Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors

2023 Awards
Fluoridation Special Merit Award
Gwen Sullentrup

Distinguished Service Award
John Welby, MS

Distinguished Service Award
Matt Jacob, BA

Outstanding Achievement Award
Rudy Blea, BA

Greg McClure Memorial President's Award
M. Dean Perkins, DDS, MPH
I am honored to nominate Gwen Sullentrup of the Missouri Office of Dental Health for the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors/American Dental Association/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fluoridation Special Merit Award. Gwen has led efforts across Missouri to establish a successful approach to fluoridation. She has developed several innovative efforts and is leading the process at the local level to increase the percentage of Missouri residents receiving optimal fluoride levels, a potentially challenging undertaking for a state oral health program. Gwen has demonstrated relationship-building skills and a collaborative vision that have allowed her to continue to succeed and improve the health of the public. Because of her diligent work, she has overseen over a dozen accomplishments over the last few years as the Community Water Fluoridation & Dental Sealant Coordinator. Here are some highlights:

The Missouri Office of Dental Health (ODH), in conjunction with partners (ADA, CDC, Missouri Coalition for Oral Health, Delta Dental, and MO Primary Care Association), hosted their first-ever water fluoridation summit, which gathered public health, water regulatory, and dental professionals from across the U.S. to learn about and discuss water fluoridation and to network to share information. The summit was attended in person by 60 people and virtually by 33 across 24 states. Gwen was the driving force behind this effort, making it happen in just six months. The summit offers a model for a short, focused conference that could be replicated elsewhere.

In April 2022, with Gwen's support, the Missouri ODH developed a three-tiered statewide media campaign. This was the first time ODH had launched a media campaign of this reach and caliber, and the results were phenomenal. ODH reached over 364,000 people via newspaper circulation, over 244,000
households via connected TV ads, and over 3 million people via digital billboards. Twenty-four percent of counties and cities that did not yet have fluoridation saw the ads via YouTube TV. This campaign had 70,982 clicks, 34,555,775 impressions, and 23,084 engagements!

For 2021, Missouri had 30 water systems that received the CDC Water Fluoridation Quality Award for keeping their fluoridation levels between 0.6-1.0 ppm over the previous 12 months, almost double the number of systems that received the award for 2020. This was greatly influenced by Gwen's approach to collaboration, educating at all levels of the public health system, and integrating the importance of relationships to build success in maintaining optimal fluoride levels.

In 2020, ODH, in collaboration with Delta Dental, developed a CWF Equipment Repair and Replacement Program for water system upgrades, repairs, and replacing broken or outdated fluoridation equipment. Gwen played a vital role, allowing ODH to work with and replace fluoridation equipment for 35 public water systems across the state, thus keeping fluoridation for over 679,000 Missourians with funding made available through the preventive Health and Services grant and from Delta Dental.

As funding is available, Gwen carefully operates this program, looking for opportunities to update aging equipment and initiate new systems. ODH was awarded additional funding this fiscal year to continue the Repair and Replacement Program as part of the Governor's budget. The funding has been used to upgrade twenty-six water systems and keep fluoridation online so far for over 245,000 Missourians.

The CWF Equipment Repair and Replacement Program allows Gwen to contact water operators and build a network within the water community, leading to many beneficial relationships with equipment suppliers, engineering services, and regulatory departments. Additionally, it has led to two relationships with one retired water plant manager and one current water plant manager. These relationships have brought new influences to water fluoridation since both water plant managers are now advocating for water fluoridation in nearby communities. In fact, they are currently working with one water system to initiate fluoridation!
With the support of the Missouri Coalition for Oral Health and through Gwen’s efforts to build partnerships at all levels of public health, ODH has conducted trainings throughout the state about CWF for dental professionals and advocates of oral health.

Missouri’s fluoridation statute requires a 90-day notification period before discontinuing or starting water fluoridation in a water system. ODH has faced a number of rollback attempts over the last several years, but through Gwen’s diligent efforts, including traveling to the communities, having conversations with community members, and leading her team’s support, they have successfully kept fluoridation in all these communities!

Through Gwen’s strategic leadership, ODH is now working with ten communities considering initiating water fluoridation in their water systems, which could bring fluoridation to more than 54,000 Missourians. Because of these relationships, for the first time in over 30 years, two water systems (one with over 74,000 people and serving 27 water systems over a 14-county area, and the other with over 8,000 people) voted to begin the 90-day notification period to consider starting water fluoridation. One of these systems (with over 8,000 people) voted in December 2022 to begin fluoridation at their municipality with a start date of May 1, 2023.

We are pleased to give this award to Gwen in recognition of her commitment, persistence, creativity, and relationship-based approach, which, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, has turned the tide on the CWF conversation in Missouri. Instead of being on the defensive and dealing with the next rollback, ODH and their partners are now proactively working with water systems and oral health advocates to discuss fluoridation and its benefits for their communities.

Nominated by:
Matt Zaborowski, MPH, CPH
Preventive Health Activities Manager
American Dental Association, Council on Advocacy for Access and Prevention
Distinguished Service Award
John Welby, MS

Having spent the majority of his career as a marketing director in hospitals and healthcare, John transitioned into oral health in 2011. Since then, he has used his background and experience to bring a new perspective to the way Maryland and many other states approach oral health communication. Furthermore, he recognizes and values the expertise other non-dental professionals can bring to the oral health field.

John joined ASTDD as an Associate Member in August of 2015 when he started working for the Maryland Office of Oral Health as their Director of Social Marketing and Health Literacy. Oral health was completely new to him. John began attending NOHC conferences, learning about the field, and learning about what made public health people tic. He found out that he had a lot in common with them and started making friends and building professional relationships by getting involved in ASTDD.

John currently serves on the ASTDD Board of Directors as the Associate Member Director. He chairs the ASTDD Communications Committee and serves on the social media workgroup. He has presented webinars on various communication topics for ASTDD including health literacy, communications and social marketing.

John helped develop the ASTDD design standards which provide a consistent appearance and present the organization’s brand in a professional and unified manner. He co-facilitates the Communications Community of Practice, and he facilitate the bi-monthly Spotlight presentations.
In addition to all he has done for ASTDD, John and his “colleague in arms,” Matt Jacob have presented to the National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research and the Harvard School of Dental Medicine’s Dental Public Health residency programs. He also chaired the Oral Health Progress and Equity Network’s Public Perception Network Response team for many years.

John has won over 50 national awards for his work in healthcare advertising and communication materials including three prestigious “Best of Show” awards.

I would like to take this opportunity to express ASTDD’s sincere thanks to John. Due to his expertise and willingness to jump in whenever asked or when he sees an opportunity, ASTDD communications have reached an all-new level. John, you have our unending gratitude.

Nominated by:
Kimberlie Payne, RDH, BA and Bev Isman, RDH, MPH, ELS
Matt Jacob is the owner of Jacob Strategies, LLC and an award-winning public health consultant and author of several articles in peer-reviewed journals. He has helped oral health advocates, federal agencies, national organizations, state health departments and other stakeholders raise the profile of oral health issues and launch successful communication initiatives. He has provided technical assistance directly to more than a dozen states and through ASTDD webinars and workshops on how to develop compelling messages, communicate effectively, especially about fluorides and fluoridation, and make data more memorable to audiences.

As an ASTDD associate member and an active participant on the ASTDD Communications Committee and Social Media Workgroup, Matt and his sidekick, John Welby from Maryland, have presented numerous ASTDD trainings as well as provided feedback and tips to DPH residents who presented projects using plain language and one visual slide during Five-Minute Masterpiece sessions at the NOHC for the past few years. On ASTDD’s behalf, Matt posts regularly to our Facebook account and helps develop social media messages and campaigns. He is providing technical assistance via an ASTDD social media project for three states for the next year.

Early in his career Matt was a Senior Associate Director of Affiliate Services for the American Federation of Teachers (2003-2009) and Vice President & Director of the Public Advocacy Division of Wakefield Research (2009-2010). His transition to dental health issues came in 2010 as the Project Manager for Communications for the Pew Children's Dental Campaign. He managed a variety of communications including drafting talking points, editing reports and e-updates, serving as principal writer for
a February 2-12 Pew Report that garnered more than 22 million media impressions including by major news media, writing web and video content, delivering training, and managing more than $500,000 in contracts with media and research firms. In July of 2013 he became Director of Communications & Outreach for the Children's Dental Health Project. Responsibilities were similar to those at Pew but included training and technical assistance to oral health professionals and health officials in numerous states, including CDC grantees. Matt also developed a content/marketing plan for CMS that spurred a redesign of their web content and helped increase orders for the Think Teeth collateral. From 2017 to 2020, he chaired the Project Advisory Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics Campaign for Dental Health (likemyteeth.org).

Matt is a member of the Society for American Baseball Research and has compiled a large collection of baseball and other sports memorabilia; ask him to tell you about the new basketball related book he is writing with his brother.

Nominated by:
Bev Isman, RDH, MPH, ELS
Outstanding Achievement Award
Rudy Blea, BA

Mr. Blea has served as Chair of the School and Adolescent Oral Health (SAOH) Committee for more than a decade, beginning his leadership role in 2012. He has overseen the establishment of ASTDD Policy Statements concerning SAOH, Best Practice Reports as well as National Oral Health Conference (NOHC) presentations focused on the work of the Committee. He continues to serve in the capacity of Chair, even after retirement from the New Mexico Department of Health as Oral Health Program Manager. Prior to his becoming Chair of the SAOH Committee, Mr. Blea was an active member of this same committee, beginning in 2004.

Mr. Blea has worked in the field of public health for 43 years, recently retiring at the end of 2022. Mr. Blea’s accomplishments in the field of dental public health are directly related to his ability to connect with others - both individuals and organizations. A few examples include the following.

While in New Mexico for the 2017 NOHC, Mr. Blea gathered a group of experts in the field of community water fluoridation to discuss and map out a plan of action to resume fluoridating the Albuquerque Bernalillo County water supply. In 2011, the county stopped fluoridating and due to the tireless efforts of Mr. Blea and others, opponents of fluoridation were defeated and in 2018, the utility board members voted to appropriate a quarter million dollars to purchase the needed equipment and resume fluoridation. Also, during the COVID pandemic, when many state oral health programs' resources were diverted to address other public
health needs, Mr. Blea continued to work with the New Mexico Oral Health Coalition, hosting online meetings and webinars, continuing to support their engagement in oral health prevention programs, and especially child and adolescent/student focused programming.

Mr. Blea has had a distinguished career in dental public health serving two states - California (26 years) and New Mexico (17 years). While in California, he served as Chief of the Office of Oral Health within the California Department of Health Services. During his tenure, he built collaborations with other sister agencies and county health departments as well as non-profit organizations statewide. Prior to his leaving this position, he worked with the California Dental Health Foundation implementing the "California Smile Survey," an oral health assessment of the state's kindergarten and 3rd grade children. It would be another 14 years later, before another survey of this magnitude was undertaken in California.

After leaving California, Mr. Blea led the Dental Health Program within the New Mexico Department of Health based in Santa Fe. During his tenure of 17 years, he spearheaded the state's focus on implementing school-based oral health programs and worked tirelessly building statewide collaborations with organizations, agencies, and institutions as well as the Native American populations. His ability to collaborate is demonstrated with the strong relationship he built with the New Mexico Alliance for School-Based Health Care, which hosts an annual Head 2 Toe Conference. Through his work, the Alliance recognized the value of oral health services both school-based and linked and hosted conference sessions focused on oral health.

What should be noted, is that Mr. Blea is NOT a licensed dental professional and he has no formal training in dental public health, which demonstrates that his passion and advocacy for better health and overall health across the lifespan is not just admirable, but unique, and the reason his professional career and contributions to this organization and dental public health should be recognized by ASTDD.

Nominated by:
Lynn Bethel-Short, RDH, MPH
I am nominating Dr. Dean Perkins for the 2023 Greg McClure President’s Award for his dedication, leadership and service to the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors and overall contributions to advancing dental public health for the Nation.

Dr. Perkins received his dental degree from UMKC School of Dentistry, and a Masters of Public Health degree from the University of North Carolina. He then practiced general dentistry for ten years before taking a position with the Missouri Department of Health where he served as Chief of the Bureau of Dental Health Missouri Department of Health where he retired in 2003.

During his time with the Missouri Department of Health, Dr. Perkins served in many roles with ASTDD. He held the positions of Secretary/Treasurer, President -Elect and President for ASTDD. In 2000, Dr Perkins, became the ED of ASTDD and held this position until 2009, at which time, Dr. Perkins, became ED Emeritus and webmaster for the Association. Some of his most notable accomplishments and contributions to ASTDD include helping to obtain the first federal Cooperative Agreement that allowed ASTDD to become a participant and resource for state and territorial Oral Health programs, contributing to the conception and design of the National Oral Health Surveillance System and the Synopsis of State & Territorial Oral Health Programs, and launching the ASTDD Best Practices project. He is also known for helping to establish a collaboration between ASTDD and the American Association of Public Health Dentistry (AAPHD) to launch the first joint National Oral health Conference in Oak Park, IL in 2000.

Over the last 14 years of service to ASTDD as webmaster and Executive Director Emeritus, Dr. Perkins participated in countless monthly board calls providing guidance, leadership and contributing with his vast knowledge on all matters related to the support of state oral health programs.
Dr. Perkins, thank you for your heartfelt dedication to the Association, your patience, your guidance and direction in sustaining the work of ASTDD without which, the association would not be where it is today.

Nominated by:
Julia Wacloff, RDH, MSPH
Chief, Arizona Office of Oral Health
2022-2024 ASTDD President
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