

TD10

Today's Dietitian's 11th Annual Showcase of 10 RDs Who Are Making a Difference

BY LINDSEY GETZ

The impact dietitians have in their businesses, workplaces, communities, and the world is nothing short of astounding. And yet, there are only so many opportunities *Today's Dietitian* has in its pages each month to spotlight their amazing work. That's why we ask our readers each year, in honor of National Nutrition Month[®] and Registered Dietitian and Nutritionist Day, to nominate colleagues whom they believe go above and beyond the call of duty to make a lasting difference in the dietetics profession.

Every year, it's increasingly difficult to choose the final 10 winners among the hundreds of nominations we receive. There are so many RDs doing great work, and we commend you all for your tireless efforts.

Profiles of our TD10 winners who have demonstrated excellence and were voted as standing above the rest in dietetics are featured on the following pages. They're making a significant difference in public health, renal nutrition, dietetic diversity, childhood and maternal nutrition, and other specialties. We invite you to read their inspiring stories on how they're advancing the dietetics field and leaving an indelible mark on health care's future.

Scott Kimner, RD, LD

Senior Account Manager With Patient Care America in Pompano Beach, Florida

Scott Kimner is a leader in malnutrition and renal nutrition in the state of Georgia. He's known for always going the extra mile to make a difference in patients' lives. He organizes educational opportunities while increasing awareness of these specialties through his involvement in the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) at the state level.



As a successful account manager with Patient Care America (headquartered in Florida, with his territory in Georgia), Kimner has built a strong rapport with fellow dietitians and patients. He's also involved in volunteer work. Kimner is serving a second term as chair of the Georgia Council of Renal Nutrition (GCRN), a chapter of the NKF. His chapter recently was chosen as one of the best in the nation. Kimner personally has been responsible for growing the local chapter because he always asks everyone he meets and speaks with whether they've signed up for GCRN. Kimner also participates regularly in NKF walks and connects patients with the Atlanta Community Food Bank by giving them a voice at GCRN meetings. He also orchestrates "Lobby Days" in dialysis centers where food bank staff members share their services and network with dietitians.

Kimner's outgoing and positive attitude also extends to his relationships with patients. Of the challenges Kimner faces in his day-to-day work, he says helping patients translate education into actionable steps is his biggest, as the renal diet can be difficult to follow and sometimes overwhelming. However, he's found that taking a creative and interactive approach to learning about the diet makes it less formidable. He has organized what's called Patient Appreciation Days and played games such as High Phosphorus, High Potassium, or High Protein Bingo or handed out fun quizzes to help make the information more understandable and easier for patients to remember. With these efforts, he's having a tremendous impact on patients' quality of life and overall health.

"I've found that bland education just doesn't work—nor does focusing on everything the patient can't have instead of what they can have," he says. "Changing my approach has helped me really connect with patients with the hope of making a difference."

Lee Tincher, MS, RDN

President of Meals for All, Inc in Sacramento, California

Because of Lee Tincher, the health care community is better equipped to handle the needs of residents during natural disasters. Tincher founded an emergency preparedness company that's changing the way health care facilities serve meals during emergencies.

Since becoming a dietitian in 1977, she's dedicated her entire career to assisting health care communities to improve the quality of life for patients, residents, and elders. Tincher knew the profession was her destiny from the time she was just 12 years old, when a home economics teacher told her about dietetics.

Positions she held, such as corporate dietitian and self-employed consultant, helped develop Tincher's business skills, leading her to become the second dietitian to own Nutricopia (formerly Health-care Management Composite), a dietitian consultation service that provides comprehensive menu and recipe systems to hundreds of health care facilities and small hospitals. This includes computerization, menu support materials, regulatory compliance policy and diet manuals, in-service education, and supervision/training of dietitians specializing in long term care. The business grew to become the largest private employer of dietitians in California. After seeing the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on television, Tincher searched for a better way to provide nutritionally adequate meals during emergencies. In 2013, she founded Meals for All, Inc, and, in 2016, she sold Nutricopia on its 40th anniversary to focus all of her efforts on emergency preparedness.

"In California, we experience a lot of disasters—from earthquakes to fires and floods," Tincher says. "I've been part of evacuations of long term care facilities, including a massive evacuation to a sports stadium where everyone was fed hot dogs. I just knew there had to be a better way." Not finding the nutritious products facilities needed, Tincher created a turnkey program specifically for health care that includes creating the formulations, specifications, labeling, quality assurance, distribution, and marketing for meals.

Becoming a food manufacturer meant learning an entirely new set of nutrition and business skills—and taking much risk. The result is an innovative solution that not only saves time and money for facilities during emergencies but also gives everyone peace of mind knowing that nutritional needs will be properly met. With the use of freeze-dried and dehydrated foods, the meal system Tincher developed saves approximately 33% of the storage space of traditional emergency food supplies. Today, there are more than 5 million emergency meals created by Meals for All supporting health care facilities across the United States and in most US territories.

Tincher also is a sought-after speaker and author and has been elected to serve on various committees at state and national levels. She's well regarded for her focus on compliance and quality assurance and was selected to serve on several quality assurance and regulatory committees for California health care facilities. ■



Lindsey Getz is an award-winning freelance writer based in Royersford, Pennsylvania.

Donna Yester, MAE, RDN, LD

Clinical Dietitian at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Department of Medicine

Donna Yester is on a mission—a mission to provide nutritious food and culinary education to people living with HIV or AIDS, a valiant effort to stamp out food insecurity and improve access to better health and wellness within this community. It's an effort to which she has dedicated most of her career.

Yester has served as a dietitian at the University of Alabama at Birmingham's (UAB) department of medicine for 30 years, spending two decades of that time specializing in HIV nutrition at the Center for AIDS Research. Yester also plays an important role in fighting food insecurity by referring patients to Birmingham AIDS Outreach Food and Education Delivery program, or B-FED, which is part of a collaboration between UAB and Birmingham AIDS Outreach. Through that program, hundreds



of individuals living with HIV or AIDS receive food boxes with fresh fruits and vegetables and whole wheat bread.

Since one of the primary barriers to treating HIV remains medication adherence, Yester and her team brought in a doctor to address these adherence issues. Step by step, she says, changes are being made.

The hours can be long—and the work sometimes can feel exhausting—but Yester says the relationships she builds with her patients keep her from burning out. Her patients often wax poetic about how her support and encouragement over the years have made a huge difference in their lives.

But, nonetheless, Yester says there's still more work to be done.

“Though we've come a long way, there's still a lot of stigma surrounding HIV and many of these folks are marginalized,” she says. “That's why I'm here. I consider myself a worker bee and will just keep going. If I can change the life of even a single person, then it's all been worth it.”

Deepa Deshmukh, MPH, RDN, CDE, BC-ADM

Cofounder of DuPage Dietitians in Lisle, Illinois

After emigrating from India to the United States in 1993 with a degree in food science and nutrition, Deepa Deshmukh embarked on an illustrious career in public health, private practice, public speaking, nutrition communications, and food product entrepreneurship. Her ongoing, lofty mission is to help all people maintain good health through nutrition. However, she recognized that people would need access to sound nutrition information to meet that goal. Her first position, volunteering at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, gave her the opportunity to teach nutrition to families living in homeless shelters—an a-ha moment that created in her a passion for public health, compelling her to get her Master of Public Health degree.

Early in her career, Deshmukh fought for dietitians to be recognized by insurance companies as credible health care practitioners and be included as in-network providers. As a private practitioner, she was the first dietitian in Illinois to be included under Aetna, UnitedHealthcare, and Humana—helping patients get reimbursed for MNT.

Today, her quest to improve accessibility to health care for everyone continues. In addition to working in private practice, she volunteers twice per week at VNA Health Care Illinois, a community-based, not-for-profit health care provider in the Chicago suburbs serving vulnerable populations battling chronic health conditions. Deshmukh



has been involved with the VNA's FreshFirst program, which helps provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables. She also has advocated and secured funding for a wellness kitchen within the VNA Center and has developed a kitchen-based chronic disease care curriculum to teach patients how to manage heart health, weight, and diabetes through healthful eating. Deshmukh says diabetes is near and dear to her heart, as she lost her father to the disease.

In her career, Deshmukh always has been a problem solver and one that seeks to fill a void. When she recognized many of her private practice vegetarian and flexitarian patients were struggling to incorporate lentils into their diets, Deshmukh created Lentil Krispies as part of her Nutritionist Deepa brand. These ready-to-eat, clean-label add-ons can be used in soups, salads, yogurts, and more. Deshmukh also worked with a manufacturer to develop a lentil-based meat substitute designed for school, workplace, and hospital cafeterias—areas in foodservice that currently are lacking plant-based options. This product will undergo taste trials this spring.

In an effort to reach more people with her nutrition message, Deshmukh recently launched a podcast called *Ask Nutritionist Deepa* and is in the process of developing a program called Power Me Up, which will be available as a webinar for those transitioning to a plant-based lifestyle.

“Most of the accomplishments that I've had go back to enhancing accessibility,” Deshmukh says. “Without access to science-based nutrition information, people can't be expected to make changes.”

Kate Thomas, MS, RDN, LDN

Owner of Karuna: Nutrition + Movement in Massachusetts

One colleague describes Kate Thomas as a woman of “compassion” and one who’s worked hard to make “her dreams come true.”

After spending the first half of her professional life working at an ad agency, Thomas wanted more. So, she pursued a dietetics degree with the intention of starting her own nutrition business—but not just your average private practice. After graduating, she gained experience in the eating disorder space while working at the Franciscan Hospital for Children and at Walden Behavioral Care in Massachusetts. She also worked at the Boston Medical Center. She says through these experiences, she learned there’s more to nutrition counseling than just teaching people about food. This inspired her to create a private practice equipped with two studios designated for physical activity, a teaching kitchen, and space for individual counseling sessions. Thomas describes it as a place where people can take “better care of themselves” without being judged.

The two studios are what she calls “movement studios,” where community classes such as Yoga and Zumba are held. “A lot of people say they don’t have time to exercise, or they don’t like it, or they feel really judged when they’re doing it,” Thomas says. “So, I started thinking about how I could combine nutrition and movement in a nonjudgmental way.”

Thomas also encountered many people who didn’t know how to cook—or didn’t have time. This inspired her to create a culinary teaching kitchen in which Thomas cooks with her clients during counseling sessions—something that’s facilitating lasting behavior changes in their lives.

The name Karuna, Thomas says, is the Sanskrit word for “compassion,” something she wants her practice to exude. She’s careful to ensure that even the language used by the fitness instructors is on par with the Karuna messaging. There’s no talk of exercising to “lose weight” or to “burn calories.” It’s all about feeling good.

“We want to talk about fueling our bodies, feeling stronger, and feeling better,” Thomas says. “Our goal is to meet people where they’re at. We want everyone to feel safe and not judged when they’re at Karuna.”



Chimene Castor, EdD, RDN, LDN, CHES

Associate Professor in the Department of Nutrition Sciences at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Chimene Castor is always busy doing something to make the world around her a better place. Whether it’s through her nonprofit, Sowing Seeds, Inc, which provides nutrition and educational support to children in Haiti, or in her daily interactions with students, she’s undoubtedly making a difference.

Originally from Haiti, Castor says the idea of sowing seeds to produce a harvest came to her while reading the Bible one day.

“I have this dream of educating women—the idea being that you educate a woman and you educate a nation,” she says. “But we recognize that you cannot educate a child that’s hungry, so, first and foremost, we must provide food. We also take care of school uniforms and provide much-needed feminine products.”

Though she has an 18-year career as a clinical dietitian for hospital, rehabilitation, and nursing home centers, Castor now is forging a path for future dietitians through her roles in academia. Castor is the initiator of the Interprofessional Education and Practice Health Disparities conference for the College of Nursing and Allied Health—an opportunity, she says, that enables her dietetics students to present their work, which helps them build self-efficacy and interact with other professionals for future employment. She also spearheaded the Global Health and Nutrition track for the department of nutrition sciences and health education. This track enables students to study abroad and take advantage of international service learning.

While serving as clinical coordinator at Howard University between 2012 and 2016, Castor tutored students on weekends in her free time to prepare them for the Registration Examination for Dietitians. As a result, 100% of the students who took the exam passed with flying colors.

Castor says she always told her students, “mediocracy is not an option.”

Castor also has participated in several health programs in South Africa, Kenya, Jamaica, Tobago, Ghana, and Togo, providing nutrition education and addressing nutritional components of disease. She has coauthored several scientific articles and currently is doing research on sleep and diabetes in the Alzheimer’s population.



Tamara Melton, MS, RDN, CPHIMS

*Executive Director and Cofounder of Diversify Dietetics;
Registered Dietitian With the Compass Group*

Tamara Melton has taken on an initiative over and above her current position as director of nutrition and sustainability at Chartwells School Dining Services K12 to fill a badly needed niche in nutrition and dietetics. And she has corralled much support from colleagues who believe her work will make a huge difference in attracting people of color to the field.

After many years in academia at Georgia State University—and more recently, working in school nutrition—Melton

was struck by not only the lack of diversity in dietetics but also the lack of resources available to bring about change. She began thinking about what students—and young people—of color would need to successfully traverse a path into the field. From here, the idea for a nonprofit, Diversify Dietetics, was born.



“While there’s a lot of talk about a need for more diversity in our field, the trouble is, we need something that’s going to get students of color into dietetics in the first place,” Melton says. “It can be a difficult pathway, and there isn’t a lot of support.”

Melton found that students of color and many young dietitians of color felt unsupported and isolated. Melton has listened to students and young professionals who had done everything it took to earn a dietetics degree—and then left for nursing or something else because they were so disenfranchised.

Diversify Dietetics is looking to change that. The organization is committed to increasing diversity from all ethnic and racial groups. One way it’s achieving this is by facilitating and promoting regular meetups in various cities—its biggest one having been at FNCE. The organization also hosts a career center, where it posts job listings. Many companies are turning to Diversify Dietetics and asking for help in attracting a more diverse pool of job candidates.

The group also runs a structured mentorship program providing customized mentor/mentee matches. And Melton says that regularly spotlighting dietitians of color and other ethnicities on its blog has been a powerful way of representing the diverse field. At press time, Diversify Dietetics also was in the process of launching its first-ever Entrepreneur Summit for Dietitians of Color, to be held in March in Atlanta.

“It’s fair to say that this idea—at least in some form or fashion—has lived in others’ heads, as well,” Melton says. “We would not be where we are today without our community, and I need to thank them for supporting us.”

Dawn Ballosingh, MPA, RDN, LMNT

*WIC Program Clinic Manager at OneWorld Community
Health Center in Omaha, Nebraska*

Mothers and their children are Dawn Ballosingh’s greatest passion in dietetics. Serving these populations and others, she’s acquired a long list of accomplishments and she’s still going strong. According to one colleague, Ballosingh “is an exceptional visionary leader, program developer, and collaborator” who “optimizes diversity and inclusivity in her volunteer and professional life.”

Ballosingh credits her mother for her burgeoning interest in dietetics—even before she knew what a dietitian was. Having grown up in Trinidad, her parents were involved in food collections for the poor, and that had a long-lasting impact. Ballosingh moved to the United States in 1986. Interestingly, she had a career as a professional keyboardist in Florida before becoming a dietitian.

In her first job in dietetics, she served as the nutrition program developer for Kids Connected by Design, a home visitation program that helps prevent child abuse and neglect by promoting positive parent-child relationships. It’s in this program that Ballosingh developed and implemented “Embedded Dietitian” for high-risk pregnant minority women, many of whom had HIV or gestational diabetes, and through which she provided nutrition education.



That experience made her transition to program manager for Omaha WIC a natural one, as she loved working with moms and babies.

Under her leadership, her clinic grew to become the largest in the state. It was in

this role that Ballosingh became a sought-after mentor. Her mentees revered Ballosingh for her visionary leadership and unfailing support. Always one to remain humble, Ballosingh calls her mentoring “just a realization of my limitations.”

“Those of us who are senior dietitians need to be thinking about passing the baton to the next generation of dietitians who will lead our industry into the future,” she says.

Ballosingh is equally passionate about her volunteer work. She serves on the executive committee of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics’ (the Academy) Women’s Health Dietetic Practice Group and has increased student membership by 20%. She’s also one of two representatives from the Academy chosen to serve on the US Breastfeeding Committee. What’s more, Ballosingh was selected to be a member of the Fetal Loss and Infant Mortality Case Review Team by the Douglas-Sarpy County Health Department Board of Directors. In 2016, she was named the Omaha District Dietetic Association’s Dietitian of the Year and was a nominee for the Nebraska state Outstanding Dietitian of the Year award.

Isaac Hicks, III, RDN, CSSD

*Director of Sports Performance Nutrition
at Indiana University*

He's described as compassionate, a student advocate, an encourager, a good listener, a relationship builder, and a master of creativity.

These are just some of the attributes that portray Isaac Hicks, who's revered as one of the best mentors his student athletes have ever met. The University of Delaware graduate—who was a running back for the Blue Hens—has a dietetics degree with a concentration in sports nutrition and has been focused on making a difference in young athletes' lives.

Hicks got his start in the nutrition profession in the community health setting in Wilmington, Delaware, where he worked mostly with high school athletes from low-income, urban backgrounds. That often meant he had to find creative ways to stretch a dollar for nutritious food that would help his athletes fuel and recover.

"Some of these kids might have been given \$3 that they had to make last for the day," Hicks says. "In Wilmington, there were more corner stores than grocery stores, so that might have meant me pointing out a banana or an oat grain bar for 50 cents and how we could use those cost-effective snacks to work for the athlete."

When Hicks got hired as the director of sports nutrition for Liberty University, he had a tight nutrition budget, so he applied similar tactics to get the most bang for those bucks. He showed the athletes how their favorite granola bar eaten in the appropriate window of time could help meet their nutrition needs. His student advocacy and creative approach to choosing healthful foods his athletes could embrace shattered the notion that dietitians are the "food police." Students knew he truly cared about their well-being because he always made time for them—even if it was just to talk. His compassion also caught the attention of Indiana University, which soon came knocking.

Today, Hicks might have the big budget of a big-name school, but he's maintained his passion for building relationships with students and keeping nutrition approachable. Hicks credits his focus on relationships to being a follower of Christ and says his entire mission is to be there for his students—in whatever capacity they need him.

"Some days that might mean I have to step back and say, 'Let's not talk about nutrition today; something is going on with you—let's talk about life,'" Hicks says. "I just want them to know I'm here for them."



Elaine Magee, MPH, RD

*Wellness Services Corporate Dietitian
for Albertsons Companies*

Elaine Magee is an award-winner who's received accolades for her work in academia, sports nutrition, media, and retail.

In her substantial and varied dietetics career, she has served as the wellness and performance dietitian for Stanford University, consulting for the National Football League's Oakland Raiders, and served as the nutrition expert and one of the top bloggers for WebMD.com. While at Stanford, Magee helped install the first ever gluten-free micro-kitchen of any university.

Today, she's a corporate dietitian with the Boise, Idaho-based Albertsons Companies while also consulting for the National Hockey League's San Jose Sharks and continuing her media work. She's a syndicated columnist for *The Recipe Doctor*, the chief nutritionist on the largest local morning radio show in the country with more than 100,000 listeners, a sought-after speaker, and an author of 25 published books.

Within months of being hired at Albertsons, Magee was responsible for developing the RD Network, which comprises several hundred dietitians who can provide nutrition assistance to shoppers. Magee also has developed and manages several wellness programs with annual funding of more than \$600,000 from sponsors. This includes the Healthy Aging Cooking and Tasting class, which received the Progressive Grocers Innovation Award in 2018.

In addition, her redesigned Eating Healthy With Diabetes Tour received the 2018 FMI Community Outreach Award. And her Kid-Approved Meals for the Whole Family programing received the 2018 FMI Foundation Gold Plate Award Honorable Mention. She also was awarded the 2019 Emerging Champion of Change from Winsight Grocery Business and the Global Market Development Center.

In her role at Albertsons, Magee also leans heavily on her media skills. She develops food messaging and has produced more than 200 recipes for Albertsons. She also dabbles in food photography.

Magee says that, in every single effort she's involved with, her focus is on engaging people in fun and memorable ways. She wants her content and her messaging to be user friendly.

"After all, my belief is that healthful food won't do people any good if they're not eating it," she says. "It has to taste great and be easy to make. That's always my philosophy when developing programming, recipes, or any other content."

