AARON JONES: FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

By: Sally Henry

Aaron Jones was a senior at Hinkley High School in Aurora in 2009 when his principal suggested he check out the new health careers program being offered: Aurora LIGHTS. Until then Aaron had been thinking about his father’s suggestion to become an engineer. But engineering didn’t feel right to him: “I’m not an office person; I need to be active.”

Aurora LIGHTS was a joint initiative of the Central Colorado AHEC (CCAHEC), the Colorado AHEC Program and Aurora Public Schools funded by an award from the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP). It sought to stimulate interest in and prepare high school students for success in health professions, especially at the graduate levels. A large majority of Aurora students are low-income and minority; their graduation and college-entrance rates were low.

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The Western Colorado Area Health Education Center in Grand Junction has announced Georgia L. Stewart as its new Executive Director. Ms. Stewart comes to the AHEC family with extensive experience in non-profit organizations and the healthcare field. Recently serving as the Executive Director of Cumberland HealthNET in Fayetteville, North Carolina, she brings passion for all aspects of the medical field. Georgia earned her MBA from the University of Phoenix and enjoys working with uninsured patients with chronic conditions. She also served as a volunteer navigator for the Affordable Care Act and enrolled consumers through the last two open enrollments. Georgia is married to Daren Stewart who has served in the United States Army for the last fifteen years and has three beautiful children; Braxton, Jacy and Kenadee.

The Colorado AHEC Program Office is excited to welcome Dr. Cynthia (Cindy) Johnson Armstrong PT, DPT, CHT, CEAS to our team. Cindy is replacing Dr. Mary Jane Rapport as the new Associate Director of Professional Programs. She brings extensive experience to our office particularly in rural healthcare needs for physical therapy. Cindy is currently working on updating the Colorado AHEC housing policy to make it streamline with our new database that is being implemented very soon. You can reach Cindy at 303-724-8927 or by directly emailing her at cynthia.armstrong@ucdenver.edu.

IT Coordinator, Sam (Samantha) Hanson, joined the AHEC Program Office Staff in February, part-time. Previously, she has held many positions at the School of Medicine, beginning with the Bone Marrow Transplant Program, and a long stint with the SOM Dean’s office where she worked with Willa Buswell for over 10 years. She then helped start up and support the Center for Advancing Professional Excellence (CAPE) on the AMC campus. She took a break to be home with her two boys during their middle school years, and now she is back to fill the “empty” 5 hours of her day. She is an avid tennis player and outdoor enthusiast. Although from Minnesota originally, she has been in Denver for over 20 years and spends as much time as she can in Steamboat. She loves Colorado and will never leave, ever.
Gabriela Rodriguez joined the AHEC Program Office in March of this year as an Administrative Assistant III. Gabriela assists Dr. Jennifer Hellier with her various educational pipeline programs. Previously, Gabriela has worked for Denver Public Schools and Community College of Denver. She earned a BS from Metropolitan State University of Denver in Human Services and a MA from Argosy University in Forensic Psychology. When not working, she enjoys spending time with her husband and two children. She enjoys watching basketball and volleyball and working out.

(Aaron Jones - Continued from page 1)

Of African-American and Filipino heritage, Aaron wasn’t going to be the first in his family to attend college, both his parents went, but the program could help with some enhancements he couldn’t get elsewhere, making him better prepared for very competitive college placements.

Among other Aurora Lights opportunities, Aaron joined the Saturday Academy, which provided interactions with current CU Anschutz Medical Campus (AMC) medical and other health professions’ students, hands-on activities and visits to AMC labs and field trips to Denver’s health facilities.

The activity that had the biggest impact on Aaron was a shadowing experience with Dr. Mark McLean, a family physician at the Metro Community Provider Network. His patient interactions were most memorable to Aaron. Medicaid patients often can’t receive the gold standard of care due to the program’s limitations, but Dr. McLean extended himself. If the ideal medical treatment couldn’t happen, his support and caring certainly did. Aaron was hooked!

A naturally outgoing, positive and friendly young man, Aaron joined the Aurora Lights faculty team when he graduated that spring--first as a mentor for the Summer Health Careers Institute and then during the school year for the Saturday Academy. He had been accepted into the University of Colorado’s downtown Denver campus as a pre-med and biology major with a minor in ethic studies. Despite his heavy course load, he continued to work with those coming up behind him all through college.
With his engaging personality and strong work ethic, he was hired for a number of youth-focused positions at CCAHEC throughout his college years. By the time he graduated in May 2013, he knew he was headed to medical school but wanted to take a year off to gain more experience. Kris Wenzel, CCAHEC’s Executive Director, hired him as the agency’s Administrative Assistant and Student Liaison. He offered to help on all of CCAHEC’s programs as needed and became an integral member of the staff as they administered the Denver Metro Engineering & Science Fair, the Nightingale Awards, and the Colorado Health Foundation’s Health Professions Scholarships. Aaron never said “no” to a request. Everyone knew Aaron’s time at CCAHEC was limited—he wanted to go to medical school. Last winter he applied to several schools and was accepted by his first choice. This July, Aaron will become a full-time medical student at Rocky Vista University in Parker, Colorado.

Aaron will be a wonderful addition to both his profession and his community. He has promised to continue as a volunteer with CCAHEC; offering his unique perspective and encouragements. Since he is unsure of his final specialty and may enter the military, he won’t commit just yet to being a preceptor, but says it’s a definite possibility “if practicality allows”.

Best of luck to you, Aaron! We will all miss you and your thoughtful comments. You will do great things no matter where you land!

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**Western Colorado AHEC Partners with STRIVE to Provide Nurse Aide Training**

By: Nicole Heil

WCAHEC’s long standing Nurse Aide Training program has found a new home on the main campus of STRIVE at 950 Grand Avenue in Grand Junction, CO. The program will continue to be taught by a WCAHEC contractor using the STRIVE facilities.

Formerly known as Mesa Developmental Services, STRIVE has been offering a variety of services to help Mesa County families and support individuals with developmental disabilities for nearly 50 years. “The collaboration between STRIVE and WCAHEC will be beneficial not only to our organizations but also to the community at large,” said Georgia Stewart, WCAHEC Executive Director.
Western Colorado AHEC Participates in School District 51 High School Students’ Healthcare Career Day

By: Nicole Heil

WCAHEC was excited to participate in this year’s 2015 Healthcare Career Day at Community Hospital on March 18th. The program brought 50 high school students from around the Grand Valley to Community Hospital to learn about the responsibilities and educational requirements of various healthcare professionals.

This annual event is highly valued and appreciated by the area schools’ staff and students. Students took a tour through different hospital departments following a fictitious patient, “Tommy Teenager”. A Hospital Administrator, Physician, Respiratory Therapist, Nurse, Radiologist, Laboratory Technician, Physical/Occupational Therapist, Pharmacist, and Health Record Specialist gave presentations about their jobs in real work settings. Students increased their knowledge about careers in healthcare, gained insight into the numerous motivations professionals have for pursuing careers in healthcare, and generated ideas for classes to take during their high school careers. In addition to serving as the liaison between the hospital and the school district, WCAHEC conducted evaluations of the program with each student attendee.

“It is Community Hospital’s dedication to community service and to the betterment of the residents of Mesa County that make this such a special event for the students who attend,” said WCAHEC staffer Natasha Schumann.
Centennial AHEC and 9Health Fairs: Connecting Communities to Better Health
By: Megan Blaser

The 9Health Fairs have been held every spring since 1980 in Colorado and over 2 million people have been served. Each fair is coordinated and organized by different volunteers and groups in their local community. This year Centennial Area Health Education Center (CAHEC) took an active role in the volunteer coordination of the Eaton 9Health Fair, April 18th at Eaton High School. Between general volunteers, medical screeners, and student participants, CAHEC helped to coordinate 153 volunteers to help serve almost 400 participants. These Coloradans took charge of their own health by taking advantage of receiving free and reduced-cost health screenings. CAHEC was very fortunate to work with the Eaton Lions Club who have been supporting this event since the very beginning, some long standing volunteers, and introducing new people to the mix from other CAHEC networks. These types of life changing events happen at a grass roots effort, from dedicated local leaders like Connie Green (President of Eaton Rotary Club), Harvey Green (President of Eaton Lions Club), Travis Miller (Captain, Eaton Fire Department), and Jennifer Berg-Ramsey (overall regional 9Health Fair Coordinator/University of Northern Colorado students coordinator). CAHEC and the medical professional volunteer screeners are helping to connect students to 9Health Fairs where they obtain their required number of blood draws and hands-on experience in the field.

Many fairs offer over 20 health screenings including: traditional screenings like blood chemistry, vision, hearing, oral health, and skin, but also some non-traditional screenings as well. 9Health Fair actually encouraged additional screenings to be offered such as stress and memory, which addresses the ever increasing mental/behavioral health concerns that are being integrated into all facets of healthcare today. This is because overall health includes mental health. If health providers do not assess and address symptoms of depression, it can lead to a lack of motivation in following an appropriate diet and exercise regimen that can exacerbate physical ailments like diabetes. This progressive approach by 9Health Fair compliments CAHEC’s current Youth Mental Health First Aid Training program, which helps to identify these signs and symptoms of mental health. It is programs like these that fulfill the mission of AHEC by bringing students to careers, professionals to the communities, and communities to better health.
Jennifer Berg-Ramsey has been a host home for the Centennial Area Health Education Center for one year. Her inspiration to become a host home comes from her mother who was a physician in a rural community. Jennifer grew up in a family invested in the community’s health and saw firsthand the value of medical professionals serving the residents. More importantly, you become family to the small community you are serving. Today, Jennifer holds RN, BSN, and MS degrees and uses them to serve the Greeley School District as the School Nurse. Jennifer tries to foster this extraordinary experience she had growing up with her students, in hopes that they will be inspired and someday return to rural Northeastern Colorado to become a part of those communities and families!

Jennifer and her family (including her husband, Terry, two very active young daughters, chickens, and livestock) live in rural Weld County in a beautiful home with unobstructed views of the Rocky Mountains. They have enjoyed hosting students from near and far. The family regularly includes the students in their family outings, sharing their experiences with these students. The Ramsey children develop bonds with these students, much like a family would with a formal exchange student. The girls ask to stay up late to meet the students on their first night of arrival and frequently ask questions or tell them about their school day or 4H project. These experiences have been mutually enjoyable, as students often comment on the valuable experience they have with Jennifer and her family.

The Area Health Education Center’s role in placing students in housing during their clinical rotations has become a familiar program to many, but we are still in search of more “host home extraordinaires” like Jennifer Berg-Ramsey. She sees the value in the services she is providing to her family, her students, and the community by cultivating a positive experience and exposing the students to our community in a very positive way.
Vestido Rojo Event
By: Doreen Gonzales

Heart disease is the number one cause of death for Hispanic women. On February 7, 2015, Southeastern Colorado AHEC partnered with the American Heart Association to offer cholesterol health screenings and heart healthy education at the “Vestido Rojo” or Red Dress event. The successful event was held at the Pueblo Convention Center in Pueblo. Shanae Gutierrez, Health Education Specialist, sat on the “Vestido Rojo” event committee and recruited the “Madrinas” or hosts for each of the Southeastern Colorado AHEC tables. Shanae and Eva Muniz Valdez, RN-C, Health Programs Manager, participated in offering health screenings to participants in conjunction with the American Health Association’s nationwide movement. The event emcee was bilingual in Spanish and English to ensure outreach to the Spanish-speaking community.
SECAHEC Nightingale Nurse Recognition Event
By: Doreen Gonzales

On March 20, 2015, about 250 people attended the Southeastern Colorado AHEC 2015 Nightingale Event at the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center in Pueblo. SECAHEC presented the 29 nominees for this year’s Luminary Awards. Six area nurses were selected as this year’s Luminaries. The Luminaries also represented Southeastern Colorado AHEC at the 30th Annual Colorado Nightingale event in Denver on May 9th. Selected were: Virginia Chacon, MSN, PMHNP; Susan Giebel, BSN, MBA; Patricia Head, MSN, FNP; Camille Hodapp, MSN, NNP; Denise Root, MSN; and Terri Tibbs, RN, AND, CRRN.

SECAHEC’s Health Programs Manager, Eva Muniz Valdez and staff members produced a wonderful and successful event. Generous donor contributions of gifts baskets and gift certificates provided an array of choices for attendees. Live music and gold-hued table top décor set the stage for the well-attended event.

As presented at the Annual Colorado Nightingale event in Denver, SECAHEC is pleased to announce Denise Root, MSN, Chair of Nursing and Health Occupations at Otero Junior College, La Junta, as the recipient of the State Nightingale Award in the category of Administration/Education/Research and Non-Traditional-Innovation. Eva Muniz Valdez served as one of the state selection committee members.
The San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center (SLVAHEC) embarked on a Prescription Drug Addiction education campaign in October 2012 in the San Luis Valley. The campaign has included workshops with the local healthcare workforce on managing chronic pain and work with healthcare professionals and community stakeholders on addressing prescription drug addiction and abuse.

The work was supported by grants from The Colorado Trust’s Convening for Colorado initiative and COPIC. This work has taken the community into a higher level of community awareness regarding the problem facing so many residents in our valley. Much has been accomplished in addressing this problem. However, much work is still needed to be done as so many issues have been uncovered that will require comprehensive approaches and effective resolutions to alleviate this community issue. The San Luis Valley “community” has strongly supported the work the SLVAHEC has conducted during these last two and a half years. Plans for continued work through an entire “village” approach are underway.
“Grow Your Own” Program Opens a New Chapter

By: Freddie Jaquez

The San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center has administered the “Grow Your Own” program since 1979; thirty-six (36) years of supporting and nurturing the dreams of high school students pursuing a health career. The program boasts numerous outcomes in that period of time; none of which is more impressive than knowing that 44% of these students today are working in a healthcare occupation!

In planning for the future of healthcare delivery, the “Grow Your Own” program is revising its program presentations to include the State Innovation Model (SIM). The integration of primary care and a behavioral health model will now be the basis of the foundation of the program’s core presentations.

Funding from the San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group (SLVBHG) will enable the “Grow Your Own” program to proceed with the new educational format. The collaboration of SLVAHEC and SLVBHG staff has been ongoing for six months in preparation for the launch of the new instructional format in time for the 2015 “Grow Your Own” Summer Health Careers Institute which begins June 1, 2015. “It is an exciting time and we look forward to our partnership with Mr. Fernando Martinez, Chief Executive Officer of San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group, as we prepare our students for the future in health careers,” stated Freddie Jaquez, Executive Director of the SLVAHEC.
DURANGO, CO – The Southwestern Colorado Area Health Education Center (SWCAHEC) is pleased to announce the winners of the 2015 Nightingale Luminary and Star Nursing Awards. The awards provide an opportunity to acknowledge exceptional nurses from the region whose hard work continues to improve community health.

The Nightingale Luminary Awards honor registered nurses in two categories under the Nightingale Luminary criteria: nurses working in clinical practice and nurses working in administration, education, research or non-traditional practice. Winners include:

Clinical Practice
Advocacy-Mary Jo Seiter, Mercy Regional Medical Center, Director of Urgent Care at Purgatory
Innovation-Lillian Bostrom, Southwest Memorial Hospital, CRNFA-Operating Room
Leadership-Enid Acosta-Leisenring, Hospice of Montezuma County, Deputized Coroner

Administration, Education, Research or Non-Traditional Practice
Advocacy-Alexandria Anderson, San Juan Basin Health Department, Nurse Family Partnership, SANE Coordinator for the 6th Judicial District
Innovation-Colleen Sullivan-Moore, Pagosa Springs Medical Center, Women’s Service Oncology Nurse Navigator
Leadership-Meghan Higman, Southwest Memorial Hospital, Education Coordinator

The Nightingale Awards event was founded in 1985 to honor nurses who best exemplify the philosophy and practice of Florence Nightingale, a 19th century nursing pioneer who epitomized the art of helping people toward their optimal health. Registered nurses throughout the state are nominated by solicitation from the regional Area Health Education Centers system.

Also honored at this event were the Star Nursing Award recipients. Registered nurses Jennifer Heath and Alicia Ship received the awards. Heath was awarded the Shining Star Award and Shipp was presented the Rising Star Award.
SWCAHEC Announces Summer Health Careers Camp for Area Teens

By: Lisa Schwantes

DURANGO, CO – The Southwestern Colorado Area Health Education Center (SWCAHEC) is pleased to announce the 2nd Annual Health Careers Camp for area teens. The camp will be held on the Fort Lewis College campus June 9-12 and is open to students entering 8th, 9th and 10th grades for the 2015-16 school year.

Students will have the opportunity to explore the many fields within the healthcare industry. Campers will experience hands-on learning activities; including application of sutures, checking for vital signs and learning CPR. The camp will provide information about the educational requirements necessary to pursue a degree or certification in a health profession, as well as share information about the potential financial resources available for students from rural areas.

SWCAHEC Partners with Blueprints of Hope

By: Kathleen McInnis

DURANGO, CO – The Southwestern Colorado Area Health Education Center (SWCAHEC) has partnered with Blueprints of Hope, a non-profit organization which provides compassionate nurse navigation services for cancer patients and cancer survivors. Blueprints of Hope works toward promoting an environment of community-based oncology nurse navigation services, advocacy, and resources for cancer survivors. The programs help to solve the unique issues related to the complexity a cancer diagnosis presents at any phase of the cancer continuum.

Because the organization is very small and chooses to put financial resources toward patient care, Blueprints of Hope has entered into an agreement which allows SWCAHEC to be the fiscal sponsor. The Blueprints of Hope and SWCAHEC promote dual missions of improving access to quality healthcare services for the region. To consider a charitable contribution as an investment in the well-being of our community of cancer survivors, visit www.blueprintsofhope.org.
Colorado Health Professions Development (Co-HPD) Scholars Program

By: Jennifer Hellier

The Colorado AHEC Program Office is pleased to announce that the 6th Annual Colorado Health Professions Development (Co-HPD) Scholars program will be held June 22 – July 17, 2015, at the University of Colorado Denver and Anschutz Medical Campuses. CO-HPD Scholars participate in a year long program with a one-month summer intensive experience. Participating undergraduate students strengthen their applications to health professional schools and programs by receiving hands-on training and exposure to a variety of health careers, and through advanced professional school examination practice with Kaplan Test Prep. This year we will include some new speaker topics, like wilderness medicine, and regional projects such as prescription drug abuse.

The Co-HPD Scholars (formerly known as CREATE Health Scholars) program has been very successful as over 70 past participants are currently in a health professional career, school, or program. Of these students:

- 18 are attending medical school or a residency program
- 12 are in nursing schools or nurse practitioner programs
- 8 are in Masters and PhD research programs
- 7 are in dental school
- 5 are in pharmacy school
- 3 are attending physician assistant programs
- 3 are in veterinary school
- 2 are working on their Masters in Public Health
- 2 are in behavioral health programs (e.g., clinical psychology)
- 2 are in Forensic Medicine
- 1 is in podiatry school, and
- 9 are currently working in a health field, such as a genetic counselor, dental assistant, medical lab scientist, pharmacy intern, health information technician, etc.

Currently this program is free of charge to the students, thanks to generous funding from The Colorado Health Foundation, Caring for Colorado Foundation, and the Colorado AHEC Program Office. It is expensive to house students from all over Colorado and to provide them with a Kaplan course. Thus, we are currently applying for new funding so that we can keep this amazing program at no cost to the scholars.

If you have any questions about the Co-HPD Scholars program, please feel free to contact Jennifer Hellier or Gabriela Rodriguez at 303-724-6489 (email: Jennifer.Hellier@ucdenver.edu, or Gabriela.Rodriguez@ucdenver.edu).
Health Matters

Faculty Advisors Training
By: Jennifer Hellier

The Colorado AHEC Program Office is pleased to announce that the 5th Annual Colorado Health Professions Development (Co-HPD) Faculty Advisor Training will be held June 17-19, 2015, at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. This year we will include information about several health professions and how students can be strong candidates in fields like: Anesthesiologist Assistant, Behavioral Health, Bioengineering, Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant, Public Health, Sonography and Ultrasound, and Veterinary Medicine.

Last year we had the largest attendance and hope we can beat that number by 10%. Thanks to generous funding from donors (Caring for Colorado Foundation, School of Dental Medicine, and Colorado AHEC Program Office), this training can be made possible for advisors throughout the state at no cost.

If you advise students in a college, university, community college, or high school, you can be a Co-HPD Faculty Advisor. Co-HPD is currently seeking faculty and advisors from Colorado universities, colleges, post-secondary institutions and high schools. Our coordinated network of advisors will share consistent messaging about student preparation for health professions and about the array of careers that are essential to the health of communities. Together, advisors participate in a three-day summer workshop so that they may offer guidance to students participating in Co-HPD community projects and the students of their home institutions. Housing and mileage reimbursement are provided for those health and science faculty advisors attending from other regions of the state outside of the Denver Metro Area.

The Co-HPD Faculty Advisors program serves the first two goals of Colorado AHEC:

1. Increase the potential for minority/disadvantaged students in elementary and secondary schools from rural and medically underserved areas to pursue career pathways in the health professions.
2. Increase the potential for health professions students enrolled in degree programs in medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and allied health to practice in rural and urban medically underserved areas in Colorado AHEC Program regions upon graduation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jennifer Hellier or Gabriela Rodriguez at 303-724-6489 (email: Jennifer.Hellier@ucdenver.edu, or Gabriela.Rodriguez@ucdenver.edu).
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