

RVBH Children's Hospital receives 2026 KHA Quality Award

BY MICHELE LOHMAN
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

RiverValley Behavioral Health (RVBH) Children's Hospital has been named a 2026 Kentucky Hospital Association (KHA) Quality Award recipient in the psychiatric hospitals



Dr. Wanda Figueroa-Peralta

category, the first time the entity has received the "prestigious statewide recognition," said the hospital in a press release.

The KHA was established in 1929 and, according to the nonprofit's website, "represents hospitals, related health care organizations and integrated health care

systems dedicated to sustaining and improving the health status of the citizens of Kentucky." Each year, the KHA hosts a convention where the awards are presented.

RiverValley, according to the press release, was chosen as a recipient of the Quality Award because of the hospital's BIRCH Program, which was introduced in 2024. RVBH describes the BIRCH program as "a specialized long-term treatment program for high-acuity adolescents." The program was developed in cooperation with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health & Family Services and is

the "first-of-its-kind" program in the state, allowing for male patients between the ages of 12-17 to receive more intensive, trauma-informed treatment, lasting for more of an extended period of time, such as six to nine months.

"BIRCH helps youth who have struggled in previous placements or experienced repeated crises build confidence, stability and hope for the future," says RiverValley's website.

Katie Demko-Day, the administrator of the RVBH Children's Hospital, said that "receiving this recognition is an incredible honor and moment of pride for our entire team."

"Since opening The BIRCH in August 2024, we've seen youth who once faced

repeated placement challenges successfully transition to less restrictive levels of care with greater stability and hope. This award affirms that when we work together with clarity and commitment, we can raise the standard of care and strengthen Kentucky's behavioral health system for the youth who depend on it," she said.

RiverValley's president and CEO, Dr. Wanda Figueroa-Peralta, said that the award is proof that the hospital is making an impact on the lives of families across the region.

"This award represents the young people who have found healing, the families who have found renewed hope, and the dedicated professionals who make this work possible

every day. It underscores RVBH's leadership in advancing behavioral health care across Kentucky through strong infrastructure, meaningful collaboration and a shared commitment to raising the standard of behavioral healthcare," said Figueroa-Peralta. "Our partnership with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services demonstrates what is possible when vision, funding and clinical expertise align to address critical gaps in the behavioral health system. Ensuring every youth and family has access to the care and support they need is a complex responsibility, but through collaboration, meaningful and lasting change is achievable."

According to the RVBH website, the BIRCH program provides patients with "individualized, developmentally appropriate therapy, skill-building for self-regulation, communication and problem-solving, family engagement and caregiver support, structured recreational and therapeutic activities and psychiatric management and trauma-informed relational care via the MANDT model."

The hospital will be officially presented with the award at the KHA Convention, which will be held at 3:45 p.m. EST on Monday, March 23, in Louisville's Marriott East.

More information about the BIRCH program can be found by visiting rvbh.com.

CIVIL

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These Supreme Court decisions prohibited the segregation of public school buses, but the southern states continued to ignore the rulings, with the federal government turning a blind eye to the injustice.

Watkins said that he heard from his friend that the Freedom Riders were coming to Greyhound bus station in Jackson, and the two young men decided to visit the bus station "not to be Freedom

Riders...to see what they (the Freedom Riders) looked like."

"We get to the bus station. There's no one there. We didn't know what was going on, but we were waiting, and we begin to do what 13-year-old kids do — play," Watkins said.

After growing bored with running up and down the train station's sidewalks, Watkins said that he and his friend turned their attention to the bus station, each poking their heads inside the doors to see if they could catch a glimpse of a Freedom Rider. And, as a joke, Watkins said that his friend pushed him inside the

train station.

"Now, I knew I was in the wrong waiting area...these walls, they're pretty. Back during that time, we played pinball machines — they had a whole wall lined up. And I'm looking, and I'm amazed until I see a sign hanging off the wall that read, 'White's Only.' Now I knew I was in the wrong waiting area, but it didn't hit me until the sign," said Watkins.

But before he could make an exit, Watkins said that he was confronted by a police officer, who ended up taking him to the back of the bus station, where he was asked

two questions — his name and his birthplace. And because he was born in Wisconsin, Watkins said that the officer assumed that he was one of the Freedom Riders.

"I was put into a transport vehicle known as a paddy wagon and was taken to this notorious prison called Parchman, and not only was I taken to Parchman, I was put on the death row camp. Never heard those two words — death row," he said.

While on death row, the civil rights leader said that he was beaten "almost every day."

"Food was taken. It was just a horrible place," Watkins said.

Watkins spent 13 days on death row at Parchman before being released, but he said that, following his arrest, he "just wanted to do something to change things — make a difference." The desire to make a difference kept him motivated to continue being a Freedom Rider and, subsequently, leading to more than 100 arrests.

Watkins was awarded the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award by President Joe Biden, and received an official public apology from the City of

Jackson in January 2026.

He tells his story in "Pushing Forward: The Story of Mississippi's Youngest Freedom Rider," available on pushingforwardbook.com.

KWC's program was sponsored by the Daviess County Public Library, the Owensboro Human Relations Commission, the Coalition for an Inclusive Daviess County, the Hager Foundation, the Owensboro NAACP, Western Academy and the Young Foundation and moderated by Adryan Taylor, president of KWC's chapter of the NAACP.

WHITE

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resources, and failure to attend at least half of NTSB meetings," White House spokesman Kush Desai said. "The Trump administration remains committed to maintaining safety and security for Americans in the air and on the ground."

Inman said Monday that he hadn't initially planned to sue over his firing, but now says, "I look forward to defending my reputation through all legal means possible."

"I categorically deny the allegations made in the White House statement. It has become increasingly obvious this action was a political hit job," said Inman, a Republican who was appointed in March 2024 during former President Joe Biden's administration.

After Inman's firing and the unexpected dismissal in May of Vice Chair Alvin Brown, a Democrat appointed

by Biden, the NTSB currently lists only three members on its website. But the U.S. Senate recently confirmed American Airlines executive John DeLeeuw, and he will become the fourth member of the board that investigates major crashes of planes, trains and automobiles as well as pipeline incidents. The NTSB is currently investigating more than 1,000 cases and will make recommendations on how to prevent similar tragedies when it releases its final reports.

The NTSB has declined to comment on Inman's dismissal.

Inman, who is originally from Calvert City, operated a State Farm insurance office in Owensboro from 2000-2017.

In 2017, Inman left Owensboro to become a director at the U.S. Department of Transportation. Inman also served as the DOT's director of operations and as a deputy chief of staff before becoming DOT chief of staff in 2019.

Inman was the lead board member on scene after last year's midair collision near

Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people after an airliner collided with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter. He also oversaw the initial investigation of the crash of a UPS cargo plane in Kentucky that killed 15 people in November.

And in June of last year, Inman gave his first public speech about D.C. aircraft collision during a Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce's Rooster Booster breakfast.

After the speech, Inman discussed with the Messenger-Inquirer how he dealt with being the spokesperson for the NTSB in the aftermath of the mid-air collision.

"No one can be prepared for that; we do trainings and mock interviews and briefings," he said. "Board members don't launch unless they launch with another one. So you have an idea but this scale was so much larger."

Before last year, it was extremely unusual for board members at independent agencies to be dismissed. However, Trump has fired

members of the Federal Reserve Board, the Surface Transportation Board, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to clear the way for his own appointees.

The five-member NTSB is supposed to be split between three members of the president's party and two members of the other party. After Inman's firing and the addition of DeLeeuw, the board will be split evenly, 2-2, between the parties, and Trump will be able to appoint a third Republican.

Brown and Robert Primus, who served on the U.S. Surface Transportation Board, were the only Black board members overseeing their respective independent agencies when they were fired last year. Both have challenged their firings in court, and the legal services group Democracy Forward has filed discrimination claims on the men's behalf.

ISLAND

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did not wish to take chances on students getting sick.

"Anthony said vandals or thieves got into the school through the coal chute into the furnace room. The district will apply to the state board of education for a calamity day. The repairs were expected to be made by noon Monday, allowing students to get back to classes Tuesday."

Spring begins tomorrow. After another crazy weather week, I know many are looking forward to some spring weather. I hope everyone has a great week ahead!

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Luke 4:8

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JUST

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realized what Cain had done to Abel. I may have pain, but I'm not stupid.

When she says that, I smile at her and say, "That's okay my dear. I got it all under control." She looks at me and laughs, and I would rather deal with her laugh than with the pain I have.

The other week, I was in the waiting room, and as I was there, I looked around. It must've been my imagination, but I seemed to be the youngest person in that room.

Half a dozen of the people there were using walking canes. Most of them were hobbling to see the doctor. I've never seen such a crowd of older people.

Then it hit me like a pie in the face. Looking at all of these old people in that room with all kinds of pain, I realized that I fit in perfectly. That really startled me at the time.

Instead of seeing a medical doctor, I need to see a psychologist.

I was thinking, as I looked around at the people there, is there a time when this pain ends? How long do I have to put up with pain?

As I was thinking about this I remembered a verse in the Bible that addresses this.

"For I reckon that the

sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

As painful as my sufferings are, they are only temporary. One moment in heaven and I won't remember any of my pain. As I trust Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour my destiny is assured.

MCLEAN

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approval process.

Planning & Zoning Committee members also decided to open public discussion concerning possible revisions to existing ordinances governing solar energy at the public hearing next month.

Once the wording on the moratorium is approved by the Planning & Zoning Committee, it will return to Fiscal Court for final approval.



Be Kind TO YOUR MIND

Youth Mental Health Art Contest

Students in grades K-College throughout our 7-county region in Kentucky (**Daviess, Hancock, Henderson, McLean, Ohio, Union, & Webster**) are invited to create and submit a visual art piece (drawing, painting, sculpture, poem, etc.) to promote Mental Health Awareness and how to, **"Be Kind to Your Mind."**



For more information or to view the art submission form, scan the QR Code to visit www.rvbh.com/artcontest

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A \$500 scholarship will be awarded for project of the year winner in each division!

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT IS **APRIL 16, 2026**