

NEWS RELEASE
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Public invited to honor Douglas County Health Champions

(Lawrence, KS) – The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department will recognize longtime Lawrence teacher Michel Loomis and Free State High School student Josie Naron as the first recipients of the Douglas County Health Champion Award. They will be honored during a community breakfast April 5 for their exceptional efforts to model, encourage and promote health in the community.

The breakfast will be from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. at the Community Health Facility, 200 Maine. The event is open to the public and is part of the Health Department's celebration of National Public Health Week.

Health Board member David Ambler, retired vice chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Kansas, will be the guest speaker. Ambler has served on numerous boards of health agencies and has received many honors including the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce's "Citizen of the Years" award. In 2007, the Kansas Board of Regents named the recreation center on the Lawrence campus the David A. Ambler Student Recreation Fitness Center.

"We aren't going to solve our health problems by being sedentary. We need to educate policymakers and residents on strategies to improve our health," Ambler said. "Michel Loomis and Josie Naron are shining examples of such work. They not only model healthy behaviors and help educate others, but they are working to create opportunities for others to live healthier lives as well."

Loomis retired Jan. 1 after teaching English and physical education at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School for 31 years. The school gymnasium is referred to as the "The Loomis Gym" because she volunteered to open and supervise the gymnasium for students who wanted to use it before school. Twenty-five years ago, she helped start a 2-mile fun run for students and over the years, it has become an annual fundraising event that all of the students participate in along with neighbors, teachers and parents. Loomis also started an after-school "Smart Strength" program that's free and open to all students.

"In teaching the youth of our society to appreciate health and fitness, in modeling healthful living among students, and in opening avenues for lifelong fitness activities to young teens, Michel Loomis impacts the youth, the parents of the youth and the future parents who will raise the next generation of Kansans," said Lawrence resident Nora Murphy.

At age 16, Naron says she is pursuing her dream: a career in public health where she can help fight infectious diseases and solve societal issues. Naron has been a volunteer at the Health Department for more than a year. Her work has included analyzing statistics on childhood injuries and then putting them into graphics for community use and entering immunization information into a statewide database. She's working on a project that looks at how the lack of transportation can affect residents' wellbeing. This summer, she will spend three weeks at Johns Hopkins University for a "Civic Leadership Institute," where she will study public health, societal issues and community development.

"I was very impressed with Josie the first time I met her. She's very bright and has passion and interest in learning as much as she can about public health," said Kim Ens, director of Clinic Services at the Health Department. "Though she maintains a rigorous class schedule, participates in school activities and works part-time as a piano teacher, she still wants to contribute to the health of the Lawrence community."

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