

# OU health sciences professor dances for a cause

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Oakland University's own Jennifer Lucarelli will compete as a local celebrity dancer in [Flagstar's 13th annual Dancing with the Stars](#) fundraising event to benefit [Lighthouse Michigan](#), a nonprofit that provides emergency shelter, food assistance and other services to those in need.



*OU health sciences professor Jennifer Lucarelli practices her dance moves with Jeremiah Childers, an instructor at the Royal Oak Arthur Murray Dance Studio.*

For the past several weeks, the associate professor of interdisciplinary health sciences has been working with a professional dancer from the [Royal Oak Arthur Murray Dance Studio](#), and will compete against two other local celebrities to raise funds for Lighthouse.

Due to ongoing COVID concerns, the event will be held virtually on Saturday, November 20 at 7 p.m. TV anchors Jason Carr (Local 4) and Taryn Asher (Fox 2) will emcee the event, and it will be livestreamed on the Lighthouse [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#) pages.

“The ability to participate in the Dancing with the Stars fundraiser to raise money for this cause has brought me so much joy, and really helped push me to work hard to create a routine that I hope the audience will love,” said Lucarelli, who added that this isn’t her first foray into dance.

“No one from Lighthouse knew when they invited me to participate that I actually did swing and ballroom dance for many years during college. I’ve participated in a few informal competitions at events, but nothing like this before. I’m a bit rusty but am appreciating the opportunity to work with a really talented and fun professional to create a performance that will hopefully make everyone smile.”



*Lucarelli and Childers*

Though tight-lipped about her dance routine, Lucarelli noted that it features a tribute to James McQueen, the community outreach and pantry manager for Lighthouse.

“James has been part of the [Healthy Pontiac, We Can!](#) coalition for many years, and is how I was originally connected with Lighthouse,” she shared. “He is the one who orchestrated the amazing work that we’ve done since COVID, which has completely shifted how emergency food systems work in Oakland County.”

Lucarelli has worked with Lighthouse through the Healthy Pontiac, We Can! coalition for over a decade to improve healthy eating and physical activities in the Pontiac community. She serves as chair of

the coalition, which includes over 50 partnering organizations, including OU.

When the pandemic hit, Lucarelli collaborated with McQueen and others to help Lighthouse shift its food pantry operations to the then-closed Oakland Center on OU’s campus. This allowed volunteers to maintain social distance while dramatically increasing the number of households served throughout the community.

The website [mycovidresponse.org](http://mycovidresponse.org), created by Oakland University alumni Cameron Underdown and Chris Powers, was utilized to coordinate safe no-contact home delivery of food and supplies to households in Oakland County. Last month, Lighthouse awarded

Oakland University a 2021 Community Partner award honoring the work of its COVID-19 Emergency Response Team.

In addition, Lucarelli is designing research-based evaluations that will help guide the work of partnering organizations to better serve those in need in the local community.

“I'm currently working on evaluation of Lighthouse's emergency food delivery coordinated via the My COVID Response website to examine the impacts on overall household stability and family self-sufficiency,” she explained. “When we approach our work from a whole person perspective and begin to look at the root causes of food insecurity, and how it impacts other aspects of a household's health and wellbeing, we can ensure that their voices and experiences are leading our work.”

Read more about Lucarelli's work with Lighthouse at [my.lighthousemi.org/dancing/luca](https://my.lighthousemi.org/dancing/luca).