



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ceca Announces the 10th Annual National Award Recipients

Program Recognizes Four Healthcare Workers from Around the Country for Exceptional Acts of Care

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 14, 2024 – Ceca, a national nonprofit serving healthcare and senior living providers through a managed caregiver recognition program designed to improve employee retention, engagement, and resiliency, announces the 10th annual National Ceca Award recipients. The program recognizes four extraordinary caregivers from across the nation who are selected annually from Ceca’s network of healthcare partners, and from public nominations through a national network of healthcare affiliates and other channels.

The 2023 recipients are:

- **Jacqueline Akansugba**, a Geriatric Nurse Assistant at Edenwald Senior Living in Towson, MD. Jacqueline’s outstanding performance, excellent customer service, unwavering dedication to her job, and her love and commitment to residents over her 16-year tenure make her “one of a kind.” Her calm demeanor and respectful communication with residents and families creates a positive environment. Jacqueline goes well beyond her assigned duties, prioritizing the welfare of all residents in her unit. She is wonderful at bringing new employees under her wing and fosters a collaborative care approach with various departments to address individual needs. Notably, Jacqueline’s warm and welcoming attitude earns her praise from team members, residents, family members, and visitors alike. Her pleasant and engaging personality significantly contributes to the thriving community at Edenwald, aligning with the community’s mission to inspire people to live lives of significance.
- **Carla Castellano**, a Professional Caregiver at Focus Healthcare Solutions in Liberty, MO, garnered 38 heartfelt nominations, predominantly from patients and their loved ones. Described as a genuine “angel” by most that meet her, Carla’s exceptional dedication and care have left an indelible mark. One nomination highlights her going above and beyond for a quadriplegic client, far surpassing that client’s experiences with other caregivers. For another client, Carla transforms the caregiving dynamic, creating joy and promoting fun in therapy routines for the client’s physical and mental well-being. Her positive encouragement and caregiving impact has even empowered another client to walk confidently with only a cane. Beyond her caregiving duties, Carla emerges as a source of emotional support during challenging times, providing a shoulder to cry on after a client tragically lost a son and grandson. Carla is the perfect mix of everything you could want in a caregiver.

- **Menbere “Gabbi” Ali Gebral**, a Certified Nursing Assistant at Knollwood Life Plan Community in Washington, DC, received heartfelt acknowledgments for her exceptional dedication and warm spirit. Described as having a huge heart, Gabbi goes above and beyond to ensure residents' comfort and enjoyment, attend to their appearance, and craft delightful treats. A resident's family expressed gratitude for Gabbi's kindness, recounting numerous occasions where she helped their mother get to dinner and other events so that she wouldn't miss out. Gabbi's compassion is evident in her small gestures, like dressing a resident for a party and making them feel loved and included. Her impact extends well beyond her job role, making everyone feel like part of the community in the artful way she fosters a sense of belonging and friendship. Gabbi's genuine care and selflessness have left an enduring impression on both residents and staff.
- **Paul Borowski**, an Environmental Services team member at Middleburg Heights Health and Rehabilitation Center in Middleburg Heights, OH, stands out for his 16 years of service consistently demonstrating values of dedication, compassion, and initiative. His interactions with residents, families, vendors, and staff reflect kindness, consideration, and professionalism. Beyond housekeeping duties, Paul enriches residents' lives through engaging weekend activities, ranging from Bingo to word games, and one-on-one interactions. He exudes genuine care for residents' emotional and physical well-being, acting as an integral part of the care team, such as when he saved a life by recognizing the signs of stroke while in a resident's room. Additionally, his quick response during crises, like a burst pipe, highlights his commitment to community welfare. Paul's creativity extends to employee engagement, where he has made handcrafted decorations to create a positive work environment. Furthermore, Paul's humility, professionalism, and dedication further solidify his exceptional role within the community.

National Ceca Award Honorees receive an engraved trophy and a cash award of \$2,500. Awards are presented in-person by Ceca's President Nate Hamme, team members from their organization, and those they care for.

“I say it every year—the most fulfilling part of my job is reading the amazing and inspiring stories of the dedicated and talented individuals who are nominated each year,” noted Nate Hamme, President of Ceca Foundation. “We have read about countless acts of care that, while they may seem ‘small’ on the surface, have made a tremendous difference in people's lives, which creates a seamless and beneficial healthcare experience. To Jacqueline, Carla, Gabbi and Paul—you have had a profound impact on those in your care and stand out as exceptional caregivers embracing your ability to make a difference. This commitment to service rises above and beyond any job description, and Ceca is humbled to present these awards.”

Ceca also recognized 10 finalists, who, in their own right, deserve recognition for their contributions to their community and those they support:

- **Emmanuel Asare**, Direct Support Professional at Open Door, Columbus, OH
- **Shawanda Burrell**, Environmental Services Technician at Keswick Multi-Care Center, Baltimore, MD
- **Lauren Harglerode**, Resident Life Associate / Med Tech at Providence Place Senior Living, Chambersburg, PA
- **Arianna Hasty**, Resident Life Associate at Providence Place Senior Living, Collegeville, PA

- **Jennifer Koedam**, Activities Director at Fellowship Village, Inwood, IA
- **Celestine Nwosu**, Registered Nurse at Doctors Community Rehabilitation and Patient Care Center, Lanham, MD
- **Tim Peaslee**, Certified Nursing Assistant at Maine Veterans' Home Scarborough, ME
- **Sharon Puckett**, Licensed Practical Nurse at Trilogy Health Services - Harrison Trail Health Campus, Harrison, OH
- **Chris Smith**, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor at The View Alexandria, VA
- **Laura Wicklund**, Resident Assistant at Vista Grande Villa, Jackson, MI

The national award program has had a lasting impact on caregivers from across the country. In fact, over the last five years, data shows that employees recognized through the program have significantly higher retention rates, with improvements ranging from 20-120% on average across different care settings, combating the trend of a depreciation of talent within the field.

“It is an incredible feeling to know that a simple, yet authentic and meaningfully conceived award such as ours has an impact on the retention of employees. We are at a critical period in combating healthcare staffing issues, and Ceca is proud to do our part in helping support providers in retaining their best and brightest,” said Hamme.

About Ceca

Ceca is a 501(c)3 nonprofit based in Washington, DC, which partners with healthcare communities nationally of all sizes to recognize their exceptional caregivers. Ceca’s mission is to improve the human experience in healthcare by providing a highly affordable, turnkey recognition solution tailored to healthcare providers, using its innovative software, network, managed services, and cash awards. Founded by Matthew and Rosemary Lawlor in 2013, Ceca has publicly recognized more than 50,000 exceptional acts of care and nearly 1,400 caregivers have received a Ceca Award. To date, Ceca has awarded over \$500,000 to deserving caregivers. For more information, watch a brief video and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. To schedule an interview with one of our award recipients, contact Michelle Stewart.

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