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FEATURED

Salute to Excellence in Health Care: Health Advocacy Organization of the Year

## PrepareSTL is Health Advocacy Organization of the Year

Helping community battle COVID

JoAnn Weaver For The St. Louis American

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Under the guidance of Managing Director Rebeccah Bennett, the PrepareSTL team has not wavered in helping keep underserved communities safe from COVID-19 and is adding 300 staff members for its Community Health Champion (CHC) Peer-to-Peer Outreach Program.

Health is the number one priority for PrepareSTL.

For its quality work and community health campaigns, PrepareSTL will be honored as the Health Advocacy Organization of the Year during the 22nd Salute to Excellence in Health Care on April 14 at the Frontenac Hilton.



Rebeccah Bennett, PrepareSTL managing director, responded to COVID-19's impact on the African American community by creating opportunities for people of color in St. Louis to recover and heal.

“They got together for the purpose of helping African Americans and foreign-born people of color in these times of COVID to be able to survive and be able to move through the negative impacts that a public health crisis can bring,” Bennett said in a virtual interview.

PrepareSTL hosted its Living Well Summit in July and reflected on the arduous health path the region had traveled since the pandemic began.

“We are out here today, just so we can enjoy having survived the last 17 months,” Bennett said in a video displayed on the PrepareSTL website.

“Black folks don’t need a reason to celebrate and neither does any other group of people, so we are out here as a part of our Living Well Summit just so we can enjoy.”



PrepareSTL distributed PPE kits and information in more than 1,000 places across the city and county over the past 17 months. The effort focused on Black neighborhoods immigrant communities, and senior population.

Photo courtesy of PrepareSTL

In 2020, the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) was awarded a \$1 million grant from Missouri Foundation for Health for the second phase of the PrepareSTL campaign.

In its first phase, Prepare STL provided information and resources to people disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This included low-to-moderate income African Americans and people of color living in St. Louis city and county. Its goal was to slow the spread of the new coronavirus and address its adverse social and economic impacts.





RHC works in partnership with the City of St. Louis Department of Health, the St. Louis County Department of Public Health, St. Louis Integrated Health Network, Alive and Well Communities, St. Louis Mental Health Board (MHB), Vector Communications and Emerging Wisdom.

“Black women have played a major role in developing and implementing this campaign, and we will continue to cultivate and celebrate the leadership of Black women and all community leaders involved with the campaign,” said Angela Fleming Brown, Regional Health Commission (RHC) CEO.

PrepareSTL partnered with “The T,” a community trauma center founded by surgeon and community activist Dr. LJ Punch, to assemble and distribute more than 50,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) kits.

PrepareSTL organized nearly 200 volunteers to distribute the kits and information in more than 1,000 places across the city and county. The effort focused on Black neighborhoods, immigrant communities and senior populations.

“PrepareSTL has created an incredible infrastructure for communications, community outreach, and economic development, which have all been rooted in racial and health equity,” said Courtney Stewart, vice president of Strategic Communications at Missouri Foundation for Health.

PrepareSTL holds an abundance of programs and events annually to inform the community on how to monitor and sustain their health. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged this function, tasking the organization with how to effectively combat rising case numbers and COVID-19 related death rates.

As the pandemic progressed, the St. Louis region recently experienced a drastic decrease in COVID-19 numbers, according to the St. Louis Pandemic Task Force. However, this organization is doing its part to ensure Black residents are safe and remain vigilant in the fight against the threat.



PrepareSTL and the COVID-19 Regional Response Team plant to [hire](#) 300 people to engage Black residents and other communities of color about COVID-19 vaccines so they can make an informed choice.

The hirings are part of the Community Health Champion (CHC) Peer-to-Peer Outreach Program, and it is based on the premise that one of the most effective forms of communication is word-of-mouth. Especially when it's peer-to-peer and involves people who are trusted.

The program's goal is to conduct 600 community conversations with 6,000 people in St. Louis, St. Louis County, and East St. Louis, Illinois.

Tickets for the 22nd Annual Salute to Excellence in Healthcare Awards Luncheon on Thursday, April 14 at the Frontenac Hilton are \$800 per table of 8 for VIP/Corporate seating or \$100 each, and \$75 each or \$600 per table of 8 for general seating. To order tickets, call 314-533-8000 or visit [www.stlameric.com](http://www.stlameric.com).



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