduction program by the Laurel County Health Department.

"Public health problems such as opioid and substance-use disorders are very complex," said Mark Hensley, the executive director of the Laurel County Health Department. "To have success improving health outcomes requires work and collaboration of many partners, disciplines and resources. The HRSA grant will provide resources needed as the health department convenes partners to affect positive change for prevention, treatment and recovery services in Laurel County."

Northern Kentucky University — The Owen County Collaborative Addiction Treatment Initiative

The Owen County Collaborative Addiction Treatment Initiative (OCCATI) — whose partners include Northern Kentucky University (NKU), the Owen County School System, the Three Rivers Health District, the Northern Kentucky Area Development District, the Owen County Drug Prevention Coalition, and Northkey, Owen County's designated community mental health center — seeks to identify and close gaps in OUD prevention, early intervention and access to treatment and services in Owen County.

One part of the group's strategic plan includes the introduction and expansion of a Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) service program within the Owen County health care and school systems. This SBIRT program will use the Kentuckiana Health Collaborative's recently published "Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) – Addressing Unhealthy Substance Use in Primary Care Settings" toolkit, which is aimed at increasing universal OUD screening, improving early detection and delivering early intervention for OUD.

A second part of the plan will have consortium members make use of existing relationships with medication-assisted treatment (MAT) providers in the Northern Kentucky region in order to help close the gaps in access to MAT services in Owen County.

In addition, the plan calls for strategies to be developed to increase NKU's recruitment of SUD practitioners in Owen County and other designated rural communities, and develop a clinical placement program for the county in order to decrease treatment costs.

"Our collective and comprehensive approach targets our younger population before addiction sets in," said program director Valerie Hardcastle. "We are excited to plan a multi-pronged approach to OUD that engages our regional partners to significantly impact not only Owen County, but our entire region." ■



Scott A. Seitz, APRN
Powell Family Health
Stanton, Kentucky



What was the period of your service in the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program?

I just completed my service as of October 25, 2018.

What were your job responsibilities at your NHSC practice site?

Primary care provider, nurse practitioner student preceptor

How did you first learn about NHSC programs?

Through discussions with other people involved with rural health clinics.

What does it mean to you to be a NHSC alum?

I am thankful to have been a participant. I was able to diminish my student loan debt considerably. I have spent the last eight years serving this community and would not change that for anything. I love my patients and the community and NHSC made it even easier to continue to serve this community.

What is the most important thing/lesson that you learned during your NHSC service?

Serving a medically underserved community is more rewarding than any other career venue. I specialized in several areas — emergency medicine, occupational health, hospital medicine, nursing home/geriatrics — prior to becoming a primary care provider in a rural health clinic. Since I started in this community, I have had multiple opportunities to leave the area and do other things. I have never felt called to go anywhere else in the way that I was called to this community. NHSC made it much easier for me to continue that service.

What advice would you offer to someone who is considering participating in NHSC programs?

First, I would say serving in a medically-underserved area will change your life — especially if you have practiced or were trained in a traditional setting. Second, it is easy to meet the requirements of the NHSC program, so by all means, do it. Lastly, once you participate in this program, precept other practitioners/students so they can get involved in rural health. Let NHSC help you make a difference. ■



If you have participated in a National Health Service Corps program or know of someone who has, please let us know. We're looking for participants to feature in future issues of The Bridge.

Saint Joseph London community garden feeds region

Article by Rhona Creech

They're growing more than just food on an acre of tilled ground in London, Kentucky.

A community garden started there in the spring by employees of KentuckyOne Saint Joseph London is helping to address the need for better diet and nutrition in the region by providing free, healthy, homegrown vegetables to community members.

The harvest produced so far: Appalachian garden staples such as corn, tomatoes, peppers, okra, potatoes, squash and green beans, as well as pumpkins and watermelon.

Rita Taylor, the hospital's community outreach coordinator, says the garden — which is located just three blocks off of Main Street on the former site of Marymount Hospital — has been an all-around community effort.



"We worked with volunteers from the community; my father-in-law disked and plowed the ground, and people came to help out," says Taylor, who admits she had never previously gardened.

Employees of the City of London even chipped in by installing water lines to help keep the garden watered.

And, the garden's impact is being felt community-wide: Taylor says that about 90 area families — 200 people in total — have received some of the fresh produce. Included among those being assisted are discharged patients who are part of the hospital's Community Outreach Program, which provides them with education and assistance, and now, fresh produce.

Those who reap the benefits of the garden are asked to volunteer to work in it, if they are physically able, Taylor says. Others who are unable to volunteer due to a disability or ailment are able to call and request that produce be delivered to them at home.

Taylor says the idea for a community garden was



sparked by a recent community health needs assessment — a survey distributed annually to Laurel County residents through social media and other online sites. The assessment, required of tax-exempt hospitals, helps the hospital staff to determine the region's major health care needs. And, once those are established, Taylor and other staff members determine the top three needs and brainstorm about ways to best address them. This year, the needs identified were diet and exercise, tobacco use, and drug and alcohol use.

She says that things escalated quickly once the community's needs were determined.

"We had the conversation about what the top needs were one day, and five days later, we were planting the garden," Taylor says.

The hospital staff's efforts to combat community diet and nutrition concerns didn't stop with the garden.

In order to encourage exercise among community members, staff members also mapped out walking paths in Laurel County. Online maps show how many laps walkers must take on each path to reach a half mile and a mile in distance.

Taylor says hospital president Terry Deis and Dr. Shelley Stanko, the facility's chief medical officer, deserve much credit for the garden.

Deis and Stanko "have been very supportive throughout this entire process," Taylor says. "We couldn't have done it without them."

And, she says she hopes the garden will continue to grow, literally and figuratively, and that as word spreads, more people in the Laurel County area will make use of it. ■

continued from page 5

The extension office acquired funding for the project. Plants were donated by KSU and a Franklin County farmer. And Lewis developed a plan for the garden and offered recommendations on materials. He visits with the residents once a month to teach horticultural therapy.

The residents — who are each given production space in the gardens so that they can grow what they like — also have access to nutrition and cooking classes taught by the extension office's food and nutrition agent.

Lewis says he is in the process of establishing a garden at the nursing home on the VA campus which will provide a space for residents to be able to stay active and do outdoor therapy.

He's also currently working on a number of similar projects with extension agents from Powell and Wolfe counties, and with staff from a hospital in Owensboro.

The AgrAbility staff has assisted in everything from developing a site plan for gardens, to offering recommendations on the required equipment and tools, to even offering some teaching and instruction.

Says Lewis, "I'd love to work with every county agent to have an accessible garden in senior adult day health centers across the county, [to] be providing that level of activity and education with those folks."

And, Lewis says that it's not simply the aging population who can reap the therapeutic benefits of gardening and farming.

At Easter Seals Cardinal Hill in Lexington, for instance, Kentucky AgrAbility partnered to build accessible gardens — both in-ground beds and raised beds — that have been used by participants in



Children in the Creative Beginnings program at Easter Seals Cardinal Hill in Lexington work in a raised bed garden. Kentucky AgrAbility partnered with Easter Seals Cardinal Hill to build accessible gardens at the facility.

its Adaptive Recreation program, serving people of all ages with spinal cord and brain injuries, amputees, intellectual disabilities, strokes and other conditions, as well as by children in the organization's Creative Beginnings childcare program, which is available for children of all abilities.

Children in the Creative Beginnings program recently planted a pizza garden — growing and then harvesting all of the ingredients necessary to make a pizza.

Cindy Jacobelli, the director of adaptive recreation at Easter Seals Cardinal Hill, says that there are both educational and emotional benefits to the children's work in the garden.

On the one hand, she says, the children are exploring and learning — sharing what they're doing in the garden with their parents once they get home and even making connections between the garden and the vegetables they see on visits to the grocery store.

The garden also gives the children a greater sense of purpose by showing them that

they can grow their own food, she says.

She adds, "It gives them a sense of accomplishment."

Lewis says he also sees that sense of accomplishment in the faces of the newest batch of farmers he's been working with.

"It's really neat to see how, I don't know if powerful is the right word, but how fulfilled people feel when they realize that they can do for themselves," he says. "I think that we forget that. We forget that we are biological creatures with some control over our destiny. And so, I feel like it [gardening and farming] empowers and it uplifts people.

"And that certainly makes me feel good."

For more information about Kentucky AgrAbility, visit the program's website at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/ANR/Agrability/NewAgrabilityWebsite/> ■

continued from page 9



Mark Neff, the president and CEO of St. Claire HealthCare in Morehead, will step down in January after more than 23 years on the job. He is pictured here with Valerie Cotten, a registered nurse at St. Claire Regional Medical Center.

Conversations between Neff and UK officials led the university's health care system to hire the local OB-GYNs and establish UK Morehead Women's HealthCare. It's now a thriving four-physician practice.

And, in 2012, St. Claire, UK, and Morehead State University partnered to start the Rural Physician Leadership Program, a two-year program tailored for third- and fourth-year medical students interested in a future devoted to medical practice in a rural area. The three also joined to open the Center for Health, Education and Research, which houses educational and residency programs, as well as other health-focused organizations.

Neff says that St. Claire's partnerships with UK have "gone in a whole bunch of different directions [and] will be really, really important to this organization for the next 50 years."

"Long-term, stable, positive" force

Neff says that he's proud of the fact that St. Claire HealthCare has been able to sustain the original mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame-Covington Province — an international congregation of religious women, affiliated with the Catholic Church, who are the sponsors of the nonprofit health system — despite the dramatic changes that have occurred in health care over his 23-plus years in Morehead. That mission focuses, in part, on "fostering the fullness of life, especially for people who are poor, sick, and aged" and is reflected in St. Claire's mission: "To proclaim God's goodness through a healing ministry to the people of Eastern Kentucky."

When pressed, Neff says that he has been a "long-term, stable, positive" force in the system's evolution.

"[I]t's been tough," he says. "It's not an easy thing. And obviously I've had all kinds of great help to be able to do that — including the support of the Sisters as well as the Board of Directors."

When he steps away from Morehead early next year and returns to South Bend — largely, to be closer to his children and grandchildren living in Chicago — Neff says that St. Claire will continue to operate on a strong foundation. And, it will likely continue to do the unexpected.

"People in the community never dreamed that we would have the resources like we have now, in terms of its complexity, of all of the things we do," he says. "Because by rights, a facility of this size really shouldn't be here." ■

Nominate a Kentucky Rural Health Champion

Each quarter, *The Bridge* accepts nominations to recognize an outstanding individual who has made significant contributions to rural health in Kentucky.

Nominees should include individuals who:

- ▶ Demonstrate leadership and expertise in direct patient care, health care education, health care administration, health promotion or public advocacy.
- ▶ Have played a key role in developing or implementing innovative solutions to problems or challenges for rural Kentuckians at the state, region or local level.
- ▶ Are widely recognized as extraordinarily successful in their field.
- ▶ Have career and work effectiveness that can be documented.
- ▶ Have served as a mentor or role model to offer positive influence on others in their field and beyond.
- ▶ Reside and/or work within the State of Kentucky.

Please contact Michael McGill (michael.mcgill@uky.edu) for information on suggesting a rural health champion in your area.

The Bridge

KENTUCKY'S CONNECTION TO RURAL HEALTH ISSUES

Fall 2018

For additional information,
questions or comments contact:

Kentucky Office of Rural Health
750 Morton Blvd.
Hazard, KY 41701
606-439-3557



Celebrating the Power of Rural!

We are proud to support National Rural Health Day, and we hope that you will join us in celebration of those who work every day to help keep our community healthy.

It's not just a day, it's a movement.

For permission to reprint an
article from *The Bridge* or for
additional information, contact
Michael McGill at michael.mcgill@uky.edu