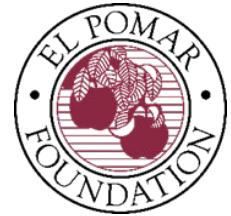


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For more information, contact:

Erin Hannan, Senior Vice President of Communications
719-577-5750 or ehannan@elpomar.org



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

Colorado Springs, CO – October 29, 2024 – Three nonprofit organizations and three individuals from around the state were honored by El Pomar Foundation during the Foundation’s 2024 Night of Excellence at The Broadmoor on Wednesday, October 23. For thirty-five years, El Pomar has recognized extraordinary nonprofits and community leaders in this awards ceremony, which includes Awards for Excellence and the Julie Penrose Award.

The organizations honored were **Food Bank of the Rockies** in Denver, **Mt. Carmel Wellness and Community Center** in Trinidad, and **CASA of the 7th Judicial District** in Montrose. The individuals honored for their lifetime achievements and outstanding contributions to the nonprofit sector were **Kathleen Merritt, Paul Major, and Lucille A. Echohawk**.

Awards for Excellence were accompanied by \$30,000 grants for each of the three organizations. Each individual honoree received \$10,000, which was directed to the nonprofit of their choice.

“El Pomar is fortunate to support the great work of nonprofits across the state throughout the year,” said El Pomar President & CEO, Kyle H. Hybl. “These awards are a meaningful way for us to highlight remarkable organizations and individuals for their exceptional service and commitment to the people of Colorado. Their stories are inspiring and the ways they innovate, collaborate, and overcome challenge is noteworthy.”

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE HONOREES

[Food Bank of the Rockies](#) received the **Metro Award for Excellence**. Founded in 1984, Food Bank of the Rockies works to address hunger across portions of Colorado and Wyoming through their Fighting Hunger, Feeding Hope program. In 2023, Food Bank of the Rockies sourced and distributed nearly 66 million meals, ensuring over 367,000 individuals across the two states were fed daily. Through the power of food, they have given hope for a brighter future to many rural communities. Looking forward, Food Bank of the Rockies is hopeful that one day everyone will have the food and resources needed to nourish themselves and their communities.

[Mt. Carmel Wellness and Community Center](#) received the **Spotlight Award for Excellence (Health)**. Mt. Carmel Wellness and Community Center serves as a gathering space for meetings and community building in Trinidad, Colorado. Jay Cimino and his wife, Emily Cimino, founded Mt. Carmel with goals to offer healthcare in the form of behavioral health, primary care, and wellness education while also offering wellness services, prevention, education, and youth programming to their community in Southern Colorado. Some of their programs include yoga, youth choirs, orchestras, cooking classes, exercise & health classes, and leadership programs. With these initiatives at their core, Mt. Carmel Wellness and Community Center is a place for mind, body, and spirit.

[CASA of the 7th District](#) received the **Rural Award for Excellence**. Created to advocate for a child’s best interests in court as they navigate legal issues due to abuse or neglect, staff and volunteers work to support and amplify the needs of these children. CASA of the 7th District recognized that although the advocacy services they provide are valuable, there were needs in the community that weren’t being met. Programs such

as Supervised Exchange & Parenting Time and Youth Services program have helped bridge that gap. Additionally, their new housing project, Village of the San Juans, is wrapping up construction. This village will provide affordable housing and build a community for youth who have aged out of the foster care system as well as senior citizens.

Kathleen Merritt 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. For the last 10 years, Kathleen has worked tirelessly to better her community through her work at Bright Futures, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and families in the San Juan Region. Kathleen brings to the table her expertise on early childhood development through her 21-year career directing a childcare center and preschool program in this community. As the Bright Futures Executive Director, Kathleen has increased the organization's program support by 160 percent, allowing Bright Futures to serve seven counties in various capacities. Kathleen Merritt directed her \$10,000 award grant to Bright Futures.

Paul Major 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. Paul has been an active member of the greater Telluride area since he founded the Telluride Foundation in 2000. He served as CEO for 22 years, and under his leadership, the foundation was able to offer generous support to charitable organizations in the community. During his final year as CEO, the Telluride Foundation distributed over \$3 million in awards and grants. The passion for addressing the needs of rural communities has remained a top priority for Paul, as he currently serves on the Board for Paradox Community Trust and is the manager for Rural Homes, LLC. Paul Major directed his \$10,000 award grant to Paradox Community Trust.

JULIE PENROSE AWARD HONOREE

Lucille A. Echohawk received the Julie Penrose Award, which the Trustees of El Pomar established in 2020 in honor of what would have been Mrs. Penrose's 150th birthday to connect her legacy of philanthropy and service to other women throughout Colorado committed to the betterment of their communities. **Lucille A. Echohawk** is a citizen of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma and a resident of Colorado. She has led a life of tireless advocacy and service in child welfare for American Indian and Alaska Natives. Landmark institutions such as Native Americans for Philanthropy, Denver Indian Center, Inc., Denver Indian Family Resource Center, Pawnee Evening Star Fund, and Native American Housing Circle were all co-founded by Lucille during her more than 30 years of service to her community. She has either served or is currently serving as board chair for these organizations and continues to share her expertise in numerous other roles and commitments. Lucille has been recognized for her lifetime achievements by various organizations and was a 2023 Denver International Women's Day Honoree. Lucille A. Echohawk directed her \$10,000 award grant to Denver Indian Resource Center.

Photos from the ceremony are available here:

<https://elpomar.egnyte.com/fl/ik2S7OenP0>

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 35 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 \$7 million in grant support to more than 450 nonprofit organizations and government entities 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 150th 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/

About El Pomar Foundation

El Pomar Foundation is one of the largest and oldest private foundations in Colorado. El Pomar contributes approximately \$25 million annually through grants in the areas of arts and culture, civic and community initiatives, education, health, and human services, as well as community engagement and leadership development programs to support Colorado nonprofit organizations, including three historic properties open to the public: Penrose Heritage Museum, Penrose House Conference Center, and Will Rogers Shrine of the Sun. 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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