

A Greater Purpose

An Award-Winning Alumnus Strives to Make a Big Impact in Health Care

By Annie Flachsbarth

When **Daniel S. Creitz**, '13, graduated from law school, he wasn't exactly sure where his career would take him.

"I knew that I wanted to go into private practice for a while. I wanted to be able to try cases and know how that worked, but I also knew that eventually I wanted to be a part of something bigger," Creitz said. "I knew pretty early on that hard work and honesty are going to be the two things that get me to where I want to go."

Now, as the senior vice president and chief compliance officer for Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas in Pittsburg, Kansas, Creitz is helping the organization make a huge impact and winning awards for his work. As he explained, the services his health care system provides to rural southeastern Kansas, as the largest health care provider in the region, is not only important, it's crucial.

"Kansas is the 34th healthiest state in the union, but if you remove nine of the counties, we'd be the 10th healthiest," Creitz said. "We're operating in the sickest region of the state, but we're providing low-cost, high-quality services directly to those who need it the most. That's something that makes you feel really good every day."

On average, 1,400 people visit one of their sites for a service each day. As Creitz put it, you don't always get to be a part of something that's so expansive every day in the legal profession. It's also why he connects so strongly with a quote written on the back of his hospital badge: "Do all the good that you can, for all the people you can, in all the ways you can, for as long as you can." That mission came from Mother Mary Bernard Sheridan, the nurse responsible for bringing modern health care to southeast Kansas, who also founded Mount Carmel Hospital in Pittsburg, which once stood in the same location where Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas stands today.

"That is written on the walls of the clinics, and encompasses the mission and values we have here," Creitz said. "We live by that. From the providers to the nurses and housekeepers, it's universally embraced."

When hired on at Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas, Creitz made history as the first attorney employed by a health center in the state of Kansas. Now, he leads an in-house legal department of other attorneys and staff that oversee a myriad of components of the health care system, such as compliance and the contracting and vetting of providers.



Daniel S. Creitz, '13

"What I love about what I do is that I'm a part of something bigger than myself that is truly making a dent on our community," Creitz said.

Rooted in Service

As son of the **Hon. Daniel D. Creitz**, '85, Creitz grew up in the legal profession, so to speak. He remembered summers in Erie, Kansas, his hometown of a little over a 1,000 people. It had two stop signs and one gas station, and his dad had the only law office in town.

"I remember riding my bike to the gas station to get two pops, taking them to Dad's office and sitting down with him to hear him talk about his day," Creitz said. "He instilled in me the belief that I could really do this."

His father was a private practice attorney for 17 years and has served 20 years on the bench. As a result, Creitz gravitated toward law from about age 7 or 8, occasionally thinking about medicine along the way.

"I don't want to say it was all I knew, but it was ever-present in my life," Creitz said. "Dad always viewed his job as a public service. As you trace the profession back in history, administering the law was intended to be a public service, and there are many lawyers – particularly Washburn grads – who still believe that it should be."

Creitz's mother is in her 40th year teaching, and he knew he would either grow up to be a teacher or a lawyer.

"I had two really good role models in my parents. They were very hard workers as well as very public service and community-oriented," Creitz said. "I saw their hard work every day and twice on Sunday."

Making an Impact

Creitz was recently honored as the 2023 recipient of the Geiger Gibson Emerging Leaders Award. The award celebrates young leaders whose specific work has helped better the health of medically underserved patients, communities, and special populations. Award recipients are usually nominated by their CEO and must meet certain criteria, including being under 35 years old, serving in health care, and not a CEO or project director. Adding to the prestige, Creitz was the first awardee

from Kansas, and he was also the first attorney to win the award.

“Those are two very distinguished points. It’s rare to have an attorney in health care, and it was also rare for how young I started,” Creitz said. “Additionally, although we’ve had two or three nominations in Kansas over the past 10 years, I’ve seen who has received the award before and who has been nominated. It was very humbling to be the first in our state to receive the award.”

As a Geiger Gibson Emerging Leaders award recipient, Creitz has the opportunity to participate in some unique experiences, including being a guest lecturer at George Washington’s Milken Institute in Washington, D.C. He credits his receiving the award to a combination of hard work, a belief in the cause, and those who encouraged him along the way.

“While this is certainly hard work and I had a role in developing my own piece of it, I also had a lot of great mentors over the years,” Creitz said. “My boss is a phenomenal mentor. She has been incredibly gracious with her time. She is a very kind, very understanding, and incredibly intelligent woman.”

Although their career paths were different, Creitz’s father also significantly influenced him.



Daniel S. Creitz, '13. Photo submitted.

“I always joke that my dad and I have two things in common: We have the same name and we both have JDs from Washburn,” Creitz said. “But in reality, we also both view our work as public service. He’s on the bench because he can cause a net positive effect on drug court and judicial finances at the state level. With me, I’m always working to create a sustainable system of health care, workforce, and education.”

As a matter of fact, education is an area Creitz is passionate about finding ways to grow.

“I work in an organization that is 88% women. When my daughter says she wants to be a doctor one day, I want her to connect with educational initiatives and let her go to a health camp. Ultimately, I want to create those opportunities in the community for her and anyone who interacts with us,” Creitz said. “We can get back to that as a legal profession. We can tell kids that they can be lawyers one day, and I can do that within a health care entity and help bridge that gap. I’m going to try.”

Creitz’s goal is to create the biggest net positive impact on people today and tomorrow – and it’s because he’s seen firsthand the impact it has made.

“It goes back to the fact that I very much believe in what we do here,” Creitz said. “Our chief clinical officer delivered my two kids. I get health care here. My family gets health care here. I believe in what we do, and it’s just an incredible experience and I’m very lucky to be where I am.”

Creitz also credits his wife of 12 years, Kylie, with much of his success. The two met on a blind date as undergraduates at Pittsburg State University. While in college, she worked at Community Health Center and Creitz would clean the lobby as he waited for her shift to end. She eventually joined him in Topeka while he attended law school. The two married when he was a 2L.

“My law school friends would tell you she is probably the best part of me,” Creitz said. “She worked very hard to help get me through law school, and I couldn’t have done it without her. She was kind of that person that took care of a large group of us and helped make sure we were okay. A lot of credit goes to her. She’s very gracious and has really allowed me to tackle this career. I can’t appreciate her enough.”

The pair have a two-year-old son, Liam, and a 6-year-old daughter, Spencer, who, coincidentally, wants to be a doctor one day, something that further motivates him to continue developing the health care presence in his community.

“It’s nice to be a part of something where I can grow professionally while also growing the organization and helping our community,” Creitz said. “Those things working in concert together in rural Kansas is a dream come true.”