

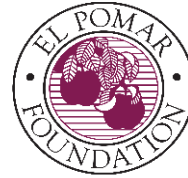
## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*Celebrating 85 years*

### **El Pomar Foundation Honors Colorado Nonprofits and Community Leaders at Night of Excellence Ceremony**

**Colorado Springs, CO – November 1, 2023** – Three nonprofit organizations and four individuals from around the state were honored by El Pomar Foundation during the Foundation’s 2023 Night of Excellence at The Broadmoor on Friday, October 27. Recognitions included Awards for Excellence and Julie Penrose Award.

The organizations honored were **Colorado Education Initiative, Early Connections Learning Centers, and Wray Community District Hospital**. The individuals honored for their lifetime achievements and outstanding contributions to the nonprofit sector were **Jason Janz, Bob & Joyce Rankin, and Kathy Loo**.

Awards for Excellence were accompanied by \$30,000 grants for each organization. Each individual honoree received \$10,000, to be directed toward the nonprofit of their choice.

“Awards for Excellence and the Julie Penrose Award are a meaningful way for El Pomar to spotlight and honor extraordinary organizations and individuals who stand out in their service of communities around the state,” said El Pomar President and CEO, Kyle H. Hybl. “Through both this acknowledgement and the accompanying grant funding, we are pleased to thank and recognize them for their work in support of the well-being of the people of Colorado.”

#### **AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE HONOREES**

[Early Connections Learning Centers](#) received the **Pikes Peak Award for Excellence**. Founded in 1997, Early Connections implements nationally accredited early care and education for children ages 6 weeks to 14 years old through programs that include a literacy-focused curriculum, family support activities, nutritious meals and snacks, and physical and behavioral health support. The organization is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Colorado Office of Early Childhood, and is a member of Colorado Shines, GuideStar Platinum Transparency, and Pikes Peak United Way. As the oldest non-profit childcare organization in Colorado, Early Connections Learning Centers has helped thousands of families in the Pikes Peak region over the past 25 years.

[Colorado Education Initiative](#) received the **Spotlight Award for Excellence (Education)**. Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) cultivates systems of improvement and equity in K-12 education by helping teachers, school leaders, and district stakeholders catalyze comprehensive changes in the system. Through a team of educators and system leaders, CEI mobilizes design initiatives in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Family and Community Partnership; Social Emotional Development; Youth Activation; Leadership; and Change Management. With these six redesign commitments at the core of their projects, CEI has supported public education system improvement since 2007 in more than 150 urban, suburban, and rural school districts. CEI is motivated by the long-term vision that every student in Colorado will be equipped to succeed fearlessly in school, work, and life.

[Wray Community District Hospital](#) received the **Rural Award for Excellence**. By prioritizing a patient-centered environment, the organization is committed to sharing how they work to provide safety and care to their patients to ensure customer satisfaction and quality care. Some ongoing initiatives include the Hospital Transformation program which focuses on developing infrastructure, delivery system integration, and care interventions as well as the Scopes of Care initiative which focuses on follow up care practices and social needs screenings. Their commitment to patient quality care is highlighted through their recognition in 2021 by The Chartis Center of Rural Health and the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health with a Performance Leadership Award in Quality and Patient Perspective as well as being announced as a 2022 Top 100 Critical Access Hospital.

**Jason Janz** received the **Russell T. Tutt Leadership and Service Award** which, named for a former El Pomar Trustee, honors a Colorado Nonprofit Executive Director or Board Chair who has exemplified leadership and service. Influenced by spending his childhood and adolescence in poverty, Jason co-founded [CrossPurpose](#) in 2012 with a mission “to abolish economic, relational, and spiritual poverty through career and community development.” Jason's passion for social entrepreneurship and serving the poor is lived out through his role as CEO where he builds the staff team, sets the organizational culture, and raises funds. Jason desires to help spark a neighbor-loving movement in and through the church of Jesus Christ. After pastoring for eleven years, Jason moved to a diverse, low-income neighborhood to start a church and be in-community with those experiencing poverty. Five years ago, his church began a poverty abolition program that helps families exit poverty and become self-sufficient. Jason and his wife Jen have four boys and live in inner-city Denver. Jason Janz directed his \$10,000 award grant to CrossPurpose.

**The Honorable Bob & Joyce Rankin** received the **Ben S. Wendelken Trustee Award** which, named for a former El Pomar Trustee, honors an individual or individuals who embody the spirit of service and giving by going above and beyond to make an unprecedented impact through philanthropy. A native of Mississippi, The Honorable Bob Rankin, earned a degree in electrical engineering before serving three years in the Army and then moving onto a long career including with Ford Aerospace and as a Division President with Computer Sciences Corporation. His work in the defense industry led to an opportunity to move to Colorado Springs in 1980 where he served as Chief Engineer and later Division Vice President of a division of Ford Aerospace. While in Colorado, Mr. Rankin helped found two new businesses along with Computers for Kids, now Youthentity, a nonprofit that recycles electronics and helps high school students build skills for a career in Technology. In 2012, Mr. Rankin was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives before moving to the Senate where he served until 2022. For eight years he served on the Joint Budget Committee and was a leader on legislation supporting rural Colorado, education, and tax reform. During his time in the Senate, Mr. Rankin served as co-chairman of the Education Leadership Council and was a board member of the Colorado Tourism Board. He was also honored to be a member of El Pomar’s Northwest Regional Council from 2014 to 2023. The Honorable Joyce Rankin grew up in Detroit, Michigan and graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in Elementary Education which led her to teaching fifth grade in the San Francisco Bay area. Mrs. Rankin received her master’s degree in Elementary Education and an administrative credential from California State University. At this time, Joyce met and married Bob, moving to Colorado together. Joyce was elected to and served on the Colorado State Board of Education from 2016 until 2023, where she strongly advocated for literacy in elementary school. The couple’s involvement with the READ Act, which focuses on literacy development for children in kindergarten to third grade, led to great strides in education. Throughout the course of their public service, both Bob and Joyce were passionate about the state of Colorado’s education system and ways to improve education for youth. The Honorable Bob & Joyce Rankin directed their \$10,000 award grant to Ascendigo Autism Services.

## **JULIE PENROSE AWARD HONOREE**

**Kathy Loo** received the Julie Penrose Award, which the Trustees of El Pomar established in 2020 in honor of what would have been Mrs. Penrose's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday to connect her legacy of philanthropy and service to other women throughout Colorado committed to the betterment of their communities.

**Kathy Loo** moved to Colorado Springs in 1961 and became involved as a volunteer for many social service organizations. Kathy served as president of the Head Start Advisory Board and Brockhurst Boys Ranch. She was a member of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and served on Colorado Springs City Council for six years, investing her time and money in various organizations, including Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, and The Nature Conservancy. She is also co-developer of Blue Dot Place, the first downtown apartment complex in 50 years. In 1969, Kathy founded the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo Auxiliary and served on the Zoo Board of Trustees from 1980-1990. As President, she directed the search for a new director and was instrumental in the design and implementation of a new master plan. She is the only honorary trustee and continues to be a strong supporter and advisor to the Zoo. Kathy has served on various boards including Pikes Peak Community Foundation, Colorado Springs Symphony, Colorado Springs Urban Renewal Board, and Colorado Women's Forum where she served as President. She co-chaired a capital campaign to renovate and expand the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and then led a transition team to guide the institution forward. She is also Executive Vice President of High Valley Group, a family investment company and is presently working on a project to bring affordable housing to downtown Colorado Springs. Kathy Loo directed her \$10,000 award grant to Pikes Peak State College Foundation to support scholarships for art and music students.

### **About Awards for Excellence**

*In 1989, El Pomar Foundation's Board of Trustees developed Awards for Excellence (AFE) to honor Spencer and Julie Penrose's commitment to the nonprofit sector. For more than 30 years, the program has recognized organizations and nonprofit leaders from across Colorado who serve their communities with distinction, and now includes lifetime achievement awards honoring individuals' outstanding contributions to the nonprofit sector. Accompanying the awards are grants totaling \$120,000 in recognition of their excellent work to support the people of Colorado. Since its inception, AFE has provided more than \$6.5 million in grant support to more than 500 nonprofit organizations throughout Colorado. Honorees do not apply for the awards but are nominated and selected by community leaders throughout Colorado. More information can be found here:*

<https://www.elpomar.org/programs/afe/>

### **About the Julie Penrose Award**

*The Trustees of El Pomar Foundation established the Julie Penrose Award in 2020 in honor of what would have been Mrs. Penrose's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Award is presented yearly to outstanding women who, like Julie Penrose, have made significant contributions to their communities through their leadership and dedication. More information can be found here: [www.elpomar.org/programs/julie-penrose-award/](http://www.elpomar.org/programs/julie-penrose-award/)*

### **About El Pomar Foundation**

*El Pomar is one of the largest and oldest private foundations in Colorado, contributing approximately \$25 million annually through grants in the areas of health, human services, education, arts & humanities, and civic & community initiatives, as well as community stewardship and leadership development programs to support Colorado nonprofit organizations. Spencer and Julie Penrose founded El Pomar in 1937 with the mission to enhance, encourage and promote the current and future well-being of the people of Colorado.*

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