On the Front Line: Public Health Nurses

By Renee Frauendienst, Stearns County Public Health Division Director/CHS Administrator and Katy Kirchner, Director of Public Health, Morrison County

Ronald Reagan once said, “Some people wonder all their lives if they’ve made a difference. The Marines don’t have that problem.” He was rightfully extolling the virtues of this elite, small group of the armed forces. Marines have a specific mission. They have a purpose, and then at all costs, and without any fanfare, labor to make sure the objective is met!

While nowhere on the same scale of sacrifice as the Marines, Public Health Nurses are also an elite corps of the nursing profession. They, like the Marines, are small in size. Their area of expertise cannot be overlooked or minimized, and they too make a difference.

Public Health Nurses have the distinction of melding the values and philosophies of nursing and of public health together in an incredible and powerful force in the community. They work at all levels of intervention with individuals, families, communities, and even systems to promote the health of the community and the entire population.

This type of “warfare” is different than that of the Marines, who “are forward deployed to respond swiftly and aggressively in times of crisis.” Public Health Nurses work to prevent the crisis, to get ahead of the game, to not only respond to the person who fell into the river, but to go up stream and work with the individual, the community, and the system to prevent anyone else from falling into the river.

Douglas County Commissioner Bev Bales Named AARP "50 Over 50" Award Winner

Douglas County Commissioner Bev Bales was chosen by AARP as one of the first “50 Over 50” Minnesotans. The list celebrates the state’s most accomplished inspiring leaders toward a better tomorrow.

The list of Over 50 winners includes explorer Ann Bancroft, Famous Dave’s Dave Anderson, and 91 year old Fran Heitzman, founder of Bridging which provides furniture and more for homeless and others in poverty.

There were over 300 Nominations from where the 50 finalists were chosen. Bev received seven nominations commending her tireless dedication to efforts in the community. She has been a county commissioner for 16 years, and has contributed to improvements for senior citizen centers, veteran’s programs, food shelves and the meals on wheels program. She started Douglas County’s “Beyond the Yellow Ribbon” program which helps families of deployed military, making the county one of the first certified in the state. She also led the county to a first place victory in the National Association of Counties (NACo) “Change a Light” energy efficiency contest, getting 9000 LED bulbs for residents.

Bev has a gift of making people feel special, nominating and recognizing residents for their contributions. She has also won lots of fame for her 40 years as the “birthday lady.” In 1974 she began making daily calls to KXRA, an Alexandria-based radio station to report residents’ birthdays and anniversaries. Her list ballooned over 1000 names before she ended the tradition last year.

“There is this sense that as you get older, you’re in decline and your best days are behind you,” said Chris Farrell, who served on the selection committee. He is the author of Unretirement, which chronicles the evolution of retirement in the United States. The list celebrates the state’s most accomplished inspiring leaders over 50.

“It’s very humbling and gratifying,” said Bales of the recognition. “I know a lot of people who do a lot of wonderful things.” AARP will present the Awards in October in Minneapolis.