

CHAIRMAN'S AWARD 2021

In January of this year, Greene County began its latest response to the COVID pandemic, with the introduction of the COVID vaccine into our communities. In turn, it is my response, and it is my honor, to spotlight tonight and sincerely thank the dedicated county staff who made this possible: the entire Public Health staff, including Kim Kaplan, Laura Churchill, and Kerry Miller, along with Daniel King, the County's Emergency Management Specialist and Penny Martinez, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator.

In the course of one year, Public Health had gone from 24 hour tracking of airplanes coming into New York State from areas of known COVID infection, to our own paper-based Departmental system of contact-tracing and case investigation, which required hand-delivery of quarantine orders throughout the County; to an advanced medical records database, making tracking less time consuming and less labor intensive, to wide-spread COVID testing throughout the county when none other was available; and finally arriving at the goal of vaccination as prevention.

Your journey is epic and continues with daily, but never routine, case investigation as a primary means of Public Health disease control and arriving at what seems like a long awaited, but in reality, an amazingly fast response by the scientific community to bring us a vaccine.

In addition, the amount of work, coupled with the quality of work, done by Penny Martinez and Dan King has been almost inconceivable, not only in planning, organizing, and initiating the Point of Dispensing (POD) sites throughout the County, but working at each of these sites to ensure their success. With their innovative ideas, this relatively small county was able to hold 82 PODS at over 25 different locations throughout the County, including senior centers, schools, fire houses, churches, and Blackthorne Resort, from Windham to New Baltimore, with 16,573 doses of vaccine being administered. They have inspired a dedicated team of volunteers, who have given and continue to give so generously of their time and expertise, resulting in 1,736 volunteer hours and over 500 paramedic hours.

All Public Health employees - nurses, administrative staff, supervisors, etc. -- so many staff members to thank - including Jillian Jenkins, Kasey Redmond, and Jennifer Passero to name just a few, all contribute greatly to this ongoing effort. There are many on the front lines, staffing the PODS directly, either as clinicians or by registering community members, or entering the vaccines into the New York State database (this was initially a flawed and extremely challenging system). There was a transition from the demands of COVID testing clinics, as community testing became more widely available. At the same time, there are many staff working behind the scenes, on the constant reporting and paperwork. Public Health maintains a dedication to contact tracing and case investigation 7 days a week. There was also a departmental need to track the specifics of vaccine availability and approved usage. Obtaining, tracking, and utilizing vaccines was made challenging by a tangle of ever-changing regulations. The task of helping community members, businesses, and institutions to navigate the ever-changing guidance, has been ongoing.

Importantly Public Health has incredibly maintained their dedication to ensuring that all of the necessary work of their department remains in focus. Any Public Health staff available did whatever was necessary to ensure that their programs for Children with Disabilities, Family Planning, Substance Abuse Treatment, Men's and Women's health, communicable disease response and surveillance, rabies prevention and response, Emergency Preparedness, and Community Outreach were all operating and available to our residents in need. Public Health has stretched its resources, with the help of each and every staff member, to achieve these goals throughout the course of the pandemic.

So many of you have worked non-stop since the beginning of this pandemic and not your normal hours, but including early morning hours, late evening hours, seven days a week, one weekend after another, working through all the holidays from New Year's through to Christmas, for sixteen months now.

To Dan, Penny, and everyone at Public Health, please know that your work is noble and necessary. It is also often frustrating and exhausting. This was not a battle you signed up for, but it is a battle that you are winning – for all of us – with your special type of selflessness and strength. Thank you for being the helpers and heroes we look to. You are a testament to our exceptional workforce, and we are incredibly proud of all of you who have spent long hours, weekends, and holidays seeing this community through the crisis as smoothly as possible.

In awe and in gratitude, I respectfully present each of you with this year's Chairman's Award.