

Utah County Employee of the Month for February, 2015  
Eric Edwards - Director, Health Promotions  
Utah County Health Department

Eric Edwards is the Director of Health Promotion at Utah County Health Department. After graduating from the U of U with his bachelor's degree (*boooooo!*) he was smart enough to get a Master's in Public Administration from BYU (*Yaaay!*) He started his career at Salt Lake County Health Department in 1995. (*Ask about his time dressed as a Dodo Bird to give school assemblies on Safe Gun Use!*) Six years later, he flew south to work with us. And boy, are his arms tired!

When Eric became director 13 years ago, he had 5 employees. Now there are 22 employees – spread out in 3 areas of the building and at the American Fork office! He is always looking for new funding opportunities that will allow his staff to better serve the public. Currently, Eric and his employees oversee 23 grants totaling \$691,203. And that is just **this** year's funding!!

With employees joining the staff with new grant funding, and desks spread out throughout the building, Eric had the idea to create a New Employee Orientation manual (how to complete time cards, use Groupwise, get a badge, etc.) Each new employee is also assigned a mentor to help them adjust to the new job. He also started a monthly newsletter where each employee can share what they are working on and all employees will feel included and part of Health Promotion.

Eric is passionate about promoting public health, especially with students entering medical school. He encourages them to get a medical degree AND a degree Public Health. He wants them to understand the importance of **prevention**, which is what Public Health is all about – preventing injury and disease.

Eric includes the newest technology in grant writing and programming. He contacted the computer department to create several GIS maps that easily show disease prevalence and other data, which enabled us to secure grants and visually see areas of the county that need help.

Eric and his staff advocate for better health, even if this makes them unpopular with the public. One example is when several ER doctors became concerned about the number of patients suffering catastrophic injuries at jump gyms (compound fractures and paralysis) and approached the health department for help. Eric and our Injury Program recommended jump gyms monitor all injuries and report them to the health department. He is currently evaluating the data to determine the scope of the problem (and if a mandatory reporting or safety regulation is needed.) He has spent 2 years helping to develop a county policy regulating E-cigarettes, e-juice, and accompanying devices. Eric is a regular attendee at the quarterly Board of Health meetings.

Since Eric likes a lot on his plate, he decided to be president of both statewide public health associations! He was President of the Health Education Association of Utah in 2006 and President of the Utah Public Health Association in 2010. He is also actively involved in Utah Local Association of Community Health Education Specialists, and found out after he was hired that it was Utah County's turn to coordinate the group. Welcome to the job!

Eric has a lot of outstanding qualities that make him an exemplary employee. Eric speaks Spanish and helps translate when needed. He is also kind, intelligent, dedicated, thorough, hard-working, and team-oriented. He has a high degree of emotional maturity and treats people with professionalism and respect. Eric also has a quirky sense of humor and doesn't take himself too seriously. His leadership style is open and collaborative and this makes him very approachable.

Eric looks for ways to collaborate with other divisions and provide programming. He partnered with WIC to provide a guest speaker for Leadership Training for both WIC and Health Promotion staff. He collaborated with WIC to provide several different tobacco cessation programs over the years. The Baby Steps program provides diapers as a reward to expecting moms who quit smoking. This is a big incentive to WIC clients! He developed online education classes for WIC on health related topics such as immunizations and asthma. He has also helped develop an outreach program for the health department. This program features the services of the entire health department and can be taken and used by any staff to provide outreach and education.

Eric and the tobacco program are also partnering with the Environmental Health division to enforce new electronic cigarette ordinances passed by the Board of Health.

With the rapid growth in the north county area, Eric collaborated with nursing and environmental health to create a health department office in the American Fork WIC building. At the AF office, patrons can receive immunizations, drop off restaurant plans for review, get help installing car seats and take free chronic disease self-management workshops.

Eric also coordinates Recovery Plus, a collaboration between Wasatch Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, and the Health Department. It's a pilot program to see how all three agencies can collaborate and not duplicate mental health and substance abuse efforts. If successful, this will go statewide.

Eric's wife, Angie, says Eric is an incredible dad. Although he is outnumbered by females in their home, he doesn't just tolerate it, he loves it! He takes his girls fishing, biking, ice-skating, swimming, etc. He enjoys spending time outdoors with his girls. Angie remembers when the girls were little, Eric came home from work with pink baseball gloves, Barbie fishing poles and pink tackle boxes. That was his way of saying, 'I can do this girl thing.'

Eric also attends all of his girl's clogging competitions, and helps wherever needed – even trying to help his daughters apply their makeup (with disastrous results.....)

Between work, teaching at BYU, church callings and family, he doesn't have a lot of spare time. But when he does, he enjoys fly fishing and tying flies. His girls tease him that he's not any help with math homework, but they all ask for help with anything science related, especially the life sciences. He has a great memory for 'all things science'.

Angie says that "Eric is very easy going and it takes a lot to push his buttons. I've never heard anyone say anything uncomplimentary about him. He is easy to be around. It doesn't matter if it's a room full of preschoolers or legislators; he adapts to the setting and does his thing. Eric has an amazing way of finding the good in things and people."

Eric is also an amazing vegetable gardener. His family always has fresh tomatoes, onions, potatoes, etc. There were so many potatoes this year Eric must have thought he had a contract with McDonald's to provide the potatoes for their fries!

Angie says, "His biggest fault is his loyalty to the "U". One of my greatest accomplishments is making sure our girls want to go to BYU. That is a hard thing for Eric. We often remind him that his Undergraduate was from the U of U. When he was older, **and so much wiser**, he chose BYU for his Masters. We try to be patient with him. We know he will convert eventually. "

"He has talked many times about the great people he works with and how lucky he is that he enjoys going to work." Angie agrees.

The Health Promotion staff would like to nominate Eric Edwards for Employee of the Month for February 2015.