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## America's Blood Centers Announces 2026 *Awards of Excellence* Winners

*National leaders recognized for outstanding contributions to the nation's blood supply*

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**Washington, DC** – America's Blood Centers (ABC), the national organization of community-based, independent blood centers that supply 60 percent of the nation's blood supply, is proud to announce the recipients of its 2026 *Awards of Excellence*. These awards recognize outstanding individuals and organizations for their exceptional contributions to supporting the nation's blood supply. The awards were presented during ABC's Annual Meeting in Tucson, Arizona, which brought together blood center executives and national leaders to discuss critical industry topics, advocacy efforts, regulatory updates, and the latest advancements in science, medicine, and technical affairs.

"America's Blood Centers is proud to recognize these individuals and organizations for their outstanding support of our nation's blood supply. These award recipients exemplify the dedication, innovation, and passion that drive the blood community forward," said Kate Fry, CEO of America's Blood Centers. "Their contributions have helped expand the donor base and provide life-saving blood products to patients across the country."

### The 2026 Awards of Excellence winners include:

**William M. Coenen President's Award: BET on Blood for Sickle Cell Disease Initiative:** Honored for its transformative effort to address the profound underutilization of red blood cell exchange therapy for patients with sickle cell disease. By uniting stakeholders across the blood and sickle cell community, the initiative confronts systemic barriers such as limited awareness, training gaps, and misconceptions about blood donation. Its collaborative, patient-centered approach and commitment to advancing care have helped ensure that more patients receive the blood therapies recommended as first-line treatment for an often-underserved community.

**William M. Coenen President's Award: Janet Howard, Former CEO and Administrator, Western Kentucky Regional Blood Center:** Honored for 45 years of unwavering service and her commitment to providing "any amount of any blood type, at any time." Under her leadership, Western Kentucky Regional Blood Center more than doubled its service area, ultimately serving 11 medical facilities and more than 450,000 Kentuckians. Her career stands as an example of service-driven leadership, operational excellence, and the ability to deliver outstanding patient care regardless of geography or organizational size.

**National Partner of the Year: Vanderbilt University Owen Graduate School of Management:** Awarded for their pivotal role in launching and delivering the inaugural [Executive Fellows Program](#), a rigorous year-long leadership development experience created in partnership with ABC. Vanderbilt's faculty developed tailored case studies, facilitated interactive learning, and provided the academic expertise that established a strong foundation for the program. Their partnership has been instrumental in advancing the next generation of blood community leaders.

**Blood Community Advocate of the Year: Juan Cotto, Government Affairs Director, Bloodworks Northwest:** Recognized for his outstanding leadership in state-level advocacy, uniting Washington's blood centers and driving major policy wins that strengthen the state's blood supply. As incoming chair of ABC's Council of States, Mr. Cotto consistently shares his expertise and successful strategies to support colleagues nationwide. His efforts at the federal level, most notably helping secure U.S. Representative Kim Schrier as the original lead co-sponsor of [the bipartisan BLOOD Center Act](#), have had a profound impact on the patients and communities the blood community serves.

**Blood Community Advocate of the Year: Nick Gehrig, Vice President of Communications, Vitalant:** Recognized for his standout advocacy leadership, especially at the state level. Mr. Gehrig has led proactive initiatives across Vitalant's entire footprint, including efforts on numerous National Blood Donor Month resolutions, and is the incoming vice-chair of ABC's Council of States. His deep knowledge of a vast service area and willingness to support other centers make him an indispensable resource to the entire blood community.

**Outstanding Blood Drive of the Year: Florida Strawberry Festival, Nominated by OneBlood:** Recognized for its remarkable impact on the community's blood supply, collecting 481 units of blood during its 2025 drive, supporting the potential to save up to 1,443 lives. The festival has become a vital partner to OneBlood, helping maintain a strong blood supply during periods of high demand. Its strong collaboration, continued commitment, and enthusiasm for lifesaving work set a powerful example for how local community partnerships can directly improve patient care.

**Outstanding Public Relations Campaign: New York Blood Center Enterprises' (NYBCE) "A Nationwide Call to Action":** Honored for delivering NYBCE's most ambitious and coordinated National Blood Donor Month effort to date, reframing blood donation as a core civic responsibility. By empowering community and civic leaders across all eight divisions, the campaign generated more than 1,200 earned media mentions, the organization's strongest media impact in nearly a decade. Through proclamations, PSAs, and broad public sector support, the campaign demonstrated how a mission-driven approach can strengthen relationships and elevate awareness across every market served.

**Corporation of the Year: Perdue Farms, Nominated by Sheppard Blood Center:** Honored for its rapid and remarkable growth as a blood drive partner, becoming Sheppard Blood Center's largest corporate contributor in just three years, with more than 500 donors participating in 2025. In 2025, Perdue expanded to two new locations, further strengthening its regional impact. Notably, 81% of Perdue's blood donors are from communities of color, helping ensure a more diverse and medically essential blood supply for patients with conditions such as sickle cell disease. Through consistent growth, dedicated communication, and meaningful community investment, Perdue Farms has proven itself as an outstanding corporate partner in the blood community.

**Larry Frederick Award: Diane Golden, Nominated by San Diego Blood Bank:** Honored for her extraordinary volunteer service, contributing 1,814 volunteer hours to San Diego Blood Bank, including 644 hours in 2025 alone. Ms. Golden stepped up during a critical period in 2020 when volunteer numbers were drastically reduced and has since become a dependable presence at donor centers, mobile drives, and major community events. Her compassion, reliability, and dedication to recruiting new donors embody the spirit of personal advocacy that the Larry Frederick Award was created to celebrate.

**Thomas F. Zuck Lifetime Achievement Award: Dr. Kip Kuttner, Miller-Keystone Blood Center:** Awarded for more than 30 years of distinguished service to Miller-Keystone Blood Center and the blood banking community as a leader, mentor, teacher, and unwavering advocate. Dr. Kuttner's extensive national service includes his role as Chair of the ABC Scientific, Medical and Technical Committee, contributions to numerous [Blood Bulletin](#) publications, and service as the ABC liaison to the AABB Circular of Information Task Force. His integrity, compassion, and lifelong commitment to advancing blood banking and transfusion medicine will continue to inspire generations of medical professionals.

Founded in 1962, America's Blood Centers (ABC) is the national organization bringing together community-based, independent blood centers across North America. These organizations operate in more than 1,100 communities and provide close to 60 percent of the U.S. and a quarter of the Canadian blood supply. ABC member organizations serve more than 150 million people and provide blood products and services to more than 3,500 hospitals and healthcare facilities. All ABC U.S. members are 501(c)(3) organizations are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or Health Canada. For more information, visit [www.AmericasBlood.org](http://www.AmericasBlood.org).

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