

# All eyes on: Brenda Higgins

**Higgins serves as Director of three University health departments**

BY BETHANY COURY  
Assistant Features Editor

Her new title, though unofficial, is now "The Backbone of Truman State University's Health." The Director of the Student Health Center and of Disability Services since 2002, this summer Brenda Higgins became the director of a third organization in Student Affairs: University Counseling Services.

Higgins, a family nurse practitioner, did not always want to be a nurse. She attended Truman intending to become a teacher but changed her mind when working part-time assisting a podiatrist in surgeries. She said this change worked out for her because as a nurse and as a member of the nursing faculty, she gets to teach all the time.

"It's been a wonderful decision for me," Higgins said. "For me, I think nursing has just been a true blessing in my life."

The Kirksville native got her bachelor's degree in nursing from Truman State in 1984 and went on to get her masters, post-masters and doctorate degree at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She worked at Northeast Regional Medical Center, primarily in outpatient surgery and pediatrics, but left in 1990 to teach for Truman's nursing faculty. In 1996, she took a joint position with the nursing faculty and at the health center as a nurse practitioner, which evolved into a full-time position as a Family Nurse Practitioner and Director of the Health Center in 2002.

Higgins has a husband, who works as a counselor, and two chil-

dren — a son who teaches English in Kirksville schools and a daughter who's studying to be a counselor at Stevens College in Columbia, Mo. Between her family and job, Higgins said she stays very involved politically, finding that that's the way to make a difference in the lives of people. Higgins recently organized study abroad trips to do medical mission work in Mexico and Belize. She said doing this has been a real joy, but her favorite hobby is still playing with her two-year-old grandson.

This summer, after Brian Krylowicz, the former Director of UCS, became the Director of Counseling at the University of Montana, Lou Ann Gilchrist, dean of student affairs, decided Higgins, who's had plenty of interaction with counseling services, would be a good fit.

Joe Hamilton, assistant director of UCS, said the counselors had a solid relationship with Higgins before this decision was made.

"Brenda's been working at the University for many years," Hamilton said. "Of course we, the health center and the counseling services, have all worked closely with one another because we have a number of students who we also refer to the health center for medication or to get some sort of physical evaluation."

Higgins also said she knows the UCS staff quite well and its competency is one of the reasons she was comfortable taking this position. She said because they're so very well prepared and do a good job, her job is really to support what they do.

However, Higgins said that taking on this new responsibility is going to be a challenge which she will not go into blindly. For that reason, she initially reacted to the proposal with hesitance.

"However, [I've] worked for the

University since 1990 — I know that we're in a bit of a financial crunch right now," Higgins said. "I'm very dedicated to Truman and to Truman students, so if I can participate in any way and help for us to maintain the kind of good quality services that we have at both the health center and the Counseling Center, then I'm happy to be a part of doing that."

Higgins said that she is not a professional counselor and therefore will not be counseling at UCS, save for an emergency situation. Higgins said that as a nurse practitioner she has training in diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric problems and that nurses counsel all the time, but that there is a clear difference when it comes to professional counseling.

"The director provides supervision and the leadership for the members of their organization," Higgins said. "[It involves] coordinating efforts in the whole Student Affairs' department ... for a unified and worthwhile living environment for students while they're at Truman."

Higgins said becoming the UCS director presents an opportunity for strengthening of coordination within Student Affairs. Higgins said the health center and UCS already collaborate a great deal to try to provide holistic care to their shared clients and, with a newly shared director, the two services are speculating sharing one facility in a year or so.

"We would be merged into one unit that's still two separate components," Higgins said. "Patients would have separate areas in the same building — they wouldn't share waiting rooms — but administratively it would be easier to merge



Blaise Hart-Schmidt/Index  
Family Nurse Practitioner Brenda Higgins prepares for Truman week as she begins her new job as the Director of University Counseling Services.

them and for our staff to meet together."

Alice Davis, a family nurse practitioner at the health center, said that this idea was discussed in a conference in Philadelphia she attended in June.

"A trend in a lot of other universities is having counseling services and health center underneath one roof," Davis said. "I think they saw it as a way to not lay people off, just maybe share some more jobs and duties and try to keep everyone employed with all the cuts."

Davis, a Truman alumna from the class of 1995, is a former stu-

dent of Higgins. She kept in touch with Higgins up until September 2009, when she came to work as a Family Nurse Practitioner at the health center. Davis said Higgins handles dilemmas promptly and professionally and is wonderful to work with.

"I really enjoy working with her," Davis said. "It's a very less stressful environment than other jobs I've worked at previously. That's part of the incentive of why I worked at Truman — because I knew Brenda well enough to know it would be a wonderful environment to work in."

# Center teaches sustainable living

BY MEGHANN HENRY  
Staff Reporter

The house at 216 North Ely Street might appear to be a regular Kirksville home, but inside, its residents, Jerry and Michelle Jones, are creating a new community project that has the ability to change the way Kirksville residents live.

The Kirksville Permaculture Education Center, which began in June, serves as a place for the Kirksville community to learn and teach everyday practices that focus on sustaining and improving the environment.

"We just want it to be a place where people can come learn something and share something and, hopefully, we can help them take action in one way or another toward sustainability," Jerry said.

After graduating from Truman in 2008, the couple had planned on moving to Oregon, but after speaking with world traveler and founder of the sustainable community Possibility Alliance in La Plata, Ethan Hughes, the couple realized the lifestyle they were looking for could be obtained by staying in Kirksville.

"One of our main goals was living in a way where we could raise our son Oliver together and spend a lot of time with him — be together and live a low-income lifestyle," Jerry said.

"Those were all really obtainable and really possible in Northeast Missouri, whereas in Oregon it really wouldn't be."

After visiting other nearby sustainable communities, such as the Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage and the Sandhill and Red Earth farms in Rutledge, Mo., Jerry and Michelle were inspired to begin the permaculture project in Kirksville.

"We would go out and visit these places and be really inspired and think that they were wonderful, but then we'd come back and not really be able to implement anything," Jerry said. "How do you implement these features that are on an 80-acre farm into your three-bedroom apartment on the second floor?"

Jerry enrolled in a three-week permaculture course offered at the Possibility Alliance, which marked permaculture's beginning in Kirksville.

"Permaculture is basic-

**Possibility Alliance Classes**

**Bike Mechanics**  
Sept. 18



**Intro. to Beekeeping**  
Sept. 21



**Small-scale cheese making**  
Oct. 9

ly a combination of modern science — botany, ecology, biology — and folk wisdom," Hughes said. "We just put our heads together on how to bring it to Kirksville and KPEC was born."

The couple worked hard during the summer to implement sustainable practices around the home. They planted a vegetable garden that utilizes permaculture practices, such as companion planting and designing water flow. Rain barrels installed outside the house capture rain that is used to water the garden.

The budget for the project is limited because it is funded entirely through donations and the couple's private budget. Jerry said they do not plan to implement any alternative energy practices, like solar wind, because of the limited budget.

They limit the use of cell phones and laptops and they do not use a microwave, clothes dryer or a television.

"Hopefully, I'll be able to make some kind of bicycle powered laptop, or bicycle powered washing machine," Jerry said.

Currently, the Kirksville

center collaborates with the Possibility Alliance to bring workshops to their 80-acre farm in La Plata. All workshops and events held at the Possibility Alliance operate on the gift economy, something the KPEC will implement as well.

"For the day-long classes we don't even ask for donations — if somebody wants to give, then they can," Possibility Alliance ambassador Emily Brezinski said. "For longer classes, you can donate whatever you are able to."

As the house continues to develop into a more sustainable home, the couple will begin hosting events on their own.

"We haven't really done anything in association with the Permaculture Center in terms of getting people to come here or hosting any events here yet, because we kind of wanted to get the house set up and running how we wanted it running," Jerry said.

The center plans to host skill-sharing workshops on canning and preserving, fermentation, bread making, knitting, natural painting, writing, garden bed preparation and anything

else volunteers are willing to teach.

Next month, the center will host a local farmers' speaker series which will give the area's farmers an opportunity to talk about their farms and the practices they use.

Steve Salt, local farmer and owner of the newly opened organic produce store, Near and Far Downtown Grocery Store (see page 8), plans to discuss the importance of utilizing local food, Jerry said.

Jon Arbuckle, a new chicken farmer to the area, also plans to speak during the series.

"He's going to talk on the differences on labeling and the different types of eggs and what those mean and why they make a difference," Jerry said.

Jerry also hopes to host workshops on topics that will benefit college students, including small-space composting, energy saving window treatments and homemade, environmentally-friendly house cleaners.

"We want to try to give people an idea of what they can do in town easily — empower them with those abilities," Jerry said.



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