

2026 Board of Directors Hero award



Dana M. Hart, SH Emergency Center

Nominated by Christine Powell, SH Emergency Center

Dana Hart is a shining example of compassion, initiative and servant leadership — but above all, she is a hero. In the wake of the sudden and heartbreaking passing of a dearly respected colleague, Dana responded not just with empathy, but with courage and action. She founded what is now a statewide Nurse Honor Guard program — a solemn and beautiful tradition to honor nurses who have passed, recognizing their lifelong dedication to the care of others. Dana did more than comfort the grieving — she transformed the way we honor the profession. When a beloved nurse in our organization dies unexpectedly, the loss deeply impacts our organization and community. Dana recognized both the opportunity and the moral responsibility to create a meaningful tradition — one that would ensure nurses are remembered with the same honor and dignity they gave in service to others. Dana developed the structure, protocols and symbolism of the ceremony, organizing an inaugural tribute that was heartfelt, dignified and deeply moving.

What began as a personal act of love quickly grew into a statewide movement. Dana shared the model, supported other facilities in launching their own Honor Guard programs and built a lasting system that formally recognizes the impact of every nurse who passes. Today, the Nurse Honor Guard performs ceremonies that include a symbolic final call to duty, the reading of the Nightingale Pledge and the presentation of a white rose — each gesture a powerful and reverent tribute. In another recent act of selfless service, Dana spent her own personal time sitting with a fellow nurse — both a colleague and patient — during her final hours, making sure she was not alone. Dana then organized and led the Honor Guard for her, once again going above and beyond with grace, strength and quiet heroism. Dana’s initiative has become a legacy, bringing comfort to countless grieving families. It has united caregivers in a shared tradition of respect, and elevated the way we honor the nursing profession. What she created will continue to grow and endure — benefiting generations of nurses to come.

Dana Hart didn’t just respond to loss — she redefined how we honor life. She has touched hearts, built a tradition that will outlive us all. She inspired a new, transformative standard of how we recognize those who give their lives to the care of others. Her extraordinary kindness, leadership and vision are exactly what it means to be a hero in health care.

The 2026 Salem Health Board of Directors Hero Award was given to Dana Hart, following Board review of all Hero Awards given during the year.