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## **Riverside County health officials to honor 'Community Champions' for contributions to local residents**

Each year, Riverside University Health System—Public Health honors five individuals or partner organizations with its Public Health Champion awards.

The five winners have contributed to improving the health and well-being of Riverside County residents and will be recognized March 27 during the Board of Supervisors meeting in Riverside to kick off National Public Health Week (April 2-8).

“These individuals and organizations have stepped up and gone beyond what would normally be expected of them,” said Kim Saruwatari, director of Riverside University Healthcare System – Public Health, which hands out the award. “They have seen the importance of giving back to the community and their efforts have benefitted many residents. We are honored to give them this much-deserved recognition.”

The five recipients represent the five supervisorial districts and selected for their dedication to improving the health status of Riverside County residents; collaboration with Public Health and/or other organizations focused on public and population health; and because of their sensitivity to the needs of special populations and reducing health disparities in care and outcomes.

In addition to the awards presentation, Dr. Geoffrey Leung, ambulatory medical director with Riverside University Health System-Medical Center, will give a “State of the County’s Health” address. There will also be a Health Expo between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. at the County

Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon St. in Riverside. More than 40 vendors will participate and there will be health screenings for blood pressure, glucose and dental.

The following is a list of winners:

District 1

**Jesse Valenzuela**

As an advocate for low-income residents in Riverside County, Jesse has helped organize free health screenings for residents to help fight against issues such as diabetes and high blood pressure. A Corona resident, Jesse has coordinated the efforts through local Hispanic chambers of commerce. In addition, Jesse serves on the Community Action Partnership Commission and is a founding member of Community Action Riverside. His volunteer efforts include coordinating healthy initiatives in the Riverside/Corona region, San Geronio Pass, and working in desert communities to assist health needs of farm workers. Jesse is an active volunteer with Flying Doctors Community Health Fair at Cesar Chavez Community Center in Riverside, which provides free dental and vision screenings, along with recycled vision glasses for those in need.

District 2

**CNUSD Tobacco Prevention Programs**

About two decades ago, Corona-Norco Unified School District Student Services (CNUSD) committed to empower youth in creating a next generation that is tobacco free. District officials developed a district-wide tobacco prevention program. In 2008, Riverside University Health System-Public Health and the CNUSD Tobacco Prevention Programs collaborated to expand the program beyond the school campus and into the surrounding communities in an effort to create a healthier and safer community. The programs have achieved notable success in the areas of school-based tobacco prevention education and high school student-driven local smoke-free policy work. For example, CNUSD high school students voiced their strong support for a smoke-free parks ordinance in Norco and the new rules were adopted by the City Council. Students took part in tobacco litter clean-up events and were trained by local law enforcement to participate in youth sting operations. The CNUSD Tobacco Prevention Programs are going strong and excited to continue efforts to help prevent future generations from starting tobacco use.

District 3

**Lisa La Russo:**

A paramedic for more than 20-plus years, Lisa established Splash Medics, a non-profit organization comprised of first responders dedicated to educating children and their families on water safety. She authored the book, “Toby the Dolphin and Water Safety” and it was published in 2015. Members of Splash Medics volunteer their time to participate in readings at school sites and community fairs and she is a member of the Riverside County Water Safety Coalition. She has created partnerships with several agencies throughout the county, including the HOPE Collaborative and First 5 Riverside. Ms. La Russo is dedicated to preventing injuries to children and her efforts embody the spirit of the Public Health Community Champion Award.

District 4

**Jory Kirchhevel**

Known as “Coach K,” Jory has been instrumental in organizing extra activities above and beyond the regular PE curriculum at Carreon Academy in Indio. He has focused on providing parents, students and teachers with healthy living resources on his extensive school webpage in addition to on-site activities (mileage club, flag football, soccer, baseball, WOG-a-thon, health fairs, staff healthy challenge, parent survey). Coach K collaborated with RUHS-PH to present their Rethink Your Drink message and physical activity session to more than 600 students during the “Wellness Day” event. He is often found throughout Coachella Valley either coaching community flag football, basketball, baseball, soccer or running charity 5K’s with the Dr. Carreon Comets (students). His next project with RUHS-PH will be stencil-painting colorful activity stations on the school playground for active recess and creative obstacle courses for his PE classes. Thanks to Coach K’s focus on health and fitness, the school received the America’s Healthiest School - Bronze level award from Healthy Schools.

District 5

**Floyd Velasquez**

As the Disaster Preparedness Manager for the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Floyd regularly works with county departments to create a safer, more resilient Riverside County. The County of Riverside Emergency Management Department (EMD) and Riverside University Health System-Public Health collaborate with Velasquez on the development, training and exercise of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians Closed Point of Dispensing (POD) Plan. The Tribe’s Closed POD Plan impressively covers up to 90,000 community members – from tribe members to casino visitors and outlet shoppers. This plan is an ideal example of our collaborative efforts to provide lifesaving medications in the event of a public health emergency. He facilitates the Southern California Tribal Emergency Managers Group, which gathers tribal governments in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties to prepare for emergencies and disasters.