



Connecting students to careers,  
professionals to communities &  
communities to better health.

# AHEC ACCESS



Fall 2007 Newsletter

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Connecting students to careers

## What do you want to be when you grow up?

By Joan Beatty-Lee, BA

The hospital room is a flurry of activity. Nothing but lab coats and surgical caps as far as the eye can see. The patient is crashing experiencing cardiac arrest. Vital signs are being monitored, and a crash cart is wheeled into the room. The patient flatlines. A hush falls over the room. Giggles erupt behind surgical masks; ten or more doctors apply their stethoscopes to any available skin surface searching for signs of life. Two doctors fight over who gets to perform the chest compressions, and one doctor keeps repeating, "STAT," just because he likes the sound of the word.

You are probably guessing that this is no ordinary hospital

experience, and you would be correct. This is a Health Careers Summer Camp, a field trip experience, complete with human patient simulators, and teenagers pretending to be doctors.

Every summer Gulf-coast South Area Health Education Center (GSAHEC) offers funding to community-based organizations serving youth to develop and implement Health



At a GSAHEC Health Careers Summer Camp facilitated by Girls Incorporated of Sarasota County, Sierra Jones practices finding organs on a model

**Camps continued on page 4...**

■ ■ ■ Connecting students to careers

## ICHS students ask, "Why are our babies dying?"

By Emily Meade Hite, BA

Four USF graduate students spread out their work around a table at the Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County. Surrounded by surveys, articles, laptops and coffee, the students attempted to answer a question with both local and national implications, "Why are our babies dying?"

Between 2003 and 2005, the fetal death rate for African Americans in Sarasota County tripled. This is an alarming trend that reflects national statistics indicating that African-American women have had consistently worse birth outcomes. In partnership with USF's Area Health Education Center (AHEC) and the Healthy Start Coalition of Sara-

sota County (HSCSC), medical students: Melissa O'Connor and Charlotte Woods-Hill, public health student, Stasha Roberts, and social work student, Mary Catherine James, had eight weeks to identify the leading causes of fetal death and create a successful strategy for combating the growing crisis in Sarasota County.

**Babies continued on page 2...**



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## Babies: Assisting women in making healthy choices during pregnancy

HSCSC research led the students to the Newtown community of Sarasota County, an area with a high concentration of African Americans (92.3 percent). The team worked quickly to familiarize themselves with the community and survey the residents' assets and needs. A few weeks into the project, they created a marketing campaign and action plan titled, "Save My Life." Targeted towards pregnant women and women of child-bearing age, "Save My Life" is a comprehensive list of tips to educate and assist women in making healthy choices during pregnancy. The students passed out fans with the "Save My Life" tips to local churches and distributed bracelets and brochures to raise awareness throughout the community.

The campaign was applauded by Jennifer Highland, executive director of HSCSC. "Having this group of graduate students work with us provided our Coalition with an invaluable gift: they planted a 'seed,' which will grow with nurturing provided by our membership and the citizens of Newtown. We now have a great presentation on black fetal mortality issues based on a thorough literature review and interviews conducted [by the students] in Newtown. From this point, we can apply for grants and other sources of funding to respond to Newtown's requests to help them reduce the number of fetal and infant deaths experienced there."

HSCSC is currently in the process of applying for a March of Dimes grant to continue the students' efforts.

Local doctors and community stakeholders from the Newtown community commended the students' findings and recommendations. The presentation captured the attention of a



Left to right: Stasha Roberts, Melissa O'Connor, Charlotte Woods-Hill and Mary Catherine James surveyed women to determine what they knew about fetal death rates and its causes in the African American population during the Juneteenth celebration in Newtown.

licensed midwife who volunteered to provide prenatal care in Newtown's only local clinic; prior to this, no prenatal care was available in Newtown. The "Save My Life" campaign and the students' final presentation also received extensive media coverage that brought further attention to the Newtown community's high fetal death rate.

The four interdisciplinary students that participated in the project at Healthy Start were part of the USF AHEC Interdisciplinary Community Health Scholars (ICHS) Program. Each summer 16 qualified health professions students are selected to work on community projects within the nine-county USF AHEC service area. Projects are designed through a joint effort of the local AHEC Center, GNAHEC in Land O' Lakes and GSAHEC in Sarasota, the community-based organization's site coordinator and the student team. ICCHS provides students with the opportunity to develop a better understanding of health care issues in underserved communities; participate as members of interdisciplinary health care teams; and help local communities develop ideas for improving health. The other partners and projects selected for this year's USF ICCHS Program were:

- Pasco County Health Department: Students conducted

focus groups to determine how to increase participation in diabetes management education courses offered by the health department and updated the county's Health Profile. The rate of Pasco County residents diagnosed with diabetes is higher than the state average.

- Johnnie Ruth Clarke Health Center: Students surveyed patients, staff and community members in order to improve awareness and increase utilization of the pediatric services offered at this Pinellas County clinic.
- Laurel Civic Association: Students developed presentations on topics ranging from HIV/AIDS to dental health and restructured the Kid's Café menu to offer nutritious foods for youth enrolled in this program.

All of the 2007 ICCHS projects were immensely successful. Each team tackled difficult health issues with dedication, passion and determination. The efforts and experience of the Healthy Start ICCHS team illustrate the benefits of the program for the partners and community residents, as well as for the students.

"The opportunity to carry out a project in only eight weeks that was really addressing a critical health disparity and that produced tangible results and a definite impact on the people of a community – and not just a nice shiny research paper – was unforgettable. ICCHS forces students to step outside the comfort of their own disciplines, their own classrooms, and deal in a real way with health disparities that exist right now," said Charlotte Woods-Hill, Healthy Start ICCHS team member and second-year medical student at the USF College of Medicine.

## Health Professions Summer Academy

*equips students with the skills needed for college and insights into health careers*

*By Mandelyn Hutcherson, MAMC*

You may have seen them at the University of South Florida's College of Medicine handling the medical robots used for teaching instruction. Or you might have caught a glimpse of them on the heli-pad at Tampa General Hospital talking to the pilot or climbing aboard an aeromedical helicopter. Then again, maybe you read about them in the Bradenton Herald or saw them on Bay News 9.

For two weeks in June, 25 junior and senior high school students from across West Central Florida lived in a dormitory on the University of South Florida campus and explored opportunities in the health care field. These 25 students were competitively selected for the seventh year of the USF AHEC Health Professions Summer Academy from almost 90 applications to the intensive, two-week academic program that increases the skills students will need for college and brings



*Pictured are the 25 students who comprised the 2007 AHEC Health Professions Summer Academy.*

health careers to life.

Many students are minorities, come from a disadvantaged background and are the first in their families to go to college. Each student received a scholarship that covered all program costs including tuition, room and board, transportation, SAT test preparation materials, workshops, courses, field trips and a \$100 stipend. The students all had at least a 3.0 GPA, and a single, common thread united

them – an interest in pursuing a health career.

“We focus on recruiting more minority and disadvantaged youth into health careers because research and experience indicate they will be more likely to care for the medically underserved. As our population becomes more diverse, it is important that our health care workforce reflects that diversity,” said AHEC Program Director Cynthia Selleck. “Programs like our Summer Academy help accomplish this

because we are inspiring students to choose a health career, building that pipeline of the next generation of health professionals to care for the medically needy, and we're providing these students with experiences and skills to make them successful in a health career.”

The students' jam-packed schedule of activities over two weeks included presentations from faculty and students in the USF Colleges of Medicine, Nursing and Public Health and the School of Physical Therapy, and behind-the-scenes field trips to Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, Shriners' Children's Hospital and Tampa General Hospital. Health professionals and students from dentistry, pharmacy, psychology and social work shared the inside scoop on careers in these health professions. Students were also equipped with life management and college survival skills

**Academy continued on page 7...**

## P.A.C.T. interns take DeSoto County by storm to educate about wise portion size

*By Emily Meade Hite, BA*

Semhar Abraham and Brian Howard quickly work to set-up an eye-catching display board and several visual props in the lobby of the DeSoto County Health Department. In between presentations to 20 preteens attending the Arcadia Red Cross' "Ready Set Go" Camp, Semhar and Brian are anxious to also provide information about healthy portion sizes to the patients and family members sitting in the clinic's waiting room. Semhar, a Manatee Community College (MCC) nursing student, stands at attention as she catches

the eye of a patient. With a big smile, she quickly moves forward to engage the woman in a conversation about how to control portion sizes for a healthier lifestyle.

Brian, a recent graduate of MCC's nursing school, and Semhar were selected as interns to participate in Gulfcoast South AHEC's annual Project Addressing Community Topics (P.A.C.T.) in DeSoto County for the summer. The P.A.C.T. Project provides health professions students with community-based training opportunities in rural and underserved communities.

The purpose of P.A.C.T. is to improve access to primary health care through a community-based service learning project implemented by health professions students. The 2007 P.A.C.T. project was a six week, part-time project in DeSoto County that utilized the "Be Wise about Portion Size" curriculum created by the Florida Interagency Food and Nutrition Committee.

Brian and Semhar took DeSoto County by storm. Focusing on a wide age range, their audi-



*The Be Wise About Portion Size poster and station on how to control portion sizes for a healthier lifestyle.*

ences varied from local preschool students to visitors at Arcadia's Senior Friendship Center. In the course of the 300 combined hours they worked, the two interns provided over 18 presentations to more than 350 attendees from DeSoto County. Frequently

**P.A.C.T. continued on page 6...**



***“Their eyes lit up with excitement whenever they practiced the tools of the trade like administering CPR, finding and timing a pulse, listening through their stethoscope...”***



Top: Dhara Patel playing the part of MD during a camp coordinated by Girls Inc. of Sarasota County.

Below: During a Health Careers Summer Camp facilitated by Girls, Inc., Alexis Thompson pictured in scrubs.

Careers Summer Camps in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota counties. Faced with the knowledge of 47 million uninsured Americans who are medically underserved and critical shortages of primary care health professionals, GSAHEC is on a mission to recruit students from underserved and underrepresented communities into primary care health fields. The purpose of the summer camps is to inspire and expose students to health careers, assist them in establishing a career in health and encourage them to work in underserved areas.

During the summer of 2007, five summer camps were funded by GSAHEC with a total of 93 camp participants and 388 camp program hours. Campers traveled on field trips to the health professions programs at Manatee Community College, Sarasota County Technical Institute and the University of South Florida. They went on excursions to county health departments, physicians' offices, area hospitals and the Museum of Science and Industry. Campers also explored many health careers in depth by interviewing health care professionals such as medical doctors, physician assistants, nurses, therapists, EMT/paramedics, pharmacists, dentists and dental hygienists. They were encouraged to try on scrubs, surgical masks and caps and snap on the gloves. Their eyes lit up with excitement whenever they practiced the tools of the trade like administering CPR, finding and timing a pulse, listening through their stethoscope for heart and lung sounds and learn-

## Online CE courses available for free!

By Christina Mathis, MBA

Healthcare professionals are required to attend continuing education courses to maintain their licensure. Wouldn't it be more productive and cost effective both to the employer and employee if courses could be completed in the comfort of the home or office?

St. Petersburg College realized the need for online education and created a partnership with the Florida AHEC Network and the Florida Department of Health Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion to provide online education programming to health professionals. The Department of Health courses are FREE for Florida physicians, nurses, dieticians and community health education specialists (CHES) as long as scholarship funding allows. To access these courses visit [www.onlinece.net](http://www.onlinece.net) and click on DOH.

Currently the CE Health Program at St. Petersburg College

offers more than 200 continuing education courses on a wide range of topics. The online forum allows health professionals from all areas, including underserved and rural areas, to use state of the art technology to meet their licensure requirements. These programs, presented by experts in the field, are designed to keep health professionals up to date on the latest trends in the healthcare industry. Topics range from required courses such as Medical Errors Reduction, Domestic Violence and HIV/AIDS to Cultural Competency, Breastfeeding and Hypertension.

Visit [www.onlinece.net](http://www.onlinece.net) to learn more about the St. Pete College CE Health Program. Users can pay just \$8 per course or \$69 for a yearly subscription. This exceptional opportunity is available now, so logon to find out which CE courses are approved for your discipline. Remember, the DOH courses are currently FREE for Florida physicians, nurses, dieticians and CHES.

## 2008 Summer Academy

Applications for the 2008 USF AHEC Health Professions Summer Academy will be available online December 3. Applications can be downloaded from the USF AHEC Web site: [www.health.usf.edu/ahec](http://www.health.usf.edu/ahec).

Please contact LaToya Clark at [lclark2@health.usf.edu](mailto:lclark2@health.usf.edu) if you would like to receive Academy applications by mail. The Academy will take place in June 2008.

ing how to check their blood pressure.

Health Careers Summer Camps are a lot of fun and chock full of exciting new learning experiences. One camper commented that the camp encouraged him to start planning a health career because he could save someone's life.

Another camper remarked, "My favorite part was that I got to meet new people, and learn a lot of new things, so now I feel much, much smarter than the first time I came in."

These campers are planning their future in a health career. What do you want to be when you grow up?

# Inspiring and rewarding amazing individuals in our healthcare system

By Maureen Guthke, MPH, CHES, and Ansley Mora, BA

It was early Monday morning, and they had quite a drive, but the ladies dressed in pink were all smiles when they arrived at the Unity Conference in Tampa. For a year and a half the Community Health Workers (CHWs) with the Newtown Wellness Program in Sarasota have been presenting and perfecting their “Pink Ribbon Parties” to women in their community, and today was their chance to show off their hard work to their peers across the country and learn from them as well. There was a sense of excitement among the group, tied in with a bit of nervousness.

The Florida AHEC Network sponsored 42 CHWs to attend the Unity Conference. Twenty-three of those came from the USF AHEC Program’s nine-county service area, and not only did these folks attend, but they excelled in their representation at the conference. Poster sessions were presented by the Newtown Wellness Program and the Manatee County Health Department. The Florida Institute for Community Studies and the Healthy Start Coalition of Manatee County facilitated roundtable discussions. Participants attending the breakout sessions heard from Mary Becker and Sheri Spano regarding “Breastfeeding Basics for CHWs,” and Eleanor Ball with the Wellness Program and Ansley Mora with GSAHEC presented “Networking and Capacity Building for CHWs.” The excitement of the CHWs overflowed in their spirit and commitment to the critical work they do to connect people in need.

Guadalupe Lamas, Parish Nurse with San Jose Mission located in Dover, shared, “I had the oppor-

tunity to meet other outreach workers in our area who are also working to improve the lives of the communities we serve. I am an RN, but have always considered myself a Community Health Care worker. Thanks again for another great event.”

Mary Jenkins with the Newtown Wellness Program explained, “The conference was really inspiring! It made me want to do more for my community and broadened my awareness on the challenges others face in getting good health care.”

On the evening of May 22, following Unity 2007, several FLAHEC Network staff excitedly drove to The Big City Tavern in Ybor City. They were ready to show their appreciation for all the hard work and dedication that CHWs demonstrate in reducing health disparities and promoting healthier lifestyles in our state. The staff members including Edna Apostol, Latoya Clark, Maureen Guthke, Ansley Mora and others, began quickly stuffing gift bags with promotional items from each AHEC around the state. There was just 40 minutes before the invited CHWs were to arrive. Every table needed to be set, every gift bag had to be



Above: Pictured left to right, Carlene Harvin, Lillie Roberts and Mary Jenkins in front of their Newtown Breast Cancer Awareness Program Poster. This program is funded by the Florida Suncoast Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure.



Right: During the Unity Conference, Maureen Guthke of GNAHEC addresses the crowd at the Florida AHEC Network’s appreciation event for community health workers.

stuffed, and the floor had to be arranged for perfect viewing of Lisa Renee Siciliano, the guest speaker from the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW).

The 42 CHWs affiliated with the Florida AHEC Network had the remarkable opportunity to hear Lisa Renee share her achievements as a CHW including her journey in becoming the Executive Director of the notable MACHW Network and how the Network has been a driving force for the recognition of CHWs in the healthcare field in the state of Massachusetts.

To conclude the evening, the CHWs had the opportunity to brainstorm and prioritize some ideas on how the FLAHEC Net-

work could further support their outreach efforts. Two pages of a flip chart were filled with wonderful and creative thoughts of what would help sustain and enhance program activities. As a result of this “dotmocracy” that took place, the FLAHEC Network Community Health Promotion Committee has more ideas than ever before on how to support CHW needs, and the valued CHWs throughout the state of Florida are energized to reduce health disparities and promote healthier lifestyles in our state.

## DeSoto High School students win first at State Leadership Conference and fifth at National Leadership Conference!

By Joan Beatty-Lee, BA

Hanna Holland and Maria Rubio, recent graduates of DeSoto High School and active

participants in Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA), placed first at the State Leadership Conference in Daytona Beach this April for their Community Awareness project "Prevention of Underage Drinking." Then in June they presented their project at the National Leadership Conference in Orlando taking fifth place in the nation!

This dynamic duo made it their mission to inform the Arcadia community on the dangers of underage drinking. They partnered with the DeSoto

County Coalition to purchase a billboard for travelers to see as they enter the community. They also placed posters on businesses, made place-mats for local restaurants, held coloring contests for the elementary schools, poster contests for the middle schools, essay contests for the high school and parked a wrecked car outside the

prom reception... just to name a few of their endeavors.

Not to be outdone, HOSA Advisor Marilyn Goodman was awarded the 2007 HOSA State Rookie Advisor of the Year. Nominations for this esteemed award were submitted by students, whose letters of appreciation detailed the impact

their HOSA advisor had on their lives. There are approximately 200 HOSA Advisors in the state of Florida, and approximately 25 are classified as "rookies" (on the job for two years or less). Receiving this award is an impressive accomplishment for Mrs. Goodman. It is a special honor to be recognized for having a positive impact on your students' lives.

Even though Hanna and Maria were sad to say goodbye to friends and teachers at DeSoto High School, their HOSA affiliation is far from over. These outstanding young women plan on being involved in post-secondary HOSA during their college years, establishing charter HOSA chapters if necessary. Hanna attends Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville and plans to become a veterinarian, while Maria is attending the University of South Florida in Tampa and plans to pursue medicine.

As an academic partner with the DeSoto High School HOSA



*Pictured left to right: Hanna Holland, Marilyn Goodman, advisor, and Maria Rubio at the HOSA National Leadership Conference in Orlando where their Community Awareness project "Prevention of Underage Drinking" placed fifth in the nation!*

chapter, Gulfcoast South AHEC is pleased to congratulate Maria and Hanna on their outstanding awards and wishes them the best as they continue on their health career path. We look forward to working with Mrs. Goodman and her outstanding HOSA students during the 2007-2008 school year.

### **P.A.C.T.** from page 3...

identified as the "Snack Man" by Arcadia's younger populations, Brian was thrilled with his experience and the impact it made on the DeSoto community.

"Many of the people from all age groups to whom we presented the Be Wise About Portion Size program were very literate about healthy eating and lifestyle habits. What made our project so rewarding, however, was that our education regarding portion control came as a complete surprise to most people. I feel that we not only impacted a significant percentage of the local population, but that we also enlightened folks of all ages as to one of the roots of a growing com-



*Semhar Abraham and Brian Howard, the "Snackman," pictured at a presentation in Arcadia. The two interns provided over 18 presentations to more than 350 attendees from DeSoto County.*

munity health concern: obesity and overeating. With all things considered, I would say that our project met and exceeded its goals and was hugely successful," Brian said.

Through Semhar and Brian's efforts, GSAHEC was able to reach populations of all age groups in DeSoto County in order to provide presentations and educational materials to combat obesity.

P.A.C.T. is designed to provide health education to residents of DeSoto County, but it also provides a unique educational experience for the interns. The health professions students learn to present outside a classroom, to people with a different knowledge base and varying literacy levels. The interns must also find innovative ways to capture the audience's attention and help people retain information.

Semhar said, "It's different preparing the presentations. I have done all kinds of presentations to classmates where we have a similar knowledge base about the subject matter, but this time I had to make it fit the general population and keep it interesting enough so they would remember it."

Semhar and Brian both benefited from their time in Arcadia. Semhar concluded, "If I had to use one word to describe my experience working in Arcadia, I would use the word 'wonderful.'"

# HOSA teams place at National Leadership Conference

By Dianne Frankel, MPH

As Brittany Burnett walked into the Orlando World Center Marriott’s lobby, home of the 30th Annual HOSA National Leadership Conference (NLC), she was not prepared for the sights and sounds that engulfed her. High school and college students from across the country including Texas, Florida, Georgia and even Hawaii mingled in the open atrium of the resort dressed in their signature “HOSA” outfits consisting of navy blue blazers and bright, red bow ties.

One would be amazed to see how much HOSA, better known as the Health Occupations Students of America, has grown since 1976. HOSA’s membership has reached more than 93,000 members in 44 states, and can be found in 2,600 secondary and post-secondary schools. Moreover, they are living up to their mission: to enhance the delivery of compassionate, quality health care by providing opportunities for knowledge, skill and leadership development of all health science students. In its 30th year, the conference hosted more than

30 competitive events including Sports Medicine, Emergency Medical Technician and Dental Terminology.

Brittany, a senior and president of her HOSA chapter at Plant City High, has been a HOSA member since she was a sophomore. Her teacher, Mrs. Johnson, assigned the event Medical Assisting-Clinical to Brittany, and she picked right. Brittany placed eighth at NLC.

When asked what she thought about the conference, Brittany expressed enthusiastically, “It

was a blast. I have told so many people in my chapter that they need to compete this year. It’s a great experience. I met so many different people from all over the place. When the time came to leave, I wasn’t ready.”

This year GNAHEC funded four HOSA teams, which allowed the students to travel to and compete at HOSA’s State and National Conference. Gulfcoast North AHEC was pleased to learn that the following four high schools, from its five-county service area, placed in their events at NLC 2007!

EVENT	PLACE	WINNER	SCHOOL
Medical Assisting-Clinical	8	Brittany Burnett	Plant City High School
Creative Problem Solving	9	Kaiser; Castoro; Jaquith; Jaster	Crystal River High School
Medical Reading	2	Alaqili; Croy; Higgins	Palm Harbor University High School
Parliamentary Procedure	3	Kagay; Hilliard; Mertens; Sourbeer; Hoyt	Palm Harbor University High School
National Recognition Program	Achieved standard	Beryl Colbert	Boca Ciega High School
Chapter Newsletter	Achieved standard		Boca Ciega High School

## Academy from page 3...

in several courses that ranged from living healthy and learning to study smart to how to apply for financial aid, manage your credit and budget your money. A little fun was even thrown in with trips to Busch Gardens and Adventure Island.

“These students have a once-in-a-lifetime experience. For many, it’s the first time they have been away from home for two weeks, let alone staying on a college campus in a dorm room,” said LaToya Clark, coordinator of the Summer Academy program and diversity initiatives.

“I really liked it,” said Willine Joseph, a Manatee High School senior who plans to become a

registered nurse. “It’s new. You get nervous when you first arrive. Without my parents I was afraid I might forget something during the first day.”

“At times, it’s kind of hard and confusing,” Willine said, “but it’s a lot of fun.”

Perhaps the most rigorous part of the students’ training involves two to three hours of SAT preparation every day but Sunday. The students alternate between math and verbal courses each day and complete 30 hours of SAT preparation.

Maria Plunkett, a Palm Harbor University High School junior, said that the summer academy

experience helped solidify her interest in medicine as well as sparked her interest in other health careers. At Tampa General Hospital, Maria operated an ultrasound and found some organs that she didn’t know exactly where they were before.

“Now I might look into ultrasound, it’s really cool,” said Maria.

Maria grew up with an ailing mother who benefited from medical treatment, and for that reason she’s very interested in medicine, and ultimately wants to be a surgeon.

“All my life medicine has been a passion of mine, and I really

wanted to do it. I figured the summer academy would be good exposure, and it has been,” said Maria.

“The Summer Academy this year was a great success. The students really got up close and personal with a career in the health field. They had hands on opportunities to see the real side of health that many never get to experience,” said Clark, program coordinator.

From the positive feedback and comments of the students, it looks like the next generation of health professionals is ready to tackle a new school year and prepare for their future in a health career!

**The University of South Florida Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program, inspires, trains, recruits and retains a diverse and broad range of health professionals to practice in communities where the need is greatest. Your gift will assure improved access to health care for Florida's disenfranchised and medically needy populations.**

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**Don't forget John Wills Challenge!** Former Executive Director John Wills will match all gifts to GNAHEC during the annual fund campaign up to a total of \$10,000! Be sure to make your donation before December 31<sup>st</sup> to receive the match.



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