

County Commission Update: Former Director Inducted into Hall of Fame

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer

It's an extremely rare honor in any profession, yet it's one received recently by Tooele County's former Emergency Management Director. Kari Sagers was inducted into the Utah Emergency Management Association Hall of Fame on Wednesday, January 16, 2013, surrounded by her peers. On that day Sagers joined a very elite group, with only six other inductees since the Hall of Fame was founded in 2009.

Kari said she never expected such esteemed recognition. "This is the top commendation given to emergency managers in the state, and I feel very honored to get it, as well as the respect of my peers. I worked really hard throughout my career, but I was fortunate to have a great staff and partners to help me build the emergency management capability we have in the county. It was a team effort. At the induction ceremony, several emergency managers from around the state approached me to say I was their valued mentor while they built their emergency management programs. I'm grateful for these compliments," she said.

Having worked for Kari for 12 of her nearly 25 years in emergency management, I know how deserving she is of this special recognition. I watched her work tirelessly alongside her deputy director, Marilyn Candelaria, and the rest of the emergency management staff. Under Kari's leadership, critical emergency plans were put in place, the original Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was built in the county building, and funding was acquired for a new EOC built in 2009, which is recognized as one of the best in the state.

Over the years, Kari established new working relationships with many other local, state, and federal agencies in and out of the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP). The partnerships Kari created were the example and standard for all the other CSEPP sites around the country. Overall, Kari built a nationally recognized emergency management program in Tooele County, which led to the declaration by National Public Radio that Tooele County is one of the best prepared counties in the nation.

According to the Utah Emergency Management Association (UEMA), its Hall of Fame is "designed to recognize and honor those professionals who, by virtue of their contributions, are of such significant stature that they are considered to be among the most highly regarded professional leaders in Utah emergency management. This shall be the highest level of recognition given to an individual by UEMA and only awarded once in a lifetime. No more than two individuals will ever be inducted in a given year without a special petition for approval to the membership." (UEMA 2013 Annual Conference Program)

Kari was the only UEMA Hall of Fame inductee in 2013. She was joined at the induction ceremony by her husband, State Representative Doug Sagers. Marilyn Candelaria, Commissioner Bruce Clegg, Tooele County Health Department Community Services Director, Bucky Whitehouse, and I also attended the ceremony to honor Kari.

Commissioner Clegg, who had oversight of the emergency management department during the last six years of Kari's tenure said, "We're proud of Kari and her accomplishments. We're indebted to her and admire her. Through Kari's management of CSEPP, she provided many benefits over the years to a lot of the county departments and to the hospital. We were lucky to have her as an employee. Kari is a great example of the high quality of employees we have in Tooele County. Her hard work and efforts really made a difference here."

Kari's Hall of Fame citation reads, in part, "Kari is universally well liked and respected among long-time associates and new-comers alike. She has gracefully served in a number of leadership positions and is often sought out for formal and informal advice and guidance among peers from coast to coast.

"Among Kari's attributes and character traits that make her an important asset in the Emergency Management environment are poise and a level-headed, mature approach to day-to-day activities, plus a willingness to respond to emergency and crisis situations. Kari's reliability, technical and tactical proficiencies are tempered by a million-dollar smile and pleasant sense of humor." (UEMA 2013 Annual Conference Program)

Kari's efforts and expertise in the world of emergency management were also recognized recently by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army. Last September, representatives from Washington, D.C. traveled to Tooele to present Kari with the Program Manager's Award for Superior Service.

The award citation reads, "In appreciation of your leadership and contributions as the Tooele County Emergency Management Director for more than 23 years. As a Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program pioneer, you established multi-jurisdictional partnerships that were pivotal to the successful completion of the mission, helped develop program guidance, and were a tireless program advocate. You have been an esteemed mentor to other CSEPP sites, and an invaluable asset to TCEM as well as to the Utah and national CSEP Programs. On this day, August 15, 2012."

Throughout her career, Kari served on many national working groups, boards, and committees to establish public protective action procedures, exercise development and evaluation guidelines, and public warning criteria. She was a much sought after trainer and exercise evaluator as well.

Kari's previous recognitions include the FEMA and US Army Outstanding Director Award, Utah's first Outstanding County Emergency Management Director in 1991, a certificate for meritorious service, also from the State of Utah, UEMA Member of the Year, and numerous other local and national awards.

Congratulations, Kari!