

**JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE**

Public Health Facility, 531 Meade Street, Watertown, New York 13601

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**2024 Public Health Service Awards of Distinction**

**Watertown, NY** – The Jefferson County Public Health Service has established public health excellence awards to honor employees and community partners for outstanding service in the advancement and improvement of public health. The inaugural award ceremony for the first recipients will take place on Thursday morning, 9/12/2024 at 8:30 a.m. at the Jefferson County Public Health Service facility at 531 Meade Street, Watertown, NY. In addition to the honorees receiving such well-deserved recognition, the awards are named for the past two directors of public health, Jean A. Bilow and Ginger B. Hall, as well as Retired U.S. Army Reserve Major General Robert J. Kasulke, MD, Jefferson County’s long-serving medical director, who passed away in late 2023.

The award for public health professional excellence is named for Jean A. Bilow, the first and longest-served Jefferson County Director of Public Health. Much of the department’s current structure and programming was either put in place or greatly expanded through Jean’s leadership. While programs have certainly evolved since her retirement, Jean had a vision that expanded public health’s impact broadly into the greater health care system, and improved population health. The Medical Examiner, Emergency Medical Services, and health promotion programs all happened under Jean’s leadership. Jean also led the department’s responses to a significant meningococcal outbreak, novel H1N1 influenza, pertussis, and other communicable disease responses. Jean’s tenure also saw the development of public health preparedness and response, which was put in place following the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks.

The award for public health clinical excellence is named for Ginger B. Hall, the second Jefferson County Director of Public Health. Before Ginger became the department head, and during her time as Director, her tenure greatly advanced clinical care, quality assurance, and quality improvement standards in the home and clinic settings. Ginger also ably led the department’s response through the COVID-19 pandemic, and she worked tirelessly to procure funding to establish the first community paramedicine program pilot in New York State, which is measurably and significantly reducing costly Emergency Department visits and hospital inpatient admissions in Jefferson County.

The award for public health community partnership is named for Robert J. Kasulke, MD, who served as Medical Director and Assistant Medical Examiner for Jefferson County over approximately three decades. Dr. Kasulke sadly passed away in November 2023. A hallmark of Dr. Kasulke’s career was service to the community and to the country. In addition to his work for the department, he was medical director for Hospice of Jefferson County for many years, he served as a physician for the Gouverneur Correctional Facility, he was a Major General in the U.S. Army Reserves, and he was actively committed to honoring veterans, through both honors programs for veterans that became patients of Hospice, and honor flights to Washington D.C. which supports aging veterans in visiting national war memorials. Dr. Kasulke served his community tirelessly, through active membership on many community agency boards of directors.

Employees nominated colleagues and partners over the Spring of this year, and the department's administrative team selected the following inaugural 2024 award winners:

The 2024 **Jean A. Bilow Award for Public Health Excellence** will be awarded to **Vonnice L Joels, Medical Investigator** with the Jefferson County Medical Examiner program.

The 2024 **Ginger B. Hall Award for Public Health Clinical Excellence** will be awarded to **Cathleen M. Biggs, RN** with the Preventive Services Unit of the department, and whom for many years also worked in the Certified Home Health Agency.

The 2024 **Robert J. Kasulke, MD Award for Public Health Community Partnership** will be awarded to **Anita Seefried-Brown, Director of the Alliance for Better Communities.**

Future awards 2025 forward will be presented annually every April during National Public Health Week. Media is invited and encouraged to attend this event.

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