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Planning for the Unthinkable

In the last few months, I've had some nostalgic thoughts about my childhood in Grand Junction, Colorado, population about 20,000. Extended networks of family and friends provided a strong sense of community as I was growing up. In the much more crowded, urban environment of Contra Costa County, those networks are more fragile or even non-existent.

Participating in several pandemic influenza drills lately, I've realized how important community support is going to be if there is a pandemic.

Most of the disaster scenarios we've envisioned over the years — even a huge earthquake — would affect a relatively small portion of our county. That doesn't reduce the need to plan, but in those scenarios, we know we can count on help from the outside, from areas that aren't experiencing the calamity. We've had mutual aid systems in place for years that would allow us to get – or give – help from or to surrounding communities or even other states and countries. And for disease outbreaks such as seasonal flu and other communicable diseases, we've generally developed a range of treatments and containment measures.

A challenging problem

Pandemic flu poses a particularly challenging problem even for those of us who are accustomed to dealing with communicable diseases. The scenario for pandemic flu is that the existing H5N1 virus — presently confined to animal transmission — will undergo a genetic change that would make it transmittable from person to person.

In this age of global travel, the prediction is that the disease would spread incredibly fast to all areas of the world. The impact would be felt everywhere, so counting on help from other areas is not a reliable strategy. And there could be waves of the outbreak, stretching out over a period as long as 18 months.

What we have for our planning efforts are lessons learned from the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak, a pandemic that killed 20-40 million people worldwide. We know that — unlike seasonal flu — that pandemic killed healthy middle-aged and younger people as well as

the frail and elderly. We also believe that communities that acted early to reduce transmission by home isolation and increased use of hand washing seem to fare better.

The disruption to society during that pandemic was significant. Researchers have pointed out that as access to food became difficult and many people died, the fabric of society was severely strained.

What we'd face

There are a number of factors that complicate our situation should we confront a pandemic. The population is much more dense and mobile than it was in 1918, making transmission more likely. Many businesses have gone to just-in-time inventory methods, meaning they have only a few days of product on hand. If their employees are ill and absent, our supplies of food and other important items could be compromised.

In April and May, I participated with a large number of our partners in two pandemic flu tabletop exercises. Many questions came up during those exercises about how we will respond when we can't rely on mutual aid and are likely to have no vaccine or insufficient antivirals. We also acknowledged that our health facilities, which are often at capacity during regular flu season, would be swamped, with not enough intensive care capacity or ventilators to meet the needs.

During our tabletop exercise with the school community, we talked about what the impact

Continued next page



Dr. Walker

DID YOU KNOW

Ambulance services contracted by our Emergency Medical Services Division respond to more than **70,000** emergency calls a year..

would be if state officials closed all California schools — for as long as 12 weeks — when the first case was confirmed in the state.

Working with partners

Although there may be no complete answers for some of these questions, we know we must continue to plan for the unthinkable — which experts are sure will someday be a reality. This planning and continued vigilance may have to go on for years and we will have to battle the short attention span we all have for any kind of planning for a future disaster.

I am convinced that we must press on, in our workplace, our own homes and our communities, to avoid social chaos.


As a health department, we have made tremendous strides in building our community, strengthening our partnerships with the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, the County Office of Education, local cities, law enforcement, hospitals and others. I am heartened by that collaboration because it means that during a crisis, we will be familiar with each other and can work effectively to serve the community.

Individual and community efforts

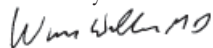
As individuals, we can ensure that our family disaster plan and supplies are in place. Think about what you'll do with your own children if schools close for months and how your community can help parents who are needed in hospitals, law enforcement and other essential services. That is critical for us as disaster service workers because we will all be expected to roll up our sleeves and help in whatever way is necessary.

In our neighborhoods and communities, we will have to organize and support each other in ways we've never imagined, to create those networks some of us remember from the past. Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) are an excellent vehicle for establishing trained grassroots supporters.

Our Public Health staff — including Francie Wise, Kim Cox and the Health Emergency Response Unit — will continue their efforts to develop and exercise a comprehensive pandemic flu plan. All of us need to find ways to keep this at least on the "simmer" burner. I know that's a challenge since many of us are already stressed trying to maintain normal functions, but we must continue our preparedness efforts.

 For information about what it means to be a disaster service worker and how to prepare yourself and your family for pandemic flu and other disasters, visit chealth.org

Sincerely




William Walker, MD

Ideas Sought to Fund Benefits

Several months ago I told you how smoothly the budget process had gone this year, but warned that the issue of funding retiree health benefits looms large because Contra Costa has a much higher burden for many more employees than most other counties. The Board of Supervisors has now begun what I'm sure will be a very long and difficult discussion about how to handle the issue. Recently, the Board heard a report from its OPEB, or Other Post Employment Benefits work group. The group identified three funding sources for the liability, including resources available for transfer without reducing benefits or service levels, reducing or changing benefits and/or reducing service levels or program cuts. The Board did not make a decision about specific funding strategies, but they did authorize the County Administrator to begin an employee outreach and education campaign and to solicit ideas from employees. I will keep you posted as this discussion continues. You are encouraged to email concerns and ideas to opeb@cao.cccounty.us – WW

New Employee Emergency Line, Info Card in Use

When a disaster hits, all public employees are considered Disaster Service Workers (DSW) and are required to report to work as soon as their families and homes are safe and secure. To find out where to report, employees are instructed to call a main number, and now that number – 866-946-9911 – is toll free. New wallet size employee emergency cards are available with the new number, a description of the role of a DSW and information about what to do during bomb scares, building evacuations and other disasters.

 Contact Fowzia Younos at 313-6823 for supplies of the new card.

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the September edition is August 13. Publicize your upcoming events and successes by sending information to Dan Smith at 597 Center Avenue, Suite 255, Martinez 94553, fax 925-313-6219, email: dsmith@hsd.cccounty.us The Director's Report is available online at chealth.org and on iSite, our intranet, at cchs.

Meals on Wheels Delivers Emergency Packs

Nearly 1,000 Meals on Wheels Program participants countywide served by the Public Health Division's Senior Nutrition Program will each receive an emergency meal package this summer. The E-Pack contains six nutritious, high quality, shelf stable meals to sustain residents when a disaster prevents regular Meals on Wheels deliveries. The program's two Public Health Nutritionists, Kathy Jackson Moore and Jackie Winfield, will visit participants' homes to deliver the first E-Packs and provide a one-on-one orientation and assistance in selecting an appropriate storage location. Program Operations Manager Liz Vargas led the E-Pack design project. All new Meals on Wheels Program participants will receive an E-Pack, which will be replaced every six months, at which time program participants can consume the meals from their previous E-Pack. The \$48,000 annual cost for the project is funded by contributions and foundation grants received by Meals on Wheels of Contra Costa, Inc. The organization is a charitable nonprofit that recently celebrated two milestones: subsidizing more than 1 million meals delivered to homebound Contra Costa elders and raising more than \$2 million since 1990 to provide the meals.



For more information contact Paul Kraitz at pkraitz@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-646-9143.



Public Health Nutritionists, from left, Jackie Winfield and Kathy Jackson Moore deliver E-Packs to homes in Contra Costa.

Division Recruiting Registered Environmental Health Specialists

To meet the urgent need for qualified applicants to fill positions for Registered Environmental Specialists and Environmental Health Trainees, our Environmental Health Division (EHD) is targeting college students on campuses in the northern part of the state. Besides written information, EHD offers ride-alongs for students that have shown an interest in the field. Led by Diana Kato, Supervising Environmental Health Specialist, and her staff, the project is paying off, with seven more specialists this year. With the help of the County's Human Resources Analyst Teji O'Malley, recent recruitment for the EH Trainee yielded more than 150 applicants and a steady stream of Registered EHS I/II applications have been submitted in the last several months. EHD anticipates filling the remaining five open positions for Registered EH Specialists and Trainees in the near future.



For more information, contact Diana Kato at 925-646-5225, ext. 221.



CCHS Staff Shine at Annual Art Show

Ann Loflin (right) shows off her artistic talent with sand and shells along with about 40 other CCHS staff during the second annual "Healthcare Workers as Creators: An Evening of Art on the Courtyard" June 7 at CCRMC. To see more photos, visit iSite, the department intranet. For more information about the program, email Paul Sarvasy at psarvasy@sbcglobal.net

Free Tax Preparation Program has Record Year

Earn It, Keep It, Save It (EKS), a Contra Costa partnership program, this year helped a record-breaking number of families and individuals file taxes and receive their owed tax refunds. Staffed by volunteers, EKS helped more than 2,000 low to moderate-income families this year receive more than a total of \$2.4 million in tax refunds and credits. Only 68 volunteers participated in the program, a 30% drop from the previous year. The 68 volunteers included four CCHS employees: J. Deirdre Tolbert, Felicia Walls, Barbara Barton and Francine Davis. EKS is a project of the Family Economic Security Partnership, a public, private and nonprofit collaboration including CCHS, Contra Costa Employment and Human Services Department, United Way of the Bay Area, First Five Contra Costa, Internal Revenue Service and East Bay Community Foundation.



For more information, contact program manager Lloyd Madden at Lmadden@ehsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-1736.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Margarita Allen

Interpreter

Health Care Interpreter Network

For her ongoing high quality interpretive services. She is skillful, compassionate and thorough when interpreting for Spanish-speaking prenatal patients on a variety of sensitive psychosocial issues. Our patients and staff are lucky to have her.

— Nominated by Linda Wise

Maria Banales

Certified Medical Assistant

Richmond Health Center

For always taking time and providing exceptional loving care to all our patients and for her willingness and patience to help with a smiling face all the time.

— Nominated by Lolly Bhandal

Felix Box

Experienced Clerk

Homeless Program

For working tirelessly on a project that was not part of her regular responsibilities — she knew the job had to get done for a deadline — and for showing she is part of a team with a strong commitment to the program.

— Nominated by Cynthia Belon

Nora Carmenate

Counselor

CCHP Member Services

For assisting with and calming down a mother who locked herself out of her apartment, leaving her baby who was just released from the hospital inside. She stayed on the phone and helped the mother by making several calls to her family and neighbors.

— Nominated by Lenell Anderson

Dr. Martha Corcoran

Martinez Health Center

For continuously going above and beyond to afford me the best possible health care. She treats me like a 'person' and has called me on her own time to discuss medical issues.

— Nominated by a patient

Janet Gordon

Clinic Coordinator

Concord Adult Outpatient Clinic

Jeannie DeTomas

Secretary

Mental Health Administration

Erika Barrow

Clerical Supervisor

Adult Mental Health

For being a vital part of the planning, organizing and helping the mental health staff with the Suicide Assessment and Risk Management Conference. They all did a wonderful job.

— Nominated by Susan Moore

Juleine Latteri

Secretary

Emergency Medical Services

For her suggestion to add information about employees' Disaster Service Worker role to the CCHS Employee Emergency Wallet card.

— Nominated by Kim Cox

Yvette Mesa

Interpreter

Health Care Interpreter Network

For her ongoing high quality interpretive services. She interprets for Spanish-speaking prenatal patients with an upbeat attitude, sensitivity and joy in her work. We benefit from her skill.

— Nominated by Linda Wise

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Alana Sumblor

*Senior Level Clerk
CCRMC Specialty Clinic*

For sitting with a patient and generously helping him to reinstate his Basic Adult Care so he could get the medicine he needed.

— Nominated by Linda Nakell and Patricia Reed

Graciela Vaquerano

*Financial Counselor
Finance Division*

For being very helpful and caring about the patients, going the extra mile, and helping Social Workers to understand the process.

— Nominated by Jackie Levin

Cathy Willson

*Specialist Level Clerk
Appointment Unit*

For being kind, patient and gentle, making a huge difference in the way the patients and nurses feel. She is the ultimate role model for professionalism, teamwork, continuity of care and customer service. If there were an award for “ultimate service excellence,” Cathy should surely receive it.

— Nominated by all CCHP Advice Nurses

Marina Rowoldt

*Public Health Nutritionist
Public Health*

For providing excellent nutrition education with empathy and understanding of parents wanting to feed their children healthy food.

— Nominated by Mary Jane Kiefer

Trina Ruffin

*Senior Level Clerk
Pittsburg WIC*

For always going the extra mile providing referrals for services needed by the client.

— Nominated by Mary Jane Kiefer

Maria May

*Clerk-Specialist
Pittsburg WIC*

For always helping people feel welcome with her smile, can-do attitude and kindness.

— Nominated by Mary Jane Kiefer

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Robert J. Harrison, Jenny V. Jennings, Sheila C. Conkle, Carolyn E. Smith, Martha A. Martinez, Vidya Raman, Christine A. Giles, Wilfredo Perez, Grace S. Ma, Leslie A. Dones, Jon E. Stenson, Sarina B. Martell, Kevin J. Corrigan, Lupe M. Gutierrez, John F. Higgins, Prescilla I. Tantoco, Juliette A. Kelley, Cleo L. Patzer-Alvarado, Tambra Gutierrez, Jerry H. Yoshioka, Edwardo R. Nazareno (10 years); Dawn M. Wadle, Ann E. McDaniel, Shirley A. Ennes, Frank J. Beasley, Loraine Coleman (15 years); Ogo S. Mbanugo, Cynthia A. Ashbrook, Victoria A. Fidel, Michael S. Anderson, Mila P. Leynes, Vern L. Wallace (20 years); Kenneth J. Salonen, Rao Parvataneni, Sharon L. Funk, Katherine Heinen, Soo In Lee (25 years); Stephanie Lobato, Charles Berletti, Cynthia Shelby (30 years); Bette Lucey and Dorothy Haynes (35 years).

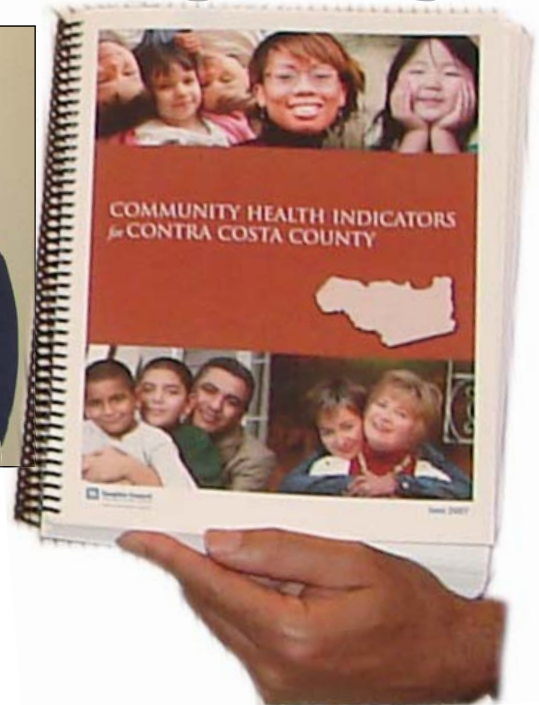
Do you know someone who's going the extra mile?

To recognize a CCHS employee, vendor or volunteer for outstanding Service Excellence performance, submit the “Going the Extra Mile” commendation form, available from every CCHS Division Director, or email your commendation to ServiceEX@hds.co.contra-costa.ca.us or fax it to 925-313-6219. The form can also be downloaded from the Internet (About Us page) or iSite, our Intranet.

Reducing Health Disparities



Our Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation unit is, from left, Chuck McKetney, Jennifer Lifsbay, Jennifer June Balogh, Ken Knight and Debbie Casanova.



Eleven cities featured New Community Health Indicators Report Issued


Our Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation (CHAPE) group released the new *Community Health Indicators in Contra Costa County* report in July, updating the old report, which was released in August 2004.

The report describes selected community health indicators for specific cities and places in Contra Costa County and highlights what health disparities exist in the county. The 11 cities featured in the report were chosen either because they were the largest cities in the county or they had a disproportionately large number of health disparities. Using information from the 2000 Census, birth and death certificates as well as various other information sources from 2002 to 2004, the report includes new information about HIV, infant mortality, prenatal care, oral health, cancer incidence, suicide and self-inflicted injury. There's also a section with Frequently Asked Questions, an index, and a Quick Start Guide, which describes how to retrieve the information from all the tables in the report.

While Contra Costa County is doing better overall than the rest of the state, there are still regional and ethnic disparities that must be addressed. Commenting on the fact that most of the indicators are similar to the last report, Chuck McKetney, CHAPE Director, says it's not realistic to expect dramatic changes in only two years. "Many of the diseases that we describe are chronic diseases and take years to influence. And since the population is getting older, chronic disease will continue to be an issue."

One of the biggest problems the report highlights is the inequity in health outcomes for low-income residents of color. African-Americans, in particular, have a higher, age-adjusted death rate from all causes compared to all county residents. In addition, they are five times more likely to die from homicide, and almost two times more likely to die of prostate cancer.

The report will be presented to the Hospital Council of Northern and Central California, which funded the project, and Chuck will be doing presentations for Divisions and others interesting in the report.

 The report and an Executive Summary is available online at cchealth.cccounty.us to arrange for presentations or for more information. Contact Chuck McKetney at 925-313-6171 or email cmcketney@bsd.cccounty.us

New Report Outlines Efforts to Improve Children's Oral Health

Our Children's Oral Health Program and the Dental Health Action Group have released a new report about efforts to improve the oral health of Contra Costa children and what still needs to be done about the silent epidemic of dental disease. *Healthy Teeth for Life: The Oral Health of Children in Contra Costa County* is the culmination of seven years of work and is intended to raise awareness about the issue and provide a tool for local action. Dental disease is five times more common than asthma. Of 13,304 preschool and elementary school children screened by the Children's Oral Health Program during the 2005-06 school year in Contra Costa, 12% of the children had serious dental disease and needed urgent or emergency dental treatment. Another 16% had less serious dental decay, but still needed to see a dentist soon. Padmini Parthasarathy, Senior Health Education Specialist with our Family, Maternal and Child Health Programs (FMCH), was the main author with significant contributions from Lynn Pilant, recently retired Manager of the Children's Oral Health Programs, and Program Specialist Lorena Martinez-Ochoa, also with FMCH.



Left to right, Lynn Pilant and Padmini Parthasarathy show off the new 'Healthy Teeth for Life' report.



The report is available online at www.cchealth.org/services/dental or for more information, call Padmini Parthasarathy at 925-313-6178.

More Inspections on Tap for Environmental Health

Our Environmental Health Division is implementing new provisions of the State Health and Safety Code (Cal Code) that came into effect July 1. Cal Code replaces the existing California Retail Food Facilities Law covering food safety issues that has been in effective since 1985. Among other changes, Cal Code requires skilled nursing facilities and general acute care facilities to comply with food handling permit and inspection requirements that apply to other retail food facilities. These new provisions will require many more inspections by our staff, who have been preparing for their new responsibilities by conducting field surveys of the 43 affected facilities in the county. As a result, staff learned about the facilities and established good working relationships with facility owners and operators.



For more information, contact Diana Kato at 925-646-5225, ext. 221.

Safety Training Available Online

The County's Risk Management Unit has safety courses available online on the County's intranet. Courses include Ergonomics; Health Services Safety and Infection Control Review; Back and Lifting Safety; and Injury Illness and Prevention. Employees must get approval from a supervisor to take an online course during work time. Continuous registration is available via the Risk Management website at http://intranet.contra-costa.org/depart/risk_management/. Click on "On-line/On-site Training" then on "Workshop/Program" and just scroll down until you get to your desired course. Allow at least one hour for training.



More information is available from Bob Stit at bstit@ti.cccounty.us or by phone at 925-646-1306.

Healthy Outlook Column Covers Asthma, Allergies

Dr. Stephen Daniels writes about how to cope with allergies and asthma during the allergy season in a recent installment of our "Healthy Outlook" column, which runs in the Contra Costa Newspapers chain. Wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath are associated with asthma. Common symptoms of allergies include itchy and watery nose and eyes, sneezing and sinus congestion. Generally, the most effective and safest medicines for both nasal allergies and asthma are the prescription steroid inhalers. Some steroid inhalers take hours or days to work, so to get the most from your inhaler: use them early, before severe symptoms develop; take them regularly around the clock (according to your doctor's instructions) regardless of your symptoms; and don't stop taking them right away when your symptoms improve. Consult your doctor before beginning or changing any medicine.



Dr. Stephen Daniels



To read more of this and other Healthy Outlook columns, visit cchealth.org and click on the Healthy Outlook link in Items of Interest or on the Publications page.

Pittsburg Health Center Expands

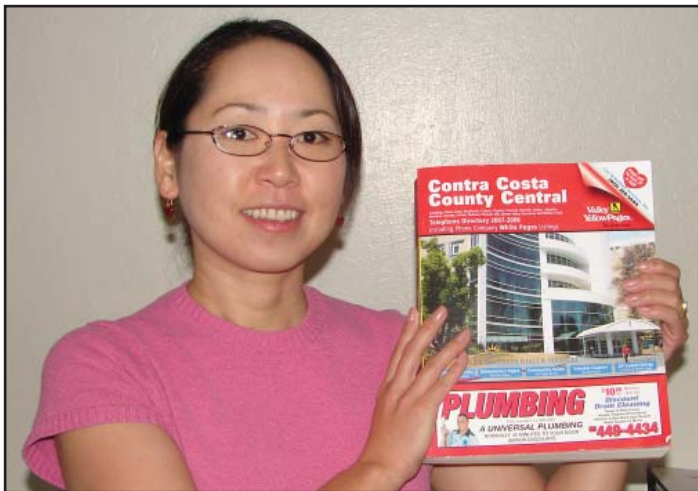
A new 15 exam-room suite is scheduled to open this summer on the second floor of our existing Pittsburg Health Center, 2311 Loveridge Road. Included in the new space is a cast room to support a very busy orthopedics clinic, a sigmoidoscopy room for colon cancer screening, and significant expansion of the Center's Medical Records capacity. Adding the screening room will help PHC in its attempt, along with our other Health Centers, to get residents over 50 years old screened for colon cancer. When fully staffed, the buildout should allow the ability to see an additional 20,000 visits (primary care and specialty) per year. Some of the funding for the project, located at what was once Los Medanos Community Hospital, came from the Healthcare District. Congratulations to Clinic Coordinator Waynette Mason and Clinical Services Manager Nancy McCoy for their work with the architects and contractor and to Clerical Supervisor Sylvia Elizarraraz for her knowledge and expertise in the procurement phase of the project.



Waynette Mason, Nancy McCoy and Sylvia Elizarraraz, left to right, review construction plans in the new nursing station at the Pittsburg Health Center.

CCRMC Wins National Award

The National Association of Public Hospitals (NAPH) presented CCRMC with its Safety Net award at NAPH's annual meeting in June for achievement in improving patient safety. Of the more than 100 member hospitals, CCRMC was singled out as the sole recipient of this award. CCHS Director Dr. William Walker was in Boston attending the conference and reported that Contra Costa was mentioned many times for being a leader in improving patient safety. CCRMC was recognized for the System Redesign project, led by Dr. Steve Tremain and Anna Roth, to establish dedicated time and space for acquiring knowledge of best practices about process improvement and applying them to clinical processes. As part of the project, a System Redesign Model was developed and utilized to evaluate and prioritize internal strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement in our organization. The project has produced dramatic outcomes: Surgical infections for total joint replacements dropped from 24% to 5%; time to aspirin and EKG for patients with chest pain from one hour to 10 minutes; unreconciled medications on admittance from 47% to 7%; deaths from cardiopulmonary arrests on medical surgical care units from seven in 2005 to zero in 2006; and ventilator associated pneumonias from 10% in 2004 to 1.5% in 2006.



Shizuko Angel, CCHS Web Developer, walks in front of CCRMC in the cover photo of the Valley Yellow Pages.

CCRMC Photos – in the Phone Book

If you haven't seen the Valley Yellow pages for Central Contra Costa County, you're missing an amazing number of profiles and the front cover photo of Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. Among the departments featured are the Cancer program, Emergency, Imaging and much more. The information campaign is sponsored by the Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation and spearheaded by Board member Barry Collins. All the space, including a letter from both Foundation President Dick Blair and CCHS Director William Walker, was donated. If you can't find a phone book, you can see the profiles on the CCRMC page on our website (cchealth.org) – a new one is posted every few weeks.

Mental Health Vocational Program Lauded

Our Mental Health Vocational Services Program was recognized recently by the Board of Supervisors for being the most successful one in California. The program has also been selected by the State Department of Rehabilitation to train other county vocational services programs in assisting mental health and dually diagnosed consumers to obtain meaningful employment. Vocational Services Coordinator John Hollender and his team – including Beth Hanis, Yvonne Farr, Gretchen Burt, Thomas McAinley, Leticia Wiesner, Shanda Schmitz, Lisa Degroot, Elena Eagan, Candice Toyoda, David Woodland and Linda Davis – serve more than 300 clients a year and deserve kudos for their commitment and outcomes.