

## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Hometown Health Hero – Undersheriff Keith Eichler**

**(Coldwater, MI)** Heroes come in all shapes and sizes. Some come from your hometown and wear a Sheriff's uniform. Keith Eichler, Branch County Undersheriff was one of 13 awardees statewide recognized by the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) at the Capital Rotunda (Lansing, MI) today for working collaboratively within his community to make it a healthier place to live and grow. This year's Michigan Public Health Week theme is Safety is No Accident: Live Injury Free. Awardees were nominated and selected because of their extraordinary efforts to promote safety and prevent injuries and violence.



In this photo, left to right: State Senator Bruce Caswell (District 16), MDCH Director Olga Dazzo, Undersheriff Keith Eichler, State Representative Kenneth Kurtz (District 58) and Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's Safe Kids Coalition Coordinator Mary Boyer-Proctor.

Undersheriff Eichler is a homegrown, Hometown Health Hero – having lived all his life in Branch County. A Bronson High School graduate, who received Associate degrees from Ashworth University in Business Management and Criminal Justice, Keith has been employed by the Branch County Sheriff's Department for 27 years. He worked his way up through the ranks – first serving as a Correction's Officer for the Sheriff, then Road Deputy, Jail Administrator, and becoming the Undersheriff in 2006.

Keith is passionate about traffic safety issues. As Undersheriff, he oversees the Get STOPPED (Sheriffs Telling Our Parents and Promoting Educated Drivers) program. This Michigan Sheriff Association program's goal is to reduce the number of young drivers injured or killed in motor vehicle crashes each year. Interested parents of young adults, ages 16 to 21 years, can register their car online. If their car is pulled over for any reason, the parents will receive written notification of the incident so as to make them aware of potential problems, as well as enable them to enforce parental rules that often co-exist with teenage driving privileges. The information sent to the parents includes:

- Time and location of stop
- Driver's name and the number of passengers in vehicle
- Reason for the stop
- Whether any citations were issued

He implemented an award winning car seat program. This program was funded by a \$4,000 Office of Highway Safety and Planning grant which was used to purchase car seats for parents who could not afford one. Working collaboratively with the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency and the Safe Kids Coalition, he worked to make sure that these free seats were provided to families in need and installed into their cars correctly. Though the grant has been expended, he continues to maintain the Sheriff's role as a car seat inspection site.

He also is assisting in developing the Safe Kids' annual plan and is working to establish a Child Passenger Safety Certification class to address the lack of certified technicians in the county. According to Keith, "It's not enough to have a car safety seat for your child. Seats must be installed correctly so that if there is a crash, the child is protected. Many adults are unaware they are using the safety restraint incorrectly, thereby placing their child at risk. Certified technicians can help assure the installation is correctly done through car seat safety checks. However, this county only has four certified technicians. We need more."

According to Mary Boyer-Proctor, Health Department staff and Safe Kids Coalition Coordinator, "Keith has shown so much dedication to our cause. He has provided much leadership in developing our annual plan. He willingly assists in any way he can – whether directing cars to inspection slots during a car seat check event or talking to people at a health fair. As a result of his work and the great work of all the volunteers, Branch County residents have increased in knowledge in the correct usage of car seats and seat belts. This not only prevents injuries but it saves lives!"

Keith also serves as co-chair for the Branch County Substance Abuse Task Force, another initiative that seeks to prevent injuries and to provide substance abuse education. Task force members state Keith willingly volunteers to assist with various assignments ranging from speaking engagements to the County Mock Crash, hosted by the schools' SADD Chapters. As co-chair, he works hard to make sure that the public is aware of the impact of drinking and driving and the negative consequences associated with illegal drug use.

Steve Todd, Health Officer for the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, congratulates Keith on his award, noting that "Keith is a great collaborator. He is always more interested in getting the job done than getting the spotlight. And it seems fitting that during this time when people are asked to do more with less, that the hard work of those that aren't asked but just do is recognized. Keith demonstrates the truism that Public Health is everyone's work."

Michigan celebrates Public Health Week during April 11<sup>th</sup> to April 17<sup>th</sup>. This year's theme helps to ensure that core public health principles such as promoting safety and preventing injuries and violence have a strong foundation in our communities and public health system. To learn more about Get STOPPED, go to the Branch County website at <http://www.countyofbranch.com> and click on Sheriff's Department. To learn more or to become involved in the Safe Kids Coalition and/or the Branch County Substance Abuse Task Force, visit the health department's website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org).

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