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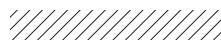
Today's Dietitian's Fifth Annual Showcase of 10 Incredible RDs Who Are Making a Difference

BY LINDSEY GETZ

For the past five years, *Today's Dietitian* has asked readers to nominate colleagues who they believe have accomplished incredible feats in the dietetics field, who have gone above and beyond what's expected of them to spread nutrition messages, establish new trends, lead movements, and help the underserved lead healthier lives. Each year, all the wonderful successes you have in the nutrition profession continue to amaze us, making it increasingly difficult to select only 10 winners from such an exceptional pool of high achievers.

Dietitians represent nutrition in many different areas and in many different ways. Some work with underprivileged populations, the elderly, and children. Others tirelessly investigate our food sources and sustainable food systems and provide nutritious meals to those who don't have access to them. And still more are making great strides in the areas of education, policy reform, research, and engaging one another as they advance the profession.

In honor of National Nutrition Month® and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Day, *Today's Dietitian* has chosen 10 exemplary dietitians who deserve recognition for their exceptional work in the field. We hope you enjoy their stories and become even more inspired to continue the incredible work you do each day.



Melinda Hemmelgarn, MS, RD

Freelance Writer, Speaker, Columnist, and Food Sleuth Radio Host

Melinda Hemmelgarn says she always has been one to ask the why questions, so it makes sense that she now is best known as the award-winning Food Sleuth columnist and radio show host.

Over the years, Hemmelgarn has focused much of her investigative work on media literacy, pursuing the big question: Who owns the messages about our food? She's also a passionate advocate for growing and eating organic and locally produced food and living sustainably, and zealous about educating food consumers to put more thought into their choices. "Whenever I'm giving a talk, I hand out a postcard that says, 'Thinking beyond our plate,' because that's what I want people to do," she says. "I want to help people think more critically. The food choices they make affect so much more than just us. People need to ask: Where does my food come from? Who



produced it? Under what conditions was my food grown or produced? And were the workers treated fairly?"

Hemmelgarn says individuals who have been brave enough to ask the hard questions and pursue the truth always have inspired her. And there's no doubt she's become one of those people. As the founder and former director of the University of Missouri's Nutrition Communications Center, she led the movement for integrating media literacy into nutrition education. "People are getting their nutrition information from the media, and we really need to start questioning what information they're getting," she says. "We don't realize how much we're influenced by media, and I want to be sure there's a voice in the media that's bringing food truths to light."

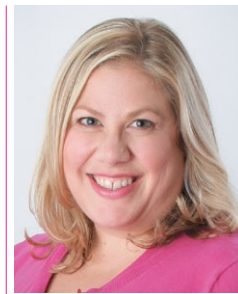
That passion for pursuing the truth may have been instilled at a young age. Hemmelgarn says she had an excellent role model in her mom. "She was a stay-at-home mom that was active in the PTA and always writing letters to senators or fighting for what she believed in," Hemmelgarn remembers. "She showed me how to be an advocate for those who might not have a voice."



Angela Grassi, MS, RD, LDN

Founder of the PCOS Nutrition Center

After gaining more than 30 lbs for no distinguishable reason, Angela Grassi saw three different physicians who each told her just to watch her diet more closely. She already was doing intense workouts and, as a dietitian, knew her diet shouldn't have promoted that kind of weight gain.



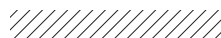
After much frustration, Grassi finally wound up seeing a polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) expert who confirmed she had PCOS, even though she didn't have some of the telltale signs that might have brought a quicker diagnosis. It was a life-changing moment in many ways.

Driving home from that specialist visit, a lightbulb went off, and Grassi decided she would devote her dietetics career to PCOS. Her goal has been to educate other dietitians since they're often well positioned to be the first to recognize the condition. "My mission is for every dietitian to know what PCOS is," she says. "When I told other dietitians I was diagnosed with it, many didn't even know what PCOS was. That astounded me since it's fairly common."

As many as one in 10 women of childbearing age have PCOS, but for many it goes undiagnosed. Grassi seeks to change that. "I knew that when I wanted to educate other professionals that a key way to do that would be a book," she says. The second edition of *PCOS: The Dietitian's Guide* just came

out, and she's working on her first cookbook. Now Grassi is involved with getting a study under way that will look at the relationship between gluten and PCOS to determine whether women with PCOS also are gluten sensitive.

Grassi says helping women realize they can become pregnant despite PCOS constantly inspires her to keep going. "When I first got diagnosed, it was the change in my diet plus supplements that helped me to get pregnant easily," she says. "Many women with PCOS have difficulty getting pregnant, but it's inspiring to help them make changes and have success."



Jan Patenaude, RD, CLT

Director of Medical Nutrition for Oxford Biomedical Technologies

Having grown up on a farm, Jan Patenaude says she always has "known where food came from—and it wasn't a box or a package." Her family grew its own vegetables and raised cattle and chickens, and her father hunted and fished.

Her interest in food led her to a restaurant management program that she started as a senior in high school. But during her first full year of college, she had to take a required nutrition course and says she instantly was hooked. She switched to a dietetics degree and never looked back.

Patenaude says what she's loved most about being a dietitian has been the freedom and the variety the profession offers. She has worked in hospitals, long term care, prisons, and home health care, and she has served as a speaker at industry meetings.

Now with Oxford Biomedical Technologies, Patenaude works to educate others about the LEAP (Lifestyle Eating and Performance) diet protocol, which is designed to reduce clinical and subclinical inflammation in conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, migraines, eczema, and chronic rhinitis.

As a true LEAP pioneer, she was the first dietitian to take part in this growing field. "It's been really exciting," Patenaude says. "I have mentored many RDs who were bored in their former careers and who wanted to make more of a difference in the lives of others. Being a LEAP therapist has allowed them to do that."

In fact, Patenaude says it's the stories of patients who have been helped by the LEAP diet that drive her own passion. "It's even saved the lives of suicidal patients," she says. "We've had patients who have tried everything, including medications, but it ultimately ends up being some dietary changes that they really needed. The work we do is very important because we're giving people their lives back."



Fifteen years ago, Patenaude's sister had a best friend who committed suicide because she gave up hope of ever finding a solution to her relentless migraines. "She left behind a family because she couldn't spend another day living in pain," Patenaude says. "I wish I'd known about this work then. Maybe someone could have helped her. I do feel like we're making a difference for people, and that keeps me going."

Jo Jo Dantone-DeBarbieris, MS, RDN, LDN, CDE

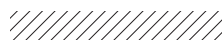
Owner and CEO of Nutrition Education Resources

Jo Jo Dantone-DeBarbieris began her schooling as a religious education major at a Baptist university, with plans of serving the Lord as a counselor. But she found that she struggled with the major. As much as she'd thought religious counseling was meant to be her calling, she says the Lord ultimately led her elsewhere. During a discussion with her mother's best friend (a dietitian), Dantone-DeBarbieris realized dietetics really was the path meant for her.

"Dietitians can go into so many different fields," she says. "When the guidance counselor asked what I wanted to do, I told her I wanted to serve people in underprivileged countries. But my first job wound up being in the health department in rural Mississippi's poorest of poor areas. I was still serving people in an underprivileged area; it just turned out to be in my own country."

That's also where Dantone-DeBarbieris was first exposed to geriatrics. Today, as the president and CEO of Nutrition Education Resources, she provides consulting services to a large number of nursing homes, hospitals, home health agencies, correctional facilities, and even child nutrition programs. She also works in an HIV clinic. In addition to a passion for geriatrics, she has a special interest in diabetes education after her own diagnosis 20 years ago.

Dantone-DeBarbieris says it's the opportunity to inspire others that motivates her. Her consulting firm employs approximately 30 to 40 dietitians, and she always has encouraged them to go above and beyond the call of duty. For 37 years, she has required all dietitians working for her to take a hands-on approach to assessments. "Instead of just looking at charts, I say to lay your hands on the patient and actually touch their skin," she says. "A physical exam tells you things that a chart does not. It's a hands-on, eyes-on assessment. About five years ago, they finally put that in the CMS [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services] regulations. After preaching it for so many years, I was pleased to see it become official."



Maria Caranfa, RDN, LD

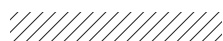
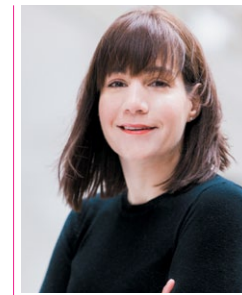
Nutrition Program Manager for Bloomin' Brands

From a very young age, Maria Caranfa enjoyed being around food and was curious about creating healthful meals. When she was 10 years old, she cocreated an at-home "restaurant" that family members would visit. The menu was filled with flavorful options such as "magic fried chicken" that was baked instead of fried and various pastas filled with garden-fresh vegetables. Caranfa attributes her passion for food to both her mother and grandmother, and says it was no surprise that she wound up in the restaurant industry.

As the nutrition program manager for Bloomin' Brands, a portfolio of five leading restaurant brands, Caranfa helps teach and consult the 80,000-plus team members who comprise the organization.

In helping to lead and support the research and development team on the analysis of new menu efforts, Caranfa also has assisted in removing more than 20,000 kcal from the brands' menus. "We literally trimmed the fat from many of the portfolio's menu items," she says. "We took a careful look at each recipe and identified ways to maximize the flavor and minimize the fat. And we did all of this without sacrificing the experience that guests come to expect from each brand."

Caranfa says she always has appreciated the ways she can bring "health and flavor together" and feels the restaurant industry has provided that. But it's ultimately food that inspires her. "I think there are millions of ways to combine food's natural flavors to create meals that are both healthful and flavorful," she says. "I am inspired by the intrinsic goodness and deliciousness of natural healthful foods like nuts, seafood, colorful produce, and grains."



Shirley Y. Chao, PhD, RD, LD/N

Director of Nutrition for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs

Supporting seniors to live independently has been a major focus for Shirley Y. Chao for the past 20 years—long before aging in place or home health care became a growing trend.

As the director of nutrition for a statewide elder nutrition program, Chao has helped raise the quality of nutritious meals served while also keeping it cost-effective. Her efforts have supported the program for 20 years, eliminating the need for a permanent waiting list that can force seniors who

qualify for meals to have to wait for months or even years because of a lack of funding.

Chao also helps uphold standards, inspections, and training to ensure food safety and provides nutritious meals to improve the health and lives of approximately 75,000 seniors each year. Her daily responsibilities range from financial contract negotiation to policy recommendations. She also helps set policy that directs the local programs and ensures individuals meet eligibility requirements to receive meals. This year, the organization started several new statewide initiatives, including a breakfast program, weekend frozen meals, therapeutic meals, and nutritional supplementation.

Chao has proven to not only be a statewide leader but a national one as well. She has served as chair of the Healthy Aging Dietetic Practice group and is on the board of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs. Throughout her career, she has helped influence policy such as the Older Americans Act.

"My main goal is to be able to support seniors to live independently in the community as long as possible," Chao says. "This year, when we got back our satisfaction surveys, I learned that the Older Americans Act 'noon meal' represents more than half of the participants' daily intake. I also learned that more than 75% of the participants are older than 80 years; 25% of them have been with the program for more than five years. All of this keeps me going. We also have 70-plus people who receive home-delivered meals who are older than 100 years old! I believe the best is yet to come."

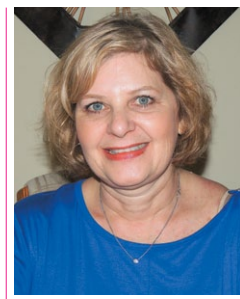


Silvia Benincaso, MPH, RD

Captain for the US Public Health Service, Acting Director of Nutrition Services at Phoenix Indian Medical Center, and Director of the Southwestern Dietetic Internship

Silvia Benincaso became interested in nutrition and its role in health and wellness—particularly in the treatment of disease—as an undergraduate at Rutgers University in New Jersey. In 1992, she was commissioned as an officer in the US Public Health Service and has been stationed with the Indian Health Service for her entire career as an officer.

While working and learning about the health concerns of Native Americans, it became clear to Benincaso that the rate of nutrition-related diseases

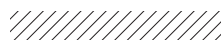


was very high, yet there were few RDs who worked within Native American communities. Even more troubling, she learned that only 0.3% of all RDs were from American Indian or Alaska Native tribes, despite the well-known fact that individuals learn best from people who understand their culture. Benincaso felt compelled to make a change.

That change would come through education. At the time, the Indian Health Service didn't have a dietetic internship program. Benincaso and her supervisor, CAPT (retired) Edith Clark, began investigating what designing such a program would entail. Partnering with Kayenta Service Unit, another Indian Health Service facility, a 33-week (now 40-week) accredited dietetic internship program was formed. The program provides housing during the six-week (now seven-week) rotation in which interns can immerse themselves in Navajo culture. To date, 13 interns have graduated, and nine are employed in programs serving American Indian people.

Another major accomplishment has been providing additional public health messages to the general public and the employees of the Phoenix Indian Medical Center. "To increase public health messages to people receiving services at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center, we purchased three large bulletin boards," Benincaso explains. "The dietetic technicians I supervise also rotate preparing colorful educational displays on a variety of topics. This year we plan to showcase food-related traditions of different Native American tribes around the nation."

Benincaso says what inspires her on a daily basis is a team that's dedicated and supportive. "I work in an environment that has embraced interdisciplinary teamwork and values the contributions of registered dietitians."

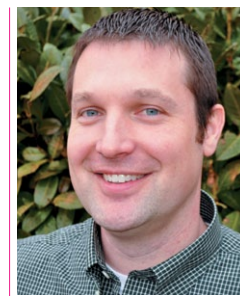


Paul Moore, MS, RD, CSSD, LDN, CSCS*D, NSCA-CPT*D

Assistant Director for the Appalachian Regional Healthcare System Wellness Center and an Adjunct Instructor in the College of Health Sciences at Appalachian State University

Although Paul Moore works full-time at a hospital-based wellness center, where he serves as the facility's assistant director, he finds time to fit in a variety of other roles, including teacher and volunteer. As an adjunct instructor at Appalachian State University, Moore enjoys teaching a general nutrition course and encouraging students to make life-long healthier choices. But the course he enjoys teaching the most is "Nutrition for Children," which often is inspired by his experiences as a father of two young kids.

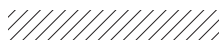
"Having children of my own is when I really turned the corner in understanding the impact that nutrition has on our lives,"



Moore says. "Watching them learn to eat and seeing how it affects them has inspired me in all areas of practice and made me more passionate about the field."

Currently, Moore also serves as the 2013-2014 North Carolina Dietetic Association (NCDA) president and volunteers as an editor for the **Weight Management Matters** newsletter, published quarterly by the Weight Management Dietetic Practice Group. Though he's busy with his full- and part-time jobs as well as his family, Moore says he believes in the importance of dietitians becoming more involved in professional associations and outside opportunities. That's why he's taken an active approach to engaging more NCDA members. One major change has been switching from one annual meeting (two to three days in length at one location) to four, one-day meetings held across the state and throughout the year. "We're also trying to connect members with a monthly webinar so that regardless of where they live or how busy they are, they can still be engaged," he says.

In addition, Moore is making a difference in his local community of Bonne, North Carolina, with a medically supervised program called THRIVE for patients with chronic disease. "Patients have really loved the program, and we're getting a lot of success stories," he says. "People will come in telling us their doctor made them, but two years later, they'll still be coming every day. It's inspiring."



Susanne Trout, RDN, IBCLC, RLC, LD

Program Director at LifeStyle Evolve

Susanne Trout's career shows the true versatility of a dietetics degree. She once served as a site coordinator for a pediatric bariatric group at Texas Children's Hospital, where she helped build one of the first adolescent gastric bypass programs in the country. Before that, she worked in the hospital's neonatal ICU (NICU), where she developed an interest in breast-feeding and became a lactation consultant. Recently, however, she moved to Arizona and into the area of health and wellness.

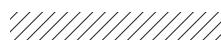


Working for a company that provides medical-grade skin-care products as well as nutrition and wellness consultation has been new and exciting for Trout. "That's what I love about this field," she says. "There are always new things to learn, and that keeps me going. I enjoy thinking outside of the box and looking at fresh perspectives."

Trout also continues to offer lactation consulting services and says she's passionate about helping people understand why breast-feeding is so important. "I loved my work in the NICU, and that's where I also developed an understanding of the

importance of breast-feeding," she says. "While [consulting] was meant to be a little side business, I often just offer my lactation consultations as a service to the community. It's something I really believe in."

Like many other RDs, Trout says one of the biggest challenges she's faced is convincing others of the "value of the dietitian." This is the one plus about the company for which she now works: "They're really promoting the dietitian and the value behind nutrition education, which is a great thing."



Lisa Eberhart, RD, CSSD, LDN, CDE

Dietitian for University Dining at North Carolina State University

As a full-time dietitian with North Carolina State University, Lisa Eberhart hasn't only changed the way students eat but the way they perceive food. She has proven that even minor changes can make a dramatic difference in students' nutrition, as one healthful choice often leads to another. Putting fruit and vegetables in prominent positions, changing milk from 2% to 1%, using turkey in place of beef, and switching from white to wheat bread are just a few healthful changes students on campus readily are accepting.



"We've tried to make things healthier without making a big deal [about it] to the students because that can turn them off," Eberhart says. "I'm proud of how far we've come. We have a huge fruit and vegetable bar that's very popular with students as well as a hydration station that looks like something you'd see at a spa and that attracts students to drink more water."

But Eberhart also is especially proud of the food labeling program. She says North Carolina State has one of the best allergy marking systems among universities, and that allows students with allergies to feel comfortable making safe dining decisions.

The campus offers iPads that enable students to sort menu items by allergen, she explains. For instance, if students have a peanut allergy, they can select the peanut icon to bring up a list of safe foods they can eat.

Eberhart began her work for North Carolina State as a consultant while keeping up with a thriving private practice. Ultimately, it morphed into a full-time job, which she says is a bit like a dream come true. "I have the perfect job because it's a marriage between food, foodservice, clinical nutrition, and education," she says. "It's such a great combination, and I really love it."

— Lindsey Getz is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pennsylvania.