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McKee gives first-ever honor

By *Shelley Widhalm*
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Seeking the spotlight is not what Melanie Keech does, but it is where Keech found herself Friday afternoon as she received the first-ever McKee Community Health Award.

The award, presented by the McKee Medical Center Foundation, recognizes an individual for contributing to “the overall health and wellness of the Loveland community through direct care or volunteer service in the health care field,” said Julie Johnson Haffner, executive director of the foundation.

“This year’s award winner is someone that is a behind-the-scenes educator, innovator and hard worker,” Haffner said. “(She) does not seek out opportunities or positions to put her in the spotlight but instead gets the job done in a quiet, unassuming manner.”

In 2005, Keech founded Home Helpers of Northern Colorado, a Loveland-based provider of home and personal care service.

Previously, Keech worked for the McKee Center for Holistic Medicine, a department of McKee Medical Center, and found that primary caregivers were suffering from stress-related health conditions.

“I felt that these primary caregivers needed some help,” Keech said. “It’s a big job to be a health provider, especially if it’s 24-7.”

The McKee Medical Center presented Keech with the award at the Thank You Loveland Luncheon, an annual event that recognizes and thanks hospital staff and the donors and friends of the foundation for their support of the McKee Medical Center.

“In the course of our fundraising and friend raising, we came across many stories from physicians, volunteers, patients and staff that exquisitely illustrate how your gifts of time, talent and treasure have helped provide quality patient care at an extraordinary level here in Loveland,” Haffner said.

One of the stories came from Kristin Pauplis, cancer survivor and patient of the McKee Cancer Center.

“I’m alive today because of the McKee oncology center,” Pauplis said.

Pauplis, who was diagnosed in June 2008 with abdominal carcinoma with an unknown primary, was told she had six months to live.

When making the diagnosis, her oncologist voluntarily got a second, then a third opinion, something many patients have to fight to get, Pauplis said. Her oncologist did whatever it took to get her the best treatment, she said.

“A tiny little city in a square state has the best medical facility,” she said. “You ask the patient a question, and you listen to their response. That’s what I experienced at McKee. ... That’s what the staff at McKee does, they put the patients’ needs first.”

Jerri Murtishaw reflected on her experiences with the Loveland Community Health Center, established in 1997 with the help of the McKee Medical Center Foundation.

Murtishaw used to suffer panic attacks and, with the help of the health center’s sliding fee scale, could get the treatment she needed.



Reporter-Herald/Jenny Sparks
Melanie Keech is congratulated by McKee Medical Center CEO Christopher Cornue after she received the first-ever McKee Community Health Award Friday during the Thank You Loveland Luncheon.

Her physician, Dr. Wayne Williamson, was unlike the doctors she had in the past who told her how she was feeling. He instead took the time to listen to what she had to say before coming up with a care plan, she said.

“Without his help, I wouldn’t be able to speak here,” she said.

Another story came from Steve Swayze, a teacher at Mountain View High School, and Iris Davis, a registered nurse and instructor for McKee’s Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth, or PARTY, program.

PARTY provides high school students with a one-day look at the effects of alcohol use and risk-related behaviors.

The approach of the program is one of intervention, education and prevention, Swayze said.

“The decisions (students) make now are crucial for the development of their futures,” he said.

Kendell Lawyer told her story about Healthy Beginnings, a prenatal program for low-income or underinsured mothers.

“Healthy Beginnings was a lifeline and support system when I was trapped and alone,” Lawyer said.