 December 20, 2022

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25th Anniversary, Co-Chair

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*For Immediate Release*

**Oklahoma Turning Point Council Celebrates 25 years**

With a theme of “Growing Together”, Oklahoma Turning Point Council celebrated 25 years of supporting public health with a celebration at the Edward L. Gaylord Downtown YMCA on December 15th presenting their annual community champion, leadership and innovator awards and naming 25 trailblazers throughout the state.

With lead sponsors of the Downtown YMCA and Chickasaw Nation, and its nonprofit partner, the Public Health Institute of Oklahoma, OTPC gathered to showcase the history of Oklahoma Turning Point Council, the diversity of its current and past partnerships, all while paying tribute to the individuals and groups who showcase the spirit of the Oklahoma Turning Point Council. Chairs for the event were Neil Hann, MPH, CHE, Chair of Health Promotions Sciences at the OU Hudson College of Public Health, who is one of the founding members of OTPC; Laura Ross, Director of Programs for the Public Health Institute of Oklahoma and Director of the Oklahoma Primary Health Care Extension System and the Vice Chair of the Oklahoma Turning Point Council; and Anissa Chadick, Executive Director of Healthy Living at the YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City and serves on the executive council for OTPC**.** Emceeing the event was News 9 reporter Jordan Dafnis who created a positive and energetic atmosphere for the entire event.

The Oklahoma Turning Point Council (OTPC) was founded in 1997 with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Oklahoma State Department of Health. As one of 27 funded projects nationally, the Oklahoma Turning Point Council was formed to provide support to Oklahoma communities through direct partnerships focusing on health improvement efforts. Rather than a top-down approach to public health, Turning Point seeks input from communities to help identify community priorities and implement local solutions. OTPC has partnered with communities across Oklahoma to work on local innovations such as community health centers/family resource centers/community schools, community/parent advisory committees, Handle With Care OK, peer support groups, Annual OTPC and Oklahoma Partners in Public Health Conferences, Policy Forums, extensive walking trails, community gardens, improved school health activities and advocacy for health improvement policies. Moreover, OTPC continues as an independent statewide consortium focused on advocacy and policies to improve Oklahoma’s health. **Now in its 25th year, the Oklahoma Turning Point Council remains the only active Council nationally**

At this special event, many individuals were presented with accolades for their accomplishments. 25 Turning Point Trailblazers were recognized for their achievement to OTPC and public health in Oklahoma**.** Each of the awardees below demonstrated the core beliefs of OTPC in the knowledge that communities have inherent strengths, and everyone has a stake in public health.

**The 25 Trailblazer Awardees:**

* Rep. Carol Bush
* J. Sunshine Cowan
* Danielle Dill
* Adrienne Elder
* Sandy Foster
* Toni Frioux
* Neil Hann
* Jill Hazeldine
* Tina Johnson
* Ryan Kilpatrick
* The Lynn Institute
* James Mold
* Rep. Cyndi Munson
* Suzanne Nichols
* Larry Olmstead
* Pathways to a Healthier You- Kim Whaley
* Paula Price
* Laura Ross
* Lana Shaffer
* Jerry Speck
* Gaylene Stiles
* Deanne Taylor
* Texas County Health Improvement Organization
* Washington County Wellness Initiative- Sheree Hukill & Penny Pricer
* Valerie Williams

Each year, OTPC encourages nominations of initiatives, projects, events and individuals in Oklahoma that contribute to health improvement and quality of life in the community it serves through strategic partnerships and/or coalition efforts.

The Community Health Champion Award recognizes the service and dedication of those that make their communities better.

**The Community Health Champion Awardees:**

* Delaware County Community Partnership
* Opioid 918
* Health Alliance for the Uninsured
* Youth Action for Health Leadership
* Multi-County Coalition
* Handle with Care Oklahoma
* Pathways to a Healthier You

The **Neil Hann Leadership Award** honors individuals who display innovation, inspiration, and leadership in creating a culture of health in Oklahoma. It recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to protecting and promoting the health of Oklahomans beyond their normal work duties. The 2022 Recipient for the Neil Hann Leadership Award was **Brandie Combs**. Brandie began her state service in the fall of 1994 as a Maternal and Child Health Consultant with the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Her exemplary leadership was proven, once again, as she continues to deal with the COVID 19 pandemic while moving forward with new initiatives that are innovative and creative. She is the expert, not only for our health care providers, but for city and town governments, schools, assisted living, and correctional facilities. Throughout the COVID-19 public health response, Brandie has led the way in driving and communicating efforts for the safety of all across her region and the state of Oklahoma.

The **Health Innovator of the Year Award,** was awarded to **Representative Ajay Pittman,** who is now serving in her third term headed into the 59th Legislative Session. She is a sixth-generation Oklahoman, who is an American political leader and community activist. Pittman is the first female millennial elected to serve in the Oklahoma 57th State Legislature. She is also the first statewide second-generation female legacy member to serve in House District 99.  Senator Anastasia A. Pittman, her mother, held the office for eight years.

She is a proud seventh-generation Native American, with dual citizenship in the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. She is the third Seminole elected to serve in the Oklahoma State Legislature. In 2019, House Speaker Charles McCall appointed her to serve on the joint committee on State-Tribal Relations, and in 2020-21 to serve as vice-chair of the state-wide redistricting committee for Oklahoma County.  Pittman has also been appointed as the co-chair of the Native American Caucus for the 58th Legislature. She currently serves on the Agriculture & Rural Development, Public Health, Appropriations & Budget for Human Services, and Transportation committees, in addition to the Agriculture Caucus, the Oklahoma Legislative Black Caucus, Mental Health Caucus, Early Childhood Caucus and the Aerospace Caucus. Pittman is also co-chair of the Millennial Action Project Future Caucus, a statewide millennial bi-partisan caucus. Representative Pittman supported Study #22-080 on the state-wide implementation of Handle With Care Oklahoma. **As a growing champion for interagency collaboration, she was chosen as the legislator who showed the most passion for health innovation.**

**Helping celebrate this momentous occasion, a representative from the National Networks of Public Health Institutes, Laura Sawney, Senior Program Manager of Tribal Public Health, joined with a special congratulatory message for 25 years of OTPC and health partnerships**. NNPHI is the national affiliate for the Public Health Institute of Oklahoma. Additional supporting sponsors and partners for the event include Oklahoma Public Health Association, Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET), The Lynn Institute, Oklahoma State Department of Health, Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma, National Network of Public Health Institutes, Pathways to a Healthier You, EB Consulting, Unite Us, Tabitha Baptist Church, Duncan Regional Hospital, Oklahoma’s Credit Union, Food on the Move, A New Leaf, Dee Flowers, Not Your Average Joe and members of the Oklahoma Turning Point Council.

For more information on the award winners and pictures of the event, please visit [www.oklahomaturningpointcouncil.org](http://www.oklahomaturningpointcouncil.org).