

GEORGE LATIMER, Westchester County Executive

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WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH PRESENTS 2019 PUBLIC HEALTH AWARDS

Top Honors go to Stephanie Marquesano and Jack Waxman

(White Plains, NY) - Together with County Executive George Latimer, the Westchester County Board of Health presented the 2019 Public Health Awards today, recognizing outstanding contributions to public health in Westchester by five people and one organization and celebrating the accomplishments of the public health community. The presentation at White Plains High School was hosted by the Westchester County Department of Health to celebrate National Public Health Week, which is observed April 1-7.

Westchester County Executive George Latimer presented the winners with proclamations honoring their achievements and said: “We are fortunate in Westchester to have so many talented professionals, parents and young people volunteering their time to improve the health of our community. I congratulate each of these individuals who have accomplished so much on behalf of our veterans, the disadvantaged and our young people. I encourage other residents to follow their inspiring example.”

Latimer thanked the volunteer members of the Westchester County Board of Health for safeguarding the County’s health, along with Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD, and the Health Department, who work together to preserve, protect and promote the health of Westchester residents.

Board of Health President Robert Baker, MD, presented the Dr. Harold Keltz Distinguished Public Health Service Award to Stephanie Marquesano, an Ardsley mother who has made it her mission to raise awareness about co-occurring disorders, which are the combination of one or more mental health challenges and substance misuse/addiction, in both prevention and treatment.

Board of Health President Robert Baker, MD said: “The tragic loss of her 19-year-old son, Harris, transformed Stephanie Marquesano into a passionate and persistent advocate. Stephanie has worked alongside mental health professionals to promote an integrated and comprehensive treatment approach, to help other Westchester families avoid losing a son or daughter to an accidental opioid overdose. She has partnered with students, educators and the County’s Department of Community Mental Health to promote peer awareness and prevention throughout Westchester public schools.”

To highlight her work, White Plains High School students who are peer leaders in the school's Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness group described their outreach activities as part of this year's CODA Week celebration, which were developed in collaboration with the Harris project, Marquesano's not-for-profit agency.

The Board awarded the J.R. Tesone Youth Public Health Service Award to Jack Waxman, 18, of Scarsdale, for his creativity in promoting the dangers of vaping to his peers and for his effective and collaborative lobbying for legislation to ban the sale of flavored e-liquids and reduce youth access to tobacco.

Dr. Baker said: "Jack took action on multiple fronts to combat the scourge of vaping on his peers. He would not be cowed by big business or sophisticated marketing. While still in high school, Jack produced a powerful video on the dangers of youth vaping and appeared on Good Morning America to draw national attention to this issue. He also worked diligently behind the scenes to influence public policy by writing to, meeting with and developing relationships with prevention organizations and policy makers to advocate for stricter local, state and federal regulation of vaping products to curb teen vaping."

The Board also recognized four Public Health Honorees:

- Glenn Albright, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist from Bedford who directs the Veterans Equine Therapy program at 13 Hands Equine Rescue in Bedford. Through therapeutic work with horses, Dr. Albright helps veterans who experience post-deployment stress, and their families, free of charge.
- Abe Baker-Butler, 17, of Rye Brook, is a leader of Students Against Nicotine, a student-led nonprofit organization, and a peer educator and trainer on preventing teen e-cigarette use. He has advocated for Tobacco 21 legislation and increased restrictions on vaping-related products at the County and State level.
- Shauna Porteus, of Irvington, is the Community Services Librarian at the Yonkers Public Library, which she has helped grow into a vital resource for advocacy and community support. She applied for and was awarded a grant to pilot a case management program at the library, where patrons are linked to needed services, including housing, jobs, health care and government programs.
- WJCS Center Lane is the County's only LGBTQ+ youth and community education center. It serves young people ages 13 to 21, providing social and recreational activities, support groups, individual counseling, social justice and advocacy, as well as workshops and leadership training.

Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD, said: "Improving public health takes creativity, commitment and collaboration. We are grateful to all our honorees and to all our non-profit partners for enhancing and supporting the Health Department's mission of promoting and protecting public health."

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About Westchester County

Westchester County, located in the heart of the historic Hudson Valley, covers 500 square miles and has a population of just under a million. Originally home to Native Americans, who were members of the Lenape tribe, it is today a rich mix of many cultures and landscapes. The County is a blend of bustling cities, quaint villages and picturesque towns as well as open spaces and a network of beautiful parks. Westchester is made up of 6 cities, 19 towns and 20 villages. Westchester County is known for top-notch public schools, and a high quality of life. The County is also an intellectual capital, boasting a highly educated workforce, competitive colleges and universities, Fortune 500 companies, world changing non-profits, and cutting-edge research centers. Westchester is led by County Executive George Latimer, who took office in January 2018 as the ninth County Executive. Using inclusion and openness as a foreground, Latimer is fighting to make Westchester a destination for all people to live, work and enjoy. Learn more about Westchester County by visiting www.westchestergov.com

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