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County Notes

› Natividad and the Health Department marked World Diabetes Day this week. While not a reason to celebrate, it is a reason to reflect on your own health. Did you know 1 in 3 Americans have prediabetes? Check your risk by taking this assessment test.

Health Department Honors MEPHLI Graduates

The Health Department’s Environmental Health Bureau is celebrating its own, staff who have graduated from its Monterey County Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute (MEPHLI).

Eight staff members successfully completed the program and their achievement was marked by a graduation ceremony held at the Hardin Foundation Conference Room and included program presentations.
The graduation ceremony is the culmination of a yearlong leadership academy which is designed to mirror the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute (EPHLI) program.

This is the program’s fifth graduating ‘class.’ Cohort V began in October 2018 and provided extensive leadership, project management and professional development training.

"MEPHLI is intended to develop personal as well as job-related leadership skills to all staff in our bureau," explains Environmental Health Bureau Chief John Ramirez. “Our fifth year has resulted in over 75% of our bureau achieving graduation from the MEPHLI program.”

During the graduation event, County Administrative Officer Charles McKee, presented the keynote address and graduates presented individual projects developed as part of the program that will continue to be part of their work efforts.

Cohort V’s projects for this year are:

- **Charitable Feeding Operations and Food Waste Minimization**: Ifeoma Okolie, REHS III
- **Implementation of HACCP Principles for Compliance**: Mary Aviles, REHS II
- **Improvement of Plan Check Process and Achieving Sustainability Through Electronic Submittal**: America Leon, REHS II
- **Hoarding: The Truth That Lies Beneath**: Corrine Ow, REHS II
- **Demonstrating Effectiveness of Ammonia and Surfactant Field Test Kits**: Rachel Rodrigues, EHS-Trainee
- **Introduction of CSIP Monitoring Program to Protect Irrigated Food Crops and Prevent Foodborne Outbreaks**: Isaiah Tuazon, REHS II
- **AB No.626-Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations (MEHKO’s)**: Christie Vo, REHS II
- **Database Related Training**: Alvin Vo Tran, REHS III

The Environment Health Bureau’s MEPHLI leadership program recently received national recognition as a “Model Program” by the National Association of County and City Health Officials.
Lori Medina Brings Expertise Back Home to Monterey County

Lori Medina is not new to the Department of Social Services and Monterey County but she has settled into her leadership role in the department, coming home after many years away.

Medina succeeds Henry Espinosa, who was the Department’s Acting Director after the retirement of longtime director Elliott Robinson. Medina served under both former directors when she came to work in Monterey County in 2016, most recently serving as Deputy Director for the Family and Children’s Services Branch before being tapped as Director.

Medina brings extensive experience to the position, administering social services programs, policy and program development and training. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia; and a Master Degree of Social Work from the University of Southern California. Her 27-year career in the field of Public Child Welfare includes holding positions in Los Angeles and Santa Clara Counties.

But it is her local roots which drew her home as she explains how she was drawn to Social Work and her vision of the department’s future.

Q. What drew you to Social Work as a career?
A. Growing up, I was often seen as the “peer counselor” or “family problem solver” with an affinity for helping people in need. This role, along with strong family values for giving back to the community, is what led me to become a Social Worker.

Q. You have worked in major metropolitan areas before returning to Monterey County. What brought you back ‘home?’
A. There is no place like home and Monterey County is just beautiful! Growing up, the small-town life (raised in Marina and graduated from Seaside High School) felt a little boring and I enjoyed exploring the metro areas, but inside I’ve always been a small-town girl. Once I started to raise a family of my own, I knew I wanted it to be in the community that raised me. I love knowing my community and I am happy to be back home.

Q. How do you see the Department evolving/Changing under your leadership?
A. Looking at the overall structure of the Department, it’s clear it is a great organization with truly committed staff members. I want to develop and continue to nurture that and there may be some changes ahead. I want to support the Department to be the best it can be – bring in innovation!
Perhaps step us outside comfort zones. Be cutting edge. I hope to explore how technology can be used to reach a broader constituency to best support our community.

Q. What are the biggest challenges facing the Department and clients right now?
A. Some of the biggest challenges upon us have been policy changes from the federal administration particularly for our large immigrant population. Another serious challenge is affordable housing and access to services – not just welfare benefits, but support from all aspects.

There is also a challenge within our Department that has potential for a lot of opportunity. There have been many new leadership transitions and vacancies in key areas. We need to keep up with the need and I am excited to see what new opportunities arise.

Welcome Lori!

HEAL Fellows Wrap up their Time at Natividad

Natividad has ended its first ‘HEAL’ Fellow program and is saying goodbye to its first fellows.

HEAL (Health, Equity, Action and Leadership), a fellowship program through the University of California San Francisco, trains health professionals both at home and abroad. For the last two years, Natividad has hosted HEAL Global Health Fellows.

The program has two types of fellows: Rotating and Site Fellows. Rotating Fellows alternate every six months between Natividad and an international site. Site Fellows are health professionals selected by Natividad and remain at Natividad over the entire two-year period.

As they wrapped up their time in the program, each of the Fellows talked about their experience in the program and at Natividad.

Kristin Burstedt, DO - Site Fellow
Dr. Burstedt is a graduate of the Natividad Family Medicine Residency. She served at the hospital, treating patients at Laurel Internal Medicine or out in the community.
“The HEAL fellowship was an invaluable opportunity to grow as a clinician caring for the underserved in the Salinas Valley. Through annual global retreats and bi-weekly conversations with fellows around the world, I now have a greater understanding and awareness of the social influences impacting community health as well as the influence of larger societal and historical factors.”

Rachel Lusk, MD - Rotating Fellow
Dr. Lusk is a pediatrician who served in inpatient pediatrics or admitting pediatric patients at Natividad. While rotating internationally, Dr. Lusk served at SEWA Rural in Gujarat, India.

“I spent one year working at the nonprofit SEWA (Society for Education Welfare and Action) Rural in Gujarat, India and one year working as a pediatric hospitalist at Natividad. Learning how a group of physicians have brought quality health care to a tribal region in rural India was truly inspiring. They taught me the importance of looking at the big picture in the community I work in, and that although people in many communities face barriers in accessing quality health care, there are incredible providers who find innovative ways to work toward health equity.”

Nathaniel Uchtmann, MD, JD - Rotating Fellow
Dr. Uchtmann is a pediatrician who covered inpatient pediatrics while at Natividad. While away on his international rotation, he served at Last Mile Health in Liberia.

“The HEAL fellowship was a “deep dive” into the complexities surrounding Global Health and the efforts to provide high-quality care regardless of location.

I traveled every six months between Salinas and rural Liberia. Despite the considerable logistical challenges, I gained unique insights into the similar challenges faced by both people and institutions to ensure basic needs are met and resources are distributed in an equitable manner.”

The HEAL Fellow Program will continue at Natividad, with the hospital welcoming three new fellows for a new two-year cycle.