

*[PHLI gave me] confidence that my voice is relevant and individual effort and commitment can make a real difference at all levels. Confidence that I don't have to have all the answers or resources before embarking on what I believe to be the right path. Patience to continue on the path and despite the bumps in the road, change does happen in time. Realization that the change can be and results from the dialogue.*

Two long-term local health officers who have also been very involved at the national level, Bobby Pestronk and Jody Hershey, expressed related ideas; we present their stories next.

### ***A National PHLI Story: Bobby Pestronk, M.P.H.***

**Health Director, Genesee County, Flint, Michigan**



Mr. Pestronk is a 1993 graduate of PHLI and reflects on some of the intangible contributions the program made to his career.

*The year had a profound impact on me.*

**New frames.** *Of course I still make use of the contacts I made with other state, federal and local health officials. The content was stimulating, addressing areas that I had never thought about before. I liked being challenged intellectually, given new frames for thought, and the opportunity to consider how knowledge in a seemingly unrelated field can be applied to my work in public health. I learned I was a boundary spanner!*

**We are important.** *Just as important, though, was the environment that had been crafted for my learning. Someone realized that local public health officers should be treated professionally and well, like executives of large companies would be treated. It was as though no effort was spared to be certain that the experience was rich in all its attributes.*

*Someone understood that our work as governmental public health officials was important, that we were important, and that we should be exposed to cutting edge thought. We were taken seriously and encouraged to speak out intelligently and demonstratively about the things that we believe and that are important to us, because we are the only ones who hold our particular world view or perspective.*

*The leadership year, for me, was a career enhancing experience. A mid career professional gained a richer understanding of the importance of the work he does. That's an extraordinarily important accomplishment for a leadership development program.*