

Celebrating Impact: Inside NCPC's 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration

Honoring service, strengthening connections, and inspiring action across San Diego County

On April 10, 2026, more than 300 nonprofit leaders, volunteers, and community champions gathered at the Rancho Bernardo Inn for an afternoon rooted in one powerful idea: that service, often quiet and unseen, is the force that drives real, lasting change.

Hosted by the North County Philanthropy Council (NCPC), the 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration (VAC) was more than just a thank you ceremony. It reflects a thriving regional ecosystem, one powered by more than 13,000 nonprofits across San Diego County, and the individuals who serve as its backbone.

Powered by Partnership

The celebration was made possible through the generous support of organizations committed to strengthening the region's nonprofit sector and the volunteers who power it.

NCPC wishes to extend deep gratitude to our Title Sponsor Wells Fargo, whose leadership set the tone for an afternoon focused on impact and community. Additional support from Platinum sponsors Jewish Community Foundation San Diego and Mission Fed Credit Union, along with Silver sponsors PNC Bank, TrueCare, and the Burnham Center for Community Advancement, helped bring the event to life.

Contributions from Bronze sponsors Davis Farr and Lifeline Community Services, as well as Partnership Sponsors Coastal Roots Farm, Catalyst of San Diego & Imperial Counties, and AFP San Diego Chapter, further reflect the collaborative spirit that defines this community.

Together, these partners demonstrate that meaningful change happens when organizations invest not only in programs, but in people.

A Legacy of Connection and Community

Now approaching four decades, VAC continues to stand as a cornerstone event for the San Diego nonprofit sector. This year's gathering brought together representatives from more than 90 organizations, alongside corporate partners and civic leaders, reinforcing NCPC's role as a connector and catalyst for community impact.

From the moment guests arrived, the atmosphere was unmistakably energized. Conversations flowed easily between sectors, new partnerships were sparked, and

long-standing collaborations were strengthened. Adding to the dynamic experience, Drew Schlosberg's Spotlight on the Community podcast was recorded live onsite, capturing real-time insights and amplifying the voices of the region's nonprofit leaders.

A Message of Hope and Collective Impact

Guiding the afternoon's inspiration was keynote speaker Grant Oliphant, CEO of the Prebys Foundation, alongside NCPC Board President Neville Billimoria. Their messages centered on collective resilience, action, and the enduring belief that even small acts of service can create profound change.

"Don't underestimate the power of everything that you do," Billimoria reminded attendees.

"There is always hope, change one life, change everything," Oliphant added.

Together, their words captured the spirit of the event: that hope is not passive and is built through action, commitment, and a shared vision for a stronger community.

A Celebration That Brought Stories to Life

Emceed by CBS8's Anna Laurel, the main program blended storytelling, recognition, and celebration. Each segment highlighted not only achievements but the human stories behind them, stories of persistence, compassion, and leadership.

VAC concluded on a high note (literally) with a performance by Strange Crew, leaving existing attendees energized with the reminder that celebration itself is a vital part of sustaining meaningful work.

Honoring Excellence in Volunteerism

At the heart of the celebration was the recognition of 68 individuals whose dedication and volunteerism continue to strengthen communities across the region.

2026 Award Recipients included:

- **Spirit of Carol Sigelman Award:** A.J. Steinberg, QueenBee Fundraising
- **Robert Krejci Standards of Excellence Award:** Drew Moser, Lucky Duck Foundation
- **Corporate Philanthropy Award:** JPMorganChase
- **Bo Mazzetti Award:** Boys & Girls Club of the Kumeyaay Nation Wellness

As each name was announced, the room responded with resounding applause, a collective acknowledgment of the passion and persistence that define nonprofit work.

“San Diego is the finest nonprofit community in the world,” said A.J. Steinberg, capturing a sentiment echoed throughout the afternoon.

Voices from the Community

Beyond the stage, the broader narrative of the event was shaped by a shared understanding echoed across conversations, panels, and recent community discussions.

Volunteers were described not just as contributors, but as the “heartbeat” and “engine” of community impact, the individuals who transform ideas into action and sustain momentum where it matters most.

Across NCPC’s Spotlight on the Community podcast series, leaders emphasized that volunteerism represents one of the highest forms of philanthropy, an investment not just of resources, but of time, energy, and belief.

They spoke of “unsung heroes” quietly powering the region, of collaboration as the true driver of progress, and of the essential role nonprofits play in strengthening both community well-being and the broader economic landscape.

Why It Matters

Events like the Volunteer Awards Celebration do more than recognize volunteer excellence. They create visibility for important work, strengthen networks across sectors, and remind those leading the charge that they are not alone.

By bringing together leaders, partners, and changemakers, NCPC continues to advance its mission: strengthening philanthropy and supporting nonprofit effectiveness across San Diego County.

Looking Ahead: VAC turns 40

In 2027, NCPC will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Volunteer Awards Celebration, a milestone that promises to build on decades of impact while inspiring a new generation of leaders and volunteers. If this year’s event was any indication, the future is not only bright, it is collective. Because when a community comes together in service, recognition, and shared purpose, the impact reaches far beyond a single day.

How To Get Involved

To learn more about NCPC’s upcoming programs, events, and ways to engage, please visit:

<https://ncphilanthropy.org/>

Drew Schlosberg's Spotlight on the Community (Sponsored by Mission Fed)

NCPC's 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration: Why volunteerism is the greatest form of philanthropy

Neville Billimoria, Board President for the North County Philanthropy Council (NCPC), Del Lewis, a NCPC Board member and serial entrepreneur, and Jim Davis, NCPC Executive Director, discuss the NCPC 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration and the "unsung heroes" powering our region. They explore volunteerism as the greatest form of philanthropy, nonprofit leadership, impact investment, and how social impact organizations drive the economic engine executives rely on. Listen Where You Live!

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5UUfaDJSIOV3jKrzzuF0DU?si=0fcb4e6eabdb4abc>

NCPC's 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration: Raising awareness and funding for mental health

Jim Callaghan, President and CEO of Turn Behavioral Health Services, talks about how volunteers, interns, and community-based organizations power mental health innovation. He shouts out the Courage to Call program supporting veterans and active-duty military, the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, and why strategic philanthropy matters to regional leaders. Listen Where You Live!

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/63spBuhyjTcrp7hXSAi9L?si=-9OA-DQFT3GIznE1eBa4iQ>

NCPC's 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration: Volunteers as the "Heartbeat of a Community"

Tad Parzen, President & CEO of the Burnham Center for Community Advancement (BCCA), is joined by Brandon Harrison, Executive Director of San Diego Futures Foundation, and Adrienne Cisneros-Selekman, Community Relations Liaison for Supervisor Jim Desmond, discuss the importance of the NCPC 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration, BCCA's One SD and the power of volunteers as the "engine" and "heartbeat" of community impact. They explore regional leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and closing the digital divide for seniors and underserved residents to drive measurable results. Listen Where You Live!

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5O4A9IcTABdjKn3Y6T7n8P?si=iOujjm-GRCaV6CAoLDjF-g>

NCPC's 39th Annual Volunteer Awards Celebration: Leveraging networks to build and grow community impact

Jim Callaghan, President and CEO of Turn Behavioral Health Services, and Alex Goodman, District Director for Assemblymember Tasha Boerner, discuss the power of volunteers ... the "boots on the ground." They chat about how executive leadership, strategic networking, and community-based mental health partnerships drive high-impact philanthropy and nonprofit innovation. Listen Where You Live!

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/4znSkEQXzDVhueO06luOTe?si=S9wMxdZHSz-6VjhfDiKZWQ>