

However, the Teacher-Connections Workshop takes it one step further.

“Connecting rural schools in Nebraska with UNMC is extremely important to us. Improving the health of Nebraskans is a key component of UNMC’s mission. The Teacher-Connections Workshop, like other programs sponsored by RHEN, helps UNMC enhance relationships with its partners in western Nebraska,” Jokela said.

Throughout the one-day event, teachers toured the campus, heard from some of UNMC’s leading researchers and conducted experiments.

As testimony to the success of the first Teachers-Connection Workshop, Matt Rogers, a high school teacher in Sumner, attended the workshop for the second time.

“As a teacher, one of my challenges is to look for ways to motivate and interest my students in the health sciences. The Teacher-Connections Workshop allows me to experience the latest technology firsthand,” he said.

During one of the activities, the teachers had a hands-on opportunity to separate DNA in one of the newly constructed Munroe-Meyer Genetics laboratories.

Lucas Leachman, a high school science teacher from Hyannis, Neb., constantly looks for ways to keep his students interested in the wonders of science.

Thirsty for ideas, he didn’t think twice

TEACHING *the* TEACHERS

about driving eight hours across Nebraska to dip into the idea well at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Leachman was one of 13 junior and senior high school teachers who put on lab coats and attended the second Annual Teacher-Connections Workshop. The event was held Oct. 28 on the campuses of UNMC and Nebraska Health System.

Sponsored by UNMC’s Rural Health Education Network, the workshop focused on one overall goal — to interest students and rural Nebraskans in the health science professions. The program also informed teachers of the kind of work conducted at the state’s only academic health sciences center.

“We hope these teachers will take what they have learned or experienced back to their students in the rural parts of the state,” said Roxanna Jokela, RHEN coordinator.

Story by Lindsay Willis & Chris Jones
Photos by Chris Jones

Although Rogers won’t be separating DNA in his classroom any time soon, he said he benefited greatly from the experiment.

“While at UNMC we were able to see cutting-edge research firsthand. Even though we don’t have the resources to conduct this research in our classroom, I am able to explain it to my students and introduce them to the world of opportunities in science. It is a great way for students and teachers to benefit.”

Speaking throughout the day were Don Leopold, M.D., director and chairperson of UNMC’s otolaryngology-head and neck surgery department; Paul Fey, Ph.D., assistant professor of internal medicine and infectious diseases, and William Berndt, Ph.D., vice chancellor for academic affairs.

“Programs like this are a wonderful opportunity to strengthen ties between rural Nebraskans and UNMC,” Dr. Berndt said. “We have always tried our best to serve the rural communities and get involved in the rural schools. We take great pride in our programs that accomplish such directives.”

In addition to participating in DNA experiments, the teachers toured the hyperbaric oxygen chamber facilities at NHS Clarkson Hospital. Workshop attendants learned about a typical day in the facility and what injuries are treated in the chambers. They also spoke to a patient as he was undergoing treatment.

Leachman said: "This was an opportunity to visit UNMC and learn about the latest technology. I'm anxious to take what I have experienced back to my classroom. Before this workshop, it was difficult to interest students in science. Now, I can give students real-life examples of how they can help others by working in the health sciences."

The UNMC Rural Health Education Network works to change how and where health-science students are educated. RHEN relies on the support of rural communities, primary health-care providers, health-care institutions, higher education institutions and UNMC. It develops comprehensive programs, which educate young health professionals in rural Nebraska.

"We sponsor programs such as this because they are important to UNMC and to Nebraska," Jokela said. "This year's program was successful. We had more participants than ever and we tried some new things. I hope we can continue to grow and be of benefit to teachers throughout the state."

Jokela said the support of UNMC faculty and staff, and the staff and students from NHS are what make this program successful.

"Without their support, the workshop would not be possible," Jokela said.

For more information about the workshop, contact Jokela at (402) 559-8946 or visit the RHEN web site at www.unmc.edu/RHEN. *d*

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Lucas Leachman (center), high school science teacher from Hyannis, Neb., works with Bob Wickert (left) of the Munroe-Meyer Institute. Wickert showed participants how to separate DNA during their visit to the laboratory.