

PHD Director Announces Retirement

Hayden—Jeanne Bock, director of the Panhandle Health District (PHD) since 2001, will retire this fall after 24 years of public health service in Idaho's five northern counties.

The Board of Health accepted her retirement notice March 25 and plans to hire her successor by August.

"I envision the health district as a little ship on a big ocean. We need a good captain or we're in big trouble," said Marlow Thompson, chairman of the Board of Health. "Jeanne is a good captain, knows the direction to go, holds steady to her course, is willing to hit the big waves head on and works well with the crew."

Under Bock's leadership, the health district consolidated public health services scattered throughout Kootenai County into one environmentally-efficient new building in Hayden. PHD replaced the office building it had outgrown in St. Maries with a new building that is equipped to serve as an emergency operations center for Benewah County.

On Bock's watch, PHD helped end a decades-old practice of residents discharging household waste directly into Shoshone County's Canyon Creek. Success was the result of a collaborative effort involving PHD, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Shoshone County Commissioners and Burke Canyon residents.

"Jeanne deals with people on a rational rather than emotional basis and that's enabled her to accomplish quite a bit for public health," Thompson said.

Bock also oversaw the creation of Idaho's first and only Aquifer Protection District. The special district PHD proposed to protect drinking water in perpetuity won overwhelming public support and became a role model for the state.

"I will miss the responsibility of making decisions I can see will benefit the district," Bock said. "My executive staff and managers provide excellent input."

One of those decisions was to create the Panhandle Public Health Foundation, now called Project Health, with former PHD director Kay Kindig. The foundation raises money from annual book sales and bike rides to support programs that promote public health in the five northern counties. This year's bike ride, Pedalin' for Project Health, is scheduled for June 5.

Bock, a native of Coeur d'Alene, earned her master's degree in nursing from Whitworth College. She joined the health district in June 1986 as a home health nurse in Sandpoint. As a community health nurse, she presented an Adolescent Health Education Conference for local teens for six years, bringing to the area national speakers on teen-related health issues. She also taught Sandpoint sixth-graders about puberty.

"Priceless. I enjoyed that part of my career," she said. "Health district services were more individual-oriented then. We've switched to focusing on the population as a whole."

As director of PHD's Family and Community Health Division, Bock was honored by the state in 1996 for her work to raise immunization rates. An invitation followed to exhibit the Children's Healthy Start Idaho Immunization Project at the Presidential Summit in Philadelphia the next year.

The Board of Health agreed in 2001 that Bock's experience and working knowledge of PHD were just what the health district needed in a director.

“She brought leadership and stability and helped move the health district forward,” Thompson said.

Bock will leave the district at the end of October. Her successor will face challenges that range from working with a board appointed by commissioners from five counties to figuring out how to provide vital health services with shrinking budgets.

“Communication skills are vital, being able to work with partners is important, and being able to see things in different perspectives—being able to realize there are other ways to get where you want to go—are all skills a director needs,” she said.

A new director also will face the challenge of preserving health districts as they now exist in Idaho, Thompson said.

“Legislators forget that other states look at Idaho’s public health district system with envy,” he said. “We need someone who understands the mission of public health, someone for the long haul with experience and a track record.

“A lot Jeanne has done will make it easier for her successor. We will miss her.”