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**April 14, 2022**

**Health Department of Northwest Michigan News Release**

**Health Department of Northwest Michigan nominates  
Beaver Island Superintendent as Hometown Health Hero**

Wil Cwikel, Superintendent-Principal of Beaver Island Community Schools, was honored in Lansing on Wednesday as a Hometown Health Hero as part of National Public Health Week. He was nominated for the honor by Dr. Joshua Meyerson, Medical Director of the Health Department of Northwest Michigan.

Cwikel, one of 10 individuals and organizations presented with the 2022 Hometown Health Hero award, was cited for his untiring dedication to assuring all eligible residents on the remote island in Lake Michigan had access to the COVID-19 vaccine. In partnership with the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, Beaver Island residents topped the list of most vaccinated residents in the health department's four-county jurisdiction.

In nominating him for the award, Dr. Meyerson said, "Mr. Cwikel advocated with the local health department for COVID vaccine clinics on Beaver Island, allowed the use of the school facilities for recurrent COVID and general vaccine clinics for all ages, and himself volunteered as a greeter, helper, and promoter of these activities."

Further, Cwikel helped coordinate clinics on the island which required staff with the Health Department of Northwest Michigan to fly by charter aircraft. Cwikel's promotion of these clinics led to measurable increases in the number of persons served and COVID-19 doses given. Without his dedication, many people on the island would have had difficulty accessing services and receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as other vaccines. Beaver Island is only accessible by ferry in the summer and small plane service in the winter. A rural health center is located on the island, but there is no hospital or emergency room.

Despite these limitations and due to Cwikel's support and use of the Beaver Island Community School facility, the Health Department of Northwest Michigan held five vaccination clinics. In addition to the COVID-19 vaccines, influenza, Tdap, childhood vaccines, and other vaccines for adults were also given.

As of November 14, 2021, Beaver Island (a census tract in its entirety) reported 91.2% of its residents 16 and older had received one COVID-19 dose, and 85.8% were fully vaccinated. Despite the obvious physical and distance barriers that living on an island entail, this locale had the highest vaccination rate of all census tracts in the health department's four-county region!

Dr. Meyerson noted that all schools within the health department's jurisdiction were very cooperative in providing assistance throughout the pandemic, yet "Beaver Island Community School and Mr. Cwikel went well beyond the customary in advocating for and helping achieve improved health outcomes for everyone in his community. He was physically present and helped work many of the clinics held at his

*The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit [nwhealth.org](http://nwhealth.org).*

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school, in addition to tending to his day-to-day obligations while school was in session,” Dr. Meyerson said.

Cwikel acknowledged the critical role schools in rural areas play in the overall health and well-being of their communities. “Whether it is helping track outbreaks of infectious disease, connecting families with community health support, or hosting dental or vaccination clinics, the more a school can do to promote public health, the more time kids will be able to spend in school. A healthy community makes a healthy school,” he added.

Like Beaver Island Community School, districts across northern Michigan were committed to providing in-person learning as much as possible throughout the pandemic. Cwikel said the leadership and staff at the Health Department of Northwest Michigan provided essential leadership and were great partners in helping schools navigate the challenging waters of COVID-19.

“It’s an honor being selected for one of Michigan’s Hometown Health Hero awards,” Cwikel said. “In my opinion, all of northern Michigan’s school superintendents, teachers, support staff, parents, and many volunteers – in partnership with Health Department of Northwest Michigan Health Officer Lisa Peacock and Medical Director Dr. Josh Meyerson, school liaisons, vaccination workers, and contact tracers – all jointly deserve this award.

“Northern Michigan fared remarkably well facing the crisis over the past two years,” Cwikel added. “I humbly accept this on behalf of everyone who worked hard to keep their schools open and their communities safe.”

The 10 Hometown Health Hero awards and Jean Chabut Health Policy Champion awards were presented in Lansing on Wednesday as part of National Public Health Week.

“Our Hometown Health Hero awards are a way for us to highlight selfless and dedicated champions of public health who are making incredible efforts to improve the lives of Michigan residents,” said Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel. “We celebrate all efforts, no matter how small or large, of health care professionals who make a positive impact on our state.”

**CUTLINE:**

Wil Cwikel (right), Superintendent-Principal of Beaver Island Community Schools, received the Hometown Health Hero award in Lansing earlier this week. Pictured with him are (from left) Health Department of Northwest Michigan Health Officer Lisa Peacock, and Cwikel’s wife Gail Gruenwald.