

NEWS RELEASE
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LeadingAge Southeast Honors 2026 Award Recipients at Annual Convention

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – July 20, 2026 – LeadingAge Southeast recognized exceptional senior living providers and team members from across the Southeast during its 63rd Annual Convention & Exposition in Orlando, presenting its 2026 awards to those whose leadership, innovation, compassion, and service are making a lasting difference in the lives of older adults.

"These honorees represent the very best of our profession," said Steve Bahmer, President & CEO of LeadingAge Southeast. "Through their leadership, compassion, and commitment to excellence, they are transforming aging services and enriching the lives of older adults every day. We are proud to recognize their extraordinary contributions and celebrate the impact they have within their communities."

This year's award recipients include:

Caregiver of the Year: Joan Brown, Plymouth Harbor on Sarasota Bay (Sarasota, Fla.) – Recognized for more than 36 years of compassionate caregiving and a lifelong commitment to serving residents with integrity, kindness, and unwavering dedication. Throughout her career, she has cared for generations of residents with exceptional skill, compassion, and grace.

Emerging Leader Award: Sandi Hall, Kirkwood by the River (Birmingham, Ala.) – Honored for her visionary leadership in guiding a \$34 million campus expansion, successfully launching new neighborhoods and services while maintaining outstanding occupancy and positioning the community for continued growth and long-term success.

Employee of the Year: Jeff Weaver, Air Force Enlisted Village (Shalimar, Fla.) – Celebrated for going far beyond the responsibilities of his role as Transportation Specialist. Whether volunteering his musical talents at resident events, delivering groceries to families in need, assisting with hurricane evacuations, or simply being a trusted friend to residents, Jeff consistently demonstrates selfless service and compassion.

Executive of the Year: Dan Lavender, Moorings Park (Naples, Fla.) – Recognized for a transformative career of leadership, from pioneering AI-enabled assisted living to launching the groundbreaking TrueSpan initiative that reimagines wellness, purpose, and connection. His vision has positioned Moorings Park as a national leader in the future of aging services.

Innovation Award: Erica Arnold, Poydras Home (New Orleans, La.) – Honored for creating innovative programs that foster meaningful connections between residents and their community through partnerships with artists, museums, schools, universities, and animal rescue

organizations, empowering older adults to continue learning, creating, teaching, and contributing.

Service Coordinator of the Year: Beatriz Garcia-Nieto, Archbishop Carroll Manor (Miami, Fla.) – Recognized for more than 12 years of dedicated service as a tireless advocate for residents. Through strategic community partnerships, she has expanded access to education, wellness programs, and essential services that help older adults remain independent, while serving as a trusted leader during both everyday challenges and emergencies.

Volunteer of the Year: The Sparklers, Westminster Oaks (Tallahassee, Fla.) – Honored for their extraordinary commitment to residents living with dementia. Through specialized training, weekly visits, and genuine friendships, these volunteers, who are also Westminster Oaks residents, provide comfort, companionship, dignity, and joy to some of their community's most vulnerable residents.

Together, this year's honorees exemplify the compassion, excellence, and commitment that define the profession and inspire others to raise the standard of care for older adults.

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About LeadingAge Southeast

Established in 1963, LeadingAge Southeast is the premier association serving high-quality senior living providers across the continuum of care in Florida, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi. The Association provides up-to-date regulatory information, a wide variety of educational opportunities, representation before the Legislature and government agencies, group purchasing services, and opportunities for networking with peers to help member communities best serve the needs of older adults.