

## 56th Annual USPHS Symposium Opening Day Events

Contributing Authors: CDR Katie Jacques, PT, DPT, OCS, CAHA, LT Austin Van Horn PharmD, BCPS, and the "Surgeon General's Own," USPHS Music Ensemble

### Surgeon General's 5K

It has been another successful year for the Surgeon General's 5K race. Over 350 runners and walkers participated at the Tulsa River West Festival Park and another few hundred participants virtually across the country. The planning team wanted to make another successful year with as much officer investment as possible, so we once again asked officers to submit their own t-shirt and logo designs. We then sent the best designs to a graphic designer who combined them to create the final image. This process enabled us to provide this year's participants with a piece of quality USPHS swag. We were also extremely happy to return to awarding medals to the top male and female finishers in each of seven age categories this year, making this race even more engaging than last year! Congratulations to our first-place male and female athletes, Lance Pittman and Lily Richardson. Thank you to RADM Denise Hinton, Deputy Surgeon General, and RDML Richard Schobitz, Director of Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ), for cheering and greeting officers at the finish line. This event was a success again thanks to LT Austin Van Horn and the efforts of the planning team, CDR Matthew Ellis, LT Samora



At the finish line of the SG 5K, first place winner Lance Pittman gives a high five to second place runner and COA board member, Kurt Kesteloot.

Casimir, LCDR Bryan Anderson, CDR Rachele Green, LCDR Kayla Dewitt, and LCDR Jen Eng.

### The First Ever USPHS Mascot

During the 2022 Scientific and Training Symposium in Glendale, Arizona, COF was approached about sponsoring the adoption of a dog to be the first ever USPHS mascot. This project to bring a mascot to USPHS, Project Koop, named after past Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, was brought to fruition after a year of coordination and collaboration between Warrior Canine Connection (WCC), the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF), Commissioned Corps

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from the  
Executive  
Director



Jacqueline Rychnovsky,  
PhD, FAANP, CAE  
Captain (Ret.), Nurse Corps, US Navy

So much was extraordinary about the 56th Annual Scientific & Training Symposium and I am pleased to share numerous highlights with you in this special edition of Frontline. Being that our meeting was held in Oklahoma, we had unprecedented support from our tribal partners at the Choctaw Nation (Platinum), Cherokee and Chickasaw Nation (Gold), and Osage Nation (Double Silver). Their support, along with a record-breaking number of industry sponsors and exhibitors, contributed to the overwhelming success of the meeting.

Before the meeting began, I was able to spend a day connecting with my enrolled tribe, the Osage Nation. As a small girl, I knew that my father was a member of the Osage Nation. I spent many weekends in Pawhuska, Oklahoma at my great aunt and uncle's cattle ranch. When I was 11 years old, I had a pen pal, a 90+ year old distant Osage relative, Oliver William Trumbly (1882-1978). It was not until Senator Daniel K. Inouye, (D-HI), during my Capitol Hill fellowship in 2009, asked me why I had not

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# COA Member Benefits

## Capitol Hill Representation

Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active, former, reserve, and retired

## Local Representation

COA Local Branches provide venues for meeting fellow officers and a forum for the discussion of issues within the Commissioned Corps

## Newsletter

Newsletter reports on monthly activities and items of interest of COA and the USPHS Commissioned Corps

## Ribbon

Authorized to be worn on the USPHS uniform by members in good standing when attending COA functions

## Insurance Programs

Low-cost insurance programs that may continue as long as your membership in COA remains current

## USF Online Programs

Discounted degree and certificate programs like PhD, DrPH, MPH, MSPH, and MHA

## NYMC Online MPH

50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

## Scholarship Programs

College scholarships for children, grandchildren, and spouses of COA members and high school seniors

## The Ohio State University

In-state tuition for graduate nursing and certification programs

## CPH Exam Discount

Deep member discount and free study guide for Certified in Public Health (CPH) Exam

# PHS COF Coin Contest Winner

This article is meant to make a correction to the original article in the April edition of Frontline (page 8). The original article cited the incorrect winner of the contest. The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) is proud to announce the winner of the 2023 Symposium Coin Contest. The coin was designed by LCDR Michael McSherry. LCDR McSherry, a communications team lead with Phoenix Indian Medical Center, incorporated the

USPHS seal and this year's symposium theme *In Service of Health: Boots on the Ground for a Healthy Nation*. After selling the coins at the 56th Annual Symposium, we still have some left. The coins can be purchased at next year's symposium in Jacksonville, Florida (June 24-27, 2024). If you would like to purchase one sooner, please email Dave Corrigan at [dcorrigan@coausphs.org](mailto:dcorrigan@coausphs.org). We look forward to all the unique designs for next year's symposium



The advertisement is a vertical banner. At the top, there are three panels: "HEALTH" showing two women, "WELLNESS" showing a person on a rock, and "TRADITION" showing a person with a bowl. Below these is a large gear graphic with a cross in the center. The main text reads "FORT DEFIANCE INDIAN HOSPITAL BOARD, INC." in large white letters on a teal background. Below that, it says "Fort Defiance, Arizona Navajo Nation". At the bottom, there is a website URL "www.fdihb.org/careers" and social media handles for Instagram (@fdihbinc), Facebook (@tsehootsooi), and Twitter (@fdihbinc). A tagline at the very bottom reads "To provide superior and compassionate healthcare to our community by raising the level of health, Hózhó and quality of life."





# Tour of Historic Greenwood-Black Wall Street

by CDR Akara Ingram, MPH, BSN, RN

Imagine, a prosperous and thriving Black commercial district where nearly 10,000 Black residents owned their own businesses such as banks, a luxury theater, grocery stores, libraries, and much more. An area, prior to the Civil War, which held one of the most affluent African American communities in the United States. Such a place once existed but was violently destroyed in 1921. This neighborhood known as Greenwood within Tulsa, Oklahoma.

As noted in many areas of the United States, there was a spike in racial tensions and white supremacy after World War I. Blacks were often faced with violence that destroyed homes, neighborhoods, and families all while simply trying to live their day-to-day lives. Greenwood, which later became known as Black Wall Street, was no different.

The Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG) supports the Office of the Surgeon General's initiatives, to include fostering social connection. What better way to create an opportunity for social connection while bringing exposure to an important part of history, than to offer this experience to the USPHS officers while at the USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium. BCOAG, along with the Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF), worked to organize and offer this tour to all who were interested.

During the 2023 Symposium, a total of seven tours were arranged, led by a local guide named Terry Baccus. Terry is a lifelong devoted resident of Tulsa and a sovereign citizen of the Muskogee Creek Nation. As many of the 250 officers who attended the tour would agree, Terry is passionate about the history of Greenwood and serves as an historian for the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce.

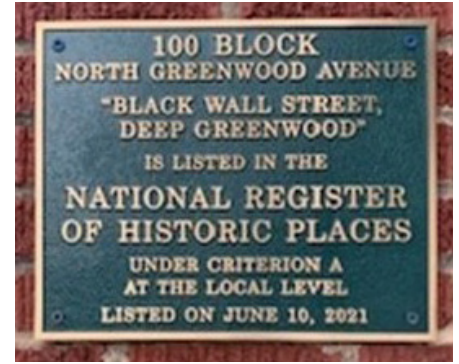
During the tour, we learned about the before, during, and after events that led to this horrific historic event. From the events that occurred on May 30, 1921 with the false accusations of the young Black teenager named Dick Rowland

which placed him at risk to be lynched; to the June 1st events that lead to over 1,200 burnt homes, 215 looted homes, and the burning of businesses, churches and libraries, over 35 city blocks, by angry white Tulsans (some who were deputized); to the fact that after the Massacre, all the charges against Dick Rowland were dropped, thus solidifying that the false accusations were part of a larger plan. Although Black Tulsans worked to rebuild, the increase in segregation, refusal of insurance companies to pay for the losses, and the strength of the [then] newly formed Klu Klux Klan made it virtually impossible. Over the years, there were many coverups that occurred, with some denying the events took place. Local Black Tulsans felt the rebuilding of Black Wall Street was destroyed a second time, with the urban renewal due to the Federal-Aid Highway Acts of 1965 and 1968. Scholars and historians fought (and continue to fight) to bring awareness to this event but often to no avail. In June 2021, 100 years after the atrocities, Greenwood Ave was finally listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Even though an estimated 100-300 people were killed and more than 8,000 people were left homeless in less than a 24-hour timeframe, Black Tulsans were not kept down. Greatness has come out of Tulsa, Oklahoma such as the creation of the GAP Band and our very own, Dr. George Lythcott.

The GAP (Greenwood, Archer, Pine) Band is known for their 1970s and 1980s American Rhythm and Blues (R&B) and funk music, which started in Tulsa. The GAP Band was named after the streets in the historic Greenwood Neighborhood. They are best known for songs such as "Outstanding", "You Dropped A Bomb On Me," "Yearning For Your Love," and "Oops Up Side Your Head".

But the one person that arose to greatness that is near and dear to the heart of US Public Health Service was Dr. George Lythcott. Dr. Lythcott was born in Manhattan, New York and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. RADM George I. Lythcott, M.D. (1918-1995) was a former Assistant



National Register of Historic Places designation plaque for Black Wall Street.



Dr. George Lythcott's remembrance stone.

Commissioner of Health in New York City. As Assistant Commissioner of Health, RADM Lythcott was in charge of the Health Department's Bureau of Schoolchildren's and Adolescent Health. RADM Lythcott was appointed as an Assistant Surgeon General and administrator of the Health Services Administration in the Department of Health and Human Services in 1977 by President Jimmy Carter. RADM Lythcott was an exceptional public servant who in the 1960s helped West African countries eradicate smallpox and measles. BCOAG

see **BLACK WALL STREET** continued on page 7

# 2023 COA Awards

by CDR Kurt Kesteloot, PE, BCEE, CPH and LCDR Melissa Reyes, MD

During the annual Commissioned Officers Association (COA) membership meeting on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, the COA Awards Committee co-chair, CDR Kurt Kesteloot, and COA's Board Chair, CDR Kristie Purdy, presented the 2023 COA awards to the recipients in the audience. This year's awards are as follows:



COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's Branch Leader of the Year Award to LCDR Shayne Gallaway.

## Local Branch Leader – LCDR Michael Shayne Gallaway

This award recognizes excellence in contributions to the COA local branches, service to the association, and to the members thereof. It is presented to a member on the executive committee of a local branch.

LCDR Michael “Shayne” Gallaway served as president and vice-president during the 2021-2022 operational year and nearly single-handedly reactivated the Phoenix COA Branch subsequent to a two-year dormancy. LCDR Gallaway conducted a needs assessment for the officers. He re-established recurring meetings using a virtual platform and recruited five officers to lead COA initiatives. During a time of low morale and healthcare worker burnout, he coordinated 10 community



COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's Small Branch of the Year Award to Southwest Oklahoma COA.

volunteer opportunities with 94 officers participating, including activities emphasizing the Surgeon General's initiatives for suicide and opioid overdose prevention. LCDR Gallaway restored communication channels, established scholarships for officers to attend the 2022 Commissioned Officers Foundation Symposium, and led the charge to improve opportunities for officers in the Phoenix area by establishing partnerships with nearby COA local branches. LCDR Gallaway is proudly recognized for his exceptional leadership and dedication to the COA.

## Small Branch – Southwest Oklahoma Branch

This award is presented to a local branch with 60 or fewer members for their exceptional accomplishments in the community and to their members.

As many local branches likely experienced, the Southwest Oklahoma (SWOK) Branch had a significant period of inactivity. Under the leadership of the current Executive Committee, the SWOK Branch exponentially increased activity during the last 12 months. The branch successfully updated their bylaws from 2014 and completed a needs assessment

survey to understand how to prioritize the upcoming operational year. After identifying it as an unmet need, SWOK COA hosted a formal photo shoot for officers. They participated in three community outreach activities in 2022 supporting local health fairs, as well as staffed aide stations at a local bike race. Most notably, after the branch recognized transportation as a major barrier for local individuals to access medical care, the SWOK Branch purchased 50 bus passes to provide transportation to local health care professionals for individuals with limited financial resources. The SWOK Branch significantly increased efforts to not only support local officers but also increased community engagement.

## Local Branch Member of the Year - LCDR Jacqueline Kouadio

This award is presented to an individual branch member to recognize a member for excellence in contributions to the COA local branch, service to the association, and to the members thereof.

LCDR Kouadio is recognized for her continuing support of the COA Phoenix Branch. In 2022, she led the branch's

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**AWARDS** from page 4 participation in three food drive events, a men's shelter clothing drive, an ovarian cancer research fundraiser walk, and a health event for American Indian/Alaska Native youth. LCDR Kouadio also regularly organized branch activities prior to 2022. For example, she was instrumental in coordinating home repairs for disabled and elderly community members, raising awareness for childhood cancer, and judging local competitions for rising health professionals in Arizona. LCDR Kouadio also participates in other local volunteer organizations. She has proven to be an exemplary leader in the local community and continues to bring high visibility of the USPHS Commissioned Corps locally and across the state of Arizona.

LCDR Kouadio was not in attendance at the Symposium. The award was presented to her branch president, LCDR Gallaway, who will present LCDR Kouadio with the award at the next Phoenix COA branch meeting.

**Retiree of the Year Award - CAPT (Ret) James Minor**

This award recognizes excellence in continued service and contributions beyond active duty or government civilian service to the Commissioned Officers Association, the Commissioned Officers Foundation, and to COA members.

CAPT James Minor started his USPHS career as a pharmacist in 1981 working at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where he was on the leading edge of the domestic and global HIV/AIDS pandemic. He was assigned as the Clinical Pharmacy Practitioner to the Intramural Research Program of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), under the leadership, and mentorship of Dr. Anthony Fauci. As we all grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, CAPT Minor has been reflecting on the parallels between then and now; in terms of the biomedical/scientific, societal, and geo-political challenges we all are facing and working through together.

thanks to LT Austin Van Horn and the efforts of the planning team of COVID-19, #50 did not happen. CAPT Minor finally decided that the time had come to step

down and yield the podium to the next cadre. CAPT Minor strongly encourages all junior and mid-career officers to make time along their career path to share their work and best practices with their peers, both as oral presentations, to garner public speaking experience at professional meetings, and submit manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed professional publications. He advised, "you can and should do this!"



COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's Retiree of the Year Award to CAPT (Ret) James Minor.

**Large Local Branch of the Year Award - Greater Texas COA**

This award is presented to a local branch with more than 60 members for their exceptional accomplishments in the community and to their members.

Greater Texas COA (GTCOA) is small in numbers compared to other "large branches," but the output and breadth of its accomplishments and contributions and high level of member involvement is emblematic of branches with significantly more members. Thus far in the 2022-2023 Operational Year, 54 GTCOA members volunteered at five events from October-January, mentored 641 high school students interested in pursuing public health careers, and enabled \$800K of dental services to be provided to 900 community members. In Fall 2022, GTCOA conducted four ceremonial drill and command sessions, consisting of physical training in cadence and marching exercises, creating opportunities for both newly commissioned officers who

attended virtual OBC and all GTCOA members to develop "esprit de corps" and unit cohesion. Twenty-one officers attended the four sessions and advanced in their command presence as unit leaders, building upon their officership to lead upcoming local ceremonies and parades. Within the last year, GTCOA ordered the first-ever GTCOA challenge coin, commissioned the first-ever official Branch logo, and ordered GTCOA t-shirts to increase visibility at volunteer events and to fundraise; the branch subsequently donated \$1,000 for the PBS documentary *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis*.



COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's Large Local Branch of the Year Award to Greater Texas COA.

**Civilian Outstanding Support of the USPHS – Sonya Coakley Baker**

Sonya Coakley Baker is the recipient of the 2023 COA Civilian Outstanding Support of the USPHS Award. This award is presented to an individual who has distinguished themselves in service to the Commissioned Corps through their role as civilian.

For 23 years, Ms. Coakley Baker has served as the backbone to support the public health program for the United States Department of the Interior (DOI). In this time, she has built a comprehensive, highly structured, and targeted human resources system that currently provides operational oversight to 70 officers. She also modernized, updated, and formalized the legal agreement between the National Park Service (NPS) and the USPHS,

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extending its terms to the entire DOI and bringing USPHS officers and their public health and clinical expertise to the entire agency and its bureaus.

Through her tremendous organizational, planning and leadership capacity, Ms. Coakley Baker has successfully recruited, hired, trained, mentored, and provided supervisory guidance support for hundreds of officers throughout the years who have served in the NPS and DOI. In her roles as both liaison to the USPHS Commissioned Corps and Deputy Director of the NPS Office of Public Health, Ms. Coakley Baker has supported officer input into, understanding of, and



*COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's Civilian Outstanding Support of the Year Award to Sonya Coakley Baker.*

adherence to the policies of the USPHS Commissioned Corps. As the longest serving Commissioned Corps Liaison in the USPHS, Ms. Coakley Baker's vast and deep experience and knowledge of the USPHS and officership, and her passion to support officers has contributed to her ability to build officer morale and create a work environment that has made the NPS and DOI the most sought-after places for officers to serve.

## **Health Leader of the Year Award - Laura Miller**

The COA Health Leader of the Year Award was established in 1987 to recognize individuals who have made notable contributions to the health of the nation. Contributions can be in research,

administration, service delivery, or another area of public health. It is presented to an individual who has achieved prominence and demonstrated leadership and excellence in public health.

Laura Miller serves as superintendent



*COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's Health Leader of the Year Award to Laura Miller.*

of Hot Springs National Park (HOSP). In 2021, the park commemorated its 100th anniversary as a national park in tandem with the 100th anniversary of the agreement between the NPS and the USPHS. HOSP and the USPHS officers assigned to the NPS have worked together for a century to provide safe drinking water and medical services to park visitors and patients. In fact, four of the first five superintendents at HOSP were USPHS Commissioned Corps officers.

As part of the joint anniversary celebrations, Ms. Miller worked with park and NPS Office of Public Health staff to create a first-ever exhibit highlighting the role of the USPHS in the NPS and HOSP. This exhibit was on display at the Arkansas state capitol building in Little Rock; subsequently, a larger version was put on display at the Ozark Bathhouse in HOSP, opening in conjunction with a special event that included local public health leaders and a video address from Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health.

In 2022, Miller worked with the NPS Office of Public Health to house a USPHS officer at the park, to better support local and regional health for the NPS.

HOSP provides millions of gallons of free drinking water to the public each year and provides oversight to businesses that use the park's thermal water for bathing and spa services, including one that uses the thermal water to brew beer in one of the former bathhouses. Miller operates a complex park and in addition to these duties ensures the health and safety of the visitors, volunteers, and employees who visit and serve the park.

## **RADM Brutsche Award-RDML Steven Solomon**

The Robert Brutsche Award is given to a



*COA Chair, Kristie Purdy, presents this year's RDML Brutsche Award to RDML (Ret) Steve Solomon.*

COA member who exhibited exceptional commitment to the COA Board of Directors or COF Board of Trustees by leadership on projects and/or sustained contributions. RDML Steven Solomon was selected by the COA committee due to his unwavering dedication to the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation during his 2-year term as COF President. He was instrumental in leading the branding and website design for Foundation, supporting funding and creation of the PBD Documentary "Invisible Corps," kicking off COF's upcoming 3-year Capital Campaign, and many other visionary projects and initiatives.



**BLACK WALL STREET** from page 3

honors Dr. Lythcott by recognizing junior officers who demonstrates a genuine sense of public service and leadership (taken from BCOAG website <https://dcp.psc.gov/OSG/bcoag/lythcott.aspx>).

As I walked down the streets during my tour, I could hear the music playing and smell the food cooking as street vendors prepared for an upcoming Biker's event on Greenwood. The murals on the buildings displayed the talent that currently resides in Tulsa.

Given the high ratings provided by various officers, with some enjoying the tour multiple times, I'd highly recommend you visiting the Greenwood museums, culture center, and take a tour to ensure you get a clear picture of the real story behind the Greenwood Massacre.



Officers pose in front of the Black Wall Street street art while on the Greenwood tour.



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# Remote Area Medical – Tulsa 2023



USPHS officers volunteer at the pop-up RAM event in Tulsa, Oklahoma May 5 and 6, 2023. Photo Credit: Chris Cannon, RAM Media Relations Coordinator

by CDR Clara Stevens and CDR Rovigel Gelviro

The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps had the opportunity to team up with the Remote Area Medical (RAM) this year in Tulsa, Oklahoma. RAM is a nonprofit organization that provides free medical, dental, and vision care to people in remote and underserved areas. The organization was founded by British philanthropist Stan Brock. Mr. Brock was known for his work as a television host on the nature series *Wild Kingdom*. According to the RAM website, Mr. Brock suffered a personal injury while living in an isolated area of Guyana, South America, a 26-day journey away from medical care (RAM, N.D.).

Inspired by his experiences, Brock founded RAM with the goal of bringing medical care to underserved communities around the world. RAM's first mission was in Guyana, where Brock and a team

of volunteer doctors, dentists, and other medical professionals provided care to thousands of people over the course of several weeks (RAM, N.D.).

RAM and the USPHS Commissioned Corps entered a formal partnership in 2016 to provide medical care to underserved communities in the United States. The partnership enabled USPHS officers to assist in the setup, management, and operations and provide direct patient care at pop-up clinics across the United States. This year, RAM and USPHS Commissioned Corps held a pop-up clinic in Tulsa, Oklahoma, right before the 2023 USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium. Over 100 Regular Corps, Public Health Emergency Strike Team (PHERST), and Ready Reserve officers helped to organize, set up, and provide care to community members in need.

Through the tireless efforts of Stan Brock and his team of volunteers, RAM has become a beacon of hope for those in need of medical care. RAM's dedication to serving those who would otherwise be unable to afford medical care is a testament to the power of compassion and the human spirit. The 2023 RAM pop-up clinic in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was a huge success. In just two days of clinical operations, over 460 patients received \$195,493 in dental, vision, and/or medical services.

The partnership between RAM and the USPHS Commissioned Corps highlights the importance of collaboration and coordination in providing health care to underserved and uninsured individuals. This serves as a model for how organizations can come together to address the pressing healthcare needs in underserved and uninsured communities.

**Citations** Remote Area Medical. (N.D.) Our Founder. Retrieved May 23, 2023. <https://www.ramusa.org/our-founder/>

## SYMPOSIUM from page 1

Headquarters (CCHQ), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH).

During the opening ceremonies of this year's symposium, LCDR Abigail, a black Labrador Retriever, was introduced to the attendees during her first appearance as the USPHS mascot. LCDR Abigail was gifted to COF from Warrior Canine Connection, through its CEO Rick Yount, and then gifted by COF to the Assistant Secretary for Health, Admiral Rachel Levine. LCDR Johnson will be LCDR Abigail's handler and travel with her as she fulfills her mascot duties and will travel with her when she goes on trips to sites staffed by USPHS Commissioned Corps LCDR Abigail gets her name from Abigail Adams, the First Lady of the United States to President John Adams, who was president during the 1798 introduction of the Act for the Relief of Sick and Disabled Seamen. This would be



*CDR Stephanie Begansky, co-chair of the symposium planning committee, asks Dr. Katelyn Jetelina about her experience in public health during the Luther Terry Lecture Q&A.*



*Assistant Secretary for Health, Admiral Rachel Levine, meets LCDR Abigail, the first ever USPHS mascot during the opening ceremonies. Also pictured is Rick Yount, CEO of Warrior K9 Connection and LCDR Dan Johnson, LCDR Abigail's handler.*

the start of what we know now today as the USPHS. Abigail Adams was a proponent of public health, and the USPHS honors her work with the naming of this mascot.

### Luther Terry Lecture: Dr. Katelyn Jetelina

Dr. Katelyn Jetelina is a world-renowned scientific communicator and the founder and author of Your Local Epidemiologist (YLE), a newsletter that “translates” public health research and events to the community and has reached over 160 million people in 132 countries with over 330 million views. Dr. Jetelina has a Masters in Public Health and a PhD in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. She is relatable to many officers because she wears the many hats. She is an epidemiologist, a data scientist, a wife, and a mother of two. She works at a nonpartisan health policy think tank and is a senior scientific consultant to several organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Dr. Jetelina was awarded two national awards for her newsletter: a medal of honor from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Emergency Management and Medical Operations Field Operations and Response and the Public Health Practice Award from the American Public Health Association. YLE provides a breadth

and depth into the pandemic, epidemiology, and public health overall. On her website, Your Local Epidemiologist | Katelyn Jetelina | Substack, Dr. Jetelina states, “Public health touches all of our lives, even outside of the pandemic.”

Dr. Jetelina emphasized the importance of educating society on public health to combat the “infodemic.” False news travels six times faster than the truth due to echo chambers. The current public health system is a 20th century structure functioning with 21st century diseases. It is underfunded, decentralized, and fragmented. We need to model practicing the act of listening, not hearing, but intentionally listening to communities with empathy to let them drive the conversation. The pandemic drove public health into a world of innovation. We need to share the “so what” about public health to make it relatable to communities so they understand how it impacts their day to day, from brushing their teeth in the morning with clean and safe water coming from the faucet to wearing their seat belt as they enter their car from a long day at work. The change needs to be a system of changing how public health is thought about, operated, and led. Now is the time for the USPHS to practice crisis communication. Dr. Jetelina said “We need to be first, be right, be credible, express empathy, promote action, and show respect to set the stage for change.”

### COA Annual Business Meeting and Awards

The COA Annual Business Meeting, held on May 7, was a unique opportunity for COA leadership to provide you, its members, a quick overview of the last year, celebrate our accomplishments, and harness collective energies to support “Your Corps, Your Causes” through COA and the Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF).

The COA Board of Directors (BOD) and Executive Committee to the BOD were introduced and welcomed members to the meeting. The BOD is comprised of one officer from each of the professional categories within the Corps, three retired officers, three officers from various categories who are considered field

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officers who live outside of the DC/Baltimore metropolitan area, and a Ready Reserve officer.

Those in attendance were provided an overview of the COA Strategic Plan 2022-2026, which includes the four priority areas: Grow, Engage, Serve, and Advocate. The work conducted by the COA BOD and staff is focused on these four goals, which are vital to the success and growth of the organization. The BOD and staff are actively working to carry out initiatives in support of the four strategic goals, increase COA's engagement through networking and participation in external activities, increase service by expanding and reshaping our programs to strengthen their value proposition for active duty, retired, and reserve officers.

Over the past year, COA has hosted several networking opportunities and virtual gatherings for members, including financial wellness seminars, retirement seminars, information sessions on the Certified in Public Health (CPH) exam, and a leadership improvement course called "The Incredible Power of Praise." COA leadership stressed the importance of continuing membership into retirement in order to still benefit from our efforts long after an officer's time in uniform has ended.

COA's Executive Director, CAPT (ret.) Jacqueline Rychnovsky USN, briefed members on the status of the association, financials, and new initiatives to continue and grow the organization, while remaining fiscally healthy for the future. While membership in COA saw an eight percent dip in the past year due to ongoing initiatives to organize and ensure accuracy in our database, and losing contact with some members due to email spam filters, COA did have a significant increase in membership in the category of O3 and below.

CAPT Rychnovsky shared COA's continued efforts of advocacy and working toward the goal of parity with servicemembers of the Armed Forces. Once again, COA advocated on your behalf to help officers with the issue of expiring leave, resulting in a permanent fix to the leave extension. COA is also advocating for improvements to TRICARE dental and pharmacy issues, along with ongoing advocacy for those who separated before October 1, 2021, to obtain a DD214. COA continues to advocate for inclusion of USPHS officers in the National Park Service Military Pass program, 12 weeks of parental leave for USPHS officers, and for the USPHS Ready Reserve to receive the GI Bill and TRICARE Reserve Select benefits.

RDML (ret) Randall Gardner, president of COF, briefed members on activities of the foundation. This was the fifth year COF supported community-based public health projects through the Barclay-Giel Seed Grant program.

The COA members meeting wrapped up with a presentation on COA's annual awards. Each year, the COA Awards Committee solicits nominations in various categories. The Retired Officer of the Year went to CAPT (ret.) James Minor; Civilian Outstanding Support of the USPHS was awarded to Ms. Sonya Coakley Baker, USPHS liaison in the Office of Public Health at the

National Parks Service; Branch Leader of the Year went to LCDR Michael "Shayne" Gallaway, Phoenix Local Branch President; Local Branch Member of the Year, LCDR Jacqueline Kouadio of Phoenix COA; Large Local Branch of the Year went to Greater Texas COA; Small Local Branch of the Year went to Southeast Oklahoma COA.

The COA Health Leader of the Year was presented to Ms. Laura Miller, superintendent of Hot Springs National Park; and the RADM Robert Brutsche award was presented to RDML (ret.) Steve Solomon, immediate past-president of COF.

The COA BOD thanked each member for their work throughout



*CDR Kristie Purdy, Chair of COA Board of Directors, provides the board update at the annual COA general membership meeting.*

the year. The strength in this organization is in the members, COA is the only organization solely representing the interests of the USPHS Commissioned Corps officers. Please see page 4 for details about the individual awards and recipients.

## OASH/OSG Leadership Brief

Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) kicked off the leadership briefing thanking the Commissioned Corps officers for their dedication and service. Officers are ready to deploy in public health emergencies. Admiral Levine said our service, officers, and work are all highly respected in HHS and the White House.

Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy, the 21st Surgeon General of the United States, framed three priorities at this time: 1) Deployment; 2) Infrastructure; and 3) Health and wellbeing of officers. VADM Murthy stated officer's feedback was collected, which led to the return of on-call months to assist with predictability with deployments. In addition, recruitment and

see **LEADERSHIP BRIEF** continued on page 12

## LEADERSHIP BRIEF from page 11

commissioning has continued for the USPHS Ready Reserve and the Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PHERST), which now have 95 and 65 officers, respectfully. As CCHQ aims to bridge the gap officers feel exists by improving infrastructure, including communication. One avenue is the Connect Sessions, where changes in policy are discussed, along with a dedicated time for questions and answers from officers. These sessions have been very popular, with over 1,000 officers regularly attending. Another example of USPHS working for its officers VADM Murthy was happy to share was the positive shift in promotion rates that were included in an email:

Lastly, VADM Murthy discussed the importance of mental

| Professional Category | Temporary Grade | 2021 | 2022 | 2023  |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------|------|-------|
| Medical & Dental      | T O-6           | 25%  | 26%  | 26%   |
| Medical & Dental      | T O-5           | 28%  | 32%  | 32%   |
| Other Categories      | T O-6           | 9%   | 10%  | 10%   |
| Other Categories      | T O-5           | 7%   | 11%  | 23.5% |
| All Categories        | T O-4           | 25%  | 35%  | 60%   |

health and wellbeing and the current crisis. VADM Murthy placed a U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community called "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," which can be found at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>. There needs to be an increase in access, focus on understanding root causes, and a boost in prevention. Nationally, 80% of workers stated their job had a negative impact on their mental health or home life. Parents sometimes place families first without tending to their own needs. Mental wellbeing is "the fuel that allows us to what we do and show up." Gun violence is causing layers of trauma and fear. Communities are fearful to go to public places like church, school, and grocery stores. At this time, 50% of adults are reporting some level of loneliness, which can lead to an increased risk in physical illness such as anxiety and depression. He encouraged us, as officers, to continue to bring forward the values we exemplify- kindness, generosity, friendship, and service.

Rear Admiral Denise Hinton, U.S. Deputy Surgeon General reported accolades for the entire Corps. She echoed the focus and importance of bidirectional communication on the Connect Sessions, at the 56th Annual Symposium, and during site visits. RADM Hinton supports the Commissioned Corps Legislative Liaison program, which has allowed three officers to complete a fellowship with a U.S. Representative or Senator. This has helped with advocating for the USPHS on Capital Hill. More good news; there are three more officers in the fellowship this year. RADM Hinton appreciated the honest feedback officers are sharing with her and headquarters and encourages officers to keep sharing.

Director of CCHQ, Rear Admiral Rick Schobitz was impressed to learn there were 1,200 officers in attendance at the symposium. RADM Schobitz ended the leadership brief with a few additional updates including the importance of recruiting officers. There are now recruitment resources including packages, YouTube



VADM Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General, provides his update during the leadership brief.

videos, and specific information created by the Professional Advisory Committees (PACs). USPHS is below census of active-duty officers, and everyone can assist with recruitment. Additional officers will help support our services at agencies and deployments. This past year, there were over 350 missions and over 47,000 deployment days throughout USPHS.

## Office of the Surgeon (OSG) General Awards

During the leadership brief, RDML Schobitz proudly delivered the annual USPHS OSG Awards to the following officers:

- PHS Intra-federal Health Services Officer of the Year: CDR Teisha Robertson. CDR Robinson was presented this award "For demonstrated success and leadership in working and collaborating with other federal health services resulting in a positive and sustained impact."
- PHS Junior Officer of the Year: LCDR Robert Paul McClung. LCDR McClung was presented this award For superior performance and dedication to continuous "improvement of efforts to address public health issues and protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation."
- PHS Senior Officer of the Year: CDR Carrie Nielsen. CDR Nielsen was presented this award "For exemplary professional achievement and recognized interdisciplinary innovation and impact in protecting promoting and advancing the health and safety of the nation."

see **OSG AWARDS** continued on page 13



## OSG AWARDS from page 12

- Humanitarian Service and Global Health Officer of the Year: LT Jamla Rizek. LT Rizek, a frequent contributor to this newsletter, was presented this award “For superior performance and dedication to continuous improvement of efforts to address public health issues and protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation.”



RDML Rick Schobitz, Director of CCHQ, outlines this year's winners of the OSG General Awards.

## USPHS Music Ensemble

This year's Scientific and Training Symposium Surgeon General's Ensemble Concert will certainly stand out from previous and future concerts as the present met the past. This year, the USPHS Music Ensemble not only opened for the documentary, *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis*, but also had the honor to perform under the conducting of U.S. Coast Guard Senior Chief Musician (Retired) George King III, lyricist and composer of the *PHS March* and *Anchor & Caduceus Fanfare*, written in 1978 and 1989 respectively.

MUCS King teared up as he shared with the audience that this was the first time he heard the PHS March performed live. The power of this moment was felt by all as he conducted for the first time here *PHS March* and *Anchor & Caduceus Fanfare* with the USPHS Music Ensemble. MUCS King made some slight changes in updating the *Anchor & Caduceus Fanfare*, which allowed for all instruments to be highlighted as they performed the melody. MUCS King also corrected the timing of some of the lyrics of the *PHS March* to align with his original composition. The night proved to be exceptionally heart-warming for the audience and performers.

CAPT Michael Ahmadi and CAPT Elise Young, co-executive directors of the Music Ensemble set the scene discussing the symbolism and development of this year's performance. Under the phenomenal direction of CAPT Ahmadi, who conducted the choral group, and LCDR Eric Jamoom, who conducted the band, the USPHS Music Ensemble gave a rousing performance to a full house comprised of USPHS officers, family, friends, and symposium exhibitors. With pieces crossing the cinematic universe, the USPHS Music Ensemble took the audience on a musical journey reminiscent of some all-time movie favorites. Songs from television and musical theater also set the tone in

spirit of the world premiere of *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis*. The USPHS Ensemble members, which includes 23 band members and 48 choral members, shined in their performance.

The set list included:

- *Great Movie Adventures*
- *Seasons of Love*
- *A Million Dreams*
- *Disney Spectacular*
- *Thank You for Being a Friend*
- *An American Tribute*
- *Anchor and Caduceus Fanfare*

The audience was further energized during the Ensemble's rendition of “*Thank You for Being a Friend*” (theme from the 1980's television show “*Golden Girls*”) with a surprise solo from Assistant Secretary for Health, ADM Rachel Levine, and a rocking solo from alto choral member CDR Ericka Murray. The entertainment then turned patriotic with the performance of *An American Tribute* from the combined band and choir.

Following *An American Tribute*, MUCS King took to the stage and provided several anecdotes. In one, he recalled watching a video online that showed members of the ensemble singing the *PHS March*, and as the video continued, it panned to officers in the audience who also were singing the very words he had written so many years ago. This video aroused much pride and a sense of fulfillment in him. With his conducting the band and choral groups at the symposium, these emotions were brought into the present and allowed him to live the experience firsthand. For MUCS King and the USPHS Commissioned Corps, this very meaningful occasion brought a new spirit and historical context that will be long remembered.

## Bringing Visibility to the “Invisible Corps” Behind the Scenes with Producer Chris Schueler

For more than 200 years, men and women have served on the front lines of our nation's public health in what is today called the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). The USPHS was originally created to protect the health of sailors



Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health, introduces Chief Musician George King III for his guest appearance as conductor of the *PHS March*.

## DOCUMENTARY from page 13

and immigrants in the late 1700s. USPHS has successfully completed every public health emergency it has been deployed for, but one of the most common questions an officer will get is, “What is the Commissioned Corps?”

Have you heard all the hype about the PBS Documentary, “*Invisible Corps In Officio Salutis In Service of Health?*” Commissioned Corps officers are excited that this film will bring the accomplishments of the USPHS to a broader audience. In this documentary, the producer, Chris Schueler, and his team from Christopher Productions LLC, artistically and seamlessly share our story as a service, weaving together stories told by 25 of our own officers, through interviews, information on our history and heritage, as well as perspectives on the direction for our future. The interviews produced a 250-page script, went through 28 drafts, and was whittled down to a 26-page final script and fit all together into 56 minutes and 46 seconds of film.

First, a little bit about Chris Schueler. He is a multi-E Emmy award winning producer/director and has created over 100 television programs which have been broadcast across the country and around the world. His programs have raised public awareness and impacted public policy nationally and internationally with partnership ranging from the United Nations to the CBS Network Foundation. More information on Chris can be found at: [ChristopherProductions.org](http://ChristopherProductions.org).

In addition to learning how this documentary will impact the nation after its viewing, COA members were additionally curious about how Chris was personally impacted by the experience of putting the documentary together. He generously shared his perspective in an interview about working with our officers prior to the big reveal in Tulsa, and the following recounts his message from that interview.

Chris was approached by RDLM (ret) Pamela Schweitzer, a Board Trustee for COF, who spoke with Mr. Scheuler USPHS and her idea about creating a documentary. Chris began working on the documentary well over a year ago when he started learning all he could about the USPHS Commissioned Corps and its history. He read numerous books such as *Plagues and Politics: The Story of the US Public Health Service* and *Service Before Self: USPHS Commissioned Corps Health Services Officers Responding to the 2014-2016 Ebola Crisis*. After absorbing our history and mapping it out with his crew, he began to schedule pre-interviews, which were informal chats with some of our leading officers including Surgeon General Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy, Rear Admiral (retired) Boris D Lushniak, and Rear Admiral (retired) Anne Schuchat. From these earliest moments in the creation of the documentary, Chris became aware that regardless of the political or public health “temperature” nationally, there was hope in the future of public health, hope within the work of public health officers. The work is led with passion and is foundationally seeded in the desire to serve and advance the health and safety of the nation. For Chris, that was felt and visible by the stories shared. Our stories impacted the producer by filling him with a sense of positive energy and feeding his passion as the producer to share our incredible work and impact. He genuinely believes we are a beacon of hope as America’s First Responders.



*Chris Schueler, producer of Invisible Corps, discusses the origins of the documentary before its World Premiere Tuesday night in front of 800 attendees.*

One commonality between all the officers’ stories was passion. This “passion plague” would make it very challenging for Chris and his team to trim 40 hours of footage and 5,000 photos under an hour, the preferred length for a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) film.

As the pieces of the documentary began coming together, Chris’ excitement continued to grow. He secured and recorded Ali MacGraw, an Oscar Nominee and two-time Golden Globe winner, who narrated the documentary. Immediately after reading the script and driven by the desire to support OUR work to keep America healthy, MacGraw called Chris saying she was in! Jeff Jolly, an Emmy award winning composer, recorded and contributed a fantastic score. Chris often finds himself humming the theme away and thinks we will too. All this work has been possible because of the Commissioned Corps and many other individuals have contributed.

After asking Chris what he envisions for the documentary after the debut, he stated it is important to ask, “Who is this for, Who do we want to see this and what do we want them to do with it?” The documentary conveys the importance of USPHS to the country’s public health infrastructure. In addition to the documentary, Chris and his team created an army of resources, like short videos from the documentary that we will be able to download and use to explain the history and importance of the Commissioned Corps to others via social media and screenings. More information about the documentary can be found at [www.InvisibleCorps.com](http://www.InvisibleCorps.com). To help get the word out, we are all being asked to reach out to our local PBS stations using the PBS Information sheet, which will be available on the live site, and ask them to broadcast the program at the end of May. For Christopher Productions and us, the journey is not over, but rather it has just begun.

From all of us at COA, thank you to Chris and his team for the thoughtful listening and inspiring compilations of our work to help us be seen.



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# Getting A Head Start: Monday Pre-Conference Workshops and the Anchor and Caduceus Dinner

by LCDR Carla Chase, CCC-SLP.D., LCDR Alyssa Plata, MPH, RRT-CPFT, and LT Kyle Knight, DPT, OCS

The 2023 USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium Pre-conference Workshops provided a collaborative and active learning environment that left attendees with skills, knowledge, and materials that they can use in their own agencies and public health domains. This year, there were two days of hands-on training for those requiring updates to Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) recertification. Cardiac arrest continues to be a significant health risk impacting hundreds of thousands of people each year. These trainings give officers the knowledge and courage they need to delegate tasks and manage the types of high-pressure situations inside and outside of healthcare facilities. There were also a couple of opioid overdose response and naloxone trainings. Expanding the awareness and availability of naloxone is a key part of the public health response to the overdose crisis.

As we become more integrated with our sister services, review is always helpful in regard to applying military principles and concepts, utilizing customs and courtesies, and proper uniform wear. This review is especially beneficial for those who don't work with many other officers in their duty stations. There was also an excellent session from members of the Personnel & Career Management Branch (PCMB) of Commissioned Corps Headquarters. They led officers through an ever-important subject of promotions. The PCMB team directed officers through instruction and breakout sessions about different segments of their promotion packets including proper curriculum vitae (CV) writing and a review on relevant policy related to the Commissioned Officers Effectiveness Report (COER). This also included tips for writing more detailed and concise COERs, reviewing official statements (ROS), and awards write-ups. Finally, there were other great topics such as implementation of a framework in the workplace that would impact peoples' mental health and well-being, a seminar on how to build health equity, and preparing for retirement.

The day ended with everyone dressed beautifully for the annual Anchor & Caduceus reception and dinner featuring the C. Everett Koop lecture, presented by RADM (Ret.) Chuck Grim. The color guard entered with the presentation of the colors, and the USPHS music ensemble opened the event by singing the national anthem and PHS march to set the tone. RADM Grim discussed the significance of providing support to underserved communities, such as American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) populations, as well as individuals incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. He stressed the need for continued efforts to ensure that USPHS continues to meet the public health needs of these underserved areas. The evening concluded with the traditional cake-cutting ceremony, where the most senior officer

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Officers conduct CPR practice during the skills portion of their BLS recertification.



Dan Precourt, Financial Advisor with Prudential Pathways, presents his session "Transitioning Successfully into Retirement" during the 2023 Symposium pre-conference retirement seminar.



RADM (Ret) Charles Grim, Secretary of Health for the Chickasaw Nation, provides the C. Everett Koop lecture at the Anchor and Caduceus Dinner.



# The Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) Honor Awards Ceremony Luncheon

by LCDR Mavis Darkwah and LCDR Kodilichi (Kodi) Echeozo, MOLC Vice-Chairs

The sound of the talking drums and rhythmic clapping vibrated through the room in celebration of the 17 Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) awardees being recognized for their outstanding contributions. Annually, the MOLC gathers to highlight the successes and accomplishments of minority officers in all chartered minority advisory groups (CMAGs) at the MOLC Honor Awards Ceremony. On May 11, 2023 during the 2023 COF Scientific and Training Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the four CMAGs [American Indian/ Alaskan Native Commissioned Officers Advisory Committee (AI/ANCOAC), Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC), Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG), and Hispanic Officer Advisory Committee (HOAC)] continued this long-standing tradition. Each year, MOLC Vice-Chairs are responsible for planning and executing the MOLC Awards Ceremony. It is an opportunity for different CMAGs to showcase elements of their culture. This year, BCOAG had the privilege. The ceremony included an invigorating and energetic performance from Africa Sanka, a collaboration of renowned Griots and Drummers, who wowed guests with their African drum playing and dance. Our keynote speaker, RADM (ret.) Trent-Adams, gave a moving speech and was present for the unveiling of the inaugural BCOAG RADM Sylvia Trent-Adams Leadership Award. This is the first award in honor of an African American female officer solely based on the merit of leadership and mentoring.

The room was filled with over 350 guests, including several distinguished flag officers such as the Deputy Surgeon General, RADM Denise Hinton. The ceremony formally opened with the presentation of colors by the United States Surgeon General's Honor Guard, the National Anthem and PHS March by the USPHS



*African Sanka in action.*

Choral Ensemble, a lovely rendition of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by LCDR Jennifer Smith-Grant, and an invocation by LCDR Darion Smith. Welcoming remarks were made by CAPT Beverly Dandridge, on behalf of RDML Aisha Mix, the MOLC Senior Advisor. During the award recognitions, there was a special recorded message from VADM Richard Carmona for the HOAC VADM Richard H. Carmona Senior Officer Award awardee. CAPT Terry Harrison, BCOAG Senior Advisor, delivered thoughtful closing remarks.

The tremendous success of the MOLC Awards Ceremony Luncheon was due to the continuous dedication and unwavering efforts of the MOLC Awards Planning Committee led by LCDR Mavis Darkwah and LCDR Kodilichi Echeozo. Special thanks to the members of the 40 officers of the Planning Committee. However, the ceremony was only possible with the collaboration and assistance of all CMAGS. Please join us in congratulating the 2023 MOLC award recipients.

## 2023 CMAG Award Recipients

### American Indian/Alaskan Native Commissioned Officers Advisory Committee (AI/ANCOAC)

- RDML George Blue Spruce Junior Flag Officer Award: RADM Travis Watts
- Dr. Taylor McKenzie Senior Officer Award: CDR Dodson Frank
- Annie Dodge Wauneka Award: CDR Karen Beauvais
- Elizabeth Peratrovich Leadership Award: LCDR Nicholas Cushman
- AI/ANCOAC Junior Officer Award: LCDR Kristen Young

### Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC)

- RADM Samuel Lin Senior Officer Award: CDR Eric Zhou
- RADM Kenneth Moritsugu Junior Officer Award: LCDR Nicole Pascua

see **MOLC** continued on page 18

# Wednesday - Category Day

by CDR Kim Calvery, LCSW, BCD, CCHP

The Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) held its Category Day on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, from 0800 – 1700 ET at the Cox Business Convention Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma as part of the 2023 USPHS Training and Scientific Symposium.

Category Day is planned by representatives appointed by each of the 11 professional category's respective Chief Professional Officer (CPO) and symposium staff to provide a full day agenda of sessions related to the symposium's "In Service of Health: Boots on the Ground for a Healthy Nation" theme and to showcase high-achieving and distinguished officers during an awards ceremony.

It is a full day dedicated to each of the 11 professional categories of USPHS. Primarily a vehicle for earning continuing education units, Category Day is also a wonderful opportunity for officers and non-USPHS professionals to network, fellowship, and socialize. This forum has proven helpful as many USPHS officers are geographically dispersed and don't consistently interact with fellow officers inside let alone outside of their category.

Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH); RADM Denise Hinton, Deputy Surgeon General; RDML Richard Schobitz, Director of CCHQ; and CPOs comprised the officials that attended the Category Day and welcomed our new mascot, LCDR Abigail, to the ranks.

LCDR Abigail posed for pictures with the officials and was regarded by ADM Levine on Twitter as "a living symbol of the Commissioned Corps and of our deeper commitment to build



The Veterinarian Category poses for a picture with the official party and USPHS Mascot, Abigail.

healthy communities, healthy people, and a healthy nation for all." Sponsored by the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF), LCDR Abigail, a Black Lab, is nearing the end of her training and assumed the rank of her handler.

The 2023 Category Day was a raving success for those who were in attendance. The introduction of the USPHS official mascot, LCDR Abigail, was both a treat and highlight.

## PRE-CONFERENCE from page 16

and the most junior officer cut the cake. This is a symbolic gesture that signifies the importance of the Commissioned Corps legacy and the passing of knowledge and experience from senior to junior officers. Overall, the traditional start to the symposium was a significant day that exemplified evidenced-based trainings, as well as military customs and courtesies. It was a time for officers to come together, learn, celebrate, and honor public health achievements and our commitment to serving.



Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health cuts the cake with LTJG Gabriel Uribe at the annual Anchor and Caduceus Dinner.

## MOLC from page 17

- CAPT Allan Lock Service Award: LCDR Ruby Leong

## Black Commissioned Officer Advisory Group (BCOAG) MOLC

- George I. Lythcott Award: LCDR Gwendolyn Hudson
- CAPT Hildrus A. Poindexter Award: CDR Gayle Tuckett
- John C. Eason Responder of the Year Award: CAPT Francisca Abanyie
- Retired Public Health Service Officer Recognition Award: CAPT (Ret) David Foley
- Inaugural BCOAG Award: RADM Sylvia Trent Adams Leadership Award was presented to CDR Glendolynn Johnson

## Hispanic Officers Advisory Committee (HOAC)

- VADM Richard H. Carmona Senior Officer Award: CAPT Ivonne Arena
- VADM Antonia C. Novello Junior Officer Award: LCDR Ramses Diaz-Vargas
- Juan Carlos Finlay Award
  - o Significant Achievement Award: CAPT Edwin Vazquez (Ret.)
  - o Sustained Service Award: CDR Alfredo R. Sancho



# New Self-Service Kiosks Increase Access To Public Health Resources, While Preparing Communities For Potential Future Crises

by Ashley Craparo, VP of Marketing for LTS

Innovators in the unattended commerce space are identifying new ways to leverage self-service technology to better the world around them. This includes the healthcare innovation firm, LTS, which transformed the concept of fully automated kiosks to make dramatic improvements in the nation's health equity.

The company quickly accelerated its presence within the healthcare space during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it provided tests and vaccinations for communities constituting more than 55% of the U.S. population. During this time, LTS leadership saw first-hand the health inequalities that exist across our nation's communities and then got to work on creating a self-service solution. Now known as testandgo, this AI-enabled smart kiosk provides immediate access to vital public health resources as well as a future stop gap for potential health crises.

Testandgo transforms the way we think about healthcare by mimicking the capabilities and therefore the benefits of unattended retail channels. It uses fully automated technology to provide fast, convenient, and always available access to diagnostic tests, such as those for respiratory viruses and sexually transmitted infections, as well as harm reduction and preventative care products, including fentanyl test strips and naloxone. Strategically placed in rural, underserved, or highly populated areas, each kiosk is designed to have an intuitive interface and provide an inclusive user-experience with full integration into existing health systems. It allows for registration access to take place either online or at the kiosk and uses multiple languages to maximize its available touchpoints for community members. With solutions such as testandgo now hitting the market, individuals will be empowered to manage their health with just the click of a button.

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# Thursday: Chasing the Scientific Tracks

LCDR Carla Chase, CCC-SLP.D.

Building one's knowledge with empirical, evidenced-based, factual information to advance the public's health is one excellent feature of the USPHS Scientific Training Symposium. This year's scientific tracks, held on Thursday of symposium week, were filled with an array of technical presentations. It was a difficult task to choose from the plethora of sessions provided.


With the number of sessions to choose from, I was almost overwhelmed, but the Guidebook app made scheduling the day more efficient. The morning sessions were packed with discussions, methods, and principles about how to achieve healthy generations, therapeutic interventions to reduce falls, addressing the opioid overdose crisis, managing Mpox in the U.S., suicide prevention techniques to address suicide prevention, health disparities, reducing health care cost, and disaster data management. The afternoon's sessions were just as exciting and included interventions to improve spinal cord injury, eczema, Hansen's disease, diabetes care, and responses to COVID-19. Other session topics included the development of a robust Communication Corps Legislative Liaison program, astigmatism, global public health communication in social media, advancing worker safety, health, and well-being. After careful consideration, I was able to make my selections of which sessions to attend and I was intrigued by each.

In the morning, the presentation on effectiveness of an inpatient falls prevention program reminded me that, according to the CDC, across the nation, approximately one out of every five falls causes an injury. The strategies, (i.e., education, collaboration, communication seemed to be key) used in this presentation could work to improve the health and safety of others in most agencies healthcare systems and organizations. Next, the health worker burnout session piqued my interest because across America, officers are working longer and harder. USPHS officers and other healthcare workers are not able to find time to take the much-needed breaks or care for themselves. The presenter of this session discussed ways to prevent burnout, reward people for their work, and check on each other. She highlighted how reducing professional healthcare worker burnout could greatly improve patient care and organizational success. I ended the morning with gaining an understanding of the USPHS Communication Corps building strategic relationships with Congress to advance changes needed to continue modernizing and improve awareness through the Commissioned Corps Legislative Liaison Program.


Thursday afternoon, I learned about the key clinical considerations, evidence-based recommendations for therapeutic interventions, and resources for patients with spinal cord injury. Next, I was shaken to hear that leprosy, known as Hansen's disease, is still being diagnosed and treated in the U.S. As a young girl, and even into adulthood, I had primarily heard about leprosy in biblical stories, so to learn it continues to this day was eye-opening. I was happy to learn that The Hansen's Disease Center has the

technology to help eradicate this disease over the next two decades. Finally, before preparing for my own presentation later that afternoon, I wanted to hear about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Healthy People 2030 effort. It was encouraging to hear about multiple measures for assessing progress towards the abolishment of health inequalities in 2030.


By attending these informative sessions, I was able to achieve some of my professional and personal goals. The face-to-face interactions were valuable. I was motivated to network professionally for the growth, advancement, and accomplishment that it will bring for our public's health. Some of the sessions fulfilled my content goal, as they were educational, while others helped me support the person who was presenting. I was able to harness quiet power by asking thought-provoking questions and listened carefully to responses. The scientific tracks provided for good networking that created new connections, while maintaining and strengthening existing ones. It built my knowledge of the evidence-based published science, highlighted the latest up-to-date guidelines and recommendations, prepared me for the next phase of my career to help in the fight of diseases, conduct research, and care for patients in underserved populations. I am excited and look forward to what's to come.



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# Spiritual Wellness

by LCDR Katrina Redman, MT, SPOC, M.Div., Chaplain (BGCT)

## Spiritual Fathers

All of us have a biological father, but do you have a spiritual father? As I was meditating on the meaning of Mother's Day, I began to look ahead and think about my father as well. Those thoughts of my father immediately turned my thoughts toward God, who I call my Heavenly Father. I began to think about how my father's spiritual life had a profound influence on mine.

A spiritual father is someone who cares for us. He is someone who imparts on us love, identity, and spiritual covering. He is someone who prays for us and is concerned for our wellbeing. A spiritual father's influence on us has a great deal to do with how we view our higher power. For example, having a spiritual father who responds quickly when we are in need helps us to project that same loving responsiveness onto our higher power. Spiritual fathers lead us by walking alongside us. He is transparent. He shares his struggles and mistakes without claiming to have all the answers and always points you toward the one who does. He demonstrates gentleness, self-control, and patience to guide you. He passes down a legacy of faithfulness to you, and he does this by maintaining a personal relationship with you over a long period of time. What a beautiful partnership! I wish everyone had a spiritual father to walk with them through life. Sadly, however, many people have never known or experienced this kind of relationship. This makes it hard for them to trust a relationship with a higher power.

As a USPHS officer, I feel so blessed to have so many officers who have walked with me through my career. I have learned so much from them and I am grateful for the time they took to help me along. A few of those officers went even further than just giving career advice. They became my mentors. They became like a spiritual father to me in that they led me by walking beside me, they shared their personal experiences with me, and they passed the baton of their legacy on to me.

I hope that you have a spiritual father. I hope that you have fellow officers or retirees who have mentored you like a spiritual father. Our work is complicated and intense. It affects us physically, mentally, and spiritually. If we open ourselves spiritually to positive mentoring relationships, we can experience connectedness that goes far beyond words and will continue for generations to come.

May we all express our gratitude to our spiritual fathers and continue their work by becoming mentors for those around us. Thank you so much CAPT Catherine Witte and CAPT Robin Hunter-Buskey for mentoring me.



### Education: Retired (definition from a non-mentoring perspective)

I do what I want when I want (see also not-my-problem-anymore).

### Spiritual Exercises

1. Article: <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/4-thoughts-on-spiritual-fatherhood/>
2. Website: <https://www.fromhispresence.com/how-to-find-a-spiritual-father-1/>
3. If you do not have a spiritual father, consider talking to a spiritual leader from your belief system and ask them to guide you or connect you with someone to fill that role.

Questions? Comments? Contact me at [khredman@hotmail.com](mailto:khredman@hotmail.com).

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** from page 1 yet enrolled as a member of the tribe that I completed the membership paperwork.

Several months ago, Rear Admiral (Retired) Kevin Meeks offered to connect me with the Principal Chief of the Osage Nation, Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear. During a Zoom call, I was able to meet and engage with him personally, along with his Chief of Staff, Jason Zaun. Following our call, they tailored a very personalized site visit for me before the start of the symposium.

On May 5, COA's Deputy Director, Dave Corrigan, and I met up with Mr. Zaun in Hominy, Oklahoma for the start of our tour. Butcher House Meats is a 19,000 square foot new facility funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act. This \$2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill was passed by the 116th U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump on March 27, 2020, in response to the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Osage Nation put their CARES Act money to good use by addressing food insecurity for the Osage people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the tribe had difficulty processing meat from their herd to provide food for their Elder and Head Start programs. With this money, they built a meat processing facility, which is federally inspected. Due to the extreme food desert in Hominy, they have opened a Butcher Meats retail counter and have started selling meat and other products at local farmers' markets. I bought the best bison jerky at this facility I have ever had. I wiped out their supply, and not much made it back home!

Next, we transitioned to the Harvest Land working farm. Again, CARES Act money was put to excellent use to build a 40,000 square foot greenhouse which boasts an aquaponics system, a food processing area, a water lab, and an orchard. They are beginning a weekly fresh produce box delivery system to tribal members in need which includes healthy recipes and other tips, along with providing fresh produce for the Elder and Head Start programs. It was really something to see.



*Downtown Pawhuska, Oklahoma – The “Osage in the Enemy Camp” statue, which is a miniature of the original “Osage Warrior in the Enemy Camp.” This was meant to show the warrior mentality of indigenous people known as the “Counting Coup,” where Osage Warriors, on horseback, would touch their enemy as they passed them to let the enemy know of their will and lack of fear.*

After lunch in downtown Pawhuska, we toured the WahZhaZhe Health Center. This facility offers dental, optometry, and primary care and will soon begin to host specialty care providers several days per month. They offer culturally sensitive care aimed at transforming the health of communities, and serve all tribes who fall within their eligible geographical boundaries.

We ended our day with a visit to the Osage Nation Museum, the oldest tribally governed museum in the United States. Exhibits and programs strive to represent the Osage arts, history, language, and culture through the generations, from the earliest surviving work of our ancestors to the newest creations of their younger people.

Located behind the museum is the first-ever memorial recognizing Osage military veterans and pre-military scouts. It was dedicated on November 11, 2018. Imagine my surprise, and great honor, to see my father's name on the granite face of the memorial. He passed away in April of 2018 and never saw the memorial

himself. Even I was not aware of its existence until I stepped outside to view the twenty-foot eagle feather memorial, designed to be situated upright like the eagle feathers worn by Osage men under the Ilonshka Dance Arbor, or ceremonial Osage dances.

It was an exceptionally memorable visit to the Osage Nation. I appreciate Chief Standing Bear, Chief of Staff Jason Zaun, Ross Cline (Butcher House), Jann Hayman (Harvest Land/Butcher House), Harleigh Moore-Wilson (Harvest Land/Butcher House), Kirk Shaw (WahZhaZhe), and Marla Redcorn-Miller (Museum), for this experience. None of this would have been possible without the support of RADM Meeks who did so many special things for this year's symposium.

If you are ever in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, stop for a lovely lunch at the historic town square and take time to visit the Osage Museum.

Enjoy this extra edition of *Frontline*. Until next month!



# It's Time to Renew Your COA Membership!

by CDR Kristie Purdy, MS, RDN/LD, BC-ADM, CDCES  
Chair, COA Board of Directors

As USPHS officers, we know far too well the challenges of not working alongside our fellow officers. We're not afforded the opportunity to work on a base or installation, where a sense of camaraderie is built into the culture of daily activities. We gain back this sense of camaraderie through membership in the Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS (COA). COA offers the opportunity to strengthen ties amongst our fellow officers and foster esprit de corps. We're able to build trusted relationships, connect amongst the ranks, and ultimately enhance the mission of USPHS while building our own morale.

With the number of responsibilities we tend to on a daily basis, it's understandable to assume why joining and being active in an association is

low on the priority list. After a full day of meetings, projects, and/or patients, it's hard to add to our daily "to-do" list. One of the greatest opportunities COA provides is the chance to invest in your professional development. Beyond the discounts and scholarship opportunities, COA is a space to build trusted relationships and camaraderie with fellow officers. Because we're all in it together – we get through it together. COA officers miss the "welcome to the club" experience that awaits other services when they report to their duty station. COA, in a sense, is our version of a base and shared space between our members connecting us to our community.

If you're not currently a member of COA, I invite for you to become one. If you are a member, remind others

to renew their membership and encourage those who are not members to become one. There is strength in membership. The more members we gain, the better we are situated as an association to continue to provide and advocate for you!

Without membership, we do not have the revenue to serve as a legislative aide and advocate for officers on Capitol Hill to fight for your rights, benefits, and be your voice in front of legislators so our members receive parity with the armed services. COA represents the interests of all officers of the Corps. Join or renew your membership in COA, so we may continue to ensure the only organization solely representing the interests of PHS officers remains strong and continues to grow! [Renew now!](#)

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The Chickasaw Nation is one of Oklahoma's largest employers with nearly 14,000 employees. The Chickasaw Nation Department of Health employs 2,000 team members at state-of-the-art facilities in Ada, Ardmore, Purcell and Tishomingo. Plans are underway for expansive inpatient medical facility near the Oklahoma City metro area by 2028.

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**COA**

PO Box 189

Cheltenham, MD 20623

**Executive Director**

Jacqueline Rychnovsky,  
[jrychnovsky@coausphs.org](mailto:jrychnovsky@coausphs.org)

**Grants Manager**

Lynn Abrahamson  
Contractor  
[lbrahamson@coausphs.org](mailto:lbrahamson@coausphs.org)

**Deputy Director**

David Corrigan  
[dcorrigan@coausphs.org](mailto:dcorrigan@coausphs.org)

**Producer**

Curveball Media, Victor Perea

**Chief Financial Officer**

Teresa Hayden Foley  
[thayden@coausphs.org](mailto:thayden@coausphs.org)

**Leading Edge Conferences**

Tim O'Neill  
[symposium@phscof.org](mailto:symposium@phscof.org)

**Director of Administration**

Erica Robinson  
[erobinson@coausphs.org](mailto:erobinson@coausphs.org)

**Group Insurance - AGIA**

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**Membership Coordinator**

Donna Sparrow  
[dsparrow@coausphs.org](mailto:dsparrow@coausphs.org)

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