

From Manteo to Morganton

UNC Health Blue Ridge CEO Makes Impact Across the State

The North Carolina Healthcare Association honored UNC Health Blue Ridge President and CEO Kathy Bailey with the 2023 Distinguished Service Award recently at its summer meeting in Williamsburg, VA.

The award, one of NCHA's highest individual honors, is presented to an NCHA member institution executive currently serving in a leadership role whose contributions to the healthcare field have had and continue to have a positive and lasting impact at the local, regional, state, or national level.

Ms. Bailey was chosen based on her valuable and unique service in and beyond her institution; exemplary leadership at the state, regional, or national level; and active engagement with NCHA.

"It's an honor to accept this award," Ms. Bailey said Wednesday. "I humbly accept this recognition and I appreciate each of you for your encouragement throughout my career. I did not walk this path alone. Walking with me have been my mentors, a loving and supportive husband, and family, and my dedicated colleagues."

Ms. Bailey said those in healthcare continue to face and conquer challenges. "I am surrounded by distinguished leaders in health care who make a major difference in the lives of those we serve every day - our patients, our teammates, and our communities," she said. "I continue to have an abiding faith in our roles, our professions, and in each one of you."

In presenting the award, Steve Lawler, President and CEO of NCHA, said Ms. Bailey's career spans almost 45 years in her native state - from the sea to the mountains. She received her nursing degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and her Master's in Public Health degree from UNC Chapel Hill.

“While at Rowan Medical Center, she developed a model for nursing shared governance – the first in North Carolina that became a model for shared governance throughout the country,” he said.

“She went to eastern North Carolina and built a hospital with the same kind of curiosity and confidence that the Wright Brothers had as they flew the first airplane on the Outer Banks,” Lawler said. “Kathy led a program to build a hospital where there was none and to do it in a place where everyone was convinced it wouldn’t work. And now it is one of the most successful critical access hospitals in the country.”

Ms. Bailey became the first president of The Outer Banks Hospital in Nags Head, NC, the first hospital to be built from the ground up in North Carolina in more than 25 years. Then she moved west toward the mountains and began working as Chief Operating Officer for Blue Ridge before eventually becoming the first nurse to lead the organization.

“She truly has had an impact from the coast to the mountains,” Lawler added. “We’ve been friends for 25 years and I can’t think of a more deserving individual for our distinguished service award.”