**Awardee Description**

*The 2021 conference was dedicated to local and state health department officials, providers, and advocates who have served on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**Award of Merit**

* The Award of Merit recognizes any individual or agency which made an outstanding contribution of major significance to the rural health movement.
* We are pleased to recognize The Office of Health Disparities Elimination, under the leadership of Dr. Kimberly Lamar, and specific team members, Elizabeth Hart, Monique Anthony, and Francis Garcia for their hard work and response during the COVID-19 pandemic. This team has been instrumental in increasing the number of rural and minority populations to get vaccinated in partnership with local health departments and other community and faith-based organizations across the state.

**Exemplary Project**

* The Exemplary Project award recognizes an organization or group that has successfully developed a unique program or project that advances rural health.
* The first recipient goes to the Tennessee Health Care Campaign. The Tennessee Health Care Campaign Rural Health Equity team convened a panel of rural health experts and conducted several listening sessions and interviews with stakeholders from 2018 to 2020 to better understand the context leading up to rural hospital closures, then released a report to educate policy makers, administrators, and advocates on this important access to care issue in rural Tennessee.
* Our next Exemplary Project award recognizes two organizations: Buffalo Valley and the McNabb Center. These organizations rolled out mobile clinics thanks to grant from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. The goal of the program, known as Project Rural Recovery, is to bring behavioral services, as well as primary care services to rural Tennesseans in their regions.

**Collaboration Award**

* Next, we have the Collaboration Award, recognizing an outstanding individual or organization that has worked jointly with others to develop a process to achieve a common goal toward the betterment of rural health. Awardees demonstrate a team spirit that has motivated others to work with a positive synergy to cross disciplines or regions.
* Our first recipient is Dr. Claude Pirtle. Dr. Pirtle has initiated and led teams in advancing the science of telemedicine/telehealth in rural clinics of West Tennessee Healthcare and has been an integral part of research teams to advance innovative technological efforts. He is always willing to assist with the needs of academic practice partners and their requests for partnerships, data, telemedicine/telehealth and more. ***(not present)***
* Our second Collaboration Award goes to Trousdale County Health Council and their more than two dozen partners for their #1 For Life Community Health Project. This multi-year project in Trousdale County is credited for increasing this small county’s health ranking from 85th in Health Outcomes and 86th in Life Expectancy to 30th and 16th, respectively.

**Bill Moats Award**

* The Bill Moats award is given annually in recognition of a member of the association who has demonstrated a true passion for rural health.
* This year’s Bill Moats award goes to Dr. Angie Dotson for her 10 years of service on RHA of TN’s board of directors and continued commitment to providing care in rural Tennessee.

**Eloise Q. Hatmaker**

* This award, named in honor of Eloise Q. Hatmaker, recognizes an individual who has contributed outstanding service to the Association and rural health over a period of years. Eloise Hatmaker was instrumental in the establishment of the State Office of Rural Health and helped establish the Rural Health Association of Tennessee.
* We are delighted to present this award to Ms. Ruby Kirby, Bolivar Hospital CEO. In 2021, Ms. Kirby has represented Tennessee on the American Hospital Association’s Rural Health Services Council in addition to her leadership at the state level through THA’s small and rural hospital constituency group and several Rural Health Association of Tennessee committees. Ms. Kirby has also been an exceptionally effective champion of health care workforce initiatives, including mentoring and supporting the professional development of her staff at Bolivar Hospital.

**Rural Practitioner of the Year**

* This award is given to a direct service provider honored for leadership in bringing health services to citizens of rural Tennessee.
* This year’s recipient is Dr. Dee Blakney, a dual certified Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) and Acute Care Nurse Practitioner (ACNP) has dedicated her career to improving the health of residents of Hardeman and McNairy counties. Dr. Blakney’s practice provides outstanding evidence-based care and management to rural patients who might not have easy access to high quality health promotion and care for urgent problems.

**Rural Health Professional of the Year**

* This award is bestowed upon an individual who has made an outstanding contribution of major significance to rural health and is a member of the Association. Consideration shall be given to all areas of rural health.
* This year’s Rural Health Professional of the Year is Dr. Rick Wallace, Associate Director of the Quillen College of Medicine Library at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. When he’s not teaching or at the library, he’s involved in community and grant writing work such as with Remote Area Medical clinics, which provide medical care for people in rural communities. Dr. Wallace serves as the President of the Tennessee Health Science Library Association and on many Rural Health Association of Tennessee committees including the Legislative Committee and this year’s conference committee, spearheading the annual academic poster contest.