

FEATURED

Valley doctor, pharmacy, volunteer among 2022 'Health Heroes'

South Central Public Health District recognizes regional contributions to preventing disease, promoting health

By GREG FOLEY Express Staff Writer
May 27, 2022



Health Hero award winners included, from left: Dr. Terry O'Connor, Lindsey McConnell-Soong (representing the Hispanic Coalition), Alejandra Hernandez, Sonya Wilander, Katelynn Crabtree, Lexi Roberson, Dr. Catherine Swink and Paula Shaffer (representing Valley Apothecary).

Courtesy photo

Several Blaine County residents were recognized last week for their extraordinary contributions to public health in 2021.

In a ceremony in Twin Falls on May 18, the South Central Public Health District issued its 2022 "Health Hero" awards to individuals and organizations who went above and beyond their normal work to prevent disease, promote healthy lifestyles and protect against health threats.

The South Central Public Health District serves eight Idaho counties, including Blaine County. Dr. Terry O'Connor, a St. Luke's Wood River emergency physician, was recognized in the "adult professional" category. O'Connor, who also serves as the medical director of the Blaine County Ambulance District, has worked extensively to fight against and educate people about COVID-19.

In a written accolade, St. Luke's stated: "Dr. O'Connor was so pivotal in providing a trusted voice to help relay important health information to our community, providing advice to elected officials, organizations and businesses, as well as spending countless hours striving to conduct research studies that would advance the scientific community's knowledge of COVID-19."

O'Connor sometimes offered support and guidance after working long hours in the emergency room, the district noted.

"His effort to provide quality education and protect lives made such an impact," it stated.

The Ketchum pharmacy Valley Apothecary was recognized in the "organization" category.

"As COVID-19 vaccine became available, Valley Apothecary went above and beyond to make those vaccines available to the community," the district stated.

The organization was one of the first to sign up to help administer COVID-19 vaccine doses, the district stated, and arranged for volunteers to help increase its ability to provide the shots.

"Valley Apothecary even set other business needs aside, when necessary, to fit in more appointments," the district stated. "In the first few months of 2021, this organization managed to vaccinate about 3,500 people. More appointment times were opened up when the vaccine became available to the general public in April of 2021."

The district recognized longtime Wood River Valley resident Sonya Wilander in the "adult volunteer" category.

For the last four years, Wilander has volunteered 40-plus hours a week to run Men's Second Chance Living, a transitional sober-living center in Hailey.

Through her work at the facility, Wilander has provided community members access to medical services, dental services, behavioral-health services, nutrition assistance and recreation opportunities "to help support a sober and quality lifestyle," the district stated.

"Throughout this service, Sonya is noted for showing incredible compassion and grace," it stated.

The district also gave awards to:

- Alejandra Hernandez, executive director of the Twin Falls-based Unity Alliance of Southern Idaho, for extensive work translating health information into Spanish.
- U. S. Forest Service forester and volunteer EMT John Pine, a Camas County resident who is credited with saving numerous lives through medical intervention and education.
- Youth volunteers Katelynn Crabtree and Lexi Roberson, for their work creating and developing the Warrior Project, a Twin Falls mental-health organization aimed at reducing suicides in the region.
- The Magic Valley Hispanic Coalition, for its volunteer work to help people in Hispanic and LatinX communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.