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Florida Public Health units focus on prevention *National Public Health Week April 3-9*



Barbara Locke, the administrator of the Florida Department of Health units in Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties

Story and Photos

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TRI-COUNTY AREA -- April 3 through 9, the Florida Department of Health is recognizing the people who provide services to the people of Florida.

Barbara Locke, the administrator of the Florida Department of Health units in Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties, spent time on Friday discussing some of the many aspects of the department in this part of Florida.

The Mission, Vision and Values of the Florida Department of Health are

MISSION

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county, and community efforts.

VISION

To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

VALUES (I CARE)

Innovation: We search for creative solutions and manage resources wisely.

Collaboration: We use teamwork to achieve common goals & solve problems.

Accountability: We perform with integrity & respect.

Responsiveness: We achieve our mission by serving our customers and engaging our partners.

Excellence: We promote quality outcomes through learning and continuous performance improvement.

Among the people who serve the public health interests of the state in the Tri-County Area are

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Administrator Locke, Nursing Director Elizabeth Powers, Environmental Health Manager Wesley Asbell, Health Educator Consultant Kyle Roberts, Business Manager Rochelle Hartley, Medical Provider ARNP Marinda Norton, Dental Provider Ferishta Faqeer, DMD, and Preparedness and Response Planner Mark Johnson.

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There are a wide range of public health programs, clinical programs, community programs and other services available to people through the three units.

In Dixie County, the address is 149 N.E. 241st St. in Cross City. The phone number there is 352-498-1360. The website is <http://dixie.floridahealth.gov/>.

In Gilchrist County, the address is 119 N.E. First St. in Trenton. The phone number is 352-463-3120. The website is <http://gilchrist.floridahealth.gov/>.

In Levy County, the address is 66 W. Main St. (Martin Luther King St.) in Bronson. The phone number is 352-486-5300. The website is <http://levy.floridahealth.gov/>.

The normal business hours for all three offices are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

During her interview Friday, Locke mentioned that public health is always active, however people usually think about the department only when there is a disaster like a hurricane or tornado that affects a lot of people.

Another disastrous event that draws attention to the public health department is when there is a mosquito-borne virus such as Zika in the news.

Really, the people involved with public health are in the background working daily to prevent those and other disasters when they can, Locke said.

The saying that “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” still holds true today, she said.

Back in the 1980s, the Florida Health Department became involved with primary healthcare, she said. This is tending to patients’ needs in relation to acute and episodic care.

Former Florida Surgeon General Dr. John Armstrong decided that should not be the role of the Health Department.

Celeste Philip, M.D., was appointed by Gov. Rick Scott as Surgeon General and Secretary of the Florida Department of Health on May 18, 2016.

She is continuing with Dr. Armstrong’s choice to make communities healthier.

Dr. Philip served as the interim Surgeon General and prior to that as the Deputy Secretary for Health and Deputy State Health Officer for Children’s Medical Services.

“Her focus is on children,” Locke said.

Another focus for the department statewide, Locke said, is known as “health equity.”

This means that every person must have an equal opportunity to achieve the best health possible for themselves. One area where the department is seeking to help all people reach that goal is to remove barriers from being in front of people so that they may become healthier.

Preventing one million heart attacks and strokes over a five-year period is one aspect of this public health idea.

A Florida Department of Health program titled “Million Hearts.” This is part of a nationwide effort.

To support people in their health care needs, community health workers can

- TEACH community members that they need to get screened for high blood pressure and cholesterol. Most of the time, people at risk do not feel sick and are not aware they have these conditions.
- TEACH community members to ask for and know their blood pressure and cholesterol numbers and to know what healthy levels should be.
- ENCOURAGE community members to ask their doctor what their goals should be for blood pressure and cholesterol.
- TEACH community members how important it is for them to control their blood pressure

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and cholesterol.

- TEACH community members that uncontrolled high blood pressure and cholesterol can damage their eyes, kidneys, heart, blood vessels, and brain. High blood pressure can also lead to chronic kidney failure requiring dialysis.
- TEACH community members that high blood pressure and cholesterol will put them at high risk for heart attack, heart failure, and stroke.
- HELP community members who have diabetes understand the importance of controlling the disease and regularly taking their diabetes medications.
- INTRODUCE community members to social workers and others who can help them apply for programs and insurance that can help pay for health care.



Health Educator Consultant Kyle Roberts

KYLE ROBERTS

Locke said one of the members of the Tri-County Area's units of the Florida Department of Health who is bringing all three counties together is Kyle Roberts.

He is working with community leaders and partners to create a community health improvement plan.

One aspect of looking at health issues, he said is smoking rates of children in middle and high schools, and up into the adult population.

Adult dental care for lower income residents is a goal, he said.

The environmental strengths for public health – such as walking trails and parks are a strong positive aspect in this area, he said. Promoting outdoor recreation is a goal to help improve public health, he said.

Roberts said the Florida Department of Health wants to increase access to mental health in the Tri-County Area, as well as to increase access to cancer treatment.

In regard to prevention, Locke mentioned the Dixie County unit of the Florida Department of Health recently had a mobile mammography machine from a company in Tallahassee that was available for women to use in Cross City at the end of February.

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This provided mammograms for 25 women who Locke said probably would not have made the trip to Gainesville for that examination.

It was the first time in Cross City, Locke said, and results from being part of a program to help fight breast and cervical cancer.

The Tri-County Area has a program for women between the ages of 50 and 64 years, who do not have insurance and who are in a certain economic strata, Locke said.

“They can come here and get a checkup,” Locke said, “and get referred for a mammogram for free – no co-pay. This is a great program that has been around for at least eight years.”

Locke mentioned another of the many programs available in Levy County is the Medical Reserve Corps clinic.

This service is the last Wednesday of every month. The Levy County Health Department, she added, continues to need volunteers from the medical profession or from the non-medical realm to help with this project.

The phone number to call to start the process to volunteer to help the Levy County unit is 352-486-5300.

Another prevention program is named Healthiest Weight.

The easiest resource to learn all about this is to visit the website by clicking [HERE](#).

Locke, Roberts and Johnson spoke at length about the many manners in which the Florida Department of Health’s units in the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties help individuals and whole communities in this part of Florida.

Monday (April 3) through Sunday (April 9) is National Public Health Week. This year the Florida Department of Health in the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties is highlighting its many programs – and urging people to think about preventative lifestyles.

For the people who use tobacco, try to stop. For the people who are overweight, try to reduce weight through adopting healthier lifestyles.

The Florida Department of Health provides health help for everyone. To learn more about the Florida Department of Health, click [HERE](#).

The current Florida Surgeon General is Dr. Celeste Philip.