

# Centerstone To Honor Six Community Champions Award Winners On Social Media

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ALTON – Centerstone, a national leader in behavioral health care, has named its 2020 Community Champion Award winners.

The Community Champion Award honors community leaders who have made a difference by advancing mental health and substance use disorder services through their advocacy, leadership and service.

**This year's winners are:**

## **Metro-East**

**Steve Konopka**, Highland High School

**Ty Bechel**, Alton Memorial Hospital and Amare

**Lindley Renken**, former Centerstone board member

## **Southern Illinois**

**Nancy Maxwell**, The Women's Center

**Amber Aden**, Carbondale Towers

**Joanna Simpson-Abel**, Carbondale Towers

While Centerstone usually holds a Community Champions Banquet in both the Metro-East and Southern Illinois regions, due to Covid-19, Centerstone will be recognizing its 2020 Community Champions virtually through a Facebook video.

“The six Community Champions display commitment and dedication to their community, and Centerstone is honored to recognize them for their work and for the positive impact they have made and continue to make in the lives of so many across our region,” said John Markley, Regional CEO for Centerstone.

Markley will be featured in videos of the award presentations, which will be posted on Centerstone's Facebook page ([facebook.com/Centerstone.org/](https://facebook.com/Centerstone.org/)) starting the week of September 28.

**This year's winners:**

## **Metro-East**

**Steve Konopka** - Taylor Marks, Centerstone's Director of Flourish and Youth & Family TREE programs, nominated Konopka for being a “key player” in getting Centerstone's TREE program - a substance, alcohol and nicotine treatment program that focuses on reducing or eliminating the

use for individuals ages 12-25 - implemented at Highland High School. Marks noted, "Substance use services are now a normal treatment provided at the school and Steve not only led the school down this route, but provided education to staff members on the importance" of substance, alcohol and nicotine treatment and prevention.

Konopka was also nominated by Lindsey Ebers, former Behavioral Case Manager at Centerstone, who praised him on his "efforts to link youth and adolescents to needed services," and Audra Poovey, Mental Health Counselor at Centerstone, who said that Konopka "brings a brand of social work credibility seen very rarely in the field."

**Ty Bechel** – Jean Schram, a retired Madison County Health Advisory Committee member, nominated Bechel, whom she describes as "a person in long-term recovery from addiction" who has "used his personal experience to help others and educate the public." Schram recognized Bechel's volunteer work with Amare, a Metro-East recovery community organization that he founded in 2014; his work as a Peer Recovery Specialist for a number of years; and how he has "mobilized community and recovery volunteers" as well as "agencies and community organizations to bring people together in supporting recovery" and "to assist people needing treatment." Schram wrote, "Ty has a passion for helping and impacting the lives of his fellow community members along with a commitment to improve delivery systems and services for people in recovery."

Bechel was also nominated by Fred Pollard, who wrote that Bechel "works tirelessly to spread the message of hope and recovery," and Elizabeth Bhandari, who wrote that "he has a passion for helping others when everyone else has turned away."

**Lindley Renken** – Anne Tyree, Centerstone Regional Chief Operating Officer, nominated Renken for being the "driving force behind the development of supportive, permanent housing for Centerstone in Alton," noting that the organization now has more than 70 units of housing for adults with disabilities with rental assistance. Tyree also wrote that Renken was "instrumental in leading the development" of the Centerstone facility in Alton, which "launched the legacy organization, WellSpring Resources, into a period of phenomenal growth." Tyree concluded that "Lin's dedication, selfless service to the organization, and championing of our clients and their needs for housing and service make him a Community Champion for this organization and the community at large."

Southern Illinois

**Nancy Maxwell** – Maxwell - who works at The Women's Center helping survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, runs an outreach program for women at the Eurma C. Hayes Center in Carbondale, and volunteers at the African American Museum in the Carbondale mall - was nominated by Anna Hughes, a medical and legal advocate at The Women's Center. Hughes wrote, "Nancy is the hardest-working and most resourceful person I know, and her dedication to community work and advocacy is astounding." At the Eurma C. Hayes Center, Maxwell "single-handedly founded, facilitated, and continues to grow a support group for empowering women who have experienced sexual assault." Hughes said Maxwell is the "go-to person" to help solve challenges regarding "mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, lack of food or other home items (and) trauma, noting that "she continually and creatively persists through difficult conditions to get her clients and members of the community the resources and care they deserve, no matter what kind of issue they are facing."

Maxwell was also nominated by Emily Killen, who wrote that she "has touched so many lives;" Erin Frey, who wrote that she is "a truly unique individual" who is "always giving;" and Rachel Brenningmeyer, who wrote that Maxwell "has changed so many lives through her hard work and dedication."

Amber Aden and Joanna Simpson-Abel – Both service coordinators at Carbondale Towers, Aden and Simpson-Abel are described as "two roaring fireballs that will stop at nothing to get the needs

of their residents met.” Josh Aden, who nominated the pair, said the two have “worked countless hours to make and keep community relationships so that their residents have no need that goes unmet.” Josh noted that “there is absolutely nothing that these two amazing women would not do for another person in need,” and that “they don’t hesitate to help” anyone, no matter “if the person is a resident, colleague, coworker, or community member.” Centerstone accepted nominations for this year’s Community Champions awards from February through June. Honorable mentions for this year’s awards include:

### **Metro-East**

J. French, President, Gift of Voice  
Debbie Humphrey, Madison County Mental Health Board  
Brad LaVite, Veterans Assistance Commission  
Danielle Price, Quality Coordinator, Gateway Regional Medical Center  
Riverbend Ministerial Alliance

### **Southern Illinois**

Rebecca Anderson, Perry County Counseling  
Mary Ekstrand, behavioral specialist/psychologist, Tri-County Special Education  
Carrie Eldridge, Franklin-Williamson Bi-County Health Department  
Michael Eubanks, Illinois Department of Corrections  
Joan Filkins, Centerstone residential group home volunteer  
Mary Beth Long, Memorial Hospital of Carbondale, Southern Illinois Healthcare  
Christine Raben, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Ferrell Hospital  
Nicole Rechsteiner, Franklin-Jefferson Counties Special Education District  
Southern Illinois University Legal Clinic Program  
Stephanie Thompson, St. John’s Catholic School  
Steve Webb, Superintendent, Goreville Schools  
The Women’s Center Medical and Legal Advocates

### **Past winners of the Centerstone Community Champions award are:**

#### **2019:**

### **Metro-East**

Cory Davenport with The Riverbender  
Rep. Monica Bristow

### **Southern Illinois**

Camille Dorris, Southern Illinois Coalition for the Homeless  
Brittney Hale, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois

#### **2018**

### **Metro-East**

Toni Corona, Madison County Health Department  
Tia Kingsbury, Gateway Regional Medical Center  
OSF St. Anthony’s Health Center

### **Southern Illinois**

Adrienne Baker, Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities  
Matt Buckman, Ph.D., Egyptian Health Department  
Natasha Shafer, APN-FNP, CHESI & Centerstone

## **2017**

### **Metro-East**

Latasha Barnes, Land of Lincoln Foundation  
Chief Jake Simmons, Alton Police Department

### **Southern Illinois**

Lukasz Dabrowski, MD, Southern Illinois Healthcare  
Michelle McLernon, Jackson County Health Department

## **2016**

### **Metro-East**

Vicki Young, Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation  
Genoa QoL

### **Southern Illinois**

Diana Brawley Sussman, Carbondale Public Library  
Patsy Parker, volunteer and advocate

### **About Centerstone**

Centerstone is a not-for-profit health system providing mental health and substance use disorder treatments. Services are available nationally through the operation of outpatient clinics, residential programs, the use of telehealth and an inpatient hospital. Centerstone also features specialized programs for the military community, therapeutic foster care, children's services and employee assistance programs. Centerstone's Research Institute provides guidance through research and technology, leveraging the best practices for use in all our communities. Centerstone's Foundation secures philanthropic resources to support the work and mission of delivering care that changes people's lives.

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