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NRHA announces 2018 Rural Health Award recipients

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is proud to announce its [2018 Rural Health Award recipients](#) to be honored at the largest gathering of rural health professionals in the country **May 11** in the Big Easy.

“We’re extremely proud of this year’s winners,” says Alan Morgan, NRHA CEO. “They have each made tremendous strides to advance rural health care, and we’re confident they will continue to help improve the lives of rural Americans.”

The following organizations and individuals will be honored during [NRHA’s 41st Annual Rural Health Conference](#), which will bring hundreds of rural health professionals and students from across the country to New Orleans.

NRHA's **2018 Rosemary McKenzie Legacy Award** goes to Agnes Attakai, MPA, Director of Health Disparities Outreach Prevention Education at University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health. Ms. Attakai is member of the Navajo Nation and a champion of health equity in Arizona and nationally, as director of the Arizona Indians into Medicine Program at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. Agnes has worked diligently for 17 years to reduce health disparities among Arizona’s Native Americans, most notably by developing the Native American health care and public health workforce.

NRHA’s **2017 Journal of Rural Health article of the year** is “[Polysubstance Use Among Adolescents in a Low-Income, Rural Community: Latent Classes for Middle- and High-School Students](#)” by Roderick A. Rose, Caroline B. R. Evans, Paul R. Smokowski, Matthew O. Howard, and Katie C. Stalker (J Rural Health. September 18, 2017). "Using latent class analysis to identify subtypes of polysubstance use among rural middle- and high-school youth, we showed that although the middle-school youth had lower overall use rates, some subtypes of users had greater predicted inhalant and prescription drug use than their high-school peers. This suggested a disturbing trend in light of ongoing efforts to curtail opioid misuse in these communities," says Roderick Rose, lead author and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work research assistant professor.

St. Luke’s Miners Rural Health Centers is this year’s **Outstanding Rural Health Organization**. Serving the communities of Hometown and Nesquehoning, Pennsylvania, these two clinics provide more than 12,000 patient visits annually, delivering high-quality primary care services to an underserved population. With a focus on patient-centered assessments and behavioral modification, the clinics have implemented a successful chronic condition management program for patients who have diabetes and/or unusually high rates of emergency department utilization. The clinics are also involved in pediatric care, utilizing their mobile health van to bring well visits, behavioral health, vision services, and more to area schools.

The National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health’s (NOSORH) National Rural Health Day has been named NRHA’s **Outstanding Rural Health Program**. NOSORH developed National Rural Health Day in 2010 as an opportunity to celebrate the “power of rural” and bring positive attention to the unique health care needs of rural America. Now in its eighth

year, National Rural Health Day continues to see success in the form of national awareness, new collaborations, community engagement, resource development, and more. With the support of state offices of rural health, NRHA, and their partners, National Rural Health Day has brought much-needed attention to rural health issues.

Rhonda Kay Skelton has been posthumously awarded the **Louis Gorin Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Health Care**. Skelton served as the obstetrics/newborn department manager at Mercy Hospital in Moose Lake, Minn., which in February became one of only two critical access hospitals in the state to earn a baby-friendly designation. This prestigious international recognition was achieved through Skelton's foresight, leadership, and commitment to patients. At a time when many rural hospitals are eliminating OB services, the Rhonda Kay Skelton Birthing Center continues to provide its rural community with compassionate, skilled maternity and infant care.

Kent Hoerauf, MD, CMD, FACP is NRHA's **Rural Health Practitioner of the Year**. A board-certified internal and geriatric medicine physician at West River Health Services in Hettinger, N.D., Hoerauf has made important contributions to more than 20,000 rural residents in roughly as many square miles for the last three decades. He was instrumental in creating the first designated Alzheimer's unit in southwest North Dakota, as well as West River's level IV trauma system. Hoerauf also serves as clinical professor of internal medicine at University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Science. He travels more than 720 miles each month to reach the rural communities he serves.

This year's **Outstanding Educator Award** recipient is **Cella Janisch-Hartline**. As nursing leadership senior manager at the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative, Janisch-Hartline guides first-year nurses through the nurse residency program, helping the cooperative to increase first-year nursing retention from 50 to 60 percent to more than 90 percent. She also helped develop a rural leadership residency, allowing new rural leaders to learn best practices, receive coaching, and use available tools and resources. She has also created and taught "boot camps" for rural OB nurses, ER nurses, certified nurse anesthetists, and nursing supervisors.

NRHA's **Outstanding Researcher Award** winner is **K. Bryant Smalley, PhD, PsyD**. Smalley has focused on improving health status among diverse rural populations during his time as associate dean for research at Mercer University School of Medicine in Macon, Ga. Smalley's research initiatives have engaged numerous stakeholders and received millions in funding, including Project EDUCATE, an ongoing study testing a telehealth-delivered intervention for diabetes and hypertension self-management, and Partnerships for Health, which creates community-based partnerships to address pressing health issues in rural Georgia. A perennial presenter at NRHA's Annual Rural Health Conference, Smalley has also published 30 peer-reviewed journal articles, including in NRHA's *Journal of Rural Health*.

This year's **NRHA/John Snow Inc. Student Leadership Award** goes to **Grant Gase**. An osteopathic medical student at Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, Gase has been called "the future of rural health advocacy." He serves as the rural medical education chair of NRHA's Student constituency group, and he regularly attends the association's educational and advocacy events. As a student leader, he is developing the Perry County Health Clinic in New Straitsville, Ohio, which is a health professional shortage area for primary care and mental health services. He is also collaborating with local stakeholders to establish a rural training track program.

Jacob Thatcher has earned the **NRHA/John Snow Inc. Student Achievement Award**.

Thatcher has distinguished himself as a leader and respected rural advocate during his time as an osteopathic medical student at Pacific Northwest University in Boise, Idaho. In addition to his studies, Thatcher is also an NRHA Rural Health Fellow and a member of the association's Rural Health Congress, as well as a Society of Young Rural Surgeons fellow. He was instrumental in the creation of a telehealth project at Shoshone Family Medical Center, and he recently developed another initiative addressing chronic pain and opioid dependency by creating shared medical appointments.

Michelle Mills has been named NRHA's **Volunteer of the Year**. Mills has been indispensable to NRHA as the chair of the Rural Health Clinic constituency group. She has delivered exemplary service as well in the finance committee, membership committee, state office council, state association council and board of trustees. Mills has assisted NRHA many endeavors, including judging conference submissions and award nominations, helping with conference sessions, and providing encouragement to NRHA staff. She is always willing help when she is needed and be an active and powerful voice for rural Americans.

The **President's Award** goes to **Roger D. Wells, PA-C**. Selected for the award by NRHA President Tommy Barnhart, Wells has been an NRHA member since 2014. Since then he has attended every NRHA event and served on the association's Rural Health Congress, Government Affairs Committee, and board of trustees, as well as chair of the Clinical constituency group. He has assisted with the development of many NRHA policies, most recently the physician assistant policy paper. Wells has also helped shape rural policies at the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, Office of the National Coordinator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and National Advisory Commission on Health and Human Services.

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