

ceived the very best we had to offer, regardless of zip code.

And perhaps most importantly, the goal was to share these ideas with other hospitals facing the same struggles. Rural healthcare teams are some of the most resilient, creative, and determined professionals in medicine. They simply need support, collaboration, and the freedom to innovate.

Conclusion

Rural hospitals may never have endless resources. But resourcefulness is its own kind of strength. At Conejos County Hospital, San

Luis Valley Health, innovation did not begin with funding or technology.

- It began with trust.
- With mentorship.
- With bedside nurses speaking up.
- With leadership listening.
- And with a team determined to become better together.
- We may be small.
- But when trauma walks through our doors, we are not underprepared.

We are ready. ■



Left to right: Zach Weiderspon (Director of CCH, Administrator), Sarah Gilleland, BSN-RN, CEN (Trauma Nurse Coordinator CCH), Adena Ross, MSN-RN, CEN (Director of Emergency/Acute Nursing CCH)

Gala Event Honors Colorado Nurses

Carol OMeara, RN, MS Colorado Nurses Foundation

"An Evening in Excellence," the 40th Anniversary Excellence in Nursing Awards Gala, was held in May. Attended by over 300 Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses, their families, friends, employers and supporters, the Gala was held at the Denver Art Museum. The event is held annually by the Colorado Nurses Foundation (CNF) to recognize and honor nurses from across the state. The 2026 event was about more than a ceremony, it was a celebration of four decades of compassion, innovation, and unwavering care.

This year, 395 nominations from over 80 health care facilities were received from CNF Partners Centennial AHEC, Denver Regional Nurses Association, Pikes Peak Nightingale Association, San Luis Valley AHEC, Southwest Collaborative Committee, and Western Colorado Nightingale. Each of these partners selected finalists, known as Luminaries, for the sixteen Excellence in Nursing Awards. There were 78 Luminaries selected. Sixteen recipients were then selected from among the Luminaries by a State Selection Committee, comprised of members representing each of the participating groups and members of the CNF Board.

Emcee Mark Vickers introduced the

luminaries from each region, and each received a medallion. Crystal Awards were presented to each recipient by CNF President Margaret Mulhall as Mark shared their remarkable accomplishments. Congratulations to the 2026 recipients:

- Excellence in Nursing Acute Care Clinical Practice RN Karen Wilson
- Excellence in Nursing Acute Care Clinical Practice LPN Stephanie Galvan
- Excellence in Nursing Clinical Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Mary Sawyer
- Excellence in Nursing Community Nursing RN Tully Gibbons
- Excellence in Nursing Community Nursing LPN Stacy Martinez
- Excellence in Nursing Long Term Care/Rehabilitation RN Lynda Strickland
- Excellence in Nursing Long Term Care/Rehabilitation Nursing LPN Kayla Kephart
- Excellence in Nursing Nurse Led Teams University of Colorado Hospital Surgical Bedside Rounding Team
- Excellence in Nursing Administration, Executive Noreen Bernard
- Excellence in Nursing Administration, Leader/Manager Karen Engel

- Excellence in Nursing Education, Academia Mary Jo Stanley
- Excellence in Nursing Education, Nursing Professional Development Elizabeth Kruger
- Excellence in Nursing Nursing Research Jennifer Zohn
- Excellence in Nursing Quality Improvement Stephanie Dejesus
- Excellence in Nursing, Health Care Policy Renee Schoenbeck
- Nursing Eminence Award-Lola Fehr

To learn more about all of the Luminaries and Recipients, and to see photos of the event visit <https://www.coloradonursesfoundation.com/gala2026>. ■