



## 2011 Rural Hero of the Year

The Oregon Office of Rural Health is proud to present this year's Rural Health Hero of the Year Award to Patricia Neal. Following are submission excerpts from those who supported her nomination.

### EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTION

Pat Neal is a dedicated, tireless volunteer in our community. She has lived in Lincoln County for 22 years and has been volunteering in many community health initiatives throughout this time. Pat is currently on ten different health-related committees in Lincoln County and joined her first one, the Public Health Advisory Committee, in 1990. Other committees include: Mental Health Advisory Committee, Tobacco Coalition, Diabetes Coalition, Local Alcohol and Drug Addiction Planning Committee, Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Council, Commission on Children and Families, Chronic Care Committee, Childhood Obesity Partnership and Healthy Communities Assessment Workgroup.

Pat became interested in health care after attending a local meeting about the Oregon Health Plan (who qualified and what was covered under the plan) and she began seeking out opportunities at Lincoln County Health and Human Services and throughout the community to help positively impact the lives of others. This and her personal interest in mental health (she has two people in her life with schizophrenia) led to her full involvement in advocating for health care access in her community. Her goal is to help people lead healthier lifestyles and she has developed a great insight into the needs of the community.

In addition to participating on all of the above committees, Pat volunteers for other health-related initiatives. For the past 11 years, she has been a volunteer teacher for the AARP Driver Safety Program for seniors. She is a class leader for the local Living Well with Chronic Conditions program and is a member of the Community Emergency Response Team through the Depoe Bay Fire District. She is also actively involved in her church and is on the Board of Directors for her Home Owners Association.

### "ABOVE AND BEYOND" VOLUNTEERISM

Not only does Pat attend committee meetings (and compose meeting minutes) with exceptional attendance, she seeks out additional opportunities to be involved. She participated in community priority setting in 2002 through the CHIP process; helped bring chronic disease self-management programs to Lincoln County through the Chronic Care Committee; helps organize health fairs for diabetes education each year; advocated for expansion of services related to reproductive health in School-Based Health Centers; and helped conduct a community health assessment for Lincoln County after attending Healthy Communities Institutes in Redmond, Portland and Sunriver.

Pat is also on the planning committee for the *Let's Go Lincoln County!* initiative which is sponsored by the Childhood Obesity Partnership. *Let's Go Lincoln County!* is a summertime campaign to encourage physical activity and good nutrition for families and kids. Most recently, Pat attended a Childhood Obesity Summit in Lebanon and the next day the Annual Statewide Living Well Forum in Portland to learn more about Living Well programs throughout Oregon.

### IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The impact of Pat's contribution to Lincoln County has been overwhelmingly positive. She has a sincere interest in and passion for improving access to health care, chronic care self-management program, educating seniors, families and children, and advocating for increased services in behavioral health. Pat is nearly 80 years young and has dedicated her life to public service through education, advocacy, and influencing policy change at the systems level. Pat is also very

active through her committees in seeking out new grant opportunities to help expand programs and resources in Lincoln County.

Because of Pat's involvement in community health over the years, lives have improved in Lincoln County. Birth control options are now available for teens at the School-Based Health Centers, free Living Well with Chronic Conditions classes are held throughout the county, people are educated about diabetes prevention and management, more seniors are driving safely, tobacco-free establishments are abundant, and healthy communities are being developed. In addition, Pat is always looking out for funding opportunities to expand services to the mentally ill, including the homeless, and helps plan the annual *Recovery/Wellbriety Month Celebrations*. She participated in a committee that helped establish the *Prescription Take Back Program* in Lincoln County and another committee that helped upgrade capabilities to deliver a higher quality of care and implement mental health electronic health records in the FQHCs. Pat was part of the team that approved the request for proposal for Veterans Affairs Services to be provided in Newport which was selected and is now in operation.

Pat has already made a long-term impact in Lincoln County. Her public service and dedication to her community has continued strong for over 20 years and there is no indication that she intends to stop. She is an exceptional representative for Lincoln County locally and at regional conferences and forums. She is compassionate, dedicated, professional and motivating to be around. Because of Pat Neal, Lincoln County is a better place to live. She is truly a Rural Health Hero.

### **EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS OF SUPPORT**

Pat Neal is a "volunteer extraordinaire" who volunteers wherever she is needed. She always provides thoughtful and useful conversation in regard to health care issues. Her wisdom and caring attitude provides leadership for all of the council members she serves with and she is the memory of all that has transpired in the county over the past 20 years.

I have had the pleasure of working with diverse organizations in Lincoln County. No matter which "interest" group I am connecting with, whether it be children's safety/health, mental health, chronic disease management, public health, hospital issues or general health information, Pat Neal is there. Walking into a room and seeing her kind face always makes me feel welcome. Many heroes swoop in and do great deeds, gaining our admiration. Pat is a different kind of hero in my eyes – she is the hero who is willing to commit herself to projects and causes that are not readily rescued and fixed. Lincoln County is lucky to have someone like Pat who is willing to push and struggle against the tide of persistent budget shortfalls and lower socio-economic conditions. I admire her steadfast approach and am reminded of Pat in the John Wooden quote "why is it so hard for so many people to realize that winners are usually the ones who work harder, work longer, and as a result perform better?" Pat simply gets the job done when called upon – that is the type of hero she is. Pat not only serves her community, but she also has a sense of the greater good. I am not surprised to get an email from her informing me of research grant opportunities for my organization or other communities she has heard me speak about. The event that "sealed the deal" for Pat as my rural health hero came on May 9, 2011. I was in Linn County, not Lincoln, for a Childhood Obesity Summit and there she was! Further, after initial greetings, Pat quietly asked me "how do you donate your body to science at OHSU?" I'd never been asked that question before and told her I'd get her the information. I did so and "gently hinted" that I hoped she wasn't planning to donate soon. Her reply was classic and bodes well for Lincoln County. She said, "I hope to make it to at least 110 or more if my health allows since I have too many things I want to do to go any sooner." I just hope I can keep up with her!

I have been blessed to associate with Pat since I accepted the position as Public Health Division Director for Lincoln County Health and Human Services. Pat is an active community volunteer and serves on multiple committees supportive of issues related to our department. Lincoln County has the distinction of having a higher concentration of senior citizens than in comparable population counties. Many of the elderly residents choose to retreat into retirement; Pat Neal is the opposite and has only increased her commitments to improving community health as she has aged. Her unflinching spirit is an inspiration to all who know her. Pat participates actively in Instant Recess and Yoga sessions and is more enthusiastic than many who are half her age! She is such a positive example of giving back to the place she calls home and recruiting others to do the same. Pat demonstrates a passion for life-long learning which will serve as a personal model to me as I age. I can think of no nominee more deserving of being recognized as a rural health hero....first class and bar none! Lincoln County is proud to call Pat **ours**.

**CONGRATULATIONS, PAT, AND THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU HAVE DONE  
AND CONTINUE TO DO!**