

WINNING WOMEN

In the run-up to the 2023 celebration, Jade Wright meets three of the phenomenal females who have been named Cheshire Woman of the Year

More than 2,000 inspirational leaders, volunteers and community champions have been honoured over 35 years of the Cheshire Woman of the Year Award, and there's still time to nominate for this year's event.

'We are looking for nominations for women who have shown personal courage, outstanding professional success, given service to their community, or a combination of all three,' says Cheshire Woman of the Year chair Sylvia Cheater, pictured below.

'We use the old boundaries, so that includes Wirral, and they can have been born here, live, here or work here – we are looking to include not exclude, so if you're not sure, nominate anyway and we will do everything we can to make sure we include as many as possible.'

Around 60 nominees and their guests will be invited to a lunch ceremony at

Chester Racecourse on June 21, where their stories will be celebrated and one nominee will be crowned Woman of the Year 2023.

'There's one main winner, but the focus is on all the nominees,' says Sylvia. 'It's so hard to choose one person. When we are looking at business leaders and community champions, we are comparing apples and bananas. It's a fantastic thing to have so many incredible women in one room.'

The event raises money for the NSPCC, supporting children and families in Cheshire and Wirral. There are still options for sponsorship available, with options starting from £50. Over the years, the event has raised almost £300,000 for children's charities. 'It's a great cause and we'd ask everyone who can, to dig deep,' says Sylvia.

'The nomination process is very simple, so please put forward the woman you know and we can celebrate their achievements.'

CHESHIRE WOMEN OF THE YEAR

- 1985 - No overall winner
- 1986 - Debbie Simms
- 1987 - Barbara Sim Mutch
- 1988 - Helen Larkin
- 1989 - Bernadette McNeil
- 1990 - Janice Main
- 1992 - Margaret Loran
- 1993 - Muriel Downs
- 1994 - Rachel Cooke
- 1995 - Heidi Chapman
- 1996 - Edna Speed
- 1997 - Penny Hughes
- 1998 - No overall winner
- 1999 - Shari Cunningham
- 2000 - Jean Barnes
- 2001 - Anne H Mawdsley
- 2002 - Dei Rowlands
- 2003 - Geraldine McCool
- 2004 - Lynda Coulter
- 2005 - Joanne Southgate
- 2006 - Norma Hornby
- 2007 - Diana Woodward
- 2008 - Meg Marshall
- 2009 - Helen Newlove
- 2010 - Beryl Moss
- 2011 - Josephine Wood
- 2012 - Sue Bowen
- 2013 - Christine Pugh
- 2014 - Lynda Hill
- 2015 - Pat Rice
- 2016 - Kate Spall
- 2017 - Hilary Ash
- 2018 - Lisa Kuhwald
- 2022 - Pauline Finlay



‘It’s a fantastic thing to have so many incredible women in one room’

SHARI ROYLE, CHESHIRE WOMAN OF THE YEAR 1999

Shari Royle (nee Cunningham) was 20 years old when her life changed forever. One August Bank Holiday she was involved in a horrific car crash that destroyed the right-hand side of her face, crushed her spine and damaged her brain. Her injuries were so severe her heart flatlined and she had to be resuscitated.

'I remember lying in hospital, leaving my body, but I knew I had to come back', she recalls.

Shari was told she would never walk again but proved the doctors wrong, and despite the trauma, started her long fight to regain her life.

'I remember my dad saying to me that whatever happens to me, I always fall on my feet,' she says. 'Now, I do a lot of speaking in schools and I try to explain to teenagers that it isn't about what happens to you, it's about how you cope with it, how you pick yourself up and carry on.'

Shari won the award for her personal courage and the way that she dealt with her accident. 'I was blown away to think I had even been nominated. "Why me?" I thought. "What for?"

'My life was just how I lived before. Of course, I still wake up every morning without an eye, with migraines and back problems. But I'm here. I can walk. I can tell my story and maybe make a difference.'

Shari is a busy property professional, working for Jackson-Stops in Cheshire and alongside going into schools to speak about her experiences and giving motivational advice to



young people, she has worked with groups such as Facing The World and the British Association of Skin Camouflage.

She received her award in 1999 at Chester Town Hall.

'The actress Bridget Forsyth, from The Likely Lads, was presenting me with the award', she says. 'You could have peeled me off the ceiling when they said I'd won. Awards like this really do mean something.'

Her story was so powerful that ITV asked her to go straight from the ceremony in Chester to appear on Granada Reports.

'I felt like royalty being chauffeured to the studio and sitting on the couch on live TV with Lucy Meacock,' says Shari. 'She was so kind and made me feel so at ease.'

'It was one of the most amazing days of my life. The feeling it gave me was just the biggest confidence boost. So if there's anyone you're thinking of nominating, please do. It's a way of saying "you're worthy" and "you mean something", which is something we could all do with a bit more in life.'

shariroyle.co.uk

“You could have peeled me off the ceiling when they said I'd won”

THE BARONESS NEWLOVE, CHESHIRE WOMAN OF THE YEAR 2009

Baroness Helen Newlove has championed victims' rights and campaigned for community reform since the murder of her husband, Garry, in 2007. He was attacked outside his home in Warrington in 2007 by a gang of teenagers, in front of the couple's young daughters.

Three youths were sentenced to life imprisonment for his murder, and Helen threw herself into campaigning, setting up a number of foundations to tackle the UK drinking culture as well as providing support to young people.

A former legal PA, she used her organisational skills and lobbied government ministers, heads of the criminal justice agencies, chief constables and police and crime commissioners. She published several key reviews that shone a light on pockets of the criminal justice system, scrutinising the needs of vulnerable victims and urging better treatment for them.

'It was during that time that I won the award,' she recalls. 'I was working alongside Warrington Wolves, and we were running several campaigns.'

She was among 60 women nominated to attend the ceremony at Eaton Hall in 2009.

The following year she was given a peerage in the 2010 Dissolution Honours list and now sits in the House of Lords as a Conservative peer, where she is also a deputy speaker.

She served two terms as Victims' Commissioner for



Photo: Chris McAndrew/UK Parliament/The House of Lords

England and Wales and was given an honorary degree to be made a Doctor of Laws for her outstanding services to Victim Support.

She's also become pro-vice-chancellor at the University of Bolton, with a special focus on widening access and participation and recently launched Mentored with Newlove at Bolton Muslim Girls' High School, where she will mentor young girls.

'All of our young people need support and encouragement,' she says. 'But I think sometimes girls, in particular, need someone to tell them they are doing well.'

You can take that further, to awards like this, which celebrate women's achievements.

'I went to the ceremony thinking how lovely it would be to meet lots of inspiring women – I had no idea I was going to win the thing. It was such a wonderful event. I just didn't expect to be taking a shiny trophy home at the end of it.'

'My mum was so proud. I thought of her the other day when I was cleaning it. I thought back to the day I was given it, and all the things that have happened since, as I shined it up and put it back in pride of place.'

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PAULINE FINLAY, CHESHIRE WOMAN OF THE YEAR 2022

Last year's Woman of the Year has dedicated her career to helping homeless patients in Cheshire West.

'I think sometimes there's an idea that homelessness is something that happens in bigger cities, not in places like Chester,' says specialist nurse prescriber Pauline Finlay.

'A lot of it goes under the radar. The challenges can be quite different to, say, Liverpool or Manchester.

'I know most of my patients well. I have been working with some of them since I started this role 13 years ago.

'Homelessness is often a symptom of more complex issues. There are no quick fixes.'

Pauline looks after around 400 people in Chester, going above and beyond her role to care for her patients, accompanying vulnerable people to hospital and helping them attend services which otherwise they probably wouldn't otherwise be able to access.

She visits patients during hospital stays and if necessary supports them through the criminal justice system, as well as by the traditional health management expected of a nurse.

She is also about to start working with the new Tomorrow's Women centre, due to open soon in Upper Northgate Street, Chester.

The charity was set up in 2012 to work with women in or on the periphery of the criminal justice system to prevent offending and support women in making positive lifestyle changes.

'There is a centre in Birkenhead, which we work closely with,' says Pauline. 'The new Chester centre will allow us to do that here and to support so many women who might not be able to travel to Wirral regularly for the services they offer.'

Pauline is currently working on a holistic garden at the centre,



and looking at ways to help women who may need support with emotional wellbeing, domestic abuse, substance misuse, or crime, in a safe environment.

'It's going to make a real difference to the women I work with,' she says.

It's just another of the ways Pauline puts back into the community in Chester, and one of the reasons why she was nominated.

'I just think of it as doing my job, which is why I was so shocked when I was invited to the

Woman of the Year ceremony,' she says. 'I had such a great day and met so many fantastic women. Then when I found out I'd won I couldn't believe it.'

'I've had so much nice feedback from people since.'

Pauline is keen to encourage women to nominate each other for the award.

'Please, if you're thinking of nominating someone, put them in for it. Sing their praises. Many women often don't get the recognition they deserve.'

'Awards like this change that for the better.'

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2023 Nominations

Nominations close on March 14. To find out more, including how to nominate someone for the 2023 award or to sponsor, click here or email info@cheshirewomanaward.org.uk.



Photo: Kirsty Thompson



Photo: Kirsty Thompson

TOP:
Inspiring Women Awards founder Jacqueline Hughes-Lundy

RIGHT:
Jacqueline Hughes-Lundy, centre with winners and nominees at the 2022 Inspiring Women Awards celebration

DON'T MISS: THE INSPIRING WOMEN AWARDS

The Inspiring Women Awards recognise the work and accomplishments of women across the entire North West of England and North Wales, as well as having a national and international category.

Many of the winners have gone on to receive further recognition through the honours system including Diane Modahl MBE (Sports Award 2003), Marnie Millard

OBE (Business Award 2016) and Britain's most decorated winter paralympian Menna Fitzpatrick (Inspiring Young Woman 2017).

Nominations for these awards have now closed, but corporate and individual tickets are available for those who would like to attend the event on May 19 at The Lowry Hotel in Salford, from 12.15pm,' says founder and organiser Jacqueline Hughes-Lundy.

It's a fun afternoon, filled with inspiration, laughter, good food and great company.

Over the past 30 years, the event has publicly recognised and promoted the achievements of hundreds of women who live or work in the North West of England, North Wales and since 2022, nationally and internationally.

Book tickets now at inspiringawards.co.uk