GNAHEC Executive Director

John Wills to Retire in February

by Mandelyn Hutcherson


These words have been used to describe Gulfcoast North Area Health Education Center (GNAHEC) Executive Director John Wills, who is retiring on February 2 after almost 12 years of service.

"John has been a leader in the Florida AHEC Network (FAHECN); he has shown great initiative in our program and at the network level. He chaired the professional education committee for many years. When he says he'll do something, he steps up to the plate and gets the job done. I will miss his involvement. I came to AHEC in 1994, and he was the first person we hired at the center level. Together we grew from the new AHEC program in the network to a well respected AHEC in the state as well as nationally," said USF AHEC Program Director Cynthia Selleck.

Edna Apostol, Gulfcoast South AHEC executive director, agreed, "John and I came to the network about the same time too. We’ve experienced the growing pains, been able to see the growth of the network from its initial stages and helped to accomplish some good things over the past 10 years. We’ve worked within the network to help make it more efficient, better organized and more effective.”

Wills hired, has been there from day one, and she values her open relationship with Wills. She said they share an equal partnership that contributes to an honest, open relationship. Craig Bobik, director of marketing and technical services, has worked with Wills more than ten years, and he explained his relationship as a partnership filled with creativity and ambition. Director of Health Professional Education Christina Mathis, who started at GNAHEC when she was 18 years old, has experienced her entire professional career under Wills’ leadership.

Mathis said, “He has kept together a strong team at GNAHEC without a lot of turnover, and that speaks to what a great leader and boss he is. Over the past 10 plus years, John has been an exceptional leader, mentor and friend. He will truly be missed.”

Wills continued on page 6…
Gulfcoast North AHEC Welcomes

TCHC Medical Director Dr. Julio Roberto Sanchez

by Jody Lazzara

Julio Roberto Sanchez, MD, was recently named the new medical director of Tampa Community Health Center. Sanchez was born and raised in Colombia where he also graduated from medical school. He is the son of a surgeon and an artist.

Sanchez became medical director of a rural hospital and later worked in a clinic with his father serving a medically underserved population in his home town of Pereira, the heart of coffee land in Colombia. Sanchez came to the United States in 1994 and took ESL at Indiana University. He is multilingual and served as a senior medical officer on cruise ships for three years. Sanchez, who is board certified in internal medicine, also spent an extra year for emergency room experience and geriatrics during his residency. Most recently he served as medical director of a federally qualified health center in Indiana for four years.

It was love that brought Sanchez to the Tampa Bay area; his love for community medicine and the love of his life, Elizabeth. Elizabeth Munoz arrived in Tampa a few weeks ago from Medellin, Colombia.

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Sanchez to our community health center system.

Health Care Hero Award

Dr. Dennis Penzell, clinical associate professor, College of Medicine, and ONAHEC board member, was awarded the Physician Health Care Hero by the Tampa Bay Business Journal on Oct. 5 for his efforts serving migrant workers in Ruskin and volunteering for the Judeo-Christian Clinic. In addition Dr. Cynthia Selleck, program director, USF AHEC, was nominated as a Community Outreach Health Care Hero.

You Are Cordially Invited to

MOSI on Down to our Second Annual Belles and Boots Bash

The University of South Florida AHEC Program and Gulfcoast North AHEC would like to invite you to MOSI on down to our second annual Belles and Boots Bash. As our only fund-raising event, the proceeds will provide scholarships to deserving high school students entering into health careers as well as support important student recruitment programs. Many of these students would not be exposed to health career information or be able to go to college without the opportunities through AHEC.

This year’s event will be held on March 8, 2007, at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Tampa. The evening will consist of a silent auction, dinner provided by Outback Steakhouse, a souvenir program, music and photo opportunities in a country setting. In addition to contributing to a worthwhile goal, the Belles and Boots Bash will provide exposure to an exclusive audience consisting of approximately 300 community and corporate guests. We greatly appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you MOSI on down on March 8, 2007. For more information on attending or supporting the event, please contact Mandelyn Hutcherson at (813) 974-9699.
Establishing Community Partnerships for Community Health Promotion

by Maureen Guthke

On Sept. 18-19 Gulfcoast North AHEC and the Hillsborough County Health Department (HCHD) Community Health Division held a Community Health Advisor (CHA) training at the HCHD Crosstown Center. Community Health Advisors are “lay” people who are trained to help individuals and community members take greater control over their health and their lives. They promote healthy living through education on how to prevent disease and by helping community residents understand and access formal health and human service systems.

Seven volunteers were recruited from different faith-based organizations within the county to attend the 12-hour Community Health Advisor training. GNAHEC and the Hillsborough County Health Department collaboratively worked on the training curriculum, using educational materials from three sources: the University of Arizona’s Core Curriculum Guidebook Project Jump Start, the American Heart Association Woman to Woman and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute Search Your Heart. As respected leaders in the community, CHAs will play an important role in increasing awareness and understanding of the risk factors associated with heart disease through culturally appropriate health education activities conducted at their affiliated congregations.

The partnership between GNAHEC and the HCHD provides stability and support for the work of the Community Health Advisors. Gulfcoast North AHEC is able to provide the resources to support training of the CHAs while the Hillsborough County Health Department staff is able to provide the professional support and supervision of the Community Health Advisors. HCHD nursing staff will be the backbone of the program, assisting the CHAs when needed to provide blood pressure screenings, health referrals and other health provider services.

The Hillsborough County Health Department Community Health Advisor program will continue into early 2007. At that time Gulfcoast North AHEC and the Health Department will be working on a long-term plan to sustain the Community Health Advisors’ activities and perhaps encourage other Health Department programs to integrate the CHA approach into their own service delivery model.

Dianne Frankel is new Coordinator of Student Enrichment

Dianne Frankel recently joined GNAHEC as the coordinator of student enrichment. Frankel has a bachelor’s in biomedical sciences and a master’s in public health from the University of South Florida. She is originally from Pensacola and has been involved with AHEC for several years. Frankel’s first exposure to AHEC was in high school, but reconnected with AHEC in college when she sought a position as a graduate assistant at the USF AHEC program office.

Frankel coordinated a cultural exchange program with visiting healthcare providers from Uzbekistan as well as the Partners in Prevention of Substance Abuse (PIPSA), an anti-tobacco program, as a graduate assistant. In 2005 she was also selected as one of 16 AHEC Interdisciplinary Community Health Scholars (ICHS). Frankel embraces the AHEC mission and aspires to one day be a physician working with underserved communities; she is currently applying to medical schools. Frankel is looking forward to showing disadvantaged and under-represented youth how they have the ability and the potential, regardless of ethnicity, financial ability or background, to become a physician, a nurse, physical therapist or health care professional.
Summer Scholars Benefit Communities

by Anne Maynard and Emily Meade

Patricia Salinas is on a mission. The second year USF social work graduate student puts her bilingual skills to good use as she rounds the Sarasota County Health Department prenatal waiting room interviewing Spanish-speaking mothers-to-be. Along with her teammates Natalya Warner, Hope Bueller and Ariel Ansley, Patricia is interviewing expectant moms to find out how much they know about the importance of oral health not only for themselves but for their babies. She wants the moms and their doctors to know that an unhealthy mouth may contribute to serious problems during pregnancy.

Patricia and her teammates are USF AHEC Interdisciplinary Community Health Scholars (ICHS). The USF AHEC Program Office and its centers have sponsored this eight-week summer training program for health professions students since 1994. Students participating in ICHS gain a better understanding of the needs of underserved communities and experience working as part of an interdisciplinary team in a real-world setting. The work they perform also benefits the communities they serve by providing solutions to local health problems.

Each year 16 USF health professions students from the Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, the School of Social Work and undergraduate pre-health professions programs are selected to participate in ICHS. Four local community projects are chosen that address one or more of the health disparity areas outlined in Healthy People 2010. Each project must target medically underserved communities or medically underserved populations. The ICHS students are placed on four-person teams to work on one of the community projects. In addition to working on-site with their community partners to develop and implement their projects, students attend seminars on topics such as health disparities, cultural competency and health literacy.

The partners and projects selected for this year’s USF AHEC ICHS summer program were:

- Pasco County Health Department’s Diabetes and Early Childhood Carries project
- Manatee County Health Department’s Closing the Gap: Diabetes project
- Community Art Ensemble Bicycle Safety and Helmet Giveaway project (co-sponsored by the Epilepsy Foundation of West Florida)

Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County’s Start Motherhood with a Healthy Mouth project

The efforts of the Sarasota team illustrate the benefits of the ICHS program. The team helped launch Start Motherhood with a Healthy Mouth, a program designed by the Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County to reduce periodontal disease in pregnant women. The project was spearheaded and supervised by Jennifer Highland, M.P.H., R.N., the coalition’s contract/quality manager, and Gulfcoast South AHEC Clinical Training Coordinator Emily Meade. The program’s goal was to promote awareness of the possible correlation between periodontal disease (PD) and an increased risk for preterm, low birth weight (PLBW) infants.

Research has shown that pregnant women with PD, a chronic, bacterial infection of the mouth characterized by inflammation of the gums, bone loss and eventual tooth loss, are between 4.45 and seven times more likely to have a preterm or low birth weight infant compared to women with no evidence of the disease.

The ICHS Sarasota Team members used their backgrounds in social work, medicine and public health to research their topic, design and administer questionnaires and conduct interviews with health care providers, pregnant women and dentists regarding their knowledge and practices surrounding oral health care and pregnancy. The team found that pregnant women knew little about the possible correlation between PD and preterm/low birth weight deliveries; many health care providers did not talk with pregnant women about oral health; and some dentists questioned the possible correlation between PD and preterm/low...
Gulfcoast South AHEC Welcomes New Staff

Karen Lutz recently joined GSAHEC as recruitment and youth programs coordinator. Lutz has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of South Florida. She is from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and has lived in Florida for two years.

As a first generation college student, Lutz gets a great deal of satisfaction from counseling youth and opening new doors for them including admission into college and pursuing scholarships. She looks forward to developing relationships with area guidance counselors and assisting students to pursue health careers. Lutz also hopes to expand our health career recruitment efforts to elementary school students.

Nicole Marquez recently joined GSAHEC as an administrative support specialist. Marquez has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Eckerd College and a master’s in guidance and counseling from Argosy University. She is from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and has lived in Florida for five years.

Marquez was attracted to GSAHEC because she has experience working with youth. Through the interview process she found she identified with AHEC’s mission. She recognized the need for healthcare in underserved areas and felt GSAHEC was something she could put her heart into. Marquez looks forward to presenting the “Bone Zone” osteoporosis education program to community schools and getting involved in student recruitment efforts such as Access Day. She is learning STARS, the database that the Florida AHEC Network utilizes to capture data on its programs, and Marquez is excited about her opportunities at GSAHEC.

PACT Student Raises Nutritional Awareness in DeSoto County

by Emily Meade

Claire Murphy sits at a tiny table listening to the chatter of preschoolers as they discuss which of their favorite foods is healthy. Children excitedly yell out, “strawberries,” “potato chips” and “yogurt!” Claire smiles and passes out plastic bowls and some stickers, “Now, let’s decorate our snack bowls for our healthy snacks!”

The preschoolers at DeSoto Early Childhood Education Center are learning about good nutrition and portion sizes. Each child is given a snack bowl to decorate. When a child eats a nutritious snack, they can fill up their bowl as many times as they want. When the snack is unhealthy, they only get to fill the bowl once.

Claire Murphy is a New College of Florida pre-med student selected to participate in GSAHEC’s Projects Addressing Community Topics (P.A.C.T.) in DeSoto County during summer 2006. The P.A.C.T. Project is offered by GSAHEC every year in order to provide health professions students with community-based clinical 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 a health professions student. The long-range goal of the project is to reduce the occurrence of disease through education and screenings. The 2006 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.

The objectives for the 2006 P.A.C.T. Project were seven presentations with a total of 125 participants. As Claire

PACT continued on page 6…

Healthy Start Applauds Gulfcoast South AHEC

GSAHEC was recently honored by the Charlotte County Healthy Start Coalition for its valuable contributions in improving the health and welfare of Charlotte County mothers and infants. GSAHEC has collaborated on numerous projects with the Charlotte County Healthy Start Coalition, including GSAHEC’s Executive Director Edna Apostol serving as chairperson of the newly formed Health Disparities Committee. Under Edna’s leadership, a fact sheet and PowerPoint presentation were developed to educate the community on the racial and ethnic differences in the presence of disease, health outcomes and access to care issues that exist in the local community. In addition, GSAHEC provided a cultural competency training program attended by 40 individuals who received continuing education credits, and helped fund the Mom’s Tote Project, which promotes good prenatal and child health care through the distribution of informational materials to expectant mothers in Charlotte County.
**PACT from page 5:**

began her project, she coordinated with the DeSoto County Health Department to offer presentations to both their staff and their patients. At the Health Department, Claire spent hours discussing good nutrition with the individuals who came through the waiting room. From inmates to teen mothers to toddlers, Claire experienced a broad spectrum of the population that lives in Arcadia. Besides her work at the Health Department, Claire contacted senior centers, schools, community groups, hospitals, rotary clubs, churches and other organizations that would give her access to larger audiences. Using the “Be Wise about Portion Size” curriculum, Claire developed interactive and engaging presentations for all age groups. Through her research, she found HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of PreSchool Youngsters) and offered a presentation in both English and Spanish (through the aid of an interpreter) to over fifty mothers, fathers, grandparents and children. Claire’s presentations were also offered at DeSoto Middle School, the DeSoto Early Childhood Education Center and the WIC/Dental Clinic. Claire far exceeded the objectives stated for the summer 2006 P.A.C.T. Project by providing ten presentations to over 210 participants. Through her dedication and hard-work, GSAHEC was able to reach both English and Spanish speaking populations of all age groups in DeSoto County in order to provide presentations and educational materials to combat obesity.

**ICHS from page 4:**

birth weight deliveries.

Working together as a team, Ariel, Hope, Natalya and Patricia created presentations tailored to women of childbearing age and to health care providers. In the final days of their project, they delivered these presentations to 65 individuals. The team was gratified to learn that the Healthy Start Coalition adopted the presentations for use in its ongoing effort to improve maternal and child health in Sarasota County.

**WILLS from page 1:**

Selleck added that Wills has been innovative at his center and empowered his staff to be innovative as well. Wills is very proud of his work with the team at GNAHEC. He has found a great sense of accomplishment in developing the staff and sharing in their accomplishments.

“I’ve been able to see many of them grow, develop professionally and become more productive; that has been the most professionally rewarding part of my job,” Wills said.

Wills has provided great leadership to GNAHEC. During his tenure the staff has grown from four to nine employees and the budget for GNAHEC has almost quadrupled. GNAHEC also provides more continuing education credits than any other center in the state of Florida. Last year GNAHEC provided 23,943 CE training hours of the network’s 76,288 total hours of training. One of Wills’ most significant accomplishments is GNAHEC built and owns the building where the center is housed. They are one of the few centers in the country that can attest to this accomplishment.

In addition, Wills has been a leader for GNAHEC with the support of the organization’s board of directors in pursuing external fund-raising efforts. GNAHEC held its first fund-raising event, the Belles and Boots Bash, last year and raised more than $10,000, which will support youth health career programs for underrepresented minority and disadvantaged youth.

Wills’ attraction to the executive director position at GNAHEC more than 10 years ago was actually sparked in the job advertisement he read in the newspaper. The opportunity to start a nonprofit agency to work in medically underserved areas in the Tampa Bay region appealed to him. Wills had more than 20 years of experience working in large private not-for-profit hospitals with 100-150 people reporting to him as a food service manager. He had been recognized by the American Hospital Association as a “distinguished” healthcare foodservice administrator in 1979 and received his national professional association’s highest recognition for service to the hospital food service industry when he was awarded the Jacques Bloch Award in 1989. A chance to be in charge of developing something from scratch, actually running a start-up organization was a new challenge and an opportunity that he just had to pursue.

Today as he approaches retirement, Wills is looking forward to spending time with his wife, Joan, traveling more, visiting with friends, doing some freelance writing and exploring opportunities to do recordings for audiovisual projects, such as voice-overs and narration. As one might say, Wills has a “melodious voice” or “a voice that does not reflect his stature” according to Apostol and Bobik respectively.

Bobik said he thought everyone would miss John’s voice, his laugh and his playful side. He began telling a story about how the GNAHEC staff always laugh when John tells stories about his mother. In this particular story, his mom was cold at a restaurant, and so she wrapped a napkin around the back of her neck to keep warm. Then later on, while the group was at a network meeting, “we were at a restaurant for dinner, and John had stepped out for a minute. When he came back, everyone at the table had put napkins around our necks. That was quite the memory – we all laughed so hard!”

As Selleck concluded, “We thank, John, for his many contributions to the success of GNAHEC, the USF AHEC Program and the Florida AHEC Network. We look forward to building upon his and the center’s many accomplishments. We wish him much happiness in retirement and look forward to hearing from him often.”
Multicultural Welcome Week at USF Health

by LaToya Gregory

USF AHEC in collaboration with the Office of Multicultural Activities and USF Health held its’ first Multicultural Welcome Week (MCWW) event at USF Health. USF MCWW is designed to help familiarize incoming students from diverse cultural backgrounds with the University of South Florida. It is the foundation of involvement in multicultural activities at USF for new students and serves to bridge the divide between incoming and returning students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In an effort to educate incoming freshmen planning for health professions education with our Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Public Health and School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science, the USF AHEC Program planned an event to bring these students to USF Health. “Pursuing a Health Career at USF Health” was held Aug. 24 at the College of Nursing.

Students were able to visit USF Health, meet faculty and staff and receive first-hand information to get them started on the right path. USF student organizations with a focus on the health professions were also present to provide incoming students with information about their organizations.

For more information about MCWW at USF Health, please contact LaToya Gregory at (813) 974-5973 or lgregory@health.usf.edu.

USF AHEC 2007 Health Professions Summer Academy

by LaToya Gregory

On Dec. 1, USF AHEC will begin accepting applications for its seventh annual Health Professions Summer Academy. The academy will take place June 3-16, 2007, on the University of South Florida Campus. During this two-week, residential experience students will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities including: SAT preparation courses, scholarship/financial aid workshops, college admissions workshops, writing labs, health career presentations, tours and much more.

To obtain an application or for more information regarding the USF AHEC Health Professions Summer Academy, please visit the USF AHEC Web site at www.health.usf.edu/ahec and click on Middle & High School Student Learning Opportunities. Applications will be mailed to high schools in AHEC’s nine county service area. If you want your school added to AHEC’s mailing list, please contact LaToya Gregory at (813) 974-5973 or lgregory@health.usf.edu.

Mandelyn Hutcherson: Assistant Director of Development and Public Relations

Mandelyn Hutcherson recently joined the University of South Florida AHEC Program Office as assistant director of development and public relations. Hutcherson has a bachelor’s degree in public relations from Texas Tech University and a master’s in mass communication from the University of Florida. She is originally from Texas and has lived in Florida more than four years.

The AHEC mission is very appealing to Hutcherson, and she is looking forward to spreading the word about the good work that AHEC is doing in its nine-county area. The opportunity to build and improve the recognition of AHEC in the community, in the media and with supporters and partners appeals to Hutcherson. She is currently developing a comprehensive development and public relations program that she hopes will make a lasting and immediate impact on the program and its two centers’ relationship-building efforts.
Pediatrician Christina Pelaez, M.D. has become a familiar face to children in Parrish, Florida, over the last year. She was hired in July 2005 by Manatee County Rural Health Services (MCRHS) and is the only pediatrician at MCRHS’ Edgar H. Price Jr. Children & Family Healthcare Center. As a bilingual pediatrician, Pelaez is a great asset to both MCRHS and to the children and families of Parrish.

“I am excited to be in the job,” said Pelaez. “I really wanted it. I want to give the best service possible to all of my patients and let them know they can get good treatment in a community health center clinic. I know it is working because the patients are coming back.” However, Pelaez does recognize the unique challenges that come with working in a community health clinic. “It can be frustrating because you want to help with everything. It’s hard to let go because I can’t stand the thought of someone not getting care.”

Even though she has only been employed by MCRHS for the last year, Pelaez is no stranger to MCRHS. She originally came to the area as part of her USF residency under the guidance of Dr. Xavier Sevilla, a pediatrician with MCRHS. During her residency Pelaez was impressed with her “exposure to a wide variety of people” and felt that she was “better utilized in the clinic than in a private practice.” So after completing her residency rotation with Sevilla, also an AHEC preceptor and the beneficiary of an AHEC rotation during his medical school education, Pelaez is now returning the favor by precepting USF medical school students.

When asked why she decided to precept, Pelaez responded, “I want to be a role model and let students learn by example. You cannot be a good doctor just by knowing all the information in the books. You need to be motivated. Children need fun, nice, happy doctors. They respond to the look on your face.”

Pelaez’ success as a preceptor is evident by her 2004-2005 “USF Pediatric Resident Teacher of the Year” award. As a preceptor, Pelaez focuses on teaching the students about patience, attitude and observation. “There are qualities [of a good doctor] that you have or you don’t. Certain things can’t be taught, but others can. I teach them about the details and that observing your patients is extremely important,” said Pelaez.

As a preceptor, Pelaez is a wonderful mentor who has gladly taken on students throughout her time at MCRHS. GSAHEC is extremely appreciative of her dedication, expertise and time and looks forward to continuing to work together in the future.