

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LCC Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients Announced

Parsons, KS - Labette Community College announces that the 7th Annual Distinguished Alumni Award recipients are: Linda Gale Brown, Joe Heppler, Kara McIlvain, and Susan Souders. The Distinguished Alumni Award was developed by the Labette Community College Foundation and Alumni Association Board to honor alumni of LCC that have proved to be successful individuals within their communities, careers, and families. The recipients for 2015 will be honored at a luncheon on May 15th, 2015, and at commencement that evening.

These four individuals are all graduates of LCC and have accomplished many great things in the years following their time at the college. The following biographies give insight to how they have made an impact on whom and whatever they are involved in and why they are deserving of this award.



Gale Brown, Oswego, KS, graduated from Labette Community College with an Associate of Applied Science in Radiography in 1999. Gale worked on the radiography staff at Oswego Health Center from 1998-2002.

After graduating from LCC, Gale continued her higher education and earned several more degrees. In 2005 she received a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Friends University. In 2008 she earned a Master of Science Degree in Technical Teacher Education from Pittsburg State University. In 2012, she received and Ed. Specialist Degree in Technical Teacher Education from Pittsburg State University. She is currently working completing a Doctor of Education Degree in Adult and Lifelong Learning from the University of Arkansas.

While attending and after graduating from LCC, Gale worked as a Student Technologist and Staff Radiologic Technologist at Labette County Medical Center from 1998–2012. In 2002, Brown began working as a Clinical Adjunct Instructor for the Radiography Program at LCC. In 2003, she became an Associate Professor and Clinical Coordinator for the LCC Radiography Program. Brown has been the Radiography Club Advisor since fall 2005 and helped the club become one of the most active student organizations on campus. In fact, the Radiography Club has received the Health Science Student Organization of the Year multiple times. In addition, Gale has received the Advisor of the Year award for Allied Health numerous times. In 2011, Brown received the prestigious Distinguished Faculty of the Year Award at LCC. In 2012, she was promoted to the Radiography Program Director at Labette Community College.

Brown is a member of several organizations including the American Society of Radiologic Technologists, the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists, Kansas Society of Radiologic Technologists as Professional Development Chair and Vice-Chair of Professional Development, Association of Educators in Imaging and Radiologic Sciences, and Kansas National Educators Association as the LCC Faculty Senate and LCC Faculty Association Treasurer.

In addition to her professional affiliations, Gale has been a volunteer for Heartland of Girls Scouts of Kansas for many years. She served as the Oswego Service Unit Manager, Product Manager, and a troop leader for all age levels of Girls Scouts. Gale also provides leadership by serving on the Oswego Parks and Community Foundation Board.

Gale, her husband Brad and their daughter Stephanie live in Oswego, KS.



Joe Heppler, Parsons, KS, graduated from Labette Community College in 2013 with a degree in Psychology.

While at LCC, Joe was active in several campus organizations including the Campus Activity Board, Phi Theta Kappa honor society, Student Ambassadors, and the Student Government Association. Joe was the Campus Activity Board President, where he helped bring in speakers and would organize student activities. As part of the Student Government Association, Joe was the Vice President and a Student Senator.

As a part of Phi Theta Kappa, Joe received an award in 2013 for being an International Distinguished Member of Phi Theta Kappa. In 2011 & 2012, Joe Received the “Broken Wing Award”. This award is given to students who have soared above adversities in educational pursuits. Throughout his time at LCC, Joe photographed campus events as a student photographer. For three years, Joe was also the Student ADA Liaison for LCC where he helped students struggling with disability or injury.

After graduating from LCC, Joe went on to attend Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. There he again served as a campus student photographer.

Joe has long served as a member of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church. From 1998 to 2004, he worked as St. Patrick’s PSR (Parish School of Religion) and RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) Youth assistant where he developed lesson plans and researched truths of Faith. He later used this knowledge to help younger church members (grades 5th-6th). From 2006-2013 he was St. Patrick’s Totus Tuus Assistant. Joe continues to serve as an usher where he helps with Mass and volunteers wherever he could.

Joe is the son of Harry and Kathy Heppler of Parsons.



Kara McIlvain grew up in Labette County and graduated from Labette Community College in 2000, with an Associate in Applied Science in Respiratory Therapy. While attending LCC, Kara was active in student life activities serving as President of the Respiratory Therapy Club. She was on the Presidential and Dean's Honor Rolls, and was part of the team that was runner up for a state respiratory therapy quiz bowl. After graduating LCC, Kara earned a Bachelor Degree in Business Management from the University of Phoenix - Online.

Kara's leadership and business skills were demonstrated as she climbed ladder while working at Cox Health Systems in Springfield, MO. Kara earned a spot as the supervisor of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, and then the Adult Medical ICU, Neurotrauma ICU, and Surgical ICU.

She then became the Patient Assess and Treat Supervisor, and finally the Department Dayshift Supervisor. Kara developed Respiratory Protocols that helped save the Respiratory Department thousands of dollars, but most importantly saved lives. She worked with surgeons to develop a Post-Operative Assessment Protocol that statistically saved one person per month. As a result of that success, she was asked to develop a Post-Trauma Assessment Protocol. Kara was invited to speak at the International American Association of Respiratory Care National Convention to educate fellow Respiratory Therapists around the world about the benefits of respiratory protocols, specifically a ventilator management protocol.

In 2009, she became part of a group called Ventilator Solutions Group with the mission of traveling the region to teach respiratory therapists and physicians about the benefits of respiratory therapist driven protocols. Since moving to Parsons, and working at LCC, she has continued working with this group and has brought national renowned speakers (including Medical Directors from Harvard and Duke universities) to the LCC campus as part of the Critical Care and Trauma Seminars.

In January of 2010, Kara returned to Parsons to be an instructor for the respiratory therapy department. In 2012, she was promoted to the Program Director. While in this current position, the pass rate for our students has increased by almost 40%. In addition to initiating the Critical Care and Trauma Seminars, she has also reinstated the annual Cystic Fibrosis walk which had not been done for several years.

Kara is a member of the Labette County High School and Columbus High School Health Science Advisory Boards. She has instructed and assisted in religion classes to middle school children since 2011 and served on the Neosho Township Volunteer Fire Department from 2011-2014. In the past she was a basketball coach the Parsons Rec Center, and an assistant basketball coach for St. Patrick's little league. While in Springfield, Kara was a youth basketball coach for the UPWARDS basketball program, and taught religion to 4th graders, 5th graders, as well as, adults. She is currently a member of the American Association for Respiratory Care.

Kara has two children, Dillon and Kylie McIlvain, and is blending a family with Travis Good who has two children, Ethan and Mallory Good.



Susan Souders, a lifetime resident of Labette County, was born in Oswego, KS to Wanda and William “Bill” Hevel. She graduated from Oswego High School as Salutatorian in 1972. During her school years she was active in Girl Scouts and volunteered as a Candy Striper at the Oswego City Hospital and Oswego Nursing Home where she developed a passion for nursing. Over the next 10 years she took evening classes at Labette Community College while being a stay-at-home mom. In 1982 she entered the nursing program graduating in 1984 with an Associate Degree of Nursing.

During her second year as a nursing student, she worked part time as an LPN at the Oswego City Hospital. Upon graduation she accepted a full time position as an RN in the Emergency Room at Labette County Medical Center (now Labette Health) where she worked for over 20 years with the last 5 years as the ER Nurse Manager. She then spent the next 4 years working as a public health nurse at the Labette County Health Department. From May 2009, Susan has been employed by the Cancer Center of Kansas at the Parsons satellite office. She obtained her national certification as an oncology nurse in November of 2011.

For several years Susan volunteered her nursing services every week at the Free Community Health Clinic at the Assembly of God Church in Parsons. Now as an oncology nurse she takes pleasure in mentoring LCC nursing students, especially being able to “pay it forward” as an educator and encourager. Susan, along with the cancer center staff, also participates in the job shadowing program at both the Parsons and Labette County High Schools. One of Susan’s nursing highlights came when she traveled to Haiti in February 2011 to work at the Haitian Christian Mission medical facility.

Susan enjoys serving others through inspirational encouragement. In 2004 and 2005, she spearheaded a book project sponsored by the Women in The Word Bible Study Group at the Oswego Christian Church. The group published 2 books: Women in Bloom through Headaches, Heartaches, and Hallelujahs, and Women in Bloom through Love, Laughter, and Tears. Donations from these 2 books supported a children’s and a women’s ministry. For the past 2 years, Susan with the help of family and friends has operated a booth ministry known as “Left Over Pieces” at Vintage Heirlooms & Collectibles in Parsons. All the proceeds from the sales go to support local charities which include Hannah’s Promise Pregnancy Life Center and Safe Haven in Parsons. Susan and her husband attend Parsons Foursquare Church. Susan enjoys helping her husband with church services at the Elm Haven East and West facilities. She also appreciates teaming up with several Oswego Christian Church members to provide church services at the Oswego Deseret Health & Rehab facility.

Susan and her husband Buddy of 30 years live in Altamont and enjoy spending time with their blended family of 4 sons, 3 daughters, 13 grandchildren, and 3 great grandsons.

For more information about the Distinguished Alumni Award or to nominate someone for next year, please contact, Lindi Forbes, Executive Director of Alumni and Foundation at LCC, at (620) 820-1212 or by e-mail at lindif@labette.edu.