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Mental Health America of Los Angeles.

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TONIGHT, WE BUILD OUR FUTURE!



Dear Friends and Mental Health Champions,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Mental Health America of Los Angeles's (MHALA's) 7th Annual Under the Toque Gala: Beyond 100 — Launching the Next Century of Care.

Under the Toque is a celebration of collaboration in every sense. Local chefs, restaurants, and hoteliers have come together to share their artistry and gifts, crafting an unforgettable five-course experience for each table. And just as they blend their talents to create something extraordinary, your presence and support tonight will produce something incredible as well — helping shape the future of mental healthcare and ensuring it is accessible, equitable, transformative, and, most importantly, effective.

This evening, we share our vision for a groundbreaking new Veteran Resource Center in Long Beach and the expansion of life-changing programs across Los Angeles County and beyond. We also honor Don Ford and Rennie Euwing, whose long-standing leadership and advocacy have helped define MHALA's legacy. They embody our mission and hearts in action.

This event — and everything we do — is only possible because of our remarkable Board of Directors, leadership team, staff, and volunteers, whose dedication and hard work have a profound impact.

So please, sit back and prepare to sip, savor, and raise those paddles high. Your generosity tonight will help us launch the next century of care.

With deep appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christina Miller, PhD
President and CEO

EVENT SCHEDULE

5:00 PM

Reception and Silent Auction

6:00 PM

Welcome

First Course

First Honoree Presentation

Second Course

Closing of Silent Auction

Third Course

Heads or Tails

Live Auction

Fourth Course

Featured Speakers

Fifth Course

Second Honoree Presentation

Closing Remarks



Los Angeles Marriott Business Council



The Los Angeles Marriott Business Council is honored to support Mental Health America of Los Angeles in celebrating 100 years of moving mental health forward.

Through the Under the Toque event, Marriott Chefs from across Los Angeles come together, not just to showcase culinary excellence, but to champion a cause that touches every community.

This is more than a meal. It's a movement.

A celebration of resilience, compassion, and the transformative power of hospitality with heart, where every dish served is a reminder that caring for others is at the core of what we do.

2025 HONOREE

Don Ford



Don Ford has been a dedicated public servant in Long Beach and the Antelope Valley since 1985, spending four decades with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and retiring as captain of the Palmdale Station. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice management and is a graduate of both the West Point Leadership Institute and the Los Angeles District Attorney's Dispute Resolution Program.

Throughout his career, Don championed mental health awareness and crisis intervention, working extensively with individuals experiencing mental illness in both jail and patrol settings. He prioritized the well-being of his team, overseeing mental health and stress management for over 200 deputies. Under his leadership, Palmdale Station became the only station to achieve 100% completion of mental health crisis training for all sworn personnel.

Don has played a vital role in supporting employees through critical incidents, including officer-involved shootings, suicides, and child abuse cases. His commitment to mental health extends beyond law enforcement — he has served on the Board of MHALA for a decade. His passion lies in suicide prevention, crisis response, and programs supporting transition-age youth.

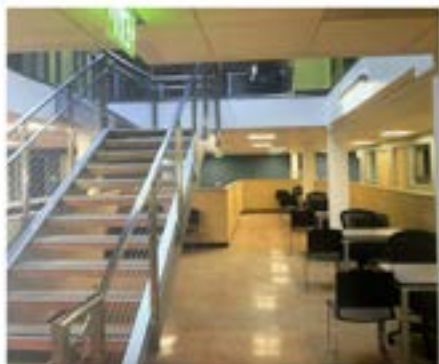
We are proud to honor Don for his dedication to service, leadership, and community care.

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FOR MHALA, PROVIDING
HELP, HOPE, AND
TRANSFORMATION FOR
THOSE IN NEED.**



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2025 HONOREE

Rennie Euwing



Rennie Euwing's journey is one of extraordinary resilience, transformation, and purpose. A former member of MHALA, she became a beloved, long-term employee who retired this year after years of dedicated service.

Her path to healing and empowerment began after decades of addiction, incarceration, and emotional hardship. With courage and determination, Rennie rebuilt her life, earning a GED, an associate's degree in administrative justice, and two bachelor's degrees, in sociology theory and criminal justice.

Her turning point came when a parole officer recognized her potential and connected her with MHALA. There, she found not only support but a community that believed in her. MHALA helped her secure a certificate of rehabilitation and a pardon, and gave her her first long-term job — an opportunity that led to a meaningful career.

Rennie has now been in recovery for 21 years. Her approach to helping others is raw, honest, and deeply compassionate. She shares her lived experience to inspire and guide those facing similar struggles, offering hope and healing through authenticity. Her legacy at MHALA is one of love, strength, and unwavering commitment to those society often overlooks.

We are honored to celebrate Rennie's remarkable journey and lasting impact.



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Now more than
ever, your work is
critical to the
well-being of the
most vulnerable
members of our
communities.

We salute your tireless efforts.

2025 CHEFS

Courtney Beavers

Courtyard by Marriott Long Beach Downtown



Chef Courtney Beavers brings a dynamic and heartfelt approach to the culinary world. From crafting bespoke dining experiences at the Bel-Air Country Club to leading mission-driven meal programs as executive chef of Alpha Phi International Fraternity, Chef Beavers has consistently blended precision with purpose.

As food and hospitality director at the Tiny Art Gallery, he explored the rich intersection of food, culture, and the arts – an ethos that continues to inspire his work today.

Now serving as executive chef and food and beverage director at Courtyard by Marriott Long Beach Downtown, he creates dishes that spark conversation and connection, celebrating food as a universal language. Whether reimagining classic techniques or infusing global flavors, Chef Beavers is passionate about bringing people together through memorable culinary experiences.

Paul Bentsen

The Westin Los Angeles Airport



Chef Paul Bentsen creates dishes that balance creativity and comfort. With a rich background that includes leading culinary teams at the San Diego Residence Inn and SpringHill Suites, Chef Bentsen has also served as a task force sous chef with Marriott's Operational Support Resources, supporting esteemed brands like The Ritz-Carlton, JW Marriott, Sheraton, and Marriott Select Brands.

His journey began with a love for cooking meals for friends and family, an early passion that continues to shape his approach today. Before joining Marriott, Chef Bentsen was a chef partner at a private catering company, where he refined his craft and deepened his commitment to hospitality.

Outside the kitchen, Chef Bentsen enjoys family time, listening to 21 Pilots, and indulging in ramen with a cold Dr. Pepper.

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2025 CHEFS

Paolo Buffa W Hollywood



Originally from Milan, Italy, Chef Paolo Buffa brings a rich blend of classical training and global culinary experience to the W Hollywood. His career began in one of Milan's top Mediterranean restaurants and flourished in the U.S. with the launch of Miami Beach's acclaimed Caffè Milano, earning multiple Golden Spoon Awards.

Chef Buffa's journey continued in New York as executive chef at Salute Restaurant and Barton and Doyle Steakhouse, followed by international experience in Washington, D.C., where he joined Marriott. Since relocating to Southern California in 2015, Chef Buffa has embraced a farm-to-table philosophy, crafting vibrant menus inspired by his Italian heritage and global influences, including Moroccan cuisine.

Known for his refined fusion of Mediterranean flavors and innovative techniques, Chef Buffa prioritizes fresh, locally sourced ingredients and meaningful guest engagement. His dishes reflect a deep respect for tradition, a passion for storytelling through food, and a commitment to creating memorable culinary experiences.

Amanda Carpio Marriott Long Beach Downtown



Chef Amanda Carpio's culinary journey began at home, where she learned to cook from her mother and bake from her grandmother. As the eldest daughter, she discovered her passion by preparing meals from pantry staples for her siblings, an experience that shaped her love for cooking and sharing food with others.

Chef Carpio spent over a decade in restaurants, notably at Roy's, where she grew from mentee to mentor, training and inspiring new talent. Her transition to hotels opened new doors, including a return to her alma mater as a culinary instructor, where she found deep fulfillment in guiding aspiring chefs.

Now serving as senior sous chef at Marriott Long Beach Downtown, Chef Carpio continues to craft delicious, heartfelt dishes while nurturing the next generation of culinary professionals.



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**At Kaiser Permanente, we continuously
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health and equity in our communities.**

Learn more at [about.kp.org](https://www.about.kp.org).



2025 CHEFS

Rod Dodd

Organic Harvest Gardens St. Pius X – St. Matthias Academy



Chef Rod Dodd is a passionate advocate for food, community, and education. As owner and chef of Organic Harvest Gardens farm in Long Beach, Chef Dodd combines his culinary training, master gardener certification, and decades of research experience to cultivate hyper-local, naturally grown produce for restaurants.

A retired staff research associate and animal resource manager for University of Southern California, University of California, Los Angeles, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Chef Dodd now dedicates his time to teaching youth and seniors through his “From Seed to Harvest to Table” program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he and his team delivered over 300 fresh produce boxes weekly to housebound seniors, earning him recognition as a “California Hero.”

Chef Dodd continues to expand his farm’s mission, using gardening and nutrition education to support Veterans, reduce stress, and promote wellness. He also inspires the next generation by teaching agriculture and nutritional science at St. Pius X – St. Matthias Academy in Downey.

Jill Hanson

Hyatt Regency Long Beach



Chef Jill Hanson brings over 25 years of culinary experience shaped by a global journey through London, Italy, and San Francisco. Now executive chef at Hyatt Regency Long Beach, Chef Hanson blends international inspiration with a deep commitment to hospitality.

Her career spans restaurants, catering, hotels, and private chef work. Drawing from her time abroad, Chef Hanson specializes in Italian cuisine and creative takes on classic comfort foods, crafting dishes that are both refined and soul-satisfying.

Outside the kitchen, Chef Hanson enjoys time on the water and the company of her two beloved cats.



We Support Mental Health America of Los Angeles

We are proud to support Mental Health America of Los Angeles (MHALA) and their mission to strengthen mental health care and awareness in our community. For decades, MHALA has been a leader in providing essential services, advocating for systemic change, and fostering compassion for those facing mental health challenges.

MHALA works tirelessly to break the stigma surrounding mental health, promoting open conversation and ensuring everyone has access to the resources they need. We stand with them in building a more compassionate and inclusive society where mental health is valued as a cornerstone of a thriving community.

Binnie and Jack Berro & family



The logo for SullivanCurtisMonroe Insurance Services, LLC, consisting of the letters 'S', 'C', and 'M' in a stylized, white, sans-serif font. The 'C' is smaller and positioned between the 'S' and 'M'.

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2025 CHEFS

Janae Macias

Sheraton Fairplex Suites & Conference Center



Chef Janae Macias has been working in kitchens for over 20 years, beginning her culinary journey as a dishwasher at just 13 years old. Raised in West Covina, she learned to cook from her grandmothers – one a talented baker, the other a master of Mexican cuisine. That early foundation sparked a lifelong passion for food and hospitality.

A proud graduate of Cal Poly Pomona, Chef Macias has spent the past decade with Marriott, gaining experience across both Texas and California. Now leading the culinary team at Sheraton Fairplex Suites and Conference Center, she brings heart, heritage, and creativity to every dish.

Chef Macias is known for her dedication to craft and her love of sharing food that feels personal and comforting. Outside the kitchen, she's a devoted hockey fan and finds peace on the beach.

Bernardo Medina

Sheraton Grand Los Angeles



With over 25 years of culinary experience, Chef Bernardo Medina brings international flair, leadership, and heart to the Sheraton Grand Los Angeles, where he has proudly served as executive sous chef for nine years.

His journey began in Cancún, Mexico, and flourished in Los Angeles at the grand opening of the St. Regis Century City. Chef Medina quickly rose through the ranks, later joining the culinary teams at Century Plaza Hotel and St. Regis Aspen, where he refined his expertise in fine dining and event cuisine. He also served as executive chef at Sheraton Agoura Hills.

A mentor and award-winning leader, Chef Medina is passionate about inspiring the next generation of chefs. Outside the kitchen, he's a devoted Dodgers fan and once played in the same league that scouted Fernando Valenzuela. Chef Medina's story is one of perseverance, pride, and a deep love for sharing food that brings people together.



A Healthy Community

The Port of Long Beach is pleased to sponsor Under the Toque and wishes MHALA much success with your plans for a Veterans Resource Center.

Cal State Long Beach congratulates MHALA on 100 years of dedicated service to our communities.

We are proud to partner with MHALA to create a future where mental wellness is within everyone's reach.



2025 CHEFS

Victor Miguel

Los Angeles Airport Marriott



Chef Victor Miguel is a distinguished hospitality leader with over 20 years of experience and a passion for culinary innovation. He began his career in 2003 as a line cook at JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa in Palm Desert, where he rose through the ranks to banquet chef, overseeing a \$21 million operation and earning top brand recognition for food quality.

Chef Miguel's career has spanned several Marriott properties, including Marina del Rey Marriott and Torrance Marriott Redondo Beach, where he led restaurant openings and elevated dining programs. Since 2020, he has served as executive chef at Los Angeles Airport Marriott, overseeing the transformation of multiple dining outlets during a \$50 million property renovation.

Honored with numerous leadership awards and recognized as a finalist for Americas Award of Culinary Excellence Rising Star and the Global Discipline Award for ACE Rising Star, Chef Miguel continues to inspire through innovation, excellence, and a deep commitment to hospitality.

Giuseppe Musso

Fairmont Breakers Long Beach



Born in Forlì, Italy, Chef Giuseppe Musso's culinary journey began in his family's kitchen, where he learned to cook during holidays and Sunday gatherings. Formally trained at Scuola Alberghiera in Castrocaro, Chef Musso refined his craft across Europe, including at the iconic Negresco Hotel in Nice and in Lloret de Mar, Spain.

His move to Los Angeles marked a new chapter, serving as executive chef at Eurochow and later opening several restaurants in West Hollywood, earning acclaim among celebrity clientele. At Michael's Downtown Italian Restaurant in Long Beach, Chef Musso infused every dish with the creativity and love that first inspired him in his mother's kitchen.

Now chef de cuisine at Fairmont Breakers Long Beach, he blends Italian tradition with global influences, crafting elevated menus that reflect his heritage and creativity. Chef Musso's journey from Emilia-Romagna to the international stage is a testament to his dedication, artistry, and love for sharing unforgettable culinary experiences.

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AMERICA
OF LOS ANGELES**

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2025 CHEFS

Jimmy Ng and Erik Pastora Los Angeles Harbor College



Chefs Jimmy Ng and Erik Pastora lead the culinary program at Los Angeles Harbor College's (LAHC's) 1111 Bistro, combining decades of experience with a deep commitment to education.

Chef Ng, originally from Hong Kong, began cooking alongside his mother and later trained at LA Trade Tech. Since 2007, he has helped shape LAHC's Culinary Arts program, mentoring students with passion and purpose.

Chef Pastora, a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran and LA Trade Tech graduate, brings a diverse background that includes work at M'Dears Desserts, the Playboy Mansion, and King's Hawaiian Bakery. Now a tenured faculty member, he shares his love for cooking and community through hands-on instruction.

Together, Chefs Ng and Pastora guide students in real-world kitchen training, preparing à la carte and prix fixe menus that reflect both tradition and innovation – nurturing the next generation of culinary professionals.

Kevin Palacios and Gerald Thompson MHALA's The Village Cookie Shoppe & Café



At The Village Cookie Shoppe & Café, Chefs Kevin Palacios and Gerald Thompson lead with heart, skill, and a shared commitment to mentorship.

Chef Palacios, café manager, has spent a decade guiding its mission, drawing from his early experiences cooking with his mother and managing large-scale kitchens. His greatest joy comes from helping staff grow – watching them leave with hope and return with success stories.

Chef Thompson, assistant manager, joined in 2015 and brings both formal training and self-taught expertise. His passion for baking and personal growth shines through in every pastry, and he finds fulfillment in helping others build confidence through culinary work.

Together, Chefs Palacios and Thompson create a supportive, empowering environment where creativity and compassion thrive – making The Village Cookie Shoppe & Café not just a place to eat, but a place to grow.



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(AND TREAT
YOURSELF!) —
ORDER TODAY.**



2025 CHEFS

Walter Rivas

Marina del Rey Marriott



Chef Walter Rivas has been elevating Southern California's culinary scene for over 17 years, bringing bold flavors and refined technique to Marriott's premier properties. A graduate of Johnson & Wales University in Colorado, Chef Rivas draws inspiration from family traditions and cherished recipes passed down by loved ones.

His career includes key roles at Los Angeles Airport Marriott, The Ritz-Carlton/JW Marriott at L.A. Live, Irvine Spectrum, and James Republic by Marriott Courtyard. He has prepared meals for the SpaceX Mission 4 crew and collaborated with renowned celebrity chefs, including James Beard Award winners.

Now serving as executive chef at Marina del Rey Marriott, Chef Rivas continues to craft unforgettable fine dining experiences, blending modern and classical cuisine with precision and creativity. His dedication to culinary excellence and guest satisfaction has earned him wide respect across the hospitality industry.

Collin Smelser

The Westin Long Beach



Chef Collin Smelser brings a spirit of culinary exploration and storytelling to his role as executive chef at The Westin Long Beach. His journey began under acclaimed chefs and evolved through leadership roles across diverse locales, blending tradition with innovation.

Drawing from global adventures and formal culinary training, Chef Smelser curates menus that reflect the essence of Navy Proof's culinary philosophy – each dish inspired by the ports of the world and infused with wanderlust. His approach celebrates flavor as a shared experience, crafting meals that are both elevated and deeply personal.

At The Westin, Chef Smelser invites guests on a gastronomic voyage where every bite is a passport to unforgettable taste and every plate a tribute to culinary artistry.

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2025 CHEFS

Luis Torres Hotel Maya



Chef Luis Torres serves as executive chef at the newly independent Hotel Maya in Long Beach, where he oversees all culinary operations for the Latin-infused waterfront restaurant Fuego and the hotel's expansive catering program across over 30,000 square feet of event space.

A lifelong Southern Californian with over 20 years of experience, Chef Torres is known for his bold Latin flavors, refined technique, and passion for fresh, local ingredients.

His impressive career includes leadership roles with Curtis Stone Events – where he curated menus for prestigious occasions and worked at Michelin-starred Gwen – as well as K2 Restaurants, Montage Hotels & Resorts, and SBE.

A graduate of Cerritos College with a degree in culinary arts, Chef Torres now brings vibrant creativity and team-driven leadership to Hotel Maya, infusing every dish with his signature flair and commitment to excellence.

Ramiro Villegas Los Angeles Mission College



Chef Ramiro Villegas leads the Baking and Patisserie Program at Los Angeles Mission College (LAMC), where he also serves as a chef instructor and catering coordinator. A proud LAMC alum, Chef Villegas earned his associate's degree in food service management and pursued advanced studies in business management at California Lutheran University.

With over 25 years of culinary experience, including leadership roles with Marriott International and Sodexo, he brings a wealth of industry knowledge to the classroom. Trained at the Culinary Institute of America, San Francisco Baking Institute, and top chocolate studios, Chef Villegas is known for his expertise in artisanal breads, laminated doughs, plated desserts, and chocolate work. His career includes high-profile catering, culinary competitions, and collaborations with industry leaders.

Beyond the kitchen, he actively supports community events and fundraisers, showcasing the excellence of LAMC's Culinary Arts program and inspiring the next generation of pastry professionals.

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