



2023 Lifetime Achievement Award

Lenita Johnson, PhD

It's been a long time since it happened—but I still remember the first time I met Lenita. She was at the first Injury Free conference that I had attended, way back when. She was convincing everyone that they needed to understand how to update their site information on the Injury Free website—and had a lot of enthusiasm for the work at hand. I thought to myself—here's a woman with a passion for her work. That was an understatement—Lenita is an incredible advocate for injury prevention for

children and for building a network of collaborators and coalitions around the country.

Lenita has many talents and experiences. Born in Texas, she traveled to Germany where her father taught in the US High School; she and her family then settled near an army base in El Paso. She is a graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington where she received her Bachelor's Degree in Journalism, she then attained a Master's Degree in Communications at University of Illinois and a PhD from the University of Missouri. Lenita worked in TV broadcasting in Rockford, Illinois, as well as for KMBC-TV in Kansas City where she was the special programs writer and produced many different documentaries and segments for Kansas City television. She is the recipient of 5 Emmys for her work. She then became the Community Relations Manager for a government-funded Child Safety Net Plan in Kansas City—her advocacy increased the market share for this plan considerably. Following that, she found her path to pediatric injury prevention by becoming the Child Safety Center manager at Children's Mercy in Kansas City—here she built community links to the hospital, enhanced the injury prevention plans within the hospital, and built relationships with business and government. Dr. Barlow tells me that she met Lenita at a four-state NTSA conference in Kansas City. Lenita said that she wanted to work toward bettering communities rather than reporting on their problems.

In January 2000, right at the turn of the millennium, Lenita joined Injury Free as the Marketing and Communications Director. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty! She has a talent for engaging people and bringing out the best in them. She also has the remarkable ability to support all of us in difficult situations—to understand the next, best steps to continuously prevent pediatric injuries. Injury prevention in pediatrics is upheld by children's hospitals around the country—these programs, though, are usually underfunded and can be threatened first by budget cuts and position losses. Lenita understood and was always the first to reach out to folks who may have been affected by these situations. Lenita knows people—and has served as a huge resource to our pediatric injury prevention community. She developed National Injury Prevention Day, organized the annual meetings, and worked to develop committees. And, if you couldn't remember someone's name or which hospital they were from—just ask Lenita!

Lenita is the heart and soul of Injury Free. So, here's to a great big CONGRATULATIONS to Lenita for all that she has accomplished in the prevention of pediatric injury and for her work building the Injury Free Coalition. Your colleagues here at Injury Free thank you and wish you lots of fun on your next adventure!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marlene".

Marlene Melzer-Lange, MD
Board Chair, Injury Free

