

## Excellence in Public Health at K-State - 2009



L to R Ms. Mindi Russell, Dr. Ethel Taylor, Ms. Virginia Barnard, Dr. Carol Ann Holcomb

### Award Winners

On 7 April, 2009, an Excellence in Public Health at K-State Reception, was held at the K-State Alumni Center. Over 50 distinguished guests, faculty, students and friends of public health gathered in the Purple Pride Room to celebrate National Public Health Week and the success of the public health programs at Kansas State. Dr. Cates, the MPH Program Director, gave a brief update of the MPH Program and presented awards to four individuals for their contributions to the program and their accomplishments in public health: Dr. Carol Ann Holcomb (faculty), Ms. Ginny Barnard (graduate), Ms. Mindi Russell (graduate), and Dr. Ethel Taylor (student). The group enjoyed remarks from all the honorees as well as the presentation by Ms. Russell about her experiences at NC State Department of Health and at the Food and Drug Administration. The following are individual pictures and information about each of our award winners.

## 2009 Outstanding Faculty



### **Dr. Carol Ann Holcomb**

The founding director of the K-State Master of Public Health Program, Dr. Carol Ann Holcomb is a true visionary with extraordinary leadership, dedication, passion and tenacity. She expertly navigated the maze of requirements, building the new program from scratch, assembling faculty and prospective students, establishing governance, developing curricula, marketing the program, and a myriad of other tasks, to put it on track for long-term success.

Dr. Holcomb's educational background set the perfect stage for her leadership in K-State's public health efforts. She possesses a Master of Arts degree in Public Health and Health Promotion, as well as a Doctorate in Public Health and Epidemiology, all from Oregon State University. She also completed post-doctoral training in Nutritional Epidemiology at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health and Hygiene.

Dr. Holcomb served on the faculty at University of Missouri-Columbia for 2 years and at Kansas State University College of Human Ecology for 29 years. Throughout her career, she pursued and shared a deep understanding of public health, with emphasis upon human nutrition, health education, and geriatric issues, particularly age-related macular degeneration. She created a Nutritional Epidemiology course at the graduate level where students enthusiastically learned to view nutrition from a population perspective, and she taught and advised undergraduates in various aspects of public health and wellness. She was known to be especially adept at assisting students, in their profession development as well as with their personal challenges. She is now a Professor Emeritus at K-State.

She has earned numerous other awards related to teaching, student development, advising and research. Her attention to detail as well as the "big picture" has been tremendous, and the Kansas State University Master of Public Health Program is what it is today because of her extraordinary capabilities and contributions.

## 2009 Outstanding Program Graduate



### Ms. Virginia Barnard

Virginia "Ginny" grew up near Paola, Kansas and received both her BS (2001) and MPH from K- State (2006) with an emphasis in Public Health Nutrition. While enrolled in the degree program, she served as the first Program Assistant to the Director. She held this position for two years and was most instrumental in developing many of the marketing resources, internal forms, and information for students.

She is employed by the Riley County Extension Service as an agent responsible for programs in health, nutrition, and food safety. In her role as an Extension Agent responsible for programs in health, nutrition and

Food Safety she is responsible for:

- **Riley County Tobacco Cessation Education Program** – Ms. Barnard works with partners from the Riley County/Manhattan Health Department, Mercy Regional Health Center, KSU Lafene Health Center, Johnson Center for Basic Cancer Research and the American Cancer Society to develop a cessation education program.
- **Riley County Walk Kansas** - Walk Kansas, a state-wide program that encourages individuals to increase their physical activity and improve their eating habits with the support of team members.
- **WeCan!** – "Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition" is a national education program that targets parents and caregivers of children ages 8-12 and focuses on nutrition, physical activity, and reduced screen time.
- **USD 383 Employee Wellness Program** – USD 383 has created a grassroots-driven wellness program to improve the health and wellness of faculty and staff. Ms. Barnard provides a 6-week basic/foundational class for those interested in behavior changes.
- **Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)** – Ms. Barnard conducts a 10-week class, for single mothers attending Flint Hills Job Corps.

A personal goal of hers has been to work with each of the agents in her office and in the surrounding counties to help extension agents and the state extension system see that their work improves the public's health and "is" public health.

## 2009 Outstanding Program Graduate



### Ms. Mindi Russell

Ms. Mindi Russell has two masters degrees from Kansas State University, an MS in Food Science (2006) and an MPH (2008) with an emphasis in Food Safety and Biosecurity. While she was working on her MS in Food Science, she enrolled in the MPH program and took courses for both programs concurrently. Mindi is originally from Arkansas City, Kansas in Cowley County and attended both Cowley County Community College and K-State as an undergraduate, receiving a BS in Food Science and achieving a cumulative GPA of 4.0.

When the CDC and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) announced the Emerging Infectious Diseases (EID) Laboratory Fellowship Program for master's level scientists to train and prepare them for careers in public health laboratories and support for public health initiatives related to infectious disease research, over 800 outstanding students nationwide applied for the fellowships. Ms. Russell applied for and received one of the 20 Emerging Infectious Diseases (EID) Advanced Laboratory Training Fellowships. The program emphasized the practical application of technologies, methodologies, and practices related to emerging infectious diseases. Fellowship awardees received a one-year stipend (\$30,000) and a travel allowance to attend professional meetings.

Her fellowship took her to the North Carolina State Department of Public Health in Raleigh where she worked in the Bioterrorism and Emerging Pathogens Unit. Her primary focus was on the development of accurate and rapid methods to detect *Taenia solium*, a pork tapeworm, which can cause cysticercosis when raw or undercooked pork is ingested. Cysticercosis is found world-wide and is the leading cause of adult-onset epilepsy. Ms. Russell received training as a parasitologist and learned molecular techniques.

After completion of her training she obtained an excellent job with FDA. Her current position is as a food microbiologist with the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. Recently Ms Russell appeared on national TV for her work in the microbiology laboratory and labeled that experience as her "two seconds of fame on national TV."

## 2009 Outstanding Student

### Dr. Ethel Taylor



Dr. Taylor earned her DVM from Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine. Currently she is enrolled in the MPH Program with an emphasis in infectious diseases/zoonoses. As a graduate student, she was awarded a research fellowship (2007-2009) from the Midwest Research Center of Excellence (MRCE)'s Veterinary Medicine Fellowship Program to study zoonotic infectious diseases.

Dr. Taylor has excelled in all of her MPH course work, completed an exceptional field experience, and is projected to graduate with her MPH in May 2009. She is currently enrolled in an advanced epidemiology course and helps teach epidemiology to first year veterinary students.

For her field experience, she initiated an experience that provided excellent experiential learning opportunities working with important, challenging public health issues. Dr. Taylor already had a good working knowledge of foodborne disease surveillance and outbreak investigation concepts, as well as associated risk assessment and risk communication issues. Her knowledge and skills were enhanced even further by working closely with Dr. Andy Maccabe, CDC-FDA liaison for food safety, and Dr. Olga Henao, Foodnet Team leader, at CDC.

Dr. Taylor also has excelled with her research, which focuses on enteric disease epidemiology – primarily the distribution and genotypic/ phenotypic characteristics of *E. coli* O157:H7 from human cases and cattle. She has already co-authored one published peer-reviewed paper, and is currently finalizing two first authored manuscripts – one on the research completed as part of her MRCE fellowship, and one directly resulting from her work with the FDA/CDC during her field experience. She won an award from the Association for Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine for a poster presenting of her research at the 2008 Conference of Research Workers in Animal Diseases.

Recently, Dr. Taylor was selected for the highly competitive, Epidemic Intelligence Service Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and will begin her work at the CDC after she graduates.