

Area healthcare providers honored as part of AHEC Week

National Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Week is March 23-27. Dillon is home to the South Central Montana Area Health Education Center (SC MT AHEC) office and serves 11 counties from Granite to Park and Lewis and Clark to Beaverhead.

The national AHEC program was established in 1971 to improve the supply, distribution, diversity, and quality of the healthcare workforce, and increase access to healthcare in

medically underserved areas.

The Dillon emphasis is on healthcare workforce-related issues, such as introducing, educating and steering K-12 students into the healthcare career "pipeline" and recruiting healthcare providers to Montana. Lisa Benzel, Director, and Bergen Morehouse, Program Coordinator, operate the office and manage the various programs. The SC MT AHEC has many innovative projects structured around

increasing the accessibility of healthcare throughout the region.

One such project is REACH (Research and Explore Awesome Careers in Healthcare). This initiative is being tried in Philipsburg and Sheridan. High school students will participate in hands-on activities at the local healthcare facility, designed to engage them in the varied healthcare careers available. REACH will take place at Ruby Valley Hospital in May 2009.

Statewide recruitment of healthcare providers to rural areas is another focus.

In honor of National AHEC Week, three certificates of recognition were awarded in the south central region: Dillon Internist, Sandra McIntyre, MD, for putting in extra hours sharing her medical expertise to WWAMI medical students placed under her tutelage; Renee Harris, Health Science Occupation Specialist at the Office of Public Instruction, for her dedication to promoting healthcare occupations and the HOSA program to Montana high school students; and Tom Bartoletti, DMD, of Sheridan, for his commitment to encouraging rural students to pursue their career dreams.