

Mental Health America, Clifford W. Beers Award, 2018

Nominee: Lori Hamilton, RN, C., Director of Healthy Initiatives, K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc.

Lori Hamilton, RN, C. is Director of Healthy Initiatives and the resident nurse for K-VA-T Food Stores Inc., parent company to the grocery store chain, Food City. With over 134 stores spanning regions in Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, and Georgia, it is no small feat for Lori to oversee the health and wellness of all 16,000 K-VA-T associates whom she affectionately calls her "patients". Lori also manages the Healthy Initiatives team and works with marketing and other store departments to develop and implement wellness programs for associates and customers and form partnerships with local organizations for events and promotions. Lori has been working with Food City for seven years and as a registered nurse for 30+ years. She is well-known in the medical community as a physical and mental health resource and advocate.

1. Professional Development

Lori earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from East Tennessee State University. She currently holds certification in ambulatory women's health care. Prior to Food City, Lori worked in a clinical setting for Mountain States Health Alliance, which included caring for patients and working with all members of the healthcare team including physicians, social workers, and therapists in the areas of Women's Health, Medical Surgical Nursing and Labor/Delivery. In this role, she opened/managed the Health Resources Center (HRC) in Johnson City, Tennessee. The HRCs are located in community malls and employ nurses, dietitians, and guest clinicians who provide health education for disease management and mental health. Lori volunteers with the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, and American Diabetes Association. She currently serves as Co-Chair of Population Health & Healthy Communities and Chair of the Health and Wellness Subgroup of Food Marketing Institute.

2. Demonstrated Success

Lori was hired by Food City to develop and implement a wellness program for associates and initiate programming that supports health in stores for customer engagement. In our region, physical health concerns such as obesity and diabetes are rampant, but opioid addiction and other substance abuse are also common and often co-occurring. Lori's goal was to provide resources to empower associates and customers to make better decisions that, in turn, change behavior. Lori has achieved this goal by not only focusing on physical health through our company diabetes program and weight loss initiatives, but also by advocating for mental health resources through associate insurance benefits and establishing an employee assistance program. Each year, Lori visits each one of our 134 stores to meet with associates individually and promote our mental health benefits and employee assistance program. She provides presentations at executive staff meetings and store manager meetings specifically on mental health in order to hopefully break the stigma and the silence often associated with mental illness and addiction.

Lori promotes a holistic view of health including wellness of mind, body, and spirit. Many times, mental and emotional health is overlooked and discussion is avoided. Lori makes herself available for all Food City associates to help them find resources and improve in all areas of health. As a direct subordinate of Lori, I can attest to her caring and compassionate nature. She understands people and genuinely works to help them succeed. In our company and community, everyone knows "Nurse Lori". This type of "fame" and likeable personality, is something that is difficult to teach, but Lori cares without trying, because it is just who she is. In our business, we are "selling" health, which can be hard to measure. As

our CEO, Steve Smith, once said, our success is measured by “how much noise we are making”. Lori has made lots of noise in our community as an advocate for physical and mental health and as a result is well-respected and viewed as a vital resource for health promotion in our region.

Lori works well with others including upper management and obtains CEO support and input in all programs through monthly staff meetings and updates. She creates cohesive teams that play off the strengths of individuals and departments and also holds focus groups to determine if programs will be a worthwhile investment in our population. She is research-focused and collects current data to drive her programs, often disseminating this information to associates as well. Lori always has a strategic plan and constantly thinks of the future by having monthly planning meetings with her staff. She chooses appropriate interventions that meet the individual or group where they are to provide realistic and attainable goals. She also creates a supportive environment by having an “open-door” policy that allows associates to contact her when needed. Lastly, Lori evaluates outcomes by keeping data on the number of associates who participate in various programs in order to streamline the process and continually provide meaningful programs.

3. Leadership

Lori is a leader and role model in our company and community for physical and mental health. She “walks the talk” by doing the things that she asks others to do such as getting recommended health screenings, getting her flu shot, exercising regularly, and taking care of her mental health by engaging in stress-relieving activities and balancing work and home life. I think the reason that Lori is such a good leader is that she puts herself at the level of the associate and engages them where they are. She has a very moderate approach to lifestyle change – not requiring huge shifts or habit changes, but by initiating small steps. She is also very encouraging and understanding. She is the type of person that never has to demand that others follow, because others want to follow her and make her proud.

4. Innovation

Lori’s role as a nurse in the business / retail environment is new and is a more non-traditional role for an RN. Lori built her position and sort of wrote her own job description when starting at Food City because there was no precedent for her role. She was able to do this by gathering research and resources and keeping a big picture mindset. Lori is able to tie her previous experiences in the clinical field and marketing environment to her current position in wellness promotion in the retail space in order to make all pieces of the puzzle fit. Lori’s efforts have initiated changes in health status improvement, behavior change, and culture change at Food City. Lori’s constant encouragement and support is a big reason why I took my job with Food City and is probably the top reason for my continued job satisfaction.

5. Compelling Vision

Lori’s future areas of interest include disease prevention and holistic wellness. Lori believes that until we focus our efforts on the person as a whole including mental and emotional health, it will be extremely difficult to achieve lasting behavior change and make an impact on the overall health of the population. Lori attends mental health continuing education seminars in the community and networks with members of the healthcare team to form partnerships and learn how to better promote this aspect of wellness to Food City associates and customers.