

News Release
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Tahlequah Hospital Foundation Hosts 16th Annual Hearts of Gold Gala

TAHLEQUAH, OKLAHOMA – The Tahlequah Hospital Foundation hosted the 16th Annual Hearts of Gold Gala on Saturday, April 8, 2022. The event brought together more 600 supporters, sponsors and staff to celebrate the tremendous impact made by the 1,000 plus employees who make up Northeastern Health System. The event raised \$335,900 which will be used to improve and expand healthcare in Cherokee and the surrounding counties.

“The Hearts of Gold Gala is one of the many ways we raise funds for the Tahlequah Hospital Foundation,” said Todd Mutzig, Chairman of the 501c3 Hospital Foundation “With these funds, we can provide scholarships to students seeking or continuing their education in the health field, and we can bring new services, equipment and specialists to our area.”

Returning to emcee the event, was television news personality, Leann Taylor, from Tulsa’s KTUL News Channel 6. Taylor joined the hospital foundation in the presentation of four annual awards to individuals exemplifying what it means to be committed to health care and to the community.

Sue Ann Freeman was this year’s recipient of the Hearts of Gold award. Freeman is celebrating 10 years as a hospital auxiliary volunteer, currently serving her second term as auxiliary board president.

“Volunteering is one of the ways I give back to my community,” said Freeman. “There is always a need somewhere and everyone has a gift to share.”

Freeman’s long-time service as a hospital volunteer was also recognized by the Oklahoma Hospital Association with the Volunteer with Spirit Award. She’s also been twice named the Kiwanian of the Year, has been named Teacher of the Month on numerous occasions, and has been honored by her church for her service and dedication.

The Dr. Mary Culver Lifetime Achievement award was presented to Mark Gish, who retired as BancFirst's president and regional executive in 2020. Through the years, Gish has been a shining example of what a lifetime of service represents. He's an incorporating member and trustee for the Tahlequah Hospital Foundation, now serving as treasurer. He serves as chairman of the Communities Foundation of Oklahoma and vice chairman of the Tahlequah Public Works Authority. He has served the Tahlequah Community Fund for twenty years as director and chairman, and six years as trustee and vice chair of the Tahlequah Industrial Authority, now the Tahlequah Regional Development Authority, serving nine years as chairman and currently serving on the Development Committee.

Gish is a re-organizing member and past director of the Tahlequah Public Schools Foundation, and is committed to serving his faith as past director and Building Committee member and finance chair for the United Methodist Church of Tahlequah and past director and finance chair for Tahlequah Wesley Foundation. In addition, he is the past president and a Paul Harris Fellow of the Tahlequah Rotary Club and has served as past director of the Tahlequah Arts Council.

The Thompson Award was presented to Dr. James G. Mahaney for his community involvement and instrumental role in the field of optometry for Tahlequah and the surrounding areas. After serving as an intern at the Naval Regional Medical Center in Corpus Christi, Texas, Mahaney returned to Tahlequah as a professor at Northeastern State University at the School of Optometry and to start his private practice where he remains today.

Having supported the community for the past 40 years, Mahaney has been consistently voted Tahlequah's favorite eye doctor.

His passion for flying led him to earning his commercial aircraft and helicopter pilot licenses. He has been a member of the airport board for 17 years, serving as chairman for the past 14 years. He was instrumental in the one-thousand feet runway extension, allowing jets to land at the municipal airport, increasing tourism and sales tax dollars for the community.

The McIntosh, Masters and Medearis award was presented to Dr. Berry Winn, who's philosophy of medicine has always been that everything you do, you do as a representative of Christ. Obedience to God, church, family, freedom and responsibility are what Winn feels passionate about.

During his career, Winn has seen many changes in the medical field including electronic medical records, ultrasound, CT scan and MRI. His leadership in medicine extends to his service on the boards of Cherokee Health Partners and Northeast Oklahoma Heart Center.

As the recipient of this year's McIntosh Masters and Medearis Award, Winn believes strongly this award was really for all the work the nurses and staff at NHS have done.

Brian Woodliff, president and CEO of NHS, shared the 2021 milestones with the crowd, highlighting the capability of NHS to invest in resources and care for the primary health burdens of the community that most rural communities go without, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke and kidney disease.

Sponsored by the Tahlequah Hospital Auxiliary, Northeast Oklahoma Heart Center, Cherokee Health Partners, Ambler Architects, and Northeastern State University, among others, the Gala showcased the hospital's growth over the last year, as well as honored several individuals who have made a significant impact on health care and in the community.