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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

9/21/2026

Missouri Rural Health Association Announces 2026 Rural Health Excellence Award Recipients

JEFFERSON CITY, MO – September 21, 2026

Missouri Rural Health Association (MRHA) is thrilled to announce the recipients of the 2026 Rural Health Excellence Awards, recognizing three individuals whose leadership, advocacy and innovation are making a meaningful difference in rural communities across Missouri. These awards honor those who go above and beyond in addressing the unique challenges faced by rural communities. The awards were presented at the Missouri Rural Health Conference by MRHA Executive Director Heidi Lucas, on September 10, 2026.

“Each award recipient represents exactly what makes rural health work so powerful: people who see a need in their community and are willing to bring others together to do something about it,” said Heidi Lucas, Executive Director of the Missouri Rural Health Association. “They’ve found practical ways to break down barriers, build stronger systems and improve the lives of rural Missourians. We are incredibly proud to recognize their contributions.”

Excellence in Innovation Award: Elizabeth Green, ToRCH Program Manager, Bothwell Regional Health Center

Elizabeth was selected for her work building a highly collaborative network of healthcare providers, community-based organizations and local partners in Pettis County.

Through her leadership of the ToRCH Pilot, Green has helped align organizations around the shared goal of addressing health-related social needs and connecting residents with essential resources. Since January 2024, the collaborative network has achieved 2,485 resolved cases, each representing an individual successfully connected with needed services.

Her nominators highlighted her ability to build trust among organizations that may not have traditionally worked together and described her as a servant leader who “doesn’t simply manage programs, she brings people together, inspires collaboration, and leads by example.”

Excellence in Advocacy Award: Judge Robert “Bob” Rice, Associate Circuit Judge, Nodaway County and Chair of the Northwest Missouri Cooperative Mental Health Board of Trustees.

Judge Rice was selected for his sustained advocacy to improve behavioral health access across rural Northwest Missouri.

After being appointed in 2020 to lead the 4th Circuit Leadership Team on Mental Health and Criminal Justice Taskforce, Rice helped turn an initial regional effort into a long-term collaborative system. He was instrumental in establishing the Northwest Missouri Cooperative Mental Health Board of Trustees, bringing four rural counties together to collectively address behavioral health needs.

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His work has helped expand crisis intervention and treatment court services, bring mental health telehealth access to 13 school districts, and convene law enforcement, educators, healthcare professionals, local governments and community members to identify and close gaps in behavioral healthcare. Rice has also championed suicide prevention and mental health awareness initiatives, reaching thousands of students and community members across the region.

His nominator summarized his impact simply: Judge Rice saw the challenges facing rural Northwest Missouri and decided to address them “county by county, meeting by meeting, grant by grant.”

Excellence in Leadership Award: Zachary Moser, Administrator, Dent County Health Center

The 2026 Rural Health Excellence Award for Leadership was presented posthumously to Zachary David Moser, Administrator of the Dent County Health Center, in recognition of his exceptional leadership and lasting impact on rural public health.

Moser, who passed away on August 29 at age 36 following a courageous battle with a rare and aggressive sarcoma, had served as administrator of the Dent County Health Center since 2021. During his tenure, he helped expand services, strengthen community partnerships, develop the public health workforce, launch new population health initiatives, and improve access to care and transportation for residents of Dent County.

Those who nominated Moser described him as a passionate, dedicated, persistent, effective and common-sense leader, advocate and partner. His influence extended beyond programs and initiatives to the colleagues, organizations and communities he supported throughout his career.

Moser is survived by his wife, Mary, and their children, John David and Amelia Jane. Mary Moser accepted the award on his behalf during the Rural Health Excellence Awards ceremony.

The award serves as both a recognition of Moser’s professional accomplishments and a tribute to a life of service whose impact on rural Missouri will continue well beyond his passing.

MRHA’s mission is to provide leadership on rural priorities through advocacy, partnerships, and education. For more information about MRHA visit mrhassociation.org.

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