

The Center for Missouri Nurses (CFMN) proudly recognizes nurses who inspire, lead, and care with compassion. Each tribute represents a meaningful celebration—whether a birthday, retirement, thank you, or lasting memorial. These dedications not only honor individual nurses but also support scholarships, research, and educational initiatives through the CFMN.



In honor of Cynthia Aurentz, DNP, MSN-ed., RN, CNE

Dr. Aurentz is tenured faculty at Missouri State University where she teaches Leadership in the prelicensure Nursing program and provides consultation and guidance for doctoral projects. She serves as the President of the Missouri Nurses Association, where she actively advocates for nurses across the state. With over 30 years of experience in nursing – spanning Emergency Care, Pediatrics, and Vascular Access – she has dedicated the past 15 years to shaping future healthcare professionals as a Nurse Educator. Dr. Aurentz earned her Master's in Nursing Education from Southwest Baptist University in 2012 and her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in Leadership and Innovation from the University of Missouri in 2018. Her research interests focus on Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices, Nursing Policy & advocacy, Interprofessional Education, and Curriculum Design & Development. In 2022, she became a certified Trauma-Informed Care Practitioner, further deepening her expertise in supporting both students and faculty.

Dr. Aurentz has published extensively in Missouri Nurse and has been an integral part of the Missouri Nurses Association for many years. Before her election as President in 2024, she served as Vice President of Communication, demonstrating her commitment to amplifying nurses' voices and driving meaningful change in the profession.



In honor of Margaret Benz, MSN(R), APRN, ANP-BC, FAANP

Margaret R. Benz, MSN(R), APRN, ANP-BC, FAANP is an Associate Professor of Nursing at Trudy Busch Valentine, Saint Louis University School of Nursing. She sees patients as an APRN in the St. Louis Housing Authority's Parkview Clinic and Saint Louis University Student Health. She received her BSN (1978), MSN(R) Cardiovascular Clinical Specialist (1982), and Adult Nurse Practitioner Post-Masters Certificate (1995) all from Saint Louis University. Ms. Benz serves on the Board of Directors and Trustees of the St. Patrick Center for homeless since 2002 chairing the Program Committee from 2002 – 2010 overseeing housing, mental health, prisoner release programs and Veteran service. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau Honor Society, Alpha Sigma Nu Jesuit Honor Society, American Nurses Association, Missouri Nurses Association, St. Louis Nurses in Advanced Practice; American Association of Nurse Practitioners; National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (Distance Learning SIG Chair 2011-2015), Association of Missouri Nurse Practitioners. Margaret was the first nurse appointed to MO Health Net Oversight Committee for the state, as a Governor Nixon appointee 2010 – 2019 serving as vice chair from 2014 -2019.

Margaret has received awards for Teaching Excellence at Saint Louis University, St. Louis Magazine's Nursing Excellence Award for Community Care, March of Dimes Nurse of the Year Award for Teaching Excellence twice, AANP State Excellence Award, MONA Nurse of the Year, MONA Advocacy Award 2023, St. Patrick Center Leo Paradis Volunteer Award, and a Volunteerism award from President Obama for community service. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and the Missouri State Representative to AANP 2018-2024. Margaret assisted with the City of Saint Louis Vaccine Administration by coordinating efforts to staff the COVID vaccine clinics with faculty and students from the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing. She is now a member of the Medical Relief Corp for Saint Louis City. She also serves as chair of Harris College of Nursing, TCU Board of Visitors.

I believe that Nurses really are the answer to improving health in our state through access to care if given the opportunity to practice to their full scope of education and training.

<https://c4mn.org/honor-a-nurse>



In honor of Jessica Giddens, BA, DNP, FPMHNP-BC, RN-BC

Dr. Jessica Giddens is a Doctor of Nursing Practice with experience in the mental health field. Dr. Giddens has served as a speaker, scientific director, thought leader, key opinion leader, consultant, and advisory board member in a wide array of specialties, including but not limited to psychopharmacology, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, attention deficit disorder, schizophrenia, tardive dyskinesia, pseudobulbar affect, binge eating disorders, autism, neurodiversity, LGBTQIA+ health, social determinants of health, neurodiversity, digital health, brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, psychopharmacogenomics, epigenetics, and genetic testing. She has worked with psychiatric and genomic research and development companies such as Otsuka, Sunovion, Allergan, AbbVie, Teva, Genomind, and Avanir. In her role as a scientific director, she has developed grant-funded CME content for companies, including Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and CVS, and non-grant-funded proprietary educational presentations.

Dr. Giddens' clinical experience spans various roles: healthcare administration, clinical and medical directorships, community health, and multiple inpatient psychiatric settings (adult, acute adult, geriatric, and child and adolescent). Additionally, her career includes roles in outpatient health, intensive outpatient care, nursing home care, substance use disorder, community health, and the Department of Corrections. She has also served as the CEO of her own company focused on digital health technology and has been part of an acute care float team, with training at a top 10 U.S. hospital, gaining experience across multiple inpatient medical units.

Dr. Giddens has contributed to industry publications, co-hosted a local health radio show, served as a peer reviewer, appeared on television and podcasts as a guest speaker, authored in an Amazon Best Seller, been a board member for multiple organizations, and presented at national and state conferences. Her involvement extends to managing her own health website and blog and engaging with multiple social media communities.

In addition, Dr. Giddens has served as a preceptor, rotating over 20 students per semester, trained medical & nursing students, and taught as adjunct faculty in psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, health assessment, practicum, and psychiatric assessment. Her diverse experience in neuropsychiatry drives her efforts to reduce stigma, promote education, and advance research.



In honor of Beulah Joshua, DNP, MBA, APRN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC, CARN-AP, AFN-C

Beulah Joshua is dual certified as a Family Nurse Practitioner and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. Her areas of expertise include working with forensic clients, management of substance use disorder, and treating clients throughout their lifespan, including all age groups. She has a passion for teaching and ongoing learning. Beulah is a nursing faculty member for the PMHNP program and also continues to practice as a psychiatric nurse practitioner, treating a wide range of underserved clients, both children and adults, with mental health needs. She has experience in leadership, teaching, and direct patient care. Her nursing career spans over 20 years in various specialties, including critical care, emergency nursing, forensic nursing, cardiology, neurovascular, risk management, and patient safety.



In honor of Suzanne Opperman, PMHNP, CDAC, CCTP-II

Ms. Opperman is the owner of (Suzanne's) Mental Health Wellness, LLC, a psychiatric therapy practice for those with various types of emotional difficulties and/or issues related to Trauma. The approach of this practice is based on Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). This theory is based upon helping clients to learn how to manage their thoughts, feelings, emotions and subsequent actions/behaviors. Studies carried out using these approaches are highly successful, using the theories of Albert Ellis (REBT) and Aaron Beck, (CBT). She began this business after retiring from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Columbia, and then returning to school to become a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. Ms. Opperman has learned and teaches other nurses about the intricacies of passing any legislation. In 2022 MONA invited her to attend the American Institute for Advocacy Nursing, AINA. The institute was in Washington, DC with ongoing monthly follow up meetings for projects initiated by attendees. Missouri APRNs gaining Full Practice Authority has been her focus. APRN transition/entry for full practice authority has been her major focus for several years.

Additionally, she has another sub-specialty working with those who are experiencing "Loved Ones" who may have Substance Dependency and/or Mal-Adaptive Behaviors/Activities. These therapy approaches are also those used in the Recovery Program of Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART Recovery), an evidence-based approach. As a volunteer with USA National Smart Recovery Facilitator, provided weekly meeting for "Family & Friends" for 5 years. As the Central Missouri Board Vice President of the Missouri Association of Addiction Professionals (MAAP) she is facilitating the growth of this State chapter of the National Association of Alcohol and Drug Counselors (NAADAC). This year the 2nd annual conference will be tele-video for greater access across the state. She is planning a speaker panel about the 2025 Legislative bills. This was well received last year. She will again provide those who work in Mental Health and Addiction with the process of Missouri legislation from submission of bills through to the final bill for approval by the Governor.

Suzanne's Mental Health Wellness practice continues to slowly grow for those who have trauma histories at very low cost/ProBono therapy. Her reviews continue to be 5 star ratings from clients. She has become a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional-II and Certified Drug and Alcohol Counselor.



In honor of Laurie Sparr, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, PMHNP

Laurie has been a nurse for 37 years, starting as a LPN and continuing her education to obtain her ASN, BSN, DNP, FNP and PMH certificate. Laurie has worked in a variety of areas with a focus on rural and under-served populations. Laurie has promoted and advocated for nurses through her active participation in MONA through MO ANA Assembly Delegate, Advanced Practice Counsel Chairperson, Center for MO Nurses co-treasurer, STLNAP treasurer, AMNP Advocacy committee, AANP, ANA, and Sigma Theta Tau.



In honor of Kris Strong, RN, MSN, MHA

Kris is very honored to be recognized and has been involved with the Center for Missouri Nurses (previously the Center for Missouri Nurses) since 2013. She has served in various roles and has been active in promoting the goals of the Future of Nursing 2010 report to advance the practice of nursing in Missouri. Kris has been a nurse for 30 years, graduating from St. John's School of Nursing in 1994 with her diploma and pursued her advanced degrees at Southwest Missouri State University (BSN) and Missouri State University (MSU). She has been a med-surg nurse and a nursing leader at Mercy Springfield for 30 years and currently is educating the next generation of nurses at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, MO.



In honor of Jeanne Wiggins, PMHNP-BC, PMHCNS-BC

Psychiatry Senior Management Team, Compass Health Network and Member, International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses (ISPN) Foundation Board of Directors.



In honor of Bill Winfrey, MPP

Bill Winfrey is Vice President for Policy and Strategic Initiatives at the St. Louis Integrated Health Network, where he leads policy work on Medicaid, oversees workforce initiatives, and is building new capabilities, including a community care hub. He previously served as a Director at ATI Advisory working on complex care and senior living and spent nearly seven years in federal service, most of that time at the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI), leading work to better link healthcare and social services. Earlier in his career, he worked in community organizations, and he has long seen the critical role that nurses play in holding up the healthcare system.

He holds a Master of Public Policy from George Washington University and a BA in Political Science from St. Louis University. He is a proud St. Louis native, currently residing with his wife and two sons in the city.

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