

# 2007 Behavioral Health Champions

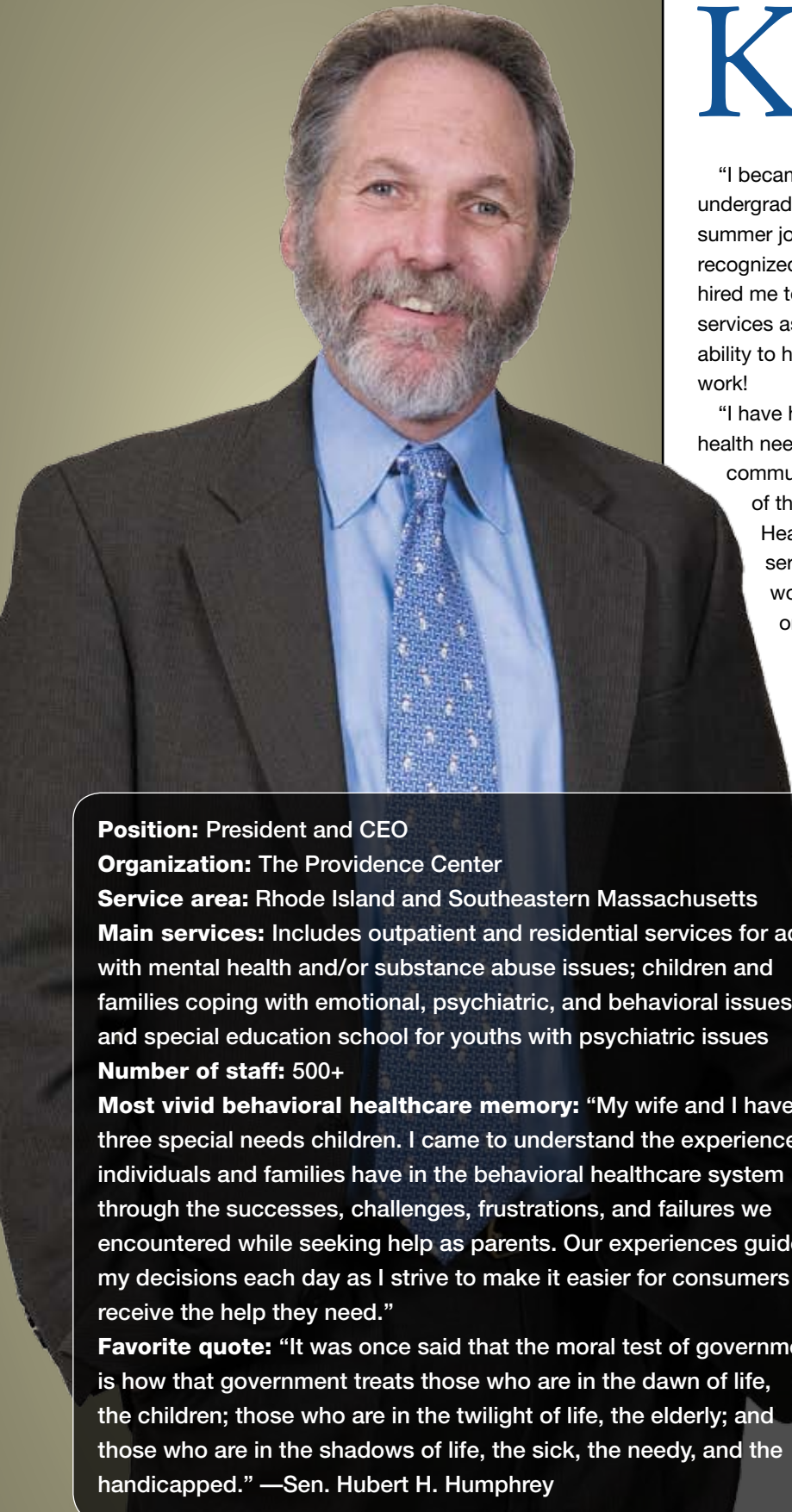
by Gary A. Enos, Contributing Editor

If you ask a child what he wants to be when he grows up, he's not likely to say CEO of a behavioral healthcare organization. But somewhere down the line today's leaders realized their passion for this field and made a commitment to improving service delivery for their consumers and communities. Being at the top of a behavioral healthcare organization certainly is a tough job, especially with omnipresent staffing and funding challenges. Yet some executives find ways to help their organizations not only survive, but thrive. They transform their operations to meet strategic goals; grow services to meet consumers' evolving needs; and share their experiences with colleagues to help improve service delivery across the country.

This is the third year *Behavioral Healthcare* is honoring such "champions" in the field. This year's honorees, nominated by readers and selected by the editors, are: Ann Borders, president and CEO of Cummins Behavioral Health Systems, Inc., in Indiana; Dale K. Klatzker, PhD, president and CEO of The Providence Center in Rhode Island and Massachusetts; Lawrence P. Noonan, CEO of A.W.A.R.E., Inc., in Montana and New Mexico; and Tuerk Schlesinger, MBA, CEO of AltaPointe Health Systems, Inc., in Alabama (chosen in partnership with the sponsor of this year's awards, Netsmart Technologies). We hope you find the stories behind this year's honorees interesting, inspiring, and reenergizing your passion for your own work.

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# Dale K. Klatzker<sup>PhD</sup>

"I became interested in behavioral health as an undergraduate at Brandeis University. I was looking for a summer job—any job—when I interviewed with a woman who recognized something in me that I didn't see in myself. She hired me to work with problem kids. I had not chosen social services as my career path and had no confidence in my ability to help anyone but myself. I discovered that I loved the work!

"I have had the privilege of serving people with behavioral health needs on many levels—as a clinician, as CEO of three community mental health centers, and as board chair of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. Throughout my career, I have expanded services through partnerships and collaborations while working with staff to instill integrity and soul into each organization.

"Three years ago I joined The Providence Center as president/CEO. My focus has been providing quality care for consumers through best clinical and business practices. I have worked to

establish partnerships, a strong leadership team, innovative technology, a sense of teamwork and open communication throughout the organization—all to more effectively meet client needs.

"My vision is simple, to ensure that people who need help receive it. People with mental illness and substance use problems are some of our most vulnerable citizens. We must not forget that, as a society, we have a responsibility to ensure that everyone receives quality services and is treated with dignity and respect.

"I learned a long time ago that no one accomplishes anything alone. Individual success is linked to many people's efforts and energy. I am grateful to my family and the many people who supported me throughout my career. They are the true 'champions.'"

*Photography: Al Weems*

**Position:** President and CEO

**Organization:** The Providence Center

**Service area:** Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts

**Main services:** Includes outpatient and residential services for adults with mental health and/or substance abuse issues; children and families coping with emotional, psychiatric, and behavioral issues; and special education school for youths with psychiatric issues

**Number of staff:** 500+

**Most vivid behavioral healthcare memory:** "My wife and I have three special needs children. I came to understand the experiences individuals and families have in the behavioral healthcare system through the successes, challenges, frustrations, and failures we encountered while seeking help as parents. Our experiences guide my decisions each day as I strive to make it easier for consumers to receive the help they need."

**Favorite quote:** "It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped." —Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey

# Ann Borders

“How many professions allow so many opportunities to contribute, to learn, to be challenged, to be inspired? I entered the behavioral health field in 1976 and, looking back over the past 31 years, I can’t think of a single inpatient or outpatient work setting where there weren’t daily opportunities to make a difference.

“I have served as president and CEO of Cummins Behavioral Health Systems, Inc., since 1993. Traditionally the smallest community mental health center in Indiana, Cummins launched an expansion campaign in the mid-1990s that established offices in six additional counties. The ‘new’ eight-county organization is now among Indiana’s larger providers. Last year Cummins served 9,247 individuals from 64% of the state’s counties—nearly double the number served 6 years ago and five times more than were served 12 years earlier. Budget size increased approximately 600% during that 12-year period.

“Cummins has been involved in a number of national initiatives to demonstrate clinical and administrative best practices, and in 2007 Cummins was awarded first place in the annual Negley Awards for Excellence in Risk Management.

“Our most important strategy, bar none, is the inclusion of consumers, employees, and key constituencies in planning, direction setting, and managing outcomes. Community partners and a Consumer Advisory Board provide policy and planning advice to Cummins’ board and staff. Employee teams manage their own business units through a three-stage operations review process developed by Cummins. Best Practice Councils are being formed to enable all staff to learn about and implement new clinical and administrative practices.

“These approaches have energized our staff and have nurtured a passion for exceptional responsiveness to the needs of our customers and our organization. Being a part of these collaborative efforts has been the most fulfilling aspect of my career.”

*Photographer: Mike Stutler*



**Position:** President and CEO

**Organization:** Cummins Behavioral Health Systems, Inc.

**Service area:** Eight counties in Central and West-Central Indiana

**Main services:** Continuum of behavioral healthcare (mental health, addiction, and dual-diagnosis services in outpatient and residential settings) for all ages

**Number of staff:** 204

**Most vivid behavioral healthcare memory:** “Any of Cummins’ consumer awards banquets would provide memories to last a lifetime. Nominees arrive in police-escorted limousines, enter via red carpet, and are honored for their achievements. Their recovery journeys have inspired us, have created new understanding within our communities, and have helped us to imagine myriad new possibilities.”

**Personal mission statement:** “My personal mission is to work with and through others to improve the quality of life of persons affected by behavioral health disorders. I believe that we are here to communicate the hope of recovery and to continuously seek ways to optimize the potential that exists with individuals and groups.”

# Tuerk Schlesinger

MBA

"I enjoy leading a team that steadfastly pursues the goal of transforming mental healthcare in our region into the mainstream of integrated healthcare. To accomplish this, we have combined the brightest professional and leadership staff, state-of-the-art technology, and adherence to the highest clinical standards of care and sound business principles. Ultimately, we want to ensure that our consumers receive the highest quality care in a seamless continuum of outpatient, residential, and inpatient settings.

"This cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. To achieve this goal, we have brought together as partners the community's hospital systems, the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, Auburn University School of Pharmacy, and the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. We continue to build on our relationships to solidify our place in the regional healthcare network.

"I have always tried to apply the principles of vision, structure, and cultural alignment to keep us focused and moving together toward our goals. Every day I give credit to the contributions made by our leadership team and board of directors. We're eager to learn from others and have traveled across the country to seek consultation and adapt our treatment services. In addition, we meet regularly with our consumers and families to maintain our connection with those who matter most.

"I'm proud of our development of a centralized access-to-care department; system-wide electronic health records and telehealth; the development and operation of a hospital for children, adolescents, and adults; and accreditation by The Joint Commission.

"I enjoy applying business principles to the everyday problems we encounter in a not-so-traditional business environment.

"My greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that we have built the strongest and best system of care possible for our consumers."

*Photographer: Steve Gouram*

**Position:** CEO

**Organization:** AltaPointe Health Systems, Inc. (formerly Mobile Mental Health)

**Service area:** Southwest region of Alabama

**Main services:** Outpatient, residential, and inpatient services for children, adolescents, adults, senior adults; hospital consultation; hospital management; nursing home and assisted living psychiatric services; telehealth services; adult and juvenile criminal justice services

**Number of staff:** 700

**Most vivid behavioral healthcare memory:** "When I first became CEO, the organization was in danger of losing its Medicaid waiver and was on the brink of bankruptcy. We were given three days to produce a reorganization plan and three weeks to implement it. At the end of three weeks, we regained the contract and saved the company."

**Personal mission statement:** "Live with integrity; respect others; and persist in believing you can bring about great and honorable results. We must help society's most vulnerable members by providing sustainable, quality care, and cultivating a reason to hope."



# Lawrence P. Noonan

“There are two stories that represent my career. I’ve used both to develop most of the services we have at A.W.A.R.E., Inc. The first I call ‘The Shovel.’ In 1971, I worked as a laborer building an industrial plant. My coworker, 80-year-old Otis, could outwork anyone. One day Otis and I were shoveling gravel, a tiresome chore since most of the gravel falls off the shovel. I was complaining about it and Otis said, ‘I don’t worry about this like you do. I only worry about the back two inches of my shovel. If I do that the rest of the shovel takes care of itself.’ Otis was saying that if you concentrate on picking up the gravel for the back two inches, you won’t spill as much and, in fact, will lift more. This philosophy has stuck with me and has become part of the foundation of our organization. If we can serve the ‘back two inches of the shovel,’ the ‘front’ will take care of itself. I believe we have proved this. If people know you serve the toughest cases, they trust you can serve the cases with less severe needs. This is how we helped grow our services.

“I call the second story ‘The Apostrophe.’ It comes from the Frank Zappa song ‘Stink Foot’ on the *Apostrophe* album. It is a song about a talking dog. His owner comments on the dog’s ability to talk. ‘You can’t do that,’ he tells the dog. The dog replies, ‘The crux of the biscuit is the apostrophe’—the ‘can’ts, don’ts, shouldn’ts’ in our lives. I believe this is an accurate depiction of the challenges people with disabilities face. It is what others think people with disabilities can’t or shouldn’t do that is the major problem they face.

“These stories are part of the guiding principles we use to develop services. When staff discover we can manage the most difficult cases, their confidence and skills grow. We develop a higher tolerance for everything else, and we are able to serve each person better.”

*Photographer: Jim Tracy*

**Position:** CEO

**Organization:** A.W.A.R.E., Inc.

**Service area:** All counties and every major city in Montana, as well as in Rio Rancho and Albuquerque, New Mexico

**Main services:** Full continuum of care for children and adults, including mental/emotional healthcare, developmental disability services, family services, and housing assistance

**Number of staff:** 900+ FTE (700 daily staffers and 200 staffers that assist as needed)

**Most vivid behavioral healthcare memory:** “The first day I worked in an ICFMR in Montana, on my first staff break, I was given a choice between helping the resident of the facility who was having an epileptic seizure in the hallway or helping the staff person who was having a seizure in the office. I helped the resident and called for help for the staff member. It was a tough choice.”

**Guiding principle:** “‘Convenience is a commodity strictly reserved for the consumer.’ It is part of a philosophy that emphasizes the difference between people who pay for services and those paid to provide services. Sometimes staff gets better services than consumers if the balance is lost in this area.”

