

Aug. 12 Open House Planned Southeast District Health Staff Enjoys Move to New Location

Written by Nemaha County Herald
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After almost two months at their new location in south Auburn, the staff of Southeast District Health Department said that the move has gone well. Kay Oestmann, director, said that the architect, contractor and everyone worked well together. "We got what we needed. We don't have people sitting on top of each other anymore," Oestmann said.

Before the move to 2511 Schneider Ave., the department staff spent eight years at the same building which houses the Wellness Center of Nemaha County at 601 J St.

"We had 10 employees in three rooms sitting on top of each other. There was not a lot of privacy for the stuff that we were doing. One employee didn't even have their own desk. In our new location, we can be more productive. We can carry out our business more professionally. We appreciate that Nemaha County (officials) found the space. They housed us the last eight years. We had a good relationship. The rent was reasonable. We outgrew it. We were able to save money," Oestmann said.

The new location includes eight offices. Each staff member decorated their office. Also included are a conference room and an immunization area. Oestmann said the district staff members do a lot of teleconferencing and videoconferencing, which has made a big difference in what the staff does.

An open house is planned Thursday, Aug. 12, from 2-4 p.m.

Southeast District Health Department officially formed in 2002. It was previously only Nemaha County Health Department. The department's staff serves residents of 40 communities in Nemaha, Johnson, Otoe, Pawnee and Richardson counties.

Oestmann said that public health is about prevention. She said that recent programs which staff has worked with included sun safety. As part of swimming lessons, department staff encouraged teaching children how to use sun block and sun screen. Staff also has taught farmers about skin cancer prevention. Other prevention programs covered such areas as colon cancer and breast cancer, Oestmann said.

Emergency response planning is another area with which Southeast District Health Department staff work, Oestmann said. That included planning for bioterrorism and H1N1 flu. Staff was active with H1N1 flu education last winter and conducted immunization clinics throughout the district, she said. Staff also worked with emergency management officials to serve district residents, including areas affected by Missouri River flooding.

Oestmann said that the staff has a pilot program in Otoe County in conjunction with officials of St. Mary's Community Hospital, Nebraska City. The program, Growing Great Kids, involved addressing at-risk pregnant women who needed help with parenting in home, from prenatal to 3 years, she said.

Immunization clinics are conducted throughout the district. The Auburn clinic is held the second Thursday each month at 9 a.m. at the district office. Other monthly clinics are at Falls City, Humboldt, Nebraska City, Pawnee City, Syracuse and Tecumseh.

Staff also followed up on children who are eligible for physicals under Medicaid and encouraged children to get physicals when it is time to do so. Staff also conducted emergency room follow-ups to encourage patients to carry out their doctor's orders. There is a Call Care program, where anyone may call in and staff can either give answers on how to treat various conditions at home or refer callers to a health care professional. Staff does not diagnose conditions, Oestmann said.

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There are active surveillance programs in such areas as foodborne illnesses or reportable diseases. Oestmann said that the staff conducts community needs assessments. She said that residents of some communities have different needs than others, depending on such factors as age. Programs are conducted as need assessment showed. Oestmann said that staff members attend various meetings involving public health, work with representatives of various agencies, try to respond locally to everything and build relationships, particularly before bad things happen.

The district staff has a multihazard emergency response plan developed in conjunction with county emergency managements plan. That covers public health officials' role in natural as well as communicable disease, to include pandemic influenza. The plan may be reviewed during regular business hours, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays. Information is also available on what to do after a flood; tornado safety; and tetanus symptoms, prevention and facts.

Southeast District Health Department is among 17 district health departments, seven county health departments and one city-county health department in Nebraska. LB 692, passed by the 2001 Legislature, provided funds to qualifying local health departments.

The department is governed by a 13-member board with representatives from all five counties. State statute requires a county commissioner and a public-spirited person that is not a commissioner from each county. Nemaha County's representatives are Sue Anderson, board president; Randall Rohrs, representing the Nemaha County Board of Commissioners and Dr. Mike Speece, a veterinarian. Statute also requires one doctor and one dentist. The doctor serving is Dr. Stacey Goodrich of Johnson County. The dentist involved is Dr. J.P. Giddings of Otoe County. Oestmann said that the district board has a veterinarian because of the district's rural identity.

"That's been valuable. It's one of the better things we have done planning wise," she said. For more information, please visit www.sedhd.org.